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Dear Tim

Shaping a healthier future – North West London

I am writing to you about your report on the *Shaping a healthier future* proposals by NHS North West London, which has been published by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Having read your report, I welcome your acknowledgement of the compelling arguments for making changes to health services in north west London, including recognising the clinical evidence that underpins the proposed changes. I was however disappointed with the quality of the overall analysis.

I know that someone with your experience of leading health systems in the NHS does not need to be reminded of the difficulties we face in making major service changes. There are the obvious practical challenges, but we also do so in an environment where patients, the public and their representatives – including Members of Parliament and local councils – are understandably very anxious about changes to much-loved local hospitals. That is why decisions to pursue such changes, including those proposed in north west London, are never taken lightly in the NHS and are done so in due regard to our responsibility to patients, to the public and to taxpayers. May I therefore take the opportunity to set a few things straight.

You seem unaware of the critical role of strategic health authorities in the assurance of plans for consulting on proposals for service reconfiguration. This covers both the quality of the proposals for change themselves and the processes and activities carried out to develop them. That role has evolved over time, but it is also set out in Department of Health guidance *Changing for the Better*, the 2011/12 extension to the NHS Operating Framework and NHS London's *Reconfiguration Guide*. The role includes assessing the NHS's application of the 'four tests' for service reconfiguration, which strategic health authorities must be satisfied have been met before consultation begins.

In the case of proposals for change in north west London, we fully tested the *Shaping a Healthier Future* pre-consultation business case in line with our duty of assurance. Our Board was fully assured of the *Shaping a Healthier Future* business case and plans for consultation at its meeting on 28 June. I am wholly confident that

London Strategic Health Authority

Chair: Professor Mike Spyer

Chief Executive: Dame Ruth Carnall DBE

in executing our assurance role we have guided, scrutinised and, where necessary, challenged the local NHS team so that the proposals detailed in the documents that you have reviewed are robust at this stage of the process. We are not new to any of this, having succeeded in doing the same for all other major service changes in London in the last few years. This applies not only to those that have transformed stroke and major trauma care across the capital, but also to some of the agreed changes that proved to be highly contentious, such as those affecting Chase Farm Hospital in Enfield and King George Hospital in Ilford.

I note that in preparing your report you interviewed a number of people about *Shaping a Healthier Future*, using their statements to support some of your conclusions. However, I am disappointed that you did not approach me or the team here at NHS London to discuss your work. I would have welcomed the opportunity to give you our perspective on the programme in a way that I expect would have avoided many of the factual inaccuracies, misinterpretations and outright contradictions - particularly between one conclusion and another - that feature in your report.

Local councils are partners in the local health system and their overview and scrutiny committees are fundamental to adding value to the process of consultation on changes to services. They deserve well-balanced, accurate and considered analysis to assist them in scrutinising proposals and processes and responding as part of the consultation. It is unfortunate that what could have been a credible report from someone with a track record of leadership in the NHS, is so grossly undermined by an apparent lack of understanding, both of the legislative and policy framework around consultation and the proposals themselves. A report with so many inherent weaknesses, which the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and others may choose to use to inform their response to the consultation, offers a poor foundation on which to base opinion.

The PCT Cluster in north west London has already responded by writing to Hammersmith and Fulham Council, refuting many of the findings in your report. I attach a copy of the Cluster's commentary on your report, rather than repeat the specifics here.

In conclusion, it is a shame that there has clearly been an opportunity missed to discuss the programme with you. You would have found us to be a critical friend and fully supportive of efforts to provide accurate and balanced advice to all stakeholders. In the meantime, we will continue to support clinical leaders and others in north west London, between now and the end of consultation and beyond, so that the local NHS can take the right decisions early next year for securing the best quality health care for the local population.

I am copying this letter to David Nicholson, David Flory, Anne Rainsberry, Paul Baumann and Hannah Farrar.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Carnall', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dame Ruth Carnall DBE
Chief Executive

