

Community Diagnostic Centre Report

Whitegate Health Centre

30th Jan 2024



Contact Details

Whitegate Health Centre, 150 Whitegate Drive, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY3 9ES.

Staff Liaised With

Ian Warren (Project Manager – CDC)

Staff Met During Visit

Ben Ward (CT Imaging Manager/ IR(ME)R Lead)

Healthwatch Blackpool Authorised Representatives

Abigail Lee

Josh Bannister

Supported by five Healthwatch volunteers and a Healthwatch placement student

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Blackpool would like to thank patients and staff for making us feel welcome during our visit to Whitegate Health Centre.

DISCLAIMER: This report relates only to the service viewed at the time of the visit, and is only representative of the views of patients who met members of the team on that date.

Introduction

This was an announced Enter and View visit, undertaken by authorised representatives from Healthwatch Blackpool, who have the authority to enter health and social care premises, announced or unannounced. The aim of this is to observe and assess the nature and quality of services and obtain the view of those patients using the services. The representatives speak to respondents in communal areas only. The team of trained Enter and View representatives record their observations, along with feedback from patients and staff. A report is sent to the manager of the facility for comments. Any response from the manager is included with the final version of the report, which is published on the Healthwatch Blackpool website: www.healthwatchblackpool.co.uk

Healthwatch Blackpool would like to thank Ian Warren and Ben Ward, together with patients and staff, for making the team feel welcome.

Background to our Enter and View

Healthwatch Blackpool have been commissioned by Healthwatch England, amongst other local Healthwatch across the country, to capture on the ground insight into people's experiences at Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs).

Healthwatch England are interested in how CDCs are working across the country, drawing comparisons between different localities and different types of CDCs. The findings will contribute to a final report by Healthwatch England.

Setting up CDCs is a flagship policy, and a crucial part of the elective care recovery plan. CDCs aim to transform diagnostics in England by reducing the pressure on acute services, ring-fencing resources for elective diagnostics and increasing diagnostic capacity. Little is known about the patient experience of CDCs. CDCs are new, having only been established in February 2022. NHS England only started publishing statistics on the performance of CDCs in March 2023, and no one has yet investigated people's experiences of using CDCs.

Healthwatch is uniquely placed to provide insight into performance against two of the aims of CDCs:

"To contribute to reducing health inequalities driven by unwarranted variation in referral, access, uptake, experience and outcomes of diagnostic provision."

"To deliver a better and more personalized diagnostic experience for patients by providing a single point of access to a range of diagnostic services in the community."

Methodology

The Enter and View representatives made an announced visit on 26th January 2024 and carried out a follow up accessibility audit on 30th January 2024.

We spoke to 10 patients and the team recorded their own observations of the environment and facilities. We also engaged with staff members whilst on the visit, however these were not formal interviews.

Our role at Healthwatch Blackpool is to gather the views of service users, especially those whose voices are seldom heard, to give individuals the opportunity to express how they feel about a service.

We use templates to assess the environment of a facility and gather information from respondents, to ensure that reports are compiled in a fair and comparative manner.

About Whitegate Drive Community Diagnostic Centre

Whitegate Drive CDC became operational in October 2022, after receiving a share of the £350m national funding allocated to reduce scan waiting times and bring services closer to patients homes.

The building is slightly outside of the town centre of Blackpool, but is situated on a main route across and through the town. Residing in West Lancashire, the centre lies within travel distance of neighbouring towns St Annes, Lytham, Ansdell, Cleveleys, Poulton and Thornton. It allows patients from Blackpool and the areas above to be treated closer to home, reducing the need for them to travel and attend appointments at Blackpool Victoria Hospital and Clifton Hospital.

Whitegate Drive was chosen as a state-of-the-art health centre rooted in the local community, with several key advantages. The £20m health centre was built in 2009 and has multiple key services already operating over three floors and 80,000sq ft. At the time of opening, the centre was described as "one of the best in the country", equipped and installed with the latest technology.



At the time of writing this report, the following departments were open to patients within the CDC:

**Phlebotomy
CT Scan
Ultrasound**

**Awaiting opening:
Cardiology
Respiratory**


Enter and View Observations: Accessibility

Getting to the Community Diagnostic Centre

Whitegate Health Centre is located on Whitegate Drive and can be accessed via Devonshire Road, Talbot Road and Park Road, all of which are main routes across Blackpool. Whitegate Drive can also be accessed from the M55 motorway via Preston New Road.

