

Time to fight back! Cash-driven cuts threaten our NHS



HANDS OFF Bedfordshire's Health Service!

Bedford faces a serious deterioration to its local hospital and health services as a result of a Healthcare Review being carried out by local health bosses in Bedford and Milton Keynes – at a cost of £3.2 million.

Large and unhelpful documents have been drawn up, beginning with a baffling list of up to 36 “potential scenarios,” which were then whittled down to a bewildering 14, and now a confusing FIVE.

In each case you need to read between the lines to work out that in ALL FIVE shortlisted options either Bedford or Milton Keynes or both would see local hospital services downgraded. They also include plans for no births in Bedford at all and for the closure of the children’s unit, defended last year.

The highest-scoring option would reduce Bedford Hospital to an “integrated care centre” with almost no beds. The next highest would cut back further to leave no beds at all, and an “urgent care centre” treating only minor lumps and bumps.

None of these is an acceptable option for Bedford Hospital and the growing population it serves. Similar cuts at Milton Keynes would simply mean Bedford would be swamped with extra patients and unable to cope.

Bedford and Milton Keynes hospitals are over 18 miles apart: all the other hospitals are further away still from each of them. But the patients who would have to travel further if local services are downgraded are the seriously ill,

frail elderly and people needing emergency treatment – many of whom will have no car and unlikely to be fit enough to drive themselves.

The plans make a nonsense of “patient choice”: who would choose to add an awkward 18-mile or longer journey to the stresses and strains of their treatment, or prefer to have emergency services so far away from them?

The plans so far offer only a series of wish-lists, all of which are a far cry from today’s cash-strapped NHS. In fact the whole review process is being carried out on a dishonest basis. *(continued overleaf)*



The Review is driven first and foremost by the NEED TO SAVE MONEY as the coalition's relentless squeeze on NHS spending starts to take a toll of frontline services. Milton Keynes CCG admits that if nothing is done, health services there will face a combined £60m deficit by 2019: similar problems are driving Bedfordshire CCG.

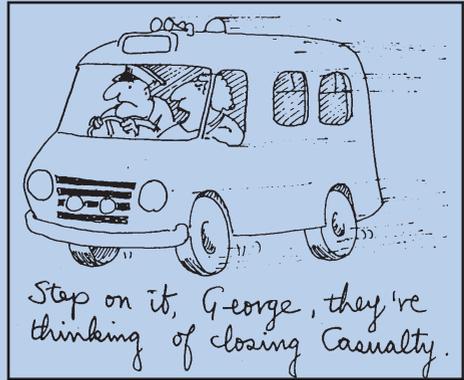
That's why the options they are putting forward downgrade and close services but have nothing serious to say about expanding or developing new services to take their place.

Nor is it convincing when Bedfordshire CCG talks about the need for "more joined up care": Bedfordshire CCG is one of the pioneers of contracting out services to private companies (dermatology) or privately-led consortiums (musculoskeletal services) – fragmenting NHS services and undermining local NHS Trusts.

They have put a host of other services up for grabs to over 500 possible providers, going "off to market" – quite the opposite of joined up care.

The CCGs tell us another objective is to improve access to GP services: but the Review team also includes NHS England, which has been consistently **cutting back** funding for GP services, while stacking up the workload of GPs, making it harder to recruit and retain new GPs in post.

The documents produced by the review repeat a long list of potentially good ideas. It's not surprising the CCGs have been able to get small numbers of hand-picked clinicians and even a few members of the public to sign up for



these proposals.

But NONE of it is costed, nor are the staffing implications discussed: any support they may have received will vanish overnight as soon as the real proposals to downgrade and cut hospitals and other services are spelled out.

That's why Hands Off Bedfordshire's Health Services is getting organised NOW, before the bad news is announced, so we can build the biggest, broadest and loudest possible opposition to the proposals, and fight every inch of the way to defend both Bedford and Milton Keynes services against cash-driven cutbacks.

The campaign has been launched by UNISON the health union and Bedford & District Trades Council, but we are inviting all local organisations to join. If need be we should make it a central issue in the next election, with no votes for any candidate who does not stand up for our local NHS.

■ Join us, help us gather support for our petition, talk to friends, work colleagues, neighbours and spread the word. Our NHS is under attack: and once it's gone, it will be gone for ever.

Contact the campaign and follow it on Facebook: just search for *Hands Off Bedfordshire's Health Services*, and Like our page. Or contact Ian Thomas – Ian.Thomas@bedfordhospital.nhs.uk or Tracey Tansley – T.Tansley@unison.co.uk.