

Community Phlebotomy (Blood testing)

**Update Report for Havering People Health Overview & Scrutiny Sub-Committee
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1. Purpose

This report provides an update on the status of the Community Phlebotomy Service. In recent weeks, waits for the service have lengthened, although they remain within contractual threshold limits. This report sets out the causes of the waiting times increases, and the recovery action plan, which is already resulting in reduced waits.

2. Background

In January 2023, North East London Integrated Care Board (NEL ICB) commissioned a phlebotomy (blood testing) service that serves residents in Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge. This followed a year-long pilot of the service in the same boroughs. Previously, phlebotomy had been provided by a range of different providers, without central coordination, and with no overarching activity model balancing demand and service capacity across the system. The new service model was intended to address these issues, and provide a stable, sustainable provision of phlebotomy in the community. The new service allows patients easy access to bookable appointments in a range of centres across Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge. The service provides bleeds for adults and children aged 12+ only. There is separate provision in place at Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust (BHRUT) for children under 12. BHRUT also provide services for inpatients, cancer patients and patients with learning disabilities and autism.

The new service model was piloted for a year. During the pilot, we monitored activity levels and patient feedback to ensure that the emerging model was delivering effectively. The feedback from patients to the pilot was extremely positive, with over 97% of patients rating the service as 'good' or 'very good'. Particular attention was paid to the experience of older residents, who are more likely to require blood tests; over 97% said that they found it 'easy' or 'very easy' to book an appointment and over 98% stated that they were happy with the distance travelled to their appointment. The experience of the pilot shaped the final service model and capacity modelling.

Phlebotomy is not included in the GP Standard Contract. A primary care Local Incentive Scheme is in place under which Primary Care are paid to provide phlebotomy. Under the scheme GPs can choose to provide phlebotomy to either all residents or just patients on their registered list. Only small numbers of GPs in Havering have opted into the scheme, the latest

data shows only six practices opting into the scheme and only three are actively providing phlebotomy, providing only 548 bleeds in total according to the latest month's activity data. One of the Havering Practices is currently in the process of setting up systems to bleed patients not on their own list, the others are only set up to bleed their own patients.

3. Status Update

The service is operating in a clinically safe manner. However, wait times for non-urgent bleeds lengthened significantly during the early part of 2023 and some sites were at the threshold level (14 days) in February. Delivery of non-urgent bleeds did not exceed this threshold, however both the ICB and the service provider, North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT), were concerned about the increase in wait times in the majority of centres, which were at the threshold limit, and concerns had been raised by patients.

Wait times have begun to reduce in recent weeks, as a result of the recovery measures outlined below, and a reduction in demand. This was growth in demand during the summer is particularly concerning is that during the summer months NHS services typically anticipate lower levels of demand. Continuing high levels of demand during the summer and/or the resulting backlog represented a risk to the service's ability to operate within the waiting time threshold during the winter, when demand for services typically increases.

Service demand is shown in figure 1 below, which sets out actual bookings into the community service. This shows higher demand during 2023 and significant growth from summer 2023 onwards. This is clearly in excess of demand in previous years, which the demand and capacity planning underpinning the service is modelled on. This sudden growth in demand, is likely as a result of a number of factors including changes in acute demand resulting from additional elective activity resulting from elective backlog clearance being carried out by local Acute Trusts, in line with Government directives and the impacts of the industrial action throughout the year.

