

# Failure to talk to public delays private GP plan

Clinic site under discussion

**JULIE GOULDING** confirmed Sefton PCT was in negotiations with Parkhaven, the owners of the world's oldest epilepsy care centre on the outskirts of Maghull, to house the new clinic.

The Parkhaven Trust was set up to care for epileptic adults in 1888, and has since developed to care for elderly people who do not have epilepsy, and adults with learning difficulties.

It now employs 180 staff and cares for around 150 patients at several buildings on Liverpool Road South, in Maghull.

Mark Worden, head of human resources for the Trust, said: "We are in negotiations with the PCT.

"The idea is to maximise the space that we are not currently able to make full use of. It will not impact on our current operations."

PLANS to open Merseyside's first privately run GP surgery were delayed because health executives did not consult the public fully enough.

Sefton Primary Care Trust last night admitted it needed to involve patients more in the plan to commission an independent company to run the new clinic in Maghull.

Julie Goulding, the PCT's acting director of Corporate Services, also revealed negotiations were now underway with a single company to operate the practice.

But she said strict Department of Health rules banned her from revealing the name of the preferred provider, chosen from an original list of more than 100.

She refused to discuss speculation the chosen bidder was Essex company Care UK, which in July secured a £5m five-year deal to run a similar new clinic in Barking and Dagenham.

It comes after another private surgery plan by Derbyshire PCT collapsed this summer when the High Court ruled patients had not been adequately consulted.

It led to Merseyside campaigners claiming they may have a similar legal case to fight, after Sefton refused to release the names of about 10 shortlisted companies.

Ms Goulding last night insisted patients would not be charged private rates for treatment at the centre, and said the PCT would strictly monitor quality standards.

**BY DEBORAH JAMES**

Daily Post Staff

She said plans for the clinic, initially meant to have opened in August, were delayed by the merger of the Southport and Formby and South Sefton PCTs on October 1.

But she also admitted: "Part of the delay has been because of the consultation. We see now that this extra effort is needed.

"This level of consultation hadn't been planned for, but with the new PCT and the real emphasis on ownership we think it is worth it to dispel some of the myths."

She added: "It (the PCT) believes it has already gone

through a process of engagement but it also recognises in the next couple of months it needs to redouble that effort."

The clinic is one of six pilots across the country under the government's new Alternative Provider Medical Services (APMS) contracts.

Proponents say the new arrangements will boost efficiency.

But members of Keep Our NHS Public (KONP) fear doctors, health care staff and money will be drawn away from the NHS and towards profit-hungry private companies.

Ms Goulding denied quality would be damaged, and said the new clinic was needed to attract

GPs to an area where the NHS had found difficulty persuading them to work.

It would also mean longer opening hours at evenings and weekends.

Peter Crowder, spokesman for the newly formed Maghull KONP, formed to fight the GP surgery plan, accused the PCT of "back-peddalling".

"The consultation is supposed to take place before the tendering process, not after.

"We believe we do have a legal case.

"They have not fulfilled their legal obligation to consult the public, and now they are trying to back-pedal and make it look as though they have consulted us.

"It's a foregone conclusion now because they've chosen a provider, but for the public it's a choice between this, or this.

"There isn't any choice for the public, they've already decided - so what's the point of consulting us now?"

He added: "The only consultation they did was about where the clinic should be, not who should operate it."

Ms Goulding added that GPs in the area had now "opened up" their admission lists, allowing the PCT to see where extra patients could be taken on by existing GPs.

She said there was little chance the plan would be dropped, but if an existing surgery had the capacity to take on an extra 200 patients, then that "would have to be looked at."

## What do you think?

Email us with your views at [letters@dailypost.co.uk](mailto:letters@dailypost.co.uk), or write to us at the address on Page 10

## Trust to issue list of dates for public consultations

**SEFTON PCT says it will soon announce dates for public consultation on the privately-run GP surgery plan.**

**A series of meetings will take place in coming months.**

**Leigh Griffin, Chief Executive of Sefton PCT, said the new GP practice would bring more family doctors to the**

**area and would provide more choice and flexible opening.**

**He said: "Anyone in Sefton East will be eligible to register with the practice, which will open from 8am to 8pm during the week and also open on Saturday mornings."**

**As part of the consultation process, the PCT**

**will be meeting local campaigners who raised concerns about the possible award of a contract to a profit-making organisation.**

**Mr Griffin said: "It is very important that we sit down and discuss these issues but I cannot be clearer in stating that I truly believe those**

**concerns are unfounded.**

**"Contrary to information circulated by some of those opposed to these plans, there is absolutely no question of people being charged.**

**The PCT Board is to consider a draft business case later this month.**

**deborahjames@dailypost.co.uk**