

29th June 2007

Dear Secretary of State

The West Sussex Primary Care Trust has just published its long-awaited proposals for the reconfiguration of health services, and these will be the subject of public consultation over the next few months.

The County Council works closely with its health service partners at various levels for all the operational and political reasons you would expect, and I and other senior members of the Council have been in regular discussion with the PCT prior to the launch of the consultation, especially about arrangements for engaging with the public and scrutiny process by the local authorities.

However, despite our understandings of the background to the difficulties facing the PCT, we have been genuinely taken aback by the scale of the reduced service in the options on which the PCT is now consulting. For example, these include the possibility of one, just one, accident & emergency department for the whole of West Sussex, a county with over three quarters of a million residents covering more than 770 square miles. I and many other people, find it simply extraordinary that at a time of record levels of government spending on the health service, and record levels of housebuilding being urged by Government on the South East, we are facing the prospect of the closure of acute services.

It is clear that Health Service officials and Trustees do not see it as part of their role to lobby government for improved funding in the way that a democratically elected local authority would take forward such concerns on behalf of the people it is elected to serve. In these circumstances, the County Council finds itself in the position of having to represent the interests of the residents of West Sussex and to challenge not only the proposals, but the allocation of finances within the service which have led to the proposals and whole disjointed way that the government is approaching the matter.

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Rt. Hon Alan Johnson MP
Secretary of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1A 2NS

Rt. Hon. Alan Johnson MP/2

I am therefore writing formally on behalf of the people of West Sussex to request an urgent meeting with you and the local Members of Parliament to discuss this alarming situation and the steps that might be taken to ensure that health services meet the present and future needs of the County.

As you will be well aware Gordon Brown has stated that health services are a priority and I believe a revision of this consultation to produce a more realistic set of proposals would be a good demonstration of his stated intentions in this respect.

Yours sincerely

Henry Smith
Leader of West Sussex County Council