

# Panel on heart unit's future 'kept in dark'

## Campaigners say process was flawed

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**A** DECISION to keep children's heart surgery in the North East was "procedurally flawed" a Yorkshire campaign group has claimed.

A High Court hearing in London is being asked to consider an accusation brought by a campaign group based in Leeds to overturn a decision made by the NHS to reconfigure children's heart services in England.

Last year it was announced that children's

heart surgery would continue at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital after a ruling was made to keep the lifesaving service.

The NHS concluded that children living in Yorkshire, the Humber and Lincolnshire would be seen at surgical units that are better able to meet new quality standards in Newcastle, Liverpool and Birmingham.

But the campaign group Save Our Surgery (SOS), which represents residents in the Leeds area, says an unfair consultation process left consultees "shooting in the dark" and should be rerun.

The Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts (JCPT) say the consultation process was fair and all relevant considerations were properly taken into account when it took its decision.

The Leeds unit faces closure along with Leicester's Glenfield Hospital and London's Royal Brompton.

Philip Havers QC, appearing for SOS, said that nearly 600,000 people had signed a petition against the Leeds closure.

He told Mrs Justice Nicola Davies, sitting at London's High Court, the consultation process was unfair because the JCPT denied consultees the chance to question how the quality of their services had been assessed.

Mr Havers said the Kennedy Panel, a group of experts set up to advise the JCPT, had produced

**Why not disclose the information before the decision was taken?**

"sub-scores" measuring the quality of service under various criteria.

But the JCPT chose only to look at the panel's total scores, and "bizarrely" refused to disclose the sub-scores to consultees, although it made them available "almost immediately" after it made its decision on how heart surgery services were to be reconfigured.

Mr Havers said: "It begs the question why not disclose the information before the decision was taken so that the consultees could comment on the scores? If your public duty is to make such information available to consultees you cannot avoid that obligation by saying you won't look at it yourself."

Mr Havers added: "There were points which Leeds could, and would, have undoubtedly made about how the Kennedy Panel had scored them."

It would also have commented on the scoring "as between Leeds and Newcastle".

The High Court hearing continues today.

In a separate move, Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has asked for the decision to be reviewed.



**EMERGENCY OP** Jessica Elliott is now on the road to recovery. Inset, Jessica in hospital

### 11TH HOUR HEART TRANSPLANT AT FREEMAN SAVES JESSICA'S LIFE

JESSICA Elliott was saved at the 11th hour thanks to the North East children's heart unit.

The 12-year-old was given an emergency heart transplant at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital just moments before her own stopped beating.

In a desperate bid to save her life, Jessica was rushed from her home town Doncaster, South Yorkshire, to Tyneside after she suffered a stroke.

She is now on the road to recovery and is enjoying life at home with her parents Michelle, 47, Alan, 43, a satellite engineer,

and sister, Stacey, 18. Her mother praised the work of the staff at the Freeman and insisted that families in Yorkshire should have no fear of their child being referred to Newcastle for heart surgery.

Mrs Elliott said: "It is hard not to gush about the Freeman Hospital as you just want to gush because all the staff there are fantastic.

"Anybody whose child may need to have heart surgery at the hospital should go and see the unit for themselves.

"The children's heart unit is a centre of excellence. The facilities,

level of care and medical staff are all outstanding. It is such a great place."

Jessica was born with congenital corrected transposition of the great arteries - a rare defect where the two main arteries going out of the heart are switched in position.

The youngster was given a new heart on April 20 last year, and each day for 14 weeks her family made the four-and-a-half hour round trip from Doncaster to Newcastle to visit her.

Surgeons who carried out the transplant said Jessica's heart was seriously failing.

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