

Submission from Lorraine Sencicle regarding Health Services in Dover

Dear Paul

Thank you for your e-mail inviting me to make a submission to the KCC-HOSC meeting of 5 September, when Dover's Health Services will again be discussed.

I need not remind you that on May 9 I presented the PPIF-PCT report to the KCC-HOSC in which we argued:

- * The case for a new Community Hospital in Dover, in line with the Government White Paper 'Our Health, Our Care, Our Say' at the same time, vehemently arguing against a polyclinic.
- * A timetable for the Dover Community Hospital.

This was given the full backing by the KCC-HOSC with the end of August as the date for the decision on the site of the Community Hospital.

Since then:

- * On the positive side: Both the PCT and the EKHT have worked with DDC to determine the site and £20m has been made available for the new Community Hospital.
- * On the negative side: The public of Dover have been misinformed of the KCC-HOSC decision for a Dover Community Hospital, believing that the decision was for a polyclinic.

The conclusion is that there is now a danger that the KCC-HOSC will now be asked to rescind their May 9 decision to the detriment of the people of Dover.

Positive Side

The Dover GP Consortium in conjunction with the PCT has undertaken a survey asking the people of Dover what health/hospital services they wanted. The results of this, apparently, concur with those hospital services, including inpatient beds, day surgery etc. that I partly read out to the KCC-HOSC on May 9. These were in line with the recommendations of the White Paper.

I am also pleased to say that up to £20m has now been set aside for Dover's Community Hospital. This announcement was made to the public on 14 August.

The DDC Scrutiny Committee, like the PPIF-PCT and the Dover GP Consortium, came to the conclusion that a Community Hospital would best serve Dover's needs. The DDC Scrutiny Committee, on May 20, invited me, on behalf of the former PPIF-PCT, to discuss our stance and also the KCC-HOSC hearing. This meeting was positive and given front-page coverage by the Dover Mercury.

The only negative side was that the DDC Scrutiny Committee failed to acknowledge the PPIF-PCT / KCC-HOSC recommendations in their report.

Finally, the Dover Society Executive have also backed a Community Hospital for the town.

Negative Side

Immediately the KCC-HOSC made their decision, former County Councillor, Mr Hansell, issued a press release opposing the KCC-HOSC decision (confirmed by the BBC). In consequence, the majority of the people in Dover believe that the KCC-HOSC had recommended a polyclinic.

By taking this stance, Mr Hansell secured a great deal of media coverage while the case for a Community Hospital has only been stated once and only in one paper (Dover Mercury - see above).

The Dover Express have constantly referred to the KCC-HOSC decision as a polyclinic and backed a march opposing it. Those who wrote to the paper to try and correct the misconception, including myself, were ignored.

Prior to May 9, a petition had been launched by Mrs Major and signed by some 4,500 people by that date. This was for a 'general hospital'. Mrs Major attended the KCC-HOSC hearing but carried on with her petition, saying that Dover was only going to get a polyclinic. Mrs Hansell, in July, with full publicity provided by the BBC and front-page by the Dover Mercury, presented the petition to 10 Downing Street.

This is of particular concern, for in statements it has been said that to overturn the decision more than 50% of the population covered by the GP Consortium had to sign the petition. Besides deliberately misleading people and multi-signings, Mrs Major has also canvassed places outside that covered by the Consortium. Indeed she was almost arrested in Folkestone and this was reported in the local press.

Although Mr Prosser, Dover's MP, stated in his written submission to the KCC-HOSC, that he broadly supported the PPIF-PCT stance. Not once has Mr Prosser publicly reiterated his support or acknowledged that the KCC-HOSC decision was for a Community Hospital.

Although Mr Elphicke is the Parliamentary Candidate for the Conservative Party, and the majority of the KCC-HOSC members are of the same Party. Yet a questionnaire was sent out to the electorate, on his behalf, in which the KCC-HOSC recommendation for Dover Community Hospital was omitted from the alternatives on offer!

It is reported that Dover Town Council's, predominantly Labour Members, have provided financial backing for Mr Hansell's 'Action Group.' I have asked for confirmation of this, but to date no one has replied. Suffice to say they are aware of the KCC-HOSC and the DDC-Scrutiny Committee decisions. I also requested to speak to them about a Community Hospital but again they have not replied.

On 14 August, the PCT organised a public meeting to discuss the site of the Community Hospital. On arrival I was mistakenly thought to be part of Mr Hansell's 'Dover Hospital Action Group'. I was instructed as to where I was to sit and told that I was to oppose, as

loudly as possible, anything that was suggested by the PCT/DDC. My 'instructor' went on to tell me that if I was to say anything, I was to remember that the media, "who are all friends of Reg," would only be looking for quotes.

At the outset Mr Meikle, on behalf of the PCT, announced that up to £20m had been set aside for the Dover Community Hospital. Unfortunately, the majority of those present were unreceptive as they are convinced that Dover is only going to get a polyclinic.

I tried, three times, to make it clear that it was me, not the PCT/EKHT - contrary to the claims by members of the audience, who had argued for the Dover Community Hospital at the KCC-HOSC. I also made it clear, three times, that I had argued equally as vehemently against a polyclinic. I added, on each occasion, that the KCC-HOSC had given their full backing for a Community Hospital, as had the GP Consortium and DDC. They just did not want to know.

Conclusion

The KCC-HOSC, on May 9 agreed with the case put forward by the former PPIF-PCT for a Dover Community Hospital and set a timetable. The PCT, EKHT and DDC have complied with this and £20m has been set aside. However, due to misconceptions, by the media, of the KCC-HOSC May 9 decision for a Dover Community Hospital, the people of Dover have been misled to believe that the decision was for a polyclinic. Although this is not true, only once and in just one local paper, have I been allowed to put forward the case for a Community Hospital. There have been masses of media coverage, a march has been held, a questionnaire has been issued and a petition has been collated, but the participants were misinformed into believing that they were protesting against a polyclinic. I am now concerned that these will be used to rescind the May 9 decision. In consequence Dover will lose a Community Hospital with a full set of hospitals services to meet the town's desperate needs that the KCC-HOSC supported.

Yours sincerely

Lorraine Sencicle