



Sandalwood 'Place of Safety' Decision Delayed

A decision over whether to close a mental health unit has been delayed. The “place of safety” suite at Stratton’s Sandalwood Court mental health hospital faces the axe. It is one of three sites in the county where those suffering mental health problems and considered to be a risk to themselves or others are taken for assessment by doctors. Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health N.H.S. Partnership Trust (AWP), which manage the sites, have proposed closing the “place of safety” suites at Swindon and Salisbury hospitals – and instead enlarging the unit at Devizes’ Green Lane Hospital. Mental health bosses were expected to take a decision over the future of the place of safety suites at a meeting of AWP’s board on Wednesday this week. However, it now appears that the decision will be delayed – as AWP chiefs consider feedback from politicians, campaigners, and health professionals over the proposed closures. Writing in a report that will be presented before the board on Wednesday, AWP chief executive Hayley Richards said: “The trust is working with CCGs, local partners and NHS England to answer additional questions received as part of the Place of Safety Consultation. “A further update will be provided to the October trust board meeting.” The comments follow an extensive three-month public consultation on the future of the “place of safety” suites earlier this year. Prompted by concerns over unsuitable buildings and staff shortages, the consultation asked members of the public for their views on a proposal to close the Salisbury and Swindon suites and open an expanded place of safety suite in Devizes. Last month, Andrew Dean, AWP deputy chief executive and director of nursing and quality, said: “Following an extensive consultation on improving the provision and quality of Places of Safety suites, we recently published a paper on the consultation outcome. “Since then the Trust has noted a number of concerns raised and decided to review further comments from stakeholders. The Board will formally consider the consultation outcome and Trust.” Campaigners have called proposals to move the place of safety suite “ridiculous”. Ben Carter, 46, of Toothill, said: “Given the size of Swindon and the current population, it seems absolutely, completely and utterly ridiculous that people should have to travel to Devizes when they’re already in a dangerously fragile state.” Ann Mooney, chairman of patient support group Swindon SUNS, which is due to close, said: “This is not going to aid patients’ recovery. People need to see their loved ones. That’s the best medicine they can get.” South Swindon MP Robert Buckland, who has previously criticised AWP for efforts to move the place of safety suite, said: “Justin Tomlinson MP and I wrote again to AWP a few days ago asking them not to move the Place of Safety from Swindon, so I hope that this latest deferral will result in the right outcome for Swindon.”

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