

**April 2018**

Dear Mr Whalley,

Thank you for your emails and enquiries.

I am sorry that we have not got back to you sooner. I thought it would be helpful if you and your other campaign group colleagues meet with myself and other NHS leaders in the Northumberland, Tyne and Wear area so that we could discuss your group's concerns face to face.

I understand that you do not wish to take that offer up at the moment, but I am happy to arrange a meeting if you change your mind in the future. These are complex and emergent issues, which as I hope you will see after reading my responses, have changed since the original announcement of sustainability and transformation plans.

The NHS in the North East and North Cumbria is one of the best performing regions in the country, but we still have significant challenges around our future sustainability, and over the last 18 months there have been discussions among NHS leaders and clinicians across all the NHS organisations in the region about what could be the best ways to do this.

As you are aware, NHS organisations locally implement nationally set NHS policy which is decided by the elected UK government.

Sustainability and transformation plans were designed to build on collaborative work under the NHS Shared Planning Guidance for 2016/17 – 2020/21, to support implementation of the Five Year Forward View which is the key national NHS policy.

Originally these were described as 'plans' in the national planning guidance, and subsequently updated as 'partnerships'.

From our perspective, we are working together as a region in different partnerships to transform health and care in the communities we serve. In the past, organisations have each had their own plans, and they will continue to do so – but STPs are the first time *shared* planning has been developed across a geographical footprint. These are not new plans, but planning and partnerships, in some cases brought together for the first time, to tackle shared issues.

STP footprints are not new, statutory organisations but they are decision making forum, and a way to bring people and organisations together to develop a shared ways for better health and care for our local areas.

Draft planning for Northumberland, Tyne, Wear and North Durham were shared during winter 2016/17, and the feedback was published in summer 2017.

The feedback highlights eight key topics including:

- Vision – people were supportive of the vision and many suggested it should be even more ambitious, having local communities with better health outcomes than the rest of the country
- Finance – concerns were raised about the ability to make improvements within current resources
- Tackling health inequalities – people said this was an important area to improve but stressed that it could not be done quickly
- Workforce – concerns were raised about having enough staff with the right skills in the right place at the right time to improve the health of local people
- Access to services – many people in rural parts of Northumberland and North Durham were worried about accessing the help they needed if current services change

This feedback was very valuable and it has influenced how we are developing our partnerships.

What is clear from the discussions we have had with staff, partners and the public that there is broad agreement that, in order to create a better future for the NHS, we need to adapt the way we do things.

That doesn't mean doing less for patients or reducing the quality of care, or changing services without involving people. It means more preventative care; finding new ways to meet people's needs; and identifying ways to do things more efficiently.

The Five Year Forward View brings this together agreement in an overall vision for the NHS. It highlights three areas where there are growing gaps between where we are now, and where we need to be in 2020/21. These gaps are:

- Health and wellbeing of the population
- Quality of care that is provided
- Finance and efficiency of NHS services.

Closing these three gaps and the Five Year Forward View vision will be achieved by everyone who has a stake in health and care adapting what they do, how they think, and how they act – at both local, regional and national levels.

One of the most powerful ways to achieve change is through local organisations and services working together in new, better ways and think differently about how close the gaps and truly meet the needs of patients in each area. While we already have a strong track record of partnership working, it's clear we need to do more.

As a group of NHS leaders, we need to create the best conditions that allow those relationships and partnerships to flourish, so people can build connections in order to generate ideas and create new and better ways to improve health and care by 2020/21.

I want to emphasise that being part of a Sustainability and Transformation Partnership does not mean that any organisations in the partnership will lose their own autonomy or identity.

It does mean we will have agreed collective working in order to develop plans which needs to address how we collectively improve health, care and finance for our local populations by 2021.

What has become clearer in the 18 months since the three STPs in the North East and North Cumbria were first discussed with local people, is the unique nature of the NHS across our region, in particular in relation to patient flows (how and where patients use services) and clinical networks (how we share clinical expertise) and taking into account the strong partnerships that have been in place for many years, puts our region in a different position when thinking about how sustainability and transformation partnerships could deliver the positive changes we need for our patients.

Towards the end of 2017, discussions between the STP leads in the North East and North Cumbria have been looking towards bringing the three STP footprints of NTW, North Cumbria and Durham, Darlington, Tees, Hambleton, Richmond and Whitby together under a single governance arrangement. Again, this would be around working together, not about creating new organisations.

These discussions have recognised that close partnership working is the only way we can ensure the transformation and sustainability of NHS services in order to improve health and wellbeing, improve the quality of care and ensure local services are efficient.

At the present time, we continue to have discussions with our regulatory bodies about how we can work more closely together across the NHS as a region, and once we have more clarity we intend to engage further with our stakeholders, partners and public.

It is our intention to share our thinking, key issues and documents as they emerge.

We want to tackle shared problems together, reduce duplications of effort and stream line administration processes and in particular address the staffing shortages we all face which create vulnerable services which has a direct impact on the care patients receive.

I want to reassure you that if there is a requirement for significant NHS service changes, proposals will be subject to requirements set out in the Health and Social Care Act (2012) and English case law for public consultation.

I am aware that there is an incorrect perception that somehow sustainability and transformation partnerships will mean that changes to NHS services can be made without proper process, or that there are secret plans somewhere.

As our thinking is clarified we will share this with stakeholders, partners and the public, and carry out service change planning including public consultation as

required that is set out in the Health and Social Care Act (2012), the NHS constitution and English case law.

We will continue to attend local and regional overview and scrutiny committees which are held in public and update elected members as health and care partnership working continues to strengthen.

I hope this provides you with information and assurance on the issues you are concerned about, and that it explains that we have had a moving situation to ensure that as a group of NHS leaders, we are looking to find the best ways of working in order to provide the best circumstances to tackle the shared challenges we have.

I would be pleased to have a face to face to discussion with yourself and your fellow campaigners, these are complex issues we are trying to tackle, and we all remain committed to doing the very best we can for the patients and communities we serve.

Yours sincerely,

**Alan Foster**

STP/ICS Lead for Cumbria and the North East