

HEALTH SERVICES FOR EDENBRIDGE: EVALUATION OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an evaluation of a public consultation on developing health services in Edenbridge and the surrounding villages. The consultation was carried out between February and April 2017 by the three organisations responsible for planning, commissioning and providing local services. A consultation document was widely distributed along with a survey inviting views on the plans and a variety of other means were used to engage people such as meetings, briefings, flyers and social media. The public response to the consultation was largely in the form of replies to the survey and the questions and concerns raised by people attending the public meetings. These have been analysed alongside a smaller number of responses generated from correspondence with members of the public, meetings with specific groups and presentations to local organisations.

The consultation attracted 432 people to public meetings and 1159 who completed the survey. Due to high numbers attending public meetings it was not possible to have the round table discussions as planned, and this may have prevented the consultation from obtaining a more considered response to the consultation questions. However, the survey questions were the same as those that would have been used in group discussions, and the higher than expected response to the survey from a broader demographic means that more **individual views** have been included in the evaluation. It is also likely that people attending the public meetings were able to raise a wider range of concerns in the unstructured Q&A sessions than might have emerged from round table discussions.

The overall view of local people was very positive about the plans. It was widely felt that GP and hospital services for Edenbridge and surrounding villages were already over-stretched and unable to meet needs. In the survey, almost all (94%) agreed that a combined hospital and surgery was the solution, and only 2.6% disagreed. Many (79%) supported the preferred option that the new facility should be on a new site and without inpatient beds. What people said and wrote showed a general acceptance that current services were neither cost-effective nor efficient and needed updating, and many welcomed the opportunity to have a wider range of services in the town on a single site. They felt that the plans had the support of medical staff, that co-location and more space might lead to better co-ordination of services, better recruitment prospects and greater ability to cope with population growth. Although there was least support for the options with inpatient beds, it was quite often commented that inpatient beds were still required, especially for elderly people and because travel to other hospitals was difficult for some.

There was widespread agreement that difficult choices had to be made (92% in the survey agreed), that there was limited money and it had to be used effectively (94% agreed), and that there was an opportunity to secure the future of both the GP surgery and the hospital that needed to be taken (96% agreed).

People were asked in the survey to pick out three statements they thought were most important to consider regarding planning future care for the area, with the following getting greatest support:

- 'Reducing travel so that people can get treatment and care as close to home as possible' (chosen by 68%)
- 'Having the most up to date and efficient equipment and facilities' (64%)
- 'Designing healthcare to meet the changing needs of the community/population' (60%)

Regarding developing better local services, having 'As wide a range of services as possible in Edenbridge' was most popular (51% in the survey gave this as their **top priority**, and 71% put this in their **top three** priorities). Using new technology, having healthcare staff working as a team, providing holistic care, and bringing services that have traditionally only been provided in larger hospitals came next down the list with between 13-17% putting these as their **top priority**, and between 49-58% ranking them in their **top three**.

When asked to choose the single most important additional service people would like to see, 'Preventative health checks' and 'Maternity services, ante-natal care and post-natal parenting support' came out top for 22% and 17% respectively in the survey (with 39% and 37% putting these in their top three). These choices were followed by 'Increased opening hours for the Minor Injury Unit', 'End of life and respite care' and 'Oncology (for people with cancer)'. Lowest on the priority list were 'Ophthalmology (medical and surgical eye problems)', 'Dietetics (run by dietician, a clinic for people for whom there are dietary or nutritional concerns)', 'Audiology/hearing aid services' and 'Access to social services'.

Responses and the general mood of meetings were largely very supportive of change and modernisation. However, there were some people expressing concerns about losing inpatient beds in Edenbridge and others wanting to retain the site or the heritage of the War Memorial Hospital. The support for the Memorial Hospital and what it represented was clear, however only a few expressed a strong view that it should be retained and most participants seemed content if it was remembered and commemorated in some way. Strongly expressed views disagreeing with the proposals were only expressed by a very small number of people in the consultation. The broad view was that a newly built combined hospital and GP surgery on a larger site would lead to better access to a wider range of services that would attract staff and was required to meet the needs of a growing population.

The full consultation report can be viewed at <http://www.westkentccg.nhs.uk/get-involved/redesign-health-services-for-edenbridge>