

Minehead Medical Centre

A review of patient access and care at Minehead Medical Centre

June 2025



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About us

Healthwatch Somerset is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve health and social care.

We're completely independent and impartial and anything you say is confidential. We also offer information and advice to help you to get the support you need. Our service is free, simple to use, and can make a real difference to people in Somerset.

As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care. This report is an example of how your views are shared.

Healthwatch Somerset is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the unitary local authority area of Somerset Council.



Background

In March 2024 we published our report [Access to GP appointments in West Somerset](#) which stated our commitment to revisit the work and collect future feedback.

When undertaking this review, we acknowledged that the One Medical Group would need at least six months before engagement could begin. This was to allow time for them to familiarise themselves with the needs of their community and the administrative processes of Minehead Medical Centre (MMC).

This report has been created using the experiences we heard from people in Minehead from September 2024 to February 2025.

We are aware of One Medical Group's commitment to quality care and service delivery; they continue to implement improvements to enhance the patient experience and operational efficiency.



- They have introduced a new telephone system to provide better access and communication for patients.
- Their administrative procedures are being streamlined to ensure a more efficient and effective service.
- They are working to actively recruit substantive GP's and are collaborating with Somerset Integrated Care Board (ICB) to support this goal.
- MMC became an [accredited veteran-friendly GP surgery](#) in July 2024 to improve support for former service personnel.

Locum: A locum, or locum tenens, is a person who temporarily fulfils the duties of another; the term is especially used for physicians or clergy.

Considerations



Our role is to gather people's experiences and represent the public voice. The feedback that we have included in this report was collected by talking to a range of people.

We heard from a range of different communities including parent carers and veterans. The feedback in this report is based on public opinion and the potentially subjective perception of those who are sharing it.

A list and description of the settings we visited is in Appendix 1.

What we did

- We reached out to several community organisations requesting their support with our collection of feedback.
- We arranged face to face visits to a variety of community groups and settings in Minehead to listen to the experiences of residents accessing the MMC.
- We promoted our visits through our social media channels and volunteers.
- We met with the MMC Operations Manager alongside One Medical Group's Associate Director of Patient Safety and Experience to further understand the challenges faced after the recent transition.

Key findings

- People are experiencing extended wait times for appointments
- The feedback indicated that a lack of GP's registered at the surgery creates barriers in patient-doctor relationships
- The reliance on locum GP's creates gaps in continuity of care
- Some patients have fed back that they have concerns about medical documentation. For example, a few respondents said their medical records hadn't been updated, e.g. previous appointments consultation, medical issue not on notes, missing correspondence.

What people told us

Waiting for care

Instances of delayed care were highlighted:

- A member of the public fed back about had a month-long wait for a blood test for a cancer patient with urgent symptoms.
- Feedback indicated that email communication with the practice was reportedly unavailable, with patients advised to send letters instead.
- One unpaid carer waited three weeks for a routine doctor's appointment.



Surgery services

Making an appointment

We heard about difficulties some individuals faced when contacting the GP practice by phone. Problems included:

- Calls being disconnected when reaching sixth place in the queue.
- Waiting over 30 minutes before they spoke to a receptionist.
- The need to be persistent to obtain an appointment.

Due to these issues several people told us they would rather go to the surgery in person to make appointments. We noted that this could mean spending money on transportation, which added extra financial pressure on them.

I was informed about a new online appointment booking system and instructed to bring in my ID for registration. However, upon visiting the surgery with my ID, I was told the system had not yet been implemented, which I found frustrating due to miscommunication.

Not everyone was unhappy, and some comments expressed there were no issues with making appointments at MMC.

When I phoned the Medical Centre, I was added to a queue and waited ten minutes before I spoke to the receptionist, which I find acceptable.



Restrictions on appointment times

Local people raised concerns that appointments are limited to 10 minutes.

Some people have mobility issues, and it would take them a good ten minutes to settle, before their doctor appointment begins.

We listened to worries about how short appointments may have wider impacts on health and wellbeing, particularly for those with multiple issues.

Delivery of care

Our conversations increased our knowledge of how care is delivered at MMC and included responses about staff approach, knowledge, and availability.



Reception staff were commonly highly praised, and nursing staff received positive feedback for their care and approachability.

However, some feedback mentioned dismissive behaviour from some medical staff.

Several people expressed a lack of privacy and said they found it intrusive when reception staff asked about medical conditions.



I was referred back and forth between a doctor and pharmacist for a rash, without resolution.



There were comments about a lack of continuity and/or quality of care which was for a variety of reasons:

- Limited availability of full-time doctors and reliance on locum GP's.
- Poor communication between doctors, hospitals, and patients was a recurring theme and lead to distrust among some people.
- Being unaware of their named doctor and missed having a family doctor familiar with their medical history.



My doctor had not reviewed my medical notes prior to my appointment, which I felt affected my care.



One 89-year-old who needed a blood test told us they were directed to Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton, which is an hour away.

Journeys such as these create accessibility challenges for those who cannot drive and those with low incomes.

A few people told us they had difficulty understanding doctors with strong accents.



Prescriptions



We were informed that the prescription telephone line hours have been reduced. This service is now only available between 11:00 am and 1:00 pm which creates challenges for those that work.

The online prescription service typically takes 4-5 days to process. People told us this timeframe was acceptable, and

they had no issues with the service.



A receptionist allegedly claimed to have sent my prescription to the pharmacy, but upon arrival, the pharmacy had no record of it. This resulted in delays and caused me stress.



Online feedback

People reached out to us and shared their experiences through our website [‘Have your say’](#) form. You can read their comments below.



Why do telephone calls always take precedence over people who have been waiting for quite a while?



One patient said ‘The lack of staff has caused extremely negative changes. I’m sure the existing staff are fed up with complaints.’



I am trying to change surgeries (without success because of the sheer volume-of people switching away from Minehead Surgery to either Dunster or Porlock).



I am in the process of taking out private medical insurance to avoid any situation where I cannot reach a doctor at the surgery or attend at the hospital, because it is not staffed sufficiently to deal with an emergency.



Mary's story

We spoke to Mary, (not her real name), who is in her 80's and has extensive experience in healthcare. Mary shared the following concerns about the current state of care at MMC. Her feedback is shared below.

Appreciative yet frustrated

“ The medical centre previously had six doctors, (at one stage) but now relies on two locum doctors, this has made accessing care more difficult and contributed to a sense of distrust.



We need a permanent doctor who knows the patients, which is vital for rebuilding trust in the practice. Due to the challenges securing an appointment, I often resort to managing my own health issues or visiting the practice in person to make an appointment.



I am frustrated by the strict 10-minute appointment time allocated by locum doctors, explaining that older patients often have multiple health concerns, making it difficult to address all issues in such a short time frame. For some patients it can take nearly 10 minutes just to take off their coats which demonstrates the need for more time during appointments.

Despite my concerns about the challenges patients encounter at the medical centre, I acknowledge that the staff are doing their best under the circumstances. I also have an in-depth understanding of the broader challenges faced by the wider NHS. ”



Inclusive voices

Parent carers of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

We joined the Somerset Parent Carer Forum 'Chill and Chat' group to gain insight into their experiences around accessing services at MMC.



The group echoed some of the problems and concerns that we were hearing from other Minehead residents, including:

- Communication with reception staff
- The prescription process
- The effectiveness of the new phone system installed in November 2024



The system disconnects my call after five callers are in the queue, forcing me to redial and restart the process.



Call your GP practice
on your precious
lunch break

or

Just tap the App



A couple of parents reported difficulties accessing the NHS App, explaining that despite their requests MMC had failed to provide a code they required to activate it.

We were told about the alleged poor attitude of some reception staff, including one instance where a receptionist was reportedly rude and shouted at her regarding a prescription issue. Members of the group expressed that they did understand the pressures that the staff are under and sympathise with the situation.

One lady described significant complications obtaining ADHD medication for her autistic son. Reduced availability of the prescription telephone line and long processing times from both the surgery and pharmacy delayed access to necessary medication.



The delays in obtaining my son's ADHD medication led to behaviour challenges, including meltdowns and school suspensions on mental health grounds.



Some parent carers reported not receiving the necessary paper slip for ordering repeat prescriptions, complicating future medication requests.

Upon further investigation we discovered that this may be due to a new system implemented in some pharmacies that cannot print the repeat prescription forms.

Ex-services personnel/Veterans

MMC became an accredited veteran-friendly GP surgery in July 2024. The accreditation aims to provide additional support tailored to the needs of ex-military personnel. We view this as a positive development in supporting the health and wellbeing of former service personnel at the surgery.



We visited the Minehead Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club (MAFVBC) to listen to their accounts of services at MMC.

Group members expressed frustration with the difficulty of obtaining same-day appointments, leaving them feeling disappointed.

They emphasised the need for an increased number of doctors and highlighted that continuity of care with a consistent doctor would help build trust and improve their overall experience.



Accessing GP services in Minehead has been a persistent challenge.




