

Decision due on two community hospitals

A decision on the future of two community hospitals in West Lothian could be made before the end of the summer holidays.

Councillors on the Integration Joint Board forced a stall on a decision to close Tippethill in Armadale and St Michael's in Linlithgow when the board last met in early June.

In a rare vote the three councillors on the Board won time for greater discussion on the plans for a new facility planned to be built around the present Craigmair care home in Livingston.

At that same June meeting the IJB – which oversees jointly managed health and social care provision between West Lothian Council and NHS Lothian – agreed to maintain three other council run care homes.

Officers produced plans aimed to cut a £17m budget deficit which proposed one site to provide respite and dementia care for the elderly at a campus base around the Craigmair care home and Maple Villa, a dementia care unit, in Larch Grove Livingston.

The plan would see the closure of Tippethill Hospital, Armadale, as a community hospital and its two wards – the Rosebery ward for dementia care for women and the Bailie ward for elderly respite care – relocated from St Michael's to Livingston.

It would also see the permanent closure of St Michael's, which

has been mothballed since the height of the pandemic in early 2021.

Health care professionals argue that a move away from hospital to home care was part of a broader change in community health care provision and the new single unit based in Livingston would be a more economical and practical way of providing care.

It would also increase bed capacity from 25 bed unit to a 30 bed one. Officers highlighted that the existing Tippethill community hospital is under-used with sometimes only half the beds taken.

However, Board member and Linlithgow Councillor, Labour's Tom Conn told the June meeting that little weight seemed to have been given to opposition to the closures in the town. He said St Michael's had been starved of funding when it should have been invested in as a community hospital.

The four appointed voting members of the IJB supported the plans for what one described as a "state-of-the-art" facility in Larch Grove.

A report to the Board said: "The West Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership (WLHSCP) has been working on a whole system programme of transformation over the past 18 months to redesign how health and social care services are delivered in the future. The programme builds on previous work to enhance community services to enable people to be supported at home wherever possible based on Home First principles.

"The Home First programme includes a review of community beds to establish what is needed now and in the future. The review has considered the changing ways in which people are cared for and supported in the community, the impact of service developments on demand for community hospital services and the utilisation of care home beds, occupancy rates across health and social care beds, the future needs of a growing population

of older people in West Lothian, and the challenging financial landscape.”

The report added: “ Hospitals should not normally be places where people go to live, even people who have ongoing clinical needs. Hospitals are places for people who need specialist short-term care and should only be considered when care cannot be delivered in any other setting such as at home or in a care home.”

Some funding for a new single site could be found from the end of a £1 million annual PFI contract paid for Tippethill Hospital by NHS Lothian.

Councillors were not convinced that changing care patterns would negate the need for community hospitals, especially with a growing elderly population.

However, after the vote IJB officers agreed to more detailed discussion with councillors to offer reassurance on their proposals.

The Board next meets on 8 August when a decision on the hospitals is expected to be finalised.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

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