



# **Service change in the NHS**

## **Insight from the work of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel**

**February 2020**



# What is the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP)?

- A non-departmental public body set up in 2003 to advise on contested service change
- Members are public appointments
- Current Chair is Sir Norman Williams
- 15 members (five clinical, five lay, five managerial)
- Supported by two staff



## What the IRP does

- **Formal Role** – Advises Secretary of State (SofS) on contested proposals for health service changes in England
- **Informal Role** – Responds to requests for information and promotes the sharing of knowledge and experience in the field of service change.



## Formal role

- Local authorities may use scrutiny powers to refer NHS decisions to SofS if not satisfied that they have been consulted adequately or if they consider the proposal is not in the interests of health services in the area
- SofS may choose to commission advice from the IRP which is normally provided in 20 working days
- Occasionally further evidence may be needed in which case a further commission and timescale is agreed



# Learning from referrals

- The IRP has advised SofS over 80 times
- We first distilled learning in 2008 and have revisited regularly
- Context has changed but many themes have persisted
- In our experience, seven critical success factors make successful service change more likely



## Critical success factors (1)

- Open community and stakeholder involvement from the first stage of considering change
- A clear vision for the health and care of the community that provides the context for service change proposals
- Money, transport and emergency care are addressed explicitly
- A credible case for change that clinicians and patients advocate



## Critical success factors (2)

- The benefits for patients of change are articulated and communicated
- Plans for implementation are sufficiently comprehensive to be credible to stakeholders
- Process is transparent from beginning to end so that consultation is truly meaningful and responses are given proper consideration before final decisions



## Observations

- NHS has got better at this and can do better still
- NHS's legal duties to involve are continuous - not just for service change
- What do the public, patients and staff say?
  - what are their issues and assumptions?
  - how are they shaping what is happening?
- Be open and authentic to avoid surprises
- Embrace scrutiny as part of the process





# Contact and further information

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