

Councillors fear reducing beds at new Whipps Cross Hospital will be 'unsafe'

Victoria Munro, Local Democracy Reporting Service

Published: 10:00 AM March 19, 2021



The existing Whipps Cross University Hospital has 576 beds. - Credit: Ken Mears

Councillors are “simply not buying” claims the new Whipps Cross Hospital will be able to support a growing population with fewer beds.

At a meeting on Wednesday, March 17, councillors on Redbridge’s health scrutiny committee agreed to seek an independent assessment of the case for having 51 fewer beds in the new hospital .

One councillor said she felt the plan to reduce beds was “unsafe” and based on “unrealistic forecasts” of likely need, given the area’s growing and aging population.

The current hospital has 576 beds available but its NHS trust Barts Health wants to reduce this to 525, aiming to speed up treatment and prevent admissions by improving in-community care.

Committee chairman Cllr Neil Zammett (Lab, Goodmayes) told a trust representative that the measures it claims will cut down on patient stays “have been around as long as 50 years”.

He said: “You will have to convince people that there’s something especially new which will lead to the reduction in beds. The message to you is we are simply not buying it.

“What we might do is consider referring the question to some outside body, like an academic institution, so the assumptions (justifying the reduction) can be looked at independently.”

Cllr Beverley Brewer (Lab, South Woodford), agreed, adding: “I think the assumption that we can operate on these 50 fewer beds is unsafe, I think there’s been unrealistic forecasts.

“Adult social care is under unbearable financial strain, it’s unreasonable to reduce its capacity and assume another part of the system will pick it up.”

She said she felt so strongly about the issue that she believed Redbridge Council should consider formally withholding its support for the project.

Cllr Zammett responded: “I would not want there to be any suggestion that Redbridge was wishing to hold up a development we have been waiting for for the past 30 years.

“But if any (independent) studies showed real misgivings about the number of beds, then that would be the time to make a move.”

The trust’s redevelopment programme director Alastair Finney insisted the trust was “confident (it) will require less inpatient beds in the future” thanks to the “integrated care strategy”.

All parts of England will be part of an “integrated care system” by April, with organisations like hospitals and councils that provide health and social care working more closely together.

The integrated care strategy focuses on preventing people from becoming so sick that they need to attend hospital, by improving care at GPs and residents’ general health.

A report on the plans for a new hospital published by the trust last September reads: “Our local partners plan to improve care and support outside of hospital.

“(Therefore) we expect more people will avoid having to come to A&E than would have been the case, because they will be better supported in or closer to their homes.

“For example, our partners in Waltham Forest and Redbridge are working to improve care for people with long term conditions such as diabetes, multiple sclerosis or chronic asthma.

“The effect will be less people reaching the stage where they need hospital and those already there will be able to be more quickly discharged safely.”

The trust also expects more patients to be seen and treated on the same day rather than admitted, thanks to doubling the capacity for tests with more CT and MRI scanners.

The report adds: “We would anticipate the overall amount of days that patients spend in a hospital bed could fall by 10 per cent over the next ten years.”

The committee also agreed to approach Waltham Forest Council about setting up a joint organisation to allow Redbridge Council and Essex County Council to have more of a say in the project.