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hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk

Stakeholder update – December 2024

Dear stakeholder,

As we come to the end of 2024, we want to express our sincere thanks for your support throughout what has been a year of challenges, opportunities and achievements. Health and care service staff have worked tirelessly to meet rising demand, deliver innovation, and improve patient care.

Our GP practices continue to deliver more appointments to meet increased demand and initiatives such as Pharmacy First and our own blood pressure campaign have improved access to care.

We have been improving access to, and carrying out more diagnostic tests too, increasing the chances of identifying serious illness earlier. Our system has carried out an increasing number of non-urgent procedures and reduced waiting lists overall, all against a 14% rise in A&E attendances. There has also been progress in developments such as the new operating theatres at St Albans City, which will result in shorter waits for non-urgent operations.

Finally, it has been inspiring to see so many teams across our Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the wider system recognised for their excellence this year, and we would like to take this opportunity to extend our thanks to all our staff for the commitment to patient care they demonstrate every day.

Our thanks go to you too, our partners and stakeholders. Your collaboration - whether that's through sharing information, delivering or co-producing services, or offering support - has been invaluable. We look forward to working with you in 2025 but before then, wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year!

Paul's visit to Mount Vernon Cancer Centre

Earlier this month, I was delighted to visit Mount Vernon Cancer Centre in Hillingdon to find out more about the treatment and care that takes place there.



Mount Vernon Cancer Centre provides non-surgical specialist cancer care for patients across Hertfordshire and parts of North and Central London, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and East Berkshire. The main services the centre provides are radiotherapy, including brachytherapy, and systemic anti-cancer therapies, including chemotherapy and immunotherapy.

Caption: Senior therapy radiographer Rupinder Talwar showed me the cutting-edge 'Ethos' imaging machine.

The centre has an excellent reputation, and its staff – employed by East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust - are highly regarded. However, the centre's future has been of growing concern for some years due to the lack of clinical services to support patients who become acutely ill during their cancer treatment, and the age and condition of the buildings, which are leased from a neighbouring NHS Trust. It was clear from my visit and talking to staff that despite their best efforts and the extensive renovation and maintenance work which is currently underway, it can be a daily struggle to continue to deliver excellent care.

NHS England is due to launch a public consultation into the future of specialist cancer services at Mount Vernon next year. The consultation is expected to recommend that services are relocated to a brand new facility at the Watford General hospital site, with satellite radiotherapy services in either Stevenage or Luton.

We will share details of the consultation process in a stakeholder letter as soon as they become available. Getting the consultation process underway soon will mean that when funding does become available, the essential consultation process will not hold up the delivery of a new, fit for purpose building.

ICB Youth Council gets to work

Our Youth Council has been getting to work feeding into a range of campaigns led by system partners.



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Ambassadors meet in term time and have already contributed to projects including creating short videos aimed at improving the experience of young people visiting their GP surgeries. This year we have recruited new Ambassadors and will be increasing the membership in coming months.

The group recently discussed ideas to support Hertfordshire County Council’s campaign to discourage vaping and offered feedback on a self-diagnosis tool to support those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Aspergers and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The group also advised ICB colleagues on ways to attract young people into health and care careers.

Our Ambassadors will next meet in February 2025. If you know a young person aged 12 to 19, living in Hertfordshire or west Essex, who would like to help improve local services and become an ICB Youth Ambassador [email Lauren Oldershaw](mailto:Lauren.Oldershaw@hertfordshire.nhs.uk) from the ICB’s communications and engagement team to find out more.

Jane shares her leadership journey at inclusive career development programme graduation

This month, we celebrated the graduation of 16 colleagues from the seventh cohort of our Inclusive Career Development Programme. This programme supports the career progression of staff from Black, Asian, minority ethnic, and disabled backgrounds across clinical and non-clinical roles.



The graduates presented their service improvement projects, showcasing six months of dedication and learning. Their work will benefit patients, services, and staff across our system. Previous participants have extended their careers through new roles and extensions to current roles as a result of this programme. [Find out more](#) on our website.

Access to local diagnostic tests moves a step closer

Work on the new Community Diagnostic Centre at St Margaret’s Hospital in Epping started in earnest this month.

The centre, which is due to open in December 2025, will provide quicker and more local access to diagnostic tests closer to people’s homes. It will offer extended opening times and more

equipment to support the current additional capacity being provided for MRI scans, X-Rays and non-pregnancy ultrasounds.

Please do read more about the plans on the [Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust website](#).

