



The voice of the Public, Patients and Clients

***Western Health and Social Services Council
Response to Developing Better Services
Modernising Hospitals and Reforming Structures***

October 2002



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28 October 2002

Mr David Finegan, Director, Modernisation Unit
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Room D4.16
Castle Buildings
Dundonald House, Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST BT4 3SJ

Dear Mr Finegan

Developing Better Services : Modernising Hospitals and Reforming Structures

The Western Health and Social Services Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on the above Report which is also popularly known as ‘The Better Services Proposals’.

The Council welcomes the examination of current services and presents a response which is focused on the West of Northern Ireland for which the Council has a particular responsibility “to articulate the views of the population in Health and Social Care provision”.

In order to assist Members to make an informed comment from the perspective of local issues in the West of Northern Ireland a series of meetings were arranged:

20 June 2002: A workshop with Western Health and Social Services Board in Omagh.

5 September 2002: A presentation in Western Board Headquarters, Londonderry on the Modernising Hospitals component (September Council Meeting).

30 September 2002: A Focus Group of current and former Council Members from the Omagh Locality.

1 October 2002: A Focus Group of current and former Council Members from the Fermanagh Locality.

3 October 2002: A presentation in the Ulster American Folk Park, Residential Centre on the Reforming Structures component (October Council Meeting).

7 October 2002: A Public Meeting in Strabane to discuss “A Proposal for an Enhanced Local Hospital in Enniskillen or Omagh”.

8 October 2002: A Public Meeting in Omagh to discuss “A Proposal for an Enhanced Local Hospital in Enniskillen or Omagh”.

9 October 2002: A Public Meeting in Enniskillen to discuss “A Proposal for an Enhanced Local Hospital in Enniskillen or Omagh”.

14 October 2002: A Focus Group of current and former Council Members from the Londonderry, Limavady and Strabane Localities.

The Council wishes to record an appreciation for the partnership approach taken by the DHSSPS Modernisation Unit and the Western Health and Social Services Board with the Council in organising the Focus Groups and the Public Meetings on an Enhanced Local Hospital Model.

The Council does accept that on this occasion the population in the Western area has had sufficient opportunity to comment on the proposals and in particular in the context that the most contentious aspects of the document relate to the “south west”.

The Council was well represented at each and every one of the foregoing events.

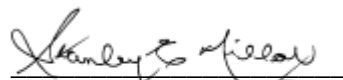
The 24 Members of the Council are representative of the geography of the Western area. The membership also includes elected Councillors to Fermanagh, Omagh, Strabane, Derry City and Limavady District Councils and reflects a cross section of Community organisations in addition to Voluntary sector special interest groups such as Older People, Mental Health and People with Sensory and Physical Disabilities.

The details of this response are built upon a consensus of Members comments who have fully participated in this consultation process.

The Council is mindful that the future shape of Acute Hospital Services in the West has been reviewed and consulted upon for the past four years. A fear is retained within the population that in the vacuum of no early decision a fate will fall upon Hospitals in Omagh and Enniskillen similar to that experienced in Dungannon.

The Council pleads for an early decision in relation to Hospital provision in the south west.

Yours sincerely


Stanley E. Millar
Chief Officer

Developing Better Services : Modernising Hospitals and Reforming Structures

Overview of Proposals:

- The Western Health and Social Services Council (The Council) agrees that the overall concept in the document is commendable and worthy of serious consideration and support.

- In particular the Council values the references to:
 - a long term plan for acute hospitals and H&SS structures.
 - the acceptance of a need for a new hospital in the south west together with:
 - an Enhanced Local Hospital in Omagh or Enniskillen.
 - Centres to undertake elective surgery which can significantly reduce waiting lists.
 - an objective that everyone will be within one hour of emergency care and consultant-led maternity services.
 - a greater choice for women in the provision of maternity care.
 - an appreciation that in future acute services will be more strongly patient focused and organised around population groupings rather than facilities.
 - the premise that none of the current hospitals delivering acute services will close but will be adapted to support the new pattern of provision.
 - the potential for the development of Managed Clinical Networks.
 - the emphasis on manpower planning and development.

- **The Council has major reservations that a number of aspects have not been sufficiently developed:**
 - ~ the interface between Acute and Primary Care services.

- ~ the absence of a strategy embracing Primary Care, Acute Care and Community Care developments.
- ~ the cross-border dimension.
- ~ the increased demands on bed provision.
- ~ a parallel enhancement of Ambulance Services and ICT to underpin the hospital proposals and
- ~ a major anxiety that the proposals may not have been totally costed and are not affordable.

