

Experience of GP Extended Hours and Out of Hours Services in Cheshire

March 2018



Contents



Overview	3
What we did.....	5
Summary of Findings.....	8
Survey Results	10
Have you used Out of Hours services before?	10
Are you aware of Out of Hours services offered by your GP surgery?	11
How would you rate the service you received, and why?	12
Have you used Extended Hours services before?	16
Are you aware of Extended Hours services offered by your GP surgery?	17
How would you rate the service you received, and why?	18
Conclusion.....	21
Appendix 1.....	23
Appendix 2.....	24

Overview

Context

Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West undertake continuous engagement activities with the public to hear about concerns and compliments regarding health and social care services. In April and May of 2017, we conducted a priorities survey to establish what people felt were their key areas of concern relating to health and social care services for our year ahead.

A common issue raised by people around their NHS services is that they struggle to obtain GP appointments and use services at a time that suits them. In order to help address this, recent years have seen the introduction of Extended Hours services to offer appointments and services outside of core contracted hours, and also of Out of Hours services which are designed to provide people with treatment if they attempt to call their GP outside of the core hours.

In order to explore themes emerging from the comments we received regarding difficulties obtaining appointments, we decided to undertake a survey to gain an idea of people's experiences and awareness of GP Extended Hours and Out of Hours services.

GP Extended Hours

News reports and anecdotal evidence tells us that GP services are stretched with many patients finding difficulty in obtaining appointments. In response to demand for GPs to offer more than just appointments during the working day five days a week, many GP Practices are now offering Extended Hours appointments outside of core contracted hours (8am-6.30pm). These can vary from appointments in the early mornings from 7am, to evenings up until 9pm, or in some cases Saturdays, in order to allow patients to attend appointments at a time when it is more convenient for them. It must be noted however that not every GP Practice offers Extended Hours, and that this is offered largely in areas with greater demand for services.

In the Vale Royal, South Cheshire, and East Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) areas, GP Extended Hours started in 2008 and has run each year since. In West Cheshire CCG area, Extended Hours has run since 2015.

Out of Hours Services

Out of Hours is an additional service that provides triage and access to appointments during evenings and weekends. This differs from Extended Hours in that whereas Extended Hours means that people can book to see their GP at a time outside of usual contracted hours, Out of Hours is in place for when people call their GP Surgery at a time when it is closed.

When a patient calls their GP Surgery between 6.30pm and 8am on weekdays and anytime at weekends and on bank holidays, they will be directed to the Out of Hours service. Out of hours cover may include GPs working in A&E departments or minor injuries units; teams of healthcare professionals working in primary care centres, A&E departments, Minor Injury Units, urgent care centres or NHS walk-in centres; or healthcare professionals (other than doctors) making home visits, following a detailed clinical assessment.

The GP Out of Hours Service in the area was set up in 2004 in the West Cheshire, Vale Royal, South Cheshire, and East Cheshire CCG areas.

Awareness of Extended Hours and Out of Hours Services

Despite the introduction of both the Extended Hours and Out of Hours services, the perception amongst people Healthwatch speak to around being unable to obtain GP appointments has remained, with many people complaining that they are unable to make an appointment to see a GP at a time that suits them. Previous work undertaken by Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West found that many people did not believe they can make appointments at evenings and weekends and have never used Out of Hours services (see Appendix).

What we did

To gain an insight into people's awareness and experience of using Extended Hours and Out of Hours services, this project was based upon a sample survey of Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester residents. This included questions relating to whether people had used each service, whether they had heard of it and how, and what they thought of the service they received. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the appendices.

As well as allowing us to gain an insight into Extended Hours and Out of Hours, we were also able to signpost people to these services where they were not aware of them.

When did we conduct our survey?

The sample survey was completed over the winter period from November 2017 to February 2018, which anecdotally has been one of the toughest periods in recent years for the NHS.

Engagement that took place was largely in the mid-mornings and mid-afternoons in weekdays, for two-hour periods at each venue or GP Surgery. This was in order to speak to people who were using GP services during core hours, as to speak to people outside of these core hours would indicate that the people we spoke to did not know about Out of Hours and Extended Hours which would potentially distort the findings.

Where did we conduct our survey?

In order to provide a broad sample of people's experiences and awareness of GP Extended Hours and Out of Hours services, Healthwatch conducted engagement activity at various locations in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester. This then enabled us to identify if there are common themes, different experiences or different levels of awareness in each local authority area.

Respondents were largely engaged with at GP Surgeries. To provide an equal sample from both local authorities, we chose four GP Surgeries in each local authority area to visit and asked patients to take the survey as they sat in the waiting room for their appointment. These GP Surgeries were:

Cheshire East

- Holmes Chapel Health Centre, Holmes Chapel
- Manchester Road Surgery, Knutsford
- Millcroft Medical Centre, Crewe
- Nantwich Health Centre, Nantwich

Cheshire West and Chester

- Whitby Group Practice, Ellesmere Port
- High Street Medical Practice, Winsford
- Swanlow Medical Centre, Winsford
- Witton Street Surgery, Northwich

Responses were received from all of the above GP Surgeries with the exception of Witton Street Surgery due to the limited number of patients in the waiting area at the particular time we visited.

Other responses were received at other Healthwatch Cheshire engagement events, as we attempted to add to our sample alongside Healthwatch's usual engagement activity. In all cases respondents were asked to identify their GP practice so that the local authority area can be identified upon analysis of the findings.

Healthwatch Cheshire would like to thank our volunteers for their support in conducting engagement at venues in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester.

Who responded to our survey?

Our sample totalled 98 people who responded to the survey. Although not all of the below were visited, respondents were engaged with at various locations as part of Healthwatch Cheshire activity and were patients of the following GP practices:

Cheshire West and Chester (West Cheshire CCG area):

- Great Sutton Medical Centre, Ellesmere Port
- Handbridge Medical Centre, Chester
- The Helsby & Elton Practice, Helsby
- The Knoll Surgery, Frodsham
- Neston Health Centre, Neston
- Old Hall Surgery, Ellesmere Port
- Park Medical Centre, Chester
- Saughall Village Surgery, Saughall
- Whitby Group Practice, Ellesmere Port
- York Road Group Practice, Ellesmere Port

Cheshire West and Chester (Vale Royal CCG area):

- Danebridge Medical Centre, Northwich
- Firdale Medical Centre, Northwich
- High Street Medical Practice, Winsford
- Middlewich Road Surgery, Northwich
- Oakwood Medical Centre, Northwich
- Swanlow Medical Centre, Winsford

Cheshire East (South Cheshire CCG area):

- Ashfields Primary Care Centre, Sandbach
- Millcroft Medical Centre, Crewe
- Nantwich Health Centre, Nantwich

Cheshire East (East Cheshire CCG area):

- Cumberland House Surgery, Macclesfield
- Holmes Chapel Health Centre, Holmes Chapel
- Manchester Road Surgery, Knutsford
- Park Green Surgery, Macclesfield
- Readesmoor Medical Group Practice, Congleton
- South Park Surgery, Macclesfield
- Toft Road Surgery, Knutsford

We aimed to produce a sample with equal respondents from each local authority but ultimately, we received 10 more responses from Cheshire West and Chester residents. The number of responses received by local authority was as follows:

Cheshire West and Chester	54
Cheshire East	44
Total	98

Summary of Findings

The main findings across Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East from the 98 responses to our sample survey are:

Out of Hours Services

- Our results show that almost two-thirds of our sample have previously used Out of Hours services. In Cheshire West and Chester 69.6% of respondents had used Out of Hours before, compared to 54.7% of those in Cheshire East local authority area. The majority of these people had only used Out of Hours once or twice in the past 12 months.
- A large majority of our sample respondents (70%) who have not used Out of Hours before were actually unaware of the service, suggesting a knowledge gap. However, this does not necessarily mean that these respondents would have used Out of Hours had they known about it, although they would naturally be more likely to in future if they did know about it.
- Over half of the people from our sample who were aware of Out of Hours first heard about it from their GP Surgery, either from being told, advertisement within the surgery, or most commonly by actually calling the GP Surgery which is logically the most common method because that is how the Out of Hours system actually works. This suggests that people may initially have just attempted to call their surgery out of hours and almost ended up using the service by default.
- Over 75% of people in our sample who rated the service they received thought it to be 'Good' or 'Excellent'. A lot of the positive comments centred around the speed and ease of access to the service.

GP Extended Hours

- More than three-quarters of our sample had not previously used Extended Hours services offered by their GP. When split by local authority, this number is higher in Cheshire East where over 85% of respondents have not used Extended Hours before.
- 80% of respondents who had used the services had used it two times or less in the past 12 months.
- Over two-thirds of respondents from our sample who had not previously used Extended Hours services were not aware of the service. This was most prevalent in Cheshire East where almost 80% of people said they had not heard of Extended Hours.
- Almost three-quarters of those who chose to respond had heard of Extended Hours services through their GP Surgery.
- The majority of our sample, almost 75%, who said they had used Extended Hours services rated them as 'Good', with a few respondents also finding them to be 'Excellent'. People commented about the convenience of being able to fit appointments around work.

Dissemination

In order to ensure that the study achieves Healthwatch's key aims of sharing the public's views on Health and Care with those who commission services in order to affect positive change, this report has been shared with the following:

- The public via publication on the Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West websites.¹
- West Cheshire, Vale Royal, South Cheshire, and East Cheshire CCGs
- Cheshire East Council
- Cheshire West and Chester Council

¹ www.healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/reports
www.healthwatchcwac.org.uk/reports

Survey Results

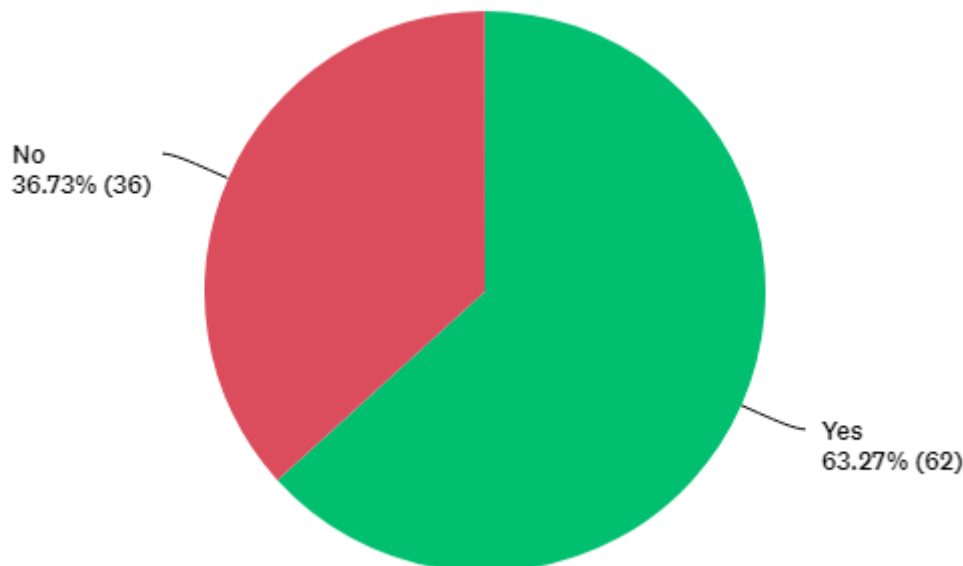
The following is a breakdown of the results from our sample survey by question. Note that in many cases patients chose more than one response to the questions below.

Have you used Out of Hours services before?

The below is the number of people who have used Out of Hours services by local authority area.

	Yes	No
Cheshire East	23 (54.7%)	19 (45.3%)
Cheshire West and Chester	39 (69.6%)	17 (30.4%)
Total (all areas)	62 (63.3%)	36 (36.7%)

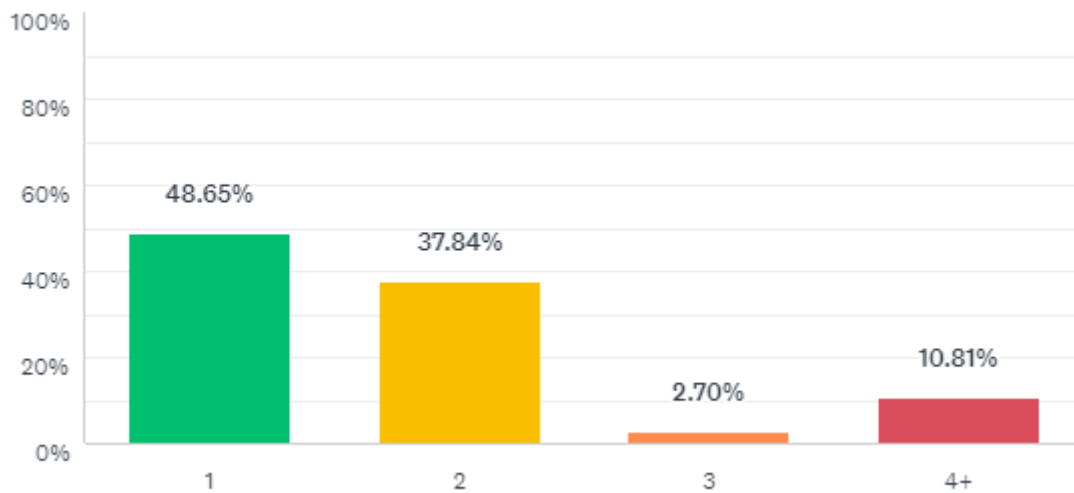
Total number of respondents who have used Out of Hours services previously (%)



- These results show that a clear majority of respondents have previously used Out of Hours services, almost two-thirds of people.
- 54.7% of respondents in Cheshire East had used Out of Hours before, compared to 69.6% of people in Cheshire West and Chester local authority area, suggesting that the service is more widely used in Cheshire West and Chester.

Of the 62 people who said they had used Out of Hours services before, 37 answered with how often they had used the service in the past 12 months. It is assumed that of those 25 people who did not respond but had used the service that they last used it longer than 12 months ago.

Number of times respondents have used Out of Hours services in the past 12 months (%)



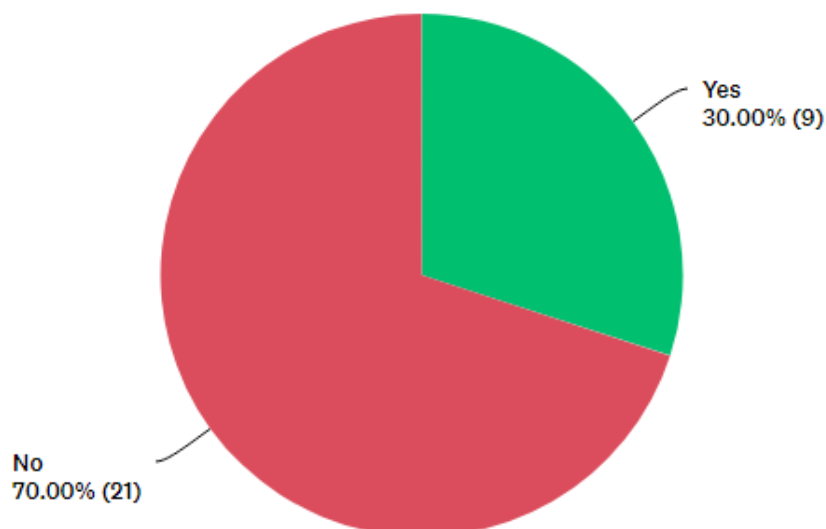
- This demonstrates that the majority of respondents are not regular users of Out of Hours services, with almost half of people only having used the service once in the past 12 months.
- 86% of respondents had used the service two times or less in the past 12 months.

Are you aware of Out of Hours services offered by your GP surgery?

This question sought to gain an idea of the number of people who knew about Out of Hours services. Obviously, the people who have used Out of Hours before will be aware of the service, but this seeks to discover whether those who have not used the service previously had heard of it, and so the following results only include the 36 people who answered ‘No’ to the previous question.

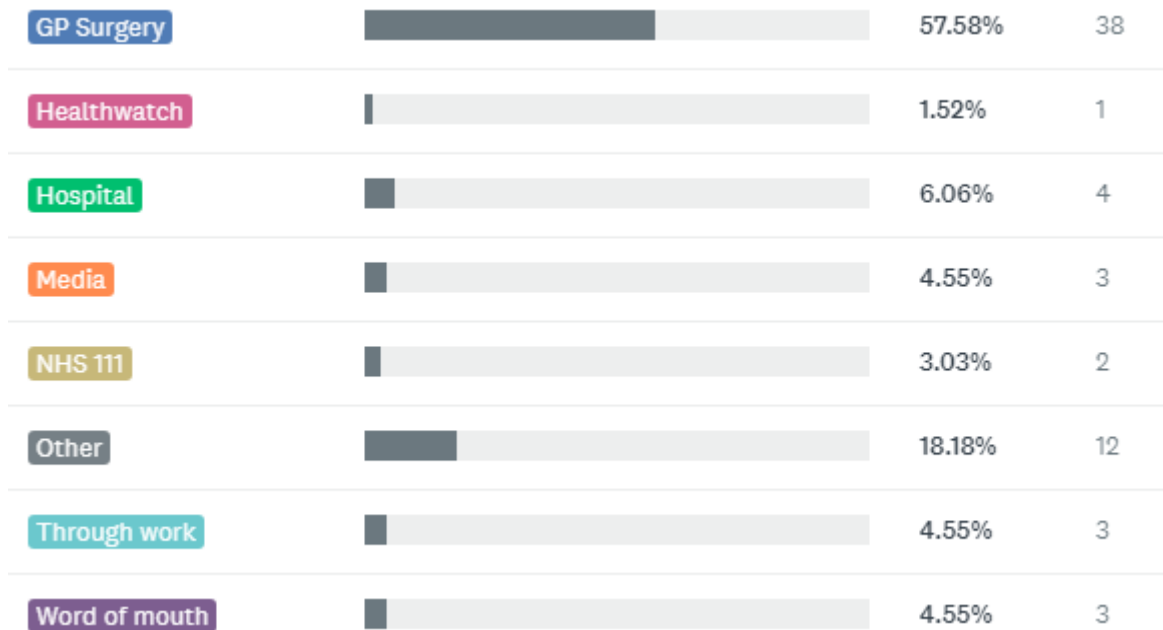
	Yes	No	Unsure/ Did not reply
Cheshire East	4	13	2
Cheshire West and Chester	5	8	4
Total	9	21	6

Awareness of the service from total number of respondents who have not used Out of Hours services previously (% - excluding those who did not reply)



- This demonstrates that a large majority of respondents who have not used out of hours before were actually unaware of the service, suggesting a knowledge gap. However, this does not necessarily mean that these respondents would have used Out of Hours had they known about it, although they would naturally be more likely to in future if they did know about it.

There were 66 respondents in total across all areas who opted to reveal how they had heard about out of hours services. This was broken down as follows:



- This demonstrates that the majority of people who are aware of Out of Hours first heard about it from their GP Surgery, either from being told, advertisement within the surgery, or most commonly by actually calling the GP Surgery which is logically the most common method because that is how the out of hours system actually works. This suggests that people may initially have just attempted to call their surgery out of hours and almost ended up using the service by accident.
- Of those who responded ‘Other’, the majority did not know how they had heard about the service, and simply believed that they had always known.

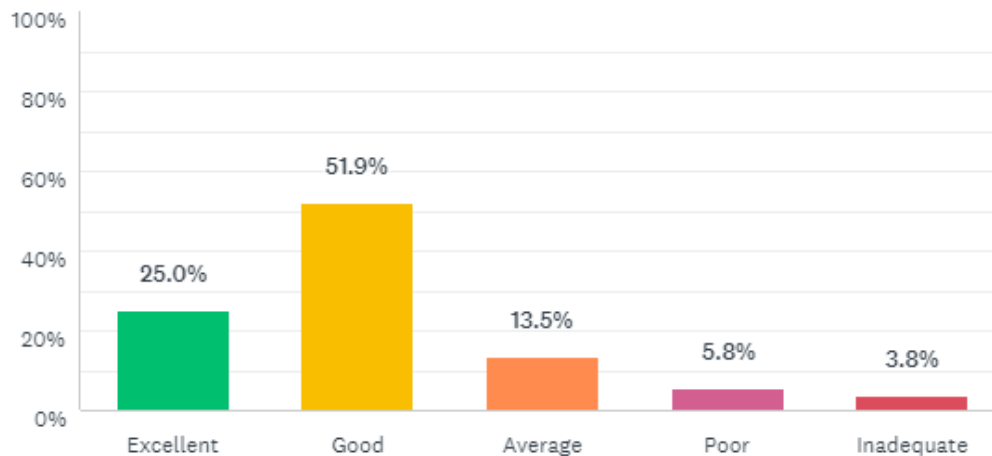
How would you rate the service you received, and why?

This question is directed towards understanding people’s experiences of using Out of Hours services and what they perceived the quality of the service they received to be. Of the 62 people who said they had previously used Out of Hours services, 52 decided to offer feedback on their experience through this question.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Inadequate	Don't know
Cheshire East	2 (8.3%)	12 (50%)	3 (12.5%)	1 (4.2%)	2 (8.3%)	4 (16.7%)
Cheshire West and Chester	11 (28.2%)	15 (38.5%)	4 (10.3%)	2 (5.1%)	1 (2.6%)	6 (15.3%)
Total	13 (25%)	27 (51.9%)	7 (13.5%)	3 (5.8%)	2 (3.8%)	10 (19.2%)

- These results found that slightly more than half of all respondents rated their Out of Hours experience as ‘Good’, with a quarter of all rating it as ‘Excellent’. A ‘Good’ rating was the most common across both local authority areas.
- It was however in Cheshire West and Chester where the majority of people rating their service as ‘Excellent’ were from, at 28.2% compared to only two people in Cheshire East.
- The results suggest that the majority of people in Cheshire East were happy with the Out of Hours service they experienced but more people in Cheshire West and Chester actually found their experience to be ‘Excellent’.

How respondents would rate their experiences of using Out of Hours services (%)



When asked why they rated their experience as they did, people from our sample responded with the following:

Cheshire West and Chester (West Cheshire CCG area):

Excellent:

- *“Useful at the weekend - not a wait.”*
- *“Everything I needed, a quick response at a clinic in Chester.”*
- *“Service good, seen quickly.”*
- *“Dealt with straight away, otherwise A&E.”*
- *“Ease of access and thorough.”*
- *“Had dressing done at this service at Ellesmere Port Hospital.”*

Good:

- *“It does what it says “ring, triage and treat”. They don’t have your history though which I think they should have so they understand the problems better. I have had some good treatment and been provided with techniques to help my anxiety by the doctor treating me and it works very well for me seen quickly convenience.”*
- *“Accessibility - quick appointment and it was resolved.”*
- *“Very helpful with children.”*
- *“It was quick.”*
- *“Helpful to get help there and then.”*

Average:

- *“Got fobbed off because they didn’t know the child like our GP.”*

- *“Not happy on the medication. When not busy helpful but not ongoing medication, tells me to go to pathways - recovery college - chapter.”*

Poor:

- *“Difficult to get an appointment, only a certain amount of slots. I need to be able to get to Chester - cannot always get to Chester, need something in Ellesmere Port.”*

Inadequate:

- *“Tried to phone about chest pains. I went to out of hours but doors were locked, was told to wait for a phone call but collapsed. When someone phoned I was told to take paracetamol.”*

Cheshire West and Chester (Vale Royal CCG area):

Excellent:

- *“Gave me the medication I needed.”*
- *“At Victoria Infirmary - reassuring to know it's there.”*

Good:

- *“When I did use them a couple of years ago they were excellent. A doctor came out to me and I was admitted to hospital.”*
- *“The service itself is brilliant. Triage can be frustrating. Had an insect sting - couldn't get it sorted at GP or Pharmacy - back and forth. NHS 111 just said to ring the doctors. Took whole day.”*
- *“Easier to use, got a quick appointment.”*
- *“I used them this weekend - they got me an appointment at Victoria Infirmary for 5pm - it was 2pm. I said we couldn't wait that long. They rang me back and told me to go straight to Leighton's Children's Ward - they were expecting us. We got very good treatment.”*

Cheshire East (South Cheshire CCG area):

Excellent:

- *“Great, Quick.”*

Good:

- *“I've used it at Leighton Hospital with the kids, all fine.”*
- *“Fine, all okay.”*
- *“Fine on time appointment.”*
- *“Mental Health Support workers are used a lot. Very helpful. They don't take much history - wondering do they take keep records on past treatments.”*
- *“No problems with the service.”*
- *“I had a direct number from previous calls before 111.”*

Average:

- *“Quicker than waiting here [GP Surgery].”*

Inadequate:

- *“Not very efficient. 7 hours waiting just before Christmas. 4 hours just to be assessed. Saw triage. Didn't test blood or temperature until I insisted. High heart rate and fever. Needed antibiotics and surgery. I had to push. It needs to be more thorough.”*

Cheshire East (East Cheshire CCG area):

Excellent:

- *“My daughter was ill. Very high temperature, lethargic, very bad cough. Phoned 111 - waited 45mins - which given it was Boxing Day I thought was good. Very thorough triage - lasting a good 10 minutes. Got an appointment to see out of hours GP who was excellent, very thorough again. Advised of medication.”*

Good:

- *“Think it was at Macclesfield.”*
- *“Macclesfield was good.”*
- *“Answered query”*
- *“Had to go to Macclesfield Hospital. I thought it would be here [GP Surgery] or health hub.”*

Average:

- *“One occasion good, one occasion not good. They were insistent on an ambulance although we said we didn't need one. Took 2.5hrs.”*
- *“Seen quickly.”*

Poor:

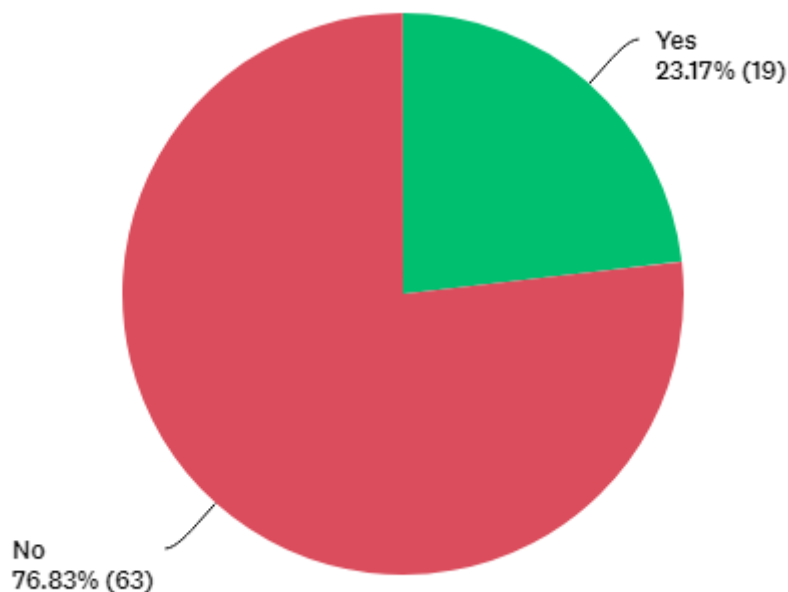
- *“Because of location. Had to go to Macclesfield Hospital - why??? There are six surgeries here surely they can take in turn.”*

Have you used Extended Hours services before?

The below is the number of people from our sample who have used Extended Hours services by local authority area.

	Yes	No
Cheshire East	4 (14.3%)	24 (85.7%)
Cheshire West and Chester	15 (38.5%)	39 (61.5%)
Total (all areas)	19 (23.1%)	63 (76.8%)

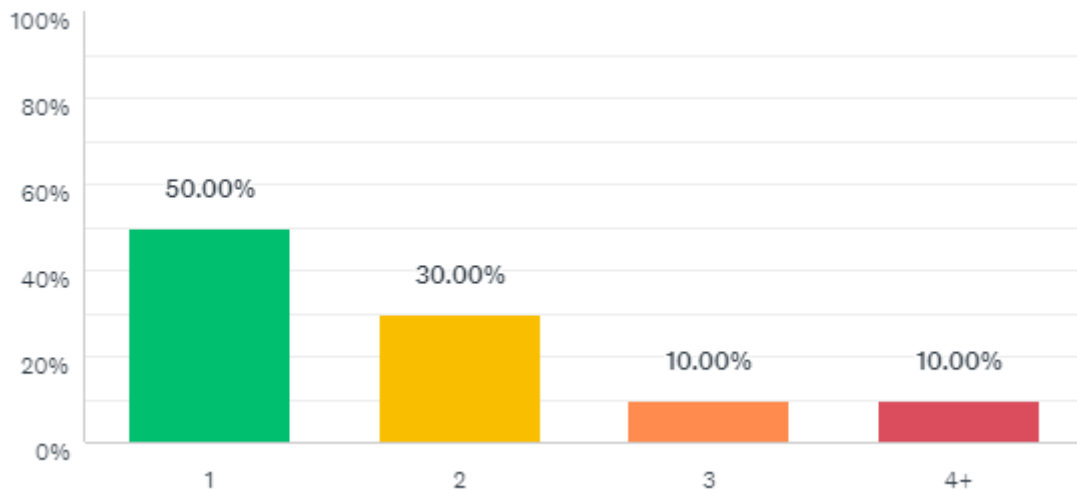
Total number of respondents who have used Extended Hours services previously (%)



- These results demonstrate that more than three-quarters of respondents had not previously used Extended Hours services offered by their GP. This suggests either that there is not a big enough need for appointments outside of core contracted hours, that they do not actually suit people, or that people are not aware of these services.
- This finding is replicated across Cheshire but is higher in Cheshire East where over 85% of respondents have not used Extended Hours before.

Of the 19 people who said they had used Extended Hours services before, 10 answered with how often they had used the service in the past 12 months. It is assumed that of those 9 people who did not respond but had used the service, that they last used it longer than 12 months ago.

Number of times respondents have used Extended Hours services in the past 12 months (%)



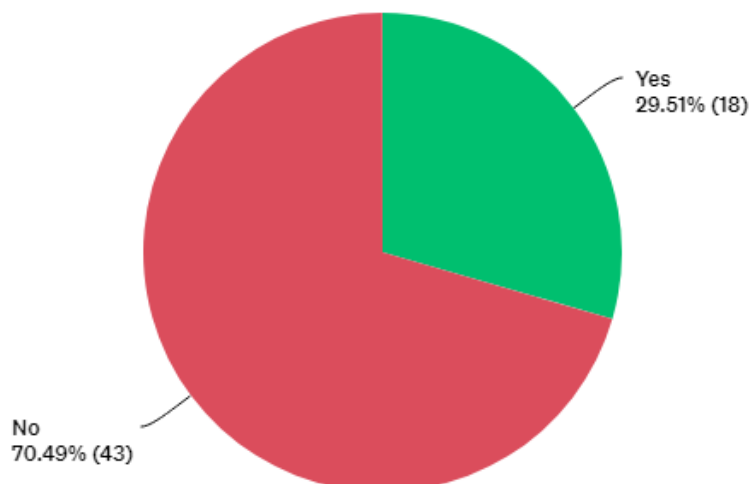
- This demonstrates that the majority of respondents are not regular users of Extended Hours services, with half of people only having used the service once in the past 12 months.
- 80% of respondents had used the service two times or less in the past 12 months.

Are you aware of Extended Hours services offered by your GP surgery?

This question sought to gain an idea of the number of people who knew about Extended Hours services. Obviously, the people who have used Extended Hours before will be aware of the service, but this seeks to discover whether those who have not used the service previously had heard of it, and so the following results only include the 63 people who answered ‘No’ to the previous question.

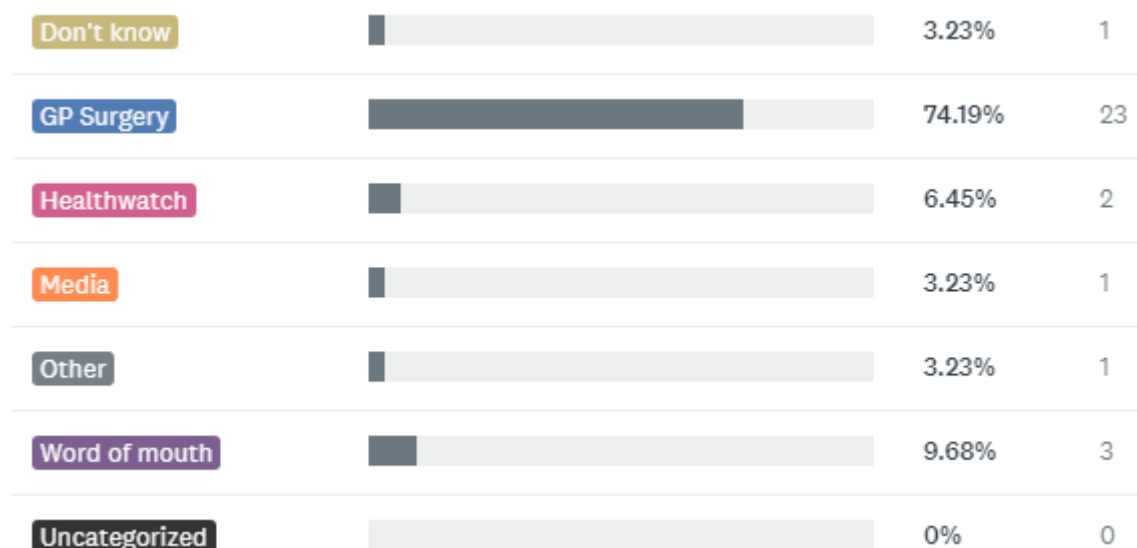
	Yes	No	Unsure/ Did not reply
Cheshire East	4 (16.7%)	19 (79.2%)	1 (4.1%)
Cheshire West and Chester	14 (35.9%)	24 (61.5%)	1 (2.6%)
Total	18 (28.6%)	43 (68.3%)	2 (3.1%)

Awareness of the service from total number of respondents who have not used Extended Hours services previously (% - excluding those who did not reply)



- Over two-thirds of respondents who had not previously used Extended Hours services were not aware of Extended Hours.
- This was most prevalent in Cheshire East where almost 80% of people said they had not heard of Extended Hours.
- These results suggest that more needs to be done in order to promote Extended Hours services and appointments, particularly in Cheshire East. However, it could be that this service is only really known about patients after they have used it.

There were 31 respondents in total across all areas who opted to reveal how they had heard about Extended Hours services. This was broken down as follows:



- This demonstrates that almost three quarters of those who chose to respond had heard of Extended Hours services through their GP Surgery. This is perhaps logical given the nature of the service, as we would assume either that the GP Practice advertises extended opening times within the surgery, on their website or most likely through people calling for an appointment and being offered a time outside of core contracted hours.
- The second most common method was through word of mouth, although this was only three responses. Healthwatch were also cited as having signposted two people about the services.

How would you rate the service you received, and why?

This question is directed towards understanding people’s experiences of using Extended Hours services and what they perceived the quality of the service they received to be. Of the 19 people who said they had previously used Extended Hours services, 15 decided to offer feedback on their experience through this question.

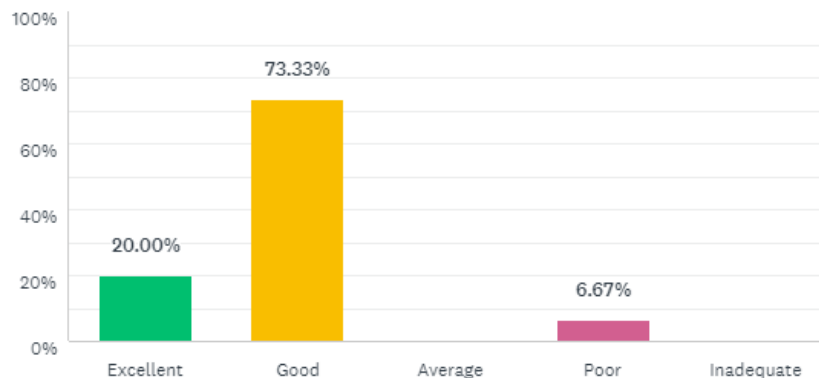
	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Inadequate	Don't know
Cheshire East	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Cheshire West and Chester	2 (18.2%)	8 (72.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	3 (20%)	11 (73.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

- These findings demonstrate that the majority of people who said they had used Extended Hours services rated them as ‘Good’, with a few respondents also finding them to be

‘Excellent’. This however is from a low sample due to the limited number of people who told us they had used Extended Hours services, and so should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive.

- The ‘Good’ rating is likely to be owing to the fact that Extended Hours services often take the form of the same service people receive in normal core contracted hours, but just at a different time, and so this fits with comments we often hear about people generally being happy with the quality of the treatment and appointments they receive.

How respondents would rate their experiences of using Extended Hours services (%)



When asked why they rated their experience as they did, people from our sample responded with the following:

Cheshire West and Chester (West Cheshire CCG area):

Excellent:

- *“More convenient as the hospital is just next door.”*
- *“I broke my leg, I had to use this service and thought it was good.”*

Poor:

- *“Cannot get a slot - only certain number. I have used the walk-in centre in St Helens - much better - need a walk-in centre in Ellesmere Port.”*

Cheshire West and Chester (Vale Royal CCG area):

Good:

- *“Monday evening fitted with work.”*
- *“Early morning appointments for smear and other things fit in with work.”*

Cheshire East (South Cheshire CCG area):

Excellent:

- *“Meant I was able to see GP after work.”*

Good:

- *“Helpful to be able to get an early appointment at 7am.”*

Cheshire East (East Cheshire CCG area):

Good:

“Have used the early appointments twice and this helped a lot.”

Conclusion



This project sought to determine whether people were aware of GP Extended Hours and Out of Hours services, if they had used them, and what they thought of them. Our sample findings present a mixed picture, with Out of Hours appearing to be more widely used than Extended Hours services in Cheshire according to our sample of respondents.

Out of Hours Services

We found that Out of Hours services within Cheshire was widely used by our sample respondents, with almost two-thirds of people asked having previously used the service. In Cheshire West and Chester 69.6% of respondents had used Out of Hours before, compared to 54.7% of those in Cheshire East local authority area. The majority of these people had only used Out of Hours once or twice in the past 12 months, and so are not frequent attendees. It is unknown whether this is because they were using other services instead, or whether they may simply not have needed to seek medical attention.

A large majority of respondents from our sample (70%) who have not used Out of Hours before were actually unaware of the service, suggesting a knowledge gap, particularly in Cheshire East. However, this does not necessarily mean that these respondents would have used Out of Hours had they known about it, although they would naturally be more likely to in future if they did know about it. Therefore, greater promotion of the service could well see the number of people using it increase.

Over half of people in our sample who were aware of Out of Hours first heard about it from their GP Surgery, either from being told, advertisement within the surgery, or most commonly by actually calling the GP Surgery which is logically the most common method because that is how the out of hours system actually works. This suggests that people may initially have just attempted to call their surgery out of hours and almost ended up using the service by default.

Over 75% of people from our sample who rated the service they received thought it to be 'Good' or 'Excellent'. A lot of the positive comments centred around the speed and ease of access to the service, which is part of the purpose of introducing Out of Hours in the first place. Therefore, there is a very positive message to sell around the service through promotion, and our research suggests that more could be done to do so, particularly in Cheshire East.

GP Extended Hours

Our findings found that more than three-quarters of respondents in our sample had not previously used Extended Hours services offered by their GP. This finding is higher in Cheshire East where over 85% of respondents have not used Extended Hours before. Again, this is a service that was not used regularly by our respondents, with 80% of those who had used the services having used it two times or less in the past 12 months. Although again, this may simply be because they did not require any further medical appointments at this time.

Over two-thirds of respondents from our sample who had not previously used Extended Hours services were not aware of the service. This was most prevalent in Cheshire East where almost 80% of people said they had not heard of Extended Hours. Almost three-quarters of those who chose to respond had heard of Extended Hours services through their GP Surgery.

This suggests that even though Extended Hours appointments are available, people are either not needing to use them or are not aware that they could have a medical appointment outside of core contracted hours. This may be because GP Practices are not particularly promoting this very well, although our findings suggest that this was by far the most common way of people hearing about the service. This is perhaps logical given the nature of the service, as we would assume either that the GP Practice advertises extended opening times within the surgery, on their website or most likely through people calling for an appointment and being offered a time outside of core contracted hours. It is likely that because the majority of people just call up for an appointment, they will take the appointments they are offered rather than enquiring about Extended Hours.

The majority of people from our sample, almost 75%, who said they had used Extended Hours services rated them as 'Good', with a few respondents also finding them to be 'Excellent'. People commented about the convenience of being able to fit appointments around work.

Recommendations

It can be concluded that the experience of people from our sample in regard to Out of Hours and Extended Hours is largely positive, with people reporting efficiency and good access at being treated at times that fit around their working lives. However, people have also told us during this research that they have not used the services, and in many cases were not aware of them, in particular with Extended Hours. This is the case across Cheshire but tends to be a stronger finding in Cheshire East than Cheshire West and Chester. All in all, it appears that there needs to be more promotion of these services in order to increase awareness and use, because there is a positive story to tell regarding the benefits of these services.

If a co-ordinated effort is made across service providers to increase promotion of Out of Hours and Extended Hours services, it would be useful to repeat this sample survey and report in a year's time, to see how use, awareness and experience of the services has evolved. In view of these services not being particularly well known or well used against the backdrop of heavy demand, it would be interesting to assess people's views and experiences of trying to obtain GP appointments during core hours. This could be in the form of further research in Cheshire of how long people feel they are waiting for appointments, why they perceive they are unable to obtain appointments, and whether they would prefer an appointment outside of core hours. This would enable us to find out whether there really is specifically a demand for Out of Hours and Extended Hours, which then in turn allows us to better make the link as to whether the sole reason these services are not massively used is because of a lack of awareness or for other reasons.

Appendix 1

Healthwatch Cheshire West GP Access Project Patient Questionnaire (March 2015)






This previous survey found that 69% of people did not believe that they could make appointments in the evening or at weekends, whilst only 34% of respondents who accessed other services if they couldn't get a GP appointment said that they had instead used out of hours services. 59% of respondents had never actually used Out of Hours services.

Healthwatch Cheshire East GP Access Report (March 2015)

The March 2015 Healthwatch Cheshire East research found that whilst on the whole people were able to access urgent same day appointments, there were increasing waiting times for routine appointments. It found that demand for appointments was higher than supply and that Extended Hours was not making more appointments available and instead just having them at different times of the day or week.

Appendix 2

Survey Questions

	
<h3>GP Out of Hours and Extended Hours in Cheshire Survey</h3>	
<p>Healthwatch Cheshire want to gain a better understanding of the usage and awareness of GP Out of Hours and Extended Hours services in Cheshire. We would really appreciate if you could please take a few minutes to answer this brief survey.</p>	
Which is your GP Surgery?	<input type="text"/>
Please can we have the first part of your postcode: (This allows us to identify the general area from which comments are received)	<input type="text"/>
<h4><u>Out of Hours Services</u></h4>	
Have you used Out of Hours services before? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Are you aware of Out of Hours services offered by your GP surgery? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
How did you hear about Out of Hours services?	
<input type="text"/>	
If you have used Out of Hours, how many times in the past 12 months? <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4+	
How would you rate the service you received, and why?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Average <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate	
<input type="text"/>	
<h4><u>Extended Hours Services</u></h4>	
Have you used Extended Hours services before? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Are you aware of Extended Hours services offered by your GP surgery? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
<p>Share your views:</p> <p>www.healthwatchcheshire.org.uk</p> <p>Telephone: 0300 323 0006</p> <p>Email: info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk</p> <p>  @HealthwatchCW @HealthwatchCE</p>	
	

How did you hear about Extended Hours services?

If you have used Extended Hours, how many times in the past 12 months?

1 2 3 4+

How would you rate the service you received, and why?

Excellent Good Average Poor Inadequate

If you would like to be contacted further by Healthwatch regarding your experience, please include your contact details below:

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:

What are Out of Hours services?

Outside normal surgery hours you can still phone your GP surgery, but you'll usually be directed to an out-of-hours service. The out-of-hours period is from 6.30pm to 8am on weekdays and all day at weekends and on bank holidays. Out-of-hours cover may include GPs working in A&E departments or minor injuries units; teams of healthcare professionals working in primary care centres, A&E departments, MIUs, urgent care centres or NHS walk-in centres; or healthcare professionals (other than doctors) making home visits, following a detailed clinical assessment.

What are Extended Hours services?

Extended Hours services are appointments at GP practices at times outside of core contracted hours (8am-6.30pm) to allow patients to attend appointments at a time when it is more convenient for them. This can vary from practice to practice but often consist of early mornings, late evening, or Saturday morning appointments.

Share your views:

www.healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

Telephone: 0300 323 0006

Email: info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

  @HealthwatchCW @HealthwatchCE

