

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCIL

Elizabeth and Victoria Courts, Stevenage

Summary of the situation for Hertfordshire County Council Scrutiny Committee meeting
– 23 October 2003

Elizabeth Court was opened in August 1998 and Victoria Court in 1999 on the basis of contracts let by East and North Hertfordshire Health Authority in March 1996 for 5yrs.

Problems with the use of places arose early in their life.

- Adhoc variations in use of places for 'Halfway House' Clients
- These variations gradually developed to the point where a number of places became 'Respite Care'
- Funding problems in 2001-2002 at Bedfordshire and Luton NHS Trust (the provider) that led to bed closures, and subsequently to Hertfordshire County Council investing money in order to support the shortfall and maintain the use of the facilities and availability of the EMI service (not necessarily for the same client base)

The CHC has raised the issue of lack of clarity about both the financial circumstances which led to this position, and the rationale for changes in the pattern of use, both of which have never been consulted upon or agreed by the CHC. Had the problems and the proposed changes been considered in an open and transparent manner, supported by clear evidence, from the beginning, this matter need not have become the issue it now is. It really should not have been at all necessary to engage MPs and Ministers before Consultation was agreed. The public bodies concerned are well aware of their statutory obligations to consult.

When asked by the CHC representative at their steering group for justification of the proposed changes already in operation, managers of both HPT and the JCPB made broad assertions about changes in levels and types of service, for which they never produced any solid evidence, statistical or otherwise.

It has also come to light more recently that Officers of Hertfordshire Partnership Trust have made an inaccurate claim that the CHC supported the change when the CHC had never even received a copy of the Business Case which contained the proposal. In any event, receipt of the Business Case did not represent a consultation. Recent correspondence does seem to have clarified this position somewhat.

The CHC's objective in raising this matter is, and has always been, to ensure that the assessed needs of the client population, both as a group and as individuals are being properly met. The events of the last 18 months, as recorded in the attached dossier, demonstrate a catalogue of confusion.

What is now needed is:

- Clarification of the present position to ensure that the facilities are used fairly for the people they are intended for in the short term
- An urgent Strategic Review led by North Herts & Stevenage PCT to be completed by February 2004 to identify the needs of this client group and put in place arrangements for its implementation as from 1 April 2004

The Strategic Review should include:

- A review of the contract with Beds & Luton Trust to provide services from Elizabeth and Victoria Courts
- An assessment of whether the service for EMI clients in North Herts & Stevenage would in future best be provided by a single agency

A copy of the chronology is attached for reference, and copies of the supporting papers have been lodged with the Committee Secretariat, and are available for reference.

Richard Edwards
Chief Officer

1 October 2003