

Surrey Adults and Health Select Committee written statement

At its meeting on 5 June 2020, the Surrey Adults and Health Select Committee formally considered the Improving Healthcare Together (IHT) 2020-2030 Programme Consultation Report and spoke to representatives from IHT, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust, Surrey Heartlands, North West Surrey CCG, Opinion Research Services, and Mott MacDonald. Outlined below is a summary of the main comments and concerns raised by members of the Select Committee during the meeting.

Travel times and access

Throughout the meeting, many Members raised issues relating to travel times and access and expressed their concern at what impact the IHT Programme proposals might have on Surrey residents. This was particularly the case when considering the preferred option put forward by IHT, which is to build a new specialist emergency care hospital (SECH) on the Sutton site. Members raised concerns about the impact that travelling to Sutton might have on Surrey residents in areas of high deprivation (particularly those reliant on public transport), as well as those with disabilities and their carers. With these concerns in mind, the Select Committee recommended that any healthcare work is backed up by proper provision of infrastructure, covering all areas relating to public transport, roads, cycle paths and pedestrian networks. The Select Committee emphasised the importance of joint working between health services, Highways England, Surrey County Council and Greater London boroughs in order to ensure that issues relating to travel times and access are minimised. Members also raised the importance of making sure that improvements to the network are matched against increasing population levels and related travel needs to the new SECH.

Future population growth and demographics

Members made repeated references to assumptions relating to future population growth, particularly in relation to Epsom and Ewell Local Plan housing expectations and government housing targets. The Select Committee heard that IHT had committed to undertaking a further piece of work around bed modelling extended to 2030 but expressed concern that there were gaps in the modelling relating to planned housing development and future population growth in Surrey. With this in mind, Members expressed their view that IHT's planning, data collection and projections should be extended to 2040. Overall, Members felt there was a lack of future proofing in the proposals and raised concerns that a failure to properly factor in future population growth could have a negative impact on not only the overall model of care being proposed but also issues relating to access via public and private transport, congestion and parking.

Impact of Covid-19

Members agreed that the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was one of the most serious challenges facing the IHT Programme and could have a major impact on its proposed model of care and timescale for development and delivery. The Select Committee welcomed the work currently being done on this but emphasised how important it is that findings on these effects, and the mitigating actions that will be implemented as a result, are included in the final Business Case. Members spoke about the significant changes to our society that have been made, and will continue to be made, by Covid-19 and reiterated their belief that the proposals for the new SECH need to ensure that they have been shaped by an in-depth and wide-ranging review of the present and future impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. This will affect not only the proposed model of care but also the capacity of the public transport system, changes to residents' preferred use of health services, and changes to patterns of working for health workers, amongst other areas.

Other concerns

Members raised a number of other concerns relating to the proposals put forward by the IHT Programme. These related primarily to worries that the total number of beds across the three hospitals is currently planned to increase by only four and that this may be insufficient (particularly when considering the concerns expressed by the Select Committee around inadequate population growth data), concerns relating to the current timescales for development and delivery, and the challenges that may result from distributing clinical teams across three different sites. Members also wanted to receive assurance that each of the local authorities affected by the proposals will be able to engage in robust scrutiny during the implementation period, and they expressed concern about being presented with what they saw as being insufficient data and documentation that was either unfinished or not up to date.

In conclusion, the Surrey Adults and Health Select Committee supports the IHT Programme's proposal to build a new SECH and welcomes the investment that will be made in Epsom Hospital, wherever the new SECH will be built, but does not feel it has received the assurances or had sight of the sufficient information and data needed to give its support to the preferred site in Sutton.