



KONP Sunderland & District

Response to the Announced Merger of City Hospitals Sunderland and South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust.

An Open Letter to Local Health Service Leaders

City Hospitals Sunderland and South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trusts in their plan to formally merge, are avoiding their responsibility to adequately and properly consult the populations of South Tyneside and Sunderland, the staff of the two Trusts and the patients, Governors, and Local Authorities.

The assertion that the merger will have no impact upon clinical services is clearly incorrect, as it is followed by the statement that it will "*help accelerate the pace of positive change even further*". We do not accept that the changes proposed in the 'Path To Excellence' are positive. The proposed changes are severely detrimental, particularly to the communities of South Tyneside, but also to those of Sunderland, by overloading even further the work undertaken in Sunderland Royal Hospital.

The Trusts' reference to "*removing unnecessary organisational boundaries*" will certainly facilitate the 'Path to Excellence', which in reality is the downgrading and closure of clinical services at South Tyneside Hospital. By removing 'structures' at South Tyneside Hospital Trust, such as governors and union representation that serve to protect staff and services, the people of South Tyneside will have a greatly reduced input.

We are concerned that the "*merger*" will result in staff being transferred to the Sunderland-based private company 'Choice'. We understand that Unison has consulted its members at South Tyneside District Hospital and the vast majority of staff reject the merger and all have major concerns. We are not aware of any consultation by the Unions at SRH Trust. You will be aware that the Government has requested that no more 'subcos' are set up. We do not agree that the merger "*will ensure our hospitals in South Tyneside and Sunderland continue to play pivotal roles in our local communities*". The evidence to date is that health care for the people of South Tyneside is being severely curtailed and the knock-on effect of this will also severely disadvantage patients in Sunderland.

We regret that your value of *"openness and honesty in everything we do"* and your mission *"to listen"* is not apparent in the way that you have consulted over the 'Path to Excellence', which resulted in such overwhelming opposition from the public, the referral by the Joint Scrutiny Committee to the Secretary of State, and a Judicial Review that is in progress.

The evidence to date is that there is not greater staff satisfaction in the two Trusts after working closely together, but on the contrary, there is already far less staff satisfaction because of the increase in workload in Sunderland, the downgrading of services in South Tyneside, and the insistence on following the 'Path To Excellence'.

You state that there will be *"greater access to a wider range of services in a timely manner as part of a bigger organisation"*, but there is no evidence to support this statement. We certainly do not accept that there will be *"Improvements in patient outcomes delivered through the Path to Excellence clinical transformation of services"* as you claim in your document 'Stronger Together'. Your *"very strong ambition to make our local NHS services even better and to continuously improve the quality of patient care for local communities for many years to come"* is laudable, but in fact, you are removing local services for the people of South Tyneside and you have refused to factor in the effect of travelling to Sunderland, in an area where there is low car ownership. This can only add to the problem of health inequalities in the area.

Your plan to *"provide opportunities to expand services and access to care for patients particularly in South Tyneside"* needs to be explained, when all we are seeing in the 'Path to Excellence' is the reduction of services in South Tyneside and the increased pressure on services in Sunderland.

We are very suspicious of the supposed improvement in financial efficiency as made in your statement (in the glossy brochure) *"initial anticipated savings of over £30 million over the next three years"*, when only £8 million is the correct figure. We note that you have used KPMG as consultants for your plan, but also note that KPMG has stated that mergers fail in up to 90% of cases.

We need a Health Service where there is *"duplication of services"*, to allow local access to vital acute and emergency clinical care, planned outpatient sessions and admissions, diagnostics, and follow-up, at both hospitals now and in the future. We, therefore, oppose the merger as it will NOT provide *"the highest quality of clinical care for local people across South Tyneside and Sunderland"*.