

**Borough Wide  
Public Consultation  
Summary Report**

**On the review and retendering of  
Sexual Health Services in Wigan Borough.**

**November 2023**

## **Introduction**

This report sets out our approach to undertaking a public consultation into local sexual health service provision, summarises the main findings and highlights how this will inform the next steps of the sexual health review and commissioning process.

In the event of making any changes to the current sexual health service in Wigan Borough, the Local Authority provides the opportunity to consult with everyone who could be impacted by the changes, including the local population, those who currently use the service, current sexual health service staff and service providers. We have worked hard to ensure that we have provided opportunities for as many people across our communities to have their say on the current service and their experiences and views including those that are considered most at risk of poorer sexual health. We have identified numerous stakeholders to ensure that the consultation was robust, inclusive and had wide reach and shared a questionnaire across the local network. We have also provided opportunities to host or support focus groups to obtain a greater level of understanding from targeted communities.

The intelligence we have obtained via the consultation and focus groups, along with other sources of data and evidence pertaining to sexual health outcomes have been used to inform the future design and the next iteration of sexual health service delivery across the borough.

## **Background**

Sexual Health remains a statutory public health responsibility and area of significant spend with poor sexual health outcomes often influencing and being influenced by entrenched health inequalities in some of our communities.

A 2016/2017 review of sexual health in Wigan identified several challenges with our sexual health outcomes and the model at that time such as increasing rates of STIs, evidence of risky behaviour, inequalities in how sexual health affects our communities, late HIV diagnoses, cost, poor coordination and partnership working, lack of alignment with the Deal and an inability to use specialist knowledge and capability to drive changes in system.

In 2017, following a formal review of sexual health provision in the Borough, Wigan set out a revised vision for sexual health services, closely aligned to the Deal and Public Sector Reform Principles and recruited a new specialist provider for sexual health in the borough to deliver this in partnership with us.

Over this period, working with our delivery partner, Spectrum, we have been able to achieve some of our ambitions and improve how services are delivered across Wigan. These changes included increased availability of support, the introduction of an online offer, and ensuring that the correct support was available for the people who need it most. However, some of our ambitions remain unfulfilled due to factors beyond our control, notably the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is within a post-pandemic context that we have launched a review into current services and to enter the next phase of service design, commissioning and delivery that is reflective of the local population need and will continue support our local communities to achieve good outcomes for many years to come.

The work takes place in a challenging context, during a period of recovery, increased asks and structural system change. This is the opportunity to review and refresh our direction of travel working in collaboration with partners across the sexual health system.

Our local agreement for providing sexual health services is reviewed regularly and the Council now needs to commission a new contract to commence from April 2024.

### **Legislation for sexual health**

In 2013 Local Authorities became responsible for commissioning most sexual health services and interventions as part of their statutory public health responsibilities.

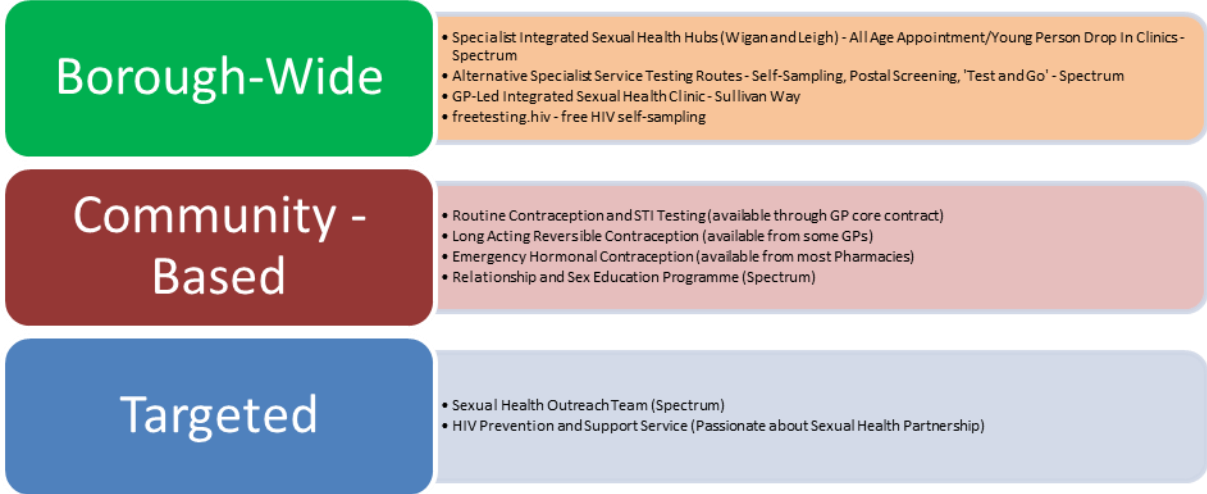
These mandated services includes:

- Preventative action to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV.
- Treatment services for STIs (but not HIV).
- Contraception and reproductive health promotion and provision.
- Specialist counselling for sexual health.

These responsibilities are currently delivered through a combination of external contracts.

Our local responsibilities **does not include** termination of pregnancy (abortion) services, some of the sexual health services delivered by General Practitioners (GP's), contraception that is used for gynaecological purposes, HIV treatment and sterilisation for women and men, all of which are commissioned by other local or regional bodies.

The image below set out how we currently discharge our responsibilities through a local delivery model.



In addition to what is currently available we believe there are further opportunities in delivering a fit for purpose sexual health service throughout the borough and the findings from this consultation have supported us to define this.

**The Consultation – ‘We Did’**

The consultation period ran from 24<sup>th</sup> May to 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023 and was undertaken through the use of an online survey that was hosted on the Wigan Council consultation page, a young person survey used within facilitated group sessions and focus groups with targeted cohorts of residents.

The consultation was promoted using both Wigan Council and our partners communications platforms via social media, notably:

- Wigan Council Twitter
- Wigan Borough Residents Newsletter
- The Deal for Communities Newsletter
- Current service providers communications via Twitter
- Healthwatch Wigan & Leigh
- Posters displayed within current sexual health provider premises including GP surgeries and pharmacies
- In secondary schools through Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) sessions (via current provider)
- Using our network of stakeholders across the Wigan Borough Health and Care system
- Internal Team Wigan Communications

The consultation methodology and approach was designed to ensure:

- We provided a comprehensive explanation of our review aims, objectives and scope

- We consulted on the development of the questionnaire with stakeholders
- The consultation documentation clearly explained the purpose and was well promoted and communicated
- We held focus groups, provided presentations and developed facilitation resources to explain the review and the consultation rationale and enable providers to run their own discussion groups
- We worked collaboratively with a range of stakeholders through the process including internal council teams, commissioned service providers, the wider health system and Healthwatch Wigan and Leigh.

At the close of the consultation on 9th July 2023 we had received a total of 173 responses to the main all-age survey.

In addition to this we used a short survey that was aimed at young people and was designed to be used within structured sessions and focus groups, but also advertised in other public spaces i.e. leisure centres, youth provision and sexual health services.

This survey was created with young people and adults working with them to ensure it was appropriate. After a 6-week consultation period, **49 surveys were completed** by young people.

## **Focus Groups**

Across the 6-week period we conducted 8 focus group sessions in partnership with Healthwatch Wigan & Leigh. The focus groups were aimed at specific cohorts of residents to obtain a greater level of understanding from targeted communities, given they are considered more at risk from poorer sexual health outcomes. 79 people participated in the sessions.

The sessions were designed to focus on a number of thematic areas which included: access and treatment, bookings and use of digital technologies, knowledge and awareness of local services, impact and experience of RSE in school and experience of current services for those that had used them.

## **What You Told Us**

The aim of the public consultation was to build on our existing knowledge of sexual health services and experiences in the borough as well as seeking views on how the services should evolve to meet the needs of the local population, to align with our corporate ambitions to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents and focus on new and innovative ways to tackle health inequalities.

Within the scope of the consultation we focused on key areas that we need to know more about in order to design and implement, in collaboration with providers and stakeholders, a service that is reflective of needs and how people want to access their information, advice and service provision.

We asked local residents and current service users to tell us about:

- Knowledge of current local services and if they know how and where to access support
- Experiences of the current service offer, including access and any barriers to access
- Preferred ways in which they use the sexual health and contraception services provision
- What are the most important features of a modern sexual health service

We also included open questions that enabled respondents to provide any further information about their experiences that may not have been covered in the survey questions.

From the 173 respondents to the online survey we know that:

- 62% have previously used a local sexual health service
- 62% have searched for sexual health information
- 75% know where to receive local support for their sexual health needs
- The majority of respondents have found information on sexual health through either using the service or have searched online.
- Of those that had stated they had used the sexual health service, 78% had a planned appointment.
- 77 respondents had used Spectrum for their sexual health needs, with the main reason for visit being STI screening.
- 5 respondents had used Sullivan Way Surgery, 23 their GP and 6 the local pharmacy.
- The way in which respondents wanted to access contraception varied based on contraception type. The contraception pill preference was access via GP; the Depo injection was a via a Sexual Health Clinic. Emergency Hormonal Contraception access via pharmacy and access to condoms via ordering online.
- The preference for accessing to Long Acting Reversible Contraception was through a Sexual Health Clinic followed closely by access to GP.
- Overall 58/107 respondents that have used a service stated they had been very satisfied with the service and it had been easy to access.

