

Oxford University Hospitals

NHS Foundation Trust

Cllr Jeanette Baker
Cabinet Member for Leisure and Health
Council Offices
Wood Green
Witney
Oxfordshire
OX28 1NB

Andrew Stevens
Director of Planning & Information
Headley Way
Headington
Oxford
OX3 9DU

Tel: 01865 572875

Email: andrew.stevens@ouh.nhs.uk

19 September 2016

Dear Cllr Baker

Thank you for your letter dated 13 September 2016 addressed to Dr Bruno Holthof, the Trust's Chief Executive. Dr Holthof is currently on annual leave and I am responding on his behalf.

Thank for raising your concerns about the impact that the temporary suspension of obstetric services at the Horton General Hospital will have on residents of West Oxfordshire, particularly those who live in the north of the District. The decision to temporarily suspend obstetric services at the Horton General Hospital was difficult and a disappointing one for the Trust to have to make. Nevertheless, it was necessary to ensure the safety of our patients, which is our paramount concern. It was only taken after assessing a number of different options and was found to be the most appropriate for ensuring the safety of expectant mothers and their babies. It is worth stating that mothers-to-be in the catchment area of the Horton who are assessed as having a normal, low risk pregnancy will be able to deliver their babies at the Horton should they choose to do so. Those mothers who are deemed to be a high risk pregnancy, while they will have to travel to the John Radcliffe for their delivery, they will in the main continue to have all their anti-natal and post-natal care locally.

The reinstatement of a full obstetric service at the Horton is a priority for the Trust and we are therefore trying very hard to recruit the necessary junior doctors to provide this service. We want to keep everyone fully informed of developments on this subject in a situation that changes regularly. We have therefore created a question and answers area on our news page for the Horton General Hospital on our website www.ouh.nhs.uk/hospitals/horton/news/questions-and-answers.aspx. We will also be posting news

From the Director of Strategy & Planning
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

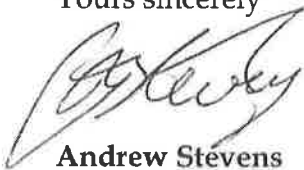
about the Horton, additional question and answers and updates on the recruitment process on the following page www.ouh.nhs.uk/hospitals/horton/news/default.aspx

If you wish to read more about the background to this emergency and temporary decision, further details are available within the board paper that was considered at the emergency board meeting held on 31 August 2016. This can be found at <http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/about/trust-board/2016/august/default.aspx>

I note your comments about the need to maintain trust between councillors and NHS organisations. We are fully committed to this objective both in relation to this short term emergency measure as well as to any wider options for change that are put forward as part of the Oxfordshire Transformation Programme.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns to our attention.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Stevens

Director of Strategy & Planning

**From the Director of Strategy & Planning
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**

Paper from Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire to the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee Thursday 6th October 2016

1. West Oxfordshire District Council's Homeless Prevention Strategy

WODC first commissioned Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire to deliver the Housing and Debt service in 2003 to reduce the number of people applying to go on the homelessness register. The service is part of the West Oxfordshire District Councils Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2012

<https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/media/119039/Homelessness-strategy-2008-2012.pdf>

The strategy goes so far as to state that 'Consideration needs to be given as to what further measures can be introduced to address financial causes of homelessness including possible expansion of the Debt and Housing Advice Project and the pursuit of a financial inclusion strategy in partnership with the CAB and housing associations in the District.' Citizens Advice has been working ever since to support the council to implement the homelessness strategy with considerable success as supported by the district homeless figures.

The Homelessness strategy was last reviewed in October 2014.

<http://cmis.westoxon.gov.uk/Cmis/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFLIDTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=XldT5YvDOzltPSoDsoWb5mb5MK7oQhNqxlURDfLhujKL7BjOI6J2QA%3D%3D&rUzwRPf%2BZ3zd4E7lkn8Lyu%3D%3D=pwRE6AGJFLDNih225F5QMaQWCtPHwdhUfCZ%2FLUQzgA2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3D%3D&mCTIbCubSffXsDGW9IXnl%3D%3D=hFflUdN3I00%3D&kCxIAnS9%2FpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3D%3D=hFflUdN3I00%3D&ujovDxwdjMPoYv%2BAJvYtyA%3D%3D=ctNJff55vVA%3D&FgPIIEJYlotS%2BYGoBi5oIA%3D%3D=NHdURQburHA%3D&d9Qjj0agIPd993jsyOJqFvmyB7X0CSQK=ctNJff55vVA%3D&WGewmoAfeNR9xqBux0rIQ8Za60lavYmz=ctNJff55vVA%3D&WGewmoAfeNQI6B2MHuCpMRKZMwaGIPaO=ctNJff55vVA%3D>

The review sets out the range of current **preventative work and initiatives** employed by the council to prevent homelessness, which include 'Funding for the specialist CAB debt and housing advice worker who represents clients in defending possession proceedings'. The paper then concludes with the following risk.

6. RISKS

6.1. Failure to sustain the efficiency of current prevention measures would inevitably lead to an increase in the number of households becoming homeless and needing to be accommodated in temporary accommodation at considerable expense.