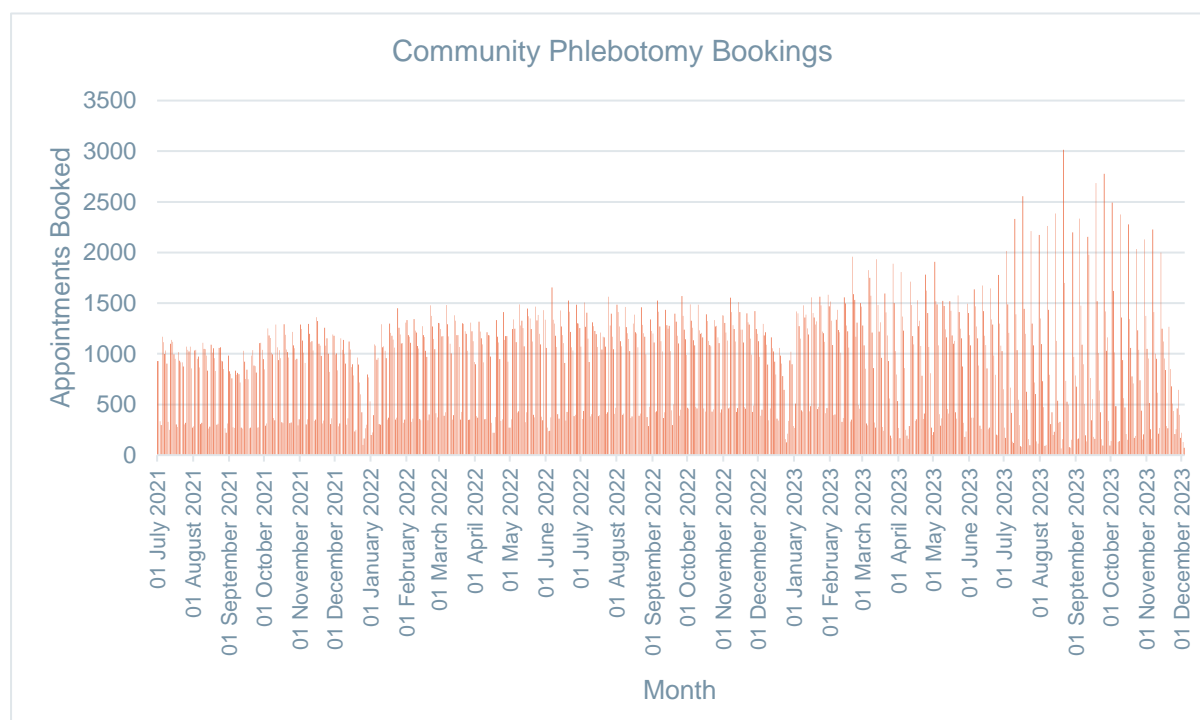


Figure 1 Daily Community Phlebotomy Bookings July 2021 - November 2023

Figure 2, below, shows the volume of appointments available in the community service during 2023. This demonstrates the mismatch between demand against capacity.

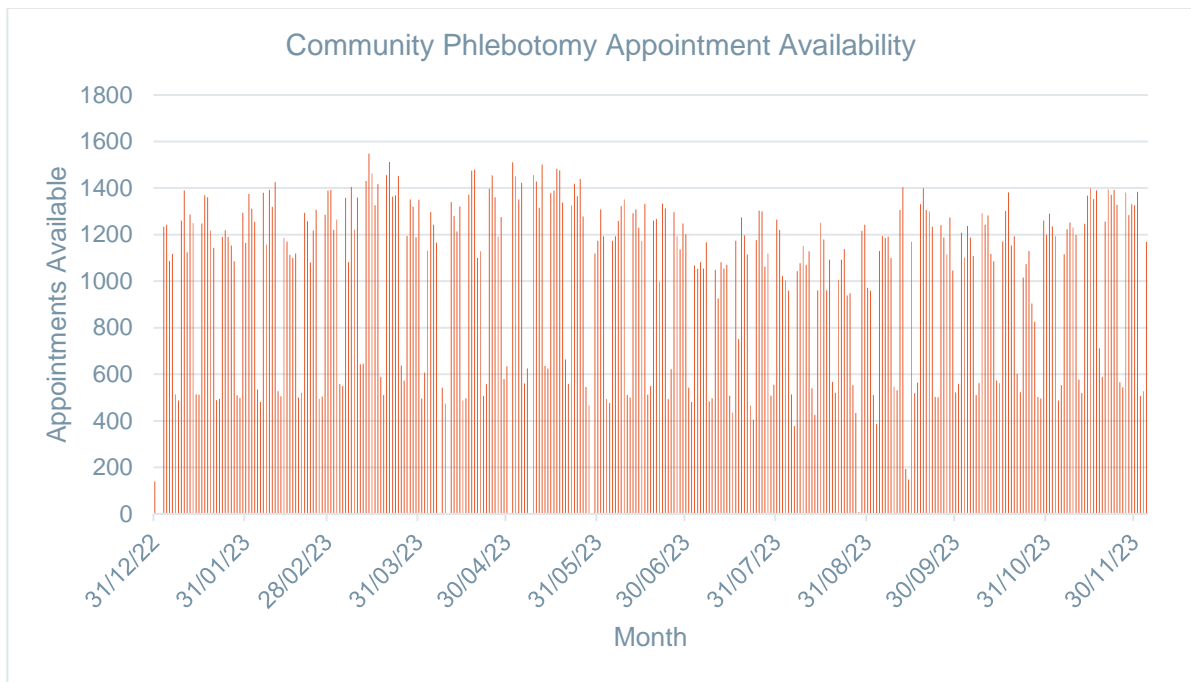


Figure 2 Daily Community Phlebotomy Appointments 2023

4. Recovery Plan

Although the service remains within the threshold level for waits both the commissioner and provider are concerned to see the service hitting the threshold ceiling. To address this NELFT have placed the service into 'business continuity review', and created a recovery plan. Bi-weekly meetings are in place between the ICB and NELFT to review wait times and progress on the recovery plan.

The plan includes the following measures:

- Morning and Evening appointments
- Changing clinic start and end times
- Training new staff who wish to join the staff bank
- Temporarily increasing the number of appointments per chair
- Additional recruitment activity

The recovery plan runs until end of March 2024, with some of the measures being time limited. On completion of the plan the service will be assessed to confirm that it is on a stable footing, or to ascertain what additional changes may be required to make that the case.

In recent weeks we have started to see a reduction in demand, leading to lower waits across many of the centres. The majority of NELFT's recovery activities will begin to take effect in the new year and should equate to a further 15% increase in capacity.

Table 1, below shows the latest wait time at each of the local centres.

Clinic	Next available date	W/C 20 November 2023:	W/C 27 November 2023:	W/C 4 December 2023:	W/C 11 December 2023:
Havering					
Cranham Health Centre	12/12/2023	14 days	Same day	14 days	1 day
Elm Park Clinic	21/12/2023	14 days	14 days	11 days	10 days
Harold Hill Health Centre	11/12/2023	10 days	10 days	9 days	Same day
Raphael House (Romford)	21/12/2023	12 days	Same day	Same day	10 days

Table 1 - Havering Community Phlebotomy Wait Times as at 12/12/23