

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CANNOCK COMMUNITY FORUM
TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2011 AT 7.00 P.M.
AT CIVIC CENTRE, CANNOCK

PRESENT: Councillors:

Alcott, G. (Chairman)
Allen, F.W.C. (Vice-Chairman)

Davis, Mrs. M.A.	Snape, P.A.
Green, M.R.	Sutton, Mrs. H.M.
Kraujalis, J.T.	Toth, J.
Morgan, C.W.J.	

(The Chairman advised that items 6 and 7 had been withdrawn from the Agenda at the request of Mr. Taylor. A written response would be sent to him).

Cannock Chase District Councillors:

Councillor G. Adamson
Councillor G.D. Ball
Councillor J. Beddows
Councillor Mrs. A.F. Bernard
Councillor Ms. J.L. Jones

Staffordshire County Councillors:

County Councillor P. Corfield

Cannock Chase Council Officers:

Mr. S. Brown, Chief Executive
Mrs. W. Rowe, Senior Committee Officer

Also Present

Chief Inspector Carl Ratcliffe, LPT Commander for Cannock Chase District
Ms. Lyn Hill-Tout, Chief Executive of Mid Staffs NHS Foundation Trust
Mrs. Carole Howard, Elected Governor, Mid Staffs NHS Foundation Trust
Ms. V. Singleton, Staffordshire Police, Neighbourhood Watch
Representatives from the Press
Local Residents (approximately 20)

22. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C. Mitchell, County Councillor J. Rowley and Carl Mason and Wes Southall from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services.

23. Notes

The notes of the meeting held on 20 September 2011 were agreed as a correct record.

24. Questions for Staffordshire Police

Chief Inspector Carl Ratcliffe played the Forum a DVD which showed two aspects of Policing. The first was a short film outlining "Operation Impact", which outlined how a partnership approach can be effective in tackling issues causing concern in the community. The film highlighted the joint operation between Cannock Local Policing Team, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Cannock Chase Council which saw four properties raided on Mill Street, Cannock. The second film showed the Remembrance Day service and how Police Officers and members of the Armed Forces had stood on "honour guard" around the cenotaph (on a voluntary basis) on the Friday and Saturday before Remembrance Sunday.

Maureen Freeman expressed thanks to Staffordshire Police for organising the events in the town centre on the Friday and Saturday before Remembrance Day and, in particular to Sergeant Anthony Richards and Special Sergeant Rob Taylor.

Councillor Snape referred to "Operation Nemesis" whereby a property on Longford Road was raided and cannabis plants were uncovered. Chief Inspector Ratcliffe explained that a gentleman had been arrested on suspicion of producing cannabis. The raid had uncovered 116 cannabis plants which was enough to produce a crop worth up to £5,000 several times a year.

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe encouraged the public to contact the Police or Crimestoppers with any drug related information.

The Chairman of the Council, Councillor J. Beddows took the opportunity to thank those involved in organising the three day event in the town centre for the Remembrance weekend.

Councillor Toth expressed concern regarding the amount of drug related incidents in the District and asked whether the "tell tale" signs of the houses that were involved in drug activity could be publicised.

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe confirmed that this would be arranged. He explained that rented houses were susceptible to this type of activity and the public should look out for houses that had the blinds or curtains closed in the day. Additionally, houses where there were a lot of comings and goings late and night or early in the mornings could be involved in drug related activities.

A local resident referred to the minutes of the previous meeting and asked for an update on the issue of the amount the youths on skateboards, bikes and scooters in and around Cannock town centre. Chief Inspector Ratcliffe advised that leaflets had been produced and were given out to the youths asking that they refrain from using their skateboard, bike or scooter in the pedestrian area. Should someone be stopped on a second occasion a fixed penalty would be issued. He outlined to a recent incident whereby PC John Wains had been in pursuit of a pedal bike and it had turned out to be stolen.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Inspector for attending the meeting and Forum Members confirmed that they had found the information provided in the DVD's to be useful.

25. Questions for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

No items had been submitted.

