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Email only

21 December 2018

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Request for Information

Thank you for your request for information received on 26 November 2018 in relation to the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (Trust). We are dealing with your request under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You requested information regarding closure of ward 6. Specifically you requested information as follows:

Under section 19 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000

- 1. Was the closure of ward 6 at Bishop Auckland ever discussed at any time with the Durham and Darlington Hospital Trust Board and Foundation Governors? Yes/No.***

Answer: The Trust has not at any point made a decision to close ward 6.

As a foundation trust, CDDFT is required, every year to submit a forward-looking annual plan. As such the organisation undertakes an engagement exercise with Trust Board, Council of Governors and other stakeholders and partners to inform, shape and design the content of this plan, which is formally signed off by the Trust Board. The plan is underpinned by the Trust's strategy and the delivery of 'quality'. Quality is defined by the National Quality Board which sets out a single shared commitment to person-centred care for all which delivers safe, effective and positive experiences which is well-led and demonstrates sustainable uses of resources.

As part of the annual plan engagement the Trust Board and Council of Governors were sighted on the Trust's ambitions to deliver quality by using national best practice and evidence to drive and deliver improvements in patient outcomes and experiences while also ensuring this was in line with their stewardship responsibility in terms of financial management.

The Trust, together with commissioners and other partners, has implemented best practice, including the 'home first' model. This model aims to support avoiding admissions, caring for patients at home, facilitating early discharges and reducing length of stay. These changes impact on demand for certain wards and services, including ward 6.

Therefore, the Trust wanted to engage and involve clinical and non-clinical colleagues in a dialogue to gain ideas and suggestions about what different models of care might look like and how facilities might be used differently. It is due process to begin a proposed change programme with this internal engagement in the first instance. We undertook this dialogue as a staff consultation so that it was supported by an HR process. As part of this work there is a responsibility on the Trust to explore all options to best use resources including whether it is appropriate to reduce bed holding costs. We do however, acknowledge that this process was not managed as well as it could have been and that some of the language used in the consultation documentation to set the context for the staff dialogue caused concern.

2. *If so, what was the date of these meetings?*

Answer: Following press coverage, the Board discussed Ward 6 when it met on 31st October 2018 and 28th November 2018. The Council of Governors discussed Ward 6 on 10th October 2018.

3. *Was Ward 6 at Bishop Auckland part of the Trusts bed reduction scheme? Yes/No*

Answer: The Trust does not have a 'bed reduction scheme'.

Please refer to the answer to question 1. The Trust is required to develop and submit an annual plan. The content of this plan includes how the organisation will deliver quality in line with the National Quality Board's commitment outlined above. Therefore, included within the Trust's annual planning process is engagement on schemes and plans to improve patient experience; outcomes; productivity and efficiency. By their nature some of these plans and schemes may have as an output a reduction in the number of beds on a particular ward or aligned to a particular service. It is acknowledged that some colleagues may refer to these as bed reduction schemes.

4. *Are the Trust Board and Governor's aware of this scheme? Yes/No*

Answer: There is no bed reduction scheme. However as detailed in previous answers, the Trust Board and Council of Governors are fully engaged in the development of the annual plan – please refer to more detail in the answers included above.

5. Was Durham County Council informed of the closure of Ward 6 at Bishop Auckland before October 1st 2018?

Answer: Please see answer to Question 1. The Trust had not made a decision to close Ward 6. An internal staff consultation process was started to gain ideas and suggestions about what different models of care might look like and how facilities might be used differently.

6. Were members of the Trust Board and Governor's notified before the letters were issued to the staff of Ward 6 at Bishop Auckland about the internal consultation regarding the closure of Ward 6?

Answer: Please see answer to question 1.

7. Have the Trust ever discussed reducing the outpatients at Bishop Auckland from 5 days down to 4 days?

Answer: Nationally, there is recognition that it is time to think differently about the way in which outpatient services are provided. In 2017/18 the Trust also saw a reduction in the number of consultant-led referrals. This has instigated a programme of quality improvement work to explore and understand if there are ways to improve patient experience; productivity and efficiency. Part of this work has included working with clinical teams to set out any and all scenarios as a starting point. One such option included consolidating clinics which would have resulted in a reduction to four days a week. This was discussed at meetings of the Executive and Clinical Leadership Committee on 30th August 2018 and 29th October 2018. However, at the latter meeting, Executive Directors did not agree to proceed with this idea, prior to a review of whether the evidence justified the change and without discussions with the Trust's commissioners to obtain their views.

8. If this is correct, have the Trust Board and Governor's been consulted?

Answer: Please refer to the answer to question 7. It was suggested within a wide range of ideas but did not receive agreement from Executive Directors, pending a review of evidence and discussion with commissioners, and therefore has not been specifically discussed with Board or Council of Governors.

In line with the Information Commissioner's directive on the disclosure of information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 your request will form part of our disclosure log. Therefore, a version of our response which will protect your anonymity will be posted on the County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust website.

If you have any queries or wish to discuss the information supplied, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above telephone number or at the above address.

If you are unhappy with the way your request for information has been handled, you can request a review by writing to:

The Chief Executive
County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust
Darlington Memorial Hospital
Hollyhurst Road
Darlington
DL3 6HX

If, you remain dissatisfied with the handling of your request or complaint, you have a right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Telephone: 0303 123 1113
Website: www.ico.gov.uk.

There is no charge for making an appeal.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Tyrrell
Freedom of Information Officer