We agree with the councils own conclusions that withdrawal of funding for the CAB debt and housing advice worker will lead to an increase in the number of households becoming homeless and needing accommodation which will add considerable expense to the council.

2. Preventing Homelessness and managing Debt

- The Housing and Debt service provides independent, impartial legal advice to people in debt who are at risk of losing their homes and to people with possession notices and warrants of eviction. In 2015/16 alone we helped 103 households. In the first six months of 2016/17 the project has supported 69 households an increase of 35%. In addition we have

been asked to help a further 20 clients with no access to the internet to register for choice based letting.

- The following is a snapshot of some of the work of the project undertaken in the three month period between January and March 2016. During the quarter the project supported 55 clients, 28 received one off legal advice and 27 were taken on by the Housing and Debt expert for ongoing support. 16 of these clients had received legal papers, 8 notices seeking possession and 8 warrants of eviction. Six of these households were referred to us by the WODC's housing team, one from a housing association and 9 self-referrals. The people who needed help were

- o 10 single vulnerable adults with mental health and physical disabilities
- o 4 single parent families
- o 2 families

- In 15 cases the Housing and Debt project prevented homelessness enabling clients to remain in their own homes or find other suitable accommodation. This was achieved through the following actions:-

- o 2 helped to pay off arrears in full - court order discharged
- o 5 possession actions suspended on repayment terms through court representation
- o 4 Evictions suspended at court
- o 1 Landlord persuaded to withdraw court action
- o 1 advocating with the landlord
- o 2 clients helped to find suitable alternative accommodation before court action and keys handed back

Had Citizens Advice not provided legal advice to these clients up to 10 vulnerable single adults and six families could have been seeking emergency housing from the council? These numbers would overwhelm the provision in Oxford City the council is proposing to purchase as set out in agenda item 7.

3. Ongoing and future support for potentially homeless clients

The paper to cabinet sets out that the future support for potentially homeless people in West Oxfordshire will be provided in the following way:-

- 1. Revenues and Housing Support Service has developed new internal support resource (Client Support Officers) that can take on parts of the work currently undertaken by the Housing and Debt specialist.*

The Citizens Advice Housing and Debt project is a unique resource for the council.

- a. We are an Insolvency Service Compliant Authority our Housing and Debt specialist is a qualified Debt Relief Order Intermediary licenced by the Office of Fair Trading under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 to give debt advice. There are no qualified intermediaries employed by WODC.
- b. Citizens Advice is the only free advice provider in West Oxfordshire authorised and regulated by the Financial Conducts Authority (FCA) to provide debt and money advice. Regular annual returns have to be made to the FCA to ensure compliance. Currently WODC is not an FCA authorised debt advice provider.

- c. The Citizens Advice Housing and Debt project holds the Money Advice Service Accredited Standards for debt advice and the Advice Service Quality Standards Quality Marks in casework for Debt and Housing. We are the only agency in the district to hold these quality marks.
- d. Our employee is a housing and debt expert qualified to give legal expert opinion.

The paper recognises that there are, however, elements of the CAB provision that WODC is not adequately resourced to in-source (or that it would not be appropriate to in-source). Examples of these elements are the provision of complex debt support and representation at Court for clients subject to eviction/possession orders.

The paper goes on to suggest that these elements could be addressed as follows:

1. CAB debt advice is a service that forms part of the CAB's core service and core grant funding would not be affected under these proposals. Clients with housing issues could therefore still access those core CAB services.

- We employ with the Housing and Debt project funding a specialist legally trained housing and debt expert who undertakes extensive support for clients putting together legal argument, preparing court papers and representing at court.
- We will no longer be able to employ this expert without this funding.
- This service could not be replicated by our volunteer advisers who have neither training nor this level of expertise.

2. The Council would commission legal representation, or continued CAB representation, for clients subject to eviction/possession orders on an individual need basis (potentially as a jointly funded contract with Cottsway Housing Association). It should be noted that this service is required, on average, for two clients per year and costs would therefore be minimal; and therefore achievable within existing Service budgets.

Although we welcome that the council recognises the need to commission legal representation we don't think the numbers are correct for the following reasons:-

- In the last three months the project expert has
 - prepared legal argument on 17 cases of threatened homelessness,
 - provided expert legal opinion to WODC on an additional 7 cases
 - prepared court papers and/or represented clients in 12 court actions, seven possession cases and 5 evictions.

To purchase legal opinion and solicitor time to prepare legal argument for 12 possession actions and represent 12 clients at court would cost the council considerably more than the current cost of £24,000, a solicitor would charge a minimum of £150 per hour for advice and considerably more to prepare a court case and provide representation.

We are grateful that the council has recognised that we receive £24,000 to deliver this service and that any withdrawal of funding would be limited to £24,000 not the £32,000 in the original cabinet decision.

We understand that the council is facing considerable financial pressures and that it has a statutory duty to provide emergency accommodation for single people who are unintentionally homeless. We are concerned however, that withdrawal of the £24,000 provided to Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire to deliver this service will increase the number of these vulnerable homeless people in the district putting additional pressure on the council's services and adding significant costs to the council's budgets. We would ask that the council reconsiders withdrawing funding for the Housing and Debt project and that it continues to be part of the council's homelessness strategy.