

Children's Emergency Department Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Enter and View Report



December 2024

Table of Contents

Visit details	3
Summary of findings.....	3
Recommendations.....	4
Service response to recommendations	5
What is Enter and View?	7
Methodology	7
Background	7
Waiting area.....	8
Waiting times.....	8
Refreshments.....	9
Observation area.....	9
QR code information posters.....	10
What we heard.....	10
Children’s feedback.....	10
Parent’s/carer’s feedback.....	11
Staff feedback.....	12
Acknowledgements.....	12
Disclaimer	13

Visit details

Details of visit	
Service Provider	Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Service Address	Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Mandeville Rd, Aylesbury HP21 8AL
Date	11th December 2024
Authorised Representatives	Oonagh Browne and Susan de Kersaint-Seal

Summary of findings

We spoke to three patients between the ages of 8 years and 12 years old, seven parents/carers and four members of staff from multidisciplinary paediatric teams.

These findings represent an account of what we observed and heard on the day that we visited:

- + In contrast to our first announced visit on 3rd December, the Children's Emergency Department (ED) was not busy. The two designated patient bays (each with four beds) in the observation area were empty
- + The waiting time was displayed on a whiteboard at reception. It was 'one to two' hours upon our arrival
- + All areas were clean and tidy with brightly coloured wall art and toys for younger children
- + There were TVs for patients in observations rooms. There was also a TV in waiting area, however this was not in use. We were told by a member of staff that the TV was not working and was scheduled to be fixed
- + Children and parents/carers gave **positive** feedback about the facilities and supportive environment within the department i.e. wall illustrations, toys, refreshments and comfortable furniture
- + The most common suggestions that we heard from parents/carers to help make their experiences better were:
 - Improve waiting times, this included time spent waiting for referrals to Children's ED from the Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) at Stoke Mandeville Hospital

- Better staff communication with patients and parents/carers across **different stages** of the waiting and observation processes including the transition from UTC to Children's ED. A few parents/carers told us that they had not been given enough information about their child's upcoming care at any stage. One parent/carer said that they were told by a member of staff that they had to wait for a 'surgeon' (as opposed to a clinician) to speak to them. Not having more information about why they needed to speak to a surgeon made them panic about what might happen next i.e. that their child would have to undergo surgery
- Have a wider range of toys/activities for children - from newborn to teens
- + There were posters on walls throughout the department with QR codes for patients and parents/carers to access more information and leaflets about [Children's ED](#)
- + The staff who spoke to us said that they were happy with the design and layout of the building. They also told us that they felt supported by management and liked working with friendly colleagues. When asked about challenges in the department, they said:
 - Explaining how waiting times work to patients and families/carers who are often frustrated
 - Not enough space in the waiting area during busy times especially when patients are accompanied by a few relatives/carers
 - Staffing pressures due to inconsistent levels of demand e.g. lots of patients during busy periods or fewer during quieter periods

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been suggested to Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust Paediatric Leads based on our conversations and observations during the visit:

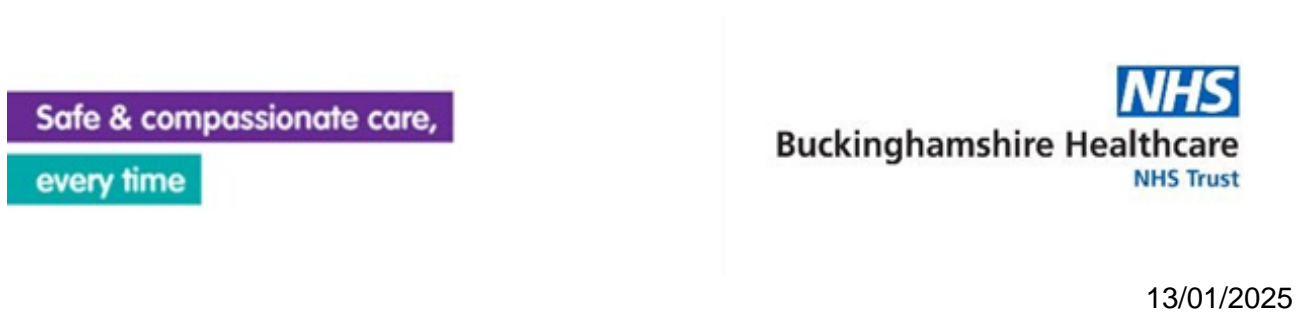
- Ensure that the TV is fixed (according to schedule) in the patient waiting area
- Provide toys/activities for older children and teenagers e.g. mindfulness colouring books and quiz sheets
- Display more visual patient information for different conditions and treatments. For example, as well as a QR link to ED, the patient information poster could illustrate an image of a human body with QR codes placed in specific areas that link to publications about the chosen body area or wound care information

☑ Deliver clear and consistent communication to patients and parents/carers. Look at ways of collecting 'real-time' patient feedback about their experience of live communications whilst waiting for triage assessments and further observation. For instance, communication feedback posters could be displayed around the department with a QR code linking to the following types of questions:

- Do patients and parents/carers feel that they understand what is happening at every stage in their care at Children's ED?
- Do they feel confident about what is going to happen next?
- Have staff answered their questions and explained any diagnoses made or treatments given?

