

### RESPONSE to Councillors following the Full Council Meeting – 18<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Thank you Councillor Flewitt for your question regarding access to the new **Southend Sexual Health Service (SSHS)** and your query in regards to late HIV diagnosis as highlighted in the Director of Public Health's Annual Report (2018-2019).

A number of the sexual health indicators benchmark Southend-on-Sea as being better or similar than England, but also recognised that some indicators have less favourable outcomes.

Since April 2019, a new Southend Sexual Health Service has been commissioned to deliver free to access sexual health services to the residents of Southend-on-Sea, this includes the testing, diagnosis, treatment and partner management of sexually transmitted infections (**STI**) and HIV. The service also provides access to a range of contraceptive methods and support in managing conception options.

The sexual health service will offer, from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019, a new digital online offer for STI testing and diagnosis with treatment and partner management being provided through clinical services. This will ensure we can meet our 48-hour urgent access standard to this service which has proven challenging in Southend. This service will complement the already existing HIV Home Sampling offer delivered in conjunction with Public Health England as part of the national service.

The model of the new service did not readily allow for a consistent walk-in facility, as the plan was focused on redirecting users to the online service. Occasional daily slots for a walk-in service has now been made a requirement with a minimum of 10 slots per day. Additionally, based on local utilisation mostly from younger people, the service will provide a Monday afternoon (15:45 to 19:00) walk-in service from the end of August 2019.

From 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019, the Terrence Higgins Trust (**THT**) will deliver a sexual health promotion and community HIV prevention service and will bring additional resource to deliver community and digital outreach; distributing safer sex and HIV prevention materials; and Point of Care HIV Testing to both the general public and to targeted identified groups.

The new THT's service provision will be using innovative methods of service delivery to further reach out to those groups identified to be at risk for HIV transmission and late diagnosis. By engaging with individuals and groups at Public Sex Environments, digitally through online forums and apps, and by increasing access to safer sexual health resources through local community distributors, THT will ensure an increased access to, and knowledge of, local sexual health support and STI/HIV prevention.

The SSHS and THT, in partnership with the Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Communications Team and Public Health Team will raise awareness of national, regional and local campaigns through joint communication channels including social media.

Primary Care services, delivered by General Practice and Community Pharmacy will also improve access to contraception, particularly Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC), and Emergency Hormonal Contraception (**EHC**) for those seeking it. We are currently in discussion with the newly formed Primary Care Networks (5 across Southend) to reach an agreement on a formal commissioning of the LARC service, with improved accessibility in the localities, from April 2020.

A deep dive exercise is currently underway to review teenage conceptions and pregnancy and to gain better insight into why our rates have plateaued - with the outcomes being presented

to the Health and Wellbeing Board in December 2019. This will inform our renewed approach in working to reduce unwanted and unplanned teenage pregnancies.

The Public Health 0-19 and our Early Help services continue to support young people in school and community settings and supporting young families through Health Visiting and Family Nurse Partnership Services. This offer includes sexual and reproductive health advice and support.

Training is being delivered to support Southend Schools, through the Enhanced Healthy School Project, to implement the statutory Relationships and Sex Education curriculum from September 2020.

The actions above detail access to specialist services as well as a response to a number of complaints (Please review the **You Said – We Did section below**); new technology options for delivering services; improved awareness raising; and direct interventions with young people and targeted groups, these will support an improvement in sexual health outcomes for Southend-on-Sea residents and intend to raise the local indicator outcomes to being better or similar to England.

**Early July - Complaint from SBC's Officer log:**

User's issue is that previously we had sexual health clinics run by "Kingsley Ward Clinic" which they said were very good. However, we now have provision in Thamesgate, which are much less good in terms of availability and access. They said the clinics were open fewer hours with little "drop in" [walk-in] function. They said a friend wanted to get the "depo injection" [LARC] and was told the next appointment was 23rd of August. They also said that after enquiring they had found that Southend was the only area in Essex where SH24 [on-line] services were not available. They asked if the Council were trying to undo all the work done about unwanted teenage pregnancy?

**25<sup>th</sup> July - Response from the Council following the recent contractual negotiation:**

*The provider of the sexual health service, formerly operating out of the Kingsley Ward Centre, gave Southend-on-Sea Borough Council notice in 2018 of their intention to cease delivering services on 31st March 2019. The Council undertook extensive public and stakeholder consultation during August and September 2018 about the future provision of local sexual health services.... It was agreed that two providers, Provide CIC and Southend Hospital, would deliver the Southend Sexual Health Service from 1st April 2019.*

*The new service operating from Thamesgate House on Victoria Avenue, has been offering access on an appointment only basis. The service continues to assist occasional walk-in patients to access appointments and support, but does not operate dedicated walk-in clinics at present. However, we are mindful that residents value the flexibility of drop-in sessions and we have been in discussions with the providers with the aim of introducing drop-in sessions in September as part of the phased development of the service offer.*

*The clinic offers a range of opening hours throughout the week and provides over 40 hours of access to patients, including late evenings and going forwards a Saturday morning clinic will be available.*

*The Council is working to empower residents to take greater control of their health and wellbeing. The model of service provided by the new Southend Sexual Health service is based on a triaged needs assessment process. This service model already operates successfully across Essex and Thurrock. This ensures that those at greatest risk to their sexual health and wellbeing are prioritised.*

*Without the detail of your friend's circumstances, it is difficult to be specific about the reason why the earliest appointment she was offered for the Depo Provera injection was 23rd August. However the urgency of her need would have been assessed and explained by the Sexual Health Service Intelligence Centre as part of the triage process.*

*Southend has previously only offered targeted online testing for chlamydia and HIV to residents. However as part of the new service, Provide CIC has been doing extensive testing of a more comprehensive online testing service using their own in-house laboratories, rather than SH24. Subject to the satisfactory completion of the test phase they will be launching this in August 2019. This will be accessible through their website.*

*We take our public health responsibilities seriously and, we are keen to help prevent unwanted pregnancies and maintain access to sexual health services. Please be assured that we are working closely with the providers to continue to develop the service.*

*In the event that your friend would like to progress her concerns with the provider, who can provide a more detailed response to her referral and appointment, their contact information is below....*

**29<sup>th</sup> July - Response from the user:**

*Thank you for your response.*

*I think at home testing is a brilliant idea so I'm happy to hear it will be coming in from August. It's also good to know Thamesgate is considering walk in appointments because having to wait up to two months for an appointment is not practical in this industry.*

*It's good to know Southend also cares about the empowerment of men and women to have control over their sexual health and family planning. Thanks again.*