

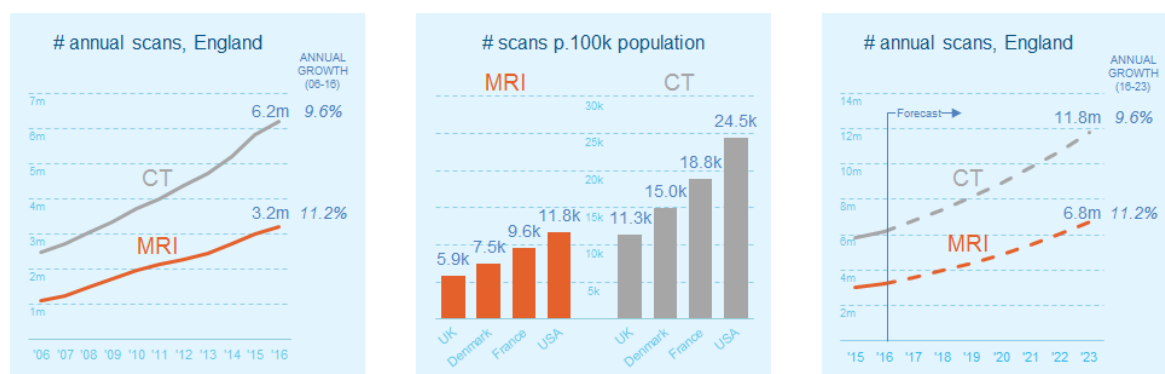
**Integrated Diagnostic Centre briefing**

**September 2021**

**Background context**

Since 2017, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust (STSFT) has been in discussions to develop plans for a new Integrated Diagnostic Centre. The primary driver for this development is the major growth in demand for diagnostic imaging which is increasing by approximately 10% per year nationally across the NHS. Essentially, STSFT is facing more demand for scans than it has capacity to deliver.

This growth, demonstrated in the graphics below, does not consider the impact on diagnostics from the NHS five year cancer plan where shorter turnaround times will be mandated and more challenging standards will be set – all of which will require additional scanning and reporting capacity. The impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated pressures on diagnostic services.



**Ambition**

In early 2019, STSFT shared its ambition (with staff, patients and the public) to create a new world-class diagnostics centre at South Tyneside District Hospital which would provide additional scanning capacity and allow the Trust to optimise imaging demand.

Discussions were put on hold due to COVID-19 however STSFT is now progressing plans following approval from the Trust’s Board of Directors with a formal planning application underway. The need for such a facility is now increasingly important to help services recover from the pandemic, reduce waiting lists, and future proof services in South Tyneside and Sunderland for years to come.

**About the new Integrated Diagnostic Centre**

The new Integrated Diagnostic Centre at STSFT will include additional MRI and CT scanning capacity, a number of clinical consultation rooms, as well as a ‘docking’ station for mobile scanners should these be needed in future to cope with the ever rising demand. It will ensure patients have timely access to scans and even more choice. The new facility will be fully integrated to the Trust’s digital patient record, allowing consultants to view and report on images in multiple locations, including their own homes. This will mean a much quicker reporting turnaround time so that patients can begin treatment sooner.

Most importantly, the new facility will also include a PET-CT scanner, meaning patients will no longer need to travel to Freeman (Newcastle) and James Cook (Middlesbrough) if they have a suspected cancer diagnosis. A PET-CT scan is a specialist diagnostic procedure which uses a drug to show areas of the body where cancer cells may be active. This is a major development for the local populations of South Tyneside, Sunderland and North Durham with STSFT becoming one of only three Trusts across the whole North East and North Cumbria ICS to host PET-CT. This means a significant number of patients will no longer need to travel as part of their cancer pathway which will be of great benefit to local residents and help improve some of the known health inequalities which exist in relation to accessing cancer services.

STSFT's plans for a new Integrated Diagnostic Centre do not constitute any service change or reconfiguration of patient services. The development is in addition to existing services and will provide extra diagnostic capacity, as well as the provision of PET-CT scanning locally for South Tyneside, Sunderland and Durham residents.