Service response to recommendations

The following response was received by email on 15th January 2025.



Dear Zoe,

**Response to Healthwatch Bucks Enter and View Visit Report – Children's Emergency
Department Stoke Mandeville Hospital
Date of Visit: 6th December 2024**

Thank you for your detailed report following your Enter and View visit to the Children's Emergency Department (ED) at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. We greatly value the insights and feedback you have provided, which are critical in helping us enhance the quality of care and overall experience for our young patients and their families. We are pleased to note the positive feedback regarding our clean and child-friendly facilities, supportive staff environment, and welcoming design elements such as the wall illustrations and toys. We are committed to maintaining these high standards.

We acknowledge the concerns highlighted, particularly regarding waiting times, communication, and the availability of age-appropriate activities. These are areas we take seriously and are prioritising improvements.

Below is our response to the report’s findings, along with an action plan addressing the recommendations:

Action Plan in Response to Recommendations

Recommendation	Action	Timeline
1. Addressing Waiting Times	Implement a display system providing real-time updates on waiting times for all specialities.	March 2025
2. Improving Communication	Conduct staff training sessions on empathetic communication and managing expectations. Introduce a “Care Pathway Card” outlining care stages for families.	March 2025
3. Enhancing Waiting Area Resources	- Procure a wider range of toys and activities for all age groups, including older children.	February 2025
	Introduce baby playmats and sensory toys for younger children.	February 2025
4. Ensuring Functional Equipment	Expedite repair of the waiting area TV and ensure robust maintenance schedules.	January 2025
5. Displaying Visual Patient Information	Design posters with QR codes linking to specific care guides using engaging visuals.	March 2025
6. Review Waiting Area Capacity	To explore ways to optimize waiting area space during peak times.	February 2025

We value the insights shared by Healthwatch Bucks and are committed to implementing the recommendations to improve both the patient and staff experience in the children emergency department. We are committed to creating a positive and efficient experience for all who visit the Children’s Emergency Department. The action plan outlined above reflects our commitment to making positive changes in response to the feedback received. We will continue to monitor the progress of these actions and keep Healthwatch Bucks informed of our developments.

Thank you once again for your valuable input and for supporting us in improving the care we provide.

Yours Sincerely,



Raghuv Bhasin
Chief Operating Officer

Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Stoke Mandeville Hospital

What is Enter and View?

Enter and View visits are carried out by local Healthwatch to find out how health and social care services are being run. They make recommendations where there are areas for improvement.

The law allows local Healthwatch to see how a service is delivered. We can visit hospitals, care homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies. We talk to the people who use the service and their families/carers and sometimes staff.

We talk to these people to help us understand what is done well and what could be done better. We then share this learning with others.

We do not look for issues around the safety of people (safeguarding) during our Enter and View visits. We report any concerns as set out in our policy. We tell members of staff who want to raise an issue about where they work to talk to the Care Quality Commission. This way they are protected by legislation if they raise a concern.

Methodology

We met the Lead Paediatrics Nurse at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in September 2024 to discuss Enter and View visits to the Children's Ward and Children's Emergency Department. Our first visit to Children's ED on 3rd December 2024 was announced by email on 19th November 2024. Upon arrival, we were told that clinical teams were responding to a critical emergency. The waiting area was full at the time. Following Enter and View guidance not to compromise the provision of a service, we did not go ahead with the visit. We announced our rescheduled visit on 6th December 2024.

We prepared semi-structured sets of questionnaires and observation templates ahead of this visit. We also did a risk assessment in line with Healthwatch Bucks internal policies and procedures.

Background

The Children's ED opened at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in April 2023. It has 14 beds, two resuscitation bays and two triage consultation rooms. Children are referred from UTC to Children's ED if they need ongoing treatment at hospital. UTC is in a different building adjacent to Children's ED which can be accessed via a ramp.



