

## Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> April 2026.

Two items on the agenda

### **1. Maternity and Newborn Services (First 100 days)**

#### **2. Update on Cancer Pathway**

### **1. Maternity and Newborn Services (First 100 days)**

The report provides an update on maternity and newborn services across Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust and partner health services, focusing on the critical “first 100 days” from pregnancy to early infancy. It outlines the maternity pathway from antenatal care through birth and postnatal support, highlighting that all hospital births in Worcestershire remain centralised at Worcestershire Royal Hospital, while community-based antenatal and postnatal care is delivered locally and at home. Health Visiting support from Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust continues until a child reaches five years of age.

The report notes significant improvement since the maternity service was rated “Requires Improvement” by the Care Quality Commission in 2020. Following a fresh inspection in 2023, the service has now achieved an overall “Good” rating, reflecting better leadership, improved safety measures, and successful completion of its improvement programme. Key improvements include reduced perinatal mortality, sustained compliance with national maternity safety standards, and stronger recruitment of midwives.

However, challenges remain. Patient feedback highlights ongoing concerns around triage waiting times, communication during induction of labour, and ensuring mothers understand all birth options, including homebirth. Homebirth services are being restructured to improve safety and consistency following national concerns raised after serious incidents elsewhere.

The report also focuses on wider public health priorities, including reducing smoking in pregnancy (down to 4% at birth), tackling maternal obesity (29% of mothers have BMI over 30), improving breastfeeding support, and increasing uptake of pregnancy vaccinations such as RSV, pertussis, and flu. Overall, the report presents a service that has improved considerably but continues to evolve in response to national reviews, local patient feedback, and public health challenges.

#### **2. Update on Cancer Pathway**

This report provides an updated overview of cancer services across Worcestershire, led by the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB), NHS England, and Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. It builds on previous scrutiny reports and aligns with the new national cancer strategy set out in the **National Cancer Plan for England (2026)**, which aims that by 2035, 75% of people diagnosed with cancer will either be cancer-free or living well five years after diagnosis. The Worcestershire system is focusing on three main priorities: **earlier diagnosis, faster treatment, and better long-term support for patients.**

A major emphasis remains on **prevention and early diagnosis**, recognising that earlier-stage diagnosis (Stages 1 and 2) significantly improves survival rates. The Integrated Care Board continues public awareness campaigns to encourage residents to seek medical advice earlier and engage in screening programmes. Worcestershire continues to perform strongly in national screening uptake, particularly in bowel screening, although there remain inequalities in participation among deprived communities, younger adults, and vulnerable groups.

Performance against national cancer waiting standards shows mixed but improving results. The report highlights the **Faster Diagnosis Standard (28 days)** and the **62-day treatment**

**standard** as key measures. Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust has improved performance compared with previous years, but pressures remain due to increased referrals, workforce shortages, and diagnostic demand. Some pathways—particularly skin, lung, and urology cancers—continue to face operational pressures because of growing patient numbers and complexity of diagnosis.

Diagnostic capacity is a central challenge. The report identifies the expansion of Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) as a major strategic response, bringing scans and tests closer to local communities and reducing hospital bottlenecks. There is also a developing ambition to improve access to advanced imaging, including PET-CT services, reducing the need for Worcestershire patients to travel outside the county for specialist diagnostics.

The report places stronger focus on **personalised cancer care**, ensuring that patients receive holistic support beyond clinical treatment. This includes mental health support, financial advice signposting, rehabilitation, and “living with and beyond cancer” services. Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) remain essential in supporting patients throughout their journey, and workforce investment remains a priority.

Challenges remain around workforce resilience, particularly specialist staff shortages, diagnostic backlogs, and increasing cancer incidence due to an ageing population. However, Worcestershire’s cancer system is showing measurable improvement, stronger collaboration across health partners, and better alignment with national priorities. Overall, the report presents a cancer pathway that is improving in timeliness and quality but still under pressure from rising demand and workforce constraints.

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