

case study

Peterborough and Stamford Hospitals

Public consultation on foundation trust status

Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust was applying to become one of the country's first NHS foundation trusts.

The Trust needed to hold a full public consultation on its plans as part of its application. This had to be completed before full details of foundation trust status had been decided by central government.

In addition, the Trust had to attract local people to join up as members, again in advance of final guidance on what membership would entail.

Athene's approach

Athene's approach was to engage the public by encouraging them to take pride in having one of the best hospitals in the country and to take a role in its future development, at all times stressing that foundation trust status maintained the NHS link.

Given the political uncertainty, we sought to avoid engaging in the national debate about the details of foundation trust status, grounding the campaign in local issues. Irrespective of whether foundation trust status were achieved, people were encouraged to take pride in and become members of their Trust.

This strategy had several key elements:

- Writing and producing the full consultation document and a summary leaflet.
- Arranging a series of exhibition stands in shopping centres and other public places.
- Engaging public interest by running a competition to find a new name for the Trust.
- Engaging with the local newspaper to run a weekly double page spread on aspects of the Trust's work. Whilst not specifically related to the issue of foundation trust status, each feature was linked back to the consultation with readers reminded of forthcoming events and where to get information. There was also a consistent call for action, reminding readers to submit their proposals for the Trust's new name.

- Arranging an outside broadcast from the hospital by BBC Radio Cambridge.
- Arranging and preparing a series of engagement events with local community and hard to reach groups.
- Engaging staff through strong and consistent internal communications and by involving them in the weekly media coverage.
- Designing and producing leaflets and posters to support the campaign.

An additional part of the campaign was the launch of a competition for local schools, inviting pupils to submit an essay on what they would do to improve health care in Peterborough. The winning entrant would gain a seat as an adviser on the Trust's Board of Governors for a two year period.

Results

The overwhelming response to the consultation was supportive of the hospital's application for foundation trust status, with opposition limited to one or two letters in the press. The broad base of the consultation enabled the hospital to make a strong claim to full public engagement in its successful application.

In addition, the sense of pride in the achievement of the hospitals was reflected in the recruitment of over 3,000 public members of the Trust.