

UNISON HEALTHCARE - BRANCH UPDATE

From: Christina McAnea, UNISON National Secretary – Health

BRIEFING HC-035-17

31 March 2017

STPs: new test for hospital bed closures announced

Who needs to know?

- Health Branches (England)
- All Health Branches (for information)

Summary:

NHS England has announced a new test that NHS organisations must meet if they are planning major bed closures, with potential ramifications for many Sustainability and Transformation Plans.

In full:

In response to the campaigning of UNISON and others, NHS England has announced a [new test](#) that NHS organisations must meet if they are planning major bed closures.

From 1 April 2017, local NHS organisations will have to show that significant hospital bed closures can meet one of three new conditions before NHS England will grant their approval:

- Demonstrate that sufficient alternative provision, such as increased GP or community services, is being put in place alongside or ahead of bed closures, and that the new workforce will be there to deliver it; and/or
- Show that specific new treatments or therapies, such as new anti-coagulation drugs used to treat strokes, will reduce specific categories of admissions; or
- Where a hospital has been using beds less efficiently than the national average, that it has a credible plan to improve performance without affecting patient care.

As part of this announcement, NHS England emphasised the continuing relevance of the four tests for reconfiguration that were drawn up in 2010.

The four tests represent a good practice framework for CCGs when they are planning and delivering changes to local NHS services. In full they are as follows:

- Major service changes and reconfigurations must put patients and the public first.

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- Change must be clinically-led and underpinned by a clear clinical evidence base.
- Patients, the public and staff should be engaged throughout the development of proposals from their very early initiation through to implementation. Engagement should seek to build an ongoing dialogue with the public, where they have an opportunity to shape and contribute to proposals, in addition to any formal consultation on options.
- Local authorities are essential stakeholders in the reconfiguration process, both through the local authority health scrutiny functions, but also the joint and integrated working between the NHS and local government through health and wellbeing boards.

In the words of [NHS England](#), under the new rules “closures can only go ahead with support from GP commissioners, strengthened public and patient engagement, clear clinical evidence and provided that they are consistent with patient choice.”

And health minister [Lord O’Shaughnessy](#) went on the record in Parliament to state that “Any significant changes outlined in the STPs will have to meet the four reconfiguration tests of strong public and patient engagement, a clear clinical evidence base, support for patient choice and support from clinicians.”

It is likely that a number of Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs) will fail on more than one of these tests – providing another means to challenge the plans locally.

UNISON’s “Responding to STPs” guidance has been updated to reflect these developments and is attached to this circular.

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