26. Question from Gordon Taylor - Name Plates on roads in the area are in a very bad state of repair and many cannot be read

Mr. Taylor was unable to attend the meeting and it had been agreed that a written response be sent to him.

27. Question from Gordon Taylor. Speed of vehicles travelling along the A34 between the White Lion Public House and Cannock Town Centre is still excessive. On this stretch of road is a large school and pedestrian lights. Speeds of up to 50mph are reached.

Mr. Taylor was unable to attend the meeting and it had been agreed that a written response be sent to him.

28. Update on the position of the negotiations in respect of the Asda monies for the Astro turf project

The item had been requested by Mr. & Mrs. Haywood. The Chief Executive advised that since the Corporate Director had provided the response at a previous meeting, Asda had now formally requested the return of the unspent S106 funds. The Council and Asda intend to follow the dispute resolution process as set out in the original S106 Agreement signed in 2001. This will involve an arbitration process to resolve this dispute. No arbitrator has yet been appointed and there are no dates for the arbitration to take place as yet.

The Chief Executive confirmed that this item would remain on the agenda and he would provide an update at each meeting.

Councillor Adamson stated that this was a sad situation which the current Labour administration had inherited from the previous administration. He expressed his disappointment that Asda were requesting the return of S106 money and that the District would be losing out.

29. Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust

The Chairman welcomed Mrs. Carole Howard, Elected Governor for the Cannock Constituency on the Council of Governors at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust. Mrs. Howard spoke about her own role as an elected Governor and invited anybody who had an interest in the running of / future plans for Cannock and Stafford hospitals to also consider becoming public members.

She explained that Members received regular newsletters keeping them informed of news and developments at the hospitals together with information on meetings and talks which they could attend. The role of Members was to build confidence in the Community regarding Cannock and Stafford hospitals, raise awareness of the Trust and to promote membership.

Mrs. Howard explained that membership application forms would be left at the meeting for anyone who might be interested in joining the Trust.

Councillor Adamson asked about the morale of the staff working at the hospitals given that they had been subjected to a lot of criticism. Mrs. Howard commented that it was a challenging situation for the staff and it was essential that they felt valued.

Councillor Toth considered that Stafford hospital was on a downward spiral particularly since it was revealed that A & E was to close during the night. The public were keen for the hospital to survive but recent surveys had indicated that staff attitudes were poor and he asked how this was going to be addressed. Mrs. Howard explained that this question would be better answered by Lyn Hill-Tout, the Chief Executive of Mid Staffs NSH Foundation Trust. However, she confirmed that a lot of work had been undertaken regarding the attitude of staff and surveys had indicated that complaints were now falling and staff attitude was improving. It would be difficult to remove the stigma attached to Stafford hospital but it was necessary to move forward.

The Chairman thanked Mrs. Howard for attending the Forum meeting.

30. Update on bed losses and jobs and A & E Services at Stafford Hospital

Item raised by Maureen Freeman.

Lyn Hill-Tout, Chief Executive of Mid Staffs NHS Foundation Trust introduced herself to Forum Members. She advised that she had been employed by the Trust since 13 June 2011, having been in the NHS since 1974.

She explained that the Board had made the difficult decision to temporarily close A & E Services at Stafford Hospital between 10.00pm and 8.00am seven days a week. The closure would be for three months from 1 December 2011. Patients would be directed to other hospitals during this period. Staff would remain in the Department until 1.00am to enable any patients arriving before 10.00pm and still in the waiting room to be treated.

All neighbouring hospitals (including Walsall, Wolverhampton, Stoke and Burton) and the West Midlands Ambulance Services had been consulted and advised of the likely impact. She advised that about 27 patients (15 in an ambulance and 12 self presenting) are usually treated in the Emergency Department between the hours 10.00pm and 8.00am. It was anticipated that around 15 patients per night would need to be taken to the other hospitals. Depending on their clinical needs certain patients were already taken to other hospitals to receive specialist care, e.g. major trauma.

