

Written evidence from Assura

About us: Assura is the country's leading healthcare real estate investment trust, working as property partner to GPs in 475 primary care buildings around the country to help them create the modern, fit-for-purpose surgery premises that doctors say they urgently need, in the right places for patients. Our Warrington-based team helps GPs to expand and improve their existing buildings, and in the development of new GP premises which are fit for the future of primary care.

GP surgery buildings are the workplaces of many NHS staff, and are the locations where most patient contact in the NHS takes place. Recent budget announcements on capital investment for NHS buildings highlighted the need for private sector funding to help government meet its £10bn goal.

Summary:

Generally, Sustainability and Transformation Plans did not provide detail on the infrastructure that will be required to support NHS services into the future in each local area.

Of particular concern to us are the implications for primary care infrastructure. There are 7,527 GP practices in England¹, and a little over 41,800 GPs². As healthcare spaces and workplaces for NHS staff, many surgery buildings fall short. We estimate that more than one third are conversions – former Victorian terraces, 1960s bungalows and run-down former offices are common.

The BMA's 2014 research with almost 4,500 practices³ remains the national benchmark for GPs' views on premises: 40% felt their premises were inadequate, making it a struggle to provide even basic GP services. Six in ten GPs reported having to share desks or consulting rooms, with four in ten reporting that this limits the number of appointments they can offer. Seven in ten said their premises are too small to deliver more services. From the patients' perspective, Healthwatch has highlighted concerns around physical access to GP surgeries⁴.

Evidence:

- (1) We welcome the committee's inquiry into Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships, as one of the core challenges for each footprint is to ensure it has the primary care estate it needs to deliver its vision. Analysis by The King's Fund of the 44 Sustainability and Transformation Plans⁵ found widespread recognition that estates will be a key enabler for delivery of NHS transformation, including access to general practice and the provision of a range of acute services closer to home
- (2) Many of the plans themselves highlighted this, flagging that realising their vision will require a primary care estate that is up to the task of facilitating an unprecedented shift in people and services.
- (3) However, only around 70% of the plans touched on their specific primary care estate needs, and just 41% discuss the issue of funding for improving primary care buildings. We recognise

that further detail of estates planning will emerge as STP areas develop their detailed delivery plans, and that more effective use of existing public estate must play an important part in that process. However, without due consideration of the buildings and spaces required to support general practice and new models of care in future, plans to meet demand may be prevented from reaching their full potential.

- (4) Sir Robert Naylor's review of NHS estate⁶, commissioned by government and published in 2017, recommended that: "STPs should develop affordable estates and infrastructure plans, with an associated capital strategy, to deliver the Five Year Forward View and address backlog maintenance." It went on: "The form of the estate must follow the service strategies evolving through local STPs – a process that needs acceleration and incentives."
- (5) In order to be successful in meeting their infrastructure requirements, Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships need support through their governance, strategic estates skills and financial autonomy – to progress estates planning more quickly and effectively. This would help to ensure that improvements to primary care premises are delivered swiftly, realising the benefits as soon as possible for patients and NHS staff.
- (6) It should also be recognised that STPs, as local blueprints, have a unique opportunity to align local healthcare infrastructure requirements with masterplanning for new homes and growing communities.

References:

¹ <http://digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB23693>

² <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/primary-care>

³ <https://www.bma.org.uk/news/2014/july/gp-premises-not-fit-for-patients>

⁴

https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/sites/healthwatch.co.uk/files/20151222_peoples_experiences_of_primary_care_full_report_0.pdf

⁵

https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_publication_file/STPs_proposals_to_plans_Kings_Fund_Feb_2017_0.pdf

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-property-and-estates-naylor-review>