

# Accessing hospitals for those with a visual impairment

July 2017



A Healthwatch Lancashire and Blackpool mystery shopping report focusing on how accessible hospitals across Lancashire are for the visually impaired community.

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## Introduction

Healthwatch Lancashire and Blackpool are committed to listening to patients and members of the public across Lancashire and making sure their views and experiences are heard by those who run, plan and regulate health and social care services.

Between December 2016 and March 2017, Healthwatch Lancashire and Blackpool completed a mystery shopping activity to test the accessibility of hospitals across Lancashire for people with a visual impairment. The sample of hospitals chosen for the activity were, in the main, the largest hospitals in Lancashire which have multiple departments and are, potentially, more difficult to navigate. This report summarises the experiences of a Healthwatch Lancashire and Blackpool volunteer with a visual impairment who simulated visits to eleven different eye clinic departments delivered in hospitals across Lancashire.

## Methodology

This project was undertaken by a Healthwatch Lancashire and Blackpool volunteer that has a visual impairment who is assisted by a trained guide dog. The volunteer visited the eye clinics of:

- Royal Preston Hospital
- Chorley and South Ribble District General Hospital
- Ormskirk District General Hospital
- Burnley General Hospital
- Royal Blackburn Hospital
- Accrington Victoria Hospital
- Clitheroe Community Hospital
- Blackpool Victoria Hospital
- Queen Victoria Hospital, Morecambe
- Royal Lancaster Infirmary
- Fleetwood Hospital

The volunteer was escorted by a Healthwatch Lancashire and Blackpool staff member to an entrance of each hospital and was asked to navigate their way to the eye clinic, and then find their way to the female toilet facilities then return to the eye clinic.

**The volunteer was asked to make observations on the following points:**

- Signage from the entrance
- Assistance from staff
- Toilet facilities
- Any other observations

Another individual with a visual impairment visited Queen Victoria Hospital, Morecambe unassisted and made their own observations on attempting to find the eye clinic there.

## Results

### **Royal Preston Hospital visited on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

#### **Signage from entrance**

*“The signage was non-existent or was too small and too far away. However, the contrast of colours was good.”*

#### **Assistance from staff**

*“I got directions from the volunteers at the information desk which had good signage. I was not offered help though.”*

#### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“I did find the toilet but there was no contrast in colours and I had trouble finding the paper towels. I think it also had baby changing facilities which is not best practice. It was not really an accessible toilet. On returning to the eye clinic, the sign along the corridor was not visible to me but I carried on and examined every door until I found the eye clinic door which had a big bold sign on it. There was no braille though.”*

#### **Any other observations**

*“The corridors were very narrow and crowded so it was difficult for my guide dog, but she coped. In my opinion, the hospital could do with knocking down and starting again at least the front entrance and outpatients as it is far too small. There is nowhere to drop-off patients who cannot walk any distance e.g. people who arrive in taxis and use a wheelchair.”*

### **Six patients shared their experiences of visiting the Eye Clinic/Broughton Suite of Royal Preston Hospital.**

All the patients received an appointment letter for their visit.

For three patients, this was their first visit and three patients had visited the eye clinic previously.

Four out of the six patients were unable to read the contents of the letter and had the letter read to them.

Four of the six patients were not able to find the department. One patient had attended before and one patient said that they could not find the department on their first visit to the eye clinic.

All six patients have missed hospital appointments in the past due to information being sent in a format that they could not read.

Five patients were not offered sighted guidance throughout their appointment and one patient did not answer.

Comments made by patients:

*“You can’t get through by phone. They are all very busy. It’s overcrowded and you wait for hours.”*

*“Considering it’s an eye department, there is not much support for the elderly with sight problems. I am lucky as I had a neighbour.”*

*“Larger signs would be helpful.”*

*“The staff are lovely.”*

*“Not great if you can’t see.”*

*“You wait forever.”*

## **Chorley and South Ribble District General Hospital visited on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“The signage is not too bad. However, the contrast could be better. There are signs on the wall near the outpatients’ department. However, there was seating in front of the signs which was not good, as patients cannot get close enough to see the signs. The sign over the outpatients’ entrance was good. A point to note was that none of the signs were in braille.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“The assistance from staff was very good and the staff and volunteers were very helpful. I saw volunteers taking patients to their destinations.”*

### **Using the bathroom facilities**

*“The toilets had large signs on the doors and were accessible. I saw staff direct or guide people to the toilet. The staff should ask if they need to wait for the patients so they can guide them back to the outpatients’ department.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“There were no other issues I encountered when using my guide dog. I would hope that the doctors are trained to react to a person with a guide dog.”*

