

Dear Craig,

{OPEN LETTER}

In response to your letter dated 24th July regarding our meeting and subsequent emails about the stroke unit at QEQM:

With respect, you are simply saying one thing (that you are fighting for QEQM), and doing another (taking no action). That is the only conclusion I can come to having read your letter.

The consultation report clearly shows the public opposition to the plan, but if you think that is enough on its own to stop the plan going ahead you are wrong. In Dorset, a petition to stop the closure of A&E and maternity at Poole hospital got a huge 37,000 signatures, and yet the plan was voted through. The CCG claimed that those who signed the petition were merely 'emotional'. Defend Our NHS in Dorset have been in court this week, taking action against the CCG - this was the only option left to them. Are you going to put us in that situation, or are you going to refuse publicly to accept the STP's plan and do something?

You have a position of power, and a political platform, please use it.

Your justification for not taking the matter up is that "professional clinicians have a greater understanding of stroke diagnosis and treatment than politicians and political activists". This was discussed in our face to face meeting, where I explained to you that there is a weight of comment from other clinicians (ones not on the CCG or the STP) at a local and national level who disagree with centralisation of urgent services into fewer centres with longer distances. Have you forgotten that? I will send you the recording, to refresh your memory.

It is not adequate to only take briefings from the CCG and the STP, and do no scrutiny of your own. It is necessary for you to take other opinions and other evidence into account, and I have sent you information that clearly shows that the one bit of evidence that underpins the claim that centralisation into HASUs is an improvement is actually quite useless in the context of Kent. You say that the CCG have pointed to Greater Manchester as a 'useful example' - are you aware that there was no uplift there at all - ie no improvement to death and disability outcomes? Besides, what is in the stroke plan is not the Manchester model; it's the London model. That is what is being proposed.

The CCG have a statutory duty to improve health inequalities and to provide adequate care for their patients; but they also have a statutory duty to not run at a deficit. It's a Catch 22. Kent and Medway STP have a deficit of £456m to clear by 2020/21. These 'deficits' are caused largely by PFI debt and insufficient funding from central government. The Stroke Review, which calls itself an 'improvement' to services, is in fact a few improvements tacked onto a huge cut in services. This IS about money, despite what the STP brochures claim.

We have asked that you raise this matter in Parliament, and you have refused, preferring to wait until the Joint Committee make their decision later this year. Once that happens, there will be no recourse to stop this plan other than an expensive legal case, which will have to be funded by the residents of Thanet. It will not be easy to raise the funds in this low-income area with high levels of deprivation.

You are an elected representative, and you have seen the consultation report which shows how incredibly strong opposition is here to the stroke plan. Talk to anyone in the street in South Thanet, and you will see what the feeling is. Will you represent us? This is possibly the biggest local issue that will happen in your time in office - will you take action? Saying you are 'hugely sympathetic' whilst taking zero action is, quite obviously, of no use to your constituents.

If we cannot call on our local MP to provide active support on a life and death issue, then who do we go to? You are in a unique position; you are the person whose job it is to represent the people here. You should be pulling out all the stops to ensure this plan does not go ahead.

I would also like to have a follow-up meeting to discuss this matter and the A&E issue. If you have no available appointments at your next surgery, please book one for the next surgery - I believe they are held every two weeks.

Many thanks,
Carly Jeffrey
South Thanet constituent and member of SONiK (Save Our NHS in Kent)

THIS IS AN OPEN LETTER THAT WILL BE SENT TO NEWS OUTLETS AND SHARED WITH THE PUBLIC