

## Update Report for Kent HOSC November 2022

<b>Date:</b>	30 <sup>th</sup> November 2022
<b>Title Report:</b>	Provision of Ophthalmology Services (Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley)
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<b>Summary:</b>	
<p>Moorfields Eye Hospital served notice in February 2020 on the Kent and Medway system of their intent to discontinue providing ophthalmology services from Darent Valley Hospital leading to the former CCG having to identify a new Provider at pace and putting in place measures to facilitate the safe and effective transfer of patients during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>This paper sets out the steps that are being taken by the Integrated Care Board to identify a permanent solution that would enable the re-provision of some acute ophthalmology services within the footprint of Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley.</p>	
<b>Overview:</b>	
<p>The majority of ophthalmology patients within Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley (DGS) are seen within the local community service without onward referral into secondary care. In 2020/21, 83% of patients have been treated within this service through a Consultant-led “triage and treat” model, which ensures that patients are seen expediently and are triaged into the most appropriate setting of care.</p> <p>Acute ophthalmology services are now provided by Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust (MTW), who took on the role of providing those services. The ICB remains grateful that they stepped in and took on this role following Moorfields Eye Hospital serving notice on their contract and stopped supplying services from the Darent Valley Hospital (DVH) site. The transfer of patients was a significant undertaking and led to significant operational pressures for MTW and it provides a positive reflection on the Trust that this was done in a safe and effective manner. At the time, MTW were unable to commit to provide services from the DVH site due to workforce issues recognising that services were already delivered over multiple sites for West Kent also Medway patients.</p> <p>Dialogue have been on-going with Dartford &amp; Gravesham NHS Trust regarding the possibility of providing space for ophthalmology outpatient services and surgical procedures to be re-provided on the DVH site. The space that was originally used by Moorfields has been re-allocated and it is not currently possible to re-provide that space without having an impact on clearing the backlog that has arisen as a result of the pandemic. Moreover, the unprecedented levels of demand arising from non-elective admissions has led to outpatient space being temporarily converted to bedded escalation areas on a number of occasions this year and it is likely that the temporary re-purposing of outpatient space for escalation beds will continue in line with surges in demand. It is not realistic that any space</p>	

can be provided on the DVH site for the foreseeable future.

In order to provide the additional activity arising from MTW taking on the previous activity from MEH, additional theatre space was commissioned from the independent sector, whereby NHS staff operate on patients at an independent facility in Gillingham. This arrangement has ring fenced theatre space specifically for ophthalmology patients, who may have been at risk of cancelled procedures or a longer wait if that activity had taken place at an acute hospital where consideration is given to treating those with the highest level of clinical need first. Whilst this arrangement has led to patients having to travel, they undoubtedly have been treated much sooner than if they would have otherwise been operated on at a NHS site.

The Integrated Care Board (ICB) has worked with MTW to identify solutions to enable the re-provision of some ophthalmology activity within the footprint of Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley (DGS). The ICB identified an existing NHS site that could be re-purposed and obtained capital funding that would have enabled a new ophthalmology centre to have opened, which would have provided both an ophthalmic theatre and some outpatient rooms. However, MTW were unable to proceed as a result of concerns at the time that they would not be able to staff the facility. The ICB is working with MTW to re-examine whether that concern is still valid now that 6 months have passed since. MTW is working with the ICB to identify a permanent solution to securing the theatre capacity needed for the medium to long term. Work is also underway to consider the future provision of outpatients at a sub speciality level with the aim to provide high volume services, such as glaucoma, locally.

Kent & Medway ICB have developed an Ophthalmology Strategy that outlines the ambition to redesign models of care, which will enable more patients to be seen within community settings. Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley have comparatively fewer community Providers than other parts of Kent and Medway and recent market testing has indicated that there are many potential Providers who could provide community services within North Kent. K&M Ophthalmology Service Improvement Group are developing full models of care for each tier of service delivery and it is anticipated that a procurement exercise will follow the completion of that transformative work. The aim is to utilise the wide range of existing skilled workforce in primary & community care; for example, many Optometrists on the high street have extensive equipment that can be utilised within a commissioned service that will support acute services and reduce the need for patients to travel to main acute sites. Digital technology is enabling much more shared care and virtual consultations, based on the diagnostics done in primary care a consultant can provide treatment plans without seeing the patient face to face. This will not only improve both the patient pathway and accessibility, it will also reduce the footfall through the acute sites and improve capacity for the more complex patients.

**Commentary:**

The commitment remains to ensure that some ophthalmology outpatient provision is re-provided within the footprint of Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley. However, this can only realistically be achieved through identifying an estates solution, securing the capital funding required and through securing the commitment of MTW to provide those services, whilst acknowledging that securing the workforce to do so will be a challenge. All relevant endeavours are being undertaken to take this forward.

The use of Independent Sector theatre capacity has minimised the impact of the pandemic on the waiting list size for ophthalmology patients. Trends seen around the country show that ophthalmology has been the most challenged specialty for having an increased backlog arising from the pandemic. However, it is acknowledged that the current solution is not viable in the longer term. Nonetheless, providing theatre capacity at an existing acute hospital will reduce the overall capacity in the system to provide theatre capacity for other procedures, which will impact on the imperative to reduce the backlog for elective procedures, which could take several years to return to pre-pandemic levels. Work is on-going to identify what site options exist, which includes re-evaluating whether it would now be viable to provide an ophthalmology centre within the site that was identified previously.

**Recommendation:**

The members of the HOSC are asked to note the challenges faced in securing a longer term solution that would enable the re-provision of acute ophthalmology services within the footprint of Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley, as well as the commitment from both the ICB and MTW to agree a solution.