

Chairman's Report 27th February 2020

We've had two weekends of being weatherbeaten first by Storm Ciara, then Storm Dennis, followed by more rain. I can only hope that calmer weather will return soon. However another "storm" is fast approaching Shepton, namely the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) review of our local hospital provision.

In the CCG report there is a new emphasis on public health and well-being to avoid sickness in the first place, and that has to be welcomed. In addition, there is an emphasis on allowing people to recover in their own homes. If this is combined with supportive services then this has to be better than long hospital stays. For people with a strong family support network this must surely be the best solution for long term care.

The Somerset CCG are now also reviewing options for all the Minor Injury Units (MIUs), including the one we have at the Shepton Community Hospital. The CCG plans to "rationalise" these units with the aim of concentrating services in "Urgent Treatment Centres" (UTCs). By cutting back on the current provision and centralising services, this could mean we lose our local MIU in Shepton. In future the nearest hospital treatment centre could be as far away as Frome or Glastonbury. With our current unreliable and infrequent bus services, this would, to say the very least, be challenging and potentially disastrous for many people.

The CCG argument for these changes is that UTCs are supported by a general practitioner and nurses, are open 12 hours each day, have a range of diagnostic equipment like X-ray machines and run an appointment system. The CCG claim that since MIUs are only staffed by nurses, have shorter opening hours and less equipment they are therefore unable to deal with a range of medical issues.

My fear is that Shepton's MIU will come under threat since we have three MIUs in the Mendip area. Our community hospital has faced pressure of closure in the past, so yet again we seem to be forced into challenging the NHS to maintain this important facility on our doorstep. There is no doubt that Shepton's MIU serves the town extremely well. The strength of feeling shown by residents and the Friends of Shepton Hospital when closure was threatened in the past proves the need to maintain high quality clinical services here.

In fact Shepton has long been promised a new Health Campus at the Community Hospital. This is also mentioned in Mendip District Council's Local Plan. Yet despite the undoubted local need, the NHS has serially failed to fund this exciting project.

Recent changes in national legislation has placed more emphasis on support for acute hospitals like Yeovil and Taunton. This has the potential to be to the detriment of community hospitals like ours in Shepton. I believe the change of approach could lead to us losing our local health provision as hospital services become increasingly more centralised.

The threat to local health service provision is already apparent in the review of Somerset's Mental Health Services. The plan to move beds assigned for mental health provision to Yeovil from Wells is one example of this centralisation and rationalisation of services. It all comes down to the painful fact that our once well-supported NHS is being starved of cash.

Of course these issues are not just happening in Somerset but are UK-wide. Professor Michael Marmot's report, published this week by the Institute of Health Equity and commissioned by the Health Foundation, reveals that people can now expect to spend more of their lives in poor health

when compared to 10 years ago. Similarly improvements to life expectancy have stalled, and significantly declined for the poorest 10% of women.

The gap between the life expectancy of the wealthy and those on deprived areas has increased to 6.6 years for men and 6.1 years for women in our region. By cutting back on local health provision, I fear this depressing trend is only likely to continue.

Shepton Mallet residents have the opportunity to comment and give their opinions on Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group's "Fit for my Future" website: <https://www.fitformyfuture.org.uk>. You have until 12th April to have your say.

Chris Inchley, Chair, Shepton Mallet Town Council