For those respondents who had stated they had found access to services difficult or very difficult they were asked if they wanted to provide more information as to how this could be made easier. The key themes that emerged are:

- More appointments to be available, including drop in spaces and test and go
- Options for online bookings
- Access at weekends and evenings
- Services available closer to where people live, work and study

- Improved information about the services that are available
- Improved access to services via telephone

### **Future services**

The aim of the consultation was to understand current user experience and to gain insight into how services could be improved. The main themes to emerge about improvements included:

- Online appointment booking system
- Online ordering for STI testing kits
- Increased evening and weekend access
- Drop in sessions
- Services are close to home/work/school

You also told us what the most important things are when designing future services, these being:

- Staff attitudes are positive and they have good knowledge
- The service is completely confidential
- The service allows for online bookings
- There are a number of sexual health services available in one place
- The services are accessible by good public transport links
- Reduce the waiting times to be seen
- Service website to be checked and updated regularly to ensure accuracy of information
- Better booking systems – book online/book in advance
- Increased access to drop in's
- Young people only sessions/targeted group sessions to reduce stigma and encourage engagement
- Better access in the local community with more clinics/outreach

### **Key Learning from the Consultation**

From this survey we have been able to ascertain:

- The demographic profile of respondents to the survey mirrors the overall profile of the current Wigan Borough population.
- High level of satisfaction with service quality and experience of healthcare. However, a significant (30%) proportion of residents stated that they had experienced difficulties in accessing services, indicating that access remains a barrier for some residents in our local healthcare system.

- There are people that remain uncomfortable using a sexual health service due to embarrassment or a sense that this is a taboo subject.
- There is a level of support for elements that can be introduced via a new model that could address some of these access barriers, including online booking, and community-based services. However, we also know that there needs to be a blended model of access, and that some groups of residents will need additional support to access services, including from trained and supported professionals.
- There continues to be a level of uncertainty amongst some residents in relation to where they can receive sexual health support and advice, potentially indicating that residents would benefit from clearer access routes and additional health promotion delivery.
- The most important features of a sexual health service continue to be in relation to confidentiality; knowledge, specialist experiences and attitudes of staff; availability of the range of services being in one place; up to date information about service offer and waiting times; the ability to be able to book online and that services are available within the local area.
- Some groups of residents have additional needs or may require alternative approaches. However, it is important for all services to be confidential, non-judgemental and able to support a range of needs.

### **What Young People Told Us**

- The most preferred ways of obtaining sexual health information was looking on the internet, NHS digital, and talking to a family member (multiple choice)
- Only 12% respondents identified talking to a teacher as a preferred option, and 12% selected talking to a school nurse
- From the responses of under 18 females, 66.7% have searched for pregnancy information. 50% predominantly searched online, and 16.7% obtained information in person. 25% had selected they had searched for abortion information online, and 16.7% had obtained abortion information in person.
- All respondents who had searched for pregnancy and abortion information said that they had found what they needed easily and helpful
- Qualitative free text comments described how online is better, as long as it is a trusted and approved website, with another noting how different websites sometimes say different things
- Another comment described how information about contraception needs to be more easily accessible in Catholic/religious schools
- 68% of respondents under 18 were aware of the specialist sexual health service in Wigan. Only 1 mentioned that they did not know any services available



- 40% of respondents under 18 stated that they had accessed some form of sexual health service in Wigan. Using Spectrum services was the most common, followed by local doctors/GPs
- Most respondents stated that they feel comfortable using sexual health services
- For those under 18 who selected that they feel uncomfortable, reasons given centred around:
  - Judgement regarding age
  - Embarrassment
  - Taboo topic
  - Not trusting the person they are speaking to
  - Religious beliefs
  - Intrusive 'but has to be done'
- If they were given a choice, the most preferred way of accessing sexual health services was identified as at a local community venue or at the Dr/GP. The least preferred way was accessing services through school, followed by a venue in the town centre.
- When asked to describe their experience at sexual health services, most describe it as a positive and helpful experience. One young person described an experience of having to travel to Bolton for an abortion as there were no local services that could offer one quickly and at a suitable time. Access was a particular issue as the respondent could not drive at this time.
- Suggested improvements to sexual health services to make them young people friendly were make it less awkward and help young people to be less embarrassed about speaking up.

To further consolidate our learning about the experiences and attitudes of young people we also asked our current Relationships and Sex Education provider (Spectrum) to complete a short exercise with pupils in Y9 and Y10 across a number of secondary schools. RSE continues to be a key mechanism for educating young people about healthy and positive relationships and how to keep themselves safe and healthy.

Five schools agreed to work with Spectrum on this during the RSE lessons with 270 pupils providing responses. We asked the pupils 2 questions and for them to put their answers on a postcard. All responses remained anonymous to encourage pupils to give honest and informative answers.

The questions we asked were:

**1. Thinking about your individual needs, is there anything you would want to be covered in your RSE lessons that would make you confident and informed about sexual health and keeping yourself healthy and safe? Please explain**

**2. What improvements can you suggest to ensure you do not feel embarrassed or worried about getting the services or information that you need for sexual health?**

The key findings and themes that emerged from the sessions are:

### **Question 1**

- Information and more coverage about LGBTQ+ communities
- Consent, harassment and personal safety
- Symptoms of an STI and the different types of testing
- Access to, and how to use contraception
- Peer Pressure
- Body Positivity
- Confidentiality

The responses from the pupils indicate they have real concerns about using services in the event their parents are made aware.

### **Question 2**

- Apps and website – information in one place, including a chat function
- More drop in and young person focused sessions/appointments
- Places to go that are closer to home/school
- Confidentiality and privacy
- Ability to be with friends
- No judgement from adults

### **Conclusion**

The findings from the consultation have been extremely useful in helping to shape the future model of the integrated sexual health service and we have read each and every one of your responses and comments with interest. We would like to say a big thank you to all of those taking part in the consultation.

We have now completed a full procurement exercise throughout October/November with the intention of having a provider in place and ready to start delivery from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

To achieve our ambitions for a sexual health service that is determined by local needs and underpinned by The Deal principles, we recognise the need to identify

and collaborative with the provider to work with us and have the evidenced appropriate level of skill, expertise, experience and capacity to achieve great sexual health outcomes for our residents.

From the evidence that we have obtained through both the recent consultation, other sources of local evidence and intelligence and the wealth of information we obtained in the 2017 review, we know that our model will have a strong emphasis on services being available at the time and place they are needed, with services available in local communities and in venues that are accessible for the local population.

We recognise that needs in relation to sexual health can be vast, multi-layered and that one approach does not meet all needs for all groups. Our findings from working with our targeted populations has defined that the work will continue beyond the review and consultation process and that we, in partnership with our successful provider and our local networks, will engage with and collaborate with people to think creatively on how we design, promote and deliver services that will support our most vulnerable communities.

Throughout this consultation, and through existing evidence we have significant information in relation to what our residents think about current services, how they can be improved on in relation to access and treatment and how we can develop a digital offer that is aligned to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and reflective of how people want to use digital platforms to manage their health and wellbeing.

The full report on the results of the survey is available on request by contacting [healthprotectionandcivilcontingencies@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:healthprotectionandcivilcontingencies@wigan.gov.uk)

## **Acknowledgments**

We would not have been able to undertake this review and public consultation without the support of our residents, partners and stakeholders. We would like to acknowledge and thank the following for their valued contribution:

- The residents of Wigan Borough and the wider members of the public who completed the online survey
- Our current sexual health providers Spectrum and Sullivan Way Practice
- Our partner agencies, including our schools and community partners who promoted the consultation on our behalf
- All our staff from across Wigan Council Public Health and Adult Social Care and our commissioned service providers who promoted the survey and encouraged staff and service users to complete the questionnaire
- Wigan Council Communications and Public Relations Team
- Wigan Council Web Development Team
- Wigan Council Joint Intelligence Unit
- All voluntary organisations and providers
- Healthwatch Wigan & Leigh
- Greater Manchester Integrated Care Service – Wigan Branch

Our particular thanks are extended to the people who supported and participated in the focus group session and RSE sessions notably

- Wigan Borough Youth Cabinet
- Million Voices
- Global Friends & Everything Human Rights
- BYOU
- Wigan Youth Zone
- Leigh Youth Hub
- Winstanley College
- Groundwork Wigan & Leigh
- St Mary's Catholic High School
- Byrchall High School
- Hawkley Hall High School
- Bedford High School
- Golborne High School

We would also like to thank our partners across health and social care who have engaged with us during the consultation process, notably:

- Health Outreach and Inclusion Service (WWL)
- Passionate About Sexual Health GM (PaSH)
- Riverside Housing Group
- With You
- The Brick
- Imagine, Act and Succeed
- Possibilities
- Well Women