## **Ormskirk District General Hospital visited on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“The signage was hopeless. I could not find any but there is a desk and “a voice” asked me if I needed help and I was directed to the eye clinic which was straightforward.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“The volunteer who assisted me was very helpful.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“The toilet was simple enough to find but in the accessible toilet there was a cone in the middle of the floor which was potentially hazardous. This toilet appeared dated and had baby changing facilities which is not good practise. The lighting could also be improved as I could not find the hand dryer.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“There were no issues I encountered when using my guide dog. The lighting in the entrance and café area could be improved.”*

## **Burnley General Hospital visited on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“The signage was poor. The hospital is sectioned by areas listed in numbers and each area also has a colour which was very confusing to me. I entered at Area 7.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“I went to the desk and a volunteer showed me the way to the eye clinic. I was told that I should have used the Casterton Avenue entrance and then the eye clinic is on the floor above the entrance. The volunteer took me in a lift but the lift did not speak the floor numbers so I wouldn’t know what floor I would be on if I was to attend on my own.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“There was an accessible toilet near the entrance in Area 7 which I used.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“There were no issues I encountered when using my guide dog, but I am glad that I do not have to attend this hospital as navigating my way was very confusing. The volunteer who I found at the desk was very helpful though and helped me to get to the eye clinic.”*

## **Royal Blackburn Hospital** **visited on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“The eye clinic was displayed on the board with a picture of an eye but it only told you that it was on level one. It did not say, where exactly you needed to go. The writing on the sign was very small.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“I continued to look for signs and a desk with staff who could help. No one came to me so I carried on walking towards WHSmith. Before I got there, a lady asked me if I needed help and it turned out she was a cleaner. She took me to the eye clinic which was not too far away.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“The cleaner showed me an accessible toilet which was nearby. Returning to the eye clinic was okay as the cleaner had given me good directions.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“I thought the signage was poor for directing people and there was no information point that I could see and no one came to me from one. There were no issues encountered when using my guide dog. There was an automated check-in which is useless to me.”*

## **Accrington Victoria Hospital** **visited on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“There is signage but I could not see to read it all as it was too high on the wall. I did not know which way to go but then someone, from behind a window, asked if they could help.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“They told me to book in there when I come for my appointment and they would show me where to go.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“I was directed to the toilets. The accessible toilet did not have a lot of colour contrast with regards to the rails.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“I had no issues encountered with using my guide dog. There were no volunteers but the hospital is not very busy and they probably don't need any in reception. They would however need someone extra to guide a patient if it is busy on days the eye clinics are running.”*

## **Clitheroe Community Hospital visited on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“There was some signage but it was too high and too small for me to read it. The entrance is “very swish” but seemed cluttered with lots of notices so I did not know where to look.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“A lady shouted ‘can I help’ but I did not know if she was talking to me or not so I asked and she said ‘yes’. She was a member of staff and she said that I should book in at the desk and they would show me where to go.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“The same lady took me to the toilet but did not ask if I wanted her to wait for me. However, my guide dog knew the way back to reception.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“No issues encountered with using my guide dog. I always think these new entrances could be zoned better as they are open plan spaces.”*

## **Case Study**

Michael Tupper, a Healthwatch Lancashire volunteer who also has a visual impairment, shared his experience of attending an appointment at the eye clinic of Clitheroe Community Hospital in January 2017:

*“My appointment was pre-booked the last time I attended. The hospital is aware of my visual impairment. There was a person available as you enter the hospital to sign you in on the automatic booking-in machine. I was offered sighted guidance throughout my appointment.*

*My doctor told me to make another appointment in 4 months and gave me a form to take to the receptionist. When the receptionist checked the appointments on the computer, she said there was nothing available for 4 months and she would have to put me on the waiting list and I would get a letter in due course. I asked if she could make sure this letter was sent in large print and asked if my records show, the fact that I required large print. She advised me that my records did not have this information and she did not know how to flag it up on the computer. I then asked if she knew what the Accessible Information Standard was and had she had any training on it. Her answer to both questions was NO; which was not the response I wanted. No doubt I will have to phone up somebody to get an appointment around the time doctor had said I should see them again so my eye pressures can be checked as required in the correct time scale. This is a new hospital that has only been open a couple of years.*

*The staff are very helpful and come out and call people for their appointments and guide them through to the consulting rooms and give any assistance that is required. There is a programme in place with regards to altering the signage within the hospital group which will take some time to implement. There was a fault with the flush in the gentleman’s toilet which I reported and was told this will be looked in to.”*



