To: Barking and Dagenham Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee

From: Dr Arun Sharma, Together First

Date: 4 March 2015

Subject: Update on urgent GP appointments

Executive summary

This paper provides the committee with an update regarding provision of urgent GP appointments in Barking and Dagenham. A verbal update will follow at the HASSC meeting in June 2015.

Recommendations

The committee is asked note and consider the contents of this report.
**Expanded GP opening hours in Barking and Dagenham**

A GP-led service has opened in Barking and Dagenham for patients with urgent needs, to improve care and help ease pressure on local A&E departments. The practice “hub” opened on Monday 19 January 2015 and is based at Barking Community Hospital in Upney Lane. It is being run by Together First, an organisation set up by local GPs to provide the new service, with initial funding provided from the Prime Minister’s Challenge Fund (PMCF).

Patients calling the NHS 111 service can now be given an appointment to see a GP that same evening. The appointments are available between 6.30pm and 10pm for patients registered with a GP in Barking and Dagenham. Patients have to be booked in by their GP practice or by NHS 111 - they cannot simply turn up at an evening surgery or book appointments themselves. Phone lines are now open from 2pm-10pm to allow bookings from GP practices, and the hub is taking referrals from A&E, walk-in services and urgent care centres. After seeing the evening GP, details of the consultation and any medicines prescribed will be sent to the patient’s own GP by 9am the next morning, so the family doctor knows what has happened and what - if any - treatment has been provided.

From mid-March, the hub will be open on Thursdays from 2pm-10pm to support half-day closure for GP practices. The hub will be getting up to speed over the next few months – we are looking to begin weekend opening hours in the spring, and are hoping to open a second hub in Dagenham. We are working with Healthwatch to identify the best location for the second hub.

**Communications**

Together First sent information about the new service to GP practices in Barking and Dagenham and to Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust (BHRUT) when the new hub opened. A media release about the service has gone out to the local media.

**Background**

Many people going to A&E or urgent care centres outside normal hours could get the care they need from a GP appointment. By making these appointments available, GPs are not only giving local people more appropriate care, but potentially saving them from a long wait in hospital.

Barking and Dagenham’s ‘urgent primary care surge scheme’ was commissioned during 2013/14 to support winter pressures on the healthcare system. This is a pilot scheme designed to provide system support during the development of the new GP-led federation, Together First. The surge scheme provides additional urgent appointments at a patient’s registered practice, within normal opening hours. The scheme was designed to reduce the need for patients to attend other urgent care services and improve patient satisfaction levels with general practice. Of the 41 Barking and Dagenham practices, 34 are currently contracted to deliver surge appointments, and these contracts expire on 31 March 2015.

Together First is a federation of Barking and Dagenham GP practices, set up to collectively operate services to benefit primary care.