

## Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8<sup>th</sup> January 2025

### 1.Update on Dental Services

- NHS England (NHSE) delegated responsibility for the commissioning of dental services to Integrated Care Board in April 2023. Access to the dental services has been in decline in the last ten years, and the position has deteriorated further following the COVID 19 pandemic when dentistry was completely suspended.
- The challenges associated with access to NHS dentistry are driven by:
  - **National Dental Contract** – the contract has remained unchanged since 2006 and it is deemed not value for money.
  - 44,000 of dental activity with an average value of £1.5 million has been voluntarily handed back to the ICB by Dental practices in Worcestershire since 2023, because of practices choosing to either reduce their NHS commitment or completely ceasing to provide NHS services.
  - Contractual obligations were not delivered by the practices hence legislative changes were implemented in 2023/24, allowing contracted activity to be reduced by unilateral decision from April 2025 in circumstances where the contract has not achieved 96% for 3 consecutive years.
  - **Workforce** – Once a dentist graduates, they need to be trained for 1to2 years to gain an understanding of how NHS dentistry operates. Once dentists have completed their training, many of them opt for private practice over NHS.
  - Practices need to train these graduates (Foundation Training Practices~), and they have reduced over the last 5 years in Worcestershire and there are only eight practices who train in the region!
  - Because of pay rates practices are not being able to retain dentists within the NHS.
  - **Access** – Access to NHS dentistry for the whole of Herefordshire and Worcestershire is the lowest across the West Midlands.

### • **Public Perception of NHS Dental Services**

Responses for the most recent 2024 dental element of the General Practice Patient survey include:

- Tried to get the NHS dental appointment in the last 6 months 34% (35% nationally).
  - Was successful in getting an NHS dental appointment 73% (76% Nationally)
  - Experience of NHS dental services – good 68% (69% Nationally).
- **Workforce**
    - Shortage of NHS dentists and dental nurses within the region is undermining the ability of high street practices and community providers to fulfil their contracts.

- Worcestershire is viewed as a lifestyle choice by both the medical and dental professions, however, due to limited training opportunities, the younger generation often tends to favour larger cities.
- Region has become financially unviable to the dentists due to the large increase in running costs with no proportionate increase in contract value.

## **National Dental Recovery Plan**

On 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024, the NHS dental recovery plan was published and since then:

- All practices are benefiting from the New Patient Premium, which means that they receive enhanced units of dental activity for each new patient that they treat between March 2024 and March 2025.
- 1 practice has received a Golden Hello funding to help them to recruit a new dentist.
- The ICB has its own Local Dental Recovery plan comprising of:
  - Improving equitable access to dental services
  - Increasing focus on prevention and reducing oral health inequalities
  - Developing the dentist workforce and support retention
  - Strengthening relationships with local providers and communities.

## **2.Update On Care Quality Commission Inspection Of Herefordshire And Worcestershire Health And Care Nhs Trust (Well Led Inspection)**

- There were 35 “Must Do” actions within the report as well as a range of identified themes including evidence of a closed culture and racism in some areas, risk management process in need of review, wider governance / systems and process concerns, variable compliance with mandatory training as well as service specific requirements.
- In September 2024, the Trust Board undertook a deep dive into the progress made and to agree the next phase of the improvement journey. From January 2025 there will be a new Improvement Board overseeing the work, comprising of Executive Leads and chaired by the CEO. This will report directly to the Trust Board and provide updates to the range of partners and regulators as required.

**Health Overview and Scrutiny Report**  
**Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2025.**  
Cllr Bakul Kumar

Two items on the agenda:

- 1. Mitigating Winter Pressures and Urgent and Emergency Care**
- 2. Overview from West Midlands Ambulance Service**

**Mitigating Winter Pressures and Urgent and Emergency Care**

- Health and Care Partners across Worcestershire had agreed a detailed Winter Plan in October 2024.
- The key points of this plan were:
  - Reduction in ambulance handover delays
  - Improvement to Emergency Department (ED) waiting times and improvements to the Emergency Access Standard (EAS) Performance
  - Reduction in the number of patients receiving care in the corridor.
- Like any other year the acute hospital had an extremely challenging operational period since the previous HOSC discussion around urgent and emergency care and patient flow.
- Waiting times in the ED and the time it has taken to transfer patients from ambulances to the care of the ED have been below the high standards the hospital seeks to deliver.
- *When challenged by me “whether they had a model to combat this problem, they answered that the winter pressure came a month earlier than expected (December than January). No satisfactory answer was given when asked couldn’t the existing model be tweaked to the needs in December!”*
- **Emergency Department**
  - During late November through to December the system experienced periods of sustained levels of ‘seasonal flu’ which put extra demand on the services and during the last week of December peaked to 150 patients occupying the beds due to this illness.
- The hospital and its partners have a commitment to improve the performance of Emergency Access Service (EAS) and achieve 78% by March 2025 but the January figures show they have attained 57.2% (admitted to the hospital, transferred to another provider or discharged within four hours).
- **Ambulance handover delays**

- Worcestershire's **Single Point Access (SPA)** provides a 'Call before Convey' service which encourages referrals from ambulance services to be treated in more appropriate settings to help reduce levels of ambulances attending ED.
- The hospital has commenced a pilot of 'Ambulance Pit Stop' which provides an in-person clinical review of patients reaching hospital in ambulance with the aim of directing to a more appropriate setting and avoiding ED.
- There was no data available on:
  - Improving level of Same Day Emergency Care
    - The total number of hospital handover delays and paramedic lost hours continues to be a cause of concern.
    - *I asked them to look at Frailty Index for residents who are admitted to the hospital.*
    - **Hospital Flow** Improving discharge planning, Community General Hospital Beds for patients aged 75 and above who stay five or more days in the General medicine specialty and post operative fractured neck of femur patients in the hospital are being organised.
    - *No data on how many community hospital beds exist in the county.*
    - Improve discharge planning and reduce length of stay in hospitals.
    - **Quality and Safety** Rise in formal complaints as patients and their families are concerned that they are being cared for in the corridors.
    - **Urgent Care Transformation** There has been an increase in the number of GP appointments in December with ten urgent access hubs have been temporarily commissioned to provide additional 1,100 weekly appointments.
    - *It has not been widely publicised, and we don't know if things became available in Bromsgrove.*

#### **West Midlands Ambulance Service**

- Substantial improvement in response time across Herefordshire and Worcestershire delivering close to 18-minute category 2 response time.
- Improvement has been done to reducing hospital handover delays and rising 999 resources across the region.
- Despite additional resources, the increase in hospital handover delay has resulted in deteriorating response times.
- Following a Care Quality Commission inspection in 2023, the West Midlands Ambulance Service developed an action plan for regulation 12 notice for response time.
- **Patient safety** Identified deaths of patients whilst waiting for ambulance along with documentation of cases of avoidable significant deterioration.

