STATEMENT FROM DR NIGEL WATSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, WESSEX LOCAL MEDICAL COMMITTEES

The NHS is facing some of the most difficult challenges since its inception almost 70 years ago and nowhere is this seen more acutely than in general practice.

Most would agree that the NHS needs to change in order to meet the challenges we all face.

International evidence confirms that the NHS provides high quality, cost effective services because of the British system of general practice based on a registered list of patients. This has to be the building block of any future provision of care. If general practice fails the rest of the NHS will also fail.

As 90% of patient contacts occur in general practice it is therefore imperative it is sustainable and has the ability to recruit and retain staff.

The GP Forward View makes it clear that there will be significant investment over the next 5 years but this will not be via direct funding to general practice but will be via services to support general practice working together and also providing services at scale.

The LMC believes that general practice needs to be considered on a par with hospital and not as an afterthought. The future of the provision of healthcare in Dorset must have general practice at the centre with practices providing high quality care to their registered population but also playing a significant role in the provision of care to their natural community.

This will mean practices working together with support from other services. This may mean practices working together in a network or federations or for some the way forward may be merger (we are seeing both of these developing locally).

For some care the natural communities of 30-50,000 patients is an appropriate size to provide services but for others a population of 100,000 is more appropriate. These localities/care partnerships need to have greater ownership of and connection to the services that are available and must have the ability to provide services at scale. This is where primary care access hubs could provide services at scale that become an integrated part of general practice, supporting individual practices as well as the natural communities of care. They are one way by which the pressure can be reduced in general practice by allowing general practice to regain control of the workload by adding capacity and offering alternatives to the default position of “see your GP”.

The LMC has been very involved with the development of the Dorset Primary Care Strategy. This has involved much discussion about how general practice can be supported, developed and become more sustainable. At times there has been challenge which the CCG has responded to positively.

The LMC supports the CCG in its recognition of, and support for, change in Primary Care, while recognising that this still needs to be translated into real delivery in terms of resource and substantive change. We will continue to work with them to make this happen.