

Briefing Note

Title: Health Screening in Wolverhampton**Date: 13 September 2022****Prepared by: Sophie Pagett
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Purpose

This paper outlines two adult screening areas that are offered to residents in Wolverhampton, the current uptake rates and plans to improve these rates across the City. The two areas this paper discusses are NHS Health Checks and NHS Cancer Screening Programmes.

Overview

Screening is a way of identifying apparently healthy people who may have an increased risk of a particular condition. The aim is to offer screening to the people who are most likely to benefit from it through a targeted approach. Finding out about a problem early can mean that treatment is more effective.¹ Screening should always be a personal choice. Screening programmes are effectively judged on whether the benefits to those who get earlier treatment outweigh the harms to those people who get treated unnecessarily, or who are subject to unnecessary anxiety.²

An independent expert group called the UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) advises the NHS on which screening programmes should be offered and each programme has slightly different eligibility criteria.³ NHS Health checks are commissioned by Local Authorities, national cancer screening programmes are commissioned by NHS England. Over 10 million adults attend screening appointments each year in England.⁴ People are invited to screening appointments via a variety of methods including letters, text messages, phone calls and opportunistic face to face invites.

In 2020, the Covid-19 Pandemic resulted in access to screening services declining due to the unprecedented demand and effects on the NHS. This led to an impact on screening services, resulting in delayed invites and missed appointments. This impact was seen across England and services are now in recovery from the effect of the pandemic. Reprioritisation of NHS services and changes to public behaviour in accessing health care during this time, means that it is likely there will be an increase in undiagnosed Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) and late cancer diagnosis in the local population. Locally we saw a drop in access to both NHS Health Checks and Cancer Screening Programmes.

¹ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (2022) NHS Screening Programmes in England. Available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-screening-programmes-annual-report/nhs-screening-programmes-in-england-2018-to-2019>

² UK National Screening Committee (2021) Screening in the UK: making effective recommendations. Available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-screening-committee-recommendations-annual-report/screening-in-the-uk-making-effective-recommendations-1-april-2018-to-31-march-2019>

³ UK National Screening Committee (2021) Screening in the UK: making effective recommendations. Available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-screening-committee-recommendations-annual-report/screening-in-the-uk-making-effective-recommendations-1-april-2018-to-31-march-2019>

⁴ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (2022) NHS Screening Programmes in England. Available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-screening-programmes-annual-report/nhs-screening-programmes-in-england-2018-to-2019>

CVD is responsible for one in four premature deaths in the UK and continues to be the cause of the largest gap in healthy life expectancy⁵. Ischaemic heart disease, dementia and Alzheimer disease and strokes are all linked to CVD, and all these conditions are among the leading causes of deaths in the UK alongside cancer⁶. The most effective way to manage CVD is early screening, detection and treatment: including management of preventable risk factors such as poor diet, physical inactivity, smoking, stress and harmful alcohol consumption⁷. Wolverhampton has higher than average adult obesity rates, physical inactivity rates and more current smokers than both the regional and national averages, contributing to CVD being the leading cause of years of life lost in the city⁸.

There are underlying health inequalities seen with CVD, with those in the most deprived 10% of the population being almost twice as likely to die as a result of CVD than those in the least deprived 10% of the population.⁵ Wolverhampton is ranked 24th most deprived local authority in England, with 21% of the population living in the top 10% most deprived areas in the country and therefore a large proportion of the city's population are at increased risk of premature mortality from CVD⁹.

Cancer prevalence is growing and will continue to grow over the coming years. It is estimated that by 2030 there will be as many as 135,000 people living in the West Midlands living with and beyond cancer.¹⁰ This is due to a number of factors, including rising incidence related to our ageing population, but also higher rates of early diagnosis and better treatments.

Cancer screening is made up of three screening programmes:

- Bowel Screening
- Breast Screening
- Cervical Screening

Each of the screening programmes above is targeted to those most likely to benefit.¹¹ Wolverhampton has seen a decline in uptake of all three cancer screening programmes over the last five years and screening rates remain lower than both regional and England Averages.¹²

Background & Current picture

NHS Health Checks

The NHS Health Check is offered to the generally well population of people aged between 40-74 that are registered with a GP practice, once every 5 years. Anyone with pre-existing health conditions, patients with a previous recorded cardiovascular risk score of >20%, and those currently taking statins are not eligible¹³. There are also separate annual health check programmes for people with learning disabilities and those diagnosed with severe mental illness, commissioned via NHS England and not to be confused with NHS Health Checks which are commissioned by Local Authority Public Health.

