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- 4 FEB 2011

Dear Bryan,

Thank you for your letter of 13 January 2011 about changes to women's and children's services at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust.

I appreciate your Committee was disappointed by my decision made public on 22 December 2010 that centralisation of specialist inpatient women's and children's services at Pembury Hospital should proceed.

However, in making my decision, I think it is important to stress that I took full account of the advice provided to me by the Independent Reconfiguration Panel, as well as considering the points raised by your Committee over the last year.

In addition, I closely studied the findings of NHS South East Coast's report following their further engagement with local stakeholders in the context of the four tests for service reconfiguration.

As service changes are implemented at Pembury, it is important local engagement continues in order to address outstanding concerns, and NHS South East Coast has committed to doing this.

What is most important is that patient services are safe and offer high quality care for mothers and babies in West Kent.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust believes the creation of a purpose-built centre of excellence at the new £225million Pembury hospital, through centralisation of specialist inpatient women's and

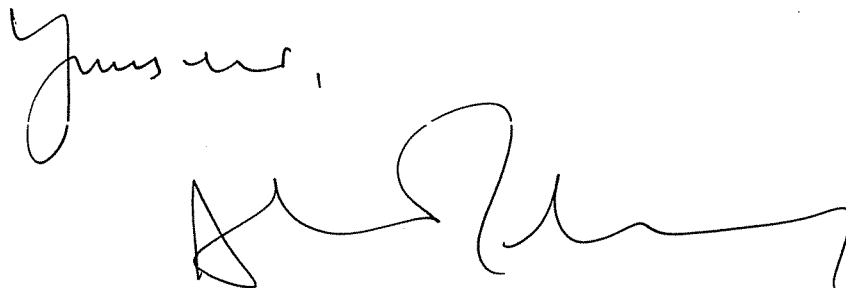
children's services in a unique, single room environment, is essential to ensure safe, sustainable, high quality services for the region.

The vast majority of women's and children's services will remain at Maidstone hospital (for instance, consultant-led antenatal clinics, postnatal clinics, a short stay paediatric unit, a foetal assessment unit and a day case children's unit), and the trust's plans introduce a new option for pregnant women in West Kent with the development of the midwife-led unit at Maidstone.

I listened very carefully to the views of local GPs during my visit to Maidstone hospital on 24 November 2010, and I was impressed by their obvious commitment to maintaining a wide range of services at the Maidstone site in order to promote it as a viable hospital in its own right.

I have made it absolutely clear that in the future, it will be a matter for GPs as service commissioners to assess whether there is an unmet need at Maidstone, and to seek to redesign and commission services where they feel this to be necessary.

In the light of the above, I will not defer my decision about changes to women's and children's services at Maidstone hospital.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Lansley', written in a cursive style.

ANDREW LANSLEY CBE