

HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 10 MARCH 2021

WORCESTERSHIRE ACUTE HOSPITALS – LONGER TERM VIEW

Summary

1. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) is to be updated on the longer term view for Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (WAHT), including emerging thoughts on learning from working differently during the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential impact on services.
2. This report follows the regular updates the Committee has received from across the health and care system about the impact of the pandemic on services including service restoration, system pressures and temporary service changes, and early learning from having to work working differently.
3. Senior representatives will be present from Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust.

Introduction

4. This report summarises some of the issues which will need to be addressed by the Trust, with partners in the local health and care system, in the next phase of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Further discussions will be needed with the HOSC and other stakeholders, including system partners, patients and the public, over the coming months about many of these issues as the priorities and plans set out in our [Clinical Services Strategy](#) are reviewed to ensure that they are still appropriate and deliverable in the post-COVID era.
6. Key areas of focus include:
 - Ensuring that patients and staff can continue to be protected against the ongoing risk of COVID-19 infection and that there is capacity and capability to react to any future surges in infection rates
 - Developing a robust plan to bring down waiting times for patients whose care has been delayed by the pandemic
 - Working with partners in the health and care system to continue the development of an Integrated Care System (ICS) for Worcestershire, to make sure services are as joined up and working as seamlessly as possible across organisations
 - Making sure that every effort is made to support the physical and mental health and wellbeing of all staff.

7. In the interests of patients, staff and system partners, it is essential that the best use is made of all Trust facilities. That includes reviewing and evaluating the short term measures taken in response to the pandemic, some immediate next steps and a more considered view of what additional longer term actions may be required.

8. The WAHT is keen to engage stakeholders, partners, patients and the public in meaningful discussions about these issues. It is also important for patients that the Trust is able to respond in the most agile way possible to balance the ongoing COVID-19 response with the efforts to reduce elective waiting times and still manage the daily demands of the urgent and emergency care service.

Current Situation

9. At the time of writing this report, the NHS in Worcestershire is still at the highest COVID-19 alert level and the joint focus is on responding to the continuing demands that the pandemic is placing on health and care services.

10. For the WAHT, although the number of COVID-19 positive patients in acute hospitals has come down from the second wave peak seen in January (269 Covid-positive inpatients), they are still caring for more than 100 Covid-positive patients across the sites with additional intensive care units open at both the Alexandra and Worcestershire Royal Hospitals.

Review of Service Changes made during the Pandemic

11. A number of temporary service changes have been made as part of the pandemic response, to protect patient safety and allow the most effective deployment of staff.

12. These decisions will be reviewed during the next phase of our pandemic response. They include:

The relocation of the Garden Suite Ambulatory Chemotherapy Unit from the Alexandra to the Kidderminster Hospital

13. The Garden Suite Ambulatory Chemotherapy Unit was relocated to Kidderminster Hospital to ensure that chemotherapy could continue to be provided for cancer patients, many of whom are immune-suppressed and clinically vulnerable, while also doing everything possible to protect them from the risk of COVID-19 infection.

14. The Garden Suite was initially relocated to the theatre recovery area at Kidderminster. This was a less than ideal base for an ambulatory chemotherapy service and it also prevented the use of the full theatre capacity to help keep elective surgical services running for patients from across the County.

15. Fortunately, some Covid-related capital funding was used to refurbish the ground floor of the disused A Block at Kidderminster, creating a greatly improved environment for the patients to receive their chemotherapy and a much better working environment for staff.

16. Feedback from staff and patients has so far been overwhelmingly positive and the Trust will continue to actively seek the views of colleagues and service users before any final decisions are made.

Opening hours of the Minor Injuries Unit at Kidderminster

17. The Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) at Kidderminster has remained open throughout the pandemic, but with hours reduced from its previous 24/7 opening – initially from 8am to 8pm from March 2020, increasing to 8am to 10pm since July 2020.

Immediate Next Steps to Restore and Restart Services (March/April 2021)

18. The use of Kidderminster for elective day case and short stay activity is continuing and as part of the Trust's restoration plan, it is the aim to have all four operating theatres at Kidderminster running by the end of March.

19. Some independent hospital capacity has been used during the pandemic but the ability to use either the Alexandra or Worcestershire Royal for anything other than the most urgent procedures currently remains extremely limited.

20. A number of steps have been identified which could be taken to further increase the ability to restart services and restore available capacity to something much closer to pre-Covid capacity, including:

- Increasing elective capacity at the Alexandra Hospital for confirmed non-Covid patients, including capacity for day case medical and surgical procedures
- Increasing capacity for more complex elective work for confirmed non-Covid patients at the Alexandra with high care provision in designated Covid-secure wards. This would allow a continued focus on elective orthopaedic and urology services as well as the transfer of more planned elective and cancer surgery from Worcestershire Royal to the Alexandra
- Transferring of activity from Worcestershire Royal to the Alexandra which would be balanced by moving some urgent surgery back to Worcestershire Royal. For those non-Covid patients requiring urgent or complex surgery which can only be provided on the Worcester site, one ward has already been designated (Aconbury 1) as a Covid-secure ward.

Longer Term

21. Longer term plans include the further expansion of elective capacity at the Alexandra through the development of a business case to improve the operating theatre capacity on that site. That would give an expanded facility that takes into account the additional infection prevention and control protection required for surgical and other procedures post-Covid.

22. Plans are also being worked up to redevelop urgent and emergency care services on the Worcestershire Royal site.

23. More details of both these, and other, longer term plans will be shared with HOSC as they take shape.

Purpose of the Meeting

24. Members are invited to consider and comment on the information discussed and agree:

- whether any further information is required
- whether any further scrutiny work is required at this stage.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance), the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and Minutes from the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 January 2021 and 18 June, 20 July, 30 September and 16 November 2020 – available on the website: [Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agendas and Minutes](#)