

Motion to: Council

18 March 2025

Subject: Access to healthcare in Norwich

Proposer: Councillor Galvin

Seconded: Councillor Schmierer

This Council notes:

- 1) Norwich's Walk-in Centre sees around 6,000 patients a month. It takes pressure off A&E and GP surgeries and helps thousands of people when they can't get a doctor's appointment, especially at weekends. People from more deprived backgrounds are more likely to use the Walk-in Centre, and thus more likely to be negatively affected by its potential closure.
- 2) The Vulnerable Adults Service provides essential specialist services for those experiencing homelessness and drug or alcohol dependence, sex workers, and those with precarious immigration status.
- 3) The Out of Hours service offers crucial face-to-face appointments during times when regular GP surgeries are closed. Offering out of hours services in fewer locations would make it harder for some people to be seen, particularly those who do not drive, have limited access to public transport or have lower incomes.
- 4) There has been considerable turmoil and uncertainty in the way these services have been managed in recent years which has impacted hardworking staff; and has a potential negative effect on patient care, especially of the most vulnerable.
- 5) NHS Norfolk and Waveney initially shared plans for the Norwich Walk-in Centre, Vulnerable Adults Service Inclusion Health Hub and GP Practice at Rouen Road in a nine-week consultation which closed on 26 March 2023. Feedback received from members of the public who completed the survey and the stakeholders potentially affected by the proposed changes (including healthcare and local authorities) strongly indicated the desire for the Walk-in Centre to remain open.
- 6) Taking this into account, as well as the wider landscape of primary care provision in Norfolk and Waveney, NHS Norfolk and Waveney recommended on 5 May 2023 that the Walk-in Centre remained open and that a new contract for the services was commissioned when the current one expired.
- 7) However, a joint statement was issued on 23 October 2023 by OneNorwich Practices (providers of the services at that time) and the NHS Norfolk and

Waveney Integrated Care Board to transition staff and services to other providers in the system over the coming months, and then close down the organisation running these services, due to OneNorwich's sudden financial collapse.

- 8) In December 2023 it was announced that North Norfolk Primary Care would take over the Walk-in Centre, as well as the Vulnerable Adults Service and the patients list of the Norwich Practices Health Centre until March 2025.
- 9) Following a significant adverse variance to the financial plan in August 2024 the Norfolk and Waveney ICS was placed under the Investigation and Intervention programme by the NHS East of England regional team. This programme (I and I level 4) includes the intervention of Deloitte consulting: they are looking at, among other things, areas of 'discretionary' spend.
- 10) On 10 December 2024 the ICB abandoned the procurement of the new contract in Norwich covering the Walk-In Centre, registered practice and Vulnerable Adults Service on the grounds of affordability, and instead extended the services run by the existing provider beyond 31st March 2025 for a period of 12 months.
- 11) However, on 3 March 2025 it was announced by the ICB that a new consultation/survey would be run with the intention to look at options for the Walk In Centre of closure or going down to 4 hours a day of service; for the Vulnerable Adults Service of either staying the same or closing the base and going to different communities, possibly on a bus or going to different hostels; and for the Out of Hours Service reducing the number of bases in various ways.
- 12) Finally and without warning, on 5 March 2025 staff were told in addition that the ICB required cuts of just over 6 per cent starting in April this year which means a significant reduction in the provision of medical services at the WiC and VAS which will have increased and immediate impacts on patient care and the wider health provision network. This is in addition to the proposals in the ongoing consultation of 3 March and came with no warning.

This Council **RESOLVES** to:

- 1) Ask Cabinet to:
 - a. Request from the ICB an urgent report (by 24 April or as soon as possible) which includes all relevant data on both the current ongoing reduction in medical services (starting in April) and those planned after the current public consultation ends. This should include but not be limited to: projected numbers of patients not accepted at the Walk In Centre due to limited range of skills of nurses and no GP cover; how the Out of Hours service will cope after 7pm when the Walk in Centre is closed; where treatment will take place of patients registered to the Vulnerable Adults Service who are not ready for transfer to mainstream or on a palliative care list; and a full assessment of the impact of all the changes, including a risk assessment of impact the potential cuts will have on the health landscape and risk to patients in Norwich,

especially vulnerable service users; all to include rationale and evidence base.

- b. In the light of the report to then set out steps that the council will take to engage with partners to try to minimise risk to its citizens, especially those most vulnerable.
- 2) Write to the hardworking staff at the Walk In Centre, Vulnerable Adults Service and Out of Hours service and thank them for the work they do for Norwich citizens in spite of the uncertainty and turmoil of the way the services have been managed.
- 3) Write to the NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (ICB) to ask them to:
 - a. Commit to maintaining the essential services provided by the Norwich Walk-In Centre on Rouen Rd, the Vulnerable Adults Service Inclusion Hub on Westwick St, and the Out of Hours Service.
 - b. Seek additional funding from central government to bridge any financial shortfalls.
 - c. Carry out a needs-based risk assessment of all services to determine where any savings can be made that do not unfairly impact the poorest and most vulnerable the hardest.
 - d. Commit to using patient panels drawn from service users to review consultations and plans in advance of publication.
 - e. Seek the advice of the Faculty for Homeless and Inclusion Health to ensure that ICB service standards meet the best practice for commissioners and service providers.
 - f. Ensure that future service models are evidence based.
- 4) Write to the ICB, local MPs, NHS England and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to:
 - a. Register its profound concern over the treatment of and potential closure of the Walk In Centre and Vulnerable Adults Health Inclusion Hub and the impact on staff and patients, including some of the city's most vulnerable service users.
 - b. Request an urgent independent inquiry into the circumstances and causes of this funding crisis, including governance, management and financial issues; an evaluation of the services and the management of any conflicts of interest in the reletting of the contracts to providers so that an understanding of what has gone so wrong within will enable a stable future for these vital services.
 - c. Ensure that scrutiny regarding transparency and conflict of interest takes place to ensure bids for future delivery are fair and in the public interest.
- 5) Request that the government, as part of the 10 year health plan, pledges that:

- a. NHS services will be adequately funded so those in most need of care receive it and do not see their services cut.
- b. That the complex internal markets in the NHS which are not adequately overseen are thoroughly scrutinised for conflicts of interest.
- c. That circumstances in which NHS trusts and providers have collapsed are reviewed by inquiries with terms of reference that are open to involved parties, including staff and users, to help set.