

**Agenda Item Number – 9.0**

**Report Title:** STW ICB Report to Telford & Wrekin Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) – Primary Care Access in Telford and Wrekin, March 2025

**Meeting Name:** Telford & Wrekin Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB)

**Meeting Date:** 20th March 2025

**Report Presented by:** Liz Walker Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board (STW ICB), Head of Primary Care and PCN Development

**Report Approved by:** Liz Walker, Head of Primary Care

**Report Prepared by:** Primary Care Team, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board (STW ICB)

**Action Required:** For discussion and assurance

**Primary Care Access in Telford and Wrekin – Report to Health and Wellbeing Board, Telford and Wrekin.**

**1.1 Purpose**

Following the report to HWB on findings from the Healthwatch GP Access Survey Report (September 2024) this report outlines planning and actions taken by STW ICB, to improve primary care access across Telford & Wrekin.

**1.2 Executive Summary**

The Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin GP Access Survey gathered 9,200 patient responses, highlighting concerns regarding appointment access, long waiting times, difficulties in contacting surgeries, and limited non-urgent appointment availability.

In response, STW ICB has initiated several improvements, including:

- Updating the Joint Forward Plan which includes access in primary care. In 25/26 we intend to develop a comprehensive Primary care strategy in collaboration with all four pillars of primary care (general practice, community pharmacy, optometry and dentistry).
- Enhanced community engagement, including Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) and social media campaigns to promote access to services at the right place and alternatives to general practice e.g. community pharmacy 'Pharmacy First' scheme.
- Service accessibility improvements, including upgraded phone systems and expanded appointment options.
- Identification of priority practices for improvement to align GP access with patient needs.



**Ambition**



**Compassion**



**Optimism**



**Focus**

- Direct support for practices through practice visits, quality visits, and data-driven interventions.

### 1.3 Recommendations

The HWB is requested to:

- Note the ongoing initiatives to improve patient access to primary care services within Telford and Wrekin.
- Endorse continued collaboration between the ICB, GP practices, and community stakeholders to enhance service efficiency and access to primary care services.
- Acknowledge that the ICB will continue to work with Healthwatch to address the concerns highlighted within their report.

### 1.4 Conflicts of Interest

There are no declared conflicts of interest related to this report.

### 1.5 Links to the System Board Assurance Framework (SBAF)

The report aligns with key SBAF risks related to primary care access, patient experience, and workforce sustainability. Actions outlined contribute to mitigating access challenges and ensuring patient-centred service delivery.

### 1.6 Alignment to Integrated Care Board (ICB) Goals

The report aligns with ICB priorities, including:

- Improving primary care access through operational efficiency.
- Enhancing patient engagement to shape service improvements
- Ensuring workforce sustainability by addressing staffing constraints in GP practices.
- Providing direct practice support through targeted interventions.

### 1.7 Key Considerations

- **Quality and Safety:** Addressing access concerns improves patient care and safety.
- **Financial Implications:** Investment in phone systems, workforce, and digital services.
- **Workforce Implications:** Additional staffing to manage appointment demand.
- **Risks and Mitigations:** Risk of patient dissatisfaction mitigated through targeted interventions.
- **Engagement:** Ongoing collaboration with PPGs, patients, and practices.
- **Supporting Data and Analysis:** Healthwatch survey data, QPC reports, and ongoing trend monitoring.
- **Legal, Regulatory, and Equality:** Compliance with NHS England primary care standards.

### 1.8 Impact Assessments

- Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been undertaken? **N/A**
- Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been undertaken? **N/A**



Ambition



Compassion



Optimism



Focus

## 2. Main Report - Primary Care Access in Telford and Wrekin, March 2025

### 2.1 Introduction

Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ICB acknowledge the content of the published Healthwatch report based on patient feedback and continues to work collaboratively to improve primary care access within Telford and Wrekin. This report provides an update on GP access survey findings and ICB actions and plans to address patient access.

### 2.2 Background

The Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin GP Access Survey collected 9,200 responses, identifying:

- Difficulties securing appointments
- Long waiting times
- Challenges in contacting surgeries by phone
- Limited pre-bookable options for non-urgent care

### 2.3 ICB Actions in Response

#### 2.3.1 Joint Forward Plan and Related Strategies

The Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin (STW) Integrated Care System (ICS) has developed a **Joint Forward Plan (JFP)** and several supporting strategies that influence, but do not specifically focus on, primary care. A key priority for 2025/26 is the development of a **Primary Care Strategy** to address specific challenges and opportunities in this sector. Current strategic priorities include:

- **Preventive care** to reduce avoidable demand.
- **Enhanced service accessibility** through coordinated system-wide strategies.
- **Supporting workforce sustainability** within primary care.

#### 2.3.2 ICB Support for Practices

The ICB is actively supporting practices through:

- Monitoring access trends which are reported to Quality and Performance Committee to identify practices needing targeted support.
- Workforce recruitment and retention efforts, including a 100% GP recruitment rate using additional national funding via ARRS roles in all nine Primary Care Networks (PCNs) since October 2024, increasing capacity and patient access.
- Funding GP lead roles and other clinical positions to enhance support and development across the workforce.
- Practice visits and quality visits to incorporate GP access and patient feedback and provide targeted support to practices.

