

REPORT TO: Health Policy & Performance Board
DATE: 15 February 2022
REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Commissioner for Halton - Health
PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing
SUBJECT: Improving Access to Primary Care Services
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To update the Board of Primary Care Services in the borough, and the improvement plans in place.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That:**

i) **The board receives and notes the update provided.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Core General Practice

3.1 General Practice has remained open during the pandemic. In March 2020 at the start of the pandemic all practices were required to follow the National Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to keep patients and staff safe and reduce the risk of covid transmission.

Whilst the national SOP has now been rescinded many practices have retained some of the requirements in order to continually ensure they can provide safe services. For example, practices continue to provide access via the telephone or on-line, with all patients triaged, some managed remotely, and a face-to-face appointment made available where clinically appropriate.

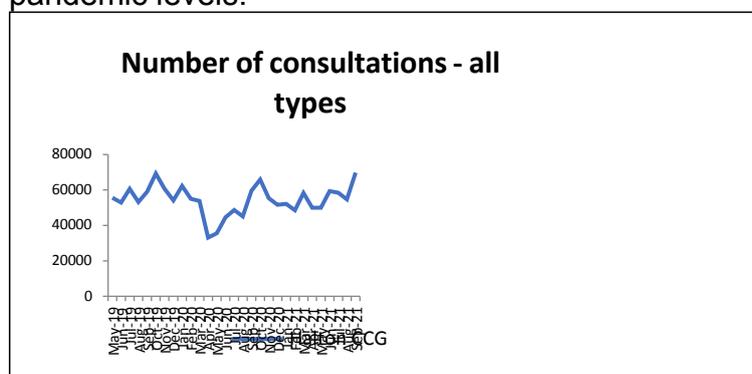
Fortunately, no practice has needed to close.

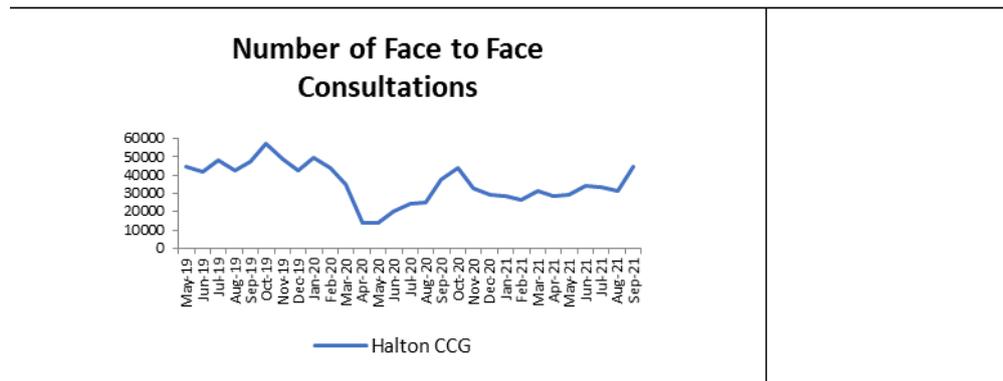
3.2 Since December 2020 General Practice and the Primary Care Networks (PCN) has played a significant role in delivering the covid vaccination programme. In December 2021, in response to the Omicron variant, NHSEI announced changes to the national GP contract to support practices to step up the delivery of the boosters, whilst maintaining core services. This means that some services have been temporarily suspended until April 2022. For example elements of long term condition management and the PCN Direct Enhanced Services (DES.) All age vaccinations, cervical screening and maintenance of long-term condition registers continue.

3.3 NHSEI have provided additional Winter Access Funding (WAF) to support a local Primary Care Winter Access Plan. The local plan includes four key elements:

- a) **Expansion of General Practice Appointments:** The number of appointments available in the two GP Extended Access services (GP Extra) provided by the two GP Federations have been increased. The appointments are available Monday to Sunday including Bank Holidays and include additional capacity during the day, evenings and at weekends.
- b) **Consistent offer across all Halton Practices for Urgent / Same Day Appointments:** Up to the 31st March 2022 all Practices will ensure a minimum provision of Urgent / Same Day appointments at a ratio of 2 per 1000 population. This equates to 268 urgent on the day appointments.
- c) **Data Validation & Improvement Plans:** All practices are reviewing the provision and recording of their appointments to ensure when a consultation is undertaken face to face, by telephone or video, it is recorded correctly, and in line with direction from NHSEI the number of face-to-face consultations return to pre-pandemic levels. If the number of face-to-face appointments appears lower than expected, then a Practice improvement plan will be developed.
- d) **Community Pharmacy Consultation Scheme:** To support the national implementation, all practices are required to refer patients to the Community Pharmacy Consultation Scheme. The scheme allows a practice to offer and book patients, who require support to manage minor illness, into a same day consultation with a local Community Pharmacy.

Despite managing staff sickness and isolation, National GP Appointment data illustrates the high number of appointments provided throughout the pandemic across Halton Practices- the total number of consultations provided in September 2021 (latest data) was 69,705 which is higher than any month from May 2019. Of these 44,592 were provided face to face which is close to pre-pandemic levels.





NHS 111 and Out of Hours Services

3.4 During the out of hours period if a patient requires support access is via NHS111. Patient demand has continued to be high. Patients are assessed against national algorithms and if a GP is required the patient is passed to the GP Out of Hours service. This service is provided by Primary Care 24 (PC24) across Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, South Sefton, Southport & Formby, St Helens and Warrington.

Demand for Out of Hours services remains high, who like all services face staff sickness and isolation challenges. The Christmas period and week following the New Year is always a particularly challenging period, and the pandemic compounded this. However, since then response times have improved, and returned to pre- Christmas levels. It is also anticipated that the work being undertaken to increase access during core hours, will reduce the pressure during the out of hours period.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

N/A

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

N/A

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

General Practices and Out of Hours Services in Halton have remained open during the Pandemic and continued to deliver core services during challenging circumstances. However, the full impact of the Pandemic on the health of the national and local population is currently unknown. It is anticipated that both national and local recovery plans will require an understanding of the impact, to best target services and patient care. In the meantime, services continue to provide the best care they can within the current constraints.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

N/A

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

N/A

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 N/A

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 *There are no Equality and Diversity implications arising.*

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
None		