

Surrey & Sussex Area Team
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5 December 2014

Sunbury Health Centre

Dear Ms Healey

Thank you for your email of 27 October, regarding your GP practice at Sunbury Health Centre. I apologise for the delay in responding to your concerns, which I have been asked to respond to on behalf of NHS England.

NHS England wants to ensure that everyone can access good quality care and treatment from local GP practices and I am sorry to hear that you are worried about the capacity of the surgery at Sunbury Health Centre to treat patients in light of local population growth.

I fully appreciate your concerns and would like to reassure you that NHS England are aware of the challenges with regard to the premises at Sunbury Health Centre and are working to try and support the practice to address this challenge.

It may be helpful to you if I provide you with some background information about the current premises and how they are managed in responding to your concerns.

The Sunbury Health Centre building is owned by NHS Property Services, the organisation that was established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 with responsibility for owning most of the NHS premises which were owned previously by the former primary care trusts (PCTs), including some local GP surgeries. Other GP surgeries are owned privately and this often includes ownership by GPs themselves.

Your practice at Sunbury Health Centre rents surgery space within the building from NHS Property Services and NHS England then reimburses the surgery for the cost of their rent as part of the overall funding provided to the practice to support patient care. Virgin Care, which provides local community services to patients, also uses some of the other space within Sunbury Health Centre.

Sunbury Health Centre has informed NHS England about the concerns they have in relation to the space available within the practice to treat patients and the suitability of the current premises.

Across Surrey and Sussex, NHS England holds contracts with 342 practices, operating out of 424 sites, and we recognise that a number of practices, like Sunbury Health Centre, are currently facing challenges with their premises.

Under the terms of the contracts they hold with the NHS, GP practices are responsible for determining suitable arrangements for the treatment of patients within their surgery premises, in accordance with what they feel will best meet the needs of their patients and in line with the necessary standards.

Should a GP practice feel that it is necessary for them to move premises in order to better meet the needs of its patients then the practice is responsible for identifying a suitable, alternative surgery site that they consider would be appropriate to deliver services from. Once a surgery has identified an alternative site then the practice can then submit a business case for the proposed relocation of services to NHS England, which is then responsible for reviewing the proposal to determine if it is affordable within available NHS resources and whether it will make the best possible use of NHS funds to improve patient access to services.

Likewise, if a practice feels that developing the surgery's existing premises will be the best option for the future delivery of patient services then they also need to submit proposals to NHS England about this.

NHS England is currently working to finalise national guidance on the process that should be used to prioritise any development requests from GP surgeries, in order to ensure that we can make local decisions based on the best use of NHS funds, as part of a nationally consistent approach that is fair to all local practices. We need to ensure that all our local premises requests are reviewed through a fair and equitable process to secure best value for the taxpayer and to improve patient care.

As soon as the national guidance is available, we will be able to formalise the local process for assessing plans to develop GP surgeries and make progress with developing the practices in Surrey and Sussex that most need improved premises.

To speed the process as much as possible, for the benefit of patients and local surgeries, NHS England's Surrey and Sussex Area Team wrote to all local practices in December to request that if they wished to look at the redevelopment of their premises they should send in a brief proposal about this so that this could be given initial consideration as part of an early review in advance of the national policy being finalised.

Your practice at Sunbury Health Centre was included as part of this process and in response to this request the practice did raise concerns about the surgery's existing premises and indicated to NHS England at that point that it wished to consider moving the surgery to another building, however the Practice did not stipulate if they had found a building that they wished to move into.

GP practices can also apply to NHS England for separate, smaller grants to improve their premises, including with regards to improving disability access, and all practices are aware that they can apply for such a grant should they wish to do so. NHS England's Surrey and Sussex Area Team wrote to all local practices in July 2014 to invite them to submit any grant requests they wished to make by September so that these could be given consideration. The deadline for all practices to submit quotes to the Area Team was September 2014

The Sunbury Heath Centre practice has applied for a premises improvement grant and it was agreed with the practice that they would not be required to submit quotes for proposed work to their premises as part of this initial process. NHS Property Services, as the practice's landlord, is now supporting the practice to progress this proposal.

As the practice is receiving support to progress its application for a premises improvement grant for the existing surgery building, NHS England has now clarified with the practice that the practice no longer wishes to consider relocating the surgery at this point in time.

NHS England will continue to do what it can to support the surgery to address the challenges that it faces in the meantime with regards to its premises. Representatives

from the Surrey and Sussex Area Team have met with the practice on three occasions to discuss their premises concerns.

Local councillors have been involved in these discussions and NHS England also initiated a meeting with Virgin Care, the community provider which occupies the same building as the practice, to work through a way in which the surgery and Virgin Care could look at sharing additional room space to help the practice with their capacity issues.

This arrangement to provide additional space for the surgery to treat its patients has now been agreed by Virgin Care and we hope that this will be of some support to the practice in the short term.

In the longer term, NHS England will continue to work with North West Surrey Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and local practices to ensure local GP services are provided in a sustainable way over the coming years, based around patient needs.

We are also reviewing plans for any borough and district council housing developments from now until 2032 across Surrey and Sussex in order to determine their potential impact on local GP practices and so that we can plan the future of services accordingly.

I hope that this letter provides you with assurance that securing high quality patient care for all local patients is a priority for NHS England and that we will continue to work with the Sunbury Health Centre practice to try and improve services for the surgery's patients.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Woolterton', written in a cursive style.

Richard Woolterton
Head of Primary Care