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Title of meeting: Cabinet

Subject: GP provision in Portsmouth

Date of meeting: 26 July 2022

Report by: Jo York, Managing Director, Health and Care Portsmouth, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board / Portsmouth City Council

Wards affected: All wards

1. Requested by

Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Leader of the Council

2. Purpose

2.1.1 This is a briefing report in light of recent media reports and concerns raised by residents regarding access to primary care provision. The report provides information on current primary care provision, the issues and challenges within the city, and the actions being undertaken to secure improvements and improve resilience.

3. Background

3.1 *National Context*

3.1.1 Every day, more than a million people benefit from the advice and support of primary care professionals – acting as a first point of contact for most people accessing the NHS. However, patient satisfaction with access to general practice is at an all-time low, despite record numbers of appointments offered and delivered.

3.1.2 Primary care teams describe being stretched beyond capacity. This has been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has seen a rise in the numbers of patients requiring urgent medical care, an increase in an elective care backlog, and the need to divert capacity to meet the national Covid vaccination campaign.

3.1.3 As a result, the NHS is experiencing extreme pressures across numerous fronts, including: primary care; mental health services; community services; urgent and emergency care services; and elective care. All the while, staff morale is reported to be at a record low, with increasing staff sickness (compounded by fatigue and 'burnout'), increases in early retirement, and difficulties in filling key vacancies.

3.1.4 However, national developments are in train designed to support the NHS, its patients, and respond to the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19

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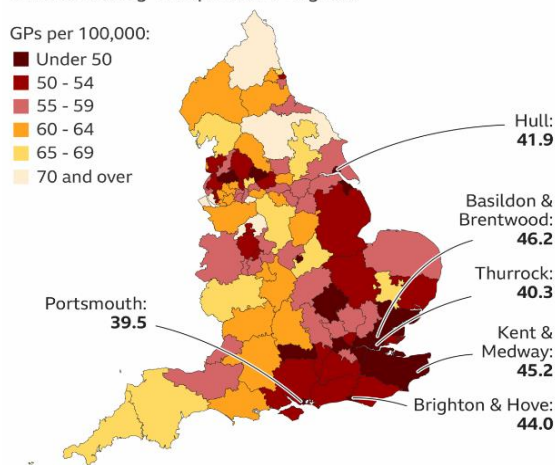
pandemic. This includes numerous developments and additional funding associated with the 'NHS Long Term Plan', and – specifically for primary care – the recommendations from the 'Fuller Stocktake Report', and the establishment and development of Primary Care Networks.

3.2 **Recent publications**

3.2.1 Recent reports in the media¹ have highlighted Portsmouth as an outlier in terms of the number of GPs working in general practice. The data referenced by this report was provided by The Nuffield Trust and was sourced from national workforce returns submitted by practices for April 2022. The data reflected 39.5 WTE GPs per 100,000 patients in Portsmouth and this was quoted as being the lowest in England.

The areas with the fewest GPs

Number of GPs per 100,000 patients in Clinical Commissioning Groups across England



A caveat should be applied to this data as many localities (and their GP numbers) were subsumed within larger Integrated Care System (ICS) organisational figures, limiting ability to accurately reflect comparisons across the country.

3.2.2 The Fuller Stocktake report was published in May 2022. At the heart of this report is a new vision for integrating primary care, improving the access, experience and outcomes for our communities, which centres around three essential offers:

- streamlining access to care and advice for people who get ill but only use health services infrequently: providing them with much more choice about how they access care and ensuring care is always available in their community when they need it
- providing more proactive, personalised care with support from a multidisciplinary team of professionals to people with more complex needs, including, but not limited to, those with multiple long-term conditions

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-61598158>

<https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/people/portsmouth-worst-in-the-country-for-patients-per-gp-as-demand-for-services-skyrocket-3717884>

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- helping people to stay well for longer as part of a more ambitious and joined-up approach to prevention

Our efforts to increase the clinical workforce and support good access and delivery of quality services should be aligned with the aims of the Fuller Report where appropriate.

3.3 Hampshire and Isle of Wight Context

3.3.1 Notwithstanding the difficulties with making comparisons, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight (HIOW) Integrated Care Board (ICB) has been able to source data for our neighbouring city of Southampton as well as the HIOW average. This reflects a comparably lower GP workforce in Portsmouth.

	No. GP WTE per 100,000 patients	No, of patients per WTE GP
Portsmouth	39.2	2,554
Southampton	49.9	2,003
HIOW average	53.7	1,862
England avg	43.6	2,280

4. Primary Care Provision in Portsmouth

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 There are currently 12 GP practices in Portsmouth and these are members of Primary Care Networks (PCNs) of which there are 5 in total. There have been 12 practice mergers since April 2013, which have supported practice resilience and helped avoid the very real threat of a practice having to relinquish its contract and force a dispersal of the patient list. This happened on just one occasion when the Queens Road surgery closed. There were 4 associated branch site closures in this time, all of which were approved following careful consideration of patient transport options and the general accessibility of the premises being retained. It is worth acknowledging that practices are independent contractors run by local GP Partnerships and there can sometimes be complex arrangements in place regarding estates and use of the buildings.

4.1.2 The Portsmouth Primary Care Alliance (PPCA), made up of member practices in the city, is commissioned to help support the sustainability of General Practice and delivery of services to support patient care. This includes the Acute Visiting Service, Clinical Assessment Service and extended hours. The PCNs are also supporting and strengthening the provision of services, most notably through leading on the delivery of the COVID vaccination programme.

4.1.3 Many practices managed to increase or at least maintain capacity through 2021-22 by outsourcing remote consultations and using new equipment and tools for more efficient working, through the NHS England Winter Access Fund.

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4.1.4 However, the impact of the pandemic and the ageing workforce, with practices finding it difficult to replace retiring GPs, has resulted in significant workforce challenges. This has been exacerbated by an increase in demand, in part due to COVID and the impact of the elective backlog.

4.2 Access to appointments

4.2.1 In terms of overall appointments offered and delivered within primary care, this has been increasing year-on-year. There was an understandable drop in 2020-21 due to the COVID pandemic (total of 943,000 appointments) compared to the previous year (1,037,000); this was due to less patients attempting to access primary care services during that time.

4.2.2 However, the figures for 2021-22 reflect that more patients opted to come forward for primary care services and practices delivered 1,003,000 appointments through a blended mix of face-to-face and remote consultations (in order to prevent the spread of covid infection). Work continues to assess the demand for primary care services, and the capacity of primary care to meet this demand.

4.3 Recruitment and retention

4.3.1 There are some very real challenges in terms of recruitment and retention of GPs in the city, as there are in many parts of the country. This has the potential to impact on practice resilience and therefore patient access. Some of the perceived barriers to securing additional workforce are:

- The coastal placement of the city which reduces the catchment area by 50% for any employer
- The high levels of deprivation and the challenges associated with this in comparison to some other parts of Hampshire
- The lack of space in some practices to accommodate Trainee GPs, and the ability therefore to recruit and retain them within the city

4.3.2 In addition to the recruitment difficulties for partners and salaried GPs, practices are also finding it challenging to secure locum GP cover. We are aware this is also the case in other areas, particularly for our neighbouring city, and we are currently exploring with HIOW Workforce Leads and practices why this may be the case.

5. Strengthening Primary Care Resilience

5.1 HIOW ICB strategy

5.1.1 The Primary Care Strategy developed by the ICB focusses on the following themes:

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- Primary care delivers high quality services
- Primary care is a great place to work
- Primary care is accessible to everyone
- Primary care responds appropriately to the needs of the population
- Primary care reduces inequalities and improves outcomes
- We deliver personalised care and encourage self-management
- We deliver integrated care especially for people with complex care needs

5.1.2 At Portsmouth place level we work with our ICB colleagues and wider system partners to take forward this strategy and the associated workstreams and activities, including the supporting digital agenda led by the local Commissioning Support Unit.

5.2 *Portsmouth Resilience and Improvement Plan*

5.2.1 A resilience and improvement plan has been developed in order to support the resilience of practices in terms of their primary care provision.

5.2.2 Activities undertaken at **individual practice** level include:

- Practices are innovating with better use of IT solutions where patients can comfortably access these, to free up GP time for face to face appointments where they are needed and improve patients' access to healthcare
- The use of telephone consultations can support patients where they have difficulty in reaching their practice but don't need tests or examinations to gain access to a GP or other healthcare professional.
- eConsult is increasingly popular with patients where they can ask questions of their practice via a messaging system. This reduces the use of face to face GP appointments for queries that don't require an urgent response. Local commissioners have supported practices with patient communications on how to use this mode of consultation appropriately. The ICB is now working with the eConsult provider to make it more user friendly, with plans to also further engage patients on this.
- Electronic Repeat Dispensing (eRD) where a 'batch' of prescriptions are authorised in advance, up to a year where appropriate, is increasingly used in Portsmouth with the highest achieving practice having nearly a quarter of their patients receiving medications this way. This means the patient only needs to go to their nominated pharmacy at regular intervals to collect their prescriptions. This negates the need for a patient to request their medications possibly each month and for the GP to sign each prescription freeing up what can be considerable time for increased face to face appointments.

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- Several practices reached out for support in 2021-22 under the national GP Resilience programme. Funding was granted to support protected time for reviewing service delivery, forward business and resilience planning, and helping embed new practice managers in their role. An element of the funding was also used to provide short term clinical cover for a practice suffering with resources issues due in part to staff illness. The process is underway for 22-23 with a significant number of proposals received from Portsmouth practices, which are currently being reviewed.

5.2.3 Activities planned / in progress at individual practice level include:

- All practices are embarking on a piece of work from August 2022 which involves utilising a new tool to review in granular detail demand and capacity data. This will enable practices to gauge how their current provision supports patient access needs and consider adapting as necessary. This will also allow the identification of practices that have resilience concerns, leading to focussed support from commissioner whilst enabling this to be flagged to system partners through the appropriate channels.
- Workforce session to be held with practices late July 2022 to discuss current approaches and any barriers to GP recruitment, advertising, and locum cover. HIOW Workforce Team to lead this and provide specialist advice and support, linking in with the Communication campaign on Portsmouth being a great place to work.

5.2.4 Activities undertaken at a **city-wide** level include:

- Delivery of conflict resolution training for practice staff, supporting reception teams and others in how to effectively and appropriately resolve any conflict with patients. This included how to recognise those that may be suffering from mental health conditions and how patients can be supported, whilst at the same time adopting a zero-tolerance policy in regard to any violent or abusive behaviour.
- Investing in estates development to ensure PCNs and practices have the clinical space to support more clinicians and other additional roles Draft plan developed and this work is on-going.
- Utilisation of Winter Access Funds via NHS England to bolster capacity through the Winter by investing in additional locum cover (where this could be sourced), remote consultations via national provider, and additional hours from existing clinical staff.

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- Utilisation of Security funding via NHS England to improve the security of buildings (e.g. CCTV, improved lighting) and the safety of staff (e.g. panic buttons, screens in reception).
- Investment into the Clinical Assessment Service (which validates and manages urgent, emergency, and primary care dispositions from NHS 111) during GP practice core hours, and out-of-hours, freeing up GP Practice staff to focus on demand from registered patients accessing their service.

5.2.5 Activities planned / in progress at a city-wide level include:

- Proposal developed by the Portsmouth Primary Care Alliance (PPCA) to host some portfolio GP roles to attract more clinicians to Portsmouth through creating varied and interesting roles within the city. The GPs would be able to rotate through the Alliance and general practice and receive appropriate support, with the aim of retaining their services within the city. The proposal is currently being reviewed and if formally approved this should commence in the Autumn of 2022.
- Utilisation of national and local funding to support improved retention, such as through -
 - reinvigorating the First 5 Group to support new GPs from completion of training to the first point of revalidation at 5 years. This should be up and running by September 2022.
 - Making best use of the national GP Retention Scheme, which is a package of financial and educational support to help doctors, who might otherwise leave the profession, remain in clinical general practice. There is currently 1 GP under this scheme and we are actively looking to see if we can increase this.
- Marketing and communications campaign in development – ‘Portsmouth as a great place to work’. This is being worked up by the integrated marketing, communications and engagement team in conjunction with practices. In the short term (4-6 weeks) there will be some social media promotion, internal comms and some of the messaging will be used in recruitment drives and advertisements for vacancies. Slightly longer term (2-3 months) there are proposals for a professional website which will provide an all-encompassing recruitment section dedicated to working in the city.

