



Walsall Council

**Joint Dudley and Walsall
Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

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Cc: - Cynthia Bower (Chief Executive Officer)
West Midlands Strategic Health Authority

**Response to the proposed re-configuration of Mental Health Services in
Dudley and Walsall**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This letter sets out the response from the joint Dudley and Walsall Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the proposals to create a new NHS organisation to provide mental health services for the boroughs of Walsall and Dudley.
- 1.2 Under Section 242 of the National Health Service (NHS) Act 2006; NHS bodies are obliged to consult with the relevant overview and scrutiny committee when considering any proposal for a substantial development of the health service in the area of a local authority, or for a substantial variation or development in the provision of such service. Under Section 245 of the NHS Act 2006, two or more Councils may appoint a joint overview and scrutiny committee of those authorities.

1.3 Dudley MBC and Walsall MBC have recently worked together to appoint a Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and held its joint meeting on 11th December 2007.

1.4 At this meeting the Joint Committee considered the consultation document '**A better idea**' and the reconfiguration business case prepared by the Walsall/Dudley Mental Health Partnership. To support this documentation a presentation was given by the interim Chief Executive and Project Lead. This presentation was very informative and was presented in a straightforward and uncomplicated manner; members would like to congratulate the Officers concerned.

2. Issues and Concerns

2.1. Given the reasons detailed in the consultation document, it is clear that retaining the status quo risks the acquisition of current services by another Trust and will therefore compromise the ability to influence and shape services by local involvement. Moreover, neither Dudley nor Walsall services are large enough to become a Foundation Trust independently. The Committee supports the proposals for creating a single Trust and would welcome a service that is able to increase involvement of service users, is cost effective, and is able to share and utilise 'best practice' and yet retain and develop local links and partnerships.

2.2 The Committee acknowledged that the proposed reconfiguration is one of management structure and not service change. The Committee welcomes the commitment that management costs associated with the merger would not detract from front-line services. In addition, the Committee hopes that the proposals would signal greater consistency in the remuneration of staff and would not result in any redundancies.

2.4 The Committee is concerned that Walsall's performance against the targets in connection with Crisis Resolution, StaR workers and Personality Disorder were indicated as poor in last autumn's assessment. The Committee hopes that the provision of such services would improve under the joint arrangements.

2.5 The Committee sought assurance that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services would benefit from the proposed locality management structure, and were satisfied that there was a commitment by the PCTs to work closely with agencies to ensure that this happened.

2.6 The Project Manager informed Members that the risk assessment undertaken as part of the Business Plan had now been updated, but a copy was not available as evidence to the Meeting. The Committee were concerned that they had not been provided with this evidence

- 2.7 The Committee acknowledges that a number of service users need to travel to neighbouring areas and in some cases across the country to receive specialist treatment which is unavailable locally. The committee hopes that under the joint arrangements fewer service users would have to travel outside their local area and that the Trust would investigate further opportunities in reducing such cases
- 2.8 The Committee is concerned that the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) might, in the end, be reluctant to approve the Dudley-Walsall Partnership, thus resulting in a further change of direction for Mental Health services. The Committee feels that this would be detrimental to collaboration across the Black Country.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The Committee agrees with the proposal to create a single NHS Mental Trust for Dudley and Walsall. From the evidence presented to the Committee, it would appear that the proposals offer a very real opportunity to improve the level of service provision through further development of specialist care, skills, enhanced knowledge and opportunity for greater autonomy.
- 3.2 The proposals would allow the Trust to apply for Foundation Status enabling it to develop greater freedoms. This would also reduce the likelihood of the acquisition of current services by another Trust which would otherwise inhibit the contribution of local involvement in shaping services.
- 3.3 The Committee felt that the position regarding the financing of these proposals could have been clearer; in terms of the accrued efficiency savings and the residual financial impact on the respective PCTs.
- 3.4 The Committee hopes that the SHA is supportive of the new NHS organisation and that it allows collaboration across Dudley and Walsall to continue in the planned direction.

Yours sincerely



Councillor S Ridney
(Dudley OSC Chair)
Joint Committee Vice-Chair



Councillor V Woodruff
(Walsall OSC Chair)
Joint Committee Chair