



Details of visit

Service address:	Leighton Road Surgery
Service Provider:	1 Leighton Road, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1LB
Date and Time:	Leighton Road Surgery
Authorised Representatives:	24 th January 2019 & 9 th July 2019
Contact details:	Dave Simpson, Michael Hyde, Leanne Fitzsimons, Manni Mena, Carol Carter, David DeButts
	Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
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Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire would like to thank the service provider, patients and staff (clinical and non-clinical), for their contribution to the Enter and View Programme.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific date set out above. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all patients and staff (clinical and non-clinical), only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

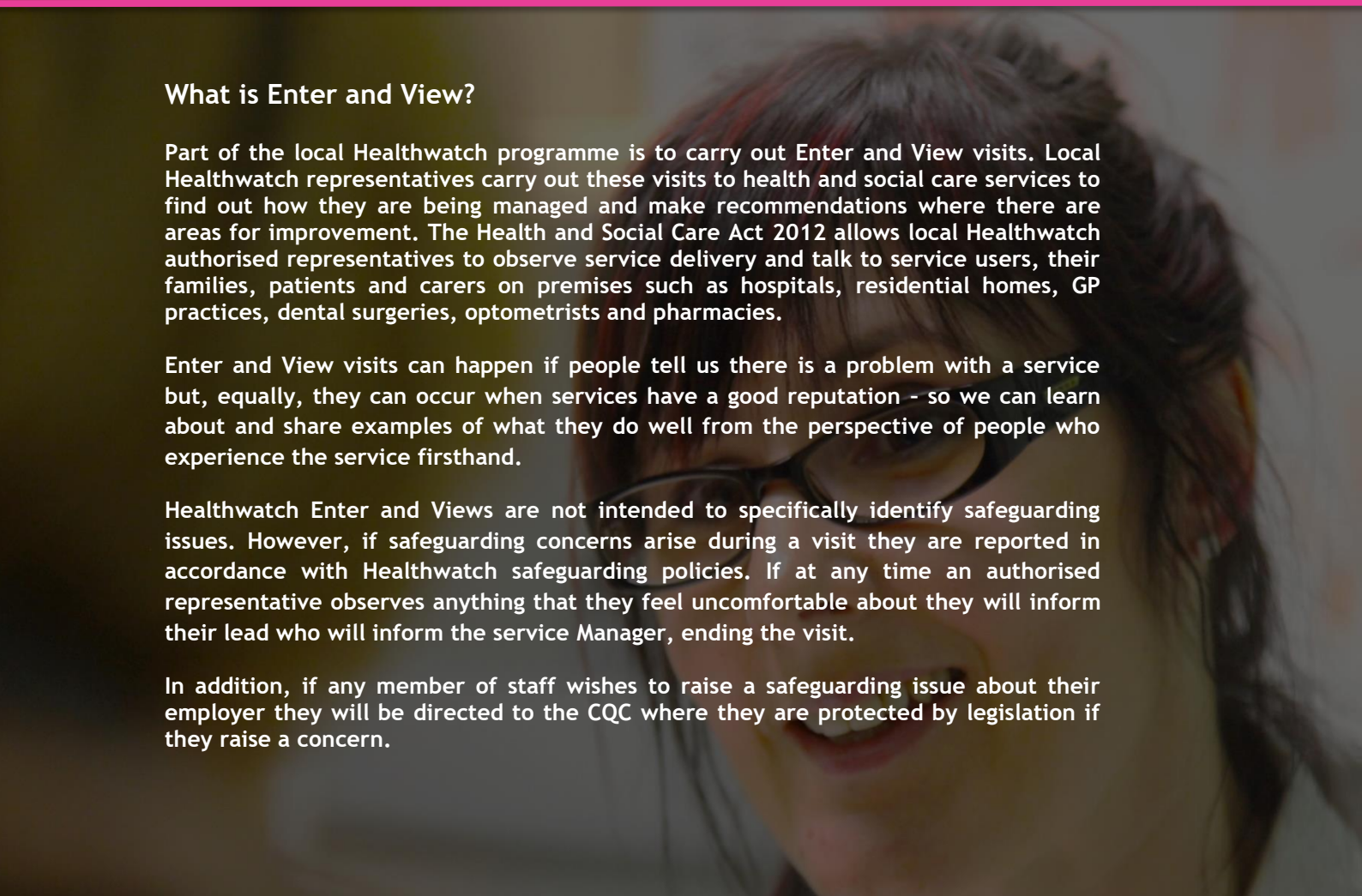
What is Enter and View?