5.2.6 Activities undertaken at a **PCN** level include:

- PCNs in Portsmouth have very much followed the national direction of travel in employing additional supporting roles under the PCN contracts to alleviate pressure from GPs. These include:
 - 13 clinical pharmacists – who undertake medication reviews and tailor complex medication regimes to meet the patients' needs. These reviews

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can be time heavy for a GP and having this resource is highly respected by those patients receiving the service.

- 8 pharmacy technicians – who efficiently run the repeat prescribing processes in practice often linking in with community pharmacies and appliance contractors to solve patient issues in their supply of medications and increasing the use of electronic repeat dispensing described below.
 - 7 physician associates – who take on several roles previously provided by GPs freeing up GP time to attend to more complex patients where their skill and expertise is required.
 - 4 First Contact Physiotherapists – who provide care across a multitude of musculoskeletal problems.
- In addition to these front-line healthcare professionals there are many other roles such as dieticians, paramedics, social prescribers and care co-ordinators. These roles free up more time for GPs and nurses, whilst helping ensure patients are seen by the most appropriate Healthcare Professional first time. The recruitment support from within the ICB will focus on attracting more of these healthcare professionals to come into Portsmouth.
 - A marketing and communications campaign to promote these additional roles has been developed by the integrated comms team and will roll out from 18 July until 11 September. This includes billboard poster advertising across the city, radio and digital advertising, organic and paid for social media posts, photographs and videos of staff, engagement at community events and a dedicated section on the Health and Care Portsmouth website.
 - PCNs are currently providing medical input into an Enhanced Care Home Team, a Multi-Disciplinary Team providing proactive care to residents, ensuring their health and care needs are supported and managed before complications occur, reducing the deterioration of health and need for hospitalisation.

5.2.7 Activities planned / in progress at a PCN level include:

- PCNs have received training in using Population Health Management tools and will over the coming weeks and months use the data to support pro-active delivery of care to patients according to need.
- PCNs will be nominating a Health Inequalities Lead to support this work.
- PCNs will be taking on full responsibility for extended access from October 2022 and are currently working with the PPCA, the ICB and the patient population on finalising plans.

6. Additional Support from Portsmouth City Council

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- 6.1.1 We are aware that Portsmouth City Council Cabinet is keen to support efforts to increase the GP workforce and this is very much welcomed. Health and Care Portsmouth teams are working closely in terms of the commissioning of services linked to deprivation, and how patients can access services so that they are seen by the most appropriate healthcare professional first time, including the GP when required. There is also a healthy level of partnership working around how to maximise best use of local estates, including for specific localities within the city. Currently there are large-scale new builds that have either completed (i.e. UniCity practice) or are on the horizon following approval (i.e. North Harbour Medical Group Practice relocating to Highclere). There are also some smaller scale premises improvements underway across the city to help increase space within surgeries.
- 6.1.2 We acknowledge the offer from the Cabinet to explore further opportunities to support primary care provision. We look forward to the summit meeting scheduled for 4 August 2022 which will allow an opportunity for partners to contribute to the development of a robust plan for the city.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 7.1.1 This paper has outlined some of the challenges associated with the provision of primary medical services in the city, and the mitigating actions that have been undertaken, are in progress, or planned for the near future. Whilst these actions may support us with the recruitment and retention of GPs and the wider workforce, it is acknowledged that there is no easy fix, and we welcome the input of Portsmouth City Council and other stakeholders.
- 7.1.2 The Cabinet is asked to kindly receive this report, which will hopefully generate further discussions ahead of the summit meeting in early August.

Jo York
Managing Director
Health and Care Portsmouth
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board / Portsmouth City Council

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

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Title of document	Location
The areas with the fewest GPs revealed – BBC News online, 31 May 2022	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-61598158
Portsmouth worst in the country for patients per GP as demands for services ‘skyrocket’ – The Portsmouth News online, 1 June 2022	https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/people/portsmouth-worst-in-the-country-for-patients-per-gp-as-demand-for-services-skyrocket-3717884
Next steps for integrating primary care: Fuller Stocktake report, May 2022	https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/next-steps-for-integrating-primary-care-fuller-stocktake-report.pdf