



Proposal to create a new NHS Trust in Buckinghamshire

Response by Buckinghamshire County Council

1. It has not been easy to come to a conclusion as the report is lacking in detail and facts upon which to make a judgement. For example, bearing in mind that the prime justification for the merger is that it will lead to improved clinical services, it would have been helpful to have some comparison of the position now and what the improved services should look like in the future.
2. It must be made clear that this response is centred on the premise stated in the consultation document that the proposal "...is only concerned with the future management of Amersham, Stoke Mandeville and Wycombe Hospitals" and that there are "no proposals in this document to change existing hospital services or their location". Plainly the response could have been different if services were to be moved or abolished.
3. The County Council supports the principles behind the proposal for the management merger. There is an obvious need to ensure that services can at the very least be maintained and the Council accepts the argument that the three hospitals are not big enough on their own to meet the required standards. However, there is some concern that no other options were put forward for consideration. It would have been helpful had the pros and cons of, for example merging with Wexham Park or the Oxford hospitals been spelled out. The proposal seems to have created a position where, if plan A is not acceptable – there is no plan B.
4. The needs of the north of the County seem to have been neglected in these proposals. Milton Keynes Hospital is smaller than either Stoke Mandeville or South Bucks and Milton Keynes will continue to grow rapidly over the next few years. Yet patients from Buckingham and the surrounding area look to Milton Keynes for much of their care. Similarly people in the south of the County are served by Wexham Park Hospital. It would be beneficial for attention to be given to a strategy for acute care across the whole of Buckinghamshire.
5. The suggested benefits set out in Section 5 of the document are welcomed. The Council has a duty to consider the overall health and well-being of the people of Buckinghamshire and so it is not only the suggested benefits for local authorities that are of interest. In maintaining their overview of NHS services, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Health, that includes councillors from the four District Councils, will certainly will be very interested to see the benefits emerge.
6. The Council is pleased to see the pledge that "...no services will change" as a result of this merger and that any changes in the future "...would be consulted on separately". Again referring to the Council's role in promoting and assuring the health and well-being of the local population, we shall be keen to be involved in such consultations as the need arises.
7. The Council does have some concerns about what the document does not say. For example, if the merger is to lead to "... economies of scale" and consequently cost savings, could all of these be realised from a management merger? The only cost saving identified in the consultation document is £500,000 a year from "some of the resources currently used to pay for the two board structure". The document does not explain what that actually means. At one of the consultation meetings it was

suggested that staff conditions of service, at present different in each of the Trusts, would be "...levelled up". Would the cost of one not reduce the savings of the other? The document in fact is silent on any firm proposals for reducing management costs merely stating that there are "...likely to be reductions in management posts".

8. Furthermore, there is no comment on where centres of excellence will be located. Would Stoke Mandeville for example continue to be such a centre for spinal injuries?
9. The document is also silent on where economies of scale will be achieved. It has been stated that some are already happening. It would be very helpful to know where further rationalisations are to take place and how they will benefit the public.
9. In conclusion, the County Council does support the merger in principle. There is a major concern about the apparent lack of a strategy for the whole of Buckinghamshire and anxiety about future service provision. It has been stated that people generally are not interested in management structures – what they want are hospitals providing the services they need in the places that they want them. While understanding fully that the proposal is for a management merger it seems unlikely that the anticipated benefits are likely to be achieved without some changes in the structures of clinical service provision. The Council, through its Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, will expect to be consulted fully on any future changes to service provision or access to services.