

Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP)

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2023 via Microsoft Teams

Members present:

Sir Norman Williams, Chair
Simon Brake
Tansi Harper
Graham Jagger
Rajesh Khanna
Luke March
Tony Schapira
Michael Scott
Rohan Sivanandan
Elaine Strachan-Hall
Miles Wagstaff
Suzy Walton

In attendance:

Richard Jeavons, IRP Chief Executive
IRP secretariat
Grayling Communications representative

Apologies:

None

1. Welcome, declarations of interest and minutes of the previous meeting

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members and opened the meeting. Member Simon Brake declared an interest having previously worked as the independent chair of the NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin 'Future Fit' Joint Committee and therefore agreed to leave the meeting before the discussion of item six to avoid any conflict.
- 1.2 The minutes from the IRP meeting held on 12 September 2023 were formally approved.

2. Chair's update

- 2.1 The Chair updated members on progress with public appointments. Six roles for new panel members (four managers, one consultant/senior doctor and one senior nurse) were recently advertised and interviews were held in October. The interview panel's recommendations for appointment are now with ministers in the Department of Health and Social Care for decision. Ministers will also be deciding whether to appoint five of the current IRP members to serve second terms from June 2024.
- 2.2 The panel noted that the Department of Health and Social Care had received a written parliamentary question from the Independent MP for Solihull asking how much the IRP spent on equality and diversity training in the 2022-23 financial year. The Minister of State for Health answered on 20 October 2023 to confirm that no funds had been spent.

3. Health and Care Act 2022: update on the commencement of the new reconfiguration intervention powers for ministers

- 3.1 Members received a verbal update from the IRP secretariat on the Department of Health and Social Care's (DHSC) work to implement the reconfiguration powers for ministers in Schedule 6 of the Health and Care Act 2022.

3.2 DHSC confirmed that the new ministerial powers will commence from January 2024. Secondary legislation to commence the powers is expected to be laid before Parliament in the coming months with statutory guidance accompanied by additional policy guidance from the department for local authorities and NHS bodies.

4. NHS maternity and neonatal services

4.1 Members received a written briefing from the secretariat on the current state of maternity and neonatal services in England and the key issues to consider for reconfigurations.

4.2 Key points that arose from the panel's discussion included:

- The growing complexity in births, the lack of choice in birth settings and the need for more support for women from lower socio-economic groups or those living in areas of deprivation.
- The relationship between midwives and obstetricians, their training and education including rotating between acute hospital and community settings, and the levels of required staffing.
- Oversight and governance and the need to pick up on early warning signs of issues within services.
- The differences in freestanding midwifery units and those alongside obstetric units and the travel times from community settings to hospital.

4.3 The Chair thanked panel members for an interesting and engaging discussion.

5. NHS reconfigurations watch list

5.1 Members received a report summarising current NHS reconfiguration proposals across England, including major acute service changes and those involving primary and community care.

5.2 The Chair declared a previously held interest regarding NHS England's proposal for children's specialist cancer services for south London and south east England due to having been a non-executive director at St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust from 2016 to 2019.

5.3 The following significant reconfiguration proposals were noted:

- Devon County Council's health scrutiny committee task group has continued to gather evidence to possibly submit a new referral to the Secretary of State to object to the NHS Devon Integrated Care Board's proposal to close Teignmouth Community Hospital.
- North Lincolnshire Council voted to object to proposals to move some services out of Scunthorpe General Hospital to the Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital in

Grimsby as part of the Humber Acute Services Review led by the NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board.

- Westminster Council and Kensington & Chelsea Council had both raised concerns about the options proposed by the NHS North West London Integrated Care Board and Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust for the future of the Gordon Hospital following the temporary closure of inpatient mental health beds in 2020.
- Wandsworth Council had written several letters to the Secretary of State opposed to the option in NHS England's proposal to relocate specialist children's cancer services to the Evelina Children's Hospital rather than St George's Hospital with support for the campaign from Rosena Allin-Khan, MP for Tooting in south London.

6. **Request for IRP advice from Health Minister Lord Markham regarding the concerns raised by Telford & Wrekin Council about the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals Transformation Programme**

- 6.1 Member Simon Brake left the meeting at this point to avoid any conflict of interest.
- 6.2 It was noted that Lord Markham had written to the IRP Chair on 23 October 2023 to look into the concerns raised by Telford & Wrekin Council and reflect on whether circumstances had changed sufficiently to warrant a change to the final IRP advice provided to the Secretary of State in 2019 about the original hospitals transformation proposal, then known as the 'Future Fit' programme.
- 6.3 Telford & Wrekin Council's referral sent on 20 March 2023 asked the Secretary of State to review the decisions made about the accident and emergency department and consultant-led women's and children's services at the Princess Royal Hospital in Telford.
- 6.4 A sub-group of panel members had been convened to review the evidence and formulate the advice to ministers. Further evidence had been requested from stakeholders and formal meetings planned with Telford & Wrekin Council and The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust to discuss the key lines of enquiry in more detail with each party.

7. **Any other business**

- 7.1 None.
- 7.2 The Chair thanked all those present and closed the meeting.