

# **Enter & View**

## **Boots Pharmacies in Central Romford**

The Brewery Shopping Precinct and  
The Liberty Shopping Precinct

13 March 2025



## What is Healthwatch Havering?

Healthwatch Havering is the local consumer champion for both health and social care in the London Borough of Havering. Our aim is to give local citizens and communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided for all individuals locally.

We are an independent organisation, established by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and employ our own staff and involve lay people/volunteers so that we can become the influential and effective voice of the public.

Healthwatch Havering is a Community Interest Company Limited by Guarantee, managed by three part-time directors, including the Chairman and the Company Secretary, supported by two part-time staff, and by volunteers, both from professional health and social care backgrounds and lay people who have an interest in health or social care issues.

## Why is this important to you and your family and friends?

Healthwatch England is the national organisation which enables the collective views of the people who use NHS and social services to influence national policy, advice and guidance.

Healthwatch Havering is your voice, enabling you on behalf of yourself, your family and your friends to ensure views and concerns about the local health and social services are understood.

Your contribution is vital in helping to build a picture of where services are doing well and where they need to be improved. This will help and support the Clinical Commissioning Groups, NHS Services and contractors, and the Local Authority to make sure their services really are designed to meet citizens' needs.

*'You make a living by what you get,  
but you make a life by what you give.'  
Winston Churchill*

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## What is Enter and View?

Under Section 221 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Healthwatch Havering has statutory powers to carry out Enter and View visits to publicly funded health and social care services in the borough, such as hospitals, GP practices, care homes and dental surgeries, to observe how a service is being run and make any necessary recommendations for improvement.

These visits can be prompted not only by Healthwatch Havering becoming aware of specific issues about the service or after investigation, but also because a service has a good reputation, and we would like to know what it is that makes it special.

Enter & View visits are undertaken by representatives of Healthwatch Havering who have been duly authorised by the Board to carry out visits. Prior to authorisation, representatives receive training in Enter and View, Safeguarding Adults, the Mental Capacity Act and Deprivation of Liberties. They also undergo Disclosure Barring Service checks.

Occasionally, we also visit services by invitation rather than by exercising our statutory powers. Where that is the case, we indicate accordingly but our report will be presented in the same style as for statutory visits.

Once we have carried out a visit (statutory or otherwise), we publish a report of our findings (but please note that some time may elapse between the visit and publication of the report). Our reports are written by our representatives who carried out the visit and thus truly represent the voice of local people.

We also usually carry out an informal, follow-up visit a few months later, to monitor progress since the principal visit.

## Background and purpose of the visit

Healthwatch Havering is aiming to visit all health and social care facilities in the borough. This is a way of ensuring that all services delivered are acceptable and the welfare of the resident, patient or other service-user is not compromised in any way.

## The future of pharmacy services

The government has announced plans (Independent Prescribing<sup>1</sup> at Pharmacy First) to expand the role of the community pharmacy in order to relieve the pressure on general practice, to improve access to care in local communities and to address health inequalities. Appropriately qualified pharmacists will, in future, be able to prescribe and dispense medications to deal with minor illnesses, monitoring of long-term health conditions and preventing ill-health.

This expanded role for pharmacists builds on the services many already offer (beyond dispensing medicines) such as inoculations and health advice, including medication reviews. Training of pharmacists is changing, and from September 2026 all newly qualified pharmacists will be able to work as Independent Prescribers as soon as they are registered; existing pharmacists can obtain an additional qualification to become Independent Prescribers.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.england.nhs.uk/primary-care/pharmacy/pharmacy-integration-fund/independent-prescribing/>

The plan is to expand the range of services available from community pharmacies, increasing convenience for customers and freeing up GP time for more complex needs of customers by giving pharmacists the ability to hand out prescriptions for the most common ailments under plans to ease the pressure on GPs. It will mean people with minor infections and illnesses will be able to get prescription medicines direct without seeing a doctor first, enabling pharmacists to prescribe antibiotics and antiviral drugs for conditions including ear infections, sore throats, sinusitis, shingles, and minor urine infections.

Government has made available an extra £645million to expand community pharmacy services by 2025.

In addition, tens of thousands more people will be at lower risk of a heart attack or stroke, with the NHS more than doubling the number of people able to access blood pressure checks in their local pharmacy – 2.5 million, up from 900,000 carried out in 2022.