Part of the local Healthwatch programme is to carry out Enter and View visits. Local Healthwatch representatives carry out these visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being managed and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 allows local Healthwatch authorised representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families, patients and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies.

Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation - so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service firsthand.

Healthwatch Enter and Views are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies. If at any time an authorised representative observes anything that they feel uncomfortable about they will inform their lead who will inform the service Manager, ending the visit.

In addition, if any member of staff wishes to raise a safeguarding issue about their employer they will be directed to the CQC where they are protected by legislation if they raise a concern.





Purpose of the visit

- To engage with patients of GP Practices and understand how dignity is being respected;
- Identify examples of good working practice;
- Observe patients engaging with staff (clinical and non-clinical), and their surroundings.

Strategic drivers

- Care Quality Commission dignity and wellbeing strategy.
- GP Surgeries are a Local Healthwatch priority.

Methodology

This was an announced Enter and View visit carried out at Leighton Road Surgery in Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire.

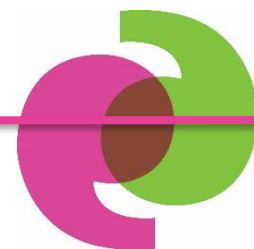
A letter and posters announcing Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's (HWCB) visit were previously sent to the practice. A questionnaire was also sent to the Practice Manager to complete prior to the visit.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire delivered copies of a questionnaire for patients to fill in, together with a 'response box', to post their completed questionnaires prior to HWCB's visit. The purpose was to minimise disruption and inconvenience to patients during the visit.

On the day of the visit, HWCB representatives spoke to members of the administration and clinical staff in addition to speaking to patients in the waiting area. Representatives also undertook a tour of the premises to observe accessibility, including disabled access, the availability of patient information and condition of the building.

The initial visit to this practice took place on 24th January 2019, however, as HWCB received a very minimal response to our patient questionnaires we had supplied in advance of the visit, it was agreed with the Practice that HWCB would re-visit at a later date. HWCB subsequently visited Grovebury Road Surgery on 9th July, with several HWCB representatives, to engage with patients in the waiting rooms and encourage them to complete the questionnaires.





Summary of findings

Leighton Road Surgery (LRS) is owned by Willis Dawson and the premises are maintained by Leighton Road Surgery.

The surgery is situated centrally in Leighton Buzzard and a second site is located at Grovebury Road. The majority of healthcare services are delivered at the Grovebury Road site. At the Grovebury Road site the premises are modern, well decorated, light and airy. The foyer area contains wheelchairs for patient use, and a water dispenser with clear signage to reception, various waiting rooms, toilets and treatment rooms. Patients can register their arrival via the electronic booking in screen or speak to one of the receptionists, and there is a notice to ask patients waiting to respect patient confidentiality.

This is a large practice serving over 20,000 patients and a practice team of over 65 members of staff including Doctors, Nurses, Dispensers, Therapists, Receptionists, Administrators and a Pharmacist. The Practice is also a Training Practice for doctors who want to become General Practitioners (GPs) and at the time of the original visit, LRS had 3 GP Registrars working at the practice.

HWCB posters advertising our visit were clearly displayed on notice boards and all staff were aware of the planned visit(s) and welcomed the team.

Results of visit

Staff - The Practice has the following members of staff:

- 10 GPs - 2 males and 8 females (+ 3 Registrars)
- 2 GPs are Partners, 2 are Locums
- 11 Practice Nurses
- 1 Nurse Prescribers

- 4 Minor Illness Nurses
- 3 Healthcare Assistant (HCA)
- 16 Receptionists (6 vacancies)
- 24 Other Staff Members

Specialist Services provided:

- Sexual Health
- Phlebotomy - drop in blood clinic
- Diabetic
- Asthma
- COPD
- Anti-coagulant

Surgery hours:

Monday	8:00 am to 6:30 pm
Tuesday	8:00 am to 8:30 pm
Wednesday	8:00 am to 6:30 pm
Thursday	8:00 am to 6:30 pm
Friday	8:00 am to 6:30 pm
Saturday	Closed
Sunday	Closed

Environment

The entrance to the surgery is well signposted and well lit, with natural light from windows as well as lighting. Reception staff welcomed HWCB representatives, issued visitors passes and introduced us to staff.

A private room is available for patients to discuss confidential matters with healthcare staff situated just off the main reception area. Corridors are wide and can easily accommodate wheelchairs. There are a number of waiting rooms, all with seating and clear signage including a wider seat for bariatric patients. Notice boards are prominent in the reception area and waiting rooms containing a wealth of healthcare information. A lift is available to the upper floor. At the time of the visit the disabled toilet had an 'out of order' sign on however there was another disabled toilet for patients to use situated at the other side of the building. TV screens were available in waiting rooms displaying healthcare information.

Information about the PPG is clearly displayed with photos of PPG members on a notice board.

Patients are called through for their appointment by healthcare staff.



Other observations included:

Car Parking

Parking is available at the front of the surgery with up to 45 spaces available for patients. Eight spaces are reserved for surgery use with three disabled spaces plus one for staff.

Patient Information

Several noticeboards and other displays contain patient information with some books for children.

Registration at the Practice

Patients may register in person at the Practice by collecting a registration form and returning it the Practice. Patients will need to produce proof of address and photo ID. Alternatively; patients can register on-line. All registrations are managed by the Practice Manager.

Non-registered patients can be seen by a GP if they register with the practice on the day. Temporary residents can generally register for 15 days and are then asked to formally register as a patient.

Patient Participation Group (PPG)

The Practice has an active PPG which is affiliated to the National Association of Patient Participation Groups (NAPP). The group meet every six weeks and the average age of members is over 40. Meetings are usually attended by one of the GP's or the Practice Manager. Members discuss key issues of concern and they work with the Practice to identify priorities for patients. They also conduct patient surveys and patients can join the PPG by accessing a form on the Practice website.



The majority of patients who completed the questionnaire were aware that the Practice has an active PPG, however one patient commented that the Practice should 'Replace the PPG, they are not challenging the practice management'.

Patient Consultation

Feedback from patients is gathered through the NHS Friends and Family test. The Practice Manager confirmed that patient surveys do take place however due to a recent increase in adverse publicity, patient surveys would be delayed until later in the year.

Appointments System

In general, patients can book appointments via System One, on the phone, or in person. However, many patients who spoke with HWCB representatives, or who completed the patient questionnaire, indicated that obtaining an appointment was extremely difficult and time consuming. In some cases, patients described having to wait up to six weeks to secure an appointment. This situation is exacerbated by the extreme difficulty for patients to get through to the surgery on the telephone. In many incidences, patients explained that it can take half an hour or longer to reach the front of the queue only to find that no more appointments are available. More comments from patients and feedback relating to the appointments system can be found at Appendix A.

Home visits are made by the doctor or paramedic who will ring the patient before they visit. Patients are asked to contact the surgery before 11am to request a visit.

Out of Hours Care

Out of hours care and extended access is provided by BEDOC (Bedford On Call); five hours on Saturday and three hours on Sunday. The surgery provides extended hours on Tuesday from 6.30pm to 8.30pm. Patients are also able to contact the NHS 111 service. Information can be found on the practice website.

Medication & Prescriptions

Medication reviews are carried out annually by a clinical pharmacist or more frequently when necessary. Patients may order repeat prescriptions in person or online via system one. Prescriptions are always available within three working days.

