

18 January 2022



**Review of GP Services in County
Durham – Progress against review
recommendations**

**Joint Report of Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources,
Durham County Council and
Joseph Chandy, Director of Commissioning Strategy and
Development (Primary Care), NHS County Durham CCG**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present to members an update of progress made against the recommendations of the Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) review of GP Services in County Durham.
- 2 The report also presents an overview of NHS England guidance issued on 14 October 2021 entitled **Improving Access for Patients to Primary Care and Supporting General Practice** and the associated **Winter Access Fund**.

Executive summary

- 3 The Adults Wellbeing and Health OSC presented its review of GP Services in County Durham to Cabinet on 18 November 2020. A copy of the review report can be found here.
https://democracy.durham.gov.uk/documents/s129331/Review%20of%20GP%20Services%20Appendix%20%20in%20County%20Durham%20v1_JH%20edits.pdf
- 4 The review was undertaken to address member concerns about the cumulative impact of several applications to review, merge or close General Practitioner (GP) services across County Durham.
- 5 The review examined the extent of GP coverage across County Durham including practice numbers, staffing structures and skills mixes, GP appointment capacity and demand including non-attendance rates.

The effectiveness of GP service provision as reflected in inspection ratings was considered, as well as patient satisfaction with GP services. Colleagues from the clinical commissioning groups explained existing and future workforce and demographic pressures which may impact upon access to GP services as well as setting out plans to address workforce pressures including the recruitment and retention of GPs and other health professionals. The role of public health, health promotion and ill health prevention together with planning policies and transport initiatives in ensuring that GP services are sustainable and accessible was also assessed.

- 6 The Review identified a series of recommendations for the Council and NHS Partners to consider and address through partnership working. The report was presented to Cabinet on 18 November 2020 and subsequently to the Health and Wellbeing Board on 21 January 2021 and the NHS County Durham CCG Primary Care Commissioning Committee in March 2021.
- 7 This report reviews progress made against the review recommendations which are attached to this report at Appendix 2.
- 8 The report also sets out details of guidance issued by NHS England on 14 October 2021 entitled “Improving Access for patients to Primary Care and Supporting General Practice” and the associated winter access fund. A report has been produced by Joseph Chandy, Director of Commissioning Strategy and Development (Primary Care), NHS County Durham to update members on the key elements of this guidance. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 3.

Recommendation(s)

- 9 Members of the Health and Wellbeing Board are recommended to:
 - (a) Consider and comment on the progress made against the recommendations made within the OSC Committee’s Review report into GP Services in County Durham;
 - (b) Receive the report of the Director of Commissioning Strategy and Development (Primary Care), NHS County Durham in respect of NHS England guidance entitled “Improving Access for patients to Primary Care and Supporting General Practice and the associated winter access fund”;
 - (c) Consider and comment on the guidance and offer any insight that will inform the County Durham response;
 - (d) Receive further reports and dialogue that respond to NHS England expectations.

Background

- 10 During 2018/19 the Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee was engaged in a number of applications to review, merge or close General Practitioner (GP) branch services across County Durham. As part of these consultations, members received representations from patients, GP practice staff and councillors regarding the potential cumulative impact of these proposed changes and decided to undertake a review of the provision of and access to GP services across County Durham.
- 11 Overall, whilst health and wellbeing has improved significantly in County Durham it remains worse than the England average. County Durham has an ageing population with higher than average numbers of people living with long term conditions many with complex health needs. Access to effective, high quality primary care to help achieve improved health outcomes and reduced health inequalities is essential. An increasing population coupled with high deprivation levels in some parts of County Durham means that demand for General Practice (GP) services is likely to increase and in order to meet this anticipated demand we need to ensure that the County has adequate numbers of GPs and other healthcare professionals and that practices have effective appointment systems and a wide ranging skills mix within their practice teams.
- 12 The review examined the extent of GP coverage across County Durham including practice numbers, staffing structures and skills mixes, GP appointment capacity and demand including non-attendance rates. The effectiveness of GP service provision as reflected in inspection ratings was considered, as well as patient satisfaction with GP services. Colleagues from the clinical commissioning groups explained existing and future workforce and demographic pressures which may impact upon access to GP services as well as setting out plans to address workforce pressures including the recruitment and retention of GPs and other health professionals. The role of public health, health promotion and ill health prevention together with planning policies and transport initiatives in ensuring that GP services are sustainable and accessible was also assessed.
- 13 The Review made a series of recommendations which aim to improve the sustainability and accessibility of GP services across County Durham.
- 14 Since the review was undertaken, we have been impacted by the greatest medical emergency in our generation and the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in major changes to the way in which general practice services are delivered.

A number of these changes support recommendations arising from this review including the increased use of technology to facilitate remote consultations and appointments. This experience will hopefully provide reassurance to patients that alongside face to face services, an increase in the use of such technology can be an effective, efficient and safe way of accessing GP services.

- 15 The review identified nine recommendations for the Council and NHS Partners to consider and address through partnership working. Progress made against the review recommendations has been collected and is detailed in the table attached at Appendix 2.
- 16 Guidance has also been issued by NHS England on 14 October 2021 entitled “Improving Access for patients to Primary Care and Supporting General Practice” and the associated winter access fund. A report has been produced by Joseph Chandy, Director of Commissioning Strategy and Development (Primary Care), NHS County Durham who will also update members on the key elements of this guidance. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 3.

Conclusion

- 17 The Board will be invited to consider and comment on the progress made against the recommendations from its Review of GP Services in County Durham.
- 18 Members will also be invited to consider and comment on the NHS England guidance entitled “Improving Access for patients to Primary Care and Supporting General Practice” and the associated winter access fund. Further update reports on the guidance and associated proposals will be brought to future meetings of the Committee.

Background papers

- Adults Wellbeing and Health OSC Review of GP Services in County Durham – Report to Cabinet 18 November 2020

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

None.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.