

Release date: Wednesday September 11, 2019

Small consultant-led maternity units are viable, says healthcare expert

A highly respected medical expert, who approved the continuation of two consultant-led maternity units in towns SMALLER than Eastbourne and Hastings has travelled to Eastbourne to brief the Save the DGH team on his decision.

As chairman of the Independent Review Group for North Cumbria Maternity Services, Dr Bill Kirkup supported the maintenance of two consultant-led maternity units in Whitehaven and Carlisle.

Dr Kirkup who also led investigations into Jimmy Savile's involvement with Broadmoor Hospital, was invited to Eastbourne by Cllr Robert Smart, who is a member of the Save The DGH team. Dr Kirkup helped the group explore the relevance to East Sussex of the North Cumbria decision to maintain the consultant-led maternity units with fewer births than in East Sussex. Whitehaven annual births are 1,300 and Carlisle are 1,700.

His report stated said: "Some of the work undertaken in North Cumbria would be relevant to national policy on staffing, training, recruitment and other issues which affect service sustainability. Central NHS organisations have been slow to recognise that policies that fit well in metropolitan areas may not transfer elsewhere, and that resource and staffing may be different."

After the meeting, Liz Walke, Chair of the Save the DGH Campaign Group demanded: "Why, if it can be achieved in Cumbria, can it not be achieved in East Sussex? This flies in the face of the notion that you need a minimum of 2500 births to have a safe and sustainable service"

"Our hospitals in Eastbourne and Hastings each have natural catchment areas for around 2,000 births annually, far higher figures than Whitehaven and Carlisle. Both regions are rural coastal communities, with bad road infrastructures leading to unacceptable journey times," she said.

Liz explained that a comprehensive study in the Netherlands concluded that journey times above 20 minutes for a mother in labour increases risk.

East Sussex had an Independent Review Panel (IRP) Report whose recommendations were accepted by the Secretary of State for Health in 2008 to retain consultant-led maternity services on two sites. In Cumbria an IRP report recommended that an independent review group consider three options. These included retaining consultant-led Maternity on two sites, which was not an option provided by the CCG's (Clinical Commissioning Groups) in East Sussex.

In East Sussex, management teams at both East Sussex Hospital Trust and the local Care Commissioning Group, which have since been changed, used safety concerns to over-ride the recommendation. This resulted in midwife-led only services at Eastbourne Dgh and consultant-led at The Conquest.

Sadly and perversely, it has recently come to light that negligence at the Conquest around the time of this change has resulted in a £25 million settlement.

Councillor Robert Smart, who invited Dr Bill Kirkup to Eastbourne, recommended interested parties to read the 22-page report of Dr Bill Kirkup's Independent Review Group. <http://www.savethedgh.org.uk/2019/Sept19/NorthCumbrialRGmaternity-report.pdf>

Cllr Smart said: "It is a pleasure to read a report that demonstrates the local health authorities innovatively responding to the wishes of the population and positively addressing the inevitable staffing challenges."

ends

Note to editors:

Dr Bill Kirkup CBE, was previously Chairman of the Morecambe Bay Investigation in July 2013. Bill has previously led investigations into the Oxford paediatric cardiac surgery unit and Jimmy Savile's involvement with Broadmoor Hospital.

His previous career highlights include:

- member of the Hillsborough Independent Panel
- Associate Chief Medical Officer in the Department of Health
- Regional Director of Public Health
- worked on public health in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan
- Director of Provider Performance Management at the Department of Health, Northern and Yorkshire
- Qualified in medicine at the University of Oxford and trained in obstetrics and gynaecological oncology

For more information, please contact Liz Walke on 07896 363381