The plan is expected to free up around 15 million GP appointments by 2025 for customers who need them most.

The pharmaceutical needs of Havering were examined in 2021/22 in the Havering Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2022–25 (PNA) <sup>2</sup>, which was approved by the Havering Health & Wellbeing Board in September 2022. The PNA identified 44

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.haveringdata.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Havering-PNA-2022-2025.pdf>

community pharmacies in the borough, including the three in Collier Row. Community pharmacies are defined in the PNA as:

*“... a frontline healthcare resource located within the heart of communities. They provide prescription medications, health promotion, signposting, retail health and care products. They can be the first point of contact for customers seeking medical information or advice, and for some the only contact with a healthcare professional.”*

Given both the government’s intention to expand the role of community pharmacies and the PNA’s firm identification of them as the “first point of contact for customers seeking medical information or advice”, and conscious of the need to relieve relentless pressure on GP practices, we decided to carry out a programme of Enter & View visits to pharmacies across the borough. The purpose of these visits was to find out – from a customers’ perspective – how ready pharmacies were to take on their expanded role.

## **Boots the company**

Boots UK Limited is a well-known, international pharmaceutical manufacturer and retailer, with branches all over the UK. In addition to prescription pharmaceuticals, it sells a wide range of health and beauty products and provides optical and hearing care services.

In addition to the two branches that are the subject of this report, there are other Boots branches across Havering.

It is our intention to visit the other branches in due course. The optical and hearing care services were outside the scope of this visit and report but will also be visited in due course.

## **Romford Town Centre**

Romford Town Centre is a major, regional shopping centre serving not only the borough of Havering but attracting shoppers from a wide surrounding area including much of the neighbouring London Boroughs of Barking & Dagenham and Redbridge and also other districts including Brentwood and Thurrock. Bus services provided by Transport for London extend not only to all parts of the borough but as far afield as Brentwood, Canning Town and Stratford. Romford Railway Station is served by trains of the Elizabeth Line, Greater Anglia and London Overground Liberty Line.

There are three separate shopping precincts: The Brewery on the western side of the Town Centre, The Liberty in the middle and The Mercury to the east. There is a wide variety of shops and stores located within these three precincts, with most major High Street retailers represented and many minor and independent retailers as well; there is also an historic street market on three days of the week. The Boots pharmacies are in The Brewery and The Liberty (there is no pharmacy in The

Mercury): both are quite large stores, with a significant footfall throughout the day, and offer the usual cosmetics and over-the-counter medicinal preparations as well as pharmacy services. There is a late-night dispensing facility at The Brewery pharmacy (which is in an open area) but not at The Liberty (where the precinct closes overnight).

In addition to the extensive rail and bus services, all three shopping precincts have large car parks adjoining them and there are also Council-run car parks in the vicinity.

We decided to visit the two pharmacies on the same day and, as they belong to the same company, set out our findings as a single report.



## **The Brewery**

Arriving at the store, the team were advised that the pharmacy manager was on leave that day. In his absence, the team spoke with the senior pharmacist on duty.

As the store is part of a shopping precinct, there is no problem with parking. Unfortunately, there is a minimum charge of £3.25 on the ground floor of the multi-storey car park and £2 for parking on the upper floors. Access and signposting to the store and access to the pharmacy was adequate, and all areas were clean. The pharmacy is situated to the rear of the store but is signposted. The team felt that the layout of the store was a little maze-like, which could prove confusing to some client groups.

### Medication

This pharmacy only provides Dossett boxes for a seven-day period.

Unused/returned medication is retained in a dedicated bin and arrangements are made for its secure disposal at regular intervals.

The store can accept small sharps boxes for disposal and these are stored in a dedicated secure container and are collected at weekly intervals. Arrangements for the disposal of large bins must be made through the local authority either by telephone or online.

This store does not provide a service to care homes as that is provided by The Liberty store. Customers requiring home delivery are required to pay for the service (except for those with specific conditions).

No particular priority is given to babies and young children but some items may be dispensed where the entire prescription cannot be completed immediately.

Every effort is made to avoid covering important information on boxes and it was noted that some manufacturers now leave appropriately sized spaces for labels on boxes.

Customers who have been prescribed new medication are contacted after two weeks to try to identify any issues such as adverse reactions and are contacted again after a further two weeks.