Hertfordshire domestic abuse inspection findings published

In October, Hertfordshire became the first area to be [inspected under a new framework that focuses on child victims of domestic abuse](#).

Inspectors from the Care Quality Commission, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, Ofsted and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation examined the work that the police, probation services, the NHS and Hertfordshire County Council undertake to help children aged up to seven who are being harmed by the abuse taking place in their homes.

The review, which was published on 12 December, found numerous strengths including how:

- most unborn children and children aged under seven who are victims of domestic abuse receive the right types of multi-agency help and support that they need
- children with different needs receive a wide range of trauma-informed and individualised help and interventions that support them in their recovery
- the family safeguarding service is making a tangible and positive difference to the lives of children aged seven and under and unborn children
- leaders across the partnership in Hertfordshire are committed to working together to improve the support and services for all children who are victims of domestic abuse.

The inspection also identified areas for improvement, including improving the identification of signs of potential harm to children from domestic abuse - and the response to those signs, ensuring that training and learning is put into practice, improving the quality of police referrals and the need for a more consistent multi-agency approach.



We, along with the joint Chairs of the [Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership](#), (left, Joint Chair Prof. Natalie Hammond), welcome the findings of the report. An action plan will be submitted to Ofsted by 11 April 2025.

Help and support is available for anyone who is experiencing, or has been subjected to, domestic abuse or other harmful behaviours. Hertfordshire residents can visit www.hertssunflower.org or call the

Herts Domestic Abuse Helpline on 08 088 088 088 for advice. There is [targeted support available for Essex residents](#) who are victims of domestic violence.

Know where to get help this festive period

In what some are calling a 'quademic,' [NHS services are dealing with challenges on four fronts this winter](#) – with increasing levels of flu, COVID, winter vomiting bugs and respiratory (breathing) illnesses.

Staff will be working over Christmas and New Year to treat everyone who really needs NHS services, but we are calling on everyone in our area to take some simple steps to stay well:

- make sure that you and your family are up to date with flu, COVID, and RSV vaccinations
- treat the norovirus bug that causes sickness and diarrhoea at home with plenty of rest and drinking lots of fluid, frequent hand washing and staying home until you have been clear of symptoms for at least two days
- get medical advice from your local pharmacy when GP practices are closed, or by contacting NHS 111 free for urgent help or if you're unsure. Don't forget the mental health support on offer via NHS 111 – choose option 2 when you get through.

People can also visit a [new online winter health and information hub](#), which has gone live. The hub offers advice on how people can look after themselves and their loved ones over the colder months. It includes information about vaccinations, how to look after your mental health and boost your immunity by eating well and advice on keeping warm.

A printed guide to all these services was distributed to citizens advice bureaux and food banks in the area, so people who are not online can find this information.

Working with our patients to improve NHS services

We are fortunate to have very engaged and committed volunteers, including our Patient Engagement Forum members, who work closely with us to engage with our communities.

Recently forum members met with ICB managers to discuss changes to services for people in south and west Hertfordshire who have musculoskeletal (MSK) problems – conditions that affect bones, soft tissue, muscles, joints or ligaments.

Members were particularly interested in how the recent handover of the contract for delivering these services to a new provider had impacted waiting times, quality of care and patient communications, after local patients contacted them about these issues.



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Commissioning and contract leads from the ICB shared that the new service had faced initial challenges caused by lots of patients transferring from the previous provider, combined with workforce pressures. Since then, the new provider has identified and prioritised urgent patients, authorised paid overtime and recruited to vacant posts.

As a result of actions and oversight from the ICB, waiting times have improved and are in line with national targets, phone calls are answered more quickly and emails are responded to promptly. An app is being developed to help patients manage their appointments. Learning points from the handover process will inform our work in future. Find out more about musculoskeletal services across Hertfordshire and west Essex on the [ICS website](#).

Christmas initiatives from our county councils

Colleagues at Essex County Council have launched a 'Kindness at Christmas' campaign to help tackle loneliness at Christmas. This important campaign aims to reduce social isolation for those who do not have friends and family to spend the festive period with. It will highlight activities, initiatives and events taking place between now and 13 January that Essex residents can attend. There is more information about the campaign on the [County Council's social media accounts, including X](#).

Hertfordshire County Council has put together some tips for a more sustainable festive period, including shopping local, going green with wrapping and reducing food waste. There is [more information on the council website](#).

Yours faithfully,

Dr Jane Halpin
Chief Executive Officer

Hertfordshire and West Essex ICS
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Rt Hon Paul Burstow
Independent Chair

Hertfordshire and West Essex ICS
Chair, Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated
Care Board