

Via email:
Paul.Osborn@harrow.gov.uk

Dear Paul,

Thank you for sight of the OSC's report on the closure of the Village Surgery. Julie Taylor has provided a factual commentary on the report but we would like comment on the judgements and analysis contained in it.

First may we thank the panel for the diligent work they have undertaken. We would also like to thank you for your help in organising of the public meetings and Pinner and for undertaking the role of chair of the meetings. We welcome the panel finding that we acted in good faith, even if you disagree with some of our actions.

The PCT made mistakes in the handling of the closure of the Village surgery. In particular we were not clear and frank enough about the reasons for the closure until the second challenge meeting. We also did not communicate effectively to the patients of the surgery the reasons for the closure, and what would happen next. This lack of communication put the PCT on the back foot, so we had already lost credibility in the eyes of many stakeholders by the time of the public meetings.

We therefore accept the criticisms of the committee in relation to this.

We still believe that the judgements the PCT made about how to respond to the resignation of the partners at the surgery were sound. The PCT was motivated by the need to ensure that patient services were maintained safely, not by the desire to save money.

The report suggests that in view of the long standing difficulties between the partners the PCT should have had in place a contingency plan. In the circumstances we were faced with- no senior doctors at the practice, escalating concerns about the service to patients and the inability of the partners to agree an alternative plan- it is difficult to see what that contingency would be other than what happened, rapid transfer of services to a nearby practice.

The comments about lack of consultation prior to closure are presumably based on an assumption that we could maintain safe services at the Village while we consulted with patients. This was not the case and as the NHS Constitution says, patients *"have the right to be treated with a professional standard of care, by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, in a properly approved or registered organisation that meets required levels of safety and quality."*

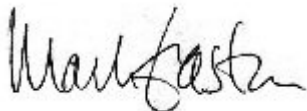
Regarding the LMC it is disappointing the report does not reflect the discussions the PCT had from 2007 with Mrs. Jean Hassell from LMC GP Support regarding the dialogue with the partners about options for keeping the practice going- including bringing on board additional staff. Despite the LMC's best efforts it proved impossible to get an agreed plan from the partners. This seems to undermine the report's view that the practice could have been maintained if more advice had been sought from the LMC, especially as agreement would have been required from some of the doctors involved on the use of their premises. Jean has subsequently retired, but we wonder whether the panel would have benefited from discussion with her, as the LMC official who was most involved.

The panel "felt that the partners could have been required to co-operate with an orderly transition to another surgery or to comply with NHS Harrow in keeping the surgery open with additional support."

The partners did co-operate with an orderly, albeit rapid, transition to an alternative surgery. We were pleased that two of the partners got jobs at the Pinn, since we have heard clearly from Village patients about the importance of continuity. We had no powers to force the partners to continue with a service that they were so unhappy with they took the very significant step of resigning their livelihood.

In conclusion we want to stress that in view of the very significant challenges faced by health services in Harrow over the next few years we are very keen to work constructively with the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Will intend to be fully transparent on the difficulties facing us and improve our consultation and engagement with local stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Easton
Chief Executive



Dr Gillian Schiller
Chairman