

Losing Patience With CCG

Stockport NHS Watch has lodged two formal complaints with the local Clinical Commissioning Group following marathon attempts to get the CCG to improve its contracting arrangements.

The two complaints are about publishing contract information and adopting ethical guidelines for the selection of contractors. On both matters, the CCG made commitments that have not been carried through.

The CCG had promised Stockport NHS Watch that it would start making public key details of contracts by last April, but so far little more than the name of the contract has been disclosed. The issue was first raised in June 2013.

Clinical Commissioning Groups are required by law to involve the public in the decisions they make to buy healthcare services. Such participation is impossible without information. The public needs to know that the bad decisions made to sign deals with Arriva and Healthcare at Home will not be repeated.

Stockport NHS Watch's second complaint is about the CCG's failure to carry out its commitments to adopt clauses laying down ethical practice for NHS contractors. The CCG's first positive statement about the clauses was made to Stockport NHS Watch in December 2012. The commitment to adopt them was confirmed early in 2014, but the clauses have been excluded from a recently published final draft of the CCG's Procurement Policy.

The clauses on ethical practice originate with lawyers hired by the 38 Degrees campaign organisation. They are intended to limit bad behaviour by companies that are taking advantage of the drive to privatisation within the NHS.

Key points of the ethical clauses are: contractors to pay at least the "living wage"; exclusion of companies and key personnel convicted of offences; and prohibition of the common practice of healthcare companies exploiting offshore locations and other "improper tax avoidance". The clauses permit some flexibility.

The CCG must consider formal complaints made to it.