

Urgent Question from Councillor Julia Evans

On January 31st of this year, the Integrated Care Board declared a County wide critical care emergency in the health care system, last declared during a Covid outbreak in August 2022. At this point Covid was not the cause, it was simply a matter of being overwhelmed. This will have knock on effects within both the health care system and the social care system.

Meanwhile the building of the overspill wards at the front of the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital has not yet started. The Hospitals Trust focus seems to be solely on the Hospital Transformation Plan which is years away from completion. Community Hospitals are either closed or under threat of closure with massive reduction of beds numbers in the County over the last 20 years (stats showing nearly two thirds lost nationally, possibly more here in Shropshire despite an increasing population locally).

How is this crisis being responded to by the Council? How is the council working to seek assurance that this will not happen again and that a working health care system exists here in Shropshire fit for purpose and serving it's population?

Response from Councillor Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health

Thank you for the question.

A 'critical incident' was declared across the NHS in Shropshire as the county's two acute hospitals deal with "high volumes of very sick patients. This was specifically related to the hospitals being under extreme pressure due to the high demand for urgent and emergency care services and ambulance handover delays. A critical incident is part of the NHS incidence response planning escalation processes. By declaring a system wide critical incident, they can bring more resources to bear on tackling the bulge in demand.

Shropshire Council responds from an operational and strategic perspective. Shropshire Council has a delivery role in services, working in partnership with Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust in complex discharge pathways. The Council supports the ICB through a Gold Command structure to ensure senior oversight of the position in the acute trusts and attend Urgent Care Delivery Boards to support partners in the wider Urgent Care work. Our operational managers attend daily meetings and will escalate concerns to the Director of Adults Social Care and to the Chief Executive.

Strategically, Shropshire Council is a member of the Integrated Care Board and Integrated Care Partnership. Its role and responsibilities were summarised in a Cabinet paper on the [19th October 2022 NHS STW Governance Arrangements](#). The Council was obliged to establish an Integrated Care Partnership with and be a member of the Integrated Care Boardⁱ

In Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, the ICS is a partnership involving the local NHS, Local Government organisations, the third sector and other relevant bodies with an active interest in the health, care and wellbeing of the residents of the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. Together they collaborate to address health and care inequalities, enhance integrated working, ensure optimal use of available resources and contribute to broader societal priorities.ⁱⁱ

As a member of both the ICB and ICP the Council does continue to seek assurance that the Strategy and Joint Forward Plan are being delivered and raises concerns where performance does not meet expectations or is below standards. However, NHSE remains statutorily responsible for NHS performance with ICBs accountable for the oversight of NHS performance

The Council is also part of the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC), established over 15 years ago by Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils to jointly scrutinise broader strategic changes and implications relating to health service provision across the Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin Health System. The JHOSC's Terms of Reference lay out that the Committee will: "Operate in a way that will lead to rigorous and objective scrutiny of the issues under review and be carried out in a transparent manner that will boost the confidence of local people in health scrutiny. "

The JHOSC have focussed in 2023 and 2024 to date, on the performance of the Integrated Care System and SaTH within this, seeking to provide robust critical friend challenge. During this timeframe they have had 5 formal meetings which are held in public, where these have been the topic in focus:

- 23rd January 2023 receiving an update on SaTH Maternity Services – Our Improvement Journey
- 7th June 2023 considered the Shropshire Telford and Wrekin Joint Forward Plan
- 6th July 2023 were updated on and considered the NHS planning for winter pressures and how the lessons learnt from the previous year had been applied
- 24th October 2023 scrutinising the historic and current performance levels at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust and how they are being supported by the local and national system.
- 27th February scrutinising Urgent & Emergency Care and the learning from the preparedness for Winter Pressures across Shropshire Telford & Wrekin.