

Enter and View

Neighbourhood Mental Health Cafés

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Contents

Acknowledgements.....3

Disclaimer.....3

What is Enter and View?3

Purpose of the visit3

Summary.....4

Findings from the visit.....5

Survey response28

Recommendations34

Service Provider Response35

Mental Health Cafés and providers.....36

Distribution list.....37

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire would like to thank the service provider, service users and staff for their contribution to the Enter & View Programme.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed between April 2025 – June 2025. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

All comments included in this report are written verbatim to capture the tone and authenticity of the experience, therefore no editing of comments has taken place. This report is not representative of the experience of all service users.

What is Enter and View?

Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire has the statutory right under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to visit health and social care services and see them in action, this is called 'Enter and View'.

Healthwatch staff and volunteers (Authorised Representatives) work together to carry out these visits.

The aim of these visits is to primarily listen to the feedback of service users, their families, carers and staff and to observe service delivery and the facilities available for patients. The feedback and observations are then collated into a report, all feedback is anonymised including any evidence, insights and suggested recommendations. The service has the opportunity to comment on the report before it is published.

A service can be visited for several different reasons such as:

- The public has provided feedback about the provision.
- It is part of a rolling program of visits to similar services.
- A service is running well and good practice could be implemented in other places.

Purpose of the visit

Background

The visits to the Neighbourhood Mental Health Cafés were part of the Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire work plan on mental health services. Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) is currently reviewing the service model and asked Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire to support this process by independently gathering insight into how the cafés are operating, and we have visited each café to share the experiences of people using these cafés and the staff who deliver the service.

Objectives

- To observe how each café operates in practice.
- To understand the experiences of services users and to hear staff views.
- To identify best practice or areas for improvements.
- To provide an independent summary with clear recommendations to support the future development of the café model.

Method

- This was an announced Enter and View visit. We had contacted the Mental Health Neighbourhood Leads and service providers in advance and had access to communal areas during our visit.
- The visit was carried out by two person teams made up of at least one Healthwatch staff member with an Authorised Representative.
- People were asked if they would like to participate in sharing their experiences by providing feedback through a survey.
- Throughout the visit, the teams observed the environment and interactions between staff and service users.

Summary

The Enter and View visits to Neighbourhood Mental Health Cafés across Leicester and Leicestershire reveal a consistently positive picture of warm, welcoming spaces offering emotional and practical support. The cafés are described by many people as a "lifeline" providing connection, safety and relief from isolation or crisis. Staff are widely praised for their compassion, active listening and knowledge of mental health needs. The cafés differ in where they're based, how they're set up and what activities they offer but all share a focus on building supportive relationships and listening to what people need.

Feedback from people

People described the Mental Health Cafés as a "lifeline" – a vital source of emotional and practical support. They consistently highlighted how supportive, warm and approachable the staff are. Many felt that being welcomed into a safe, non-judgemental environment helped ease their distress. The availability of one-to-one space was noted as particularly beneficial, giving individuals the privacy and time they needed to talk openly and feel heard.

Most people reported that the support they received at the Mental Health Cafés was very helpful.

People expressed the name "Neighbourhood Mental Health Café" can be either daunting or misleading with some people thinking that the café is a social space for tea and chat.

Some people expressed concerns about referrals. GPs are sometimes unaware of the cafés or unclear on how to refer. Individuals and staff expressed concerns that GPs are not giving much information about the cafes to people, they are not informed that the cafes are available and unclear how to refer with some people saying their GPs had given them a letter with a list of cafes and that individuals would have to source out the cafes themselves. Some users had poor experiences with VitaMinds and told us that they had been rejected and would not need the service.

Accessibility of referral systems can be challenging. The Joy App was described as confusing and the lack of phone contact made booking difficult for some. There is a shared view among individuals and staff that the Joy App could be more effectively utilised by including additional information, such as contact details and other useful resources.

Overall, there is a strong appetite to see the cafés continue and grow. There is a clear sense that they are plugging gaps in overstretched mental health systems. For many, they offer an approachable, low barrier point of access to support.

Findings from the visit

Oadby Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Trinity Methodist Church, Harborough Road, Oadby, Leicester, LE2 5AB
Monday 9 June 2025 at 10am

We visited the café on three separate occasions: Monday 7 April, Monday 14 April and Monday 9 June. On two of those visits, the café was closed, but a staff member was offering phone call sessions only. On our first visit, there was no sign indicating that the café was closed and operating solely as a phone service.

We were told that people usually come through the back entrance, where there's a board and a poster to guide them, people familiar with the service generally know where to go. We were informed that there are designated rooms for one-to-one sessions, breakout spaces and a meeting room that can be used for private conversations as needed. On the second visit, there was a poster on the back door clearly stating that the café was closed and offering phone support only.

During the third visit, we observed that the café space is clean and well maintained. It's located next to another café on the ground floor, with ramps outside to provide wheelchair access. There's a small garden area. The signage is clear, with posters displaying opening hours and the days the café is open, with arrows guiding visitors in the right direction.

Inside, there are quiet spaces available and another room set aside for sensitive conversations. The lighting is soft and not overwhelming, though there's no calming music or background noise. The layout includes one large table for activities with hard chairs, plus a smaller table with two chairs.

Staff were warm and welcoming during our visit. All staff members were actively engaging with visitors. We observed friendly conversations and active listening.

There's a table with various information leaflets covering topics such as bereavement, managing finances, housing support and debt help. Mental Health Café leaflets and a welcome pack – presented in booklet form – are also available. The information board features posters for services like the Joy App, Helping Hands, data protection certificates and more. The space is accessible to people with disabilities, with an accessible toilet and ramps. However, the corridors are a bit narrow, which might make entry into some rooms more difficult, even though the café itself is quite spacious.

The welcome pack includes information on confidentiality, data protection and outlines what visitors can expect from the café and how staff can support them. There's another area available for private, sensitive conversations if needed, in addition to the main café space.

Activities in the café include mindfulness colouring and games. Staff mentioned that they're interested in introducing more meditation and group activities, depending on what people would like. They also noted there's a range of creative options and once staff become more familiar with the café's rhythm and the needs of the people using it, they plan to tailor activities accordingly.

Leicester University Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Leicester Student Union, Percy Gee Building, University of Leicester, University Rd, Leicester, LE1 7RH
Monday 7 April 2025 at 1pm

The café is located within the Student Union building. During our visit, we were informed that for the month of April, the café would only be offering online sessions. However, there were no physical posters or notices displayed to indicate this change. The update was only accessible after scanning the QR code on the poster, which redirected to the website.

Highfields Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Merlyn Vaz Centre, 1 Spinney Hill Road, Leicester, LE5 3GH
Tuesday 8 April 2025 at 9.30am

The café is clean, welcoming and thoughtfully arranged, with soft seating and refreshments such as tea, coffee and biscuits readily available. The room layout includes several tables and chairs, there is one large central table displaying signposting leaflets, booklets and activities. There are three smaller single tables with chairs. While the café does not currently have a dedicated space for private conversations, we were told that staff will guide individuals to the far end table at the back of the room, where a banner is used to create a sense of privacy. We observed this setup during our visit; although the conversation was quiet, parts of it could still be overheard.

