

About this bulletin

The two Primary Care Trusts in East Sussex (Hastings and Rother & East Sussex Downs and Weald) launched a public consultation of the future of maternity, special care baby and gynaecology services on 26th March 2007.

This bulletin aims to keep you posted on what is happening during the consultation and to up date you about events and information.

PCTs' vision for healthcare

- To improve the health and well-being of their populations.
- To ensure everyone can lead a healthier life and receive timely, safe and convenient treatment.
- To make the best use of all available resources.

What's been happening?

Consultation document – two versions of our document were produced, a full document and a summary one – around 16,000 documents have been circulated since March and we continue to receive requests for copies.

It has been noted that there was an error in the published consultation document and consultation summary. This is in relation to the graph depicting the number of births in East Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust. An erratum and addendum to replace the original graph has been published and widely circulated. This can be found on the Fit for the Future website, together with a pdf version of the consultation document that has been amended to reflect this change. This can be accessed at: <http://www.southeastcoastfff.nhs.uk/Home/East-Sussex.aspx>.

An erratum and addendum has been produced and circulated to replace page 26 of the main document and page 7 of the summary document. The up to dated version of both documents are available at www.southeastcoastfff.nhs.uk.

Website – the website was launched at the start of the consultation and provides background information, news and dates. There is also a comments form for people who wish to make a response to the consultation online. To date there has been 3459 visits to the website, which on average is 42 per day. The average length of time spent by each visit is 7 minutes.

Public meetings – 14 public meetings have been arranged in East Sussex. Nine meetings have been held so far, in Seaford, Eastbourne, Hastings, Crowborough, Newhaven, Bexhill and Uckfield, Hailsham and Rural Rother. The meetings have taken the format of ‘Question Time’ with an expert panel presenting their case followed by questions from the floor. Lively debate and a host of questions have been received and we expect more of the same at the remaining meetings. The remaining public meetings are as follows:

Lewes	Monday 18 th June 2007	7pm	Assembly Room, Town Hall, Lewes (via Fisher Street) BN27 2DG
Hastings	Monday 25 th June 2007	2pm	White Rock Theatre, Hastings TN34 1JX
Eastbourne	Monday 2 nd July 2007	2pm	Gold Room, Winter Garden, Eastbourne BN21 4BP

Please note that to enable parents with young children to attend the public meetings, we have arranged a crèche facility (free of charge) at the Hastings meeting on 25th June and the Eastbourne meeting on 2nd July. Children will need to be booked into the crèche in advance – please contact Jacquie Fuller, Child & Family Care Co-ordinator, NHS Staff East Sussex, 10323 417400 ext 4676 or mobile 07769678532 or email jacqui.fuller@esht.nhs.uk.

Attending forums and groups – as well as the large number of public meetings being held the PCTs have written out to a wide range of organisations and groups offering to attend any existing meeting or forum to present and discuss *Fit for the Future*. To date a number of organisations have taken us up on the offer. However, we continue to make our offer and anyone who is interested should email fitforthefuture@esdwpct.nhs.uk.

Working with Campaign Groups - The PCTs’ public consultation document makes clear that in addition to the options proposed by the NHS, the PCTs would also “welcome alternative proposals” and would be keen to see, “if there are any realistic, cost-effective and preferred alternatives to those outlined in this document.”

To date the PCTs have received one new proposal, a joint proposal from the *Save the DGH* and the *Hands Off the Conquest* campaigns that is generally referred to as ‘Option 5’.

The PCTs agreed with the campaigners that this proposal should be assessed by a New Options Assessment Panel comprising representatives from the campaign groups and representatives from the PCTs. This panel met on 15th May and was independently chaired by, Professor Steven Field. The same process and criteria will be used to assess any other proposals that emerge during the consultation.

A reminder about about why we are consulting

Why we need to change:- there are two key issues driving this consultation: -

- **Safety** – for consultant-led units, safety is improved by increasing consultant presence on the labour ward; having consultants providing the decision-making and supervision on complex procedures; and ensuring that doctors do not work excessive hours.
It is hard to achieve these in smaller units and in future, units delivering less than 2500 babies each year may not be able to treat high-risk obstetric cases or multiple births. – see Facts and Figures below.
- **Staffing** – with doctors and midwives working across two hospital sites at present, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain adequate staffing levels; changes to junior doctor training means less hours available and less experienced doctors on duty.

