

Dear Anna,

Further to the recent meeting of the North Central London Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (NCL JHOSC) on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2024, I am writing to you on behalf of the Committee to summarise our main areas of focus relating to the NCL Start Well programme.

The Committee previously received information about the Start Well programme at a meeting in November 2023 at which you provided details of a forthcoming public consultation regarding proposed changes to maternity and neonatal services and children's surgery. At this meeting, the Committee was informed that, due to various factors (including a declining birth rate, an increased number of complex births, an imbalance of demand across services leading to over/underutilisation of particular units and the fabric of estates not meeting best practice standards), the existing model for these services was no longer sustainable in NCL. The proposed changes included:

- Moving to a model with four units providing maternity and neonatal care instead of five units. This would mean the closure of maternity and neonatal services at either the Royal Free Hospital or the Whittington Hospital.
- This would mean having three Level 2 units and one specialist Level 3 neonatal intensive care unit at University College London Hospital (UCLH).
- There would no longer be a Level 1 unit or a stand-alone birthing centre.
- Pathways for paediatric surgical care would be streamlined.

After consideration of the report and discussions at the meeting, the Committee made a series of recommendations relating to the consultation process including:

- The need for the public to be made aware of the underlying support of NHS Trusts for the proposals, including Trusts directly affected by the potential closure of a unit as this was particularly relevant to any local debate on this issue.
- The importance of clarity over the capital funding being provided under either of the main two options and the need to address any potential risks over the longer-term of insufficient capital funding to support the ongoing cost of Start Well programme, including any possible hidden costs.
- To engage with residents over the development of mitigations for people who may be affected by additional transport costs.
- To closely monitor and report back to the JHOSC on the ongoing modelling of patient flows as current predictions may not necessarily match the choices that patients subsequently make in future years.

Following the conclusion of the consultation process, which ran from December 2023 to March 2024, an independent organisation (ORS) conducted an analysis of the feedback received. Further details about the consultation process and the key findings from an interim report from ORS was provided to the Committee meeting in July 2024. We understand that the full evaluation report will be available in autumn 2024.

The Committee has understood that the direction of travel outlined through the consultation has been clinically-led and has acknowledged the potential benefits of the changes overall. However, the Committee also wishes to emphasise that there are some remaining areas where further details and clarification will be required as the process moves forward, most notably on the additional financing that would be provided to improve the remaining units and also the ongoing modelling of the anticipated patient flows resulting from the proposed changes.

The Committee also acknowledges the efforts that have been made through the consultation process to engage with potentially impacted groups, including those who may find it more difficult to provide feedback or who are potentially less willing or able to engage. Having established connections with these groups, the Committee highlighted the importance of continuing this dialogue during and after the implementation of the proposed changes to ensure that any ongoing concerns are captured and addressed. This could include, for example, monitoring any transport issues that they may experience and ensuring high attendance rates at antenatal classes.

Finally, the Committee wishes to reiterate that its comments at this stage are based only on having seen the interim report on the consultation results and that we await the full analysis report which is expected to be made available later this year.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you and your team for your continued engagement on this issue and I look forward to further discussions in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

**Cllr Pippa Connor**  
**Chair of the North Central London Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee**