

# **Ambitious project to improve GP and primary care services in West Lothian**

**An ambitious three-year project to improve GP and primary care services will be launched in West Lothian later this year.**

A report to the local Integration Joint Board, which oversees care in the community, outlined plans to improve the inequalities which exist across the county in primary provision.

The strategy plans to enhance preventative care, and to develop better access to primary care including GP and MDT teams.

But the Board is in no doubt that financial pressures as well as external economics dog the path ahead for both the council, NHS and the work the Board itself is responsible for.

The plan is the first long term proposal for primary care in West Lothian. It builds upon work already done to develop multi-disciplinary care teams (MDT) to assist GP practices with services including community nurses, physiotherapy as well as other services including dentistry and podiatry.

The difficulty in getting appointments at GP practices has been a growing complaint across West Lothian, with frequent community objections to planning applications for more housing.

The IJB has acknowledged that there is an imbalance between poorer provision in the west of the county than in the east.

In spite of this East Calder's medical practice has long been recognised as a pressure point. It has a patient list which has far outgrown the practice and the centre's buildings in a poor state of repair with not enough space to accommodate GP and associated MDT services.

In his report to the Board Neil Ferguson, the General Manager for Primary Care and Community Services, acknowledged the risks.

He said: "Risks to the sustainability of primary care could lead to reduced access to services for citizens, and deterioration of the health of the local population.

"Collapse of an individual practice would fall to the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to provide services which poses a significant financial risk in addition to significant challenge to service delivery."

Another big potential challenge to the plan is finding staff to do the work. Recruitment, and retention of primary care staff is already difficult. The plan suggests ongoing training and professional career development and to support staff well-being through mental health resources and flexible working arrangements to encourage retention.

It also suggests more partnership working with the Third Sector and voluntary roles.

The three-year plan is linked to the IJB strategy of improving health inequalities, a "Home First" approach to treatment, and enabling high quality care, support and treatment.

Informal engagement has taken place with West Lothian's GP practices, Health and Social Care Partnership Community teams and Acute NHS Lothian representatives, The Local Medical

Committee and Primary Care Contracts Organisation representatives have also been consulted.

The proposals also seek to ensure efficient use of health care premises by focusing on maximising clinical space and the use of remote working and assisting NHS Lothian to manage expansion and to reduce waiting times for primary care appointments.

Board members generally welcomed the proposals but highlighted concerns that initial consultation times were short, given that the plans are set to come to the IJB for approval before the summer and fully fledged proposals are supposed to be in place by later this year.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter