

DGH Campaigners listening to NHS improvement plans

Save the DGH members had four opportunities last month to hear how local NHS services are being shaped at our local hospital. Sandy Medway, former non-executive director of Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust, and Vice-Chair of Save the DGH Campaign, reports on the meetings she attended.

First, we met with Eastbourne DGH Chief Executive, Adrian Bull, who regularly meets with members of the campaign group. We asked questions and challenged thinking around several issues affecting local staff and patients. It was a good, frank and open dialogue, in which we felt heard and understood. This type of meeting is a big improvement on those held with previous regimes. There is a humble recognition of the improvement work still needed, following their last few Quality Care inspections.

Second, a couple of campaign members attended the August Trust board meeting, to see and hear first hand how decision makers are working together. It was clear the board are working hard on the issues that matter and Chairman, David Clayton-Smith, was both challenging and supportive in seeking out detailed answers and firming up deadlines to getting work done. This was good to see, and we commend the board on its most recent efforts and clear focus on driving improvements with an aspiration to becoming an "Outstanding Hospital Trust by 2020."

Third, some campaigners attended the Trust AGM, and heard presentations by staff on what they achieved last year and plans for improvements going forward. There was much to celebrate, not least of which is the apparent joy staff have in demonstrating their passion for the work they do. It is clear staff relations between senior executives and middle management are much improved from previous years where once bullying was the norm. We still hear about staff who are not so happy with proposed changes but time will tell if current decisions have the desired effect overall. We were pleased to note the shift in no longer relying on Agency staff to plug shortage gaps. Great strides are being made towards creating permanent posts for longer term planning and using their own bank of part-time staff to increase staffing needs when required.

Fourth, a number of campaigners, attended a recent presentation, at our invitation, by the two strategic leads for Maternity provision across the Sussex, Surrey NHS partnership. One spokesperson, an Obstetrician from Western Sussex hospitals, listened to our plea for services in East Sussex to be configured similarly to West Sussex, with Consultant-led Obstetrics at both Eastbourne and Hastings. Our voices were heard. Western Sussex hospitals have no deficit and have an Outstanding rating. It can be done, and we want the same.

In all of this we are encouraged, by what appears to be a willingness to listen harder and strive for excellence despite the challenges of deficits and budget cuts. I am minded of that old saying, "We have done so much, for so long with so little, we can do anything with nothing". The voluntary sector knows this only too well.