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South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS staff come together to plan future of hospital services

Over 250 hospital doctors, nurses, therapists and other NHS staff from South Tyneside and Sunderland are gathering this week (Monday 26, Tuesday 27 and Wednesday 28 June) to consider new and innovative ways of delivering high quality, joined up, sustainable care that will benefit local people both now and in the future.

The staff sessions are part of the ‘second phase’ of the Path to Excellence, a transformation programme of local hospital healthcare across South Tyneside and Sunderland, which has been set up to secure the future of local NHS services.

Over the past six months, NHS doctors, nurses and support staff from both hospital Trusts have already been coming together to begin early discussions around ‘phase two’ of the Path to Excellence programme which will look at a number of hospital services covering both emergency and planned care which are provided at South Tyneside District Hospital and Sunderland Royal Hospital.

Over 700 staff across both Trusts have already given their feedback to date on the issues and challenges being faced in their particular areas of work, as well as putting forward ideas for quality improvement. Almost 200 staff also took part in early staff engagement sessions which took place in March 2018.

As work gathers pace on ‘phase two’, NHS leaders are sending a very clear message to all staff, patients and the public that **both** hospitals will continue to exist in the future and **both** will continue to play pivotal roles serving local people. There will, however, need to be some changes in the way services are delivered to help both South Tyneside District Hospital and Sunderland Royal Hospital improve some of the gaps in quality which currently exist and address growing workforce pressures.

Dr Shaz Wahid, Medical Director at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and clinical lead for the Path to Excellence programme, said: “Our staff time is really valuable, so I’m pleased that we’ve been able to arrange for colleagues representing a good cross section of the clinical service review areas to spend dedicated time looking at the issues, giving their feedback and coming up with ideas on how we can make improvements to patient care.

“Work so far with staff has focussed on listening to their concerns around their current daily challenges, understanding their frustrations in not being able to consistently deliver the very highest quality of care for patients and beginning to think through what some of the potential future solutions might be.

“Our staff are living and breathing these challenges every day and their insight really is invaluable as we work together to improve care for patients. Our teams have appreciated the opportunity to understand issues from each other’s perspectives and begin to think about how we can work differently and collectively as bigger more resilient teams, to solve the challenges we face.”

As well as engaging with staff, work on 'phase two' is also being informed by targeted engagement with patients on their recent experiences across a range of emergency and planned healthcare services which are provided at South Tyneside District Hospital and Sunderland Royal Hospital.

Last week (Thursday 21 June) NHS leaders from NHS South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) NHS Sunderland CCG, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation trust, met with elected members on the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for South Tyneside and Sunderland to share an update on progress around 'phase two'.

Dr Shaz Wahid said: "On behalf of the NHS partners, it was very helpful indeed to share our early thinking around the current and future challenges the NHS is facing and aspirations on how we can meet those challenges. It was good to be able to update elected members on how we are fully engaging our staff and councillors asked excellent questions and gave some very valuable feedback that we are incorporating into our planning. We look forward to sharing these important issues more widely over the coming weeks and months."

A 'draft case for change' for 'phase two' has been developed which outlines the joint ambitions of the local NHS to improve hospital services even further for the future. This 'draft case for change' will continue to develop further over the rest of 2018 and early into 2019 as the local NHS learns more from engagement with staff, stakeholders and partners. Over the autumn, NHS leaders also intend to share early thinking on emerging ideas for the future and give people the opportunity to influence any future options, which would eventually form part of a formal public consultation later in 2019.

The draft 'case for change' for 'phase two' of the Path to Excellence programme will be formally launched in the summer and shared widely with other health professionals working in primary care and community health services and will give local people the opportunity to find out more.

This work on phase two of the Path to Excellence programme is taking place as NHS leaders await the outcome of a referral to the Secretary of State for Health from the South Tyneside and Sunderland Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the decisions made by local CCGs for 'phase one'.

The services reviewed under 'phase one' included stroke care; maternity and women's healthcare; and urgent and emergency paediatric services – all of which remain vulnerable due to significant staffing pressures

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