

NORTH TAWTON TOWN COUNCIL

Town Clerk:
Mrs R Rice

14a The Square North Tawton
EX20 2EP
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Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of North Tawton Town Council held at the **Town Hall** on **Thursday 2nd October 2014 at 7.30 pm.**

Present: Cllr S Blood Cllr Mrs C Burrow
Cllr A Gillespie Mrs G Hoggins (Chair)
Cllr I MacLeod Cllr Mrs A Ponsford
Cllr Mrs D Rice Cllr Mrs L Watts
Cllr S Whiteley Cllr N Morgan

Nearly 200 people were present

In attendance: Karen Acott, Dr Thomas, Dr Gilford and Dr Sherlock – Wallingbrook Health Group, and Mike Barber, Chemist.

1. **Apologies for Absence** – Apologies for absence were received from Cllr K Hodge and Cllr Dr P Brickley.
2. **Declarations of Interest** – Town/Parish Councils are now responsible for determining requests for a dispensation by a town/parish councillor under Section 33 of Localism Act 2011. This is because they are a “relevant authority” under section 27(6) (d) of the Act.

Although dispensation normally only apply to a disclosable pecuniary interests in the interests of openness and transparency dispensations have been requested on this matter

Medical Practice, North Tawton

In the event that Councillors need to make any resolutions regarding the Medical Practice at North Tawton, the following Councillors, as patients of the current Wallingbrook Medical Practice have been granted dispensation.

This dispensation will apply to any matter involving the Medical Practice until May 2015.

Signed by: Cllr Mrs G Hoggins, Cllr Mrs C Burrow, Cllr S Blood, Cllr S Whiteley, Cllr A Gillespie, Cllr Mrs A Ponsford, Cllr K Hodge, Cllr I MacLeod, Cllr Mrs L Watts.

3. **Wallingbrook Health Group**
Notice to terminate the Primary Medical Service contact of North Tawton Medical Practice.

The Chairman stated that the purpose of this meeting was to consider the letter from Wallingbrook Health Group to NHS England stating that they have given 6 months’ notice that they wish to terminate their services as provider of Primary Medical Services contract. – previously circulated to Councillors.

“Karen Acott read out a statement that Wallingbrook, has issued following their decision to give 6 months’ notice to NHS England that they wished to termination their services as provider of Primary Medical Services in North Tawton.

“The decision has not been taken lightly and ever since we took the contract over on the 1st September 2011, we have worked tirelessly to improve the quality of the services as well as access for patients. We have consolidated back office functions and moved to a more digital and efficient way of operational management within the practice without compromising patient safety.

Over the last 2 years, we have increased our clinical sessions to provide better skill mix and our experience shows that 12 GP sessions is the minimum safe limit for this population. We also introduced better systems for managing long term conditions and extensive enhanced services. As part of our mission to improve population health, we have also inspired the Patient Participation Group (PPG) to set up the annual Healthy Living Day which is a great success in the community. Much of the medical equipment is supported by the Friends of North Tawton Surgery (FONTS) who is a separate fundraising group and currently in its 20th year of fundraising for the practice.

In recognition of the urgent need for premises development, we spent £15,000 on planning and subsequent appeal to build a modern extension that would incorporate the local pharmacy. This was the ideal opportunity to secure the future of the practice and was in line with national policy drivers around medicines optimisation and patient safety. Unfortunately, our appeal was rejected and the hybrid pharmacy medical model we call Pharmedic could not be realised. During the last 2 years, we also mentored the local pharmacist, through her independent prescribing qualification.

We set up a strong and highly engaged Patient Participation Group (PPG) and they have supported us from day 1. The PPG together with the town council have also identified a new site for the practice. They have also discussed the viability of the practice with the local MP, Mel Stride who subsequently sent questions to Simon Stevens, Chief Executive, NHS England but neither of us has received any response to date.

We are very disappointed in the inertia we experienced with NHS England and the lack of support we have received to date to keep the practice going. We tried to explore various options from funding an innovative model of healthcare provision, premises development to contract alignment. All of these appear to have been met with inaction on your part.

The practice is unviable as it stands and the contract value requires urgent attention. We are unwilling to put the health and lives of this community at risk by cutting services even further just to meet your current unjustifiable funding envelope which we believe is unsafe. It therefore leaves me with no other option but to hand the contract back to you on the 31st March 2015.”

The Chairman asked members of the public if they had any questions.

Mr G Cripps asked a question about the Patients Participation Group.

Mrs Jenny Williams asked what is the point of this meeting, as a decision had already been made that Wallingbrook were going to terminate their contract.

Karen Acott replied that the medical practice was not sustainable.

Sally Yarrow asked why North Tawton and not any of the other practices within Wallingbrook Group.

Karen Acott replied that North Tawton deserved better, Wallingbrook is run as a business, and it could not continue under the current NHS funding.

Cllr S Blood asked if all contracts were a fixed price per head.

Karen Acott stated that the price per head for North Tawton had evolved over time, the price per head is different for different practices.

A question was asked - is the contract less value per head at Chulmleigh and is the viability supported as it is a dispensing practice.

Unknown – stated that she had a disabled mother, what happens when the practice closed.

Dr Sherlock answered that it was with regret that Wallingbrook could not get the practice to work at North Tawton. NHS England are responsible to provide contracts, providing healthcare to rural communities is a challenge. NHS England may find another provider, this will be done in consultation with patients.

Mr R Knott asked if the problem was not enough patients.

Karen Acott replied that this is not happening in isolation, it was happening with a lot of smaller surgeries.

The Clerk read out a briefing note received from NHS England

Briefing note : Medical Services in North Tawton.