⁵ Public Health England (2019) Health matters: preventing cardiovascular disease [Health matters: preventing cardiovascular disease - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

⁶ Office for National Statistics (2020) Leading causes of death, UK: 2001 to 2018 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/articles/leadingcausesofdeathuk/2001to2018>

⁷ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2022) CVD Prevention: NHS Health Checks [CVD prevention: NHS Health Checks \(nice.org.uk\)](https://www.nice.org.uk)

⁸ City of Wolverhampton Council (2022) Public Health Annual Report 2021-22 Wolverhampton [Public Health Annual Report 2021-22 v9.qxp WCC 1668 - 07/22 \(wolverhampton.gov.uk\)](https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk)

⁹ City of Wolverhampton Council (2021) Public Health Annual Report 2020-21 Wolverhampton [Layout 1 \(wolverhampton.gov.uk\)](https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk)

¹⁰ Public Health England (2017) Cancer in the West Midlands. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cancer-in-the-west-midlands>

¹¹ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (2022) NHS Screening Programmes in England. Available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-screening-programmes-annual-report/nhs-screening-programmes-in-england-2018-to-2019>

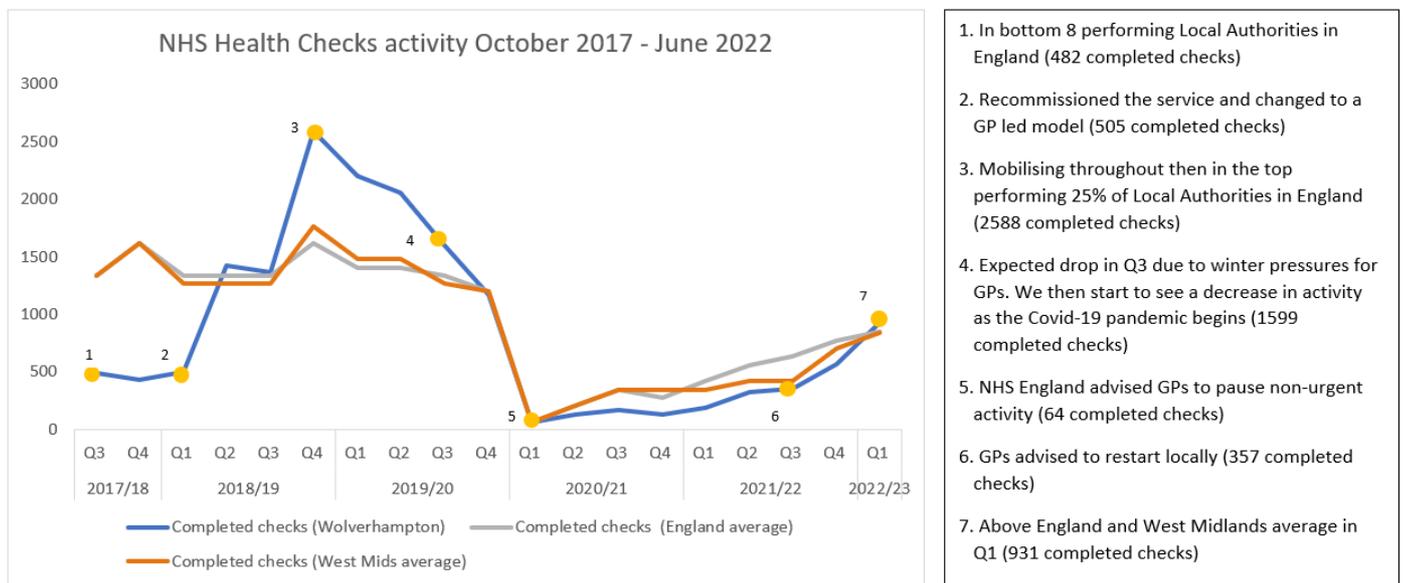
¹² Fingertips (2022) Cancer Services data, Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/cancerservices/data#page/1>

¹³ NHS (2022) NHS Health Check [NHS Health Check - Home](https://www.nhs.uk)

The NHS Health Check assesses a patient’s lifestyle; including alcohol intake, physical activity routine, diet, dementia risk, family history, weight, height and blood pressure measurements, and involves a blood test which measures cholesterol and blood glucose. The results provide a 10 year CVD risk score which can be used to predict the likelihood of poor health outcomes as a result of CVD during this time, and then patients receive personalised advice on how to improve their risk¹⁴.

Since 2018 the NHS Health Check programme in Wolverhampton has been delivered using a Primary Care model through GP practices. Changing to this model in 2018/19 saw a steady increase in completed health checks, moving Wolverhampton from the lowest performing 25% of local authorities in England to the top performing 25% of local authorities in England. Activity remained above England average until the end of 2019/20.

At the beginning of 2020/21 there was a fall in activity which mirrored the England average due to the Covid-19 pandemic and national advice for GP practices to limit face to face appointments for ‘non-urgent’ services¹⁵. Activity remained low throughout 2020 and 2021.



1. In bottom 8 performing Local Authorities in England (482 completed checks)
2. Recommissioned the service and changed to a GP led model (505 completed checks)
3. Mobilising throughout then in the top performing 25% of Local Authorities in England (2588 completed checks)
4. Expected drop in Q3 due to winter pressures for GPs. We then start to see a decrease in activity as the Covid-19 pandemic begins (1599 completed checks)
5. NHS England advised GPs to pause non-urgent activity (64 completed checks)
6. GPs advised to restart locally (357 completed checks)
7. Above England and West Midlands average in Q1 (931 completed checks)

Figure 1.1. Demonstrates the change in activity over time for the NHS Health Check Programme in Wolverhampton compared to the West Midlands and England.

In January 2022, NHS England published guidance that advised general practice should return to pre-pandemic routine services¹⁶. Now that services have resumed, a recovery period from covid has begun. The ambition is to return to pre-pandemic levels by supporting providers through both training and workforce development, ensuring a quality service is offered during practice hours.

In collaboration with GP practices and Primary Care Networks (PCNs) the service has been recommissioned using an updated specification and all GP practices and PCNs in Wolverhampton are now signed up to deliver. Embedding NHS Health Checks into GP practice supports the use of routine call and recall systems to identify and invite eligible patients via a risk stratification approach, meaning that those who more at risk of developing CVD are invited for a health check as priority. Several invites are sent to eligible people using a range of different methods.

¹⁴ NHS (2019) What is an NHS Health Check? [What is an NHS Health Check? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

¹⁵ NHS England (2022) Community health services prioritisation framework [Coronavirus » Community health services prioritisation framework \(england.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

¹⁶ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (2022) NHS Health Check Restart Guidance <https://www.healthcheck.nhs.uk/see/cmsfile/?id=1690>

Commissioning of an additional PCN level service specification has also been rolled out across Wolverhampton. The aim of this is to provide patients with better access to book a health check local to where they live by supporting PCNs to set up additional clinics and offer support to low performing GP practices within their network. Following a successful pop-up event at the Newhampton Arts Centre on 8th June 2022, PCNs will also be supported to provide further outreach clinics at community venues across the city to target specific at-risk patient groups who may otherwise not attend routine GP appointments.

Health inequalities data around uptake by ethnicity, age, sex and deprivation will be monitored and reported to practices with ambitions to improve equity of access. This, along with outreach clinics and additional enhanced access via PCN clinics will ensure that the service is equitable, and data can inform where any areas of low uptake are to enable a focus on reducing health inequalities.

Current activity

Indicator	Period	Wolves			Region England			England	
		Recent Trend	Count	Value	Value	Value	Worst/Lowest	Range	Best/Highest
People receiving an NHS Health Check	2018/19 Q1 - 2022/23 Q1	–	15,835	22.3%	20.8%	21.5%	1.6%		55.4%

Figure 1.2: Indicator relating to current Wolverhampton performance, showing 5 year rolling average for % of those eligible who have received an NHS Health Check compared with Region and England ¹⁷

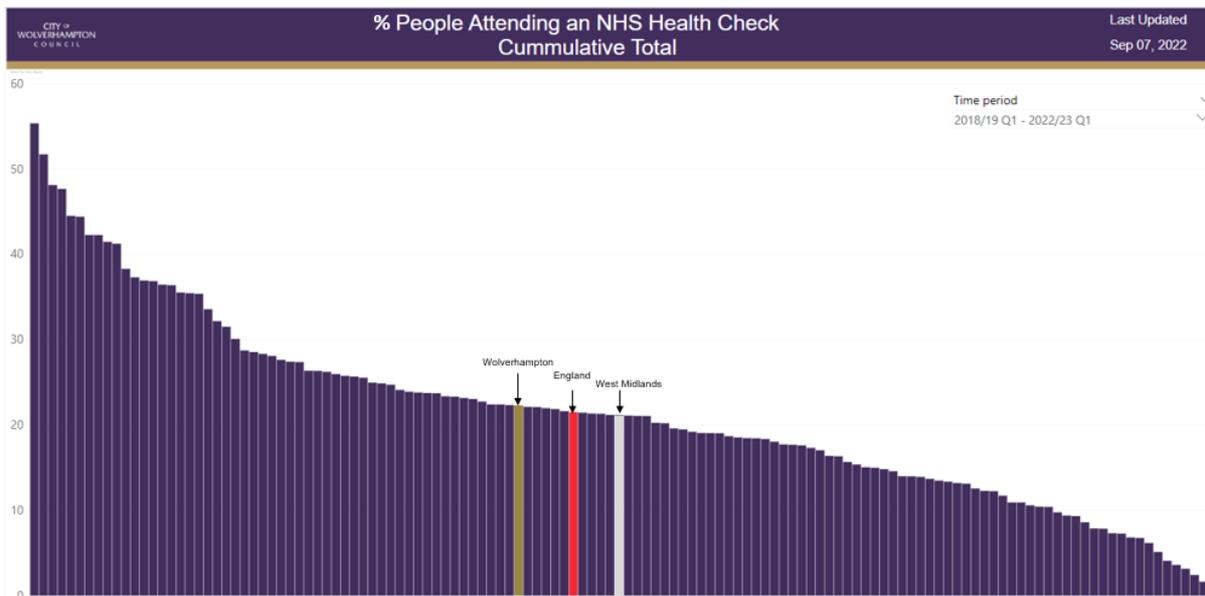


Figure 1.3: Ranked Local Authorities - highlighting cumulative total no. of people attending an NHS Health Check ¹⁸

Uptake in Quarter 1 of 2022/23 (931 completed checks) is above both West Midlands and England averages respectively. Furthermore, figure 1.2 highlights how Wolverhampton is also above England Average over the last 5-year period. However, there is still much room for improvement, as figure 1.3 shows, Wolverhampton is currently ranked 54th out of all Local Authorities in England. On average, the target for Wolverhampton is to be completing 775 checks per quarter to maintain above England average performance and 1,695 checks per quarter to reach the ambition of top quartile in England (48% of eligible patients having had a health check over the next 5 years).

¹⁷ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (2022) Fingertips: Public Health Data NHS Health Check [NHS Health Check - Data - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk/nhs-health-check-data)

¹⁸ Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (2022) Fingertips: Public Health Data NHS Health Check – area comparison [NHS Health Check - Data - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk/nhs-health-check-data)

Cancer Screening

Cancer Screening rates are below the England average across all three of the programmes, figure 2.1 below.

Indicator	Period	Recent Trend	Wolves		Region England		England		
			Count	Value	Value	Value	Worst	Range	Best
Cancer screening coverage: breast cancer	2021/22	↓	14,482	52.4%	62.3%*	64.1%*	41.7%		78.1%
Cancer screening coverage: bowel cancer	2021/22	↑	21,610	56.2%	62.3%*	65.2%*	47.4%		77.0%
Cancer screening coverage: cervical cancer (aged 25 to 49 years old)	2021/22	→	32,667	64.3%	67.9%*	68.0%*	42.9%		78.2%
Cancer screening coverage: cervical cancer (aged 50 to 64 years old)	2021/22	↓	16,694	71.0%	74.3%*	74.7%*	53.5%		89.8%

