

Cllr Margaret Whitehead  
Chair  
West Sussex Health and Adult Social Care Select  
West Sussex County Council  
County Hall  
Chichester  
PO19 1RQ

[www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk](http://www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk)

12/09/2012

Dear Margaret

### **CHANGES TO CHILDREN'S SHORT BREAKS IN WEST SUSSEX**

I am writing to advise you about a change we are making in the way we provide short breaks for disabled children/children with complex needs.

A short break is part of the range of services provided to children in need and their families. They include day, evening, overnight and weekend activities and can take place in the child's family home, the home of an approved carer or in a residential or community setting. We currently provide residential short breaks in West Sussex at three units: Holly Lodge in Horsham, the Cherries in Chichester and Finches in Burgess Hill (Finches is part of Chailey Heritage Clinical Services).

The change we are about to make is to transfer the small number of children who currently use the short break service at Holly Lodge to Finches. 6 families currently use the service at Holly Lodge. We are working closely with the families involved and staff affected to manage the process with care and sensitivity, and aim to have completed the transfer by the end of September.

#### **The context for change**

There are a number of factors which taken together create the context for change. These factors include:

- NHS Sussex is considering how the local NHS should continue to provide short break services in line with national policies and practice - in particular the vision for a new *NHS at Home* service – and with regard to local service arrangements, the demand for services and resources.
- There is an ongoing reduction in demand for short breaks of this kind due to eligibility changes set by the Department of Health and new approaches to meeting the needs of children by offering alternative service choices.

Within this context, NHS Sussex is developing options with regard to the future of short breaks in West Sussex for discussion with stakeholders.

#### **How this is affecting us**

The reduction in demand for short breaks of this kind – we have had no new admissions at Holly Lodge for over a year – and the fact that change has been on the agenda for some time have together caused uncertainty within our service:

- In response to the fall in demand we have had to reduce the days and times we open Holly Lodge and Cherries, which means the children and families have less choice and flexibility.
- Despite repeated efforts, we have struggled to recruit to replace staff that have left to take up other work opportunities. These difficulties reflect the fact that their specialist skills are in short supply nationally, but are influenced as well by the uncertainty surrounding our future service arrangements. Our staffing difficulties reflect the specialist skills required and uncertainties about the model of care going forward, and are not about a shortfall of money within the service.

We are working hard to manage these difficulties, and we continue to offer high quality care thanks to the exceptional efforts of our staff. But going forward, we need to take action to alleviate our difficulties because:

- Service users need to be able to plan their short break with more certainty.
- We must maintain a safe service for these children.
- The situation is putting undue pressure and strain on our staff.

By acting now to manage the temporary suspension of services at Holly Lodge and transfer the children using Holly Lodge to Finches in a planned way, we aim to put the services on a firmer footing, which will benefit children, families and staff alike.

I must emphasise that this step is a direct response to our current challenges with regard to the quality of service we can offer our children and families and to our staffing difficulties. It does not prejudge the outcome of the children's short breaks options review being led by NHS Sussex, referred to above. We are committed to playing our full part in this review, and to work with our commissioners and families to ensure that children and young people with complex needs receive coordinated, high quality care and support to enable them to live ordinary lives in line with national policy and best practice.

### **How we are managing the change**

We know that this plan will mean change, disruption and possible inconvenience to children, families and staff, and we apologise for this. We are working closely with the children, families and staff to manage the change as smoothly as possible.

We acknowledge that some people might be unhappy with this decision. But we believe that the children, families and staff have the right to expect us to deliver a safe, effective and consistent service, and we cannot continue to do this going forward unless we act now.

I hope that this letter provides you with a clear description of why we are taking this step, but if you would like to discuss the situation in more detail feel free to call:

- Head of Children's Community Nursing Trudy Ward (07990 551777) or
- Head of Children's Services Pauline Lambert (07979 708740).

Yours sincerely



Richard Curtin  
Executive director of operations