

24 September 2024

Temporary changes at Sevenoaks Hospital

The purpose of this paper is to provide HOSC members with an update on the decision to temporarily move inpatient beds from Sevenoaks Hospital in June, due to a fire safety risk.

Background

Following a planned fire evacuation exercise at Sevenoaks Hospital, KCHFT's Executive Team took the decision on Friday, 14 June to make urgent temporary changes to move our inpatient rehabilitation ward to other local hospitals. The exercise followed a survey by KCHFT and a fire safety audit by Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS), which highlighted issues with fire compartmentation.

The temporary move was not a decision KCHFT took lightly, however the safety of patients, staff and volunteers will always be the trust's first priority.

Sevenoaks Hospital is made up of two buildings: a main building which previously was home to the 19-bedded inpatient ward and an outpatient building. A 15 bed-ward was opened at West View Integrated Care Centre, in Tenterden to support the system providing frailty care and general rehabilitation, while Tonbridge Hospital is specialising in stroke and fractured neck of femur (broken hip) care.

What has happened since the temporary move

Since the trust took the decision, it has carried out a thorough assessment of the work that needs to be completed to make the inpatient building at Sevenoaks safe to return to for both patients, staff and volunteers.

This full-scale review has now been completed and the estimated cost is in the region of £6million for both the fire safety work and the backlog maintenance. This exceeds the capital available to us and comes at a time when the Kent and Medway system as a whole, faces an unprecedented financial challenge.

While the fire-related works will improve the safety of the Sevenoaks building, it will not change the evacuation plans and the requirement for the evacuation of frail elderly patients from the first floor, remains a significant risk.

In addition to this, KCHFT's ambition is to develop our rehabilitation model for community hospitals for the future and we have put forward a draft case for change to NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB). One of the key drivers for a review is the quality of our estate, which is impacting on our ability to deliver effective rehabilitation for our populations.

This wider review is due to be led by the ICB across the whole of Kent and Medway and will need the involvement of patients and carers, public, staff and wider stakeholders. We don't yet have a timescale for this review.

Until the system can work with patients and carers, public and wider partners to develop what the new model of rehabilitation looks like, KCHFT believes it is the wrong time to invest millions of pounds of public

money – millions that is not at its disposal – in a building that may not give the option to deliver a future model of rehabilitation our communities need.

Therefore, on Friday (23 August), KCHFT's Board reluctantly took the decision to pause any work on the inpatient building until the wider review of community hospitals across Kent and Medway has taken place.

Once the review is completed, the system will be able to decide what the model of care looks like, where and how many beds our population needs, what is affordable and what facility is needed to deliver effective rehabilitation and the best outcomes for people in the future.

It is impossible to say yet, whether or not this will mean beds on the current Sevenoaks site, which is why the pause is needed until the review is completed.

Moving remaining services on the Sevenoaks site

As the trust has made the decision not to complete the fire safety works, the remaining services in the inpatient building will be moved into the main outpatient building across the road and other buildings on the Sevenoaks site.

This will mean the Urgent Treatment Centre, community nursing service, audiology and some other outpatient clinics will move into vacant space during the coming weeks and months.

Patients will be kept informed if they need to attend a different building for their appointment.

Some remedial work is being completed first to enable the change to happen. There is enough space to move these services in to Darent House and the outpatient building and the trust is working with services to make sure the move happens smoothly and services can continue to provide everything they need to.

We have completed a review of the space requirements needed for the move, including engagement with service leads and a detailed plan for accommodation has been established. The trust expects to be able to accommodate all of the existing second floor services of the main hospital building into the outpatient building in a first phase. The trust hopes to achieve this by December 2024.

A second phase of relocating services on the ground floor is due to take place between January and March 2025.

Supporting staff and patients

Patients and carers, public, staff and stakeholders are being kept informed through messages on [KCHFT's website](#) and bulletins, regular briefings and one-to-one conversations.

As we do not yet have a timescale for the Kent and Medway community hospital review, in the interim, we will retain the additional 15 bed unit at West View Integrated Care Centre to provide care for west Kent patients. We are therefore consulting with all staff who previously worked in the Sevenoaks inpatient service. Alongside the consultation we are holding meetings with all affected colleagues to ensure that we can offer suitable alternative employment and maintain safe inpatient facilities.

Next steps – developing what is right for the people of Sevenoaks

KCHFT is committed to delivering the very best care for the people of Sevenoaks and west Kent.

Therefore, during this pause, the trust will continue to work with system partners to develop what inpatient rehabilitation will look like in the future and focus on improving out-of-hospital services to reduce the reliance upon bed-based care, which is often detrimental for many frail and elderly patients.

This aligns with the national direction of travel to develop thriving integrated neighbourhood teams that support seamless coordinated care, provides care close to home and intervenes early to prevent people's health and wellbeing declining. This work will be led by West Kent Health and Care Partnership.

The trust knows it cannot do any of this without the involvement of our patients, public and wider stakeholders and is committed to keeping everyone up-to-date as we progress.

By improving in and out of hospital care, we can make sure people in Sevenoaks and across west Kent, have high quality services that deliver the best outcomes for our communities and are sustainable for the long-term future.

Pauline Butterworth
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