

TO: **All members of Council**

Our reference CS
Your reference N/A
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Dear Councillor

Council - Tuesday 22 March 2022

Attached are the written responses to the questions/statements raised at the above meeting, as referred to in the minutes.

Yours sincerely

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West Suffolk
Council

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Council: 22 March 2022 - written responses to questions

Item 5: Leader's Statement: Question from Councillor Max Clarke to Councillor John Griffiths:

In the context of rising infection rates of COVID-19 and hospitalisations, Councillor Max Clarke asked whether all our staff at West Suffolk Council receive proper sick pay or statutory sick pay only, and if the former, does proper sick pay carry over to the contracted maintenance and housekeeping staff?

Response from Councillor Griffiths:

All West Suffolk Council employees receive full sick pay for reasons of absence due to contracting Covid. This is as per the NJC terms and conditions for local authority employees.

Services provided by third party organisations, such as Verse, are not covered by the NJC terms and conditions. As part of the Vertas Group wide terms and conditions employees receive statutory sick pay for all absences.

Item 5: Leader's Statement: Question from Councillor Don Waldron to Councillor John Griffiths:

Councillor Waldron's initial question was in connection with whether there was any further news on a GP practice moving into the Mildenhall Hub, as was mooted when it was agreed to be built.

Upon invitation by the Chair, Councillor Lance Stanbury informed Council that the Reynard Surgery GP practice based in Red Lodge, had a second surgery in Mildenhall town centre (White House surgery). Pre-COVID and following a period of consultation with patients, the practice was intending to move that operation into the Mildenhall Hub. However, whilst this was encouraged by the Council, the practice, as a private sector organisation with its own challenges to overcome, particularly around the impact of COVID-19, reviewed its plans. This included reviewing how the practice considered they could deliver health and care services more effectively and efficiently. It consequently decided to consolidate all its services under one roof at Red Lodge. This meant provision of a satellite service was not pursued at the Hub and the decision was taken to close its White House surgery.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Waldron asked that when it was agreed for the White House surgery to relocate to the Hub, why the practice wasn't tied in at that time by contract, which meant they were able to pull out at the last moment?

Response from Councillors John Griffiths and Jo Rayner, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Community Hubs:

The Mildenhall Hub is designed flexibly for community/primary health care provision and the lease to the NHS is structured deliberately to keep all options open in the future. However, ultimately, any questions on the provision of NHS services in and around Mildenhall must be referred to the NHS itself.

What we can confirm is that the Council's own contractual relationship with the NHS at the Hub is through a 20 year head-lease for the entire health centre, under the One Public Estate Programme. This head-lease for the NHS is held by the West Suffolk Foundation Trust on behalf of the West Suffolk Alliance of health and care providers (soon to be the Integrated Care Board). It is the Alliance which then decides how to operate the facility on a shared basis between all health providers. Meaning that the same consulting room can be used flexibly for many different things during the same week if desired.

While we understand the concern of Councillor Waldron's constituents about access to GP services, how the NHS chooses to use the consulting rooms therefore has no bearing on the rent or service charges paid to the Council. Or the strength of the business case for building the health centre.

As a matter of record, it was never originally intended to include GP facilities in the Hub when Forest Heath signed off the project in 2016; it was conceived with the NHS in its first phases as a replacement for the NHS community health building at College Heath Road. However, as Councillor Stanbury explained at the recent Council meeting, after construction of the Hub began, the NHS partners did explore the potential for the Reynard GP Practice to operate a satellite service in the new health centre when its White House Surgery in Mildenhall closed.

If this had gone ahead, it would have been a separate third-party arrangement between the GP Practice and the Alliance under the terms of the NHS head-lease at the Hub. As such, the Council was never directly involved in the discussions with the Surgery because they had no bearing on either the design or construction of the project, or the negotiation of the main NHS lease with the Trust.