Staff mentioned that one-to-one sessions typically last around 30 minutes, but they can be extended if needed. The café is well signposted within the centre, with clear directions, banners and posters indicating where to go. Staff interaction was calm and supportive. Staff support

each other well, stepping in when necessary and people are encouraged to express themselves freely.

We were told that in the past few months, recovery workers have brought in a range of skills and expertise, which has enriched the support offered. Staff arrive at least 30 minutes early to set up, aiming to make the environment as safe and comfortable as possible. The café is accessible and includes accessible toilets.

If a person needs help outside of café hours or is in crisis, they are advised to contact emergency services. Telephone support is also available during festive seasons such as Christmas. For first-time visitors, staff explain the guidelines around confidentiality and code of conduct. People are informed if there is a need to involve other organisations. Information is securely stored and records are kept locked. There is an interest in transitioning to digital storage.

Some people drop in, while others book appointments in advance, often leaving their contact details. Emergency contacts, such as family members, are also noted. While there is no dedicated private room for sensitive conversations, staff expressed the need for one, ideally located nearby for safeguarding reasons.

The café runs in-house activities, and on Mondays, people can participate in creative sessions held at John Lewis. Thursday mornings are dedicated to the Women's Wellbeing Café, where women volunteers provide snacks and lead activities such as self-care jars, painting and decorating. Guest professionals, like florists, often deliver sessions free of charge. These regular activities have had a positive impact on mental health.

Staff hold regular meetings to share important updates and feel well supported in their roles. The lead plays a key role in keeping the team informed and connected to what's happening across Leicester. Staff manage referrals, wellbeing checks and book tailored appointments. They help people set personal goals and signpost them to additional free sessions. Ongoing training is encouraged, with courses like Decider Skills, suicide prevention and mental health first aid awareness being offered.

Saffron Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Saff Caff, Heathcott Road, Leicester, LE2 6LS
Tuesday 8 April 2025 at 11am

The café, located off Saffron Lane, is situated within a large outdoor greenery area and is comprised of two well-maintained buildings. However, it is not easy to find due to gated access. Although a large sign marks the location, the gates were closed at the time of our visit which led to confusion as to whether the café was operating at the time. Entry is usually via a doorbell, with staff greeting people upon arrival, but on this occasion, the bell was not working, and we had to call the number listed on the poster. There is parking available.

The café is set in cabin style buildings. It provides a calm environment with appropriate lighting. Refreshments such as tea and coffee are available. The space includes a designated area for sensitive conversations and people can also choose to take a break in the second

building if needed. A code of conduct is visibly displayed on the coffee table and people are reminded of it during their visit. Staff allow people to express themselves freely but will step in where necessary, particularly if a conversation becomes inappropriate.

The café offers quiet spaces, indoor activities such as jigsaw puzzles and board games, and access to a large outdoor area and allotment, where people can walk, relax, or engage in mindful activities. An outdoor classroom is also available and school visits take place from time to time. This space helps promote well-being in a natural setting, giving people the freedom to move around and choose how they engage.

Staff interaction is strong and consistent. We were told staff are trained to de-escalate distressing situations, either in person or over the phone, and they work collaboratively to support people. If needed, staff can contact the Police Community Support Officer (PSCO) or local neighbourhood lead. The café also provides telephone services, including during holiday periods, and has seen return visits from people seeking a space to recharge or connect.

The café is accessible, with ramps and an accessible toilet available. Staff are actively involved in signposting people to local groups, workshops and in-house mental health services. While the service is functioning well, staff acknowledged areas for improvement. These include raising awareness of local services, increasing engagement from social prescribers and offering more outreach to inform the community about the café's presence and purpose.

There was also discussion around the nature of the café itself. One staff member shared that while some people come for signposting, others view the café as a safe space they can visit regularly, not just a place for onward referral.

The café currently runs two sessions in one day, from 10am to 4pm resulting in one long session. Previously open on Mondays, sessions shifted to Tuesdays based on individuals preference. Attempts to split the day into multiple shorter sessions proved difficult to manage.

Overall, staff reported that the café is working well. Continued investment in awareness, infrastructure, funding and staff support would help sustain and grow its impact.

Braunstone Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – The Grove Community Hub, Cort Crescent, Leicester, LE3 1QZ
Tuesday 8 April 2025 at 1pm

The café offers a calm and welcoming environment. There are quiet, separate rooms available for private conversations and the natural lighting from the windows creates a bright atmosphere. There were soothing ocean sounds playing through speakers and the space is furnished with sofas, soft seating and tables to create a relaxed setting.

A range of activities are provided, including games, mindfulness colouring, bingo cards, interactive activities, goal-setting exercises and self-affirmations. People are also invited to provide feedback through a "Have Your Say" survey, accessible via QR code.

There is a table of leaflets and information available, although currently only in English. The café has a lift, making it accessible to people with mobility needs. Dietary needs are partially considered, with alternative milk options and some vegan snacks available.

During our visit, conversations observed were respectful and inclusive of all backgrounds. There is a clear code of conduct that people are required to sign. Private rooms are used when conversations could be triggering for others.

Staff are trained to manage distress situations and are familiar with emergency contact procedures, though there are no visible signs displaying this information. Mental health professionals are available for referrals and the café supports signposting to additional activities, such as local football groups.

While the internal environment is positive, staff raised concerns about the location. The café is based within an office building, which can feel daunting for some visitors. It is accessed via a reception area and located upstairs. A larger hall is available downstairs for hire, which can sometimes make parking more difficult.

A key challenge remains visibility, staff shared that not enough people know the café exists. They believe a more visible and accessible location, such as a community centre, could help reach more people. Currently, the same group of people tends to return each week and a more community-facing venue could enhance the café's impact and accessibility.

Leicester City Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – David Wilson Foundation Centre, St Martin's House, 7 Peacock Lane, Leicester, LE1 5PZ
Tuesday 8 April 2025 at 2.30pm

The café is based within the David Wilson Foundation Centre. While it was slightly difficult to locate at first, banners placed outside the entrance helped guide visitors once nearby. The main reception area is used for private conversations, with an additional separate room also available for more sensitive discussions. The main café space is a large, open area with two tables set up for activities such as mindfulness colouring, jigsaw puzzles and reading materials.

The café felt welcoming with a warm and friendly atmosphere, there were refreshments like tea and coffee readily available. Staff were friendly and attentive, often bringing drinks and interacting positively with people. The walls were decorated with posters and artwork, and although the room was brightly lit, there was no background music, contributing to a very quiet atmosphere. Hard chairs were placed around the main tables, while softer seating was available along the sides.

Accessibility is clearly considered, with accessible toilets provided. People sat quietly around the table during the visit and staff were observed engaging one-to-one, supporting people through activities.

Staff are confident in handling difficult or distressing situations. If a person is in crisis, staff offer one-to-one support, listen actively and assess the next steps. This could include referral to the hub, admission to the emergency department, or contacting appropriate services via the central system, depending on the urgency of the situation.

The café is well-equipped with information resources; leaflets, books and signposting materials are displayed on the tables and signs are available in various languages. A clear code of conduct is in place and sensory and mindfulness-based activities are available, including 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercises and breathing techniques.