Jack's story

We met Jack, not his real name, at the MAFVBC. Jack is a veteran, and he shared some of his varied experiences of accessing healthcare below.



I have experienced significant challenges in accessing timely care from my GP, same-day appointments have been extremely difficult to obtain, and when facing a more serious issue, I would need to call 999.

The earliest GP appointment I was offered was for mid-October, which was 4 weeks away, despite being off work due to a nerve issue in my shoulder that was causing excruciating pain. 

“ During this time, I was able to see a nurse and sought help from a chiropractor.



I self-certified for the first seven days, but I required a sick note after that period. Unfortunately, the sick note only mentioned neck pain and did not fully capture the severity of my condition.

While at work, I consulted a doctor who refused to examine me and could not refer me for an MRI. Instead, the doctor added severe neck pain to my records and advised me to go to Accident and Emergency (A&E), which would mean travelling for over an hour to Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton.

On another occasion, I was seeking antibiotics, and I saw a nurse instead of a doctor. Although the nurse was helpful, she was unable to prescribe the medication, which required a doctor's approval.



Additionally, I had previously broken my ribs and was told by reception that I needed to see a physiotherapist. The physiotherapist was supposed to call me between 13:00 – 16:00, unfortunately, I never received that call, and I had to self-medicate for pain relief.



Furthermore, I am an unpaid carer for my wife who is seriously ill with Leukaemia, she needed to see a doctor, but was sent to A&E, where she was later diagnosed with sepsis.

Despite her condition, the doctor at the hospital refused to call for her medical notes, stating that the patient must do it themselves, which added unnecessary stress to an already difficult situation.

Overall, these experiences highlight the growing difficulties in accessing timely and appropriate healthcare, which have had a significant impact on both my own health and my ability to care for my wife. ”

Thank you

We would like to thank everyone who gave their time to share their stories with us.

We would also like to thank the following groups and organisations for their support and promotion of our work:

- Community Council for Somerset – Talking Café and Carers group
- Minehead Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club
- Minehead Library including Knit and Natter for adults
- One Medical Group – Minehead Medical Centre
- Somerset Parent Carer Forum – Chill and Chat

Recommendations

Based on the feedback that we heard we would like to make the following recommendations:

- Evaluate the new phone system – investigate the functionality of the new phone system to resolve issues, such as call disconnections and long wait times.
- Extend the opening times of the prescription line or explain why the system works as it does.
- Offer patients the ability to ask for longer appointment times. This could be a reasonable adjustment for those with additional needs or language barriers as highlighted in the Equality Act 2010.
- Work with the West Somerset Primary Care Network to offer [enhanced access appointments](#) as set out by NHS England in 2022.
- Ensure staff are frequently reminded about the support they can receive to help them manage stress. This includes opportunities to take extra training like courses on 'How to manage tough conversations'
- Consider running practice open days with our support so you can hear from and connect with the local community regularly.

Stakeholder response

Response from NHS Somerset and One Medical Group

NHS Somerset:

Sukeina Hassan, Director of Primary Care

Since January 2024, Minehead Medical Centre has been led and managed on an interim contract, for a two-year period, by the One Medical Group.



The One Medical Group and staff at Minehead Medical Centre have been working at pace, since January 2024, to make improvements to the care delivered to patients at Minehead Medical Centre.

NHS Somerset has maintained oversight and assurance around these improvements, providing support as needed.

This includes:

- The practice now offers over 900 appointments per week across a multi-disciplinary team which includes GPs, advance nurse practitioners and practice nurses, with a dedicated care coordinator who ensures patients are seen by the most appropriate professional, enabling effective and tailored care.
- Patients with an urgent same-day requirement are triaged to see a GP on the same day.
- We have improved the telephony system to make it easier for patients to contact Minehead Medical Centre for an appointment including a call back feature for when telephone lines are busy.
- The nursing team have undertaken additional training to enable them to see a wider range of patient conditions such as asthma and wound management.
- A feedback post box has been set up in the reception area, for patients to provide feedback on the service. We have also supported development of a thriving Patient Participation Group that meets regularly to look at our services, patient experience and how improvements can be made.

