

St Luke's Consultation Event

Held on 27 August 2015

Background

St Luke's Health Centre is located in a densely-populated residential part of Southend-on-Sea. It is unique within the area, combining a GP practice serving over 6000 registered patients, and a walk-in centre that is available to anyone who requires medical attention.

NHS Southend Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) are currently looking to move the GP surgery from its temporary accommodation, and at the same time they are reviewing the future of the walk-in centre. To involve people who use both services, the NHS Southend CCG had a consultation period for 12 weeks ending on 11 September 2015. During that time residents had the option to complete a survey giving their views on the future of both services.

Back in 2014 Healthwatch Southend wrote a report entitled **St Luke's Health Centre: A GP service in need of a permanent home**, and as our chief role is to give the people who live in Southend-on-Sea a voice in their health and social care services, we felt it was important to continue to keep local residents involved in the process.

Healthwatch spoke to the Southend CCG, and also the councillors in St Luke's ward, and all agreed it would be beneficial to hold a public engagement event so that residents could voice their concerns directly to CCG staff. With the help of Councillors Ayling, Endersby and Van Looy, we set up a meeting at Ferndale Baptist Church on 27 August and publicised it using social media, leaflets and posters.

John Cooke, the manager of Healthwatch Southend, chaired the meeting, and facilitated the audience putting questions to five members of the CCG team and a representative from NHS England.

Present from Southend CCG were: Melanie Craig (Chief Officer); Sadie Parker (Associate Director of Primary Care and Engagement); Ian Ross (Head of Primary Care); Jason Skinner (Chief Finance Officer); Paul Ilett (Head of Communications and Engagement)

And from NHS England: Laura Cooper (Assistant Contracts Manager, Primary Care Team)

We had over 50 people attending the event, including Councillors Ayling, Endersby and Van Looy. Below is a record of the questions and answers that were captured throughout the evening.

Questions and Answers:

Q - I am worried that only people in the St Luke's ward are being talked to about the walk-in centre, is this right?

A - No, we're consulting with all local areas including Castle Point and Rochford CCG and all areas of Southend, not just St Luke's ward.

Q - I can't get an appointment in a local surgery so I use the walk-in, will this be addressed?

A - I'm sorry about your experience, GPs are an independent business and don't work for the NHS, the CCG can facilitate a meeting with your local surgery to address concerns and will be addressing it across the board in other surgeries.

Q - I'm a local resident and I've been hearing from walk-ins that they're told unless you're registered at St Luke's you can't use it?

A - No, that's not correct.

Q - St Luke's is a deprived ward, if some of the people using the walk-in will now need to get to Southend Hospital instead there are no direct buses there, two are needed, and none on a Sunday or after 7pm?

A - That's why the new practice we're looking to build should have longer hours and be easily accessible so you should only need A&E in an absolute emergency.

Q - How big a footprint will the new building need and how much will it cost?

A - It will have 10,000 patients, I can't say the footprint yet or the cost but yes it will be a lot of money and you will have a very nice medical centre. We can't be specific until we know exactly what services will be sitting in it.

[comment from the audience] I have full praise for the St Luke's staff but I worry about parking if it moves to St Luke's church with staff and patients trying to park there?

(CCG noted the comment)

Q - Re convenient times to see your GP, 8am - 6.30pm isn't good enough for working people?

A - We accept that sometimes the availability of doctors isn't good enough, we are working on that. The new St Luke's practice will be open at weekends.

Q - You say about 1680 patients use the walk-in a month, does that include patients registered at St Luke's as in the evening registered patients have to use the walk-in?

A - No, that shouldn't include registered patients. There are two separate systems, one for registered patients and one for walk-ins. The surgery is open the same hours as the walk-in, it's just in the evenings there are no bookable appointments so a registered patient would need to sit and wait for the next free appointment but they are not actually counted as a walk-in patient.

Q - Rochford and Castle Point have 19 practices doing evening appointments but Southend doesn't, when the walk-in centre closes where will everyone go?

A - Rochford and Castle Point, and ourselves [Southend CCG], put in a bid for extra funding, they were successful and we weren't so they can open their hubs for longer hours. We did a trial opening the medical centre on weekends a bit like a second walk-in centre, we advertised it constantly, but it was hardly used and we had doctors just sitting waiting for people. Decisions have to be made based on need and that was taken into account. Some of our GP practices do offer evening appointments through NHS England's extended hours scheme.

Q - Re the extra funding, why did they get it and not us?

A - We're separate organisations; they had a lot of GPs who wanted to try it. We have different priorities to them, we have over 100 care homes in Southend, the residents are very vulnerable and making sure they're looked after is a priority. Rochford and Castle Point has fewer care homes. We have now managed to secure funding for GP facilities specifically for vulnerable people so this will help people in care homes get appointments which will in turn free up appointments in all our surgeries.

Q - I live in Wakering, originally this walk-in centre was there for the whole of South East Essex, if you're closing it where will those 1680 who aren't St Luke's residents go? And if it moves to the hospital what about parking?