Feedback can be submitted via the website and if someone is unhappy with the service, they are encouraged to contact Turning Point or the Central Access Point.

The staff highlighted that the café offers a much-needed social space for people to engage in face-to-face interaction, build friendships and share their experiences. The café also plays an important role in supporting people with practical tools, such as breathing techniques and in linking them with other services when needed.

Improvements mentioned included a desire for more equipment and resources, though the team noted that tea, coffee and Wi-Fi are available. The café benefits from close working relationships with Turning Point teams, NHS staff and organisations like P3. Staff shared that “we are like a big family,” describing a strong sense of camaraderie among those working across different services, such as the café and the access point.

People have expressed positive experiences with the café, highlighting the valuable support they receive. One person shared, “The one-to-one people are amazing,” Another mentioned, “It’s part of my routine every Tuesday.”

**Thurnby Lodge Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Thurnby Lodge Community Centre,
Thurncourt Road, Leicester, LE5 2NG
Wednesday 9 April 2025 at 12pm**

The café is well-maintained and welcoming, with soft-furnished seating and appropriate lighting throughout. As people arrive, they are greeted warmly by staff, who are trained in mental health support and active listening. Signing in sheets are available on entry, along with a timetable showing other mental health cafés in the area.

Staff actively engage with visitors, providing them with information about local services and talking directly with both the service users and the people supporting them. The café is inclusive and accessible, with resources such as books, pamphlets and signposting materials available.

Although refreshments like biscuits and coffee are provided, no alternatives were available at the time. Conversations are respectful and inclusive of all backgrounds, and we observed people being encouraged to express themselves freely. Confidentiality guidelines are in place, with a private area available for sensitive conversations when needed.

Staff intervene appropriately when someone appears distressed, and emergency contact procedures are visible and accessible. Policies, procedures and a code of conduct are clearly displayed.

There are structured activities, including art and mindfulness sessions and peer support is encouraged. Visitors can provide feedback on their experience and mental health professionals are available for support or referrals.

The café works closely with partner organisations like VitaMinds and food banks. Staff shared that these cafés are a vital part of early intervention, helping prevent more serious outcomes like hospitalisation or job loss, and ultimately easing pressure on the NHS. However, concerns were raised about funding not matching rising expenses, especially as the café supports individuals with increasingly complex needs. There's also a need to strengthen safeguarding measures to ensure the safety of both staff and volunteers.

**The Peepul Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Peepul Centre, Orchardson Avenue,
Leicester, LE4 6DP
Wednesday 9 April 2025 at 2pm**

The café is located on the ground floor. There were banners and posters clearly indicating the location. There is no background music, resulting in a quiet environment.

The café is accessible to people with disabilities, including an accessible toilet; however, some rooms are quite small and may be challenging for wheelchair users to navigate. Staff are mindful of access needs and strive to accommodate where possible.

There are designated quiet and private spaces available for sensitive conversations, including a separate room and a partitioned space nearby to ensure confidentiality. A visible 24-hour mental health helpline poster is on display and confidentiality policies are in place, with clear guidance and packs available for volunteers and staff.

Staff were warm, approachable and proactive. They greet visitors warmly, ask what support is needed and follow through with care and attentiveness. Staff are trained in Mental health support and active listening. Staff have received a range of training, including safeguarding, NHS-led courses, in-house training and mental health advocacy via VitaMinds.

Many staff are multilingual, which helps reduce language barriers for non-English speaking individuals. They also have strong partnerships with organisations like Turning Point and engage in ongoing outreach, including visiting GP surgeries, to combat cultural stigma and raise awareness.

We were told a variety of activities are offered, such as rock painting, sewing, word searches, board games and mindfulness exercises. Peer support is actively encouraged, with staff stepping back when appropriate to allow natural connections to form between visitors.

Welcome packs and diverse resources (leaflets, booklets) are available. While refreshments are offered, there were no alternative dietary options noted.

Visitors can be referred to NHS 111 (option 2) for further mental health support. Staff also go beyond simple signposting—helping with tasks such as GP calls or filling out forms—especially for those with limited support networks. The centre also offers a form-filling service on Fridays to assist with benefit applications and accessing basic needs.

People are invited to provide feedback via a QR code. Complaints procedures are in place and followed, with staff receiving further training if necessary.

Syston Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – The Old School Room, Syston Community Centre, School Lane, Syston, LE7 1HN
Thursday 10 April 2025 at 12pm

The café is set in a large, bright, well-lit room with tables and chairs for groups of four. It is a part of the village community centre. The main hall is divided into two areas—one for general socialising and another specifically for one-to-one support, each with its own entrance. This setup works well, as some people come specifically for private conversations.

While there's no background music, the room did have a bit of an echo. A separate, confidential room is available for more sensitive discussions, with clear signage on the door to maintain privacy when in use. Outside, a mobile café unit serves as the greeting point and provides drinks and snacks, which visitors can bring inside—some also brought their own lunch. The space is fully accessible, with disabled parking spaces and step-free access.

There were three staff present, including one running the mobile café. The café is run by Rural Community Council (RCC) staff and supported by trained volunteers, many of whom have lived experience. All staff and volunteers are trained in Mental Health First Aid.

We saw a large range of up-to-date leaflets spread across a long table, covering topics related to mental health, health services and wider social support. Staff were warm and engaging, greeting visitors and helping them settle in. They were clearly attentive, checking in with people and guiding those who hadn't been before. The mutual support between visitors was also noticeable.

Although no distressing situations occurred while we were there, both staff and attendees described past instances where someone needed support—handled by calmly moving to the private room to talk things through. In some cases, other visitors noticed someone struggling and offered support as well.

Activities were available, including tabletop games, drawing materials, colouring and mini mindfulness exercises. Staff mentioned that many men attend the café and there's interest in creating a men's mental health group.

Privacy was well managed, and staff always responded to individual needs—whether for group interaction, one-to-one support or simply quiet time.

People are required to complete a signing in sheet on arrival. A code of conduct was visible on the tables, along with a feedback QR code and a timetable of café openings across the area. Although the schedule didn't include specific addresses, it was clearly laid out. Staff encourage feedback either online or via the QR code, though we were told that some attendees struggle with reading or don't use smartphones.

During our visit, there were around 8 or 9 people in attendance. Two women told us how important the café had become in their lives. They didn't know each other before coming but had since formed a friendship and now come back every week. One man told us that the weekly one-to-one support he receives at the café is invaluable. *"I'm suicidal, I come every week for one-to-one support. I find it helps me."*

The café runs two sessions, from 12pm–3pm and 3.30pm–6.30pm and some people stay for both. Staff are very welcoming, offering drinks, checking in with people creating a calm, safe space. People travel in from a wide range of surrounding areas like Queniborough, Sileby, Anstey, Braunstone, Beeby, and Thurmaston, showing that the café has a good reach. It's clear that repeat visits are common and that people can access whatever kind of support suits them.

Many people spoke positively about the café but also expressed frustration that local GPs hadn't mentioned it. They felt the café wasn't widely known and wished this kind of support existed in every village. There's a desire for better signposting and more joined-up services. We were also told by staff that friendships formed at the café often continue outside of the sessions.

While the main room was calm and welcoming, people waiting for one-to-one chats were relaxed and happy to sit together or engage in activities. There is also outdoor space available for anyone needing time outside.

People have expressed positive experiences with the café: "I'm depressed; I find the café helps me."

"The café is a massive benefit for me. Make friends and there is a social aspect. It is a real lifeline for people."

**Eyres Monsell Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Eyres Monsell Young Peoples Club, 170 Whitteney Drive, Leicester LE2 9AQ
Thursday 10 April 2025 at 12.30pm**

The café is spacious, with good natural lighting and calming background music playing. It's clearly accessible, with banners and posters displayed at the entrance to help people locate it. There are refreshments available and different tables are set up with mindfulness colouring activities, signposting information and a wide selection of leaflets.

Comfortable seating is available throughout, including a cosy sofa area. There's also a private room with soft seating for sensitive conversations, where key information like the code of conduct, safeguarding guidance, emergency procedures are clearly displayed. Staff greet visitors warmly and are trained in mental health support, active listening and de-escalation techniques like the Decider skills. People are encouraged to express themselves freely, although sometimes staff will gently probe to help open conversations.

When it comes to handling distress, staff are well equipped. We were told they take the person to a quiet, private area, help them regulate emotions using breathing techniques and then take the time to really talk and listen. One staff member noted that the term "*Mental Health Café*" can sometimes be misleading or even off-putting, as some people assume it's a social space rather than somewhere that offers support in times of crisis. The reality is that many who come are in crisis and staff support them in ways that help prevent further deterioration of their mental health. Others come for companionship, particularly those who feel isolated and find the café a safe place to connect.

The café is inclusive and respectful of all backgrounds. It's fully accessible, including an accessible toilet. Feedback can be given through a QR code and although the café doesn't currently offer structured activities, there are ongoing discussions about what that might look like in the future. VitaMinds and other organisations come in to provide services and distribute leaflets.

Staff told us the café is working well "*no improvements, working well right as it is*", there's a mix of regulars who are isolated and people who come in while in crisis. Some visitors even return later to let the team know how much the support helped them. One staff member said there's nothing they'd improve - "*it's working just as it should*" - but did mention it would be useful to have more training, like the gambling awareness session they attended previously. That session is no longer offered, but they felt it was beneficial and would like to see it brought back for both staff and individuals.

Coalville Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Marlene Reid Community Action, 85 Belvoir Road, Coalville, LE67 3PH

Thursday 10 April 2025 at 3pm

The café is staffed by three members of the Community Centre team, who also hold other roles within the centre. One staff member greets everyone arriving and supports any new visitors or those in distress, often taking them into one of the quiet rooms for a chat. The lighting throughout is soft and comfortable, with no background music, creating a calm and quiet atmosphere. Seating is comfortable and there are quiet rooms located near the entrance hall specifically for one-to-one conversations, furnished with soft chairs around a table.

During our visit, people spoke openly and freely about their mental health journeys, how the café had helped them and the friendships they'd developed with each other. Visitors are encouraged to express themselves and to support each other, which was clearly happening.

A range of signposting leaflets was laid out on a table, alongside activity materials like colouring and word searches. The café is located on the ground floor, fully accessible with no stairs and an accessible toilet. Refreshments, including snacks, biscuits, cakes, tea, and coffee, were readily available. A Code of Conduct was displayed and included clear expectations like no alcohol or drugs on site and no behaviour that might distress others.

One person shared how, during a particularly difficult time, the café staff had been a vital support. Another person arrived while we were there, accompanied by a support worker. They first met with staff privately in one of the quiet rooms before joining the group. Attendance is recorded via a form which is later shredded to maintain confidentiality. Reception staff greet everyone warmly, creating what is clearly a safe, welcoming space free of judgement. As the staff are based at the centre all week, café users are welcome to drop in at any time—not just during the café's designated hours—for a chat or a hot drink.

Mutual support was clear during our visit. While there are no mental health professionals based at the café, staff rely on NHS 111 or the local Crisis Team for urgent support. That said, they expressed a strong desire to have direct backup from a mental health clinician to better support users in crisis. Some people preferred to engage in quiet, solo activities rather than group interaction, needing more time to feel comfortable socialising.

Feedback can be given using a QR code linked to a survey, though some people give feedback verbally. Staff expressed that while their current training is helpful, they would benefit from a more coherent introduction to the mental health support system and clearer guidance on service pathways. They also raised concerns about gaps in communication and clarity when working with the Crisis Team, particularly around triaging and eligibility. Staff appreciated the opportunity to visit other cafés to share ideas and improve their own service delivery.

Visitors described the café as much more than just a place to visit — for many, it has become a support network and feels like a family. Several people spoke about how the café has had an impact on their lives, with one saying, *"They have saved my life,"* and another saying, *"It has been a lifeline."* Many described the space as somewhere they feel accepted and understood, with comments like, *"The café gives us independence, makes me feel like I'm not a misfit,"* and *"We see it more of a positive than a negative."* Peer support was highlighted as a key strength, with users appreciating the openness and honesty in the group: *"Peer support, everyone's open and honest"* and *"I always walk out with a smile on my face."*

There were also reflections on challenges with other parts of the mental health system. One person said it took them ten months to see a psychiatrist, while another shared, *"The Bradgate Unit turned me away."* Others found help from crisis services but felt the support was too short-term: *"Crisis point helped but wasn't long enough."* A particularly concerning piece of feedback was someone being told by the Crisis Team, *"Crisis team said instead of self-harming, just scratch your legs."* Several people voiced the need for better integration with clinical services, saying, *"It would be useful to have a clinical staff in here when needed."* Overall, people felt that the café is filling an important gap in the community, *"This is covering in the community what is missing."*

**De Montfort University Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – De Montfort Student Union,
Campus Centre Building, Mill Lane, Leicester, LE2 7DR
Friday 11 April 2025 at 12pm**

The café was clean and tidy, with a large private room that's also used for one-to-one conversations. The space is well-lit with overhead lighting and large windows, and it offers a variety of seating: soft chairs, sofas, high stools, and tables. Staff members appeared warm and approachable, offering drinks and checking in with visitors.

People are encouraged to express themselves freely and staff handle distress by responding to the situation – sometimes taking people out for a chat, using the one to one space, or stepping outside to give someone room to breathe. If needed, they contact the Hub for assessments. The atmosphere is flexible and supportive.

The café provides a range of signposting leaflets and activity tables, including games, colouring and word searches. A code of conduct is clearly displayed, and all visitors are asked to sign to confirm they've read it. Diversity monitoring forms are also in place. The space is accessible, with elevators outside and disabled toilet facilities. Although peer support can be more limited in smaller groups, it does happen naturally when possible.

The café is open to both university students and the public. While there is no direct access to mental health professionals, staff can link in with the Hub, the crisis team, or escalate concerns to DMU security, emergency services or senior safeguarding staff. Staff emphasised creating a welcoming environment where people can feel safe and supported. However, it's important to note that the current contract for the café is due to end at the end of May 2025.

**Earl Shilton Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – The Stute (Earl Shilton Social Institute), 12-
14 Station Road, Earl Shilton, LE9 7GA
Monday 14 April 2025 at 12pm**

The café is clean, well-maintained and feels welcoming from the moment you arrive. The staff greet everyone warmly at the door. There's relaxing background music, soft chairs and tables throughout the space, creating a calm and comfortable environment. The café is accessible, with a ramp outside and staff willing to come out and meet visitors if necessary. Refreshments are available.

A private room is available at the back for anyone needing quiet or a one-to-one chat and all visitors are made aware of the code of conduct, which includes confidentiality guidelines. Each visitor also has access to an alarm bell, ensuring an added layer of safety.

People are often seen chatting at tables and offering each other support. There aren't any structured activities at the moment, which staff say is intentional, as visitors have expressed, they prefer the relaxed, unstructured nature of the space. Feedback can be provided via QR code surveys placed on every table.

Referrals to mental health professionals are available through established links with the Hub and Local Area Coordinators. Staff feel the café is working well and have developed a clear sense of what suits their community best – *“I think it’s working well. We’ve found what works.”*

Centrally located in the middle of Earl Shilton, the café benefits from good parking and visibility. A video was even filmed to help show new visitors what to expect and the team have found social media to be one of their most successful tools for outreach and engagement.

Lutterworth Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – The Family Hub, Coventry Road, Lutterworth, LE17 4RB (located in grounds of Leisure Centre)
Monday 14 April 2025 at 2.30pm

The café located at the family hub offers a welcoming environment. Staff are friendly and all have mental health backgrounds. The team includes qualified mental health nurses. While no visitors were present during our visit, the environment was clearly set up to support them, with calming background sounds, good lighting and a mix of sofas and soft chairs for comfort. The space is fully accessible, located on the ground floor with disabled toilets available.

There are one-to-one private rooms available for those who need a quieter space. Staff offer initial one to ones and are equipped to manage distress in a calm, supportive way. Confidentiality is clearly communicated from the first visit and there are clear emergency contact procedures in place.

Resources such as books, signposting leaflets, and decider tools on tablets are on hand, and there are structured activities like art sessions and breathing exercises. Staff have found that people tend to open up more while engaged in creative or mindful tasks.

Peer support is encouraged, and some past attendees have gone on to form their own social groups, though staff remain aware of the need to protect more vulnerable individuals. The decision was made not to use volunteers, as it was felt they couldn’t be supported safely in this setting. Feedback can be given easily, and referral pathways are in place through urgent care services, the Hub and the Central Access Point.

Staff also reflected on the evolving identity of the café. While it has provided valuable social support, they’ve recognised the need to balance this with progression and appropriate signposting. Some attendees have outgrown the space, which is seen as a natural and positive outcome. There was a shared feeling that the term “Mental Health Café” doesn’t always reflect the nature of the work – a suggested alternative was “Mental Health Neighbourhood Access Point,” which better captures its purpose. Staff are interested in visiting other cafés to share ideas and learning across the network.

Market Harborough Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Congregational Church Centre Bowden Lane, Market Harborough, LE16 7JD
Thursday 17 April 2025 at 11am

The café is in a large room, with a calm atmosphere and refreshments are provided. There is one large table with activities, comfortable seating throughout, and quiet spaces available, including a dedicated room for sensitive conversations.

Staff greet everyone warmly and are all trained in mental health support, including active listening, grounding techniques and crisis response. People are encouraged to express themselves freely, though conversations are kept light where appropriate. If serious concerns are raised, such as suicidal thoughts, staff will sensitively guide the individual into a private space for further support.

During our visit, we observed a person on a mobility scooter moving around the space easily. There are accessible toilets and a baby changing area. Following a drop in attendance due to a previous rule excluding under-18s, the café has adapted to now allow children accompanied by their parent or guardian (who retains full responsibility).

A clear code of conduct is displayed throughout the venue, including at the front desk and emergency procedures are visible and accessible. While structured group activities were trialled in the past, staff found they weren't well-received. The current approach is person-centred, offering art, crafts, games and letting people choose their own engagement level. The focus remains on one-to-one sessions, which staff view as a key strength.

Peer support is encouraged and considered a major component of the café's success. A peer support worker, who has lived experience, holds the same training level as recovery workers. Staff described strong support from team leads, who are approachable and trusting. Relationships with LPT and the Hub have improved significantly, and the crisis team now actively refers individuals and even brings them to the café in person.

The café relocated from the job centre to its current site and now has spaces better suited. Changing the operating hours (10.30am to 5.30pm) and maintaining consistent staff has also improved service engagement, increasing attendance from just a few to now between 10 and 14 people per week.

Staff are well-trained in coping strategies and describe this skillset as *"our bread and butter."* There's a policy in place for managing breaches of the code of conduct. However, they identified key areas for improvement, especially around the wider system: there's a need for a more streamlined and standardised referral system, better communication and clearer use of tools like the Joy App. Staff also suggested introducing a transition and education programme for 16–18 year olds to help them understand what support is available as they move into adult services.

New Parks Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Team Hub, New Parks Community Centre, St Oswald Road, Leicester, LE3 6RJ
Saturday 26 April 2025 at 11.30am

The café is clean, well-maintained and welcoming, with bright overhead lighting and comfortable soft chairs and tables. Although there is no background music, some noise from

other groups in the shared community centre space is noticeable. There are two private one-to-one rooms available for confidential conversations or to support those in distress.

Staff warmly greet visitors and offer drinks. People are encouraged to express themselves freely. Staff are skilled in de-escalation and calming techniques, and when necessary, will refer individuals to appropriate services such as the Central Access Point (CAP), talking therapies, or specialist organisations. We were told that only two people have been considered a potential danger among over 1,700 people who have accessed the service and police or specialised units were called when needed.

Resources like mental health leaflets are available, though somewhat limited. The café is accessible, located on the ground floor with disabled toilets and wide doorways. Dietary options are minimal primarily tea, coffee, and occasional sandwiches with allergy notices displayed.

Conversations are respectful and inclusive, supported by staff training in diversity and cultural sensitivity. Confidentiality is maintained using private rooms and secure handling of documents and data, with encrypted computers and locked storage.

No structured activities like art therapy or mindfulness sessions are offered at the café itself, as the café mainly focuses on conversation and peer support. However, being located within a community centre allows easy access to a variety of other activities such as craft groups, flower arranging and bingo all run by mental health trained facilitators.

People can provide feedback via an NHS app. The café also supports a diverse range of individuals, including women leaving arranged marriages, Caribbean residents and Syrian refugees seeking passports.

A person commented, *"There's no café in Anstey, so I come here. I like coming because there are many different crafts groups. If I wasn't already coming to this building, I wouldn't know about the café."*

**Beaumont Leys Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Barley Croft Community Centre,
Malham Close, Beaumont Leys, LE4 0UT
Monday 28 April 2025 at 10am**

The café has a pleasant appearance, and the staff are welcoming and polite. There are quiet spaces available for those who need them, with good lighting that's not too harsh or dim. Background music is sometimes played but kept low since other groups share the building, and some visitors prefer no music at all. Comfortable seating includes soft chairs around a round table. Staff greet visitors warmly and have mental health training through online courses, although some volunteers feel this only helps so much. People are encouraged to express themselves freely.

Staff work as a team to handle difficult situations, supported by in-house awareness training and manager assessments. The café is accessible, with a ramp, wide doors and disabled

toilets and drinks are offered. Resources like books and pamphlets are available. Confidentiality is taken seriously, with supervisors offering one-to-one support for staff and debriefs after sessions.

Private rooms are available for sensitive conversations and every person has access to the café's phone number for emergencies. While there aren't structured activities like mindfulness sessions the café offers games, crafts and other flexible activities based on what people want, including things like Zumba and breaking fast sessions. A feedback book allows people to share honest opinions.

Staff noted the location isn't ideal, renting space from a school and only operating 3 hours a week, which limits consistency. Despite this, people enjoy the games and activities. Before visits, people get a call and have a one-to-one on arrival, which is well received. The team also does weekend check-ins if needed. They prefer to refer people directly rather than just signposting, to avoid leaving people stranded and to maintain trust. There's also a need for a children's space.

People shared that the café is working well for them and provides valuable support. One person said, *"It is working well for me. It definitely helps for me. It feels like a weight off my shoulder for me. The building is well for me. I come every Monday for the last 3 weeks. Staff are lovely. I came from Birstall, I come with my friend which helps, if I come alone I might feel a bit out of place."*

Another person said, *"The staff are exceptionally good. When it is busy, it feels overstretched. It is nice when it is quiet. If there were more qualified staff it would be great, when it is really busy. All staff are helpful in their particular fields. I was with CPN for 16 years then was left with nothing, which is why I came here."*

One person commented the positives of the café but shared thoughts on having more funding for games, *"The building is ok to find for me, but because I knew how to get here already. I feel the café is fine in this building, it is the people that make it. As I am autistic it would be nice to have a set place every time. Could do with more funding for more games etc."*

**Hinckley Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Hinckley Baptist Church, Baptist Walk,
Hinckley, Leicester, LE10 1PR
Wednesday 30 April 2025 at 1pm**

The café is run by the same staff who also run the Market Harborough café. There are private one-to-one rooms available for those who need quiet spaces. Background music can sometimes be heard from the café next door. Seating is comfortable, with soft chairs around a central table.

The staff have mental health and active listening training. Visitors are encouraged to express themselves freely within the boundaries of the code of conduct—if someone is oversharing or distressed, they are gently prompted to use the private room.

Staff are well-equipped to handle difficult situations, depending on the context, with training in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), grounding techniques and crisis response. There's also an added layer of support, with someone always on call, including the operations manager, CAP, Turning Point and the mental health hub, who all provide strong backup. Emergency procedures are accessible throughout the building.

There's a table of leaflets for signposting, and the café is accessible for wheelchair users, with a lift and accessible toilets. Conversations are respectful and inclusive, and the staff group is diverse, including different religious backgrounds and LGBTQ+ representation.

The café avoids pre-planned structured activities as they've found people don't like being forced into something. Instead, they offer art, crafts, games and worksheets and allow people to choose. Group work is suggested rather than scheduled. Peer support is encouraged and embedded into the way the café works.

People can give feedback through the NHS survey, though it was mentioned that it would be good for staff to see comments. The team have great connections with the Hub, Central Access Point, the Leicester Counselling Centre and they find the Joy App helpful.

One person mentioned the need to walk through the church café to reach the mental health café and they find that off-putting. People say the space is friendly and both group and one-to-one support is a real strength. The peer support workers have been praised and with many mental health services lost in Hinckley, this café has become a vital support for the community.

One person said they once observed staff responding quickly and compassionately when a visitor was struggling, taking them into the private room. However, there was a general consensus that the VitaMinds service is not helpful.

Wigston Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – The Menphy's Hub, Bassett Street, South Wigston, Leicestershire LE18 4PE
Friday 2 May 2025 at 1pm

A poster displaying the café's opening times was visible outside upon arrival. The café is spacious, with overhead lights off during the day to make use of the large windows for natural light. There's no background music or noise. The café is accessible as it's on the ground floor. Seating is comfortable with soft chairs arranged around round tables. All staff are trained and expected to have a broad skill set covering various aspects of mental health, along with knowledge-based training.

Staff are confident handling difficult situations or when a visitor is in distress. We were told that people often refer to VitaMinds for talking therapy, though waiting times can be long, the service itself is helpful. There's a table with signposting leaflets and refreshments available. While there is a code of conduct in place, it's not displayed in the café. For sensitive conversations, a private one-to-one room is available and staff intervene appropriately if someone is distressed. Emergency contact procedures are visible and accessible.

A table with games and mindfulness colouring was set up and meditation sessions are also offered. However, staffing has been an issue—when short staffed, they’ve had trouble managing people who show up despite posters asking them not to, but staff still feel obliged to accommodate them.

One example was a man who came asking for a referral to the mental health hub; staff called a taxi for him, but he returned two weeks later saying nothing had happened. Because the café couldn’t share information with the hub, the person’s more challenging behaviours were missed and he received no support. After this, the referral pathway was changed.

Staff felt that in that case, they had unintentionally raised expectations about the support available to the individual. The only option currently is calling NHS 111, which requires consent.

The team is waiting on a welcome pack for clients that includes the code of conduct, safety plans and other important information that people can take away with them.

**Loughborough University Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Bridgeman Building,
Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough, LE11 3LB
Sunday 4 May 2025 at 12.30pm**

The café is located on the university campus. It offers two quiet spaces for those seeking a more peaceful environment. The lighting is suitable and easy on the eyes. There was no calming music or background noise, the seating was comfortable, featuring soft sofas.

The staff are friendly and approachable. We were informed that they are trained in mental health support and active listening. One staff member shared that they received mental health and first aid training through LLR Mind as part of their role. Staff are described as responsive to individuals and their needs, encouraging people to express themselves freely. They strive to be respectful and inclusive of all backgrounds during conversations. When difficult or distressing situations arise, staff are equipped to manage them and may offer one-to-one support, along with further assistance if needed.

Refreshments are available, and there are leaflets tailored for university students, including information on mental health support. The café is accessible to everyone, with step-free access and an accessible toilet.

A code of conduct is provided via a QR code. While emergency contact procedures are not visibly displayed, staff reported that they are aware of the appropriate actions to take in an emergency.

Group activities, such as ball games and quizzes, are occasionally held, and the café tends to be busier on Thursdays. Peer support is encouraged and regular visitors provide mutual support. Mental health professionals are also available for support or referrals, including links to services such as the Falcon Centre, the Mental Health Hub, student counselling and the Neighbourhood Mental Health Lead.

We were told the café is running well and is well attended. The name "café" seems to work effectively—while some refer to it as a "crisis café," others feel "neighbourhood café" sounds more welcoming. People attend for a range of reasons, from socialising to seeking one-to-one support.

We were informed that the current contract is due to end at the end of May. After this, students will be directed to the Health and Wellbeing Centre for continued support.

Measham Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Age UK Measham, 40 High Street, Measham, Swadlincote, DE12 7HZ
Tuesday 13 May 2025 at 4.30pm

The café is located within the Age UK building. There's a cosy corner with four chairs separate from the main group table, and on the day we visited, plenty of natural light came through big windows. There was no background music initially, but it was turned on later and is usually played. Seating includes one armchair and several padded dining chairs.

Staff greet people warmly and most people are known by their first name. The staff hold mental health training certificates through Age UK's online learning portal and keep up to date with a range of courses, including suicide awareness run by Age UK and the Samaritans. The local Mental Health Neighbourhood Lead also organises courses and does annual training audits.

If someone arrives in distress, one staff member takes them upstairs to a private space (if they can manage the stairs). For anyone who cannot manage the stairs, staff can create a quiet area on the ground floor by placing a screen around the space, while another stays to offer support and checks in regularly for safety. Staff emphasise listening without rushing. We were told that a code of conduct is normally displayed near the entrance and used to manage difficult behaviour, however on this occasion the code of conduct was placed elsewhere due to having a different layout in the café.

Conversations in the café are respectful and inclusive of all backgrounds. The manager shared that confidentiality guidelines are in place, with staff trained in GDPR. There are resources available, including a table of leaflets and the Joy App on a laptop for signposting. The café is accessible with a ramp at the entrance; while the quiet area is upstairs, staff can create a private, screened space downstairs for those who cannot climb stairs. Refreshments are offered.

Emergency protocols are clear, with an A4 flowchart of contacts displayed near the entrance. The manager keeps a fire safety log of first names and arrival times. Staff observe and respond to distress with care, ensuring closure after intervention.

Activities include colouring and mindfulness exercises on the group table and each session ends with a 30-minute meditation. People are encouraged to socialise and chat during activities. Feedback can be given via QR code or on paper, though it's unclear if there's a

standard form for paper feedback. The crisis team is available 24/7 by phone.

The café supports individuals in crisis compassionately; one example involved walking a distressed young man to the doctor and ensuring he was safe at home until crisis help arrived.

While intended for short-term visits, some people have attended for years, making slow but steady progress. Staff give simple self-help guidance and provide a safe social space where people from diverse backgrounds mix well.

Every session staff do meditation at the end. It brings a close to the session and is a clear cue to end the session, otherwise people may want to stay longer.

The team takes concerns seriously and some clients have returned to thank them for helping build confidence, such as returning to work.

The manager's efforts to distribute flyers at the GP surgery has been met with little enthusiasm from receptionists and it is felt that GPs could advertise the café more.

After each visit, individuals complete a data sheet about how they feel, but many decline. For example, three out of five people at the last session didn't complete it, making official figures appear lower than actual attendance.

Paper feedback forms seem to work better than online ones.

Enderby Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Enderby Adult Learning Centre, Townsend Road, Enderby, Leicestershire, LE19 4PG
Thursday 15 May 2025 at 4.30pm

The café has a calm environment with overhead lighting that's not too harsh and soft background music playing. Seating is comfortable, with soft chairs arranged around a table, and there are private one-to-one rooms available for anyone who needs a quieter space. It's fully accessible, located on the ground floor with no steps.

Visitors are always greeted warmly at the door. Staff all have mental health backgrounds, including former mental health nurses and are trained in active listening. Everyone is offered the chance to express themselves freely and there's a strong focus on making people feel safe and supported. Conversations are respectful and inclusive of everyone. Confidentiality is clearly explained to first-time visitors and supported by access to private rooms. Emergency contact procedures are available and visible.

There's a signposting table with resources. While most of the work here is done through one-to-one sessions rather than structured group activities, art and colouring is available. We were told that structured sessions are kept optional, as too much structure can make people feel uncomfortable. Tools like guided breathing exercises and decision-making aids are available on tablets and people are encouraged to use them if they want. Mental health professionals are not on-site, but referrals are made to the hub and Central Access Point where needed.

Most of the support offered here is through one-to-one work, with a breakout social area that people can choose to join. Everyone is offered a one-to-one discussion first, then can move to the social space if they want. This flexible format works well, particularly for those new to the café who might find group sessions daunting.

There's also an awareness of not fostering dependency on the café, it's meant to be a step on the recovery journey, not a long-term holding space. Some regulars do come weekly and for one person who's been accessing mental health services for 30 years, attending this café has helped keep him out of hospital.

Staff are always at the door to meet people and signage shows who is doing one-to-ones, who is greeting, etc. We were told that communication between the café, the hub and the Central Access Point has improved. Now, when the café calls, the other services know what initial steps have already been taken, which helps the support process. Having staff with mental health backgrounds makes a big difference.

Running sessions can be tricky with staffing. If there are two staff, they can accommodate up to four visitors. If only one staff member is available, they'll come to the venue and let people know it won't be running. Staff are able to contact some visitors between sessions via email.

Staff shared that they get new people at Enderby about once a month and can signpost them to LACs (Local Area Coordinators) for support with issues such as housing or activities. The LACs sometimes drop in to sessions, which works well. Staff always check in on each other during one-to-ones and have found the data forms useful for keeping track of who's attending and how they're doing.

Loughborough Neighbourhood Mental Health Café - Loughborough Wellbeing Centre, Asha House, 63 Woodgate, Loughborough LE11 2TZ
Friday 16 May 2025 at 6.30pm

When arriving at the café the session is clearly signposted, with an A3 board outside the centre showing opening hours from 4.30pm to 10.30pm (last entry at 10pm). This is the only session in Loughborough for the week. The café is clean, well maintained and has a relaxed, peaceful atmosphere. There's no music playing, which helps keep the space calm. Seating is varied, with a mix of chairs and settees, allowing people to sit alone or in groups. There's plenty of space for movement, making the café accessible and comfortable for all.

Visitors are warmly greeted by staff. On our visit, there were three staff members, including the manager from Turning Point, who also supports cafés in Hinckley and Market Harborough. Staff interactions were excellent—friendly, welcoming, and genuinely engaging. We observed people taking part in activities, as well as going into one-to-one sessions, which are held in a separate room. The manager explained that in difficult situations, staff move people to a quiet space, introduce grounding techniques and assess capacity. If capacity is lacking, they would call an ambulance and contain the situation, involving the hub if the individual is suicidal. Staff are trained in grounding techniques, crisis skills and tools like the Decider Skills.

Although they don't label it formally as peer support, the café does facilitate opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction, including some collaboration with other organisations. A good range of leaflets is displayed on the noticeboard and shelf unit, offering signposting to further support. Refreshments are available and the environment feels safe and inclusive.

One-to-one support is managed through a triage system and staff report that these sessions work well. There is a separate room for private conversations. The café operates with a clear code of conduct, visible at the reception desk. Staff are trained and know what to do when a person is in distress. There's also a system in place for filling in forms for the NHS, and QR codes are available so people can provide feedback.

Activities such as mindfulness colouring and fidget tools like poppers are available on the tables, helping to create a low-pressure space where people can relax. The majority of visitors are from Loughborough, Nottinghamshire or Coalville. Some people choose not to attend their local café due to stigma or concerns about being recognised. Around 70% of attendees are repeat visitors, with about 30% being new. Age range is roughly 20 to 65, with an estimated gender split of 60% male to 40% female.

