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Mr Peter Coles  
Acting Interim Chief Executive  
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust  
Northwick Park Hospital  
Watford Road  
Harrow  
HA1 3UJ

Dear Peter

### **Proposed merger of North West London Hospitals NHS Trust and Ealing Hospital NHS Trust**

The Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee has spent a significant amount of time in recent months considering the proposal to merge North West London Hospitals NHS Trust and Ealing Hospital NHS Trust. This is an important development in the North West London health sector and an issue which has warranted our attention and scrutiny. The committee is conscious that there isn't going to be a formal public consultation on this matter, but I have been asked to write on the committee's behalf setting out our views on the plans so that these can be presented to the trust's boards when they consider the Full Business Case for the merger.

The Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee understands the clinical and financial reasons driving the merger proposal. The arguments are persuasive and it is clear to members that a merged organisation has a greater chance of meeting the quality requirements commissioners will expect in the future. However, there are concerns that at this time when the future commissioning landscape in North West London is still unknown there are no guarantees that what emerges from the "Shaping a Healthier Future" project will lead to a sustainable future for the merged trust. We would not want the merger to go through only for the new trust to face similar clinical and financial problems that the separate trusts are currently dealing with.

In our committee meetings and in the informal meeting with Harrow and Ealing scrutiny councillors, a number of concerns about the merger and the implications for patients have been raised. Some of these remain, including:

- Patients could be required to travel longer distances to access services. Although it is hoped that more services will be delivered in community settings away from the main hospital sites, access could be a problem for some patients depending on how services are reorganised. We hope that this issue is monitored and expect the trusts take into account the impact of its plans on patients travel times.
- Increased investment in community services is crucial for the success of the merged organisation. Although the principle of investing one third of savings from the acute sector into



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community services had been explained (with a possibility that the proportion of reinvestment into community services changes when the Full Business Case is developed), implementation of this policy is of great importance to members. Already we are hearing informally that community services are struggling to cope with demand. Expecting them to do more without making the necessary investments in staff, equipment and technology will lead to a worse service for patients, increases in patient dissatisfaction and ultimately greater pressure on hospitals as services in community settings fail to prevent admissions. Again, the committee will be looking to the new trust to provide evidence of its plans for investment in community services.

- Concerns about Northwick Park's ability to cope with an increase in patients, particularly to A&E have been highlighted throughout discussions on the merger. The merger will leave the new trust with three A&Es – it is not unreasonable to assume that at least one of these will close leaving the remaining units to absorb a greater workload. Councillors would like assurance that Northwick Park can cope with an increase in patients. Making better use of Central Middlesex Hospital and expanding the range of services delivered from the site would be welcomed by the committee. It has been suggested that it could become a planned care centre, where it is not competing for resources with emergency services. Members would welcome this development if it ensures a viable future for Central Middlesex Hospital and takes some of the pressure off Northwick Park.
- An Equalities Impact Assessment hasn't been published with the Outline Business Case. This raises a number of concerns, not least how the merger proposal could have an impact on vulnerable groups who are more reliant on hospital services than others. Without a thorough assessment of the equalities implications of the merger, we are concerned that there could be unforeseen consequences that have a detrimental impact on service users. This should be remedied when the Full Business Case is published, which we hope will contain an Equalities Impact Assessment.

The work on the merger has taken place independently of NHS North West London's work on service change. We understand that for modelling purposes four service change scenarios have been included in the Outline Business Case to demonstrate that the merged organisation would be clinically and financially sustainable if service changes take place and it loses income. There are no guarantees that NHS North West London will want to continue commissioning the range of services it does from a merged trust and that one of the four models, or a variation thereof, could be implemented at some stage. Commissioners have endorsed the Outline Business Case and the trusts are confident that the Full Business Case will be endorsed when it's published. We also understand that you will be working with commissioners to promote the benefits of integrated community and acute services. But until commissioner's work on "Shaping a Healthier Future" is complete, there will be a degree of uncertainty about the acute service landscape in Brent and members are concerned about this. Although the two processes are separate, to councillors it seems that the success of the new trust will be dependent on the "Shaping a Healthier Future" project, as this will have such a significant impact on the acute sector in North West London.

I hope that this letter can be presented to the boards of both North West London NHS Hospitals Trust and Ealing Hospital NHS Trust when they consider the Full Business Case for the merger. If you have any questions about the points raised please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Sandra Kabir  
Chair, Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Brent Council



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Cc Julie Lowe, Chief Executive, Ealing Hospital NHS Trust  
Simon Crawford, SRO, Organisational Futures Project  
David Cheesman, Director of Strategy, North West London Hospitals NHS Trust  
Mansukh Raichura, Chair, Brent LINK  
Councillor Ann Gate, Chairman, Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee, Harrow Council  
Councillor Abdullah Gulaid, Chair, Health and Adult Social Services Standing Scrutiny Panel, Ealing Council



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