She confirmed that the decision was taken on the grounds of safety and not because of money. The Trust had been trying for the last two year to create a sustainable Emergency Department. Military doctors and nurses had been used on a temporary basis but there was a need to recruit and retain good quality permanent Consultants. Funding was available for 6 posts but only 3 Consultants were in post. There was a national shortage of Emergency Care medical staff but the reputation of the Trust and the continued external scrutiny had not helped in recruiting staff.

She confirmed that the Trust were committed to re-opening the Emergency Department at night when it could be assured that all the criteria had been met to enable safe care to be provided throughout 24 hours a day. The temporary closure would enable the Trust to recruit the new Consultants and ensure the existing staff had the training and skills they required to provide a safe service when the Emergency Department was re-opened.

Maureen Freeman welcomed Lyn Hill-Tout to the Forum and thanked her for attending. She had placed the item on the agenda prior to the Trust confirming the closure in the press. She sought confirmation of what would happen after February 2012 if the Trust were not able to recruit the

required number of Consultants and asked whether it would close permanently.

Lyn Hill-Tout advised that every effort would be made to meet the required criteria to enable the Department to re-open in February. One additional Consultant had already been recruited and the Trust was advertising for the remaining posts. A possible solution would be to link the A & E Department to another hospital and talks were taking place with Stoke tomorrow. One big department across two sites would make it easier to recruit staff. She explained that monthly Board meetings would be held to discuss the progress. She hoped to come back to the Forum after February to confirm that the Emergency Department had re-opened.

Maureen Freeman referred to a petition that had been gathered in Cannock Town Centre on Saturday which confirmed that no-one wanted Stafford A & E Department to close. She then asked for confirmation as to whether there had been any job losses and if there were any plans for job losses in the future.

Lyn Hill-Tout confirmed that there had been no job losses. There were no plans for any job losses on the clinical side but the Trust were seeking voluntary redundancies from the Management and Administration side.

Maureen Freeman then asked whether any ward had been closed or whether there were any plans to close any wards. Lyn Hill-Tout explained that Stafford hospital had closed a ward due to the hospital changing the way care was delivered. The aim was to reduce the time patients spent in hospital and to get people better quicker. People were living longer and being cared for (with illnesses) in their own homes.

The closure of the ward would enable the other wards to be redecorated as it would allow patients to be moved temporarily in to the spare ward. Additionally, the closed ward could be re-opened during the busy winter period if necessary.

With regards to Cannock hospital she confirmed that beds had shut on the Fair oak ward (the stroke/elderly ward) due to the length of the patients stay in hospital being reduced. Holly bank ward was not fully utilising the beds and there was a proposal for the two wards to be combined in January. Consultation with the clinical staff was currently being undertaken with regards to this proposal.

Maureen Freeman asked the Chief Executive, Stephen Brown, whether Cannock Chase Council had written to the Secretary of State for Health to request that the A & E Department at Stafford remain open. The Chief Executive explained that to his knowledge this had not been done but should Members of the Council wish this to be done it could be arranged.

Councillor Beddows had concern that men and women would be put in wards together should wards start to merge and considered that the planned night closure would leave a huge gap in services. Due to the stigma attached to Stafford hospital he asked whether consideration could be given to relocating the A & E Department to Cannock hospital.

Lyn Hill-Tout confirmed that there were no plans to go back to mixed wards. Women and men would be split in to smaller bays or single rooms. She explained that not all A & E patients were taken to Stafford at the current time as a number were already taken to Stoke or Wolverhampton (depending on their clinical need). Patients would still receive the same service but there may be extra travelling time. The minor injuries unit at Cannock was to increase their opening hours during the temporary closure of the A & E Department at Stafford. She advised that there would be the same problems if the Emergency Department was to relocate to Cannock hospital as there would still be a need to

recruit the required number of Consultants.

Councillor Adamson referred to the bed closures at Cannock hospital and explained that staff were unaware of the reasons and assumed that their jobs were at risk. Lyn Hill-Tout confirmed she would deal with this matter as there was clearly a lack of communication.

