

Community Bulletin

Issue 5: 03 August 2015

Recommendation on the future of North Tawton Surgery

NHS England is recommending that the surgery at North Tawton be commissioned as the branch of a larger practice from next April, rather than left to stand on its own.

People at a public meeting in the town on 30 July were told this would help ensure that the service remained sustainable for the long term as well as meeting the needs of the community, as gleaned from the responses to a survey in June.

The recommendation will now go for a formal decision by NHS England in the South West during early August.

The survey

As a part of a public engagement programme, survey forms were sent out to all registered patients, as well as being made available to people who go to other surgeries. In addition it was made available to online. A total of 419 survey forms were completed, showing that:

- Most people lived very close to the current surgery, with almost 65% having a journey time of 10 minutes or less and with approximately 47% of people travelling to the surgery on foot
- There was a moderate level of demand for extended-hours appointments, particularly for early weekday mornings and evenings and for Saturday mornings
- Most people were interested in traditional methods of consulting a GP or practice nurse, particularly face-to-face or telephone appointments; there was little interest in using email or Skype for consulting a health professional.
- Access to a GP or practice nurse was seen as important and there was support for an increase in the number of nursing appointments available; there was less of an interest in having the ability to consult other professionals, such as health visitors, or pharmacists
- Access to the same team was seen as very important for people with complex or long-term health problems; regular reviews and specialist knowledge was also seen as important.
- Access to same-day appointments was seen as very important to people with complex or long-term health problems

There were also many broader comments about the need to retain a service in North Tawton

NHS England has looked at the survey responses alongside other information it has drawn together at about service provision in the North Tawton area. As a result, a number of key issues have been identified, which need to be addressed:

- There is no other practice whose boundary covers the whole of the North Tawton area, which means that there is no alternative service for many patients
- Most patients live close to the surgery and alternative services are at least four miles away, which would make them less accessible.
- The pharmacy would be affected if there were no GP service in North Tawton. If the pharmacy were to close this would have an impact on patient access to services. The nearest other pharmacy is in Okehampton, seven miles away.
- The population of North Tawton is projected to grow over the next few years. A development of 60 new homes is already under construction. West Devon District Council has also identified further land for development on the site of the former woollen mill. This is likely to include the building of new homes, as determined in line with Neighbourhood Plan which is currently being developed by North Tawton Town Council.
- The practice population is small - just over 2,000 - which means that it is unlikely to be financially attractive to other providers as a standalone surgery
- A small standalone contract is also unlikely to be able to sustain the wider range of services or extended-access arrangements that are envisaged across the NHS. It is also worth bearing in mind that many small practices across Devon and Cornwall are struggling with recruitment and retention of GPs and with covering of periods of absence.
- The current practice premises are restricted and not suitable for use as main surgery. There are no other suitable premises in the town, so the alternative would be a new build. This may not be seen as value for money due to the small number of patients.

Why a branch surgery?

The designation of North Tawton as a branch surgery would:

- Meet the needs of the local population by retaining a service in the town
- Ensure that the patients still had local access to a pharmacy
- Be in proportion with service provision for a small rural population
- Provide greater resilience by being linked to a larger practice
- Enable a wider range of services to be offered as a part of the bigger practice
- Increase patient choice in terms of where they access services. People live in a wider area than North Tawton and some may find it more convenient to use the other sites. This would be in line with the NHS Five-Year Forward view – the national blueprint for development.

How it would work

If approved, NHS England would tender for a provider to offer a weekday service in North Tawton, involving a combination of GP and nurse appointments. The provider would also be expected to offer extended-hours appointments at North Tawton.

In addition, the provider would be able to supplement provision at North Tawton with services at its main site(s).

In order to put patients at the heart of decision-making, the provider would be expected to consult with its Patient Participation Group about opening times, appointment arrangements and availability of services at North Tawton.

Timeline

Invitation to tender	Early September 2015
Deadline for submission	Early October
Evaluation	Early to mid-October
Formal decision made	November
New service goes live	1 April 2016

For further information

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