

PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Contract signature delay likely for Bedfordshire & Luton Mental Health Trust

The signature on the much anticipated new management contract for Bedfordshire & Luton Mental Health and Social Care Partnership NHS Trust (BLPT) looks set to be delayed.

Following September's announcement on the outcome of the groundbreaking and extremely tough competition for BLPT, South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (SEPT) came out as preferred bidder, with Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust as reserved bidder.

However, before contracts can be exchanged there is a detailed external approvals and advice process which needs to be completed by Monitor (the independent regulator of Foundation Trusts), the Department of Health Transaction Board and the NHS Competition and Cooperation Panel (CCP). While good progress has been made, including last week's approval by the CCP, further work is required.

It now looks unlikely to meet the original contract signature date of 27th November and a revised date is likely, subject to the satisfaction of regulators. The start date of April 1st 2010 is currently unaffected.

Andrew MacPherson, Director of NHS East of England's Strategic Projects Team, said: "The transaction process is necessarily extremely thorough, particularly given its innovative nature. The status of both the preferred and reserved bidder will continue until approvals have been completed. Meanwhile BLPT and Commissioners, with the support of the Strategic Projects Team, are continuing to map out the integration and mobilisation plan to ensure smooth transition of the Trust's management and services.

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Notes to editors:

1. BLPT provides mental health, learning disability, substance misuse and social care for the 600,000 residents of Bedfordshire and Luton. For more information on the trust please visit <http://www.blpt.nhs.uk/>
2. On 18 November, the Co-operation and Competition Panel (CCP) recommended to Monitor and the Department of Health (DH) that the proposed acquisition of BLPT by South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust be allowed to proceed. For a copy of the press release visit www.ccp-panel.org.uk
3. BLPT's Board put itself up for merger with an established NHS organisation to help develop services and bring the benefits of NHS Foundation Trust status to the local community. NHS Foundation Trusts have greater freedoms to manage their own affairs and improve services.