Councillor Adamson was of the opinion that the decision to temporarily close the Department was because of finances. He considered that lives could be put at risk because it was closing during the worst time of year. He had concern regarding the distance people in Cannock would have to travel if they had to go to Stoke. He felt that that the public were very concerned about the closure and this was apparent from the number of people who had signed the petition. He considered staff were dedicated as his wife was currently receiving excellent treatment at Stafford Hospital. However, he sought reassurances that patients would receive the same treatment during the closure.

Lyn Hill-Tout confirmed categorically that the decision to close was not about money; it had been based on safety as the Department were at risk during the night. She explained that it was one of the most difficult decisions the Board had had to make but it was better for patients to travel a little further in order to receive safe treatment. It would be unsafe for the Department to remain open as it was under staffed by doctors. The recruitment of doctors was the biggest risk to reopening and everything possible was being done to meet the criteria for re-opening the Department in February. She reassured Councillor Adamson that patients would received the same treatment during the temporary closure.

Councillor Adamson asked whether the costs of the Public Inquiry were being met by the Trust. Lyn Hill-Tout explained that the Government were paying part of the costs and the Trust was incurring its own legal costs.

In response to a further question Lyn Hill-Tout confirmed when a hospital was full the Ambulance was diverted to the next nearest hospital. Patients would then be moved back to their local hospital as soon as this was possible.

Councillor Allen referred to the excellent attitude of staff during his experiences at the hospitals. Lyn Hill-Tout explained that the organisation had a large number of excellent staff and complaints regarding the attitude of staff were falling. Communication was important to ensure the public felt proud of their local hospitals. Unfortunately, the public sometimes based their knowledge of the hospitals on what they read in the press and not from personal experiences.

Councillor Toth asked whether the hospital had been kept open whilst it was unsafe to do so. He also asked what the hospital's position was in terms of money and whether it would be closing down. He was advised that the hospital had safely remained open using locum staff. She confirmed that the hospital had a planned deficit of £18 million on a turnover of £150 million. The Trust was receiving support from the Department of Health and the PCT which showed there was real support to get Mid Staffs back on its feet. It needed to have a plan for operating at breakeven within three years. She explained that every year hospitals are asked to make efficiency savings and this had not been achieved by Mid Staffs. However, the proposed Management and Administration reductions would help. In response to a question, she confirmed that it was not close to being shut down.

Councillor Kraujalis made reference to previous Chief Executive's of the Trust who had assured the public that they were going to make a difference. He asked Lyn Hill-Tout whether her word could be trusted. She considered that she had been open and honest with her answers and had presented the facts and commented that "the proof of the pudding would be in the eating".

Councillor Snape asked whether there were plans for the A & E Department to be open at night during the Christmas and New Year period and asked for information regarding readmissions. Lyn Hill-Tout said no and explained that the Trust was looking at whether outreach services to deal with drunkenness in the town centre during the Christmas and New Year period were needed. She advised that regular monitoring was undertaken regarding readmissions and this information was publically available.

Councillor Morgan considered that bed closures could impact on waiting lists. Lyn Hill-Tout explained that bed closures gave more flexibility if they were done well and safely. Patients were receiving better treatment and their stay in hospital was less. The maximum waiting time for patients to receive treatment was generally 18 weeks, although the Trust had particular difficulties in Gastroenterology and Orthopaedics.

Finally, in response to questions from Councillor Mrs. Bernard the Chief Executive of the Hospital Trust confirmed that it had been decided to close A & E for three months because this was considered to be the right amount of time to overcome the problems regarding training staff and recruiting Consultants. With regards to the possibility of merging with Stoke she confirmed that should merging with another Trust lead to better working then it should be considered. Providing excellent clinical services at both sites was the important priority and the matter of who managed the sites was a secondary issue. The long term financial viability would need to be considered.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive of the Hospital Trust for attending the Forum.

31. Forward Agenda for Future Meetings

The Chairman explained that a form was available for any issues to be discussed at future meetings of the Forum. Appropriate representatives would be invited to attend and debate the issues and answer any questions.

32. Date of Future Meetings

The Forum noted that the next meeting of the Cannock Community Forum had been arranged for Tuesday 6 March 2012.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting at 9.05 pm.

CHAIRMAN