

Deal Community Phlebotomy Service

Background

Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust (KCHFT) gave notice of its phlebotomy services operating from Victoria Hospital, Deal - with the service ending on 31 October 2021.

As general practice was already contracted to provide blood testing, the decision was taken to work with existing practices in Deal to deliver sufficient capacity for all needs of their patients from 1 November 2021. The new service was consulted with the local population but the removal of the service from Deal Hospital was not consulted with as it didn't meet the threshold for public consultation. Lessons were learned regarding how the change was communicated.

In February 2022, NHS Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group received a petition on the issue. At the time of receipt, the petition had received over 2,000 paper signatures and 1,300 online signatures. The petition read: "We the undersigned demand the reinstatement of the Phlebotomy Service to ensure all residents of Deal and District, especially the ill, vulnerable, elderly, disabled, carers and young, have their blood tests **LOCALLY** and in a **TIMELY** manner."

In addition to the petition, Natalie Elphicke, the then local MP, launched an engagement exercise on 28 February 2022 seeking feedback from residents. An online and paper-based survey was open until late April 2022. The survey received 3,200 responses and a full report was produced.

From July 2022, members of NHS Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board's (ICB) Executive Team met Natalie Elphicke, local councillors and campaigners to work in collaboration to resolve any further concerns. During this period, a three-month review plan was completed by the ICB. The plan focussed on the themes of access, care, and patient satisfaction. In developing the plan, all Deal practices undertook a patient engagement exercise to ascertain actual patient experience. The feedback was positive, albeit with some areas of focus for improvement.

The ICB has also attended Dover District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure it is kept apprised of progress.

In September 2022, a 'Proposal for a Phlebotomy Service at Deal Hospital' was developed by the Blood Service Health Action Group and presented to the ICB. The proposal recommended that East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust (EKHUFT) should provide a service six days a week at Deal Hospital, with staffing provided by Buckland Hospital as a pilot for a period of 12 months.

NHS Kent and Medway ICB gave due consideration to the pilot scheme proposal, which included sharing with EKHUFT for comments, and identified a third party to undertake an independent review of the concerns raised in relation to access to timely blood tests in

Deal. The independent review was completed by Bexley Health Neighbourhood Care, which concluded that there were several positive outcomes following the service changes, with some further recommendations, which could enhance the current service offer.

As part of this review, Natalie Elphicke, MP, met KCHFT to discuss reinstating phlebotomy at Victoria Hospital, in view of the site becoming a community diagnostic hub. KCHFT responded with a costed proposal. In addition, EKHUFT also responded to the pilot developed by Deal and Surrounding Area Health Action Team with a revised cost proposal.

The ICB considered the proposal presented by Blood Service Health Action Group and the proposals from EKHUFT and KCHFT and concluded that, despite patients accessing phlebotomy five days a week AM and PM, and an upward trajectory of growth in phlebotomy activity in general practice, which correlates with a reduction in the number of patients being bled in secondary care, a formal procurement of a Deal Community Phlebotomy Service should be undertaken. The service would focus on the following groups as identified by the Deal and Surrounding Area Health Action Team:

- fasting
- urgent
- difficult venipuncture
- pre-chemotherapy requests
- glucose tolerance testing
- children aged between five and 16.

Procurement routes explored

In November 2023, the ICB approved a request for quotation (RFQ) process to be undertaken for a Deal Community Phlebotomy Service. However, the process was abandoned as all bidders withdrew from the process.

In March 2024, the ICB approved a competitive process to be undertaken for a Deal Community Phlebotomy Service. The service aimed to supplement the existing phlebotomy service in primary care. Patients would be directed or signposted to the service from primary care and/or secondary care, as per the service specification. It took into consideration the priority groups identified in the 'Proposal for a Phlebotomy Service at Deal Hospital' developed by Deal and Surrounding Area Health Action Team on 29 September 2022.

Unfortunately, the procurement was unsuccessful as no bidder met the mandated minimum threshold.

As previous procurement routes had been unsuccessful, the ICB's Procurement Team, Arden & Gem (AGEM) advised that the ICB could consider the following the recommendations:

1. Re-advertise the Deal Community Phlebotomy Service

2. Award the service under a Contract Modification to an existing contract holder.

Next steps

The ICB is proceeding with option two. This is a compliant route under the Provider Selection Regime (PSR). The PSR allows for certain modifications to be made to services during the term of a contract without a new provider selection process taking place. While this is an option, it is dependent on existing providers' capacity and willingness to modify contracts.

This option allows the ICB the opportunity to modify an existing contract without undertaking a new provider selection process. Modifying a contract can be quicker and less costly than a full procurement process, which involves advertising, evaluating bids, and onboarding a new provider.

The ICB has considered possible providers that hold a current phlebotomy contract, and which could be offered the service and is currently engaging with them.