- Patients have been supported to sign up to the NHS App which means they can order repeat medication through this platform any time of the day/week.
- The practice is now working to a two-day turnaround to review and submit repeat prescriptions to a patient's chosen pharmacy.
- The practice is proud to have become a Veteran Friendly Practice.
- The practice is working towards a gold standard accreditation for end-of-life care to help provide a high level of care for end-of-life patients.
- A call and recall system has been put in place so that patients are called for reviews in a structured way.
- A new website has been created to make it easier for patients to find the information they want.
- A review of staffing has been carried out to ensure roles match the skills and qualifications required.
- Systems and processes for running the service, to ensure quality, safeguarding, and meeting CQC standards have been reviewed and improvements made.
- A Carers Champion in post who has weekly calls with all the nursing and residential homes to support improved outcomes for their residents.
- We would also like to clarify some areas of the report where patient and stakeholder feedback has been provided:
- All GP and nurse appointments are 15 minutes long unless a patient needs more time. They can then be allocated a 30-minute appointment.
- The practice has a system in place to ensure patient privacy when sharing medical information when booking appointments. Notices are displayed at reception to remind patients that this is an option.
- We have one part time GP and regular GP Locums in place to help support continuity (equivalent to 4.5 GPs a day). The GPs are also supported by a wider multi-disciplinary team. Significant recruitment efforts are ongoing to recruit substantive GPs.
- The number of clinical consultations undertaken is carefully managed to ensure a balanced working day for GPs and to ensure patient safety is maintained.

- Patients can make repeat prescription requests through the prescription phone line, at the practice during opening hours or by using the NHS app.
- Urgent on the day blood appointments are available.
- Patients are encouraged to contact us by phone or in person.
- As of August 2024, all staff have completed Oliver McGowan training.

We recognise that there is further work to improve the service and are committed to taking forward this work as a priority, ensuring timely and sustained progress.

Some of the areas where further work is planned includes:

Workforce – Recruitment to substantive posts.

Improved Access – Implementation of a new digital triage system to provide an alternative route to telephone/in person requests and to support improving access to the most appropriate clinician.

Collaborative Work with health and care partners – A health promotion day for West Somerset residents in June 2025 with our health and care partners to highlight services that can support the health and care needs of our population.

Appendices

1. Groups and venues we visited

Community Council for Somerset (CCS) – Carers Support Groups:

CCS carers support groups are free, friendly, informal drop-in sessions held in local communities across Somerset. They provide the opportunity to connect with other unpaid carers in a space offering support and friendship. There are also online groups.

Visit their website for further details: <https://somerseccarers.org/>

CCS – Talking Cafes:

Talking Cafes are free, friendly, informal drop-in sessions held in local communities across Somerset, offering a safe space for people to connect, chat, and access support and advice.

Visit their website for further details: <https://somerseccarers.org/talking-cafes/>

Minehead Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club

Official Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs are a warm welcoming space for veterans from all branches. They are an important social support resource for service leavers adapting to civilian life, to connect with people with similar experiences or combating loneliness and isolation.

Visit the official AFVBC website for further details: <https://afvbc.com/>

Minehead Library:

Minehead Library service is provided by Somerset Council and host a range of free facilities and groups. On separate occasions we visited both the public area of library, and the Minehead Library Knit and Natter for Adults group.

Visit the Somerset Council website for further details of all library services: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries/>

Somerset Parent Carer Forum:

Somerset Parent Carer Forum is an organisation who support parents of a child or young person between birth to 25 years with additional needs and/or disabilities. They provide a range of free information and support for parent carers in Somerset and run groups for people to meet up with other parents.

Visit their website for further details: <https://somerseccarersforum.org.uk/>

Website links in this report

Page 2	Access to GP appointments in West Somerset	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/post/access-to-gp-appointments-in-west-somerset
Page 3	accredited veteran-friendly GP surgery	https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/case-study/veteran-friendly-accreditation-for-gp-practices/
Page 7	'Have your say'	https://www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk/have-your-say
Page 12	enhanced access appointments	https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp/investment/gp-contract/network-contract-directed-enhanced-service-des/enhanced-access-faqs/

Image attributes

Cover	A female doctor showing a mother and child something on a clipboard.	https://www.freepik.com/author/gpoints-tudio
Page 4	Man in blue turtleneck shirt talking on phone.	Photo by Yan Krukau: https://www.pexels.com/@yankrukov/
Page 5	A lady in a wheelchair talking on the phone.	Photo by Marcus Aurelius: https://www.pexels.com/@marcus-aurelius/
Page 7	A pharmacist in a white coat handing a medicine to a person.	https://www.freepik.com/author/freepik
Page 9	Chill and Chat Logo.	Somerset Parent Carer Forum – Company Number: 10227489
Page 9	NHS App infographic.	https://campaignresources.dhsc.gov.uk/campaigns/nhs-app/
Page 13	NHS Somerset logo.	NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board
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