

Report for Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel - Tuesday, 7th June 2022

HCRG Health and social care services contract in Bath and North East Somerset not extended

The Governing Body of Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BSW CCG) together with Bath & North East Somerset Council's cabinet agreed during meetings on 27 May not to extend a contract for health and social care services operated by HCRG Care Group.

The seven-year contract, which covers the delivery of 51 health and social care services to residents, was initially awarded to Virgin Care Services Ltd and began in April 2017, with an option for the commissioners to extend the term by three years, taking it to 2026/27.

The BSW CCG Governing Body met on 11 November 2021 and agreed a recommendation for a three-year extension of Virgin Care Services Ltd's joint commission for these services. As this is a joint contract, Bath & North East Somerset Council adopted similar recommendations on the same day.

On 1 December 2021, Virgin Care Services Limited notified BSW CCG and Bath & North East Somerset Council that the business it formed part of had been sold to T20 Pioneer Holdings Limited, which is in turn held by Twenty20 Capital Limited (via another company) (T20).

T20 is a private equity investor. The commissioners were not aware of the potential sale of the provider, prior to making their decisions.

Since the November decision to extend the contract was made on the assumption that the commissioners would continue to deal with the same provider, with the same intentions and risk profile, BSW CCG and the council paused formal confirmation and notification of the extension decision and commissioned an independent review of the implications of these changes to local services.

The content of this independent review highlighted uncertainties arising from the change in ownership of Virgin Care, including ongoing contractual and financial risks, which have now been carefully considered by BSW CCG Governing Body and Bath & North East Somerset Council cabinet at meetings held on 26 May.

Both have agreed not to extend the contract which will now end on 31 March 2024.

Both the CCG and Council have said that the decision offers an opportunity to create a new integrated model for health and social care services for local people which would be commissioned at scale. Other benefits highlighted by the CCG and Council include the opportunity to explore integrating adult social care staff and third sector commissioning back into the council.

BaNES Integrated Care Alliance and Integrated Care System update

The Health and Care Act received Royal Assent in April 2022 with changes coming into force from 1 July 2022.

At the heart of the changes brought about by the Act is the formalisation of integrated care systems (ICSs) and the dissolution of Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs).

Bath and North East Somerset will be part of the Banes, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW) ICS. ICSs are partnerships that bring providers and commissioners of NHS services together with local authorities and other local partners to collectively plan health and care services to meet the needs of their local population. There is a strong emphasis on working collaboratively together, instead of competition.

BSW ICS will be made up of two parts: an integrated care board (ICB) and an integrated care partnership (ICP). ICBs will be tasked with the commissioning and oversight of most NHS services and will be accountable to NHS England for NHS spending and performance. ICPs will bring together a wider range of partners, not just the NHS, to develop a plan to address the broader health, public health, and social care needs of the population. ICSs have the potential to reach beyond the NHS to work alongside local authorities and other partners to address the wider determinants of health. Along with other local authorities in BSW, Bath and North East Somerset Council will be a key partner in this arrangement.

As part of the establishment of the new Integrated Care System at BSW, the Bath and North East Somerset Integrated Care Alliance (ICA) also goes live on 1 July 2022. The BaNES ICA held a development day recently to look at how governance, structure, priorities and key areas will be developed.

Covid update

The pandemic continues to present us with challenges although we have begun to move towards treating Covid-19 as business as usual as much as we can while continuing to keep patients, visitors and staff safe.

Nationally, the NHS threat level in response to Covid-19 has been downgraded following drops in community cases and hospital inpatient numbers from a Level 4 (National) Incident to a Level 3 (Regional) incident.

The NHS needs to remain vigilant, and local systems need to ensure their resilience and capability to re-establish full incident responses in the event this becomes necessary.

Systems have been asked to move resources from focussing on Covid response to a focus on recovery of patient access, outcomes and experience and to reform for the future with integrated care systems.

In recent weeks we have seen the very high numbers of hospital inpatients who have tested positive for Covid begin to decline, along with the number of patients who have Covid as their primary diagnosis, but we continue to monitor trends very closely.

Current guidance for all healthcare settings states that masks must continue to be worn in all areas, unless a room or space has been risk assessed as being 'Covid secure' – this is the case in most staffrooms, meeting rooms and some office spaces. In all clinical areas, waiting areas, open plan office areas in corridors and stairwells, when visiting patient's own homes or in our GP practices, masks must be worn by staff and visitors at all times. Patients are encouraged to wear a mask where clinically appropriate.

National guidance states that social distancing is no longer required in healthcare settings and we are adopting this approach in all areas provided that face masks are worn. One metre is required where face masks are not worn, with 2m distancing required in areas where infectious respiratory patients are cared for.

Strict hand hygiene should be maintained at all times, and everyone should be using the hand gel provided.

Latest figures for our Covid vaccination programme show that in BSW 2,270,000 vaccines have been delivered. In BaNES 173,878 people have received first doses and 166,353 received second doses.

RUH uses latest technology to treat ovarian cancer

The Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust has become one of five trusts in the UK to introduce an innovative piece of equipment used for the targeted removal of cancer cells for patients with ovarian cancer.

The PlasmaJet Ultra is more successful in removing all traces of the tumour than more traditional surgical methods, leading to better patient outcomes.

Some women undergoing surgery for ovarian cancer need to have parts of their bowel removed in order to eradicate the disease. In some cases, this means patients need a stoma and possible further follow-up surgeries.

The PlasmaJet Ultra uses the plasma energy from ionised argon gas to destroy cancer cells safely during surgery. This makes it easier to remove cancer cells from structures such as the bowel and diaphragm, without causing damage to healthy surrounding tissue.

As a result, there may be no need to remove the tissue in these areas, which reduces the impact on a patient's quality of life after their surgery and the amount of time they stay in hospital.