

Oxfordshire Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 24 June 2021

Title of Paper: Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group: GP Workload

Purpose: The following paper aims to provide the Oxfordshire Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee with an update on:

1. General Practice workloads and appointment data
2. The delivery of services through the pandemic and vaccination programme

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General Practice Workload

1. Context

This paper provides the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the delivery of services in general practice with specific reference to workload. Members will appreciate that the last year has seen unprecedented demands placed on the NHS because of the response to the COVID pandemic. Whilst those demands are not the focus of this report, they provide a key context to some aspects of workload.

2. Service Delivery during the pandemic

As a part of the level 4 incident declared by NHS England nationally general practice alongside other providers within the NHS was required to respond to key instructions and requirements. The CCG, working with other partners in the Oxfordshire system worked to support and enable general practice to enact those requirements seeking to maximise patient safety and patient services whilst minimising detriment to the practices.

A key feature and point of difference during the pandemic was accelerated delivery of remote and virtual services. As a clear step to reduce the spread of COVID practices were required to introduce a *total triage* approach. All practices introduced telephone triage which meant that patients were assessed by a GP over the telephone first, allowing many patients to be offered advice and potentially prescription or referral without the need for a face-to-face appointment.

This significantly reduced footfall at practices who were all supported to introduce robust infection prevention and control measures. Practices found ways to maintain services for patients whilst keeping them safe and reducing the risk of spreading infection. Most GP practices are used to busy waiting rooms and reception areas. Their consulting rooms can be unsuitable for organising furniture to allow 2m distance.

A dedicated additional service was commissioned to provide face to face appointments to the most infectious of patients – those who were COVID positive or suspected to be COVID positive.

General practice staff were supported to work from home where possible, again minimising the risk of the spread of infection and enabling some to continue working during periods of self isolation. IT kit and systems were provided to enable this.

3. Impact on service delivery from a patient perspective

Patients with appropriate IT at home have been able to use e-consult or video appointments in addition to the telephone consultations. There are always some patients who do need to be seen face-to-face and those patients were offered an

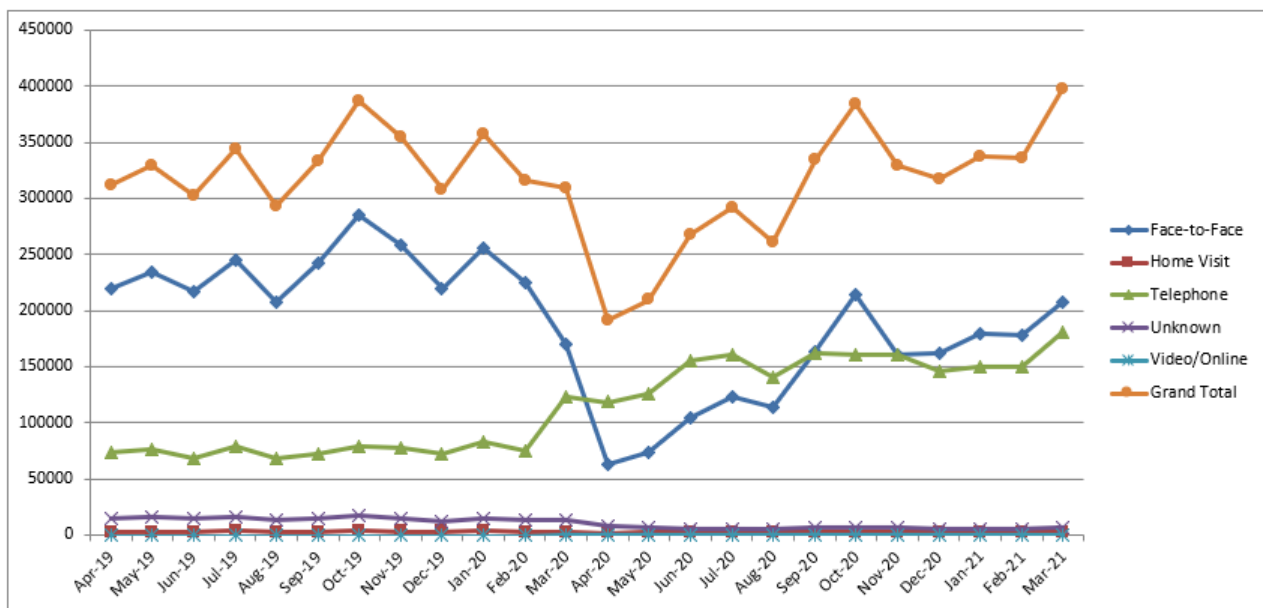
appointment in the practice with advice in advance about arrangements one arrival for keeping them, and staff, safe.

