Helen Atkinson

Strategic Director for Adult Social Care and Public Health

SCC

Kate Shields

Regional Director of Specialised Commissioning (South)

NHS England South

8th August 2017

Dear Helen and Kate,

I am writing to put on record that Healthwatch Surrey believes, based on the facts available to us, that engagement and consultation with service users around changes to sexual health services in Surrey, particularly around changes to the HIV services offered through GUM clinics, has not been adequate. We have not seen evidence to date of any substantial engagement with users of HIV services, or evidence of how this feedback has been incorporated into service change. Given the importance of these services to local people and to those who are in vulnerable circumstances we are very concerned at this apparent lack of engagement.

It is our understanding of the legal requirement to consult that this should happen at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage; should give sufficient reasons for change to allow for an “intelligent consideration and response”; give adequate time for that response; and the product of that consultation must be “conscientiously taken into account” and evidenced as such (the Gunning Principles). We cannot see how these requirements have been met to date in the changes to HIV services.

You acknowledge in previous correspondence (emailed on 3rd July 2017) that the meeting with service users on 13th May was not ideal as the purpose was not clear, and that letter refers to that meeting being “t*he start of a process to engage with service users*”. However it is clear that meetings now planned at Chertsey House in August and September are mainly for the provision of information and they come too late in the day to be a significant opportunity for patient views to help shape the future delivery of the services. That could only have happened much earlier in the process but it is our understanding that meetings with HIV service users did not take place whilst the specification was being developed.

As such we cannot see that the decision of the Cabinet of Surrey County Council as referred to in the papers of 20th March 2017 to agree a six month extension to allow “*appropriate levels of consultation*” has been fulfilled. Given the extension and express desire for consultation was made in March, we are concerned that it has taken until August to arrange meetings with users for a service that is due to change at the end of September. We are also concerned that that these meetings are primarily to give information, and come too late in the day to influence the way services are delivered. We fail to see how that can be seen a genuine engagement and "appropriate consultation".

One of the powers that we have as a local Healthwatch is to refer matters to the SCC Adults and Health Select Committee and we will be taking steps to do this.

We urge you as commissioners to reconsider the extent to which there has been meaningful collection, analysis of and response to patient concerns. Given the time needed to do this we urge you to revisit the timeframe urgently to facilitate meaningful user input into the design of the services. We again repeat our offer that we would be pleased to assist with that engagement if there is a genuine opportunity for patient views to influence the delivery of services.

I look forward to hearing from you. We will be publishing this letter and your response on our website.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Scribbins

Chief Executive

CC: Helyn Clack and Dr Andy Brooks, Co-chairs Health and Wellbeing Board; Ken Gulati Chair of Adults and Health Select Committee