

CABINET

Thursday 29th July 2021

LOCAL NHS MERGER CONSULTATIONS

Report of the Executive Head of Health and Wellbeing

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that Cabinet reviews the NHS proposal for the Bursledon and Blackthorn merger, and the Living Well Partnership merger, and considers any comments or response it wishes to make to the consultations.

Summary

This report identifies the key issues raised by two NHS GP merger consultations running in parallel: a proposal for the Bursledon and Blackthorn GP surgeries to merge, and a separate proposal for the St Luke's and Botley GP practices in Hedge End and Botley to merge with the other surgeries in the Living Well Partnership. Engagement with patients, stakeholders, and public will run between 26 July to 22 August. Eastleigh Borough Council is a key stakeholder and holds a vital community leadership role to advocate for residents of the Borough.

Statutory Powers

Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 i.e. the Local Authority's general power of competence, including power to act for the benefit of its area or persons resident or present in its area.

Strategic Implications

1. This report relates to Enabling Health and Wellbeing and Tackling Deprivation objectives of the Corporate Plan (2015-2025) objectives. While the Council is taking its own actions to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for residents, overall quality of life depends on a range of factors including the quality and accessibility of healthcare provision locally. Eastleigh Borough Council has a community leadership role to advocate for residents of the Borough.

Introduction

2. The necessities born from the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the way in which General Practice (GP) surgeries have been functioning and offering access to care for their patients. More services are now provided on a remote basis, although the offer of face-to-face consultations remains where appropriate, and this will remain important for some patients who are not able

to have their needs met remotely by telephone or online consultations. Vaccination Centres have also been implemented in existing GP surgeries, displacing patients to nearby alternative facilities. GP Surgeries are now working in collaboration with each other as Primary Care Networks (PCNs), building resilience, utilising efficiencies, and extending the range of services available to support GPs in delivering care to their patients.

3. Changes such as these in the NHS are beyond the immediate control of the Council; however, the Council seeks to influence service changes on behalf of residents. The Council has established good relationships with a range of organisations that make up the NHS as well as the Voluntary and Faith sector and other charitable organisations and are working with them to secure the best health provision possible for residents.
4. The Council has for many years delivered against a policy of localism whereby services are delivered as close to local areas or natural communities as possible. This improves local engagement and community cohesion and ensures greater responsiveness and accountability of the service. The local provision of services also has environmental and economic benefits, reducing the need for driving to access services and supporting the economy of town or local centres. The Council seeks to encourage other organisations where possible to align with this local approach.
5. The Council has taken this approach specifically in relation to General Practice provision in the southern parishes. The Council previously objected to GP surgeries being closed in Netley and Hamble to be replaced by the new surgery at Blackthorn; planning permission was granted on appeal in 2004; and when the Bursledon GP practice needed to move from its unsustainable location (a domestic bungalow in Manor Crescent), the Council delivered a purpose-built GP surgery facility in the heart of the Bursledon community at the Lowford Centre which opened in 2014.
6. While the Council supports efficient provision of services via digital and remote means where possible, public services must recognise that some residents are not able to use digital technology and it is important to protect face to face service provision where needed. Some users of GP services are frail or with illnesses or injuries that make it difficult to drive; others may not have access to public transport. A local facility that is within walking distance is therefore likely to be the preferred model of provision.

Blackthorn/ Bursledon NHS Contract Merger Proposal

7. The previous GP for Bursledon Surgery retired in December 2019. Blackthorn Medical Centre in Hamble agreed to step in temporarily in early 2020 to provide GP services to the patients of Bursledon Surgery.
8. During the pandemic, Bursledon Surgery, which is based at the Lowford Centre, was used exclusively for general practice consultations with patients from across the Eastern Southern Parishes with indications of a COVID-19 infection, allowing patients without symptoms to attend other surgeries as usual and without the risk of cross infection. More latterly, Bursledon Surgery

has been used to support the successful delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination programme by local practices. During this time, patients registered with Bursledon Surgery have been accessing 'face to face' appointments or remote consultations, offered via telephone, video or online, from Blackthorn Medical Centre.