## **Blackpool Victoria Hospital visited on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“The signage was good in the entrance but I could not see the lift. It was not clear where to go as it is a large atrium.”*

*The signage along the way was very small and not useful for me. Corridors were narrow with a lot of people. There were also several doors off the corridor. At the eye clinic check-in area, there was another volunteer waiting to help. They also wore a uniform top (polo shirt) which did help.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“I found the desk and asked for directions but the volunteer insisted on taking me to the eye clinic which was quite a long walk but it was not too complicated.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“There were toilets along the route to the eye clinic and in outpatients. The volunteer said the toilets were better at the main entrance which I found they were. I could go in the ladies’ toilet with my guide dog because there was a cubicle large enough for both of us. The accessible toilet was also good with good contrast.*

### **Any other observations**

*“The staff were very helpful and made sure that I was okay. There were no issues encountered with using my guide dog. The lighting was good.”*

## **Queen Victoria Hospital, Morecambe visited on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“I could not find any signs to help and no one came to help me.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“I returned to the check-in desk and asked where the eye clinic was. The lady directed me to go along the corridor and then to turn left. Once I reached this place, I had to ask a patient if I was at the eye clinic. I still could not see any signs that I could read.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“I went to the toilets in the entrance area which I had noticed when entering the hospital. I could not find the light switch in the accessible toilet but someone noticed that I was struggling and told me where it was. It was quite a small toilet that included baby changing facilities. There were no problems returning to the department once I had found it.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“The signs that I did find were covered with a shiny surface which meant that I could not read them as there were reflections on them. There were no issues encountered with using my guide dog. The entrance was grim looking and the lighting was low. I did not find any volunteers that could help me.”*

### **Note:**

A further visit was made to Queen Victoria Hospital, Morecambe by another individual with a visual impairment. They visited the hospital unassisted and made the following comments:

*“There are 4 buildings on site, with the signage just showing the name of the building. I had to enter each building to try to find the eye clinic. In one building, I was right by reception with my white stick, but I was not asked if I needed help. So, if they do have an eye clinic, I couldn't find it. Not once was I approached as I wandered around, but the toilet was clean.”*

## **Royal Lancaster Infirmary visited on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“I initially went into the wrong building as the signage outside was poor. I was told that the eye clinic was in the old building with the big wooden door. There was no offer of help to find it. On coming out from the main outpatients' entrance, I was assisted to the old building by the Healthwatch staff member who was waiting outside. On entering the building, there was no desk for help and the signs had very small writing on them. I managed to guess that the yellow strip said 'eye clinic' on it with an arrow pointing down the corridor. I walked on and passed a door with a yellow sign above it but I could not read it. I went further on and came across a sign that directed me back. The yellow sign was, therefore, the one for the eye clinic. It should have been lower down on the door.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“There was no one to ask.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“Further on past the eye clinic, there was a little desk so I asked to be directed to the toilets which were down a corridor on the left. The door had a picture with a toilet on it. A man had just come out and told me that the accessible toilet was on the right through the door. I managed to find my way back to the eye clinic after going to the toilets.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“There were no issues encountered with using my guide dog. The signage was too small. There were no volunteers at the entrance. The desk would have been better closer to the entrance door. The large wooden entrance door was not automatic and could potentially be a problem.”*

## **Fleetwood Hospital visited on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

The volunteer entered the hospital via the main entrance and made the following comments:

### **Signage from entrance**

*“The main entrance was accessible with clear signage, although the letters were a bit squashed so it was difficult to see the top of the board. There was contrast and a clear way to reception.”*

### **Assistance from staff**

*“A member of staff asked me if she could help as I walked through the automatic door. I asked if there was an eye clinic in the hospital and she said that there was no consultant led eye clinic, just diabetic retinal eye screening.”*

### **Using the toilet facilities**

*“I thanked the lady and asked if there was a toilet and she took me to the accessible one which was lacking in colour contrast. The rails and the walls were in white as was the sanitary ware.”*

### **Any other observations**

*“There were no issues encountered with using my guide dog. The diabetic eye screening was on the ground floor which would make it easier to find.”*

## **Summary of Experiences**

This report describes the experiences of a Healthwatch Lancashire volunteer with a visual impairment navigating their way to the eye clinics of the hospitals visited either via the main entrance or via an alternative entrance:

- Signage was very important to the volunteer, although the usefulness of the signage varied at each hospital visited. Small text, positioning of the signs and the contrast of colours were the main issues identified.
- The volunteer valued the assistance that was offered by staff or volunteers, although the level of assistance varied at each hospital and in some hospitals the volunteer struggled to get assistance.
- Some of the accessible toilets visited had baby changing facilities which was not seen as good practice from the volunteer’s point of view.
- Low level lighting in Ormskirk Hospital’s toilet facilities meant that the volunteer struggled to find the hand dryer.
- At Burnley General Hospital, the volunteer used a lift to access the eye clinic. They found that the lift did not speak the floor it was on.