Figure 2.1: Cancer screening coverage in Wolverhampton 2021/22 ¹⁹

NHS Bowel Screening Programme

The NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme detects bowel cancer at an early stage when treatment is more likely to be effective. This service is provided by a national hub. A screening kit is offered to men and women aged 60 to 74 every 2 years, the eligible age is being reduced over the next year to 55 year olds, up to 74. The kit is posted to eligible residents, completed at home and posted back to a laboratory for analysis. People aged 75 or over can request a kit every 2 years, but will not automatically be sent one.²⁰ About 1 in 20 people in the UK will develop bowel cancer during their lifetime.²¹

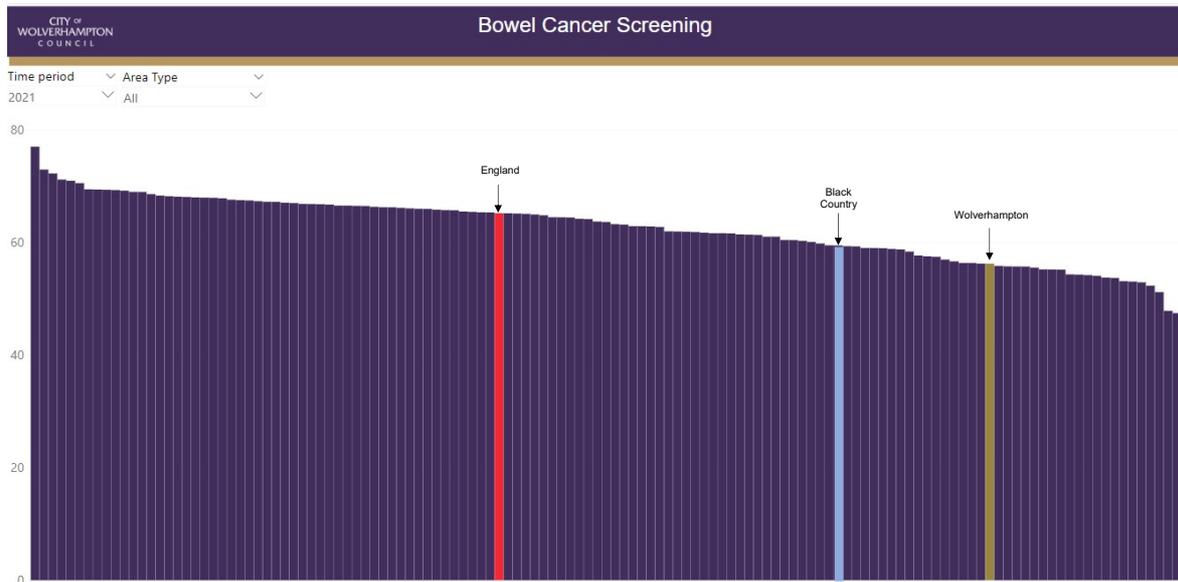


Figure 2.2. Bowel cancer screening percentage uptake by Local Authorities in England, 2021²²

¹⁹ Fingertips (2021) Cancer Screening Data in Wolverhampton, Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/cancer%20screening>

²⁰ Public Health England (2021) Bowel cancer screening: programme overview. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bowel-cancer-screening-programme-overview>

²¹ UK National Screening Committee (2021) Screening in the UK: making effective recommendations. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-screening-committee-recommendations-annual-report/screening-in-the-uk-making-effective-recommendations-1-april-2018-to-31-march-2019>

²² Fingertips (2021) Cancer Screening Data in Wolverhampton, Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/cancer%20screening>

In 2018, Wolverhampton bowel cancer screening rates were at their lowest in the last 5 years at 51%, compared to 57% in the West Midlands, 59.4% across the black country. The introduction of a new at home testing kit saw an increase in access across England. During 2020, the pandemic saw an impact on all bowel screening rates. Despite the introduction of new kits over the last few years, and services having now recovered from the effects of the Pandemic, Wolverhampton rates locally remain at 56.2%, lower than both the West Midland, 62.3% and England average in 65.2%.²³

NHS Breast Screening Programme

Breast screening uses mammography (X-rays) to look for abnormalities in breast tissue. Women in England and Wales aged 50 to 70 are invited for breast screening every 3 years to detect early signs of breast cancer. Women over 70 can continue to have breast screening by making an appointment at their local screening unit every 3 years through a self-referral.²⁴ In Wolverhampton this service is provided by both the Dudley Group of Hospitals Trust and The Royal Wolverhampton Trust.

