

NHS Lothian withdraws funding for veterans service

NHS Lothian has announced today that it will withdraw joint funding from a service that provides support to veterans in Lothian.

The health board has told Veterans First Point Lothian staff and patients that it can no longer provide its share – £214,778- of the total budget required, to maintain the service amid the significant financial challenge facing health boards.

Veterans First Point Lothian was jointly funded by The Scottish Government and NHS Lothian as a “one-stop shop” offering support, advice and mental health care for veterans. It is a multi-award-winning service which has provided support to more than 2,500 different veterans throughout the last 15 years.

By April 2025, NHS Lothian advises that the service will cease to exist in its current form and say “a significant redesign and move of premises” is planned by March 2025.

The health board says it is being forced to review all services and departments to make “efficiency savings” of seven per cent following the budget allocation made earlier this year.

Further reductions in part of the mental health budget of 4.6% means that the health board can no longer continue to find its share of this service.

Tracey McKigen, Director of Royal Edinburgh Hospital and Associated Services, NHS Lothian, said: "This has been a really difficult decision and we apologise to all of our patients and staff who are affected. We would like to thank the team for their dedication and commitment to supporting our veterans over the years.

"This is no reflection on the quality of the Veterans First Point Lothian service, but it does serve as a stark reminder of the extremely difficult choices that we are facing every day as we balance the need to provide safe and effective healthcare while meeting the severe financial challenges facing health board and other public sector organisations."

Miles Briggs MSP said: "It is extremely disappointing that NHS Lothian has been forced into the decision of withdrawing funding for Veterans First Point.

"Years of financial mismanagement by SNP Minister have left NHS Lothian in a desperate situation and unable to fund services.

"Veterans First Point provides a lifeline to veterans to access healthcare and provides a service tailored to their needs.

"NHS Lothian is the most underfunded health board in Scotland, leading to a reduced levels of services for patients across the region."

The Scottish Government will allocate its 40 per cent share of the funding. NHS Lothian is what service it can provide in the future within the remaining budget.

Veterans First Point Lothian will no longer be able to accept new referrals or commence any new episodes of treatment. Veterans who are impacted by the change are urged to contact the team to discuss alternative support. If any veterans feel they need help or support and are not already part of Veterans

First Point Lothian, they should contact their GP during the day. At evenings and weekends, they should contact NHS 24 on 111.