Patient Questionnaire Results

As previously mentioned, the first visit to the Practice revealed that only three patient questionnaires had been completed. However, following a subsequent visit to the practice, **114 questionnaires** in total were completed. This included questionnaires

that had been emailed directly to patients by the Practice and returned to HWCB. The full results of the questionnaires completed at the Practice are shown at **Appendix A**. In summary, of the patients at the Practice who completed the questionnaire:

- The majority of patients were extremely frustrated with the current appointment booking system. Many complained that it can take *‘several weeks to get an appointment’* and for others it was extremely stressful attempting to get through on the phone, only to be told that all the appointments for that day had gone. Many patients stated they had been referred to the walk-in clinic at Milton Keynes and one patient explained that *‘The walk-in clinic at MK has been a lifeline for us’*. Additional comments can be found at Appendix A.
- A fairly high percentage of patients (70%), who completed the questionnaire, indicated they did not have to wait long to be seen on arrival at the surgery and a vast majority of patients (89%) stated that staff were helpful and polite. Comments included *‘... I have found the reception staff extremely kind, thoughtful and helpful and willing to go the extra mile’*. However, additional comments given would indicate that some patients felt that one or two staff members were *‘extremely dismissive and rude’*, particularly when on the phone.
- Knowledge of accessing out of hours care varied considerably, from visiting the drop in centres in Bedford and MK to phoning 111 and going to A & E or checking the practice website. A few patients commented that they would not contact the practice as they were not confident that they would receive helpful information.
- The majority of patients indicated that they could discuss their needs with the clinician (89%); they felt involved in decisions about their care and treatment (84%) and that the clinician listens to them and considers their opinions (84%).
- Less than half of patients felt they were able to choose whether to see a male or female clinician (40%), with one patient commenting that *‘You can but only if you are prepared to wait for an appointment (with that gender) usually several weeks’*. 33% of patients indicated they were not able to choose a male or female clinician.
- Less than half of patients (45%) knew how to make a complaint about the surgery or staff but 52% did not. One patient claimed to have written a letter of complaint but had failed to receive a reply.
- The average result of the quality, care, treatment and service at the surgery was scored as 5.8 overall on a scale of 1 - 10. One patient was particularly concerned about the negative comments relating to the surgery and staff, and was keen to point out that *‘LRS surgery is very friendly, easy to talk to The receptionists are very friendly The health care assistants are very good at their job ...’*
- When asked what changes did patients feel the Practice could make to improve the patient experience, a vast majority of patients commented. These were broken down into themes, as follows:
 - **Doctors** - The majority of patients were concerned that there was an insufficient number of doctors at the Practice which is having a detrimental effect on patients and wanted more GP’s recruited.
 - **Staff** - Many patients indicated that when speaking with staff on the phone they were quite *‘rude’* and some patients stated that *‘the managing partners need to be held accountable for their poor treatment of staff’*. However, other patients were complimentary, particularly about nursing staff.
 - **Location** - Many patients disliked travelling and would prefer to have one practice in Leighton Buzzard. Others asked for the Practices in LRS and Linslade to merge.
 - **Medication Reviews** - Many patients would like to see medication reviews easier and quicker with clear notification of when a review is required.

- **Decision Making** - Patients would like to see the Practice highlighting improvements to services with clear communication on how they intend to address the current issues and concerns, for example, the limited availability of appointments.
- **Improved Appointment System** - This was the section for which the majority of comments were received. Many patients commented on the *'awful'* appointments system and gave clear examples of a poor service. One patient stated that *'It is too difficult to make appointments even for minor ailments that could be sorted out very quickly. I have gone private in the past as I was not prepared to wait'*, another said *'It is impossible to get through on the telephone and the online system never has appointments available either. It is a very poor service. The surgery appears to have too many patients, too little staff and stressed out, miserable receptionists'*. Solutions offered included *'More doctors, more appointment slots, which would allow for online booking that works and slots available at the weekends and into the evening'*. Additional comments can be seen at Appendix A.
- **General** - Many patients also commented in this section which included *'This surgery has been getting worse for many years without any signs of improvement. They are focusing on managing statistics rather than providing good patient care, that is just wrong'*. Changes patients would like to see include improving communications between staff, quicker turnaround time for test results to be placed on patient notes, and clear messages left for patients when relating to multiple test results. One patient explained the following: *'Changes, I think are appointment availability and a confidence that clinicians have the freedom to do the very best for their patients. Whilst I have the opportunity, I have once or twice been sent to the nurse practitioner to look at a skin lesion and through no fault of their own, been misdiagnosed. 30 seconds with a GP would have been more beneficial. Over the years, we feel we have had on balance, good quality of care. My husband was under the care of a registrar last year, who undoubtedly listened to his needs and responded quickly and extremely efficiently which was fortunate because he was eventually diagnosed with cancer. After a major operation, the receptionist could not have been more helpful and Doctor R's care was again exceptional. We are most grateful. I have also (more so in recent years) received very kind and compassionate care for minor issues'*.

