
Health Scrutiny Committee 21st January 2016

Report of the Chief Officer, Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group

General Practice Closures and Mergers

Purpose of Report

1. To provide assurance to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that Dudley CCG is complying with NHS regulations and policy governing the closure and merger of general practices.

Background

2. Under the delegated functions agreement between NHS England and Dudley CCG, the CCG is responsible for making decisions in respect of GP practice mergers and closures. All applications are considered in accordance with NHS Regulations and NHS England policy.
3. Branch closures are considered in accordance with the NHS England policy 'Branch Closures for Primary Medical Services'. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/brnch-close-pms.pdf>
4. Practice mergers are considered in accordance with the NHS England policy <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/mng-reg-con-vari.pdf>
5. The policies describe the process to determine the steps required to undertake the closure of a branch surgery and or merger of a practice and the associated contract variation required under The National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) Regulations 2004 as amended <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2004/291/contents/made>. Adhering to the process ensures that any changes reflect and comply with national regulations and legislation so as to maintain robust contracts.
6. The underlying principle for the CCG to consider when any such proposal is made to them is; 'has the applicant been able to clearly demonstrate the grounds for closure and or merger and have they fully considered any impact on the contractors registered population?' Consideration also needs to be given in respect of any financial impact to the CCG.
7. Practices are responsible for engaging with their patients and local population on their proposals. Engagement takes place in a number of ways including leaflets, posters, letters, information on prescriptions, talking with Patient Participation Groups and attending local community forums. In addition practices will be liaising with other practices in their area, MPs and Local Medical Committees, Healthwatch Dudley and the Health and Wellbeing Board. All practices will provide the CCG with details of why they are proposing the changes, what those

changes may mean and how to get in touch to ask questions or leave feedback. Information is also provided should patients wish to consider registering with another practice.

8. **St Thomas Medical Centre and Bean Medical Practice**

Dr Manivasagam was the sole contract holder of two separate General Medical Service contracts for providing Primary Medical Services from St Thomas's Medical Centre and Bean Medical Practice. Dr Manivasagam submitted an application to merge both contracts, resulting in one single contract providing primary medical services from the Bean Road site. Following the closure of the St Thomas Network, Dudley Council became the direct landlord. Due to the uncertainty of the future of the land the Council were not in a position to offer a long term lease. In addition to the uncertainty of the site, St Thomas's was in need of considerable investment in order to improve the premises and services offered. A recent Care Quality Commissioner (CQC) inspection reported the site as 'requires improvement'. Bean Medical Practice will offer a much wider range of enhanced services not currently provided at St Thomas' by male, female and multilingual doctors with a full time nurse.

This application was considered by the CCG, Primary Care Commissioning Committee, held in public session on 20 November 2015 where the application was approved. The practice closed on 18 December 2015 and the registered patients were transferred to Bean Road.

9. **Wordsley Green & Market Street**

Drs Barhey & Partners of Wordsley Green Surgery have applied to close their Market Street branch surgery located at 84 Market Street, Kingswinford. There is one single General Medical Services contract, all patients are therefore already registered with Wordsley Green. Despite the practice making improvements to the site a considerable amount of further investment would still be required to bring it up to modern day practice standards. The Market Street branch is currently unable to offer the full range of medical services that are provided at Wordsley Green. Market Street is approximately 1.2 miles away from Wordsley Green there are approximately 1350 patients who visit the branch site and many of these are accustomed to visiting the main practice to receive the enhanced services that the branch surgery is unable to provide. Wordsley Green has the capacity to accommodate the increase in numbers. For patients who do not wish to visit Wordsley Green there are a number of alternative surgeries in near proximity. The patient and key stakeholder consultation process ended on 29 December. The practice has made a formal application to close on 14 March 2016 this will be considered by the CCG Primary Care Commissioning Committee, held in public session, in accordance with the above policy and regulations.

10. **Lower Gornal Medical Practice and Masefield Road**

Masefield Road is the branch surgery of Lower Gornal Medical Practice who practise from Bull Street, Lower Gornal. The two sites are approximately 1 mile away from each other. Despite investment and a number of efforts being made, the practice feels that they are no longer in a position to offer equitable care across both sites. In order to provide the full range of medical services to its patients and for their services to remain viable the practice are proposing to close the Masefield Road branch. The patient and key stakeholder consultation process ended on 31 December 2015. The practice has made a formal application to close on 1 April 2016 this will be considered by the CCG Primary Care Commissioning Committee, held in public session, in accordance with the above policy and regulations.

11. The CCG has received enquiries from other Dudley practices considering similar proposals. Where a practice premises is owned by NHS Property Services, the closure of a branch surgery and increased use of space at the main site provides a good fit with the CCGs estates strategy, which seeks to consolidate services into fewer premises and reduce the level of void space in NHS-owned buildings. The NHS faces challenging times and this is no different in Dudley with an ageing population, a shortage of GPs and financial constraints. Locally we need to maintain financial stability whilst ensuring we still deliver high quality patient centred care. We are passionate about patients in Dudley having the right care, in the right place and at the right time and we are committed to integrating our services so that care is wrapped around our patients and the GP is the focal point for co-ordinating that care. Only by being innovative and bold in our approach can we ensure that health care remains viable and consistent within Dudley.

Recommendation

12. It is recommended that:-

- The Committee accept the report for assurance that Dudley CCG and its member practices are complying with NHS England policy and regulations.
- The Committee advise Dudley CCG what level of involvement they want in future changes to contractual arrangements regarding mergers and closures.



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Paul Maubach
Chief Officer, Dudley CCG

Contact Officer: Daniel King
Telephone: 01384 321868
Email: Daniel.king@dudleyccg.nhs.uk