

Appendix Four

Subfertility Clinical Policy

Consultation Communications Plan Outline

Plan for public consultation

Changes to fertility treatment policies in Cheshire and Merseyside

Introduction

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB) has been reviewing its subfertility policies.

Currently, there are ten separate policies covering NHS fertility treatments for people in Cheshire and Merseyside. These are called NHS Funded Treatment for Subfertility policies.

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside is proposing a new single policy for the whole of Cheshire and Merseyside.

The new policy would include a number of changes based on the latest national guidance, but we are also proposing to make some changes for financial reasons. This includes the number of in vitro fertilisation (IVF) cycles.

Subject to Board approval, we are planning to hold a six-week public consultation between 3 June and 15 July 2025, so that people can find out more, and share their views. We will use the feedback we receive to make a final decision.

This document outlines the plan for public consultation. It should be read alongside the Board paper Sub Fertility Clinical Policy Status and Options for consideration, which contains additional background information about the proposal. The plan has been developed by NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's Communications and Engagement team, and will be presented to the Board of NHS Cheshire and Merseyside for approval ahead of public consultation launching.

Objectives

The public consultation objectives are:

- To inform patients and the public, carers/family members, and key stakeholders about the proposal to have a single subfertility policy for Cheshire and Merseyside, and explain what changes this would mean.
- To gather feedback on the proposal, including from people who are currently accessing or have accessed fertility services, organisations who support them (where applicable), their carers/family members, and the wider public, to understand views, including how people might be impacted if changes were to go ahead.
- To understand where there might be differences in responses between different groups/communities, including those with protected characteristics, in line with equalities duties.
- To use public consultation feedback to inform final decision-making around the proposal.

Consultation mechanisms and materials

Feedback will be gathered using a questionnaire containing a series of qualitative and quantitative questions, available online, or in a printed/alternative format or alternative language on request. Respondents will be able to contact NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's

communications and engagement team for help completing the questionnaire, including providing their feedback over the phone if required.

A consultation document will be made available, setting out supporting information about the proposed change. This will also be available in an Easy Read version, with alternative languages and formats available on request.

Both the questionnaire and supporting information will be hosted on a dedicated page in the 'Get involved' section of the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside website.

As part of the consultation, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside will offer to attend meetings of existing groups and networks to provide information about the proposal.

Members of the public will be directed to contact engagement@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk or 0151 295 3052 with any enquiries about the consultation. NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's Patient Experience Team will be briefed on the engagement so that any enquiries that come through central routes can be directed appropriately.

Stakeholder enquires will be directed to communications@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk

Analysis and reporting

Responses to the consultation will be analysed and compiled into a feedback report by NHS Cheshire and Merseyside's communications and engagement team.

The NHS Cheshire and Merseyside programme team which has been reviewing subfertility policies will use the consultation findings to produce a paper for the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Board, so that they can make a final decision on the proposal. The feedback report will be appended to this paper, which will be presented to a meeting of the Board. It is expected that this will take place in public, in late summer/early autumn 2025.

Communications and promotion

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside will promote the opportunity to take part in the consultation across its own channels, including website, social media and in regular newsletters and briefings.

A toolkit for promoting the consultation – including social media assets and short and long form copy for newsletters and websites – will be shared with partners and wider networks for use on their own internal and external channels. This will include local authorities, hospital trusts, GP practices, Healthwatch organisations, the VCFSE (voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise) sector, and other relevant groups, including those which support people experiencing fertility issues.

To ensure that those who would be most impacted by any potential change have an opportunity to share their views, we will also work with colleagues at Liverpool Women's Hospital (NHS University Hospitals of Liverpool Group) to utilise existing patient communication routes, where possible.

Audiences and methods of communication and engagement

The table below provides an overview of key stakeholder groups, and details of how we intend to communicate with them during the public consultation. This is not exhaustive – during the consultation period we will continue to actively identify opportunities to reach different groups and communities to encourage them to take part, including those highlighted in the equality impact assessment (EIA).

