

Appendix 2 – media interest

Issues that have been of particular interest to local media outlets in the early months of the year include access to primary care services, the search for a long-term provider for Withnell Health Centre, a national measles outbreak, and the continuation of NHS industrial action.

LMC report

A survey conducted last year by the Consortium of Lancashire and Cumbria Local Medical Committees (LMC), found that 10 GP practices in Cumbria and Lancashire are at immediate risk of closing their doors, while a further 111 say they are struggling financially.

The ICB acknowledged the concerns in drawing up its GP Quality Contract proposal for 2024/25.

Professor Craig Harris, chief operating officer for Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board, said: “We acknowledge the financial challenges outlined in the report and understand the importance of ensuring that general practice is both sustainable and resilient.

“We are particularly concerned about those practices who considered themselves to be at immediate risk of closure and have written to all practices offering our support to those that require it. We have considered the report and met with the LMC to discuss it and that was taken on board when finalising our recent ICB GP Quality Contract proposal for 2024/25.

“The ICB shares the vision of a robust, resilient, and thriving general practice which is able to, and funded to, form part of an expanded integrated community model of care.

“We also recognise the significant pressure faced by general practice staff and we are grateful for their continued hard work and commitment to their patients.”

Dental access

Patients nationwide have been unable to get a dentistry appointment, according to recently-published data, while many patients have reported their practice wasn't taking on new patients when they last tried to book an appointment.

The national picture is reflected in Lancashire and South Cumbria, with the ICB launching the dental access and oral health improvement programme to tackle the problems.

Amy Lepiorz, associate director of primary care for Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board, said: “Providing access to NHS dental care continues to be a priority both locally and nationally, and we recognise the difficulties that many patients are having in accessing routine dental care.

“In Lancashire and South Cumbria, we have launched the dental access and oral health improvement programme to improve access to primary care dental services in the high street and to improve oral health.

“This will include services such as routine care for people who require a check-up and any follow-up care, as well as urgent dental care for those in immediate need of support, prioritising the parts of Lancashire and South Cumbria with the greatest need for dental access and oral health support. It will also aim to reduce inequalities in dental access and oral health across the region.

“The programme will focus on where investment should be prioritised, improving patient pathways, communications to the public and to staff, and supporting retention and recruitment of the dental workforce.”

Withnell Health Centre

The procurement process for Withnell Health Centre, near Chorley, has been a long-running situation for the ICB, with significant media interest.

Following the dissolution of the partnership in 2021, Dr Ann Robinson has run the practice on a temporary contract having disputed the process of a previous procurement exercise. In March, the ICB announced that a competitive procedure under the Provider Selection Regime – which came into operation at the turn of the year – should be held.

Professor Craig Harris, chief operating officer for NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board, said: “The Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board’s Primary Care Commissioning Committee has today approved a competitive procedure under the Provider Selection Regime to appoint a long-term provider for Withnell Health Centre.

“Based on consideration of all procurement routes and the associated published guidance, we believe that this is the option which will give the quickest route to securing the best outcome for Withnell Health Centre and its patients and staff.

“The ICB has engaged widely with the local population and the feedback will make a valuable contribution to the competitive procedure. The committee was clear that it is important for the new evaluation process which we have developed with involvement of the patient steering group is used which involves local people and embeds learning from the procurement process in 2022.

“We recognise the concern within the community and the potential impact on staff and patients and this decision provides an opportunity for a potentially quicker resolution within the timeframes we have set out, while ensuring we follow due process for equity and fairness.”

Further information and updates are available here:

<https://www.lancashireandsouthcumbria.icb.nhs.uk/get-involved/have-your-say-current-opportunities/withnell-health-centre>

Measles

Every region in England has reported confirmed cases of measles since the turn of the year, with childhood vaccination rates having fallen over the past 10 years.

The ICB has been urging parents and guardians to check that their children are up to date with their MMR (Measles, Mumps and Rubella) vaccinations to reduce the risk of catching the highly infectious disease.

Dr Lindsey Dickinson, associate medical director at NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board, said: “The MMR vaccine is the best possible way to keep children safe and healthy, and protected against Measles, which is on the rise.

“Often, early symptoms are similar to a cold, like sneezing, coughing and a runny nose, with a rash not showing until they have been infectious for up to four days. In the meantime, before any rash shows, they could have infected a large majority of their unvaccinated classmates. The impact of that could be incredibly serious.

“A record of your child’s immunisations and vaccinations should be in their red book, but if you are unsure if they are protected, I would urge you to check with your child’s GP practice.”

Industrial Action

Industrial action in the NHS has been ongoing for more than a year, with the most recent strike in February being the 10th round of junior doctor strikes since March 2023, and January’s six-day strike being the longest in NHS history.

While consultants have recently accepted a pay offer, junior doctors have voted for more strikes and industrial action while other specialty and specialist doctors have rejected a government pay offer.

Dr David Levy, medical director at NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board, said: “The NHS has now been affected by industrial action for more than a year, but the strikes are still having a huge impact on our hospitals and across the wider system.”