



Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Defend Our NHS Press Release 30th November 2017

They're Playing Games with the Lives of Women and Babies

'How dare they? They're playing games with the lives of women and babies'.

That was the response from health campaigner Gill George following tonight's meeting where Shropshire CCG bosses announced the destruction of rural maternity care.

The plan from CCG decision makers is that the Midwife-Led Units in Bridgnorth, Oswestry and Ludlow will be closed to births forever. Instead, they will be turned into jolly 'community hubs' – which offer - for 12 hours a day - the support that used to be available 24/7 at every Midwife-Led Maternity Unit. Now, for those rural communities, there will be a choice between home births (not suitable for every mother), or travelling the long journey to Shrewsbury or Telford.

Gill George added, 'It was quite bizarre. They kept insisting tonight, *"This is what women want"* and *"This is what women asked for"*. We heard this from Commissioning Lead Fiona Ellis and from an independent advisor called Fay Baillie as well. What nonsense. They have been told by hundreds and hundreds of women in our rural communities to keep births and postnatal care in our local areas, and to keep our Midwife-Led Units open. Maybe they just forgot to write it down because it wasn't what they wanted to hear.'

In an angry meeting tonight, members of the public were told that women in rural communities will have a choice – between home birth and travelling to Shrewsbury or Telford. Asked about 'rural proofing' and making sure the needs of rural communities are met, Fiona Ellis looked bewildered and was unable to answer. Questions on the risks to some women and babies of home births weren't answered. Members of the public asked about the risks of travelling long distances in labour – and we were told midwives will ask the right questions and make a judgement call. That's all right then!

We were told that the 'Northwick Park model' says there are enough beds after the closure of the rural Maternity beds – even though the lived experience of women and midwives is that the pressure on beds is relentless and has contributed very directly to unacceptable levels of risk. Bridgnorth councillor and campaigner Dr Julia Buckley, present at tonight's meeting, said, 'They're ignoring the evidence that a shortage of beds has led to adverse outcomes for babies – and they're just carrying on and cutting beds. That has to be unacceptable. There are some important economic arguments here too. This is another strand in the destruction of our rural market towns, as young families will be far less likely to move to these areas.'

Maternity campaigners added their own voices tonight to the growing chorus of protest. Ally Hiles, leader of the Ludlow Maternity campaign, said 'We now know of FOUR babies born in Ludlow without midwife support, two in the last few weeks. One of those four babies was mine. What makes them think it's acceptable that my life and my child's life were put at risk? What makes them think they can do this to other women? We're not going to let this decision stand.'

Bobbie Brown, Coordinator of the Bridgnorth campaign said, 'This outcome goes against everything they've been pretending – about listening to women, not levelling down to the lowest common

denominator, treating us with respect. They're devious – and they're completely contemptuous of Mums, babies and our safety. No way.'

And Liz Grayston, Coordinator of the Oswestry Maternity campaign, summed up the mood of rural communities well: 'They have yet to get it through consultation - in front of the women they have apparently 'listened' to. Last time in Oswestry, 11 years ago, the crowd of us was so large and angry that we just couldn't be ignored. It's time for repeats, across our county. They have a fight on their hands'.

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