

Access to GP Appointments Task and Finish Review Group.

Friday, 17th January 2014 at 10.00am, Committee Room 3.

Present: - Councillor Newall (in the Chair); Councillors Donoghue, Francis, Macnab, H. Scott and J. Taylor.

Jenny Chapman MP and Kath Maccoll and Andrea Goldie, Healthwatch, Darlington.

Abbie Metcalfe, Democratic Officer.

Apologies: - Councillors Nutt, E. A. Richmond and S. Richmond.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations reported to the meeting.

2. Information sharing with Jenny Chapman MP

Jenny Chapman MP reported that she started asking questions about access to GP appointments following a personal experience and wondered whether other people were encountering similar difficulties. Mrs Chapman tweeted asking people to contact her on Facebook to share their experiences of accessing GP appointments in Darlington and was very surprised at the dozens of responses. They ranged from older people and carers to forces personnel and people living in Darlington who work out of town. Selections of anonymous case studies were tabled at the meeting. As a result, Mrs Chapman made enquiries with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and local GPs. She added that some issues related to people using Accident and Emergency Department (A&E) if they were unable to get an appointment with their GP.

Mrs Chapman advised she had met with Martin Philips, Darlington CCG and acknowledged that the CCG don't have 'that' many levers to pull in relation to GP Practices, due to them being independent and businesses in their own right. She added that she had also visited three/four GP surgeries and met with staff from the Practices. Mrs Chapman had also met with Michelle Thompson, Darlington Healthwatch and shared her concerns highlighting also the need to education the population and scope to change the availability of appointments.

Members discussed the visits to the GP Practices they carried out and reported back some of the comments received, including; a feeling of work being duplicated by the Scrutiny Committee and the local MP; frustrations over patients who do not attend appointments; high level of stress Practice Managers appear to be under; use of 0845 telephone number; 111 triage system and Urgent Care Centre often referring patients to GP Practices that are unnecessary and how patients could be better educated as to

when it is necessary to visit the GP. Members also shared with Mrs Chapman the feedback gathered at the GOLD Tea Dance in August 2013.

Discussion ensued on the following issues:-

- The ever changing NHS and the consideration of the patient journey, the need to focus more on improving the patients journey for all and in particular the vulnerable groups.
- The Differences between rural and urban GP Practices in relation to the appointments systems and availability of appointments.
- The use of Pharmacies and promotion about the services that are offered, which would reduce the need and reliance on GP appointments.
- Unnecessary use of GP appointments and whether anything, other than educating the public could be done about this.
- The problems in A&E as a result of people not being able to get an appointment with their GP which has an impact on waiting times and patients that really do need to be treated in A&E.
- The role of the Nurse Practitioners and how some GP Practices use them more than others and whether recruiting more Nurse Practitioners would be beneficial.
- Whether telephone triage was a viable option. The Chair explained about a GP Practice in Middlesbrough that uses a system where GPs triage patients and only book appointments to see patients after they have assessed them over the telephone. This approach relied upon all the GPs within the Practice being on-board and an initial set cost of £10k. None of the GP Practices in Darlington seemed to be keen to pilot this.

Members discussed the impact of a high number of GPs approaching retirement age and whether there are enough GPs within Darlington to meet the increasing population numbers and demand. Members also acknowledged that the formulation of the CCG encouraged GP involvement and therefore many Senior GP partners are called away from the Practice to be involved in commissioning and service design discussions, which impacts on the availability of GP appointments. Members highlighted that work of Dr Steel in relation to developing the Primary Care Strategy and Dr Mathieson's work on Urgent Care services relocation and expressed concerns as to whether other GPs were supportive of such work.

Mrs Chapman and Members acknowledged that patients behaviour have created a demand for an unsustainable service and believed that patient behaviours and culture needed to be changed. Members accepted that work was being done to educate patients about the unnecessary use of GP appointments and access to NHS services both locally and national and that it absorbs a lot of time and energy promoting leaflets and campaigns.

Consideration was given to different ways that GPs appointments could be made available; for example; running an after school surgery specifically for children, making available more flexible appointments for working people and home visits being carried out earlier in the day. Members added that the also needed to be a culture change for GPs too and embrace working early mornings, evenings and weekends. The meeting agreed the need to support the CCG in tackling this issue, while maintaining a positive relationship with them and ensuring that Darlington residents received a good high quality service.

Members discussed repeating the questionnaire they carried out in the summer at the GOLD Tea Dance to compare results, following the number of recent anecdotes various Members have shared with the Task and Finish Group. Andrea Goldie reported a snapshot of the findings from the 'How was it for you?' General Health Survey Healthwatch have been running, advising that there were both positive and negative feedback. Particular issues included the use of Dr Piper House, Urgent Care Centre instead of the GP surgeries; frustrations with gatekeeping reception staff and the belief the GPs operate an outdated and automated appointments system. Ms Goldie committed to sharing the raw data and comments to the Democratic Officer from the survey.

Members discussed developing a survey and requesting support and questions from the GP Practices to gather further evidence to submit to the CCG and to inform their recommendations. Mrs Chapman and Ms Goldie supported the idea of a survey and offered their support and commitment to share the survey using social media as far and wide as possible. Mrs Chapman suggested approaching Teesside University to make use of their expertise in formulating a survey and analysis afterwards and Ms Goldie shared ideas in relation to using survey monkey and Twitter. Members discussed how various groups could be targeted such as Nurseries, older people, child minders, etc and using as many of the Councils methods of communication as possible to distribute the survey as far and wide.

Agreed –

- a) That Jenny Chapman MP be thanked for her attendance at the meeting and for the information received.
- b) That a survey be developed with support from Jenny Chapman MP and in partnership with Healthwatch Darlington.
- c) That a letter be sent to all GP Practices in Darlington thanking them for their support so far and requesting suggested questions to be included in a survey.

- d) That a copy of the letter be sent to Darlington CCG and copied to Healthwatch Darlington and Jenny Chapman MP.
- e) That Jenny Chapman MP also write to the GP Practice Managers thanking them for their support and requesting their continued support and encouraging them to continue to be engaged .
- f) That Kath Maccoll on behalf of Jenny Chapman MP approach Teesside University seeking support for developing the survey.
- g) That Members submit their suggestions for questions to be included in the survey to the Democratic Officer.