

**TITLE OF REPORT: Review of GP Access – Final Report****REPORT OF: Alison Elliott, Interim Strategic Director, Care, Wellbeing  
& Learning**

---

**Summary**

The Committee agreed that the focus of its review for 2015/16 would be GP Access.

The Committee has considered a significant amount of evidence as part of the review of GP Access in order to scrutinise the current position across the Borough, to review challenges faced locally and nationally and to identify opportunities to build upon existing work to enhance access for the benefit of local people.

Following a series of evidence gathering sessions and site visits, this final report analyses the issues presented throughout the review and suggests headline recommendations.

---

**Background**

1. This is the final report of the Care, Health & Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of GP Access.
2. The Committee decided, as part of its annual work programme for 2015/16 to carry out a review of GP Access. This final report has been prepared on behalf of the Committee setting out the main findings and emerging recommendations.

**The Rationale behind the Review**

3. GP Access was previously the subject of a case study by Healthier Communities OSC in January 2013. The case study examined work being undertaken to improve access to GP services, including service improvements across GP practices, major service developments impacting upon access to GP services, GP Practice mergers, and patient and public engagement arrangements.

4. The case study was undertaken at a time when significant health reforms were about to be introduced from 1 April 2013 with the newly established NHS Commissioning Board having responsibility for the commissioning of GP primary care services as PCTs were abolished. Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) were also identified as having a key role to play in driving up the quality of primary medical care.
5. Since 2013, the NHS has continued to undergo significant change both structurally and functionally. The NHS Commissioning Board has become NHS England, with NHS England Cumbria and North East having statutory responsibility for GP primary care services in Gateshead. Gateshead CCG merged with Newcastle CCG's to become Newcastle Gateshead CCG from 1 April 2015 and is now also responsible for co-commissioning GP primary care services in Gateshead with NHS England.
6. Access to GP services continues to be a key issue for local communities across the borough as a whole, whether from urban or more rural areas. As well as providing a range of services directly to patients from their practices, GPs also provide onward referral to secondary and tertiary services as required. They also signpost and refer patients to community based programmes to assist with rehabilitation from illnesses, promote healthy lifestyles and to access other forms of support.

### **Scope and Focus of the Review**

7. The scope and focus of the review agreed by Committee was as follows:

#### Access to GP appointments

- Ease of making contact with local GP (phone/online);
- Ease of getting an appointment, waiting times and convenience of appointment with local GP;
- Ease of ordering repeat prescriptions from GP;
- On-line services provided by GP and ease of navigation;
- Patient satisfaction with opening hours;
- Patient views on additional opening times;
- Out-of-hours services: ease of contact, timeliness of care provided and experience of care.

#### Quality of Care

Whether patients feel that they:

- are given enough time by their GP / Practice Nurse;
- have been listened to;
- feel that tests and treatments are explained well;
- they are involved in decisions about their care;
- they have been treated with care and concern;
- they have confidence and trust in their GP / Practice Nurse;
- they have a good experience of care provided by their GP surgery.

## The Approach to the Review

8. In taking forward the Review, consideration was given to:
  - The physical and socio-demographic characteristics of Gateshead.
  - The GP Patient Survey and other sources of information on patient views and experiences of care such as the survey undertaken by Healthwatch Gateshead.
  - CQC Inspection findings regarding access to and quality of GP services in Gateshead and action plans to address issues raised.
  - Current issues relating to the provision of GP services.
  - Initiatives underway locally to enhance access/quality of GP services, spread good practice etc.
  - National agenda around GP access and implications locally e.g. 7 day services, Prime Minister's Challenge Fund, extended opening hours etc.
  - Other aspects of quality of care.
9. A series of evidence gathering sessions were held which focused on:
  - Setting the scene
  - Core issues relating to 'Access' to GP services, drawing on survey findings and other evidence as required on GP appointments, opening hours, out-of-hours etc.
  - Issues relating to the quality and experience of care.
  - GP Access and quality of care in the broader context of service developments/initiatives relevant to the review topic.
10. As well as the evidence gathering sessions, the Committee was also invited to attend a range of site visits to better understand the issues and challenges relevant to GP Access. The site visits included:
  - Trinity Square (Bridges Medical Practice and Millennium Family Practice)
  - Oxford Terrace (Oxford Terrace & Rawling Road Medical Group)
  - CCG Offices, Newburn
11. In addition, arrangements were made for the vice-chair of this Committee to observe a meeting of the Birtley Medical Group Patient Engagement Forum.
12. Committee Members indicated that they greatly appreciated the time and input of the GP practices to the review and expressed their thanks to their practice managers. The Committee also expressed its thanks to Newcastle Gateshead CCG, NHS England Cumbria & North East, Healthwatch Gateshead and Gateshead Community Based Care Ltd. for their contributions to the review.

