

31 January 2018

Equality Unit

Route Complex

8e Coleraine Road

Ballymoney

Co Antrim BT53 6BP

**Ref: Northern Health & Social Care Trust- Future Model for Acute**

**Paediatric services in Northern Trust hospitals**

To whom it may concern:

Mid Ulster District Council would like to take this opportunity to put forward its views, opinions and concerns in relation to the consultation on Future Model for Acute Paediatric services in Northern Trust hospitals Northern Trust area.

Council agrees that the aim of delivering and sustaining excellent healthcare should be at the heart of all models implemented by the Trust. The paediatric services delivered by hospital based medical services provided to babies, children and young people up to their 16th birthday play a vitally important role. However, Council is disappointed at the proposed reduction in the current level of provision provided at the Mid Ulster Hospital site. While the safeguarding of the acute services delivered at the Causeway Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital site is understandable it is concerning that this seems to be at the expense of what is currently delivered at Mid Ulster Hospital.

Council understands that the proposals were developed on an evidential basis. The figures set out in the consultation documentation demonstrate that there are significantly fewer presentations at Mid Ulster Hospital in comparison to the Causeway Hospital and Antrim Area Hospital sites. However, Council believes that these usage figures are contributed to by the current lack of inpatient provision and the limited opening times of 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday. These limitations of the Unit have no doubt led to the reduction in presentations of the new patients at the Mid Ulster site. This is especially exasperated by the fact that by the very nature of children's routines they can be likely to present with illness at times when the service is not available; such as in the afternoon (after school), in the evening or in the early morning. Afternoon referrals from GPs can be likely to err on the side of caution and send children directly to Antrim Area Hospital bypassing Mid Ulster Hospital in order to avoid the child having to go to Antrim Area Hospital after 5pm.

Mid Ulster District Council would also like to point out the investment of a substantial amount of time and resources over the last 3 years, working in Partnership with the NHSCT/SHSCT, among many other statutory and non- statutory agencies, to develop a Community Plan for Mid-Ulster. A considerable part of this process involved large scale consultation with the people of Mid Ulster, which the Trust are acutely aware, focused heavily on health services and provision in Mid Ulster. The Council spent much of this time in consultation reassuring our citizens that this new Community Planning process would mean that Health provision in Mid Ulster would now be delivered in Partnership with the Council and our other Community Planning Partners.

While Mid Ulster District Council welcomes the extension of rapid access to services within the Trust it is evident that the service will cause residents of our Council area additional travel time and expense. This comes at a time of stress and upset for the children and their parents and guardians who could be more easily served at Mid Ulster Hospital if the services were made available there at times of the day when they are more likely to be utilised.

Council would also request that the Health Trust confirms when a Rural Needs Assessment will be carried out in relation to this process? Mid Ulster's population experienced the fastest growth of all the new Council areas between 2001 and 2013 (grew by 18.7% against a regional average of 8.3%). This growth is projected to be sustained for at least the next 10 years, to reach almost 156,000 by 2023; almost two thirds of this figure are rural dwellers. There is no doubt that rural dwellers will be particularly negatively impacted upon should there be a requirement to travel to Antrim Area Hospital as a result of the proposed changes to services. This issue needs to be considered and mitigated against prior to changes to services being implemented.

### **Responses to the Questions Posed by the Consultation**

**Do you consider that the Trust has identified the key factors that are impacting on the sustainability of the current services based across the 3 hospitals: Antrim, Causeway and Mid Ulster Hospital?**

**Proposed response:** There is no doubt that there is a need to ensure that sustainability of the current service is at the core of any future model developed for paediatric services. However, this sustainability should not focus solely on the reduction of services provided at Mid Ulster Hospital.

**Do you consider that a phased approach is a reasonable way forward and that the first steps would begin to address some of the challenges being faced by the service?**

**Proposed response:** Council understands that a need for a phased approach has been identified. In relation to the rapid access clinic service at Mid Ulster Hospital and extended opening of the short stay unit at Antrim Area Hospital. Council broadly supports this proposal to offer short stays for an extended number of hours.

**The Trust proposed way forward sets out to make the service more sustainable, improve quality and reduce costs.**

**Do you agree that these issues should be addressed by the proposed way forward and are there any other factors that you think need to be considered that have not been identified?**

**Proposed response:** Council is grateful that staff have been consulted with and that they are broadly in agreement with the proposed changes. Additional issues that are identified should be consulted upon further.

**An outcome of initial equality screening considerations is available in Appendix 1. Please detail your views on the assessed impact of the proposals and any other potential impacts you feel we should consider.**

**Proposed response:** Council would encourage the continuous screening to be carried out as stated and that a range of mitigating factors introduced to ensure that S75 groups negatively impacted have their needs clearly met.

**Do you have any evidence to suggest that the proposals would create an adverse differential impact in relation to rural needs?**

**Proposed response:** Council is aware that the proposed changes will negatively impact on patients who have to travel a further distance as a result of the minor impact but we will subject the implementation of the proposal to 'on-going screening' in order to carry out further analysis throughout the implementation process. Where adverse impact is identified, steps should be taken in order to mitigate against its effects.

In conclusion, while the Trust has stated that the proposed changes are driven by efficient use of services rather than cost savings, there is a concern within the District that every time changes are consulted upon services are further reduced at Mid Ulster Hospital. This is despite the fact that Mid Ulster Hospital houses some of Northern Ireland's exemplary care units.