

Health Action Group - Progress Report to Saltash Town Council

The Action Group met on April 17. Members of the Group continue to appreciate the practical and strategic support to the Group and its objectives given by the Town Council, and we are grateful too for the leadership provided personally by Councillor Bickford, both as Mayor and as chair. The chairing of the Action Group will now pass to the new Mayor who has also been an influential and supportive member of the Group since it started.

The Action Group patient-led. What follows is a summary of where patients see current issues and prospects.

The NHS is a much loved element of our public services. In the Saltash area patients have organised themselves to engage the NHS in improving our neglected range of local services, and our Action Group of community representatives and local NHS professionals is continuing its planning. Recently, we succeeded in bringing the chief executive of the Cornwall Partnership NHS Trust (CPT) to a meeting, and also the Regional Director of NHS Property Services. Two very important people with real power. We had to feel that their engagement was a positive sign. But there is a problem....

The NHS is not the single body we all imagine. It has many independent parts, and getting these to sing from the same hymn sheet at the same time feels impossible to us. Our two local surgeries are two separate businesses, owned by their GP partners; St Barnabas hospital is owned by NHS Property Services, which is a separate company outside the NHS as such; but services at St Barnabas are run by CPT which employs the staff there; all major hospitals like Derriford are managed by their own Trusts; finally, all the long term strategic planning for, and financing of, the NHS in Cornwall is undertaken by an Integrated Care Board - the latter being the employer of Dr Andy Sant who has been a fully supportive member of our Action Group from the start. Andy has the task of ensuring all these parts together deliver the right care for patients. Some might say it is a thankless task.

Patients here need more services to be provided locally. We now understand that St Barnabas is not destined for closure in the near future, so we are demanding that it is developed to house an expanded range of services: it is seriously underused, needs a face-lift, and is therefore being run inefficiently. However, we are also pressing for a modern health facility to be built in the longer term. We also demand that local NHS beds for short-term recovery are provided somehow in the town, and quickly. Keeping patients in Derriford after treatment, or discharging them to remote community hospitals is bad for patients and a waste of resources. There is also a modern NHS office building in Saltash (Peninsula House) which has been empty for more that a year. We want to see it used.

The Group is meeting again on May 22, and we hope to have reports on progress on all these issues to encourage us - in the wake of the attendance of the top-level leaders. In the meantime, Port View Surgery and the Health Centre are trying to give patients more direct access to care (nursing, physio, pharmacy, etc) without the need to see a GP first. This should help patients directly, and free up time for GPs to see other patients who need to see a doctor. We realise this is often seen negatively, but members of Patient Groups in the practices do support the change.

George Muirhead
Chair, Health Centre Patient Group

Peter Thistlethwaite
Chair, Port View Patient Group