

Access to Primary Care

Introduction

- 1.1.** At the meeting on Wednesday 15 September 2021, West Sussex Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC) received a presentation from the West Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) detailing the active support for an operational response to the Covid-19 pandemic (including the Covid-19 Vaccination Programme) and the restoration of health and care services across West Sussex under the oversight of the Sussex Health and Care Partnership.
- 1.2.** As of 1 July 2022, the three Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in Sussex have closed and the functions of the CCGs have transferred to NHS Sussex - a new NHS organisation, known as an Integrated Care Board.

This new organisation will help improve the way the NHS plans and pays for local services, and better support local health and care organisations to give people the care they need. NHS Sussex forms part of Sussex Health and Care, our new Integrated Care System, that will help:

- Support people to live for longer in good health.
- Make sure our disadvantaged communities get the care they need.
- Improve people's experience of using services.
- Better support health and care staff.

- 1.3.** This paper provides further information for the committee on the current position regarding access to primary care, in particular General Practice services, in West Sussex.

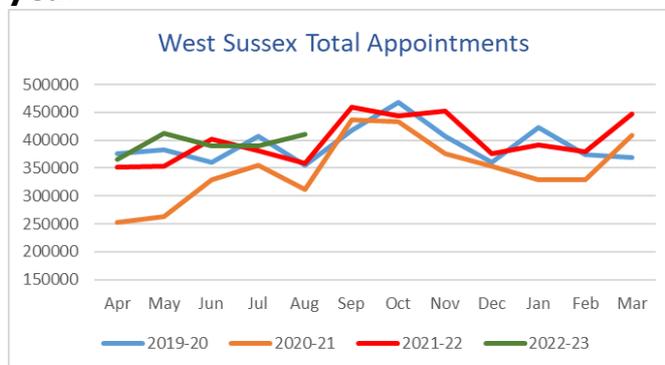
Access to Primary Care

- 1.4.** There are 75 GP Practices in West Sussex, delivering across more than 100 locations as many have branch surgeries in addition to their main sites.
- 1.5.** On 1 June 2022, there were around 474 full time equivalent (FTE) doctors employed in GP Practices in West Sussex. General Practitioners (GPs) also work with nurses and other professionals to treat and advise on a range of illnesses, manage patients' conditions in the community and refer patients for hospital treatment or social care where appropriate. These other staff groups total a further 468 FTE clinicians. Collectively, they are providing care to around 928,000 patients registered at GP Practices in West Sussex.
- 1.6.** Practices are typically owned and managed by an individual GP or group of GPs, or sometimes alternative providers, who hold a contract to provide services to the NHS.
- 1.7.** The General Medical Services (GMS) contract does not set absolute requirements on access to services, but does require Practices to provide routine services within core hours (Monday – Friday 8:00am

till 6:30pm). Out-of-hours care is usually provided through separate contracts with other providers, although some Practices do offer this themselves.

- 1.8.** Primary Care Networks (PCNs) have been nationally designed to improve access to primary care and expand the range of services available, including through better integration with community services and greater involvement of a wider primary care team. Every Practice in West Sussex is a member of a PCN and there are 20 in total (please see Annex A for an overview).
- 1.9.** The total volume of appointments in the 75 Practices across West Sussex usually exceeds 380,000 each month, and per 1000 population is consistently above the South East regional and National average. In August 2022 on average 44.4% of appointments took place on the same day as booking, 16.8% within two to seven days, and 12.6% within 8 to 14 days. Around 67.4% of these appointments were held face to face at the surgery or as a home visit.
- 1.10.** Appointment data is published by NHS Digital, and though still experimental and non-standardised, it gives NHS Sussex an indication of performance against this trajectory utilising a consistent methodology. It is clear that the number of appointments now exceeds those offered in 2019, before the pandemic, as illustrated in table one:

Table One: total number of GP appointments in West Sussex by year



Source. NHS Digital, available at <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice/august-2022>

- 1.11.** From 1 October 2022, PCNs have been offering a refreshed national “Enhanced Access” service which aims to remove variability by putting in place a more standardised offer for patients. The new service requires PCNs to provide appointments between the hours of 6.30pm to 8pm Mondays to Fridays and between 9am and 5pm on Saturdays. There may also be further additional appointment slots available e.g. on Sundays and early mornings on weekdays. Exact arrangements have been informed by patient preferences following engagement by PCNs with their local patient participation groups or other means of patient consultation. For West Sussex the enhanced access will deliver

an additional 913 hours of appointments per week beyond core hours, which will include:

- a mixture of face-to-face and remote (telephone, video or online) appointments.
- appointments delivered by a multi-disciplinary team of healthcare professionals, including GPs, nurses and other “additional roles” such as mental health practitioners, physician associates, physiotherapists and Social Prescribers.
- a blend of appointments offered on the same day or pre-booked for a future day.

1.12. Though the number of appointments has returned to pre-pandemic levels, it is clear that patient satisfaction levels have dropped. The most recent national GP satisfaction survey (Available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/2022/07/14/gp-patient-survey-2022/>) reported that though 71-75% of West Sussex patients were satisfied overall with their experience, this is a 10% reduction on the year before. This is perhaps down to the increased pressures on General Practice in recent years, including the following:

- A growing and ageing population
- Increasing complexity of patients, both physical and mental health needs
- Increasing patient expectations
- Rising demand and workload pressures
- Emerging financial pressures and the requirement to deliver efficiency savings
- Threats to the sustainability of General Practice in its current form
- Workforce challenges including:
 - Impact of the pandemic on a workforce already reporting issues with morale, capacity and resilience.
 - Reduced number of entrants choosing General Practice as a specialty
 - National recruitment difficulties and multiple vacancies
 - Retention issues
 - An ageing workforce profile.

1.13. Further insight into these statistics can be gleaned from a recent report by the three Sussex Healthwatch organisations entitled ‘Staff and Sussex Patients Views on Access to GP-Led Services’ (available at: <https://www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk/report/2022-08-02/staff-and-sussex-patients-views-access-gp-led-services>) that describes issues of accessibility and acceptability.

The key themes were:

- Frustration at the initial point of contact, usually via telephone. To mitigate this NHS Sussex is working with Practices to implement a cloud telephony system within each Practice, as well as additional phone lines. This will improve the response time for patients to speak to the correct clinician.

- An inability to put forward a preference around appointment type – which has been taken into account in the ongoing work with Practices to ensure face-to-face appointments are available.
- Variance in the patient information available on GP Practice websites. This remains a key priority and work between NHS Sussex, Healthwatch and PCNs is continuing to improve patient communication and sign posting on web-based content.

These findings have informed the NHS Sussex response going into winter 2022/23.

Winter 2022/23 Planning

1.14. In October 2021 NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI) published a document entitled: “Our plan for improving access for patients and supporting general practice”. It set out three key aims:

- Increasing and optimising capacity in General Practice
- Addressing variation and encouraging good practice
- Improving communication with the public, including tackling abuse and violence against Practice staff

1.15. A plan was agreed which aimed to build resilience in General Practice and increase access to primary care through a programme of transformation and innovation. Twenty projects were agreed across Sussex, including a significant amount of funding to GP Practices in the form of an innovation fund.

1.16. The Kent Surrey Sussex Academic Health Science Network was commissioned to evaluate the programme to understand the impact and value for money of each to support stronger future decision making. Its report found the following:

- The project with the biggest impact was the innovation fund
- 123,000 additional appointments were provided, 88.7% of which were face to face
- It is estimated that these resulted in 13,479 fewer 111 calls, = £109K non-cash-releasing benefits (NCRBs); 13605 fewer ED/UTC attendances, (£1.59m NCRBs) and the detection of 5 additional early stage cancers (£28K NCRBs)

The report concludes “Overall, the projects appear to have made positive contributions in working towards addressing the five central funding objectives and the five NHS Sussex objectives of the Winter Access Fund”.

1.17. The approach to this winter has been informed from the patient feedback highlighted earlier, and the experience of last winter. For 2022/23 a £1.5m winter fund has been identified which will be offered to those areas with the highest health inequalities to ensure better access to primary care. The key areas of focus will be to increase

capacity; maximise effectiveness; and improve communication between providers and patients.

Increasing Capacity

- a) As set out above, every PCN in West Sussex has now started to deliver the new Enhanced Access specification as of 1st October 2022, collectively delivering an additional 913 hours of appointments per week beyond core hours.
- b) Further to this, NHS Sussex will be investing an additional £1.8m to boost access to and resilience of General Practice services across Sussex this Winter via a dedicated fund, building upon previous evaluations described above. This fund will encourage innovation in measures to support services to remain accessible and responsive to patients, potentially including examples such as:
 - Additional GPs, Health Care Assistants, Practice Nurses or other key staff working extra sessions to increase appointment availability for patients
 - Support with workflow, either short term 3rd party provision or support to develop existing practice staff
 - Additional administrative support to bolster patient response times or to review existing policies and procedures
 - Care Navigation / Signposting training to better manage patient demand.
- c) Further to all of the above, NHS Sussex will additionally invest a further £1.5m to support the 11 PCNs across Sussex who have the highest number of patients living in areas of deprivation, identified according to the "Core20+5" national methodology. This will include 4 PCNs in West Sussex, who collectively cover 13 out of the 75 GP Practices in the county:
 - Angmering Coppice Fitzalan
 - Central Worthing
 - Cissbury Integrated Care
 - South Crawley

This funding will ensure the additional needs of these patient populations are taken into account in ensuring accessible and responsive services, by supporting those PCNs to consider additional measures and innovations.
- d) We will increase the roll out of the Community Pharmacy Consultation Service (CPCS), which will enable Practices to book patients with a minor illness for a same day consultation with their local pharmacy where appropriate. Currently 60 of the 75 GP Practices in West Sussex are either live with this service or engaging in training to begin.
- e) We will continue to invest in digital support for patients, including improving Practice websites, online consultations, and other app-based innovations to support patient care.

- f) We will support PCNs to recruit additional staff, including new GP Assistant and digital and transformation roles, to ensure patients see the right clinician at the right time. To date around 540 FTE “additional roles” have been recruited across Sussex since the inception of PCNs, including Physiotherapists, Physician Associates, Mental Health Practitioners and Social Prescribers.
- g) We will also continue to work with NHS, Local Authority and other partners to invest in the premises where primary care services are delivered, to ensure we maximise opportunities to improve the capacity and quality of these. NHS Sussex has a strategy for population support with regard to premises, including close working with borough and district councils around known or anticipated areas of housing growth, which includes:
- Building new premises at scale and combining with other services where an opportunity arises – for example the new Worthing Integrated Care Centre currently being developed;
 - Consolidation of premises even if no integration opportunity arises, but the quality, capacity and resilience of services can be improved – for example the rebuild of the Croft Surgery at Eastergate in Arun;
 - Developing existing sites where opportunities arise for extensions, refurbishments and the conversion of additional rooms into clinical space or offices for staff – for example work with surgeries in Crawley and East Grinstead.

Optimising Capacity

- h) Same day data from GP Practices will be automatically extracted to highlight where there are pressures in the system and offer support as soon as possible to ensure they can continue to meet patient needs.
- i) Improved Business Intelligence systems will be commissioned for Practices so they can identify those patients most in need and plan their appointments and workforce rotas accordingly.
- j) Recognising the problems patients have reported having in contacting their Practice, as reported in the patient satisfaction survey, all Practices will be supported to purchase advanced cloud telephony systems which will improve the patient experience, ensuring patients are informed on progress throughout the call and linked with the right healthcare professional. Currently 47 of the 75 GP Practices in West Sussex are now live or going live with the new service, and work is ongoing with the others.

Improve Links/Communications across the Primary Care System

- k) The new Integrated Care System will encourage PCNs to integrate more fully with Community/Mental Health providers, Local Pharmacies, Adult Social Care, and the voluntary sector, working together across West Sussex.

- l) NHS Sussex will continue to work with the three Sussex Healthwatches, patients and Practices to codesign website 'good practice' templates and offer funding to those Practices whose websites have identified as being the most 'in need of improvement', based on self-selection, Healthwatch 'Mystery Shopper' surveys, and a review by the Digital First team.
- m) Digitally Excluded Groups will be supported to learn how to better use digital health technologies, but promoting use of the NHS App, online consultations and NHS 111 Online where digital exclusion is recognised issue.

Public and Patient Communications over Winter

- n) A systemwide communications approach has been agreed by all ICS partners to have a clear and effective way of communicating with patients and the public this winter. This includes information about services; advice and support for people to stay well; and how to look after the most vulnerable over the winter months.
- o) A key element of this work is information about how people can access Primary Care, including General Practice, over the winter period. This includes positive measures such as the Enhanced Access arrangements, and reminders about how people can arrange appointments through Practice apps, websites and other means, as well as by contacting the Practice by phone. This work will showcase positive examples of access in specific Practices and recognise the work of staff across Practices in West Sussex.

Conclusion

- 1.18.** Since the recovery and restoration programme described in the paper to the HASC in September 2021, NHS Sussex commissioners have worked with primary care providers to ensure the best possible service is delivered to patients. Nevertheless, General Practice continues to face significant pressures upon its capacity, including increased patient demand and workforce shortages. The maintenance and expansion of access for patients in West Sussex to primary care services remains a high priority for NHS Sussex, and will feature prominently in local work with Practices, PCNs, GP Federations and working with partners across the West Sussex health and care system.

Annex A - List of PCNs and GP Practices in West Sussex (as at 1st October 2022)