Health and care leaders have come together to develop a Long Term Plan to make the NHS fit for the future, and to get the most value for patients out of every pound of taxpayers’ investment. Our plan has been drawn up by those who know it best, including frontline health and care staff, patient groups and other experts.

Primary care remains the bedrock of our NHS, with GPs as the expert generalist, leading wider multi-disciplinary teams, being the trusted anchors of local communities of all kinds.

And with their specialist knowledge of the areas they serve, and the patients they care for, it is these teams which are best placed to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.

But General Practice has also faced challenges in recent years, with particular difficulty in some areas recruiting enough staff to meet their rising and increasingly complex caseloads.

In response to this challenge, GPs and their teams are increasingly coming together with other practices to form primary care networks, which can employ a greater variety of professionals to provide a wider range of services for patients.

Over the next few years, we will work with GPs and their teams to support the development of these networks, which will work with hospitals, community teams, social care and voluntary services to help people to stay well and better manage their own conditions.

This will be backed by increased funding, with an extra £4.5bn a year going to primary and community care by 2023/24, coupled with concerted action to recruit 5,000 more GPs, alongside other professionals to work with them.

And as peoples’ preferences change, we will provide support to enable every primary care network to offer ‘digital-first’ services, in a way that maintains quality for patients and benefits the whole NHS.

To ensure a strong future for primary care, the NHS Long Term Plan will:

- Increase investment in ‘out of hospital’ primary and community health services by £4.5bn a year by 2023/24, to ensure that staff and services are available close to peoples’ homes.
- Deliver a further 5,000 GPs, alongside other roles such as pharmacists, counsellors, physios and nurse practitioners, to ensure that GPs’ skills are focused on where they can best help patients.
- Support GPs and their teams to work more closely with colleagues in other practices across an area, so that they can offer better access and more services and proactive care for patients.
- Help practices embrace new, ‘digital-first’ services, providing convenient access to care and advice, in a way that is safe and provides fairness for all kinds of GP practices.

Case study

In Wokingham, 13 GP practices are working together to provide better care for patients. This includes Woodley Centre Surgery, where a paramedic home visiting service is being offered across five practices covering 62,000 people.

Paramedics undertake routine visits, reporting back to the GP, giving GPs more time to visit patients with more complex needs and those approaching the end of their lives.

Over a seven-month period, 96 hospital attendances were avoided and 75 sessions of GP time saved.

It has also meant a closer working relationship with social services and community teams, and GPs have found they have more time with patients, can undertake essential practice administration and have a better work-life balance.