

TITLE	The NHS Health Checks Programme
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2014
WARD	None Specific
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR	Stuart Rowbotham, Strategic Director Health & Wellbeing

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Wokingham Borough Council has since April 2013, through its new responsibilities for Public health, taken on responsibility to coordinate and commission the new NHS Health Check programme. This is a health improvement programme aiming to reduce cardiovascular disease (heart disease; stroke; diabetes; vascular dementia) in the population through a targeted intervention with those aged between 40 and 74. Wokingham already has lower than average rates of these conditions; but they have risen in recent years; and this is reflected in the aims of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Wokingham Borough. To bring about the maximum health benefit to the population of Wokingham Borough, it is important to achieve the maximum uptake of the NHS Health Check amongst the eligible population.

RECOMMENDATION

That the committee note the content of this report and support the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Public Health Department in their endeavours to increase the availability of the NHS Health Check.

This may involve reducing the burden of its provision by GPs, through developing and commissioning alternative providers in appropriate settings.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The NHS Health Check programme aims to help prevent heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease and certain types of dementia. Everyone between the ages of 40 and 74, who has not already been diagnosed with one of these conditions or have certain risk factors, will be invited (once every five years) to have a check to assess their risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and diabetes and will be given support and advice to help them reduce or manage that risk.

Performance of the NHS Health Check programme in Wokingham Borough as measured by the proportion of the eligible population invited to attend; and the number of completed Health Checks is poorer than other Berkshire authorities; and is poorer than all England levels. In most authorities; however, performance is still below the level of aspiration to invite 20% of the eligible population each year. Local GPs are not wholeheartedly supportive of the programme; and with the pressure on GP workload and the workforce issues developing in some local practices; the current Berkshire-wide agreement on funding the NHS Health Check is not seen as providing an acceptable level of payment for GPs to provide the programme.

The Public Health Department within Wokingham Borough Council are making plans to comprehensively turn around the performance of the NHS Health Check Programme locally.

Background: The NHS Health Check Programme

Everyone in the population is at some risk of developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes, kidney disease and some forms of dementia. An NHS Health Check aims to help lower the risk of developing these common but often preventable diseases.

Residents who are registered with a GP will be invited for an NHS Health Check once every five years if they are aged between 40 and 74 years old and haven't already been diagnosed with vascular diseases or have previously identified risk factors such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol treated by medication.

At the check, the risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and diabetes will be assessed through some common diagnostic tests supported by standard questions about lifestyle and family medical history. The individual will be offered personalised advice and support to help lower any risks identified and advice on how to stay healthy. This could include suggestions on small changes to diet or on physical activity if the risk is low or moderate. If higher risks are identified, medication to control blood pressure may be prescribed along with help to take action on weight or stopping smoking.

The NHS Health Check programme is not a screening programme; instead it is a health improvement programme encouraging behaviour change and early action to greatly improve chances for a healthier and longer life. Small, long-lasting changes to lifestyle can make a huge difference. It does have some common attributes of screening programmes such as those for certain cancers in that patients are invited by letter to attend from a list drawn up by GPs of their eligible patient population; however the programme was never designed to have the rigour of screening programmes and is therefore not included within their commissioning and management arrangements. Because of those similarities; however, there has been some debate within medicine and general practice as to the validity of the programme.

The Initial Aims of the Programme

- Over four million people in England are estimated to have vascular disease
- Around 670,000 people in England are living with dementia
- Over ten million people in England are drinking at increased levels
- 850,000 people in England are unaware that they have type 2 diabetes
- In more than 90% of cases a first heart attack is related to preventable risk factors.
- 15 million people in England are eligible for an NHS Health Check
- The NHS Health Check systematically targets the top seven causes of preventable deaths: high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, obesity, poor diet, physical inactivity and alcohol consumption
- 650 lives in England could be saved each year by people accessing an NHS Health Check that year
- On average each year the NHS Health Checks programme could prevent 1,600 heart attacks, 4,000 people developing diabetes and detect at least 20,000 cases of diabetes or kidney disease earlier.