9. Blackthorn Medical Centre has proposed to the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) that it is willing to permanently provide GP services for all patients registered at Bursledon Surgery on the current basis and is proposing to merge the two practices together into one NHS contract. This requires public and stakeholder engagement and CCG approval.
10. As part of the new proposals Bursledon Surgery would remain an integral part of the Lowford Community Centre and continue to play an important role in the delivery of NHS primary care services to local people. The local Primary Care Network (PCN) plans to use Bursledon Surgery for the delivery of a range of services supporting local practices in providing care to their patients for example social prescribing, care navigation, physiotherapy, mental health services, and clinical pharmacy services. However, all access to face-to-face GP appointments in the daytime will be provided only at Blackthorn Medical Centre Monday to Friday.
11. In addition to the merger, the local provider of the out of hours or Extended Access to Primary Care service, known locally as 'Appointments+', plans to relocate to Bursledon Surgery. The PCN is in the process of negotiating a lease of Bursledon Surgery in support of these plans. Appointments+ is a service which allows for routine and urgent appointments with a range of healthcare professionals such as a GP, nurse, healthcare assistant, mental health practitioner and physiotherapists in the evenings and at weekends. Any patient registered with any practice in the Eastleigh Southern Parishes is able to use this service. At the current time, Bursledon patients travel to Botley to use this service.

Living Well Partnership (LWP) NHS Contract Merger Proposal

12. The Living Well Partnership currently provides services to its patients from a number of surgery sites. One GP practice is within the city of Southampton, east to the River Itchen, and covers five surgery sites (Bitterne Park, Ladies Walk, Weston Lane, Harefield and Midanbury). The other GP practice, known locally as St. Luke's and Botley Surgeries, has two sites, in Hedge End and in Botley. The two practices already work together within one PCN for the Eastleigh Southern Parishes.
13. The Living Well Partnership operates the two practices with one clinical and management team. In NHS contractual terms, the proposal means merging the two separate General Medical Services (GMS) contracts held by The Living Well Partnership into one. The Living Well Partnership intends to submit a contract merger application. This requires public and stakeholder engagement and CCG approval.

14. The proposed benefits of a contract merger would be to reduce the administrative work for both clinical and non-clinical staff and release time to focus on frontline patient care. Patient lists for all of the Living Well Partnership surgeries would merge.
15. This proposal is only to merge two GMS contracts into a single contract and patient lists into one. It is not a proposal to open or close any buildings or change the range of services available.
16. The CCG have indicated that patients will continue to be able to be seen at their local/preferred site. The contract merger, if approved, would also allow patients currently registered with St. Luke's and Botley Surgeries the choice to also attend the surgery sites in the east of Southampton, and Southampton residents will be able to attend the sites in Hedge End and Botley.
17. The Council understands that residents' experience is of patients being allocated appointments only at certain surgeries i.e. a Botley resident being offered an appointment only at a Southampton surgery; this point needs clarification by the CCG and Living Well Partnership.

Consultation Process

18. Both merger proposals are happening independently, yet in parallel. The Living Well Partnership and Blackthorn Medical Centre must submit full applications to the CCG in order to merge contracts. As a part of this application, there must be sufficient evidence of engagement with patients, stakeholders and the wider community, and information on the feedback received to the proposal. The CCG is supporting both consultation processes with public engagement. A key part of this consultation is a public survey that will run between 26 July and 22 August.
19. On 1 September 2021 the South-West Hampshire Primary Care Operational Group will meet to consider the merger application including all consultation response. On 22 September 2021 the CCG Primary Care Commissioning Committee meets to determine the contract merger application. If the mergers are approved, patient lists would merge and proposed changes would be implemented from 1 October 2021.

Financial Implications

6. The proposed mergers would have no direct financial implications for the Council as these services are outside of our control.

Risk Assessment

7. By considering the response Cabinet makes to the consultation the Council seeks to minimise any harmful impact that arise from these mergers affecting the quality of life for Eastleigh borough residents.

Equality and Diversity Implications

20. The Equality Act is not relevant to the decision in this report because it is a response to a consultation by an external organisation. However, the issues raised by the proposal will affect people with protected characteristics such as disability and maternity/pregnancy, and people who experience socio-economic deprivation. It is suggested that the NHS proposals should include an equality impact assessment to be considered in assessing the proposals.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

8. The siting of public services in accessible locations will help reduce carbon from transport.

Conclusion

9. Cabinet are asked to review the NHS proposal for the Bursledon and Blackthorn merger, and review the separate NHS proposal for the Living Well Partnership merger including Botley Surgery and St Luke's Surgery. Cabinet are asked to agree the response it wants to make to the consultation.

JANINE PICKERING
EXECUTIVE HEAD OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Date: 23 July 2021
Contact Officer: Diccon Bright
Tel No: 07788790729
e-mail: diccon.bright@eastleigh.gov.uk
Appendices Attached: None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

None.