

Strategic Policy Briefing Note

NHS Long Term Plan (January 2019)

Context

The NHS has published its 'Long Term Plan' setting out its strategic approach and priorities for the next ten years. The plan outlines how the NHS plans to become 'fit for the future', modernising services and getting the best value for money for patients.

The approach can be characterised along three broad themes: increased integration of services; a focus on prevention; and an awareness of the social, cultural and economic factors that affect health outcomes – so-called 'wider determinants of health'.

Importance to Birmingham and Key Services/Policies Affected

The NHS Long-Term Plan is likely to have a big impact on adult and children's social care services, especially for those working with older adults and people who need support to live independently at home.

The proposals to replace Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs) with Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) by April 2021 will give local authorities such as Birmingham City Council (BCC) a much larger role in the design and delivery of health and social care services.

This strategy recognises the important role that local government plays in health, especially when addressing the wider determinants of health such as economic and social inequalities. However, it also states that the NHS and the Government will be considering if the NHS needs to play 'a stronger role' in the commissioning of some public health services. It is unclear what this means at this stage.

Summary

The NHS Long Term Plan sets out a number of actions and goals across five areas for improvement:

1. A new service model

- A new service model for the NHS with more coordinated and joined-up services, and a more personalised approach to care.
- Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) across the whole country by April 2021, growing out of current Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs).

2. Prevention and health inequalities

- A renewed and expanded NHS prevention programme, with recognition of the health impacts of socioeconomic inequality.
- A range of new interventions/services to tackle some of the leading factors affecting health: smoking, obesity, alcohol and drug use, and air pollution.

3. Health outcomes

- Increased investment in mental health (both children and young people's services, and adult services).
- Range of measures to tackle the five leading causes of premature death: cancer, heart disease and stroke, respiratory conditions, dementia, and self-harm (including suicide).

4. Workforce development

- A full workforce implementation plan to be published later in 2019 to address workforce challenges, including a shortage of key staff and recruitment of staff from overseas.

5. Technology and digitally enabled care

- Redesign of clinical pathways to offer 'digital first' options for patients, especially in primary care and outpatient services, to free up more time for face-to-face appointments for those patients who need them.
- Increased use of health data and new technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) to identify groups of people at risk of health issues and improve outcomes.

A full policy briefing, which goes through the Long Term Plan and its implications in detail, is attached.

Additional Commentary

The NHS Long Term Plan has received a mixed response from stakeholders and commentators, with support for its broad themes but concern that the Plan may not be realistically deliverable.

This is an ambitious and forward-thinking strategy to modernise the NHS and rethink how we deliver health and social care services. However, there are various factors that will make the Long Term Plan difficult to deliver, including historically low levels of investment in the NHS (in real terms), a continued NHS workforce crisis with 100,000 unfilled vacancies, and the continued uncertainty posed by Brexit.

The future of the NHS is now intrinsically linked to adult social care and public health services, however the Government has yet to publish its Green Paper on adult social care outlining how it will be funded in the future. Until this is published, it is difficult to assess how successful the NHS Long Term Plan will be.

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