It is expected that local authorities will achieve offers to 20% of the target population annually with a vision to realise at least 75% uptake per year.

The NHS Health Check

There are two parts to an NHS Health Check. First, a patient will be asked a few simple questions and have a few straightforward health tests. These will allow an assessment of their risk of developing four diseases: heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and kidney disease.

The check will take around 20 to 30 minutes:

- A patient will be asked some simple questions about their family history, whether or not they smoke and how much alcohol they drink.
- Their height, weight, sex, ethnicity and age will be recorded.
- Their blood pressure will be taken.
- A simple blood test will check their cholesterol level.
- Their body mass index (BMI) will be calculated. BMI is a measure of whether a person is of a healthy weight for their height.

After this, a healthcare professional (who could be the patient's GP, practice nurse or a pharmacist) will give the results and explain what they mean. In some instances, tests may have to be sent away for analysis. This means that some people won't get their test results immediately and may be asked to return at a later date for this discussion.

The patient will have the opportunity to ask for advice and support on maintaining good health, and on lifestyle changes that will help you to improve your health. If necessary, they may be offered treatments that will help: for example, medication to lower raised blood pressure.

If the patient is aged 65 to 74, they'll also be given general information about dementia, including how to reduce the risk of developing it, where to find more information about it and the type of support services available in their area.

Changes Since April 2013

From April 2013, responsibility for the NHS Health Check programme moved to local authorities, which are responsible for making plans to ensure the invitation of anyone who is eligible to have a check over a five-year rolling cycle. That means everyone aged between 40 and 74 who hasn't already been diagnosed with any of the conditions mentioned above will be invited for an NHS Health Check.

The check was designed to be primarily offered and provided by GP surgeries and local pharmacies. They can also be offered at other suitable and accessible locations provided the correct criteria are met by a provider. Alternative providers have contracts with some local authorities and Berkshire Unitary Authorities have had tentative approaches from other providers.

Performance

Performance against the aspiration of 20% of the eligible population being invited for an NHS Health Check is poor both nationally and locally. At the end of quarter 2, only 4.1% of the eligible population had been invited in Wokingham Borough, with only 1.6% having has a completed health Check. The Health Checks performance in quarter 2 last was also significantly worse than quarter 1 and worse than other Berkshire UAs.

The NHS Health Check Programme was discussed at the November 2013 meeting of the Wokingham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Council, which all GP practices in the CCG area attend. The Public Health Department made a strong case for improving performance. The GPs identified that the drop in performance between quarters 1 and 2 coincided with the holiday period and that GP surgeries were (with some exceptions) not actively pursuing health checks in a systematic manner.

NHS Health Check Programme - 2013/14 Q2 – Source -

Authority	Estimated eligible population aged 40 to 74	People invited for a Health Check						Comments
		2013/14 Q1		2013/14 Q2		2013/14 Year to date		
		Number of people	% of eligible pop	Number of people	% of eligible pop	Number of people	% of eligible pop	
Bracknell Forest	32,479	232	0.71%	768	2.36%	1,000	3.1%	
Slough	31,646	732	2.31%	1,448	4.58%	2,180	6.9%	
RBW&M	43,196	1,919	4.44%	2,076	4.81%	3,995	9.2%	
Reading	36,215	1,219	3.37%	1,611	4.45%	2,830	7.8%	Q2 data missing from 9 practices (3 of these also provided no Q1 data)
Wokingham	47,837	1,197	2.50%	767	1.60%	1,964	4.1%	Q2 data missing from 4 practices (these all had nil returns for Q1)
West Berkshire	47,927	2,012	4.20%	2,429	5.07%	4,441	9.3%	
Thames Valley	581,865	23,324	4.01%					
South East	2,566,991	93,851	3.66%					
England	15,323,148	598,867	3.91%					