For routine MRI and CT scans, all patients will continue to have access to scans locally at Sunderland Royal Hospital and Durham Treatment Centre just as they do now. They will also have the choice to attend the new Integrated Diagnostic Centre in South Tyneside once it becomes operational. There are no plans to reduce the number of fixed CT or MRI scans at Sunderland Royal Hospital and STSFT will continue to use mobile capacity where appropriate – for example at Durham Treatment Centre where there has never been fixed CT or MRI scanners.

By increasing overall diagnostic capacity across the Trust, STSFT hopes to improve the range of services on offer to local residents through the development of services like cardiac MRI (which patients also currently have to travel much further afield for).

### **Impact on health inequalities**

Increasing diagnostic capacity at STSFT will impact positively on system-wide goals to help reduce health inequalities, particularly as demand continues to increase and waiting times are currently longer than they were before the pandemic. Health and equality have been consistently considered throughout the initial planning phases and will continue to be an integral part of discussions to ensure that the nine main characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 are met. An Equality Impact Assessment in line with public sector equality duties will also be undertaken.

It is clear that COVID-19 has impacted more negatively on certain groups than others with many people not accessing NHS care at all. This means we must work harder than ever to close the gaps that exist and make sure everyone has access to the same high quality care. The provision of a new diagnostic facility, alongside existing local services, will provide more opportunity for timely diagnostic investigation and prompt treatment.

The additional provision of PET-CT will also help reduce health inequalities providing more local access to cancer diagnosis compared to current arrangements.

### **Partnership with Alliance Medical**

The development has been made possible thanks to partnership working with Alliance Medical who have provided mobile diagnostic vans to STSFT for over ten years and already provide PET-CT scanning across the entire NHS. Alliance Medical will front the £10 million capital cost of building the new facility and purchasing equipment. Upfront costs will be recouped over time through a partnership agreement with STSFT to deliver additional diagnostic capacity. The new Integrated Diagnostic Centre will be 100% owned by the NHS and STSFT's investment into diagnostic provision will be used in a

much more cost effective way with a lower cost per scan negotiated through the partnership with Alliance Medical.

### **Patient involvement and experience**

Since sharing our ambitions for a new Integrated Diagnostic Centre back in 2019, extensive public engagement has taken place. This has shown that *'being diagnosed quickly so that treatment can begin sooner'*, is something which matters to patients with, 97% of patients stating timely access to tests and scans as extremely important (77%) or very important (20%). STSFT's ambition for a new diagnostics facility has been well supported with lots of positive comments from staff and stakeholders. For example:

*"The integrated diagnostic centre is positive to increase capacity/ability to respond to demand."*

*"The Diagnostic Centre is very good and will improve current waiting times."*

*"An extra Diagnostic and Imaging Centre makes more sense to do it at ST as it is a bigger site (with more space)."*

A number of virtual patient and public engagement sessions will be held over the summer for people to find out more about the development of an Integrated Diagnostic Centre at STSFT. Through engagement already undertaken to date, along with further involvement activities, the Trust will ensure a robust process of patient / service user and public involvement as plans progress. This will continue to be undertaken in line with best practice and as part of a co-production approach to inform the design process and build phases of the new Integrated Diagnostic Centre at STSFT.

### **Summary**

This is a hugely positive development for the local populations of South Tyneside, Sunderland and parts of North Durham and will mean faster diagnosis and treatment for more patients as the NHS recovers from COVID-19. The plans have been welcomed and supported by the region's Integrated Care System (ICS) and mean STSFT is now one of only three specialist centres in the North East and North Cumbria to offer PET-CT scanning. This will also benefit the wider region with increased capacity overall for the NHS to care for more patients undergoing cancer diagnosis.

### **Timings and next steps**

Work is underway at South Tyneside District Hospital to prepare the site for future development with the safe demolition of aging buildings over the summer. STSFT hopes to receive planning approval for the new Integrated Diagnostic Centre in the autumn. Building work is then expected to begin in late 2021(subject to planning approval) with the new facility set to open to patients towards the end of 2022.

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