Appendix A Procurement timeline overview

First Procurement – Request for Quotation (RFQ)		
Procurement Activity	Date	Comments
RFQ published	27 November 2023	
Deadline for Bidder clarification queries	11 December 2023	
Evaluation & approval	19 December 2023 – 12 January 2024	
Supplier withdrawal	12 January 2024	Supplier comments: “Thank you for inviting us to bid for the Deal community phlebotomy service contract. However, we regret to inform you that we are withdrawing our application to provide this service. At this time, we have conflicting priorities which require our attention and unfortunately providing the Phlebotomy service no longer compliments these work streams”.
Procurement Team (AGEM) contacted all organisations who expressed an interest in the procurement but subsequently declined to participate	15 January 2024 – 31 January 2024	
Procurement Team (AGEM) and ICB determined next steps to pursue a contract award	17 January 2024	Agreed approach: Competitive Process under Provider Selection Regime (PSR) Regulations. This invited a wider pool to organisations to bid.
Preparation and approval of ITT documents for second procurement	February 2024 to March 2024	Internal governance delay in getting the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) approved.
Second Procurement – Invitation to Tender (ITT)		
Procurement Activity	Date	Comments
ITT published	5 April 2024	
Deadline for Bidder clarification queries	19 April 2024	
Submission deadline	3 May 2024	
Evaluation & approval	6 May 2024 – 17 May 2024	
Contract Award Competitive Process Outcome Report (signed by SS and ND)	29 May 2025	
General Election	22 May to 8 July 2024	Pre-election period. All further procurement activities were suspended until post the election.
Notification of Outcome Letter (AGEM)	10 September 2024	Confirmation of unsuccessful bids

Formal non-award notice in FTS to inform the market of the outcome of the Procurement (AGEM)	10 September 2024	
Engagement with Procurement Team (AGEM) to determine options to pursue a contract award.	October 2024	
Third Procurement – Contract Modification		
Procurement Activity	Date	Comments
Executive agreement of next steps re Deal Procurement	November 2024	Agreement of contract modification. This is a compliant route under the Provider Selection Regime (PSR). The PSR allows for certain modifications to be made to services during the term of a contract without a new provider selection process taking place.
Meeting with suppliers	December 2024	

Appendix B Activity data

GP Practice	List Size (2021/22)	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	AVG no. bleeds
Balmoral Surgery	12156	589	518	528	592	570	651	641	626	531	697	594.3
St Richard's Road Surgery	10229	440	705	660	519	736	575	659	753	814	509	637
The Cedars Surgery	10794	782	497	568	731	614	637	685	781	738	722	675.5
Manor Road Surgery/New Golf Road Surgery	2397	65	110	104	120	179	162	145	165	155	178	138.3
TOTAL	35576	1876	1830	1860	1962	2099	2025	2130	2325	2238	2106	2045.1

GP Practice	List Size (2021/22)	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	AVG no. bleeds	% Growth
Balmoral Surgery	12156	907	665	825	737	536	620	704	650	677	605	692.6	17%
St Richard's Road Surgery	10229	802	643	784	836	779	852	784	670	874	580	760.4	19%
The Cedars Surgery	10794	790	674	915	843	750	927	779	779	830	747	803.4	19%
Manor Road Surgery/New Golf Road Surgery	2397	158	154	207	183	144	196	208	191	202	139	178.2	29%
TOTAL	35576	2657	2136	2731	2599	2209	2595	2475	2290	2583	2071	2434.6	19%

- The table shows the number of blood tests completed between November 2021 and August 2022 and November 2023 to August 2024. The months selected are identical to account for seasonal trends in phlebotomy activity.
- The period of November 2021 to August 2022 is representative of the period post cessation of the Phlebotomy Service at Victoria Hospital, Deal (service ended 31 October 2021). The period of November 2023 to August 2024 is representative of general practice continually increasing capacity to meet demand for blood tests two years after the cessation of the Phlebotomy Service at Victoria Hospital, Deal.
- The average number of blood tests completed per month by the four Deal practices is as follows:
 - 2045 blood tests (Nov 21 to Aug 22)
 - 2435 blood tests (Nov 23 to Aug 24)
 - This is an average monthly increase of 399 blood tests. A total increase of additional 3895 over the 10-month period (extrapolated to a 12m period: 4674) and represents 19% growth in the number of blood tests being delivered locally.

Appendix C - Comparison table between historic and new phlebotomy arrangements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victoria Hospital, Deal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Practices in Deal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational hours of service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monday to Friday, 07:30 to 13:00. • A total of 25 hours per week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monday to Friday, AM and PM with hours ranging from 12.5 to 32.5 hours per week. • Collectively the four practices deliver 83.5 hours of blood tests per week. • All hours are subject to change based on demand and capacity. Workforce is undertaken in line with +/- activity growth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing appointments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients were able to book blood tests via the telephone Monday to Friday, 08:00 to 16:00. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients can book a blood test via the telephone or, in three practices, via an electronic booking service. The 4th practice has expressed an interest in developing an electronic booking service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The KCHFT workforce consisted of a 0.67 whole time equivalent (WTE) at Agenda for Change Band 2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workforce consists of phlebotomists, practice nurses and, on occasion, General Practitioners who all take blood samples. Due to the varied nature of clinical activity a WTE count cannot be quantified but far exceeds 0.67.