

**Observation to Petition P002897**  
**Community Hospitals,**  
**Petition of residents of Axe Valley in the Tiverton and Honiton**  
**constituency, , Richard Foord**  
**Observation provided by: Andrew Stephenson, DHSC,**  
**Observation received on 19/02/2024.**

The Government is aware that the NHS Devon Integrated Care Board (ICB) is seeking to review its future requirements for Community Hospitals. We understand that the building of Seaton Hospital in 1988 was only possible with significant public fund-raising and that the continued availability of healthcare services delivered in community hospitals are strongly valued by the communities they serve. However, they also need to be able to adapt to changing clinical needs.

Between 2015 and 2017, NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (now the ICB) undertook a review of community services which resulted in the transfer of ownership of the North Devon community hospitals estate, including Seaton Hospital, to NHS Property Services. At the same time the service delivery model was changed, resulting in a reduced requirement for community hospital beds and leading to some properties such as Seaton being significantly underutilised.

The ICB is responsible for meeting the costs of continuing to run this operational property and in seeking to address its significant financial challenges is now considering how best to rationalise its property needs.

Ultimately, whilst the long-term healthcare commissioning requirements for Seaton Hospital is for the ICB to determine, the operational costs of running the property have to be paid for and therefore a long-term sustainable use must be established. The ICB is currently working closely in partnership with NHS Property Services to identify and evaluate suitable options to achieve this objective. Whilst the property remains an operational healthcare facility, it is not surplus to commissioning requirements and there are no current plans to sell the facility.

The Government believes that ICBs are best placed to make decisions on commissioning services for their communities, working with local authorities, stakeholders and local populations to meet people's needs.