

HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 NOVEMBER 2021

WINTER PLANNING – WORCESTERSHIRE

Summary

1. The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) has requested a report on the preparedness of local health and social care partners for the winter pressures of 2021/22. The Committee would like to gain an understanding of the likely demands and challenges on the system and what plans are in place to meet these.
2. Senior Representatives from NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Clinical Commissioning Group, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust and Worcestershire County Council have been invited to the meeting.

Background

3. Weather conditions over winter bring additional pressures and challenges for the health service and social care providers, many of which have been referred to during HOSC's previous discussions with local partners. Worcestershire also has a higher than average proportion of older people with increasing frailty.
4. The pressure on services from the COVID-19 pandemic has been well documented and although the vaccination programme has been very successful, the booster programme continues to be rolled out. The specific impact for acute trusts (including Worcestershire) is that acute beds need to be ring-fenced to allow the system to manage any spikes in demand. Pressures due to COVID-19 add to the usual challenges brought on by the seasonal flu season, which is expected to be challenging this winter.
5. An additional pressure this year is the national mandate with respect to the Elective Recovery Programme. This programme requires systems to continue work on reducing elective (planned) waiting lists with specific focus on cancer. Normally during winter periods elective work would be postponed, allowing for greater resilience during periods of peak activity. This will not be the case this year.
6. At the time of writing this report, the number of COVID-19 positive inpatients being cared for by Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (WAHT) was increasing on a daily basis and by 20 October 2021 had gone back up to 41, having fallen to single figures earlier in the year. This has required more beds to be designated as 'COVID-19 positive' to ensure the hospitals have enough capacity to safely manage current COVID-19 pressures and respond rapidly to further increases.
7. At the same time, WAHT also has to keep beds 'ring-fenced' for patients waiting to come in for elective procedures as an important part of the work being done across the system to tackle growing waiting lists. Having to maintain separate bedded capacity for elective patients and growing numbers of COVID-19 positive patients while also dealing

with a significant increase in urgent and emergency care patients is presenting a major challenge.

8. A benefit for the system has been improved performance in relation to i) delivering the national discharge requirements ii) length of stay iii) patients with a length of stay of longer than seven and twenty-one days. These measures are currently benchmarking well at a regional level.

9. On the basis of maintaining performance within these areas, robust utilisation of the Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) areas and robust delivery against the National Discharge Requirements Service, it has been modelled that the Worcestershire system should have sufficient capacity to be able to manage winter pressures.

10. To achieve this, all parts of the system must deliver in accordance with the system plan.

11. It is worth noting that significant workforce challenges exist across the system which is a common problem within most health and social care systems. The challenge for 2021/22 is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a greater reliance on agency staffing – which is not always available.

12. The staffing challenge is also compounded by the fragility of the domiciliary care market, which is a national challenge. The system understands and is sighted on the significant work being undertaken by Worcestershire County Council to mitigate against this, but we need to be clear that the market challenges could mean delays to patients' onward journeys from acute or community settings.

Purpose of the Meeting

13. The HOSC is invited to consider and comment on the system plan and agree:

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

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Winter Plan presentation

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 of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 November 2018 [Agenda and Minutes for Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26th November 2018](#)