

Somerset Council
Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee
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Somerset Integrated Care System Primary Care Strategy

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1. Summary

1.1. It has become commonplace to refer to a crisis in primary care services. These include GP services, dental, optometry and community pharmacy. People are experiencing a crisis in different ways:

- Patients are often having difficulty accessing services, increasing stress and anxiety and sometimes leading to avoidable suffering.
- Primary care teams are working harder than ever but cannot keep up with demand, making their working days long and stressful.
- 1. Other parts of the health and care system are finding it difficult to achieve what they need because of challenges related to primary care.

These problems have been developing for a long time and the Covid pandemic has exacerbated and exposed deep-seated problems. Policy experts across Europe, the UK and the US all agree that the fundamental problem is a shortage of clinical workforce relative to demand. The clinical workforce capacity in primary care has remained broadly static while demand has risen sharply over the last 15 years. This mismatch between supply and demand then causes various other problems, some of which become symptoms themselves.

In aggregate, primary care services in Somerset, with the exception of dental care, still generally perform well compared to the national average. Many patients are continuing to receive an exemplary service and are sometimes surprised at how quickly and well they are treated. But the overall trend on all the most important measures- continuity of care, patient experience, access- is downward.

This strategy therefore sets out how we will achieve two things:

Provide access to safe, high quality primary care services for the people of Somerset.

Develop a primary care sector that can deliver our shared ambitions as an ICS.

1.2. The primary care strategy shows how our overall Somerset Health and Care Strategy will be delivered through primary care services.

2. Issues for consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1. There are two separate but inter-related issues for the Committee to consider, as set out above. The first is the need to stabilise primary care services and ensure that patients have access to a safe, high-quality service. This is essentially an issue of resilience and sustainability. The second is the need to develop a set of primary care services that can fully deliver our shared ambitions for improved population health. This is essentially a question of transformation and integration.
- 2.2. The Committee is asked to note the primary care strategy and scrutinise delivery of the strategy to ensure that the changes proposed are delivered in a timely fashion and in a way that maximises the benefit to the people of Somerset.

3. Background

- 3.1. One of the first priorities of the new Integrated Care System was to develop a new primary care strategy. National policies including the NHS Long Term Plan and the Fuller Stocktake on the Future of General Practice are all clear that primary care services form the foundation for modern integrated neighbourhood care.
- 3.2. The new primary care strategy forms an important strand of our overall programme to develop integrated neighbourhood care.

4. Consultations undertaken

- 4.1. A comprehensive process of engagement with stakeholders has taken place over the last nine months.
- 4.2. The strategy is also part of the wider engagement with the people of Somerset on the overall Somerset Health and Care Strategy.

5. Implications

- 5.1. Primary care services continue to face significant challenges in Somerset as across the nation. There is a need to stabilise as well as transform.

6. Background papers

- 6.1.** Somerset Primary Care Strategy: [Enc-E-Somerset-ICS-Primary-Care-Strategy-2023-2027-.pdf \(nhssomerset.nhs.uk\)](#)

Note For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author