Specific Issues:

The Need to Change:

- The Council through its work programme is very aware of the Winter Pressures issue and how it has developed in local hospitals into a year-round concern.
- The profile of the population is changing. Information examined by the Council clearly indicates how the numbers of older people are growing and life expectancy has increased significantly over the past 20 years.
- Recent dialogue between the Western Board, the Trusts and the Council has drawn attention to the changes in that children can now survive into adult life with conditions which in the recent past were fatal in the very early years. Babies in the Western area are discharged home with extensive packages of care when previously they would not have lived beyond a few hours or days.
- Patients in the Western area have a right to expect the most modern of diagnostic equipment and investigative procedures similar to that available to Doctors across Northern Ireland.

- Accordingly the Council accepts there is a need for changes to improve the quality and responsiveness of hospital services.
- **However the changes must be clearly identified in the communities across the Western area to be an improvement to that currently experienced.**
- **The Department must ensure the future anticipated need and appropriate use of hospital beds is accurately calculated in order to end the undignified search for beds across the Province at the now frequent times of bed crises**

What Kind of Change:

- The Council considers that further careful consideration has to be given to the detailed design of future services as it may be many years before proposals are commissioned into actual services.
- The Council supports the right of the Royal Colleges to offer an opinion on the future direction of medicine. However the Royal Colleges must appreciate that their opinions are among many.
- **Medicine must be flexible and adapt to the needs of communities and particularly to the needs of the isolated rural communities in the West where the roads and transport infrastructure is at best poor.**

- For this reason the Council endorses the principle of Managed Clinical Networks. This can be a means whereby specialties such as Haematology (in which local Trusts across the Western area have experienced huge difficulties in recruiting Consultant staff) can be made accessible to local populations. This will mean a change from the current institutional focus.
- The Networks have a potential to effectively provide equality of opportunity to access the highly specialised services which people living in peripheral areas of the Province consider are remote and usually centred in Greater Belfast.
- The Council strongly endorses the model role of a surgeon and who is mobile and responsive to patients as explained in Para. 3.14.

Model for Future Hospital Services:

An Enhanced Local Hospital:

- The Council appreciates the Minister’s decision to ask the Western Board to develop a model for an “Enhanced Local Hospital” located in either Omagh or Enniskillen and assuming the acute hospital would be in the other town.
- In particular the Council acknowledges the approach of the Board (a) to ask the clinical staff in Erne and Tyrone County Hospitals to develop a consensus model of Enhanced Local Hospital and (b) in engaging with the communities in Public Meetings to discuss the model.
- The Council supports the imaginative evolutionary model which has been designed (See Appendix I).

- **The Council is insistent that an Enhanced Local Hospital must be set up at the same time as the new South West Hospital i.e. the concept must be presented as a complementary package otherwise it will be seen to be a second best or an afterthought.**

A New Hospital for the South West:

- The Council is pleased to note the Minister's acceptance of the need to place a new hospital in the South West of the Province with a commitment of very major capital investment.
- The new South West Hospital will be expected to offer a comprehensive range of services to the local population (see Appendix I).
- **The Council retains a major concern that the Western Board must be funded with the means to maintain services in Tyrone County Hospital and Erne Hospital pending the opening of a new Hospital.**
- The new South West Hospital and Altnagelvin Hospital should have an integrated role in hospital provision in Northern Ireland and be enabled to develop cross-border relationships with Primary and Secondary Care providers in the North Western and North Eastern Health Boards (ROI).
- Altnagelvin should be able to develop and strengthen its role as an Area and Sub- Regional Centre for the population west of the Bann.

- The Council encourages the Area Hospital to market its Sub-Regional Services e.g. Cancer, Orthopaedics and Trauma, and Ophthalmology to the entire population across the area of the Western Board and the northern sector of the Northern Board.

- Altnagelvin should recognise the new South West Hospital as an opportunity to complement its now well established role and build on the traditional strong relationships between the populations in Fermanagh, Omagh, Strabane, Derry City and Limavady District Councils' areas.

Protected Elective Centre:

- The Council views this proposal as a realistic means of addressing the protracted waiting lists for surgery whilst freeing up the major hospitals to undertake a more specialist role (See Appendix I).