The intention will be to issue an initial stakeholder briefing at the point the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Board papers are published on 22 May 2025, followed by a second update on 3 June 2025 to launch the consultation (subject to Board approval).

Audience	Proposed channel/method of communication and engagement
Internal	
NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board (ICB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General covering email with stakeholder briefing.
NHS C&M Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information in weekly staff brief.
NHS CM exec team and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ads of Quality and Improvement Place directors. Place clinical directors. AD Place transformation leads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covering email with stakeholder briefing.
GP practice staff LMC and LPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored email with stakeholder briefing. GP Practice Bulletin – information and link to communications toolkit.
UK Health Security Agency – North West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covering email with stakeholder briefing.
HCP Partnership Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General covering email with stakeholder briefing.
Hewitt Fertility Centre Liverpool Women's Hospital (University Hospital Liverpool Group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share stakeholder briefing
NHS trust communications teams – to share with COO / deputy / chair / CEO / medical directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covering email with stakeholder briefing and comms toolkit for use on their channels.
NHS England NW Communications Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General covering email with stakeholder briefing.
Assisted Conception Working Group, Reducing Unwarranted Variation Steering Group and the Obs & Gynae Clinical Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored covering email with link to stakeholder briefing to clinical networks and other groups.
External	
Current/previous patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hewitt Fertility Centre to share information about consultation across existing patient communication channels, including utilising patient portal, patient participation group, patient support group and Facebook

	page. Wider Liverpool Women's communications channels will also be utilised.
General public across Cheshire and Merseyside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion across existing NHS Cheshire and Merseyside and partner channels, including social media and website, utilising toolkit.
Democratic services / committee clerks for OSC / HWBs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder briefing shared with OSC Chairs across C&M via democratic services teams in each local authority.
LA leaders / councillors / LA chief execs / Directors of Public Health/ LA comms team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored covering email to communications teams with stakeholder briefing for onward sharing, and communications toolkit for using on their channels. Monthly stakeholder bulletin – copy with link to stakeholder briefing.
CHAMPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General covering email with stakeholder briefing and communications toolkit.
MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General covering email with link to stakeholder briefing. MP Briefing (distributed bi-monthly after Board meeting,)
Local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise organisations (VCFSEs) and CVS organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored covering email with stakeholder briefing and communications toolkit for their channels.
Place communications and engagement collaboratives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share communications toolkit and request that they utilise information across their channels and networks.
Local Healthwatch organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tailored covering email with stakeholder briefing and comms toolkit for their channels Stakeholder bulletin – copy with link to stakeholder briefing. Discuss at quarterly communications and engagement meeting.
The media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Press release to be issued at point Board papers are published, then (subject to Board approval) at point public consultation gets underway.
Community Voices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email to be sent to panel members.
Wider groups and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder briefing and communications toolkit to be shared with wider groups and networks, including those which represent people experiencing fertility issues.

Legal and statutory context

The main duties on NHS bodies to make arrangements to involve the public are set out in the National Health Service Act 2006, as amended by the Health and Care Act 2022 (section 14Z45 for integrated care boards and section 242(1B) for NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts). As part of our legal duties, we are required to involve people when we are considering and developing proposals for change which would have an impact on the way in which services are delivered.

Involvement also has links with separate duties around equalities and health inequalities (section 149 of The Equality Act 2010 and section 14Z35 of the National Health Service Act 2006). As part of our work, we need to involve people with protected characteristics, social inclusion groups and those who experience health inequalities.

Local authority scrutiny

NHS commissioners must consult local authorities when considering any proposal for a substantial development or variation of the health service. Subject to the Board's approval of this plan, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside will commence discussions with each of the relevant local authorities.

Evaluation

It's important that we understand the effectiveness of different routes for reaching people, so that we can utilise this for future activity, and the questionnaire will ask people to state where they heard about the engagement. We will summarise this information – along with other measures such as number of enquiries received and visits to the website page – in the final consultation report.

ENDS