

5 November 2024

Resident Briefing: Update on health services in Leighton Buzzard

We are pleased to update residents, representatives and partners on the latest developments in the delivery of healthcare services in Leighton Buzzard.

Increasing local primary care capacity and improving services

New, additional services, coupled with changes in how existing services are delivered, are supporting more residents to access the help they need sooner and more locally.

1. The three local surgeries, working together as a Network, have now recruited more than 20 additional professionals, including three paramedics, seven clinical pharmacists and four physiotherapists, to boost the number of appointments available.
2. The phlebotomy service, established in the town last year, is now providing around 300 additional blood tests per month, reducing the waiting time for residents.
3. A new Minor Illness Service for the town will commence in January supporting more residents to access help on the same day it is requested.
4. A new Winter Pressure Clinic providing additional on the day capacity over the winter months launched on 01 November 2024, and will run to 31 March 2025.
5. New telephony systems have been established to improve the experience residents have when calling the surgery, whilst eConsult means all practices can now be contacted online.
6. Additional appointments are available to all residents of the town during evenings and weekends. Appointments are available 1830-2000 each weekday, 0900-1700 Saturday, and 0900-1300 Sunday.

Latest information on the full range of available services across the three practices can be found here: [Bassett Road Surgery](#), [Salisbury House Surgery](#) and [Leighton Road Surgery](#).

Securing additional funding to create additional clinical space

Leighton Buzzard, like many other parts of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes, is growing quickly, fuelled by new housebuilding. The population of BLMK is currently growing 2.5x faster than the national average, and we are working with partners to make a compelling case for the investment the area needs to respond to this additional demand.

We are pleased to be working with [NHS Property Services](#), the landlord of Leighton Buzzard Health Centre, to explore an opportunity of using focussed capital funding from central Government to create additional clinical rooms in vacant space within the building. A further update on this work will be provided as soon as possible.

Considering the options for future healthcare services

Demand for healthcare continues to grow, and we understand how frustrating it can be when residents are not able to access the support they need.

Maintaining, improving and growing our estate is a top priority for the ICB, but we are limited by the resources we have available. Like many parts of the NHS, the ICB faces enormous funding pressures. We receive £1.6m capital funding per annum to cover all our primary care estates projects across our 84 practices, each providing dedicated care to our 1.1m residents living in BLMK. Existing capital resource is extremely constrained, and any new build would require additional external funding. Even if capital were available, the funding of the on-going revenue costs associated with new developments would be very challenging in the current financial environment.

Last year, the former local MP, Andrew Selous, announced that the (now former) Government had agreed that land on Vandyke Road, owned by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), could be sold to fund extra healthcare in the town.

This opportunity prompted the ICB to work with external experts to develop an Outline Business Case that would assess how much funding this could release, and how that could be used. The work was completed earlier this year, with publication necessarily delayed due to the General Election.

This week, we have received confirmation from the new Government that any sale proceeds from Vandyke Road can be reinvested in local health projects. The material published today – a full [Outline Business Case](#) and a [summary version](#) – sets out the options for how any funding released by the sale could be used, and the trade-offs this presents.

The OBC determines that making further improvements to Leighton Buzzard Health Centre is the most viable course of action that could be funded by the sale of the Vandyke Road land. Building a new health facility – in addition to the three existing GP practices in the Town - is not affordable, with an estimated £3m shortfall in capital funding and significant ongoing running costs.

The ICB looks forward to meeting with residents, local politicians, NHS staff and others to discuss the service improvements already made in the town, the potential for additional clinical space to be delivered early next year, and longer-term ambitions.

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