Feedback from patients has been mixed. Patients using e-consult have largely reported satisfaction with the service and for many this is something they would value continuing to be available. Others have also found telephone appointments to be convenient, an efficient use of time and have avoided the need for leaving home. Again, for many this is something they would want to continue to use in future.

There are two particular areas of concern coming from patients. The first relates to telephone systems in GP practices and the time taken to get to speak to someone. The second relates to a belief that face-to-face appointments have been unavailable to anyone.

4. General Practice appointment data

The graph below shows the number of general practice appointments each month for the last two years. Members will see that in April 2020, at the height of the pandemic response there was a significant drop in appointments. In line with the infection prevention and control measures we can see that telephone appointments as a proportion of all appointments has increased.



Oxfordshire General Practice Appointments by Mode April 2019 – March 2021¹

In line with the recovery and restoration work in the Summer of 2020 appointment levels were restored to pre-pandemic levels by September 2020. These levels have been sustained since that time.

There have been reports of frustrations from patients about the ease with which they can contact their GP practice. Telephone systems in GP practices have come under significant pressure for many reasons. More patients have been trying to contact GP practices for advice and with general concerns, at the same time, more general

¹ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice>

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business, including patient appointments have been taking place over the phone. Some practices have also been managing with higher levels of staff sickness and staff isolating which has reduced the number of people on duty at any one time to pick up the phone.

Face to face appointments have been available at every GP practice for the full duration of the pandemic and continue to be available. As previously reported, more than 50% of appointments are currently offered face-to-face. However, every face-to-face appointment starts with a telephone conversation with a GP to ensure the appointment is necessary and to identify what safeguards are needed beforehand. It is possible that the need for the telephone triage is influencing the public perception that face-to-face appointments are unavailable.

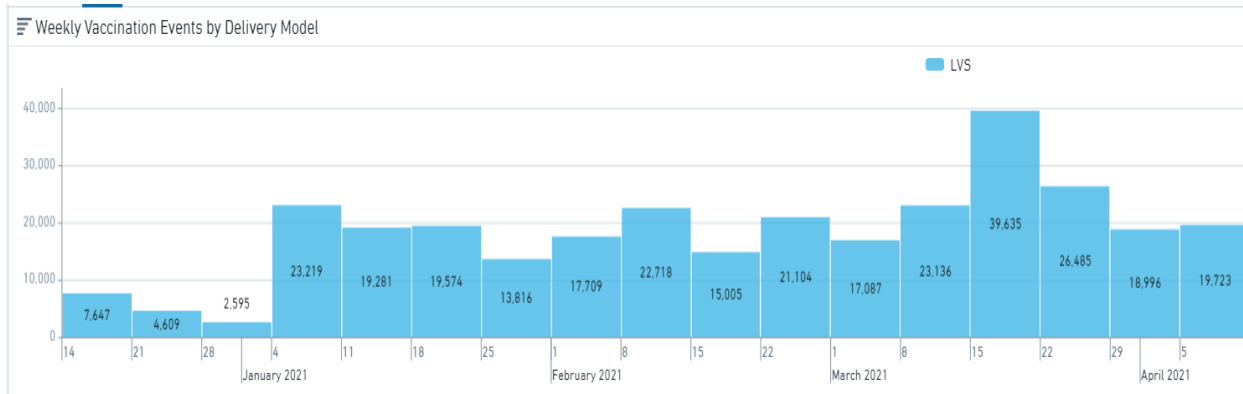
The table below shows the total number of appointments in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 years including the breakdown of telephone and face to face appointments. This data does not include appointments for COVID vaccinations.

	19/20		20/21			
	total	telephone	f2f	total	telephone	f2f
	3,945,217	947,187	2,782,059	3,656,640	1,812,643	1,741,751

Oxfordshire General Practice Appointment information 19/20 and 20/21²

5. COVID 19 vaccination programme

General Practice in Oxfordshire, through the 21 Primary Care Network Local Vaccination Service sites has delivered more than 526,000 vaccinations in the period between December 2020 and June 2021.



Oxfordshire LVS vaccination events by week³

The graph above highlights the numbers of vaccinations delivered each week by general practice in Oxfordshire in addition to the core general practice appointments in the previous graph. General practice has made a significant contribution to the overall vaccination programme with a particular focus on the most vulnerable of patients in the JCVI priority cohorts. Some but not all sites continue to vaccinate those aged under 50.

² <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice>

³ Source: NIMS data accessed through Foundry