The past year has seen the introduction of radical changes in the NHS, most of which come into force on April 1st 2013. The most important from the League of Friend’s point of view is the transfer of ownership of the Hospital and site from NHS Surrey, the PCT, to a central Government body, NHS Property Ltd. Transfer of the main provider facilities from Surrey Community Health, a subsidiary of the PCT, to VirginCare took place in early 2012 and has been operational for almost a year.

With encouragement from the League, the Mayor of Haslemere has set up a group to look into and report back on the current state of total Health Care provision in Haslemere and its environs – including the relevant bits of East Hampshire e.g. Liphook and Grayshott, and West Sussex e.g. Fernhurst – and to make recommendations as to how it should be developed.

The remoteness of the hospital’s new nominal owners from the community it serves is a continuing source of concern to the League. Unlike the large Acute Hospitals, such as the Royal Surrey County, which have an elected board of Governors to overlook the continued well-being of the hospital and the services it provides to the community, no such body exists for the smaller community hospitals which are managed by one or more providers. In the case of Haslemere there are no less than five of whom VirginCare is just the largest.

Major works to the value of £2.2 million were put under way in December 2012 by NHS Surrey to remedy the structural faults in the fabric of the hospital that have developed over the years. These should suffice, with occasional minor adjustments, to keep the hospital serviceable for another decade. It is nevertheless inevitably coming towards the end of its useful life and will need to be replaced sometime in the not too distant future. Whose responsibility this will be and where the money will come from, League will undoubtedly have something to say about the matter.

While the major works, due for completion by the end of May 2013 are under way, inpatients from Haslemere Community Hospital are being cared for at Farnham Community Hospital – also managed by VirginCare. The League offered to support any venture to provide or improve transport for relatives and friends wishing to visit patients transferred under the scheme, in the event it was not used.

The League has continued to function and grow during the past year and has been the fortunate recipient of several legacies. It continues to donate equipment to the hospital as before despite the new management. This had raised certain questions as to the propriety of giving equipment and services to a hospital that is managed by a “for profit” company. In conjunction with the Leagues of Friends of our neighbouring community Hospital we sought legal advice and it was agreed that gifts of equipment coasting less than about £2,000 presented no problem but that in future all major gifts would be made to the NHS, probably through the clinical commissioning groups (CCG) that buy services from the hospital on the community’s behalf.

Haslemere is not represented on the Guildford and Waverley CCG, the major purchaser that will be contracting for services on our behalf from Haslemere Hospital when the system changes on April 1st.

At their January meeting The Waverley Local Committee of the Surrey CC decided to ignore the closely argued case presented by the League for ensuring that Beech Road remains available for patients.
attending the hospital to park their cars when unable to do so within the hospital grounds. We have yet to see what impact this will have when the new regulations to parking in the rest of Haslemere come into force but the situation will be closely monitored by the committee and action taken should the situation deteriorate.

The committee was alerted to a leaflet issued by VirginCare that any services required by a patient, within certain specialities, that cannot safely be carried out in the hospital, would be provided for them at St Peter’s Hospital, Chertsey rather than at the RSCH. We have been assured that this is only an option and that patients will retain the right to choose to go to the Royal Surrey, or any other hospital, should they wish to. The VirginCare proposal is just another opportunity to get secondary health care.

The results of the “Use it or Lose it” campaign to which 1200 people responded – of whom more than 20% were out-of-county – left no room for doubt that Haslemere Community Hospital continues to enjoy enormous popular support. There was an overwhelming preference for the hours of the minor injuries unit to be extended, for outpatients to be preserved and enlarged and inpatient beds to be retained.

The committee are continuing to press for services at Haslemere Hospital to be extended in keeping with both Government policy and leading medical opinion that services that can be, should be, provided locally within the community to take the strain off of the acute hospital sector. In the case of Haslemere this would mean upgrading the Minor Injuries Unit to an Urgent Care Centre where appropriate diagnostic facilities including point of care testing and radiology are available, together with appropriate medical cover for a period extending from 8am to 10pm. The number of beds in two separate wards would be maintained at a level that is consistent with their continuing viability and outpatient facilities will be extended and enlarged. Ambulances would be instructed to deliver patients who can be dealt with appropriately at Haslemere Community Hospital there rather than to the A&E department of the Royal Surrey (or Frimley Park) where they contribute to the congestion and cost more as well as being less desirable.