### **Evidence Gathering Session 1: Setting the Scene & Core Issues Relating to GP Access – 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015**

13. The first evidence gathering session set out the context relating to access to GP services within Gateshead, relevant contractual arrangements in place with GP practices and key findings from the NHS GP Patient Access survey for Gateshead. In presenting the key findings, comparator information was also provided on how Gateshead practices compare with Gateshead and national averages. Other information and intelligence relating to the core issues of GP Access was also provided. In this way, Committee was able to consider the findings for Gateshead practices within a local and national context.
14. The findings of a survey carried out by Healthwatch Gateshead on access to GP services was also considered by Committee and included views on appointment systems, out-of-hours provision, continuity of GP care, consultations with GPs etc.

### **Evidence Gathering Session 2: Issues Relating to the Quality and Experience of Care – 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015**

15. The second evidence gathering session focused on the quality of care provided, including patient experience of care. Relevant findings from the NHS GP Patient Access survey for Gateshead were considered as well as other information relating to quality of care issues e.g. work that is being undertaken by NHS England and Newcastle Gateshead CCG in conjunction with GP practices across Gateshead.

### **Evidence Gathering Session 3: GP Access and Quality of care - the broader context – 19<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

16. The third evidence gathering session focused on GP Access and quality of care in the broader context of service developments/initiatives relevant to the review topic. This included the national context arising from the NHS Forward View and NHS Planning Guidance, as well as the local context from the CCG's Primary Care Strategy for High Quality and Sustainable General Practice 2016-19. Consideration was also given to the following issues and how they impact on access to GP services and the quality of care:
  - IT
  - Workforce
  - Estates
  - 7 Day Services
  - Prime Ministers Challenge Fund
  - Inter-practice referrals and other initiatives being taken forward through Gateshead Community Based Care Ltd.

## **Site Visits – October 2015 to March 2016**

### ***Trinity Square (Bridges Medical Practice and Millennium Family Practice) – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015***

17. Committee members were given a tour of the building which hosts a number of services provided by different agencies. In addition to the two GP practices located at the Health Centre, services are also provided by the Gateshead Health NHS and South Tyneside NHS FTs. Newcastle Gateshead CCG also has a presence at the centre. Services that are co-located within the Centre include diabetes services, x-ray services and sexual health services.
18. Members were shown the back office functions at the Bridges and Millennium practices, including the appointments system and processes in place and staffing arrangements to deal with busy periods.

### ***Oxford Terrace (Oxford Terrace & Rawling Road Medical Group) – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2015***

19. An overview was provided of the practice, arrangements in place for the planning and scheduling of appointments and initiatives the practice has taken forward to address key challenges facing primary care (including initiatives to enhance access to timely and quality care).
20. A presentation was also given by the practice manager which was followed by a discussion on a range of issues linked to the review of GP access.

### ***CCG Offices, Newburn – 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016***

21. Committee members were provided with an overview of the Practice Engagement Programme Visibility Wall which has been developed to provide an overview of the CCG's work on improving the quality care. As part of the visit, links were made with the committee's review topic.
22. The Visibility Wall lists all 31 GP practices in Gateshead, with a number of columns setting out details of the following for each practice:
  - Practice list size;
  - Designated facilitator and link GP for the practice;
  - Practice Training Record;
  - Practice Action Plan status;
  - CQC Inspection status;
  - How the Practice is performing against key quality indicators;
  - Any issues raised by a Practice, recorded within a Practice Issues Log.