“The contract for the provision of medical services in North Tawton is currently held by The Wallingbrook Health Group. NHS England has received a letter from The Wallingbrook Health Group giving six months’ notice that it will be terminating its contract on 31st March 2015.

On the termination of a contract NHS England becomes legally responsible for ensuring continuity and provision of medical services to patients previously registered under the terminated contract though this does not remove the contactors own obligations in this respect leading up to the termination , to cooperate with NHS England in performing these functions.

In determining how to ensure continuity of medical services to the patients previously registered with this provider NHS England is required to consult with patients, the public and overview and scrutiny committees and to consider all possible opportunities prior to making a final decision how to meet the obligation to secure health services for the population.

There are a number of factors which will need to be considered when looking at the options for provision in North Tawton. This includes but is not limited to:

- Current list size and demographic information including deprivation, age profile
- Range of services currently deliver
- Local capacity of neighbouring providers and impact on other services (eg local pharmacies)
- Geographical location (including public transport links)
- Premises ownership
- Value for money

Options for the future provision of services may range from dispersing the list (i.e inviting patients to register with other practices in the area based on their own choice) to the procurement of a new service provider.

At this point in time it is not clear what option will be taken as this will depend very much on the outcome of consultation. One of the challenges here is that that the contract will end on 31st March 2015. However that the timescale for any procurement (should this be required) is 198 days from tender to fully operational service. In light of this the Area Team will be considering whether, on the grounds that there is insufficient time to do a full consultation, it would be possible to award a short term contract to enable both the complete consultation and procurement process to take place.

The Area Team will as, a matter of urgency, be discussing its approach to this including arrangements for consultation and communication with patients and the public during the week commencing 5th October 2015 and further information will follow”.

Mrs C Hughes raised the question who should represent the town in the consultations with NHS England.

Mr Bill Dean raised the question of how to protect the vulnerable, the Patients Participation Group and others should represent the town. He also asked whether Wallingbrook Group would consider continuing after March 2015.

Karen Acott stated that they had given notice to NHS England and it was up to NHS England to provide health care in North Tawton.

Cllr S Blood asked if Wallingbrook had had discussion with NHS England regarding the apparent lack of funding.

Karen Acott replied that discussions had taken place, the premises were a factor, alignment with other practices was not an option. Mel Stride has been involved and made representation to the Chief Executive of NHS England.

Mrs K Gregory stated that we must fight to keep a surgery in North Tawton.

Mrs C Wheller asked if Wallingbrook would consider continuing if NHS England increased the financial arrangements.

Karen Acott stated that Wallingbrook Group could not see a long term viability.

Unknown asked the question why was planning permission not granted for the extension to Devonshire House.

Cllr Mrs A Ponsford asked why Bow Medical Practice could have a purpose built surgery.

Karen Acott stated that the country is coming out of recession, Bow's practice was in a different economic environment.

Ms M Easy stated that North Tawton needs a doctors surgery, it seems that Wainhomes used it as a sweetener to get their planning permission for the houses.

Mr R Edwards asked who owns the Devonshire House building, with the NatWest bank closing, could the pharmacy go into that building.

Mr M Barber from the Pharmacy stated he was shocked to hear the news that Wallingbrook had given notice to terminate their contract, he has no plans of closing the chemist shop, he will stay open as long as people bring their prescriptions to his shop, the pharmacy needs to be used. He stated that a similar situation had occurred in Somerset, two surgeries merged into one, there was a campaign to stop it but they did not win. If you lose the GP surgery the town will lose footfall for other shops as well.

Dr J Warre stated he owned Devonshire House, it was the Local Medical Committee that kept the surgery at North Tawton 7 years ago.

Karen Acott said that North Tawton deserves more, it breaks her heart that Wallingbrook have had to make this decision.

Ann Courtenay said if it is not viable for Wallingbrook how is another Doctor going to make it viable, would Wallingbrook take patients at their Chulmleigh surgery. Karen Acott said they will do their very best.

Unknown – why does North Tawton get less funding than other practices.

Karen Acott stated that the funding was historic, Dr Warre was to be a dispensing practice, part funded, but Dr Warre's contract changed, funding flows changed, and they are still trying to play catch up.

Mr C Bennett said there was 3 options, he would like to help and share to come to a resolution, he would speak to Wallingbrook and then the Town Council. Mr Bennett said he was experienced in such matters and he would be able to get a new contract and a new building at Bathway Fields.

Mrs P J Gray stated that Wallingbrook should be ashamed of themselves, they have a duty to provide health care, she thought it was disgraceful.

Cllr Mrs L Watts stated that it was clear, we needed to fight for more funding from the NHS, we must fight as a community.

Mrs C Hughes stated that we should go with a two pronged attack; funding or funding and a new practice, but working with the pharmacist would be great.

Mr K Badman stated that the practice had worked hard, the MP Mel Stride had written to the NHS and Minister, do not blame Wallingbrook. House prices will go down, if we do not have a surgery, people should not move doctors as numbers are essential when talking to the NHS.

Mr R Edwards thought that money was the bottom line, clearly NHS need to put more money in, what is the shortfall, how much extra per patients would be needed.

Mrs G Crips stated that she could not speak to highly of Wallingbrook she has always received excellent care.

Following the questions and answer questions the Chairman stated that we would await to hear from NHS England regarding the first meeting with some members of the PPG and some members of the Council. This Group could then report back to the Town with any news. Posters will be put in the Post Office and the Town Council noticeboard.

4. Questions/Comments from members of the public

Nothing was raised.

5. Any other business

Nothing was raised.

6. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Council shall be 7th October 2014.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm.