

Call to reinstate Dorset's community beds and wards: Portland, Bridport, Wareham and Ferndown

To: Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust

From: Defend Dorset NHS, Save Portland Beds, Keep Portland Hospital

In this crisis there is an urgent need for hospital beds, and the NHS has had to request to use private-sector hospital beds to look after coronavirus patients.

Yet we have closed over 17,000 hospital beds across the UK in the past 10 years. In Dorset, in the last 20 years, approaching 500 acute hospital beds have been closed at Poole and Dorset County Hospitals. We have also lost 116 Dorset Community Hospital beds in the last 10 years. 74 of these beds have gone in the past 18 months, as all beds have been closed at Portland, Wareham and Ferndown, and half the beds have been closed at Bridport.

We are anticipating that the approaching 500 beds closed at Poole and Dorset County Hospitals will be reopened in order to cope with the coronavirus crisis. We are writing now to ask that both Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group and Dorset HealthCare University Foundation Trust urgently allocate some of the Government's emergency funding, some of the returning staff and some of the volunteers who have come forward, so that Dorset Community Hospital beds and wards can be reinstated. We have seen what urgent and dynamic action can be taken when necessary and we believe this is urgent for Dorset.

We have heard from local nurses that there is no excuse for the Community Hospital beds and wards that have been closed in past years not to be re-opened. Wards only take 2-3 days to clean and prepare and staff can be hired, via agencies if needed, and supported with volunteers. We have also been told that there is a need for somewhere safe to care for people who are suffering from dementia/mental illness, who have COVID, and who need to be cared for, away from the general population. Reinstating these Community Hospital wards/beds is an ideal solution as they could be also used as local isolation units.

Dorset's acute hospitals (Dorchester, Poole and Bournemouth) are under immense pressure. Their beds are full and they are trying to operate beyond their capacity. Reinstating closed community beds and wards is an effective way of alleviating much of that pressure and freeing up vital acute hospital beds in Dorset. These reinstated community beds and wards can help ensure that none of Dorset's elderly and vulnerable patients are discharged sooner than they should have been from our acute hospitals because of this coronavirus crisis.

London's Excel Centre is being converted to house 4000 beds – but what about us here in Dorset? We need crisis help too!

We call upon Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group and Dorset Health Care University Foundation Trust to urgently work together to make this happen, and to use all solutions to save as many lives as possible. Thank you.