

Appendix A

East Barnet Health Centre: Report to London Borough of Barnet Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Background:

This project began on 30 June, 2014 and was scheduled to be a 10-week asbestos removal. However, once the building was sealed and the contractors began invasive works, additional asbestos containing materials were discovered within the structure of the building, which proved difficult to remove. The intensive nature of the removal of this additional material caused cosmetic damage to the building and owners NHS Property Services (NHSPS) deemed the site unfit to move tenants straight back into as planned.

A feasibility study was launched to examine whether it would represent better value to the taxpayer and the NHS to undertake a more comprehensive refurbishment of the building, or even to rebuild. Following receipt of the conclusions of this report, and feedback from users of the building, it has been decided that a full refurbishment represents the most efficient and best value option.

NHSPS is therefore undertaking a wholesale refurbishment of the building, to include full redecoration, improved disabled access, new UPVC double-glazed windows, and installation of a lift. The programme for the works is 120 working days, a preferred contractor has been chosen and final discussions are under way to agree the finer points of the specification and contract.

The East Barnet GP Practices have been relocated to Vale Drive Primary Care Centre while the works are being undertaken. This is a purpose-built health centre located in High Barnet, and is the closest clinically-suitable site to East Barnet. The building is owned by Community Health Partnerships (CHP) and the IT and telephony on site is run by provider trust Central London Community Healthcare (CLCH).

Answers to specific questions by Committee:

- 1. NHS England as a matter of urgency to examine and outline the current problems about patients using Vale Drive during the refurbishment work and to examine local alternatives in the immediate vicinity of East Barnet Health Centre as facilities to be used in the interim.*

The options for relocation of the East Barnet Health Centre Practices were considered at great length prior to the start of works. The criteria for relocation were that the premises needed to be clinically-suitable, have sufficient vacant space available to move a five-GP practice into, and be within a reasonable catchment area of East Barnet. . If there had been a clinical building in the immediate vicinity of East Barnet Health Centre, the GPs would have been located there. In the absence of such, three options were identified: Vale Drive, Finchley Memorial Hospital and Edgware Community Hospital. The option preferred by the practices and NHSPS's project manager was Vale Drive, as this was the closest of the three to the existing premises.

NHSPS has examined in detail a possible alternative of a “pop up” surgery in a vacant commercial or industrial premises closer to East Barnet. The project team visited Durkan House (next door to East Barnet), a commercial property on Station Road and a local empty warehouse. All properties were unsuitable. The option of Portacabins was also investigated but this was discounted as there is not enough space on the East Barnet site to locate them. In addition, any option outside of an existing clinical premises would require an N3 connection (secure network connection) to allow the practices access to their booking and prescription systems, and this takes a minimum of three months to install.

NHSPS appreciated the inconvenience caused by this relocation and is doing all it can to help, including exploring whether we can lay on a shuttle bus for people with limited mobility. This is contingent on being able to find a suitable vehicle in the area that we can hire, so we cannot promise anything, but we are certainly aware of the difficulties some people have and will do whatever we reasonably can to assist.

2. For the Committee to receive a further update on the telephone communication and BT systems issue

The telephone system at Vale Drive has struggled to cope with the additional call volumes associated with the East Barnet Practices, and the lack of a call waiting system has led to patients being automatically cut off if their call is not answered within a number of rings. Telephony providers CLCH had investigated this issue many times and exhausted all internal options to resolve it. NHSPS has since been pursuing a more radical solution which involves physically relocating East Barnet’s switchboard to Vale Drive. Permission was obtained from CLCH as telephony provider and CHP as landlord, the telephone handsets have already been moved to Vale Drive, and the rest of the equipment will be transferred from East Barnet once BT has completed the relevant infrastructure work at Vale Drive.

BT visited the site on 2 March and regrettably, the engineer was unable to complete the required works. BT’s engineer established there is not a working spare line in the Distribution Point (DP) at Vale Drive, so a new one must be run across from the exchange. A further visit from BT on 11 March established that there is not enough space within the duct work between the exchange and Vale Drive to run an additional line, and they are now assessing alternative options.

This situation is constantly developing and with a further update due from BT on 12 March, it is likely that this issue will have moved on considerably by 30 March. This update therefore represents a picture of the situation as at 12 March, and NHSPS will therefore provide a full verbal update to the Committee at the meeting. NHSPS remains anxious to see the telephone line issue resolved so the switchboard can be installed, and will continue to push BT for progress in the meantime.

3. For NHS property services to provide an update on outstanding problems with current facilities

It is unclear whether this question relates to Vale Drive or to East Barnet. The current issues with Vale Drive, namely telephony and accessibility, have however been addressed in response to the other questions. In a further effort to ease pressure on the telephones, NHSPS has relocated the Jayex automated patient booking-in system from East Barnet to Vale Drive. If this system is used by patients to check in for their appointments wherever possible, this will assist reception staff to answer more telephone calls.

Patients have expressed concern that they must enter Vale Drive on the ground floor and go downstairs to the GP area, and asked NHSPS if a fire exit door on the lower ground floor at street level could be turned into an access point. Following discussions with the landlord, an order has been placed for an external handle to be installed to enable easier access to the lower ground floor.

With regard to East Barnet Health Centre, the overarching design has been finalised and a programme of works has been drawn up. NHSPS is working with the Practices so that they can agree the data sheets for the rooms – these documents specify the uses and occupancies of the rooms in the building so that the contractors can ensure the power, data and telephone points are located as is most appropriate for each room's users. NHSPS is also working to ensure all tenants of East Barnet Health Centre will re-enter the building on a formal lease. NHSPS is spending almost £1 million of public funds on improving this building, so in the interests of the NHS it is vital to ensure the building will be occupied after that investment is committed. Having a proper lease in place protects both the landlord and the tenant; it formalises and protects the tenant's occupancy, and sets out the rights, requirements and responsibilities of both parties.

This project is moving forward at pace, so a full verbal update will be provided to the Committee on 30 March.