

Emergency Temporary Relocation of Warren Farm Urgent Treatment Centre - January 2024

Background

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) is the lightweight concrete which was used in the construction of many buildings between the 1950s and 1990s. It is highly aerated with different material properties to conventional concrete, and is susceptible to deterioration over time leading to structural issues compromising the safety and longevity of buildings.

The presence of RAAC has been confirmed in a range of public sector properties across the UK, including in the roof of Warren Farm Health Centre (WFHC) in Kingstanding, Birmingham.

Consequently, since 2020 WFHC has been part of the NHS's national RAAC programme, which has seen NHS Property Services – the landlords of WFHC - undertaking regular structural surveys and risk assessments, while putting in place appropriate measures and remedial work to ensure the site is safe to occupy in the short-term.

This has been carried out under the scrutiny and the oversight of NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (BSol ICB), which is responsible for commissioning Urgent Treatment Centre services run from the premises.

Due to the extensive nature of RAAC at WFHC, all services previously run from WFHC have been permanently relocated to other sites, and Warren Farm Urgent Treatment Centre (WF UTC) is the last and only remaining service to operate at the facility.

Furthermore, due to the extent of RAAC at WFHC and its associated risk to the building's structure, staying on site brings potential risk of having to close the site without notice if future inspections highlight imminent danger or potential structural damage occurs making it unsafe to continue to use.

Therefore to ensure the safety of WF UTC staff and patients, it is no longer viable to continue delivering WF UTC services from this facility.

On 21st November 2023, a paper was presented to Birmingham City Council's Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HASC) setting out the above, along with a number of proposed options for the relocation of WF UTC. The paper also set out that plans were afoot to carry out a full and comprehensive engagement and consultation programme to take place in 2024 with local communities and wider stakeholders on the proposed options for relocation before a final decision was to be made on the new location for WF UTC.

During and post this meeting, members of HASC requested consideration was given to amending the options to ascertain the potential to relocate WF UTC to the High Street in Erdington given it will enable the service to move without affecting any other UTCs and enabling a rapid move, to a site only 3 miles from current location.

Next Steps

Since the HASC meeting on 21st November, concern grows regarding the structural stability of WFHC and added risk of heavy rain or snowfall and the porous nature of RAAC.

Therefore, BSol ICB has taken the decision to instigate an emergency process to temporarily relocate WF UTC for up to 12 months in order to safeguard ICB's number one priority – its patients and staff.

WF UTC will move on a temporary basis to vacant space at: 1st Floor, Erdington Health and Well Being Centre (EHWBC), High Street, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 6SJ, (subject to contract).

BSol ICB has undertaken a number of steps to assure itself of its due diligence in reaching this decision, including:

- Procurement of independent legal advice;
- Conducting a scoping exercise to evaluate suitable available space - inclusive of a Quality Equality Impact Assessment to ensure this temporary site meets NHS England guidance;
- Consideration has been given to feedback from members of HASC during, and following, the meeting on 21st November 2023, and acted upon.

Furthermore, BSol ICB is now committed to commencing a new strategic review of the provision of all of its six UTCs in operation across Birmingham and Solihull following the publication of updated guidance by NHS England.

Published in Autumn 2023, the guidance outlines the standards ICBs nationally are expected to deliver to provide a consistent urgent treatment offer to the public to reduce attendance at hospital emergency departments and to improve patient access, experience, and care nationally.

The guidance describes the minimum expectation across these services and was refreshed in late 2023 to reflect changing ways of working, and the importance of UTCs as part of integrated urgent and emergency care systems.

It proposes: *“ICBs should determine where UTCs will be most effective; this may be co-located with the local emergency department and increasingly acting as the front door of ED, or a standalone service either on or off a hospital site. We expect that decisions about all existing type 3 and 4 services should be concluded through 2023/24.*

“NHS England is working with stakeholders to agree consistent approaches for patients who walk into hospitals, which will support patients to be seen in the most appropriate setting. Systems should ensure they have implemented streaming at the front door of ED, which will increasingly be through a co-located urgent treatment centre.”

BSol ICB's strategic review of all of its 6 UTCs across Birmingham and Solihull will begin in early 2024, and will include re-assessing options for the permanent relocation of WF UTC. To ensure transparency, BSol ICB will plan and deliver a programme of public engagement in accordance with its legal duties, which will take place across the lifespan of the review and subsequent implementation of BSol ICB's new UTC Provision Strategy.

Statutory Compliance:

Temporary changes are to address patient or staff safety or welfare issues. In this matter, the changes are being proposed due to potential risks identified with RAAC roof panels at Warren Farm Health Centre. The urgent context means that the normal process undertaken to meet statutory duties does not apply.

When it comes to making a *permanent* decision on Warren Farm, then effectively a new decision is being made and the normal statutory duties apply in relation to public involvement and consultation with the local authority.

Timeline for Emergency Temporary Relocation

WF UTC will continue to operate from WFHC up until its relocation to EHWBC, subject to weekly structural risk assessments of the building. The relocation process will commence immediately due to the risks noted above. It will include site preparation, IT set-up and completion of NHS England processes and procedures. Should there be a deterioration in the structure of WFHC during this lead-in time for relocation, WF UTC will be closed to safeguard patients and staff.

The UTC once relocated will continue to be delivered by Health Care Resourcing Group Ltd (HCRG), the service provider commissioned by BSol ICB.

Prior and post-emergency relocation the service will continue to be accessed via the usual ways – either by referral via NHS 111 or be patients attending as a walk-in.

Communication and Engagement

Consultation with local authorities is provided for in the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 (“the Regulations”) made under section 244(2)(c) of the NHS Act 2006.

For the purposes of temporary service changes, the duty to consult the local authority is disapplied by Regulation 23(2) where the ICB is “satisfied that a decision has to be taken without allowing time for consultation because of a risk to safety or welfare of patients or staff.” This applies in this case due to the RAAC present in the WF UTC roof.

Meanwhile, a communications plan (see **Appendix 1**) has been developed and will be implemented to:

- Ensure effective and timely communication with all stakeholders directly and indirectly impacted by the emergency temporary relocation of WF UTC;
- Raise awareness and understanding of the rationale of the emergency temporary relocation of WF UTC amongst stakeholders to ensure consistency in patient access to services during the period of transition pre-, during and post-relocation.

ACTION:

BSol ICB asks HASC to formally acknowledge:

- The proposed temporary emergency relocation of WF UTC to Erdington Health and Well-Being Centre as outlined in this document;
- The imperative to move quickly to safeguard staff and patients;
- BSol ICB’s planned review of all of its 6 UTCs across Birmingham and Solihull, which will include engagement activity that aligns to statutory requirements, and will include options for the permanent location of WF UTC.