There is a bus stop located just outside the Centre on Whitegate Drive, which is served by routes 3a and 61. Access to the site is limited via public transport from many locations around the town. For many residents trying to access the CDC, they have to travel into the town centre using public transport routes, which then connect to the one local bus travelling to Whitegate Health Centre.

There is free car parking on site, including 8 spaces for blue badge holders. However, it was noted that the car park gets full very quickly. The centre is also widely surrounded by residential permit only parking, so when the car park is full, there is a double effect impacting Health Centre visitors access. Additionally, some of the signage indicating the blue badge spaces has fallen off, so this may make the available spaces difficult to see whilst driving.

	Physiotherapy	2
	Podiatry	2
	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services	2
	Blackpool Urgent Treatment Centre	1
	GP Extended Access	1
	Marton Medical Practice	1
	Pain Management & Respiratory Investigations	1
	Pharmacy	1
	This Floor	
	Main Reception	0
	Sexual Health Services	0
	Community Nursing	0

Getting around the building

There is a lift to all floors within the building. There are accessible toilets on each floor, which have clear signs and are dementia friendly. There is also signage on the ground floor for services available on each floor, however, this isn't up to date and not all services are listed. This is situated near the reception and many participants commented on how quick and efficient the reception team were at offering a helping hand. The flooring throughout the building is mainly dementia friendly, being plain in colour and utilising darker shades throughout.

Waiting Areas

There is a good range of seating in the main reception and in each of the departments, however, there are no arm rests on main reception seating and no range in height of seating. There is sufficient space for a wheelchair user to use the waiting area and there is easy access to each of the departments. The main reception desk is easily visible from both entrances to the building. The reception desks in each department all had a hearing loop and allowed space for privacy and dignity of patients. Despite this, we noted that there is not a designated place of safety which can be used by people with dementia, autism or learning disabilities.



Environment

Ground Floor Reception Area

The building is clean, bright and warm throughout. There is a large waiting area on the ground floor with a good range of seating and a water dispenser for patients to access drinks from. There is a café towards the back of the building, where members of the public and patients can access food and drink. There was no notice board in the reception area and this could have been useful for displaying information about relevant health and community information/events.



Ultrasound

There is a reception desk for this department which was staffed at all times during our visit, with a hearing loop and an accessible counter. The waiting room was clean, bright and had plenty of seating.

Phlebotomy

There is an accessible reception desk for this department, with a hearing loop and staff on reception at all times during our visit. The waiting room was clean, bright and had plenty of seating. The nurse doing the tests that day was very chatty and welcoming to both ourselves and the patients.

CT Scan

The CT Scans were taking place on a mobile unit to the rear of the health centre. The waiting area on the unit was quite small and cramped, but there was lift access to the unit if required. The staff were again warm and welcoming.



Patients' Feedback about the Community Diagnostic Centre

We spoke with 10 patients about their experiences of accessing the CDC and their appointments. Please find a summary of their feedback below.

Experience of their journey to the CDC

5 of the 10 participants we spoke with had some difficulties in travelling to and or parking at the health centre, with the majority of participants coming from inside the Blackpool area and travelling on average for half an hour to an hour for their appointment. Those who had driven appreciated the fact that parking was free on site, however, it was noted by 3 people that parking was routinely difficult, with 2 people leaving an hour earlier than usual and 1 of them still having to park several streets away. The feedback given was that there is simply not enough parking spaces. Another participant noted that they had chosen to walk and set off early due to experiencing problems previously.

2 participants said that the buses are less frequent to Whitegate Drive, in comparison to buses to and from the hospital, which are more frequent and widely accessible within the town. 1 participant also noted that there was no connecting buses between Layton (one of Blackpool's wards) and the Whitegate drive area, with this being a known issue for Blackpool and Layton residents.

"I always get a taxi because there isn't a bus from Layton to Whitegate Drive. A bus doesn't stop near here, so it's just easier."

"Like the location of this place. The building is accessible. It's not as convenient as going to the hospital, the buses are slightly more infrequent."

Ease of Navigation once on Site

All but 1 of the participants we spoke with found their relevant department easily once on site. For the individual who struggled, they informed Healthwatch it was their first visit to the centre, but noted they would be fine coming next time. Most of the participants had accessed Whitegate Health Centre before.

Convenience of location

Almost half of the participants we spoke with found challenges with accessing the location. For drivers, it was an easy place to drive to but not park. The centre is on one of the busiest roads and routes across Blackpool, bringing both positives and negatives. The centre is situated within a residential parking area, with the majority of neighbouring streets being permit parking only. 2 participants noted setting off early for traffic and parking reasons. All but 1 participant knew where the building was. 2 participants were travelling from outside Blackpool to use the centre and had no problems in locating it.