## ***Patient Engagement Forum – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2016***

23. A final site visit was made to Birtley Medical Practice to observe a meeting of its Patient Engagement Forum. It was noted that 32 patients are currently registered with the Forum from a patient list size of 16,000 approx. and that the Forum meets twice a year. The meeting was facilitated by Joyce Mason and Deborah Dews from the practice.
24. The Patient Forum meeting focused on the following topics:  
  
*Building alterations (including parking arrangements):*
  25. The scope to locate a local pharmacy within the practice building was discussed as well as how some rooms could be utilised in new ways to enhance the range of services provided to local patients. The Forum discussed the potential benefits of having a pharmacy located within the building, including the implications for parking at the premises.  
  
*'Year of Care' update on arrangements for people with long term conditions:*
    26. An update was provided to the Patients Forum on the 'Year of Care' initiative to better join-up appointments and the care of people with long term conditions (LTCs). It was noted that the initiative seeks to co-ordinate the care of patients with LTCs, many of whom have multiple conditions. This is being done through nurse-led review meetings which assess the needs of patients in the round. Prior to the meetings, tests are arranged and managed as required by health care assistants at the practice, the results of which are then discussed with patients at their review meeting.
    27. The Forum was also informed that an additional stage is now being introduced to the Year of Care approach whereby the results of tests undertaken are communicated to patients in advance of their review meeting so that they have access to the same information as practice staff. It was noted that this also provides an opportunity for patients to consider what actions they themselves can take to help manage their condition(s) as part of their care plan, supported by practice staff e.g. signposting to local groups on the 'Our Gateshead' website.
    28. The Forum discussed the benefits of this approach both to patients themselves (through greater involvement in their own care planning to address their needs in the round) as well as to the practice (in ensuring that patient reviews are undertaken in a co-ordinated way that maximises the skills and resources of practice staff in responding to the multiple needs of patients with LTCs).  
  
*Online services:*
      29. Currently, around 1,700 patients are registered with the practice's online booking system. The practice has promoted online access and has seen a steady increase in numbers of appointments booked and scripts ordered online.

30. An update was provided to the Patients Forum on the practice's on-line services. It was noted that the online booking system is currently for GP appointments, repeat prescriptions and immunisations. The scope to extend online bookings to include nurse appointments was discussed. It was felt that if this is pursued, arrangements would need to be put in place to ensure that available online nurse appointments can be matched against the particular needs of patients so that they are always seen by the most appropriate professional.
  31. The Forum was also informed of the potential to provide patients with secure access to their medical records if they wish to have access, subject to appropriate safeguards being in place.
- Other points noted:*
32. The Patients Forum has been in existence for a number of years and is promoted through the practice's message board, posters within the practice, the bi-monthly practice newsletter, the Patient Participation page on the practice website and by practice staff.
  33. Each newly registered patient is given the opportunity to be a part of the Patient Forum. A current register of the Forum and those patients who have expressed an interest in participating in the future is kept by the practice.
  34. The Patients Forum had previously raised an issue regarding the cost to patients of using the practice's 0844 number. Subsequently, the practice changed phone companies and numbers to a local number to address this point.
  35. The profile of GPs has changed over time and it can now be more difficult to recruit male GPs to practices.

### **Headline Findings**

36. The Committee has received a significant amount of evidence and information throughout the review which has enhanced its understanding of the key issues relating to GP access. It is evident that a strong partnership approach is essential to ensure appropriate, timely and quality GP services can be accessed by Gateshead residents. Patients themselves also have a key role to play in providing feedback to their practice e.g. through their practice Patient Engagement Forum.
37. It has been reported to Committee that Practice Action Plans are developed by all practices working with Newcastle Gateshead CCG and NHS England and are reviewed and updated annually. In continuing to develop these plans in the future, it is recommended that there is a specific focus on ways individual practices can enhance access to GP services for their patients and actions that can be taken in this area. It is

envisaged that practice facilitators will continue to support practices in taking these actions forward.