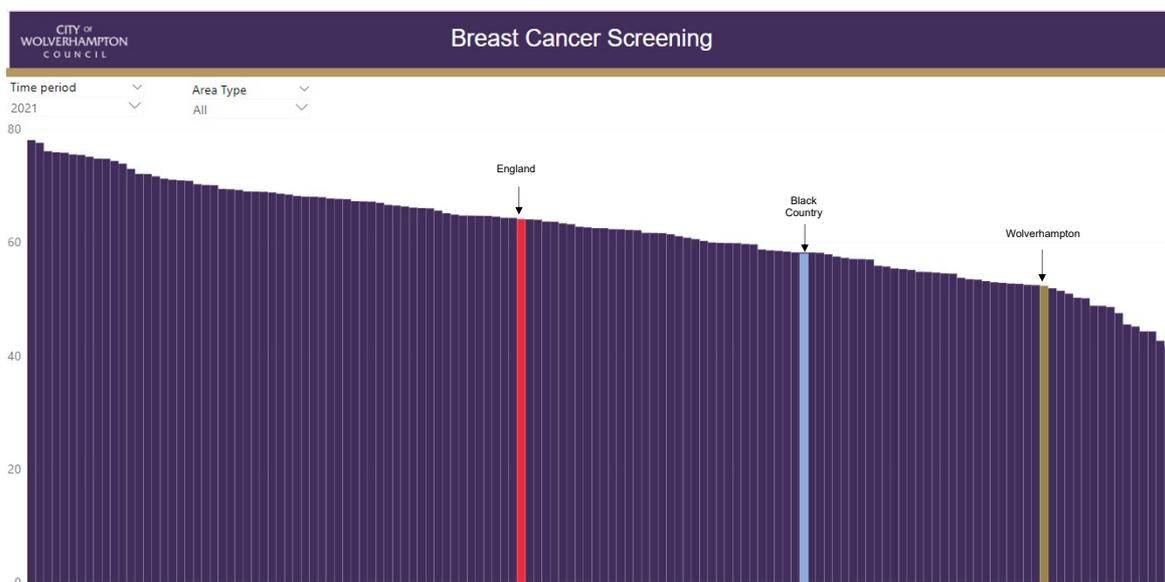


Figure 2.3. Breast cancer screening percentage uptake by Local Authorities in England, 2021²⁵

In Wolverhampton rates started to decline to 68.6% in 2018 and continue to decline to 52.4% in 2022. This is lower than both regional and England average, which are both above 62%, and Black country average of 58.2%. Locally we have been experiencing issues with waiting times for breast screening which has resulted in a review of the existing pathway and working with partners in surrounding areas to help reduce the waiting list. The 2020 pandemic saw the biggest effect on access. As of September 2022, waiting times are estimated to be back within normal limits and the recovery period for the service will finish.²⁶

²³ Fingertips (2022) Cancer Services data, Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/cancerservices/data#page/1>

²⁴ Public Health England (2021) Breast cancer screening programme overview. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/breast-screening-programme-overview>

²⁵ Fingertips (2021) Cancer Screening Data in Wolverhampton, Available form: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/cancer%20screening>

²⁶ Fingertips (2022) Cancer Services data, Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/cancerservices/data#page/1>

NHS Cervical Screening Programme

Cervical screening is offered to all women and people with a cervix aged 25 to 64 to check the health of cells in the cervix. The test looks for the human papillomavirus (HPV) which can cause abnormal cells on the cervix. If HPV is found, additional testing takes place to check for abnormal cells. It is offered every 3 years for those aged 25 to 49, and every 5 years from the ages of 50 to 64.²⁷ Cervical screening in Wolverhampton is provided by primary care, invitations invite those eligible to attend their GP practice for screening via a variety of contact methods.

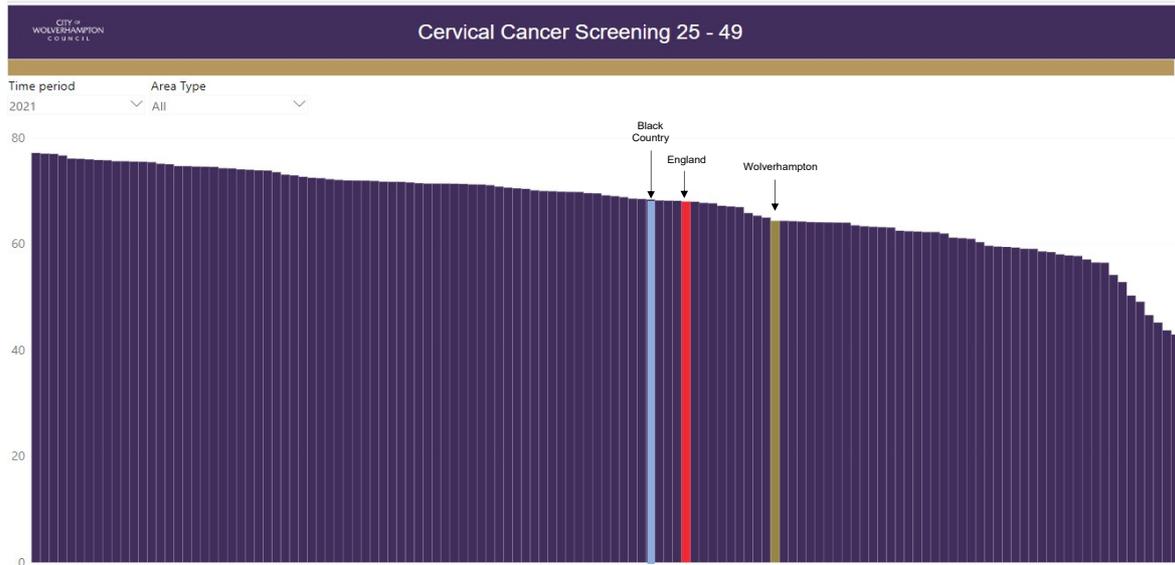


Figure 2.4. Cervical cancer screening percentage uptake for 25-49 year olds by Local Authorities in England, 2021²⁸

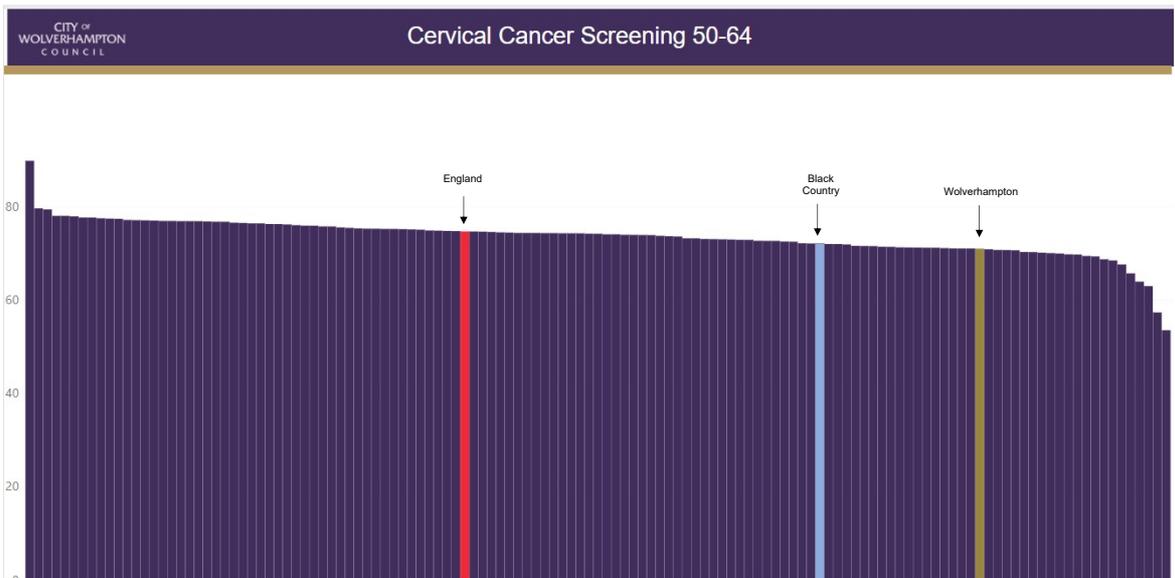


Figure 2.5. Cervical cancer screening percentage uptake for 50-64 year olds by Local Authorities in England, 2021²⁹

²⁷ Public Health England (2021) Cervical screening programme overview. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/cervical-screening-programme-overview>