## **Responses**

This report was sent to each of Lancashire’s Hospital Trusts, however only one provided a response at the time of publication.

A full response from University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust can be found below.

Action Statement Accessing Hospitals with a Visual Impairment

No.	Issues raised by patients	Response or action from provider	To be addressed by	Name of manager responsible
1.	<p><b>RLI</b> - signage – size and location</p> <p><b>QVH</b> – Signage – difficult to find signs and the signs that were present had a shiny surface which reflected light making words hard to read</p>	<p>Comments and observations relating to signage from this recent exercise have been shared with the Estates Department. A Bay wide signage scheme was completed within the last 12 months. New signage was put up at all main entrances and at all ward and department entrances.</p> <p>This report has also been shared with the Ophthalmology Department.</p>	TBC	<p>Estates Department</p> <p>Nicola Blease, Sister, Ophthalmics</p>
2.	<p><b>RLI</b> - No volunteers at the entrance</p>	<p>There is a volunteer’s desk along the main corridor of Medical Unit 1 and it seems very unusual if it was not manned on the day of the visit. The comments have been escalated to the Community Engagement Manager who looks after volunteers for the Trust. The helpdesk volunteers provide considerable help to all patients on a daily basis, particularly in relation to giving specific directions to areas and for arranging support for patients/visitors requiring additional assistance of any kind.</p>		<p>Barry Rigg, Community Engagement Manager</p>
3.	<p><b>RLI</b> - The entrance door was not automatic</p>	<p>Unfortunately the door is very wide and heavy. As a result an automatic opening motor attachment is not an option.</p>		<p>Estates Department for future consideration</p>
	<p><b>RLI</b> – Offer of assistance limited</p> <p><b>QVH</b> – Offer of help</p>	<p>It was disappointing to note that offers of assistance were not forthcoming. All staff are encouraged to offer general support to any patients whilst visiting the Trust. These recent observations will be shared with staff and a reminder will be issued</p>	July 2017	<p>Patient Experience Manager</p>

	limited			
5.	QVH – Toilet facilities small and included baby change equipment. Light switch hard to find	The size of the room cannot be rectified but the issue raised about the light switch issue has been escalated to our Estates Department	July 2017	Estates Department
6.	QVH - Low lighting in the entrance	This issue has been reported to the Estates department for them to resolve. The lighting in the entrance is too dim and needs to be brighter	July 2017	Estates Department



## Healthwatch Response

### Accessing hospitals with a visual impairment Report June 2017

Lancashire teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust would like to thank Healthwatch for their feedback regarding the mystery shopping activity to test the accessibility of our hospitals at Preston and Chorley. It was pleasing to note that some of the signage and colour contrast was clear, although recognising that further action needs to take place in the future to ensure all aesthetics are suitable, for example within the toilet area. The Assistant Director for Hotel Services wishes to extend an invitation to the mystery shopper volunteer and any others who would like to participate in the PLACE assessments to contact the organisation. This will allow the organisation to gather information on how best to improve our services. It was encouraging to note that the staff at both hospitals were helpful and the volunteers at Chorley Hospital assisted patients around the department.

We are fortunate this year to have been allocated some capital monies specifically related to PLACE and access for our patients. Therefore achievement of the actions identified should occur within the timescales identified.

The Trust would also like to ensure that Healthwatch and service users with sensory impairments are involved in our future plans and help us to develop our services further. We have just launched a STAR (Safety Triangulation Accreditation Review) Accreditation system within the organisation, which is our new quality assurance framework to enable us to monitor, review and improve quality standards throughout our clinical areas. As part of STAR we will be carrying out weekly visits to our clinical areas and we would be grateful for involvement from Healthwatch and our service users with sensory impairments.

We are also about to develop a new Patient and Public Involvement Strategy and would like to invite Healthwatch and service users to an event which will be held within the next month (further details to follow). Following on from this we also intend to form a user group where people can consistently provide us with feedback on our services.

Please note the following action plans following the visit.

## Action Report – Royal Preston Hospital

Issue raised by the mystery shopper	Response and action from provider	To be addressed by	Name of manager responsible	Timescale
No signage in some places or signage too small and too far away. No braille on the corridors	Senior building manager advised of feedback and this will be included on the PLACE assessments as an action	Senior Building Services Manager and Assistant Director for Hotel Services	P Collier A Slater	January 2018
I was not offered help [Volunteers]	Volunteer services manager was disappointed that no help was offered. She will speak with the volunteers and reinforce the need to offer help, particularly for those patients and visitors who have additional needs	Volunteer Coordinator	S Turner	August 2017
No contrast colours in the toilet	Senior building manager advised of feedback and this will be included on the PLACE assessments as an action.	Senior Building Services Manager and Assistant Director for Hotel Services	P Collier A Slater	January 2018
Not really an accessible toilet and baby changing facilities not best practice	Senior building manager advised of feedback and this will be included on the PLACE assessments as an action	Senior Building Services Manager and Assistant Director for Hotel Services	P Collier A Slater	January 2018
Front entrance and outpatients too small	Senior building manager advised of feedback and this will be included on the PLACE assessments as an action	Senior Building Services Manager and Assistant Director for Hotel Services	P Collier A Slater	January 2018
No-where to drop off patients who cannot walk far or are in wheelchairs	Car parking manager to be advised of the need for drop off points and appropriate action to be considered	Car Park Manager	F Miller	January 2018
All six patients have missed eye appointments due to inappropriate format of information sent	Discussed with the Ophthalmology Unit Manager. Information is currently sent from a central information provider. As part of the	Ophthalmology Unit Manager Equality and Involvement Lead	R Blackwell S Iaconianni	January 2018

	Accessible Information Standard this will be explored to find out how this can be resolved			
Cannot get through by phone	Discussion to take place with the Appointments Manager to find out how timely answering of phone calls can be improved for this service	Appointments Manager Ophthalmology	H Billington	October 2017
Not much support for the elderly with sight problems	Discussion to take place with the Ophthalmology Unit Manager and Volunteer Coordinator to explore what additional support can be put in place to assist those who need it	Ophthalmology Unit Manager Volunteer Coordinator	R Blackwell S Turner	September 2017

### Action Report – Chorley Hospital

<b>Issue raised by the mystery shopper</b>	<b>Response and action from provider</b>	<b>To be addressed by</b>	<b>Name of manager responsible</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Contrast [colours] could be better	Senior building manager advised of feedback and this will be included on the PLACE assessments as an action	Senior Building Services Manager and Assistant Director for Hotel Services	P Collier A Slater	January 2018
There are signs on the wall near outpatients but chairs in front, cannot get close enough to read	Senior building manager advised of feedback and this will be included on the PLACE assessments as an action	Senior Building Services Manager and Assistant Director for Hotel Services	P Collier A Slater	January 2018
None of the signs braille	Senior building manager advised of feedback and this will be included on the PLACE assessments as an action	Senior Building Services Manager and Assistant Director for Hotel Services	P Collier A Slater	January 2018



## **TRUST RESPONSE**

**Re: Response to Healthwatch Lancashire's report regarding their mystery shopping report focussing on the accessibility of hospitals across Lancashire for the visually impaired community.**

Results of the report relating to East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust were given to Meg Davey, Assistant Director of Patient Experience, who says:

"We take all feedback very seriously and constantly strive to ensure all our patients and relatives have a good experience when using the Trust's services."

In response to the report, East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust would like to make the following comments:

The Trust supports people with a visual impairment in a number of ways, including:

- Clear signage and wayfinding maps at all sites
- Written patient information in large print and audio format - The Trust now has the facility to record patient's needs in relation to the production of large print letters on our administration system. This is a recent development and work is on-going to create large print patient correspondence. All outpatient reception staff have recently been made aware of this facility
- Self-check-in machines which offer high visibility for people with low vision
- Accessible toilets throughout our hospital buildings
- Lifts with automatic voice announcements at each floor, on some sites
- Training and support for reception staff and volunteers to assist and/or escort patients

In addition, we work closely with the Royal National Institute of the Blind (R.N.I.B), DisabledGO and the East Lancashire Patient Voices Group. These partnerships help ensure our facilities, services and communication channels meet the needs of patients, visitors and staff with visual impairments. This work will be further strengthened by a new wayfinding strategy which is currently awaiting approval.

At both the Royal Blackburn and Burnley General teaching hospitals, the Eye Clinics and Blue Badge parking are located close to the main entrance, precisely to assist patients with visual impairments.