Picture 1: Signage for main Emergency Department and Children's ED

Waiting area

The waiting area is well adapted for young patients and families, it has:

- comfortable sofas allowing children enough room to stretch
- plenty of charging points for electronics installed in the furniture
- a selection of toys for younger children to play
- an interactive installation along the back wall, which features splashes of colour that react in real time to body movements and dancing



Picture 2: Electronic charging points and toys

Waiting times

A whiteboard at the reception desk showed the expected waiting times for patients – it displayed a waiting time of 'one to two hours' when we arrived. A member of staff

explained to us that waiting times are updated every two hours. They also said that this was a very short waiting time in comparison to average daily waiting times.

Refreshments

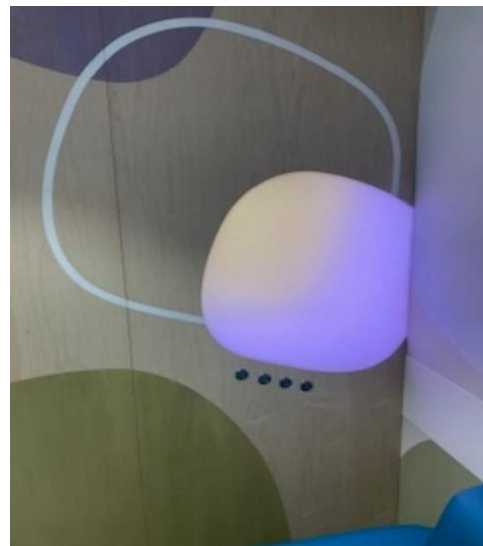
There was a refreshment station with jugs fruit juice and biscuits for patients and families/carers. There was also a water cooler with plenty of cups.



Picture 3: Refreshment station

Observation area

A member of the paediatrics clinical team showed us around the observation area. There is a quiet room in this area with weighted furniture and sensory lighting for children who might need to be in a calmer environment (such as children in a mental health crisis or neurodivergent children).



Picture 4: The quiet room

There are two bays with four beds and six cubicles within the department. The bays were not occupied during our visit. Each patient room had a TV with access to Freeview channels.

The artwork throughout the observation area illustrates clinicians doing common procedures with young patients in a friendly way.



Picture 5: Wall illustrations

QR code information posters

There were posters with QR codes to download patient information and leaflets on display throughout the department. There were also Amazon wish list posters with QR codes for donating items to help provide activities and age-appropriate toys for children during their admission.



Picture 6: Posters with QR codes



What we heard

Children's feedback

We spoke to three patients. They all said that they liked the look of the Children's ED:

It's bright and clean.

I really like the wall [interactive installation in waiting room].

When asked what could make it better, one patient said:

I think everything is good. I don't know, maybe comfier pillows [on hospital beds in the observation area].

Another said:

Not having to wait so long.

Parent's/carer's feedback

We spoke to seven parents/carers. Three of them told us that they had been to Children's ED at Stoke Mandeville Hospital before. Two said that they **couldn't get an appointment with their GP so went straight to UTC.**

The majority were positive about the facilities and supportive environment at Children's ED. They told us that the staff were very friendly, however some thought that communication with staff could be better.

What parents/carers liked about Children's ED:

- Very clean and good signage/illustrations on walls
- Comfortable chairs in the waiting area
- Provision of juice and biscuits for children

One parent/carer said:

It's one of the best children's waiting areas that I've ever seen.

What parents/carers suggested to make their experience better:

- Shorter waiting times
- Better communication with staff to understand what is happening. Also, how information is delivered i.e. the type of language used
- Toys/activities for all age groups from newborns to teens. One parent suggested baby playmats in the waiting area, another said that colouring books and pens would be good for older children

Most parents told us that communication could be better. One parent/carer who had been to Children's ED on more than one occasion told us that they had a poor experience of communication on each visit.

Another parent/carer told us that they panicked when they were told by a member of staff that they were going to get a 'surgeon' to see them as they thought their child might have to undergo surgery. When asked what would make their experience better, they said:

More reassurance and better communication. I've only seen one person [staff member] since I've been here.

Staff feedback

Staff wore child-friendly name badges with animals and colourful shapes. We spoke to four members from multidisciplinary paediatric teams. They told us about their experience of working in Children's ED, what they enjoyed most and what they found challenging:

Enjoyed most

- Having supportive managers
- Working with friendly colleagues
- The building itself – functional windows that open in the patient bays

Challenges

- Having no control over waiting times and explaining this to patients and families/carers
- Not enough space in the waiting area for busy times especially when patients are accompanied by a few relatives/carers
- Staffing pressures due to inconsistent levels of demand e.g. too many patients during busier periods or fewer patients during quieter periods

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Bucks would like to thank the children, parents/carers and Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust Paediatrics teams for sharing their feedback with us.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on a specific date. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all children, parents/carers and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

If you require this report in an alternative format, please contact us.

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