## **Priorities and Actions**

38. The headline findings of this review provide an opportunity to build upon existing work and continue the direction of travel set by local NHS Partners and GP practices themselves to enhance access to GP services in Gateshead. Recommended priorities and actions are set out below:

### **Priority 1: Access & Appointments**

#### ***Recommended Actions***

- 1.1 Work with practices to ensure patients are aware of the different methods available to book an appointment and other options if an appointment is not available. This includes the promotion of online appointments and online prescription renewals (awareness of GP online services amongst Gateshead patients was reported as being below the national average).
- 1.2 Raise the awareness of patients of the scope to request a longer appointment if they feel it is necessary, so that appointments are less likely to overrun with a knock-on effect for other patient waiting times.
- 1.3 Communicate and explain to patients with long term conditions the 'Year of Care' approach to promote self-care for patients and to signpost them to available support, such as Live Well Gateshead.
- 1.4 Improve patients' reported experience of out-of-hours services - compare data from the GP Patient Survey with GatDoc data, explore the variation further and address any issues identified (the GP Patient Survey showed Gateshead GPs as below the national average for 'ease of contacting out-of-hours services, satisfaction with out-of-hours services and experience of out-of-hours services).
- 1.5 Ensure patients have access to 7 day GP services. Continue to review data and the experiences of patients as a result of the Prime Ministers Challenge Fund initiative – working to implement 7 day access to primary care.

### **Priority 2: Addressing Variation in Quality**

#### ***Recommended Actions***

- 2.1 Continue to improve quality in GP services through identification of outliers in terms of performance and standards of care through the GP



assurance framework and work with these practices to address variation through the CCG Practice Engagement scheme.

- 2.2 Ensure that Practice Action Plans agreed with individual practices identify areas for development/particular focus as required, working closely with their designated practice facilitator to achieve targets jointly agreed with practices.
- 2.3 Deliver two learning and sharing events a year, to share good practice, help raise standards and reduce variation across practices.
- 2.4 Make the most of the Gateshead Practice Managers network to share good practice across the borough and provide support to practices when needed.
- 2.5 To further improve quality in GP services, establish links and regular dialogue with CQC local managers to triangulate information and ensure a more holistic approach to quality improvement.

### **Priority 3: Estates**

#### ***Recommended Actions***

- 3.1 Make the most of opportunities presented by the NHS Primary Care Transformation Fund to upgrade/extend GP premises to meet current and future care needs of Gateshead patients.
- 3.2 NHS partners to continue to work with the Council to ensure that plans for housing development are factored into estate plans as required and that there is sufficient capacity within the primary care system to meet the needs of local communities.
- 3.3 Principal to be observed of making the most of the Gateshead £ when developing services by making the most of all stakeholders' property portfolios to rationalise estates and avoid void costs.

### **Priority 4: Workforce**

#### ***Recommended Actions***

- 4.1 Acknowledging the shortage of doctors entering the GP training scheme and the consequent impact upon recruitment and retention:
  - Develop a career start GP programme
  - Develop a nursing in primary care programme
  - Ensure workforce strategies are aligned
- 4.2 Support practices to make the most of the particular skills/areas of expertise of individual doctors and other practice staff in seeking to provide the best care for their patients.

4.3 As part of the broader Gateshead place shaping agenda, stakeholders to continue to work with the Council to make Gateshead an attractive place to live and work.

### **Priority 5: IT**

#### ***Recommended Actions***

5.1 Implement the NHS Digital Roadmap to support GP Practice appointment systems and help ensure patients receive the most appropriate care (the NHS Five Year Forward View included a commitment that by 2020 there would be “fully interoperable electronic health records so that patients’ records are paperless”).

### **Priority 6: Patient Engagement**

#### ***Recommended Actions***

6.1 Promote Patient Engagement Groups across all GP practices to raise awareness among patients and also promote within Practices themselves.

6.2 Look at new ways to promote Patient Engagement Groups and patient engagement generally e.g. through the Council Newsletter.

6.3 Consider how the role of practice champions (volunteers) can be used to work with practices in engaging with patients.

### **Recommendations**

39. It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (i) Approve the final report of the review of GP Access.
- (ii) Agree the priorities arising from the review set out in this report.
- (iii) Agree the recommendations to be put forward to Cabinet and Council for approval and implementation.

---

**Contact: John Costello (0191) 4332065**