A - We're not proposing a new urgent care centre - neither Southend or Castle Point and Rochford are suggesting that, there's not enough space at the hospital for one and at three to four million pounds to build it's too much, we'd rather use that elsewhere. We're stating people go to A&E anyway, there are different ways of accessing A&E, through reception, through the fracture clinic, and through the hospital's out of hours GP, we're suggesting a redesigned more efficient service for A&E to make it easier for people. Also our local GPs give out more antibiotics than anywhere else in England, our doctors are trying to explain to patients that antibiotics often aren't necessary and will become less and less effective because of over-prescribing, and so if people don't get given antibiotics by their GP they will often then try at A&E, we need to address this. Also we're seeing a trend nationwide that if the walk-in centre is closed, as in Chelmsford, a third of people didn't use an alternative. People admit to us they only use walk-ins because they're handy, not necessarily because their problem is urgent. A large portion of the 1680 will not need another service.

Q - Will the [St. Luke's] GP surgery still be open in March when the walk-in goes? Will the patient cap be lifted?

A - Yes the cap will be lifted then and the GP surgery will remain open.

there for expansion, and potentially parking on Bournemouth road could be changed or a one way system could be added, various options are there. It is our priority that this new surgery is built within the ward, there are limited choices, and there will be pros and cons.

Q - I'm a pharmacist, we often pick up people before they get as far as A&E, I'm concerned about parking at the hospital if it gets busier, and if the new surgery gets a pharmacy connected with it smaller pharmacies will close down. Where are the pharmacies in all this? We deal with minor ailments.

A - You're right, pharmacists are often our best provider of emergency care, open long hours and really well trained. We want to work with the pharmacists; we have staff shortages everywhere except with pharmacists so we should be using their skills.

[comment from the audience] - I understand concerns but I think it's a great thing to happen, we've got people giving us dates on when things will happen, we've been asking for this for so long it's wonderful for the CCG to be talking to us and taking an interest in what we say, we should be celebrating this and thank them as it is going to happen.

[comment from the audience] We were promised a health centre many years ago, it would be nice for it to go in the school grounds and would be great to have all different services in one place for older people.

Q - I don't understand why the GPs in Castle Point got extra funding?

A - Castle Point applied to the Prime Minister's Challenge Fund which was an extra pot of money to bid for, a board was set up to evaluate bids, the Southend CCG's bid was declined, Castle Point and Rochford's was successful, it was out of Southend's control.

[comment from CCG] - Regarding access to GPs, from our CCG's perspective we are working on a number of projects - not just in St Luke's - lots of different schemes to initiate in the near future. Our local care homes will have a dedicated GP service releasing pressure on all the other surgeries, and we're looking at technology such as live web GP appointments which should make getting appointments easier, and we'll make more use of pharmacies.

Q - At Queensway how many people don't turn up for appointments?

A - We don't hold this information for individual practices but nationally It is approximately three to four percent don't turn up.

Q - We've been left behind in this ward, there is a high illness rate, I want to see what's being said tonight come to fruition; we want improvements now with parking problems, etc.

A - Costs are a factor, we want to explore potential different sizes depending on if other small local practices want to share the facilities and if so we'll need a

a bigger building, and on the plus size that would give you more choice - we want to hear your opinions on our survey.

[comment from the audience] - Thanks to Healthwatch for arranging this. I'd like to say to everyone here that every doctor's surgery has a PPG [Patient Participation Group] so tell them what you think, you can get involved with them if you want a say in your practice. The CCG listens to us which didn't used to happen, use this chance now to say what you think.

Q - Will smaller practices be forced to move in to the new health centre?

A - No, it's just a suggestion but some have already approached us.

[comment from the audience] - A big challenge is parking, local tax payer's money has already been spent on this and parking at the hospital must be addressed, there should be a transport plan.

Above questions were all asked during the meeting - below are a couple of comments and a question passed over at the end of the meeting:

Q - Are we short of doctors?

A - We are aware there are capacity issues with regards to GP appointments in Southend and are working on this issue. We are doing this, however, by taking a 'whole system' approach. For instance, one way to alleviate pressure on GP appointments in the borough would be a better use of pharmacies where there is still significant capacity.

Comment - You can't ask doctors to work a seven day week they will become ill themselves

Comment - There should be a penalty fee for doctors of the patients who use the walk-in service if their own doctor's is closed or too busy to see them.

Next Steps

Healthwatch Southend will be forwarding this report on to the Southend CCG and will be publishing it on the Healthwatch Southend website.

We will be closely monitoring the developments at St Luke's Health Centre, especially access to GPs and other risks identified in the Q&As above. We will continue to be transparent with the information we have and communicate it to interested stakeholders.

We would like to thank Southend CCG, NHS England, Councillors Ayling, Endersby and Van Looy, Ferndale Church and most of all every member of the public who attended for their help in making the event such a success.