The PCTs believe that there is a case for change around childbirth services, in order to make sure they are safe and sustainable. In summary the reasons are: -

- We can offer a more reliable, robust service.

Facts and figures

The number of births at the two hospitals were as follows:

Year	Eastbourne DGH	Conquest, Hastings
2005/06	1820	1620
2006/07	1952	1752

It is clear that each unit does not currently undertake enough births to meet national guidelines and qualifies as a 'smaller' unit.

Two thirds of all deliveries are unassisted – there is no consultant involvement. That means that there are fewer than 2 births a day, on average, at each hospital, that require specialist medical intervention. It is essential that consultants undertake enough births to maintain their skills and Royal College guidance suggests that less than 2500 births in one unit per year is not sufficient to.

A number of people have questioned the East Sussex population projections. The PCTs have worked with East Sussex County Council, using their projected figures for the next ten years. Whilst these suggest an overall population increase, the number of women of child-bearing age (and, therefore, the number of babies) is

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of child-bearing age (and, therefore, the number of babies) is expected to fall by about 8%.

What are the proposals being made?

- Create a consultant-led obstetric unit at either Eastbourne District General Hospital or the Conquest Hospital, Hastings.
- Consider whether a new midwife-led unit should be set up on the site that does not have the consultant-led obstetric unit.
- Provide emergency and planned in-patient gynaecological care at the same hospital that has the consultant-led obstetric unit.
- Provide ante-natal, post-natal care, out-patients and day case treatment at both hospitals.

Frequently Asked Questions

There have been a large number of recurring questions asked during the consultation. We have put together a Frequently Asked Questions sheet – which is available on the website www.southeastcoastfff.nhs.uk/Home/East-Sussex/FAQs.aspx.

What we have heard so far

Travelling times and transport are a concern

There is little or no evidence on the impact of travel times in labour on safety. The journey time between Eastbourne and Hastings is similar to the journey time already experienced by other East Sussex residents living in rural areas, and to that in many other communities.

Other midwife-led units operate up and down the country with similar transfer times to their nearest consultant-led unit.

We are working with local authorities and the ambulance service to improve access.

“Mothers want consultant-led births”

Many mothers will continue to choose consultant-led care, but the recent Department of Health report “Maternity Matters” affirms that 80% of women want CHOICE about the type of care they receive; pregnancy and birth are normal life events for most women; women must be given the information to allow informed decision-making.

“No evidence that changes will improve care”

Increasing the presence of consultant obstetricians on the labour ward has been shown to reduce both caesarean rates and complications of delivery, a major contribution to improving safety for women and babies.

Scepticism – “it’s all about cuts!” – “it’s all been decided”

We need to make best use of all our resources – staff, equipment, buildings and money. Both the PCTs and the local Hospitals Trust are working together to improve value for money and to tackle historic deficits. Plans must, therefore, be affordable. However SAFETY is the main reason we need to change.

We must emphasise that no decisions have been made and the PCT Boards are not restricted to the initial options set out in the consultation documents. Infact they expect and welcome new ideas – this is one of the reasons for an open public debate. The PCTs are committed to supporting the development of alternative proposals, which will be subject to the same scrutiny as the options in the document. Alternative options cannot become ‘official’ options until the PCTs are sure they are realistic and could work.

Everyone values the hospitals in Eastbourne and Hastings

The PCT Boards are committed to sustaining two viable hospitals with a full range of 24 hour emergency services. This will be included as a criteria for helping the PCT Boards make a final decision

What happens next?

The consultation will run until 27th July. A period of analysis will follow, which will be undertaken by an independent analyst who will work through all the responses received and will provide a report, which will be presented to the PCT Boards.

A full comparative assessment of every realistic, safe and cost-effective option that has been proposed will be undertaken to determine which option offers the best service for the people of East Sussex.

It is likely that the PCT Boards will make a joint decision in the Autumn.

We want your views

There are a number of different ways in which you can make a response to this consultation:

Complete the questionnaire at the back of the consultation document and post to the Freepost address.

Go to www.southeastcoastfff.nhs.uk and complete the response form online.

Email: fitforthefuture@esdwpct.nhs.uk.

Text *SUSSEX* plus your response to 07786 200350

Future bulletins

We are committed to keeping everyone informed on how the consultation is progressing and we will issue further bulletins in due course.

Issued by the Fit for Future Project Team
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