

SSTHC FOI Requests

14th March 2019

Re: Gateshead and Newcastle Maternity Services

SSTHC submitted identical Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust and Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust.

The purpose of the FOI requests was to learn something of the extent of integrated planning between hospital Trusts in our region, and to learn the consequences for other maternity services in our region should maternity services at South Tyneside Hospital be downgraded or closed.

The replies we received are very similar. Gateshead and Newcastle Trusts both say that they were notified of the proposed changes in South Tyneside, but also say it is not their responsibility to help shape services in South Tyneside, and neither is it their responsibility to ensure that there are enough maternity staff in our region.

Questions and Responses

1. Was your Trust consulted with and what concerns have you raised with the South Tyneside and Sunderland CCGs or any of you fellow Hospital Trusts on the proposed downgrading of South Tyneside Maternity services to a midwife led unit with the loss of the Special Care Baby Unit in the Phase 1 of the “path to excellence”?

Response from Gateshead

Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust was aware of and involved in the public consultation process. This included joint discussions between South Tyneside, Newcastle Hospitals and Gateshead Health and, as a trust, we responded to the team leading the consultation.

Service configuration is a matter for the host Trust to determine and our response was in that context and included a request to understand any potential shift of patients that would affect our services to enable us to respond accordingly.

Response from Newcastle

Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust (NuTH) was consulted regarding the proposed changes to Maternity services effecting South Tyneside and Sunderland. This included the provision of a freestanding midwifery-led unit in South Tyneside. One formal meeting was arranged in December 2018 between NuTH and Gateshead to explore the altered shift of women booking from South Tyneside to a neighbouring Trust for care. Further planned meetings are anticipated but presently no dates are set to further discuss this.

2. What is the projected numbers of the trained midwife work force across Newcastle, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland if these changes go ahead in hospital and community setting? How does it compare to the work force we have at present and have had over the last 5 years?

Response from Gateshead

Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust is only able to comment on our own workforce. We are satisfied that the numbers of trained staff are appropriate to meet the needs of the service and in 2018 approved investment in additional staff to allow us to respond to an anticipated rise in activity.

Response from Newcastle

NuTH is unable to comment on workforce arrangements within other Trusts but regularly monitors midwifery staffing within our own maternity unit. NuTH has not recruited any additional midwives based on this specific proposed work. Without further detailed predictions it is thought NuTH could absorb the predicted relatively small increase in bookings from South Tyneside within its current establishment. NuTH would not be providing community antenatal and postnatal services to these women and babies. Some women may require sonography services and/or consultant led care from NuTH but many women would only attend for labour and birth.

3. Has your Trust any published views in, the press, in minutes of your meetings, meeting that you attended or documents that show you were asked, or responded to South Tyneside and Sunderland CCG engagement, or consultation on the "path to excellence" Phase 1 in relation to maternity services or if you were not asked and consulted have made raised the matter with these CCGs or anybody else?

Response from Gateshead

Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust has engaged with South Tyneside/City Hospitals Sunderland management team and the local CCG to understand the impact of the proposed changes, we have reviewed our workforce and estate and, based on this analysis, put in place arrangements that respond to the anticipated shift in activity.

Response from Newcastle

NuTH has liaised with South Tyneside/CHS management team and the local CCG and provided comments. It is not considered likely that high numbers of women will book with the Trust. The biggest impact is considered to be the neighbouring Trusts of Gateshead and Sunderland where local obstetric units exist. This can also ensure where possible continuity of community midwifery care is provided for antenatal and postnatal care locally.

4. Has your Trust been approached by the Clinical Director of South Tyneside Foundation Trust / City Hospitals Sunderland or any Director connected with these Trusts or their merged Alliance in relation to the Phase 1 proposals for Clinical services?

Response from Gateshead

Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust routinely works with colleagues across Cumbria and the North East to understand service pressures and proposed changes in service. This has included discussions with the management team at South Tyneside Foundation Trust/City Hospitals Sunderland and their clinical leaders in respect of Phase 1 proposals.

Response from Newcastle

NuTH works with colleagues across Cumbria and the North East to understand service pressures and proposed changes in service. This has included discussions with the management team at STFT/CHS and their clinical leaders in Local Maternity Systems (LMS) and Strategic Transformational Programmes (STP) in respect of Phase 1 proposals.

5. When South Tyneside Maternity Services were temporarily closed at the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018 what was the impact on your Maternity services?

Response from Gateshead

Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust saw a rise in bookings from South Tyneside during this period and has used this evidence to support our plans for the future including the plans to increase our staff numbers (see Q2 response).

Response from Newcastle

NuTH saw a small rise in bookings from South Tyneside during this period which was managed within existing resource. This initial scoping work showed approximately 30 additional women booking per month.