

Lothians MSPs continue the fight for answers on the new Eye Pavilion

Sarah Boyack MSP for Lothian continues to campaign for a new Eye Pavilion in Edinburgh. Ahead of a meeting with NHS Lothian on Friday afternoon to discuss the matter further, she spoke to The Edinburgh Reporter to outline the problem which has to be addressed.

Ms Boyack explained that NHS Lothian's website continues to state that there will be a new facility, but it emerged earlier this year that the contract had been cancelled. She said: "We need to know when NHS Lothian found out – we think it was just before Christmas. I find this whole process shocking and we need to know what happened. We also need to know exactly what are the replacement proposals. It sounds like informal treatment is going to be in West Lothian which is a massive downgrading of people's access to eye services."

This is a matter which has attracted support from politicians of all parties.



Miles Briggs MSP at the Eye Pavilion

Miles Briggs MPS highlighted in January that The Scottish Government had cancelled the £45 million contract for a replacement Eye Pavilion in 2020. An initial agreement for the new hospital had already been signed. Mr Briggs said then: "The wait for routine eye treatments, such as for Glaucoma, are already incredibly long in NHS Lothian and patients deserve better than being short changed by SNP Ministers.

"I will hold SNP Ministers to their word to get these essential projects in NHS Lothian funded."

Mr Briggs had lodged an FOI request with The Scottish Government. It reveals the amount that NHS Lothian has already spent on the proposal.

Mr Briggs told The Edinburgh Reporter this morning: "The fact that NHS Lothian has already committed over £1 million towards a new Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion show just how committed they are to a new hospital. NHS Lothian has spent a total of £1,011,253, at least half of which has been spent with John Graham Construction Ltd.

“If SNP Ministers don’t reverse their decision to withhold £45 million for a new eye hospital then hundreds of thousands of pounds will be wasted.

“A new eye hospital has been central to NHS Lothian’s recovery plans, for a number of years, to reach performance targets and this was prior to Covid-19.

“The next challenge after Covid-19 will be getting services back on track and start reducing waiting times, which have grown significantly longer during the pandemic.

“The UK Government has committed almost £10 billion pounds to Scotland to tackle Covid-19 and this money must be used to minimise the long term impacts of the virus, including recovery of health services in NHS Lothian.”

Sarah Boyack

Ms Boyack told us that she is glad to be meeting NHS Lothian this afternoon to try and get some answers, but fears that politicians will have to continue to press The Scottish Government and the Health Minister for a solution. She wants the Health Minister to reverse the decision.

She said: “It is something we have campaigned on for years, getting a replacement for the Eye Pavilion in Edinburgh because we know that we need modern facilities for people in the region. It is a centre of excellence but the building itself is urgently needing replacement so just in the last few weeks Lothians MSPs were absolutely shocked when we heard that the Scottish Government was not going to fund a replacement. As have all individually dug around this topic it has become more shocking.

“It is clear that the Health Board had signed the contract and

there was an FOI published just yesterday saying that it is going to cost NHS Lothian at least £1 million or more to cancel the contract. We had a debate two weeks ago when MSPs were very angry because our constituents are devastated and upset about this. I had people getting in touch explaining it is not just about the expertise and access to operations but also the need for fast urgent attention for some eye conditions. The support needs to be in a central place that people can access and the suggestion is that there will be a facility in West Lothian. Nobody is happy with that.

“There is an ageing population in NHS Lothian, and people with diabetes who may experience sight loss unless this decision is reversed. According to Sight Scotland there are 14,500 people living with sight loss in Edinburgh and 12,000 elsewhere in Lothian. There will be more people needing local access to these services in the local area.”

The alternative centre of excellence is at the Golden Jubilee in Glasgow which means a long journey for patients most of whom would rely on relatives for transport or indeed public transport.

We have asked NHS Lothian for comment.