"I ended up having to park on Bloomfield Road. I didn't even attempt to park here as it is too difficult."

"Set off well early for my appointment (1 hour) as was worried about traffic and being able to park."

Experience of Getting the Appointment

Referral Process

8 out of the 10 patients we spoke with had been referred to the CDC by their GP. These were a combination of Ultrasound, Phlebotomy and CT Scan patients. The other 3 had all been referred by specialists within hospital settings.

All of the patients had been seen at the CDC soon after their referral, with most of the phlebotomy appointments taking place within 1 to 2 days up to a week of referral and the ultrasound and CT scans within 4 to 6 weeks of referral.

Choice of location and time of diagnostic test or scan

Some issues in this area have been addressed within the accessibility section of this report, as there are limited bus routes to the health centre and parking on site/in the surrounding area remains consistently poor.

Out of the 10 patients we spoke with, just 1 phlebotomy patient had been given a choice about their location of appointment, being informed they could either attend Whitegate Health Centre or Fleetwood Same Day Health Centre. The other 9 patients had not been given a choice about location, however they did all indicate that this wasn't a problem for them. 1 patient highlighted that they would have liked to have had their bloods done at their GP Surgery.

Out of the 9 patients not given a choice, all commented that this was fine, with comments pertaining to speed of service and staff morale as a strong feature of the health centre. All 4 of the phlebotomy patients had been offered choice regarding the time of their appointment. On the other hand, just 1 of the 3 CT Scan patients and 1 of the ultrasound patients had been offered choice regarding time. It does need to be noted here that most of the patients that didn't have choice around time had no problem with this.

"I had an evening appointment allocated to me at 7pm, but that's a difficult time with me putting the kids to bed, so yes, I would have preferred a choice, when they called me up to move to midday this was a lot better."

"No I do not want a choice. Whitegate Drive is close to home."

"It's just an additional task and money and responsibility for all to not get my bloods done at the GP."

"I'm almost housebound, and my GP is nearly at the end of my street. I could wheel myself down or get someone to push me and have a break out the house semi independently rather than having to take 2 patients transports and hours and money out of others time."

Timing of other scans and tests

Just 1 of the participants had another scan booked that day, but couldn't remember which so was going to the reception after we spoke. None of the other participants were waiting for other scans that day and just 1 had routine phlebotomy appointments every 12-14 weeks.

Offer of choices around timing or location of future tests or scans

The most important consideration for 6 out of 10 research participants in regards to timing and/or location of future tests was timeliness. The speed and convenience of appointments was noted as particularly good and continues to be an area of importance for patients. 3 participants said that a local appointment is very important to them, with 1 saying they would still prefer to have blood tests at the GP surgery. 3 participants mentioned things relating to travel, better access via bus routes and again increased parking on the site.

"I would say parking, having the appointment as soon as possible and also as local as possible would be my priorities."

"To get the scan straight away, quickly and being able to get to the clinic and park – it needs to be local."

Preparation for the appointment

Feeling informed about what to expect

8 out of 10 participants said they weren't very well informed about what to expect about their appointment before attending. A few patients did have prior knowledge and felt equipped to attend, especially in relation to phlebotomy, but as for healthcare providers informing them this did not seem to happen.

1 participant commented that the GP hadn't informed them but the staff once on site were well informed and happy to help. Another participant mentioned that the GP had eluded to the fact they were having a scan, but didn't know which type, and said the app confirmed this for them.

"I wasn't sure what the appointment was at first but I logged on to the NHS app once I got the message and then it made sense. The GP just told me I was coming in for a scan. I didn't know it was an ultrasound until I went on the app."

"Not well informed by the GP but the staff here were very informed and well supportive."

How comfortable do you find the waiting area?

All of the people we spoke with found the waiting area comfortable and welcoming.

Do you feel the site provides adequate privacy and dignity?

All of the people we spoke with felt that the site provided adequate privacy and dignity. The disabled toilets were also easily accessible and in justified locations.

Knowledge of Community Diagnostic Centres

9 out of 10 participants had not heard of CDCs before speaking with our team. 1 participant said they had heard of CDCs via the media, but wasn't aware they were sat or being treated in one.

Overwhelmingly this was the highest metric indicator of all, as none of the patients that day knew they were being treated by or within a CDC. Increased awareness of this facility needs to be promoted.

Experience of the appointment

All of the patients we spoke with had their appointment on time.

How was your experience of the test, scan, procedure or appointment itself?

All of the patients had a good experience of their appointment.

