

**RESPONSE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE LEAGUE OF FRIENDS.
(to the Suffolk East PCTs' consultation document Changing for the Better – next steps)**

I am writing this as Chairman of the League of Friends of Aldeburgh and District Community Hospital and a member of the Project Steering Group for the Strategic Review of Community Hospitals and Intermediate Care.

I am in disagreement with the proposals made by the PCTs. In summary my concerns are:

1. There will only be 20 NHS beds in Aldeburgh. This is insufficient and would render the hospital non-viable.
2. The document does not cover the eventuality that no other commissioner is found for the non NHS beds.
3. The document is based on the premise that people will be cared for in their homes, yet it gives no details of how this will be carried out and funded.
4. The document proposes the abolition of step down beds. This will compromise patient care, and lead to increased cost, as treatment in Ipswich Hospital is evidently more expensive than in Aldeburgh Community Hospital.

My more detailed views are set out in the paragraphs below.

At the meeting of The Project Steering Group on 10th May 2005 it was announced that it was proposed to reduce the number of beds at Aldeburgh Hospital to 30 from the established 36. This proposal was the result of a survey carried out by the Director of Public Health, DR Rosie Frankenberg, that concluded only 19.5 beds would be needed when more community-based services were introduced. In a letter to me from the Chief Executive of the East Suffolk PCTs, after I had complained about the proposal, she stated that 30 beds had been agreed, as 19.5 beds was not viable.

Now, as a result of gross mismanagement of finances over the past years, a huge deficit has been accrued and the Strategic Health Authority has demanded that the massive debt be cleared in this financial year. This has resulted in panic measures being taken by the PCTs, which have included the proposal to reduce the number of beds at Aldeburgh to 20, with another commissioner being sought for up to 12 further beds. Presently Aldeburgh Hospital has 11 beds financed by Social Care but this finishes at the end of September. At present 11 patients are in the beds funded by Social Care because care packages cannot be put in place to allow their discharge. How then are care packages going to be suddenly available when beds are withdrawn in September? If Social Care could be persuaded to continue with their support, the crisis would be much reduced.

New funding proposal have resulted in the planned withdrawal of "step-down" beds. This is causing concern as Aldeburgh and its surrounding catchment area is approximately 25 miles from the nearest acute hospital in Ipswich. At present patients can be discharged early from Ipswich and complete their recovery in Aldeburgh where they can take advantage of the excellent Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy services in the hospital. If there is to be no rehabilitation then the demand for these services will be reduced and we fear that the departments could become non-viable and staff would be lost.

The cost of maintaining a bed at Aldeburgh Hospital is much less than in Ipswich. Also, as stated by the NHS itself, it is much more desirable for patients to be near their families (see Changing for the Better, Introduction, 'Delivering services as close to home as possible'). Not everyone has a car and indeed the journey to visit relations is arduous for many of our elderly population, and the cost of parking makes it an expensive exercise.

In addition, the new payment by results proposals will encourage the early discharge of patients from Ipswich to their own homes. As 'care in the community' is not yet established this will result

in distress for the patient, as many are elderly and live alone. This may also lead to re-admission to the acute hospital, as Aldeburgh will not have sufficient beds to accommodate them. This already occurred in December 2004, when beds were suddenly cut to 18. The prospect is a real concern for our local GPs who look after patients in Aldeburgh Hospital.

The new regime of care in the community sounds laudable and should work given

- a) Sufficient finance
- b) Adequate numbers of care workers and district nurses etc.

As neither is currently available in sufficient quantities, disaster looms.

This consultation exercise "Changing for the Better" is based on a totally erroneous assessment, which rather than being focussed on clinical and customer needs, is driven by a requirement to balance the books within the current year. This means that present and future health requirements cannot possibly be met.

On 31st July a public meeting about the crisis affecting our hospital was held in the Jubilee Hall Aldeburgh. Over 300 people thronged the hall and its garden, and almost as many had to be turned away. Such is the level of feeling in the community.

I sincerely hope that you will give serious consideration to my concerns.

Sheena Griffiths
Chairman
League of Friends, Aldeburgh and District Community Hospital