#### 2.3.3 Community Engagement

- Engagement with patients, staff, and voluntary sectors to guide improvements.
- Promotion of PPGs for better patient input in service design.

- Media campaigns to promote patients accessing care at the most appropriate location including promotion of role of community pharmacy and pharmacy first.

### **2.3.4 Service Accessibility Improvements**

- Enhancements in appointment scheduling.
- Upgraded phone systems to reduce congestion.
- Expansion of primary care roles beyond GPs.
- Streamlined triage and booking processes.
- Online booking and e-consultations
- Use of NHS app
- Adoption of MDT (multidisciplinary team) approaches to improve patient access and care.

### **2.3.5 Alternative Access Models and multidisciplinary primary care teams**

- Utilisation of ARRS roles (Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme) to expand patient access. This includes a variety of clinical staff including GPs, nurses, clinical pharmacists, paramedics, physiotherapists and mental health practitioners
- Pharmacy First initiatives to provide alternative care options.
- PCNs supporting patient redirection to other primary care professionals.

## **2.4 Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP) and Modern General Practice (2025/2026)**

### **2.4.1 Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP)**

PCARP is a national initiative designed to:

- Reduce patient waiting times and improve appointment availability.
- Increase the use of digital triage and online consultations to enhance efficiency.
- Provide targeted investment to support struggling GP practices.
- Expand multidisciplinary team roles to reduce GP workload and improve patient experience.

### **2.4.2 Modern General Practice Model**

The modern general practice model aims to:

- Improve patient flow and triage processes, ensuring timely access to care.
- Strengthen digital healthcare services, including remote consultations and e-consult access to practices.
- Improve telephone and digital access to practices.
- Integrate primary care with wider community services for holistic patient support.
- Enhance workforce development, including new training and career pathways for clinicians.

2.4.5 NHS STW is working with general practices to improve access in line with NHSE guidance and the local STW System Access Improvement Plan.

This includes parity of access for patients via phone, online and face to face contact by improving phone functionality, managing demand and capacity and moving towards a



modern general access model. Improved care navigation is key which includes signposting patients to the most appropriate care and ensuring that patients know on the day how their request will be handled and that they receive the care they need. It can be demonstrated that there have been significant improvements made by practices across the county in both the first and second years of the PCARP program.

Appointment numbers have increased, different staff are available to patients and patients can use different ways of accessing and managing their care.

## **2.5 Current position in Telford and Wrekin**

- Appointment data shows that there are more appointments in General Practice (GP) now than pre-pandemic - an increase of 15%.
- In December 2024, 65% of patients were seen face-to-face, 59% of patients in T&W were seen same day/next day. (Target 54%)
- In December 2022, GP provided 230,379 appointments increasing to 237,206 in December 2024, an increase of 3%
- 89% T&W patients are seen within two weeks. (Target 88%)
- All practices have enabled patients' prospective access to their GP records.
- All practices have moved to cloud-based digital telephony and offer access through online consultation and booking alongside phone and face-to-face access.
- All practices offer patient online registration.
- We continue to encourage PCN and practice sign-up to the national GP Support Offer. A local offer is also available with flexibility to meet practice needs.
- PCN estates plans have been finalised and conclusions have been fed into the system-level infrastructure plan ahead of the 2025 Spending Review. This recognises the premises constraints practices may have in offering more appointments against practice size and future expected growth and prioritises investment.
- All community pharmacies across STW are signed up to the Pharmacy First scheme . In T&W GPs referred 3,463 patients to pharmacies for Pharmacy First pathways and minor illness between April 24 and Jan 25, exceeding national targets. This demonstrates how practices are working collaboratively with community pharmacies to improve primary care access. Referrals continue to grow month on month.

## **2.5 Next Steps:**

### **2.5.1 Self-Referral Pathways**

This is an area for focus in 25/26. Self-referral pathways will allow patients direct access to several services without the need for GP referral. This will promote the relationship and interface between Primary and Secondary services to facilitate easier patient journeys for our population and reduce need for unnecessary GP attendance.

### **2.5.2 Working with Healthwatch - Individual Practice Reports**

Healthwatch Telford & Wrekin will produce GP practice-specific reports detailing:

- Appointment accessibility trends.

- Practice-specific performance analysis.
- Patient feedback.

We have recently recruited a Primary Care Partnership Lead for Telford and Wrekin practices who will work with partners to address the concerns raised within the Healthwatch report

### **2.5.3 Practice & PPG Collaboration**

- Development of action plans with GP practices and PPGs.
- Support for establishing PPGs where absent.
- Best practice sharing from high-performing surgeries.

**2.5.4 ICB** to ensure continued monitoring of access data at practice and PCN level, offering targeted support where practices are falling below national access targets.

### **2.6 Conclusion**

By implementing national and local plans, STW ICB remains committed to working with our providers to improve GP and wider primary care access, supporting practices, and ensuring a fair and responsive primary care system in Telford & Wrekin.

