

Dear colleague,

Welcome to a new regular briefing on ULHT's efforts to maintain safe children's and maternity services. As the situation is constantly changing, we want to keep people up to date with the latest developments. We hope you find it useful.

There is a national shortage of paediatric doctors and children's nurses and ULHT is seriously affected by this. We have had a long-standing shortage at the Trust and have carried out extensive worldwide recruitment but these efforts haven't resulted in the numbers of doctors needed to maintain current services.

The women and children's directorate reviewed temporary options for children's and maternity services at the hospital due to concerns raised by paediatricians and senior nurses, who said that although current services are safe, they might struggle to provide safe care in the future if things remain as they are.

Despite reviewing all temporary options to provide safe services, we are doing everything possible to keep paediatric and obstetric services running at Pilgrim.

Paediatric services review

On Friday 27 April, ULHT Board reviewed five possible, temporary options for the provision of children's services at Pilgrim Hospital, Boston, due to concerns caused by a severe shortage of doctors and nurses.

The Trust Board asked for more work to be done on [four of the five temporary options](#) to maintain safe paediatric and obstetric services. This updated paper will be presented to ULHT board on Friday 25 May.

For all of Pilgrim's children's, neonatal and maternity services to operate 24/7, there should be eight middle grade doctors. Currently there are 4.5 middle grade doctors, but a number of these are short-term agency staff. From Sunday 1 July, we forecast we'll have just one permanent middle grade doctor, with the rest of the rota covered by temporary staff.

The service has managed to safely staff the paediatric department by asking our consultants to work extra shifts and cover the gaps in the middle grade doctor rota, together with securing as many agency doctors as possible. The tipping point will be running a rota with just one permanent middle grade doctor.

Latest position

We haven't made a decision yet and we are working hard to avoid moving services although changes are a possibility. Our preferred option is to keep paediatric and obstetric services running at Pilgrim.

We want to reassure the public that we won't take any decision lightly. A decision will be made for one reason and one reason only and that is to ensure our children's services remain safe. It's a case of hoping for the best but planning for the worst.

NHS Improvement has asked the East Midlands Clinical Senate, a group of independent clinicians set up to provide an expert clinical view to NHS organisations, to carry out a review of our children's services over the next few weeks.

They will look at the temporary options to see what's safe and what is possible. We hope the senate can produce their draft report in time for the Board's discussion in May. The timetable is tight but it's important we have this expert clinical view on what is the safest option.

We have also been joined by Dr Mel Iles, Associate Medical Director for NHS Improvement who's a leading paediatrician. Dr Iles is working with Pilgrim clinicians to see what else we can do to maintain services on the ground.

Dr Neill Hepburn, Medical Director, is chairing a twice-weekly group with ULHT staff and partners to review all four options in detail. They are developing detailed risk assessments on the options which will consider the views of the public so a full picture of the quality and equality impacts on the options can be considered by board.

This isn't about saving money, it's about safety. All options being discussed will cost more money than now, in fact the current service is the cheapest option.

No decision will be made before Trust board on Friday 25 May.

We are listening

Over the last two years, ULHT has engaged almost 2,000 people on paediatric and maternity services. We are still listening.

We want to hear from you. Over the next few weeks, we will be going out to groups and talking to as many people as possible. Whilst we want to hear from everyone, we are particularly looking to engage with groups who are interested in maternity and paediatric services.

If you would like to get involved or know of a group that might be interested in speaking to us, please contact the membership office on 01522 572301 or email members@ulh.nhs.uk.

This week, our CEO and medical director met Pilgrim's consultant paediatricians to understand better their ideas and options to retain the services as they are, if possible. They also had a wider meeting that all staff at Pilgrim were invited to.

On Thursday our CEO, medical director and frontline clinicians will be attending a public meeting organised by SOS Pilgrim in Boston.

Recruitment campaign

ULHT staff are working hard to recruit. We've had permanent adverts on NHS job for middle grades for a year. These are on for two weeks, then automatically re-advertise. They also appear on Health Jobs UK and LinkedIn.

Our recruitment offer is very attractive. We offer relocation packages, pay for flights for doctors living abroad, help international doctors apply for their GMC registration to practice in the UK, and support people to settle in the county and at the hospital.

Between November 2017 and the end of April 2018, we have received 54 applications from

international doctors. Of those, we interviewed 23 doctors but just four people have accepted a job offer and don't yet have visas to work in the UK.

In the last few weeks, we have interviewed a further seven paediatricians and offered three people a job. We are waiting to hear whether they'll accept our job offers and if they do, they will need to obtain a visa to work in the UK which can take months.

It's great news that we have a new consultant paediatrician starting at Pilgrim soon.

To complement this recruitment of permanent doctors, we are working with numerous medical recruitment agencies to appoint short-term and longer-term agency staff or locum staff. We have recently booked four doctors to work as middle grades on six month contracts.

Best wishes

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