The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has today published its report following an inspection of Weston General Hospital in February and March 2017. The Trust was given an overall rating of ‘Requires Improvement’, the same as its previous rating in 2015.

However, one area of continued concern – emergency and urgent care services - was rated ‘Inadequate’. The service has historic and ongoing issues, particularly around recruiting and retaining permanent doctors within the team. The CQC wants to see significant changes.

James Rimmer, Chief Executive of Weston Area Health NHS Trust, welcomed the report and fully accepted its findings. He said:

“Whilst we are pleased the CQC has recognised we have made some significant improvements since our last inspection, due to the efforts of our hard-working staff, we know we still have some way to go to make sure all our patients get the best possible care across all services all of the time.

“Since the follow-up inspection in March, we have already delivered improvements. This includes revising our systems for admitting and discharging patients; improving the flow of patients through the hospital; working with local GPs so they can refer and admit patients directly to the hospital for urgent care without having to come through A&E; and partnering with a neighbouring Trust to share consultant expertise, clinical supervision and training.

“However, we agree with the CQC that our urgent and emergency care services are not sustainable in the way they are currently organised. Our A&E has been fragile for several years. We have severe challenges with recruiting and retaining senior doctors to staff our A&E department 24 hours and day, seven days a week, and now need to find new ways to address this.”

“We are at risk of falling short of providing safe levels of staffing in our A&E department at night. Our staff have worked incredibly hard to shore-up the department but despite significant efforts we just can’t recruit enough permanent doctors and are very dependent on temporary and locum staff. That isn’t sustainable for such a highly specialist clinical team and poses an intractable problem for the Trust.

“Today we are announcing that we will be temporarily closing our A&E at Weston overnight from Tuesday 4 July 2017, between 10pm and 8am, because we can’t provide safe staffing levels overnight from then. This is not an easy decision to make, but patient safety is our number one priority.”

The department will remain fully open in the day between 8am and 10pm, the times when about 80% of people who use Weston’s A&E service attend. All other Weston hospital services are unaffected.
Dr Peter Collins, Medical Director at the Trust, said: “This is a very difficult decision but the right one. The risk of not filling a shift with specialist doctors, vital to safe patient care, is unacceptably high. This is also not just an issue about the number of staff on duty at any one time; we need a permanent team to lead and develop our urgent and emergency care service to make it the best it can be for our patients.

“A temporary overnight closure gives us time to work with local GPs, community services, social care colleagues and neighbouring hospitals to strengthen, redesign and rebuild our urgent and emergency care service in North Somerset. It is our ability to recruit that is our challenge, not our ability to care.

“The NHS in the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire region has robust plans in place to respond to any immediate service changes that need to be made, such as this temporary overnight closure.

“Neighbouring hospitals, out-of-hours GPs and the ambulance service will work with our staff to make sure patients can still get seen and treated for urgent and emergency care between the hours of 10pm and 8pm once this temporary overnight closure begins on 4 July.”

During the closure:

- Call non-emergency NHS 111 where you will be directed to the best medical care for you
- Call 999 for any serious or life-threatening conditions.

Patients transferred to Bristol or Taunton overnight will be brought back to Weston if appropriate as soon as they are fit enough to continue their treatment and recovery here, normally within 2-3 days.

This is a temporary measure. No permanent changes to A&E services or any other services in the hospital will be made without a full public consultation.

North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (the body responsible for planning and buying services for local people) is already engaging with staff, patients, local people and communities in the area to work up ideas for a longer-term sustainable solution to the challenges faced. Please see www.northsomersetccg.nhs.uk for further details about how to get involved.

ENDS

Notes

- Our A&E will continue to remain open during the day. Services will only reopen during the night once we are confident we can deliver a safe and sustainable service throughout the night
- The temporary overnight closure will affect around 27 people a night. Of the numbers attending at night, around 12 arrive by ambulance. Six of those patients typically are already then transferred to other hospitals nearby for more specialist care and treatment. After 4 July those local patients who need to go to hospital by ambulance at night will be taken by the ambulance crew directly from their home or pick-up point to neighbouring A&Es at Bristol and Taunton. If admitted to hospital, they will be transferred back to Weston as soon as they are fit enough to continue their treatment and recovery there, normally within 2-3 days. So, it will be about six ambulance patients a night who are
affected by this temporary change, who will receive care in a different way to the way they would now.

- There are 15 or so patients who attend Weston A&E at night who do not have life-threatening or serious conditions but require urgent care. After 4 July, they should dial 111 to seek advice and support. They may be referred to the out-of-hours GP service, or to overnight community care services until the following day when they can see their GP or other care provider.
- We are working with our staff, NHS partners, commissioners, regulators, and local communities to develop a long-term solution to these challenges. We need to make sure local people can access safe, high quality urgent and emergency services from wherever they live in North Somerset. A recent public engagement process took place to discuss ideas and possible options around this, and this work will continue over the coming months.

**Accessing services from 4 July**
- In a serious life-threatening emergency patients should call 999. Ambulance services will take patients to the closest hospital to get the emergency, highly specialist care they need. This is already the case in North Somerset for stroke or heart attack patients, any major trauma and seriously ill children.
- Anyone feeling unwell, and needing urgent care should call NHS 111, the non-emergency advice line. The service is available 24 hours a day and is free to call from mobiles as well as landlines. Trained NHS 111 advisers or nurses will assess the patient’s symptoms and advise on the best service for their needs. This may be the out-of-hours GP service, or a referral to overnight community care services until the following morning when they can see their GP or other care provider. If it is an emergency an ambulance will be dispatched immediately.
- Information on all local health services is available on the North Somerset CCG website. An advice booklet, ‘Your Guide to Local NHS services’ is also available from chemists, GPs and other community outlets.
- The North Somerset service finder app can be downloaded from iTunes or Google Play. The app provides information on all the services available locally and contact information. Using GPS it will show you the closest service to your location.

**Facts**
- Weston General Hospital’s A&E sees around 55,000 patients a year.
- A&E will be open and running a full service between 8:00 and 22:00
- Around 80% of patients use A&E between 8:00 and 22:00
- Between 25 – 30 patients on average are currently seen in A &E overnight at Weston General Hospital.
  - On average 7 are admitted overnight as patients
  - On average around 20 are treated and discharged
- All patients in the A&E department before and up to 22:00 will be seen and treated
- No other hospital services are affected.
- Clear signage will be displayed on and off the Weston site to advise public of the opening hours of the department
- Phone assistance through 111 and 999 will be put in place for emergencies.
- Any patient who arrives independently to the hospital in a critical life threatening health crisis (e.g. heart attack) during the hours of the temporary overnight closure will be stabilised while an ambulance is called.