There are occasions when there are difficulties in obtaining a particular medication but every attempt is made to provide an appropriate substitute. Particular problems may arise where a generic item is prescribed and only a branded alternative is available as there may be significant differences in the cost and the pharmacy will only be reimbursed for the cost of the generic item. In these circumstances the GP will be asked either to provide a prescription for the branded item or one for the generic item only, so that the patient may be able to obtain the prescription from an alternative pharmacy. If a GP provides a prescription for a specific brand, then the pharmacy will be

reimbursed for this item at the appropriate cost. Where a pharmacy is out of stock/unable to supply a specific item, contact will be made with the GP to try to identify an alternative. There are times when customers require specific brands due to intolerances to additives that are included by different manufacturers.

It is usual practice to contact the GP if there are difficulties in obtaining specific medications so that a suitable alternative may be dispensed. This also applies where an item is out of stock.

Incorrect dispensing is not a problem as the catalogue of medication held is on a database and all items are scanned during dispensing to confirm accurate dispensing.

### Other pharmacy services

Blood pressure checks that are free on NHS are carried out.

The only vaccinations carried out at this store are for flu and pneumonia as all other requirements are provided at The Liberty store. The stop smoking service was discontinued when the funding for this service was withdrawn.

In response to a question about mental health training, the team were advised that pharmacy staff are only trained in suicide prevention. There is a code word used to alert other staff of suspected would-be suicides.

The pharmacy is fitted with a hearing loop and large print labels are available for those with sight impairment. The only assistance for customers with language communication issues is provided if members of staff can assist.

All pharmacy staff hold advanced DBS certification.

There is no defibrillator in the store but one is available in the precinct through the security team.

There are two consultation rooms in the store, one of which can easily accommodate a wheelchair. The store has an emergency plan and is also part of Pharmacy First where pharmacists are able to offer consultations on seven prescribed ailments.

The pharmacy dispenses prescriptions throughout the store opening times and for an hour beyond, to 9.00p.m. The busiest times are mid-morning to lunch time and between 5.00p.m. and closing time.

### Views of customers

The team spoke to two customers, both of whom said that they used this pharmacy as it was near to their homes and they were within walking distance. It was also open longer than other pharmacies. They were satisfied with the quality of service. Neither had needed to seek advice from the pharmacist but both said they would seek this if necessary.

## The Liberty

As this store and pharmacy is in a shopping precinct there is usually adequate parking space for disabled drivers at ground level where there is also an electric car charging facility. There are a further four floors of parking spaces. The minimum charge for parking is £2.

Access to the store is from within The Liberty shopping precinct, which is kept in good condition (except that there are occasions when the roof leaks which could present a slip hazard – this is outside the store's control).

The store was well lit and clean in all areas and sign posting is more than adequate.

The pharmacy is situated at the far end of the store and signs pointing to it are included in the many signs within the store, although it may not be easily identified by a newcomer owing to the layout of the store. The team noted two seats for less able customers to sit whilst waiting to be served.

The team were told at the time of the visit that there was no pharmacy manager in post at the time and they were, therefore, met by the store manager. Unfortunately, the interview room was in use and the team therefore had a conversation with him in a corner of the store, which was not ideal. He advised that the interview room was able to accommodate a wheelchair if required.

## Medication

Dossett boxes are only provided to a few select customers and are provided free of charge, unless delivery is required. These may be for 7 or 28 days according to the prescription.

The store can accept small sharps boxes for disposal, which are stored in a dedicated secure container and are collected at weekly intervals. Arrangements for the disposal of large bins must be made through the local authority.

Unused/out of date/returned medication is retained in a dedicated bin and arrangements are made for its secure disposal at regular intervals.

This pharmacy provides medication to a number of care homes in the area, at monthly intervals. The team were told that there were originally some problems with this arrangement, but these have now been resolved and, wherever possible, arrangements are made to roll over items that have not been used, e.g. when a resident is away or in hospital.

No priority is given to babies and young children – prescriptions are dealt with in the order of arrival. Items that are not collected are retained for two weeks and customers are contacted by telephone if the store has their contact information. Otherwise, they are returned to stock.

Every effort is made to avoid covering important information printed on boxes and it was noted that some manufacturers now leave appropriately sized spaces for labels.

Customers who have been prescribed new medication are contacted after two weeks to try to identify any issues such as adverse reactions and are contacted again after a further two weeks.

