

Open letter to our Central Cheshire population from Simon Whitehouse, Chief Executive of NHS South Cheshire CCG

22 July 2016

As the Accountable Officer of NHS South Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) I am proud to work alongside local clinicians, managers, partners and our local population to commission high quality healthcare services across the South Cheshire and Vale Royal geographical footprints.

We have always had a real desire to make a difference for our patients and public with a focus on improving outcomes and ensuring that every single 'Cheshire pound' of tax payer's money that we commit, on behalf of the Government, is used wisely and with greatest impact. We take that responsibility seriously and we care about our local NHS.

We have made real progress in recent years, working for our local people. In Mental Health new Gateway teams are now working in localities to ensure people get care that is local and built around them. By working alongside our local GPs we now have two GP Alliances who, with our support, have been successful in attracting funds to improve access for patients as part of the Prime Ministers Challenge Fund. Parents concerned about their children's health can now use a new smart phone 'CATCH' app to gain advice and guidance. Our 'Every Breath You Take' campaign has received national recognition for the unique approach we have taken to reducing late diagnosis of lung cancer. We have moved forward with our plans for shared electronic health care records across Cheshire, which will bring significant benefits for patient care and coordination. All of these are major achievements and demonstrate our ongoing commitment to providing the best healthcare for the population of Central Cheshire.

However, similar to other NHS organisations across the country NHS South Cheshire CCG and NHS Vale Royal CCG (working together as Central Cheshire CCGs) are facing a growing demand for services, whilst at the same time working with challenging financial constraints. The NHS overall has to become more efficient to save £30billion by 2020/21 and as CCGs we have our part to play in this.

There are many reasons for this growing financial challenge; we have seen the demand for health and social care increase over the past years and we predict this will grow significantly. This increase will be caused not only by an ever increasing ageing population but by an expected increase of the overall population in Central Cheshire.

To be clear about the scale of our financial challenge; we are preparing a budget which will record an expected deficit in 2016/17 of around £8M for NHS South Cheshire CCG and £5M for NHS Vale Royal CCG. This means we are spending more money than we are allocated.

This is money from elsewhere in the country that we have to borrow to pay for local healthcare for local people that we serve. Next year we will be expected to pay that back and will also have to continue to save the same amount – the challenge becomes even harder.

Clearly this is both unacceptable and unsustainable.

The amount of money we are given per person to commission safe and effective health care including hospital care, mental health services, primary care and specialised commissioning is significantly lower than anywhere else in Cheshire. Our patients in South Cheshire are allocated a budget of £1564 per person and in Vale Royal £1578 per person whereas patients in another local CCG are allocated £1846.

In order to address these issues and to get to a point where we can live within our means we will have to make difficult decisions. These decisions will be around the provision of healthcare services across Central Cheshire but the emphasis will always remain on delivering high quality patient care. The decisions we will have to make will be hard, but our current financial position is clearly not sustainable.

Both NHS South Cheshire CCG and NHS Vale Royal CCG work closely with NHS England to ensure that both CCGs are operating effectively to commission safe, high-quality and sustainable services within their resources. The CCGs have recently been measured against an assurance framework which looks at how we have undertaken our administrative functions. As a consequence of the financial challenge we currently face NHS South Cheshire CCG has been assessed as 'Inadequate'.

As a result of this inadequate rating NHS England is using the Health and Social Care Act to apply its legal powers of Direction.

These are our annual ratings for 2015/16. There is a new assurance process for 2016/17.

NHS South Cheshire CCG being under Directions presents us with further significant challenge but we are committed to working with NHS England to strengthen our current position. We expect this to mean that all of our plans will undergo further intense scrutiny and we will have to co-operate further with NHS England on all elements of the way we commission healthcare in our local area.

These challenges will be demanding but we are prepared for them. As Central Cheshire CCGs we have an action plan that outlines how we're spending our money wisely as well as clearly showing where and how we're making savings.

We are already working to transform the way we deliver healthcare services, working with our local health, social care and local authority partners. We call this 'Connecting Care' and through this programme we are planning to deliver initiatives such as our integrated community teams. These teams will work to place the patient at the centre of their care and join up health and social care teams to look after people more effectively at home, reducing hospital admissions wherever possible. We are also recommissioning community services to look at the way we provide community services locally, bringing together local health providers to work in a new collaborative way to deliver services for our patients. These are both innovative and challenging developments, but we have to go further in order to bring about financial balance and control.

Over the coming months we will continue to place our patients at the heart of the work we do and we will continue to ensure that everyone in our local community has an opportunity to work to shape the future of local healthcare. We want to have an open and honest conversation with local people, engaging with them at every step of our journey towards financial balance.

The decisions we have to make, whilst they will be tough, will be taken to ensure that we continue to provide the right care in the right place at the right time for every one of our patients.

Simon Whitehouse

Chief Executive