Authority	Estimated eligible population aged 40 to 74	Completed Health Checks						Comments
		2013/14 Q1		2013/14 Q2		2013/14 Year to date		
		Number of people	% of eligible pop	Number of people	% of eligible pop	Number of people	% of eligible pop	
Bracknell Forest	32,479	164	0.50%	601	1.85%	765	2.4%	
Slough	31,646	423	1.34%	600	1.90%	1,023	3.2%	
RBW&M	43,196	435	1.01%	456	1.06%	891	2.1%	
Reading	36,215	615	1.70%	668	1.84%	1,283	3.5%	Q2 data missing from 9 practices (3 of these also provided no Q1 data)
Wokingham	47,837	537	1.12%	217	0.45%	754	1.6%	Q2 data missing from 4 practices (these all had nil returns for Q1)
West Berkshire	47,927	753	1.57%	916	1.91%	1,669	3.5%	
Thames Valley	581,865	9,674	1.66%					
South East	2,566,991	29,691	1.16%					
England	15,323,148	286,717	1.87%					

Analysis of Issues

GPs locally have identified barriers to their support for involvement in the NHS Health Check programme. Nationally many GPs and Local Medical Committees have voiced similar concerns and barrier. Finance is key to the barriers locally. In Berkshire, £20 is paid to each Practice for each completed NHS Health Check, with slightly different historical contractual arrangements between East and West Berkshire authorities based upon the negotiations carried out by the former Primary Care Trusts (PCTs).

Wokingham Borough GPs consider the £20 amount paid for each Health Checks is not sufficient to meet the costs incurred by the practice. This offer is the same across Thames Valley. GPs will estimate the costs that would make the programme viable for them to offer.

GPs have also identified that wider pressures on the GP and practice workforces may make involvement difficult. Recent Government announcements regarding 7-day working are creating new pressures on GPs and many are considering their practice workloads.

Within Wokingham, the Public Health Department has not been fully staffed as a result of legacy transition issues with unfilled posts and also long-term illness. This is now resolved and the Department will be fully staffed from April 2014. The resulting under-capacity has had a minor impact upon the ability of the Department to work more closely with GPs and with Public Health England who have a Thames Valley programme lead who can support local authorities with their work.

Forward Planning

In December 2013, a New Public Health Contract has been drafted and sent to each GP Practice in the Borough to replace the NHS LES (Locally Enhanced Service) contract that had been rolled over from the former PCT for the year 2013/14. Practices have been asked to make clear if they wish to participate in providing the service. This continues the payment rate at £20.00 per check.

The Public Health Team will, based on the sign-up from GPs, then investigate a turn-around plan to drive up invitations and completed Health Checks through alternative providers if necessary. Pharmacies offer one option – and the High Street multiples provide the NHS Health Checks under contract to local authorities elsewhere in the UK. Another option to which there has been only informal discussion is to ask the Council's leisure contractors to provide the Check to those eligible as part of their existing work on various health improvement interventions, many of which already require some form of health status check, e.g. blood pressure and BMI.

Other providers have speculatively offered to provide the Checks – although some may represent a financial risk on cost grounds, for instance one initial quotation offered the Check in the region of £80.00 per unit.

The Public Health Team in Wokingham Borough are committed to improve performance in the programme as a means to improving health outcomes of our residents. If GPs locally fail to improve their participation in providing the programme, all other options will be investigated to improve performance through other cost-effective provision.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£192,000	Yes	Revenue – Public Health Ring-fenced
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£192,000	Yes	Revenue – Public Health Ring-fenced
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£192,000	Final budget not yet confirmed; but expected this will be no less than 14/15	Revenue – Public Health Ring-fenced

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The figures above represent the costs to the authority of success full completion of 100% of all eligible patients receive an NHS Health Check at the rate of 20% of that eligible population per year, using the £20 per check fee as agreed across Berkshire for the GP based delivery of the service. Other potential service delivery options would incur different costs and payment methodologies, for instance some equipment and consumables may need to be procured centrally by the Council and this would be reflected in the unit price negotiated with a provider.

These costs have been budgeted for within the ring-fenced Public Health grant.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services and priorities?)

The programme outcomes of improved cardio-vascular health are a priority identified in the Wokingham Borough Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013/14.

List of Background Papers

Wokingham Borough Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013
 Wokingham Needs Assessment (JSNA) Draft 2014-15
 Public Health England: Wokingham Health Profile 2013

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