There are occasions when there are difficulties in obtaining a particular medication, but every attempt is made to provide an appropriate substitute. Particular problems may arise where a generic item is prescribed and only a branded alternative is available as there may be significant differences in the cost and the pharmacy will only be reimbursed for the cost of the generic item. In these circumstances the GP will be asked either to provide a prescription for the branded item or one for the generic item only, so that the patient may be able to obtain the prescription from an alternative pharmacy. If a GP provides a prescription for a specific brand, then the pharmacy will be reimbursed for this item at the appropriate cost. Where the pharmacy is out of stock/unable to supply a specific item, contact will be made with the GP to try to identify an alternative. There are times when customers require specific brands due to intolerances to additives that are included by different manufacturers and GPs are asked to specify brands in these circumstances.

Incorrect dispensing is not seen as a problem as the catalogue of medication held is on a database and all items are scanned during dispensing to ensure there are no errors.

### Other pharmacy services

Blood pressure checks are available to customers who are aged over 40 and who have a family history of heart disease, and the pharmacists are able to use their discretion with other customers.

This store provides a full range of vaccinations, such as those for holiday/travel requirements as well as those provided by the NHS. There is a charge for this service. The store is registered to provide this service. Stop smoking services are no longer available as funding has been withdrawn.

The senior pharmacist has been trained in dealing with mental health issues, as are some of the more junior members of the staff. All pharmacy staff have advanced DBS checks.

There is a hearing loop in the pharmacy area for those who need it but there is no specific help for those customers who are unable to communicate due to sight impairment or in English. A few members of staff who are bi-lingual are able to help with some languages. The manager was unaware of any use of language translation services.

There is no defibrillator within the pharmacy but there is one within the shopping precinct that can be accessed by a call to the security service.

The store has an emergency plan and there is also one to service the whole precinct.



### Prescribing services

The store is part of Pharmacy First scheme and the team were advised that pharmacists are able to provide assistance with seven prescribed conditions.

Prescriptions are filled throughout the day; the pharmacy opens half an hour before the store and remains open until the precinct closes. Demand for prescriptions is fairly constant throughout the day. This pharmacy does not remain open beyond the store opening times except for the early morning half hour.

### Views of customers

The team spoke to four customers, all of whom advised that using this store was part of their shopping practice; they were very satisfied with the service provided and their regular prescriptions were sent direct to the pharmacy from their GP. There was, therefore, no wait for prescriptions to be filled, with customers only attending to pick up their medication. The manager advised that where customers came in with paper prescriptions, the waiting time was usually no more than 30 minutes: this was increasingly rare as most GPs now sent prescriptions electronically.

## Recommendations

These recommendations apply to both stores.

- There appeared to be no liaison between the two pharmacies to deal with one being unable to fill a prescription. If practical, this should be considered.
- Consideration should be given to formalising access to a translation service to avoid any misunderstanding and/or breach of confidentiality.
- Training in mental health should be extended to all pharmacists and, given the layout of each store, possibly to some members of general store staff.
- For The Liberty, urgent attention should be given to appointing a pharmacy manager, given the complexity of the extensive service this pharmacy provides.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the managers, staff and customers at both pharmacies for their assistance and ready responses to our team's questions during the two visits.

## Participation in Healthwatch Havering

Local people who have time to spare are welcome to join us as volunteers. We need both people who work in health or social care services, and those who are simply interested in getting the best possible health and social care services for the people of Havering.

Our aim is to develop wide, comprehensive and inclusive involvement in Healthwatch Havering, to allow every individual and organisation of the Havering Community to have a role and a voice at a level they feel appropriate to their personal circumstances.

### Members

This is the key working role. For some, this role will provide an opportunity to help improve an area of health and social care where they, their families or friends have experienced problems or difficulties. Very often a life experience has encouraged people to think about giving something back to the local community or simply personal circumstances now allow individuals to have time to develop themselves. This role will enable people to extend their networks, and can help prepare for college, university or a change in the working life. There is no need for any prior experience in health or social care for this role.

The role provides the face to face contact with the community, listening, helping, signposting, providing advice. It also is part of ensuring the most isolated people within our community have a voice.

### Healthwatch Havering Friends' Network

Join our Friends' Network for regular updates and other information about health and social care in Havering and North East London. It cost nothing to join and there is no ongoing commitment.

To find out more, visit our website at

<https://www.healthwatchhaverling.co.uk/advice-and-information/2022-06-06/our-friends-network-archive>



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