The business of

Lynne Wallis discovers a healthcare enterprise that is winning support from local people

Until recently, the phrase ‘social enterprise’ might have meant an urban project diverting vulnerable young people away from crime while raising funds for a youth club.

But after the government launched the social enterprise action plan in 2006 to encourage new business in the health and social care sector, everything started to change.

Social enterprises are projects run by a business with the interests of the community in mind. There are now 5,500 such enterprises in the UK with a combined annual turnover of £27 billion.

Health projects

Twenty-four such projects are being supported by the Department of Health, while a number of other primary and social care services are being run as not-for-profit businesses serving the community.

The 100-year-old Wells Community Hospital in rural Wells-next-the-Sea in north Norfolk was closed for almost two years before re-opening as a social enterprise last year. It is believed to be the only enterprise in the UK that is unconnected to the NHS.

A charity manages part of the operation and when the lease is handed over properly this year, the charity will own the land and the social enterprise will own the business. Local services and professionals hire rooms and facilities.

Rooms for hire fall into three tariffs – room only, room plus nurse and room plus nurse and equipment. Mobility aids are for sale and hire in reception.

The business brain behind the scheme is entrepreneur Peter Rainsford whose grandfather designed the original hospital.

Although he has no experience in healthcare, Mr Rainsford says of himself: ‘I am a businessman and it is no different here, except that there is no individual making a profit. It is about the patients getting the best care possible’.

Matron Louise Bennett is the only full-time nurse at Wells.

KEEP IT LEGAL – SETTING UP A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

When setting up a social enterprise, it is vital to choose a legal structure that allows the organisation to operate with maximum benefits for the community and the enterprise itself.

In many instances charitable status is an attractive option but other forms of company or co-operative may be preferred, depending on the purpose of the social enterprise.

The Department of Health Social Enterprise Investment Fund has £73 million on offer for health or social care enterprises, while Futurebuilders England invests in third-sector organisations delivering public services. Alternatively, loan finance is available from specialist banks, and some primary care trusts are able to provide funding.

Public sector commissioners display variable understanding of social enterprises, so early discussions with local commissioners are advised. New social enterprises need to secure appropriate property and premises, and identify any other assets and equipment that will be needed. Legal advice should be taken before negotiating use of NHS premises.

Alice Faure Walker and Leona McHugh are solicitors at Bates Wells and Braithwaite, London.

community spirit

working alongside two part-time healthcare assistants. She agrees with the not-for-profit principle with a passion, saying this is what energised her into persuading local people to donate time helping to redecorate rooms, run open days and help out at reception.

Community effort
The hospital’s League of Friends is to buy an $80,000 ultrasound machine for the new diagnostic clinic, and the project has just received a donation of state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment. ‘We can improve our success by having multiple buyers for our beds, from insurance companies, individuals, primary care trusts and social services,’ explains Ms Bennett.

The hospital receives a commission when artwork on its walls is sold and students from the nearby National Construction College gain experience by undertaking odd jobs. ‘If we need something done, we get on with it,’ says Ms Bennett proudly. ‘A consultant asked for a towel dispenser and within 24 hours he had one.’

Bennett plans to employ 40 staff, including 12 nurses. They will be contracted with full holiday pay and benefits, and will join a bank to cover sickness leave.

A local landowner has donated a field at the back of the hospital for a new building that will house 26 new beds; the fire brigade is planning to use rooms to assess vulnerable people for fire alarms, there is talk of ‘hot desking’ with local authority staff, and ex-convicts are being invited to work in the gardens – with police presence on offer.

There is no shortage of enthusiasm, passion, ideas and plans to raise funds.

Lynne Wallis is a freelance journalist

More information can be found at: www.wellshospital.org.uk

NOTICE BOARD

Working overseas A collaborative conference titled Working Overseas: Humanitarian Aid and Development will be held at RCN headquarters on June 27. Jointly hosted by the RCN, Royal College of Midwives, Médecins Sans Frontières and VSO, the event is for people involved in humanitarian work to discuss global trends in healthcare provision. It is designed for registered practitioners an opportunity to explore options for gaining experience in developing countries. www.rcn.org.uk/news/events/event_details/rcn_events/working_overs seas

Human resources for health The first global forum on human resources for health is calling for action to resolve the critical shortage of health workers around the world. Ministers from more than 30 countries endorsed the Kampala declaration and agenda for global action, and promised to report progress in 2010. They said all countries should train and recruit sufficient health personnel from within their own country and provide adequate incentives and better working conditions to ensure the retention of health workers. According to the World Health Organization, the world needs more than four million additional health workers and at least 57 countries have an acute shortage. www.who.int/hrh/resources/topic-areas/health-systems

Small projects The Foundation of Nursing Studies (FoNS) has joined forces with Antigone, a charitable trust set up by Martha Lane Fox, co-founder of lastminute.com, to support two nurse-led teams in improving basic care. Over a 12-18 month period, support will be available for both teams from a FoNS practice development facilitator, plus funding of up to £2,000. Applications are welcomed from nurse-led teams working in any healthcare setting in the UK. The closing date for applications is May 23. www.fons.org/ahcp_funding.asp

Academic Health Sciences Centre Planning is under way for an Academic Health Sciences Centre formed by King’s College London in association with the Guy’s and St Thomas’ and King’s College Hospital and South London and Maudsley NHS foundation trusts. The three partners aim to create a centre to integrate world-leading research, teaching and clinical services. The aim is for patients to benefit from breakthroughs in medical science.

www.londonatic.org

Which enterprises qualify for charitable status?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal structure</th>
<th>Can it be a charity?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company limited by shares</td>
<td>Yes, but unusual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company limited by guarantee</td>
<td>Yes, but with restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community interest company</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrial and Provident Society (Community Benefit Society)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial and Provident Society (Co-operative)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable Incorporated Organisation (unlikely to be available until 2009)</td>
<td>Always</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited Liability Partnership</td>
<td>No</td>
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