

20 March 2008

Press release

IRP supports future of Horton Hospital

The Horton General Hospital in Banbury must continue to serve the local community in North Oxfordshire and surrounding counties according to a report published today by the IRP, the independent expert on NHS service change.

The Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust (ORH Trust) put forward proposals to reconfigure paediatric, gynaecological and obstetric services, including the special care baby unit, at the Horton Hospital. The IRP was asked to review the Trust's proposals following local opposition to the changes and a subsequent referral to the Health Secretary from the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The IRP has advised the Secretary of State to reject the Trust's proposals, because they fail to provide an accessible or improved service for local people. The IRP recommended that the Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust (PCT), working with the ORH Trust, carry out further work to set out the arrangements and investment necessary to retain and develop these services. There will need to be changes to ensure Horton Hospital's services remain appropriate, safe, sustainable and accessible.

Dr Peter Barrett, Chair of the IRP, said: "Each review we undertake is unique and takes into account local issues. Our main focus is always the patient. This review has been no different and we have listened to the views of a wide range of staff, local people and other interested parties to help inform our recommendations.

"We concluded that the local community's access to services would be seriously compromised if the Trust's proposals were implemented. Panel members were particularly concerned about the difficult and costly journeys that local people would need to make to

Oxford and felt that this might even prevent or delay some people from seeking medical advice or treatment. The Trust's proposals are not in the best interests of patients, families and carers."

One month from today the PCT should publish a plan and timeline for taking forward the recommendations outlined in the report. Patients, the public and other stakeholders need to be fully involved in this process and future service planning for Horton Hospital. South Central SHA should play an active role in overseeing and monitoring the PCT's plans to ensure a timely and robust process.

The IRP acknowledges that the Trust's proposals were primarily driven by medical workforce concerns, in particular the impact of the European Working Time Directive (EWTD) and Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) on the future safety and sustainability of arrangements at the Horton Hospital. However, the IRP considers that local patient choice and access must also be a priority and that there are other possible solutions for the Horton Hospital.

One of the IRP's recommendations in this respect is that the Trust should capitalise on the excellent reputation of the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford to develop stronger clinical networks across the Trust. As a large teaching hospital providing specialised services and one of only five designated research institutes in the country, the John Radcliffe Hospital is well placed to share its expertise to help develop integrated practice across the Trust and with primary care.

During the review the IRP was unable to consider the Trust's proposals against any overall PCT strategy for children, maternity and emergency services for the north of Oxfordshire or Oxfordshire as a whole. The IRP has recommended that the PCT develop a clear vision for children and maternity services in an explicit strategy for services within north Oxfordshire as a whole.

Dr Peter Barrett continues: "During the course of this review we were left in no doubt that local people are passionate about Horton Hospital. The hospital is well located for the population it serves and the Trust's dedicated staff will play a vital role in the future success of

the organisation. All parties should now work together to re-develop the proposals in response to our recommendations.”

ENDS

For further information please contact the IRP press office on 020 7025 7530 or email IRPpressoffice@trimediauk.com

Notes to editors

About the review

- The IRP carried out a review at the request of the Secretary of State for Health, Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP, following a referral to him from the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- The IRP’s remit was to consider if the existing proposals put forward by the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust would provide safe, sustainable and accessible services for the people of North Oxfordshire and the area served by the Trust
- A three-month review took place between November 2007 and January 2008
- During this time, IRP panel members undertook 6 visits to see the facilities first hand and meet with people from all sides of the debate – from patients and staff, to local NHS representatives and MPs. The IRP also received correspondence from over 1,000 people.

The IRP

1. The full name of the IRP is the Independent Reconfiguration Panel
2. The IRP was set up in 2003 to provide advice to the Secretary of State for Health on contested proposals for health service change in England
3. Under the NHS Health and Social Care Act 2001, NHS organisations must consult their Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees (HOSCs) on any proposals for substantial changes to local health services. If the HOSC is not satisfied it may refer the issue to the Secretary of State
4. IRP panel members have wide ranging expertise in clinical healthcare, NHS management, public and patient involvement and handling and delivering successful changes in the NHS
5. Further information, including details of all panel members, is available from www.irpanel.org.uk