Treatment by and communication with staff

Feedback about staff in each of the departments was incredibly positive. There was not a single comment made in critique of the experience with staff or treatment that day.

"Great. Friendly."

"Very comfortable. Brilliant."

"They were very nice. We had a laugh."

"Really well, I've been made to feel like a queen."

"Yes they respected my privacy. It was an uncomfortable scan but it was dealt with well."

None of the patients we spoke with had any issues with communicating with the staff. They all felt that they were listened to.

Next Steps After the Appointment

Were you given information to take away with you? If no, would you have liked some?

None of the patients we spoke with had been given information to take away with them after the appointment. Despite this, all except 1 felt that this was not needed because they knew that the next steps would involve a conversation with either their GP or specialist who had referred them. For the individual who felt they would have benefitted from this, please see the below quote.

“The lady just said the results are getting sent to the GP. I was not given a length of time until I hear. Sometimes I have to chase up the GP for the results. If the results are good, they might not call. My mind is constantly worrying about what the results are. They should let you know either way”.

Overall Feedback

What, if anything, would you say was particularly good about your experience today?

“Generally good, it’s a health appointment, I don’t mind coming.”

“It’s been a good efficient services with lovely people.”

“All is great but just impractical.” (in relation to patient transport)

“It was good. I knew the lady, I was reassured by her that she doesn’t tell anyone.”

“Great. In and out.”

“Very efficient.”

What, if anything, could have been improved about your overall experience?

All respondents stated that nothing could have been improved about their experience. The on the ground experiences on the day were very good and the responses we received were a testament to all staff at the Health Centre.

Summary

It was great for us at Healthwatch Blackpool to visit Whitegate Health Centre and see most services of the Community Diagnostic Centre in action, a welcomed health service addition for Blackpool and the Fylde Coast. Overwhelmingly, the feedback on the delivery of health services at the CDC was very positive, with speed of appointment, efficiency of results and staff morale all being highly commended.

Healthwatch visited the phlebotomy, CT scan and ultrasound departments. Both patients and ourselves were greeted in each area with big smiles in bright and warm rooms that were well lit and had necessary seating to a good standard. The participants nearly all reported positive interactions with staff.

However, practically in regards to access, there are some issues in getting to the Health Centre. It was noted that bus routes are less frequent and less diverse than access to Blackpool Victoria Hospital. There are 2 buses that stop outside the centre, 1 local (30min recurring) and 1 county (45min recurring). It was also noted that there are not many connecting buses coming from neighbouring areas travelling down Whitegate Drive, specifically Layton. Many residents have to go into the town centre to travel back out to the Health Centre, having an impact on time, money and the environment. There is also little information on the Travel Information pin board. Locally, there has been big service updates recently to local buses, therefore this could be good to display on the board.

Additionally, in regards to transport access, parking on site for residents was highlighted as a major issue. The Health Centre should be aware of this as this is an ongoing issue. The data has highlighted residents setting off more than an hour before appointments to park and still sometimes having no success. We spoke to residents stating they were parking as far away as Bloomfield Road, as well as others that said they had given up trying and now elect to walk. With the surrounding areas to the Health Centre being predominantly permit only parking, this compounds issues for patient access when the CDC car park is at capacity, as "local" parking options are few.

Awareness of the Health Centre being a CDC was very low, with just 1 participant being aware of CDC's through the media, but not aware they were being treated within one.

In summary, the operations of the CDC from our findings are running effectively, with patient experience, provision of appointments and staff feedback all scoring highly. The main areas that received critique from the patients are in regards to access. Also, as highlighted above, there is little to no awareness of the benefits of CDC's or that they exist. This highlights a gap in the public knowledge base in a town that has very poor health outcomes. Increased health awareness can only lead to increased health outcomes, so promotion of this wonderful local asset is needed.

Response from Provider:

Much of the feedback is very positive. Once patients are in the CDC and having their appointment, the response is overwhelmingly good; the staff are helpful and considerate and it appears the direct referrals from GP's are working largely as intended. The issues with parking and public transport are noted but are largely an issue beyond the scope of the service. Nonetheless, we will continue to monitor concerns and consider if there is anything we can do to alleviate these problems.

There might be opportunities to address some of the concerns regarding communication. Actions to provide information to patients to explain what CDC's are, what they do and why they are beneficial are being discussed, with a goal of delivering this by 31st March. We can also discuss with GP's if there is anything that can be done to provide information on the tests at the GP appointment, Patients are sent links to the information online, but this obviously isn't a useful method for numerous patients and alternatives need to be considered.