

A Volunteer's Perspective on Urgent Care Re-procurement

Local resident Tariq Salim was one of two Healthwatch Croydon representatives on the committee that oversaw the re-procurement of local Urgent Care services. Now the process is finalised, with contractors appointed, Tariq writes:

“Healthwatch Croydon (HWC) commends Croydon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for running a ‘fair and rigorous’ bid process for Croydon Urgent Care.

For a small organisation HWC played a significant role in the process. We had two representatives taking part in the evaluations as public representatives. This bidding process had significant complexity, and required a serious commitment of time and effort from these HWC representatives, as well as from the senior members of Croydon CCG who formed the evaluation team, and the small number of other public representatives on the bid evaluation team. I found the process hugely interesting, and coming from the outside with nearly zero knowledge of the NHS, I have learnt a great deal. The training we were given was commendable. I supplemented this with a fair amount of background reading.

There are local, NHS England related, and broader political aspects to this bid.

The local aspect is that the winning bidder will provide urgent care facilities to Croydon as defined in the bid invitation and the bid documents. HWC had input into the process for defining these. The one area where I have a concern is that walk-in centres are not located in north Croydon where the need is greatest.

The larger aspect is that this is the first commissioning of integrated Urgent Care in England after definition of the NHS England strategy of moving NHS care as near to NHS users’ homes as possible. Croydon is thus at the leading edge of the post 2012 NHS reform, and this has pluses and minuses. This procurement covers Urgent Care excepting Emergency Care at hospitals, and also excepting Ambulance Service provision, which are provided by Croydon University Hospital and London Ambulance Service respectively. This procurement is the test case for integrated Urgent Care provision in this way for all of England, and especially for London. I found Croydon CCG's strategy for this to be impressive in scope, and in the way it interpreted the NHS England vision, and I hope the successful bidder succeeds in delivering on this.

The political aspect that this bid process revealed to me is that all NHS commissioning is now done without distinguishing between private providers and NHS public (nationalised) providers. Once successful, all providers of NHS services now have the NHS “badge” and the general public need not, and generally will not, know the difference. Whatever one's politics, this is a big change which everyone should be aware of.”