In addition, representatives spoke to several patients during the visit, further comments received as follows:

'They need more people to answer the phone'

'While not perfect, LRS do not deserve the negative press they are getting'

'Telephone - need more call handlers - sometimes you can't get on quickly (starts at 20) you have to keep ringing. Perhaps longer queue needed. Sometimes you get up the queue and the line goes dead'

'Circle MSK not treated where you want'

'Leighton Buzzard is expanding - shortage of doctors - no new surgeries'

Interaction between Patients and Staff

Representatives observed patients entering the premises, approaching the receptionists who were seen to be friendly and accommodating.

Patients were seen to interact with reception staff, communicating their needs. One representative observed a patient needing clarification on an appointment, which appeared confusing to the patient, however, staff were very attentive and keen to

resolve her dilemma.



Patients did not appear to be occupying the waiting room for unduly long periods before being called for their appointments.

Clinical and non-clinical staff

During the visit, HWCB's representatives were able to speak to several members of the clinical staff (GP and Nurses) and the administrative staff.

The majority of staff spoken to had heard of Healthwatch and were aware of its functions. Many staff enjoyed working at the Practice - *'love the job and the people but find it challenging'* and they all felt supported although some indicated *'not always'*. All staff spoken to did not feel there was an adequate provision of staff at the practice; mainly due to a lack of clinicians and it was felt that more experienced staff were needed. The majority of staff spoken to attend regular training sessions for their role, including online training, and were confident that any training needs identified would be met.

Staff recognised that there were not enough appointments available for patients and the current booking system did not work although they were unclear how to resolve this. They would like to see longer appointment times for patients and shift times to be adjusted as *'sometimes we don't get a break'*. Staff were very affected by the negative publicity associated with the Practice due to patient difficulties in securing an appointment and felt that more should be done to manage patient expectations. Additional comments from staff are detailed below:

'The bad press is very upsetting for the staff and is demoralising - we need a 'you did well' comments box'

'Patient expectations are challenging; appointments on demand. They need to have realistic expectations of appointments on the day'

'Abuse very upsetting - sarcasm and swearing not necessary'

'The negativity on social media & LBO is sometimes used as 'blackmail' to get better access to appointments'

'No record of compliments and thanks - could have a box in the waiting room'

'Impact of negative publicity on staff here, e.g., not sleeping and stressed, very awful process'

Concerns/Complaints Procedure

Staff confirmed they would speak to a duty manager if they had a complaint and would direct a patient, who had a complaint, to the website or the front desk (to complete a form) or to speak to the Practice Manager. Staff have a clear understanding of the process and would refer to Managers for support. Patients who gave their feedback when asked *'would they know how to make a complaint at the surgery'* stated *'yes'* and confirmed they would look at the website or ask for a form at reception.



Recommendations

From the wealth of feedback received from patients they are clearly frustrated with the current booking system for appointments, mainly the long waiting time on the telephone and a general lack of appointments available. HWCB would recommend that the Practice urgently research a workable solution, in collaboration with their patients and the PPG, to develop a system that will vastly improve the patient experience. This could involve additional phone lines or extra staff at busy periods but by working jointly with the PPG and/or patients, to achieve a good outcome, will greatly benefit the practice, its staff and patients.

HWCB would also recommend that the Practice communicate regularly with patients, identifying current issues and concerns, highlighting how they intend to address and resolve them. Involving patients in the decision making process should alleviate much of the mistrust and ill feeling which appears to exist between the Practice and its patients.

Although the majority of staff are aware of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and its functions, HWCB is not referred to on the Practice website or in the Practice leaflet and we would recommend that a link to HWCB's website be at least included in the appropriate place on the Practice website.

Finally, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recommends that this report is shared with the patients and staff (clinical and non-clinical) of the Practice and to advise that if they should wish to contribute any additional comments about the report, to contact Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire direct.



Service Provider response

Despite several reminders, no Service Provider response has been received from Leighton Road Surgery.