- Additional work should be undertaken to firm up a model which will not destabilise the viability of surgical departments in Altnagelvin and a South West Hospital.

- In the interval the three hospitals in Omagh, Enniskillen and Londonderry should be enabled to provide Waiting Lists Initiatives within available Theatre capacity. Additional beds will be required to support Initiatives.

Maternity Services:

- The Council has constantly advocated on behalf of women in the Western area to have a real choice in how Maternity Services are delivered.

- **It has been a matter of great disappointment for Members to note a distinct lack of development of choice following the 1996 publication of proposals to introduce alternative models of maternity care.**
- The Council wishes to encourage further discussion and investment into a variety of systems of care appropriate to the limitations imposed by the geography and relative rurality of the area.

Ambulance Services:

- The Council strongly promotes the need for a quality Ambulance Service adequately resourced, equipped and staffed to undertake a vital response and support role.
- **It is a source of concern to the Council that the recommendations contained in the Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service are still not adequately resourced and there is a perceived lack of co-ordination between the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and Trust Users.**
- The Council identifies shortfalls in Service Provision in the Cityside of Londonderry and across the geography of Sperrin Lakeland Trust together with a lack of confidence in the road worthiness of the ambulance fleet in the Western Division.
- The anxieties generated from the shortfall in Ambulance Services have not helped to inspire a confidence that the much greater cost associated with the hospital proposals will be financed.

The Need for Change in Structures:

- The Council agrees with the proposal to consider change.
- However change for the sake of change is unacceptable. Change must be built on a desire to improve the health and well-being of the population.
- The process of change must not restrict progress on the development and modernisation of services.
- Use of the term Organisational Change or Reform can help the key stakeholders (who are the public) to understand and essentially contribute to the debate.
- At this point the public should have every encouragement to learn of the following key issues and then make an informed comment.

Creating a single Regional Authority:

- The Council has a concern at the suggestion of a single body with responsibility for strategic planning, workforce planning and commissioning of regional services.
- Assurances will have to be provided that what is suggested is not a refurbishment of the pre 1973 model based in Adelaide Street in Belfast. A perception was held at that time that service provision was biased towards the east of the Province.
- A single Authority should not routinely be located in Belfast. Londonderry should be allowed to submit a case for a location in the North West.

Replacing the 4 HSS Boards:

- The Council will expect further debate on the future role of the Boards.
- Members submit an opinion that there will be a requirement for some years for a Western Board to support the development of the two Local Health and Social Care Groups in the Northern and Southern parts of the area.
- The Council accepts there may be a protracted interval before the Groups have the competence to accept a delegated function of commissioning services.

Local Health and Social Care Groups:

- The Council has adopted a strong stance in support of the setting up of the two LHSCGs in the area.
- GPs are an essential part of the Groups. The Council wishes to see an early resolution of current difficulties whereby they can play an important role in the development of the Groups.

Combining HSS Trusts:

- It is the Council's view that the integrated provider model appears to work well. Again the matter is worthy of further discussion.

Review of Public Administration:

- Council Members and in particular elected local government representatives are very cautious that new structures should not be raised in advance of the findings of the Review.

- The Council is very keen to promote the importance of co-terminosity of Agencies and Public Bodies to assist with the planning of services.

Replacing the 4 Health and Social Services Councils:

- The Council is interested in the proposal for a single statutory Health and Social Services consumer body.
- **Members are adamant that a consumer model has to be designed which will include a satellite configuration to allow a voice from the west.**
- Any regional consumer body should not necessarily be based in Greater Belfast.
- The Council would identify the extensive public debate in England, Scotland and Wales on consumer representation:
NHS Scotland: Patient Focus and Public Involvement.
England: The New Patient and Public Involvement System.
Wales: NHS (Wales) Bill and Session 2001-2002 of the Welsh Affairs Committee.
- **A similar public consultation should be launched in Northern Ireland independent of the “Better Services” debate.**

Equality:

- The Council has a confidence that the extensive consultation arranged by the Minister will inform the assessment of adverse impact.

- The Council suggests that there will be a need for a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment screening procedure when final determinations are taken on the proposals.

Resources and Timing:

- The nightmare scenario shared by all Council Members is that a lack of total funding will force a piecemeal introduction of some proposals whilst others in the Western area will be given a lower priority and left on “the long finger”.

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The Western Health and Social Services Council believes the comments offered in this response will help inform the Minister in the choices that have to be made to secure a quality Acute Hospital Service in Northern Ireland.