²⁸ Fingertips (2021) Cancer Screening Data in Wolverhampton, Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/cancer%20screening>

²⁹ Fingertips (2021) Cancer Screening Data in Wolverhampton, Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/cancer%20screening>

Cervical screening follows the same trend line as both West Midlands and England average, however the rates have been consistently lower in Wolverhampton, reaching 64% and 71% following the pandemic respectively for each age group, just lower than the Black country average of 64.5% and 72.1%. Whilst the rates locally are lower, the gap between Wolverhampton and England is smaller than the other cancer screening programmes.³⁰

Summary/Next Steps

There are challenges across, and within, all individual screening programmes. In 2019, NHS England commissioned an Independent Review of Adult Screening Programmes in England.³¹ The report found that whilst each programme is broadly achieving its intended goal of reducing mortality, each could undoubtedly also do better. One of the recommendations from the report was to improve the quality of data. Data is not always reported in a timely manner which can create challenges in driving improvement.

The recommissioning of the NHS Health Check service with a new improved model to increase efficiency, including improved data intelligence, establishing a community outreach offer and introducing a risk stratification approach to invitation will support the ambition of raising awareness and putting in place interventions which will reduce the risk of CVD for all eligible residents of the City as well as those who are most vulnerable. Collaborative work with Primary Care to reenergise the programme with an increased return of face-to-face activities in practices, alongside a call for wider promotion of NHS Health Checks within local communities, will help maintain and further improve uptake in the City. A particular focus on tackling and improving existing health inequalities is also required by targeting resources appropriately.

The West Midlands Cancer Screening Health Equity Audit highlights the need to focus on particular groups in order to improve equity across cancer screening programmes. Participants understanding of cancer screening programmes and the way people are invited into programmes could be improved through better education and the invitation process.³²

Public Health have a key leadership role to improve cancer screening rates.

To halt the decline, and see improvements in cancer screening rates our approach needs to be adopted through:

- Working with key partners to influence the cancer screening rates
- Understand the complexities within each screening problems to enable us to influence change and run effectively, with a focus on insights work and invitation process.
- Partnership approaches with Wolverhampton University's Behavioural Psychology team will strengthen Public Health's ability to gain insights
- Work with the Cancer Strategy Group led by Wolverhampton Place under The Black Country ICS to review current screening programmes and provide better quality data
- Work with Primary Care Networks to raise the profile of cancer screening and utilising data sets
- Utilise the Health Protection forum to engage with partners to improve rate
- Explore the role cancer screening coordinator can play across the City with primary care

³⁰ Fingertips (2022) Cancer Services data, Available from: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/cancerservices/data#page/1>

³¹ NHS England (2019) Independent Review of National Cancer Screening Programmes in England. Available from: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/independent-review-of-cancer-screening-programmes-interim-report.pdf>

³² PHAST(2019) West Midlands Cancer Screening Health Equity Audit Summary Report.

Summary

Public Health will continue to look at ways to improve screening on a local level and use quality data to help inform us of that approach. On a national level the way screening is carried out in the future is also likely to change. New improvements have already been made through commissioning focussing on inequalities and health improvement to ensure services are targeting everyone. Combined with growing evidence on new approaches for population and targeted screening, these will provide many more opportunities to enhance the quality of people's lives.

This paper demonstrates not only the improvements required, but also importance of maintaining our progress to date. Whilst increasing and maintaining uptake is important, the uptake also needs to represent an approach that adopts reducing inequalities and ensures an equitable and suitable offer for the residents of Wolverhampton.

The Local Authority's Council Plan wants local people to live longer, healthier lives through quality care; and health, inclusive communities³³. Screening is a key priority that aligns to the Local Authorities vision for 2030. Increasing detection and management of CVD risk and cancer contributes to improving life expectancy and closing the gap between the least and most deprived wards in the city.

To see improvements and maintenance of these programmes will not be without its challenges. Partnership working is essential to help achieve this. All local partners have a responsibility to review and contribute to increase screening rates, raise further awareness of the available screening programmes in Wolverhampton to local communities, and to reduce the impact and burden CVD and cancer have on both residents, and the local health and social care system.

³³ City of Wolverhampton Council (2019) Our Council Plan 2019-2024. Available from: www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-04/Our%20Council%20Plan%202019-2024.pdf