We were told of some ongoing challenges, particularly around referral pathways. The team would welcome a more seamless system—such as a central email or directory—for referring people to the Central Access Point. There are concerns around the VitaMinds model too, with reports that people are being rejected from support, falling into a gap where they are too unwell for low-level interventions, but face long waits for higher-level services like The Lodge. GPs also need more clarity and better tools, including consistent use of the Joy App for appropriate referrals.

There's also a need for clearer public guidance around what the cafés can and can't do. Some people arrive expecting help with tasks like form-filling, which the café is not equipped to provide. Having service information available in multiple languages would help make the space more inclusive for those from diverse backgrounds.

Blaby Neighbourhood Mental Health Café – Blaby Drop In Centre, Welford Rd, Blaby, Leicester LE8 4FT
Thursday 22 May 2025 at 2.30pm

The café had a tidy and inviting atmosphere, and the staff were very welcoming. There is a private space available for one-to-one conversations or for anyone who needs some quiet. Lighting is gentle, overhead lights are used but not all switched on, keeping the space soft and calming. Seating is comfortable, with soft chairs arranged around a round table.

Staff are friendly and greet everyone warmly – it's the same team that works across Lutterworth and Enderby cafés. All staff have backgrounds in mental health (many are former mental health nurses) and are trained in both active listening and mental health support. Visitors are always encouraged to express themselves freely. Everyone is greeted at the door,

and if someone is in distress, they're taken to the private consultation room where staff do what they can to help reduce their emotional distress.

There's a clear table set up with signposting information to other services. The café is located on the ground floor, with no stairs, so it's accessible. Refreshments are available. Conversations between staff and visitors are respectful and inclusive of people from all backgrounds.

The private area is used for more sensitive conversations when needed and emergency contact procedures are clearly visible and accessible to staff. Art sessions are sometimes run, and we were told that people tend to open up more while doing creative activities. Decider tools are available on tablets and breathing exercises are sometimes introduced as part of the support. Peer support is encouraged, though it happens naturally rather than being a formalised structure. There is a system in place for collecting feedback.

Mental health professionals are available for additional support or referral – including links to Urgent Care, the Hub and the Central Access Point.

Staff noted that they really value having three very different venues for the cafés. This one is in a central, easy-to-access location that people are familiar with, which helps reduce barriers to attending.

Melton Mowbray Mental Health Café – Gloucester House, 3 Norman Way, Melton Mowbray, LE13 1JE

We did not visit the café, as it had only recently opened and had been operating for a short period. However, a staff member from the café was present at the Wigston location and provided insight into how the Melton Mowbray café is operating.

The staff member from the Melton Mowbray café shared that the café has been open for about 5–6 weeks. The staff member mentioned that a few people attend regularly and they've already seen improvements in number of attendees. Mondays tend to be quieter, while Thursdays are busier, though they haven't done extensive promotion yet.

We were told by the staff member from the Melton Mowbray café that the café is in the Age UK building, which is a good hub for people, but accessibility can be tricky. Wheelchair users sometimes struggle, though the team has made it work. The café space is in a side room with its own side entrance.

Survey response

A survey was completed during the visits and shared through our networks. We received 51 responses. We have themed the responses and provided a selection of comments. Responses are from people who have accessed the cafés in Leicester City and Leicestershire.

1. How easy was it to find out about the Neighbourhood Mental Health Café?

12 - Very easy
17 - Easy
16 - Neutral
2 - Difficult
1 - Very difficult
3 - Unanswered

2. How did you feel about the welcome you received when you arrived at the Café?

33 - Very welcoming
10 - Welcoming
4 - Neutral
0 - Unwelcoming
0 - Very Unwelcoming
4 - Unanswered

3. Was the staff member who greeted you friendly and supportive?

43 - Yes, they were very friendly and supportive
1 - Yes, they were friendly but not very supportive
2 - They were neither friendly nor supportive
0 - No, they were not friendly or supportive
0 - No, they were not friendly but somewhat supportive
5 - Unanswered

4. Did you feel listened to and understood during your visit?

32 - Yes, completely
10 - Yes, somewhat
5 - Neutral
0 - No, not really
0 - No, not at all
4 - Unanswered

5. How would you rate the environment of the Neighbourhood Mental Health Café?

27 - Very comfortable
12 - Comfortable
8 - Neutral
0 - Uncomfortable
0 - Very uncomfortable
4 - Unanswered

6. What type of support did you receive during your visit? (Multiple choice)

- 36 - Emotional support
- 9 - Practical support (e.g. help with housing, food etc.)
- 29 - Information or advice on mental health services
- 19 - Coping techniques (e.g. breathing exercises, meditation)
- 8 - Other (please specify): *Support with hoarding disorder, Grounding, Care, Safe space*
- 4 - Unanswered

7. Was the support you received helpful in managing your crisis?

- 26 - Yes, very helpful
- 13 - Yes, somewhat helpful
- 6 - Neutral
- 0 - No, not helpful
- 0 - No, not at all helpful
- 6 - Unanswered

8. Do you feel better equipped to manage your crisis after visiting the Neighbourhood Mental Health Café?

- 23 - Yes, definitely
- 14 - Yes, somewhat
- 6 - Neutral
- 2 - No, not really
- 0 - No, not at all
- 6 - unanswered

9. How would you rate your overall experience at the Neighbourhood Mental Health Café?

- 28 - Excellent
- 12 - Good
- 6 - Neutral
- 0 - Poor
- 1 - Very poor
- 4 - Unanswered

10. What did you like most about your visit to the Neighbourhood Mental Health Café, and is there anything you did not like?

Themes: People found attending the cafés very useful. People felt safe, listened to and the support received from staff have been good.

"The one-to-one support is helpful and can take the edge off a crisis for me. Colouring in the social space can be grounding."

"I was supported with my hoarding disorder by a fellow hoarder. The location at Saffron Acres Heath is lovely."

"Welcoming and helpful"

"Made to feel welcome, supported and safe environment."

"Very open and friendly welcome."

"Never attend or realised that they existed."

"Being listened to but would like to have someone visit home and have social calls."

"The cafés are good but need healthy options. The café enables me to feel heard, before I was in the dark, but feel I have some light now."

"Very helpful, supportive, welcoming, been going for about a year now helped me massively overcome some difficult times."

"Meeting like-minded people and not feel alone. Meeting younger people would be nice."

"Whatever help or support I need, they offer to me. Giving some direction/advice/comfortable, listened to, signposting to other organisations if they are not able to help."

"Staff very friendly and understanding".

"Felt safe"

"There's nothing I don't like. Feeling of comfort – looking for a place where I could feel myself that wasn't my home. Attending on a weekly basis, provides me with comfort and stability."

"Got to speak to someone quickly, make a referral and get an appointment, private room for one to one."

"I like the one-to-one, get to speak to them in private and in confidence."

11. What could be improved about the Neighbourhood Mental Health service?

Themes: Accessibility & Visibility, Social Connection & Engagement, Therapeutic & Emotional Support and Resources & Funding.

"More visibility."

"Opening more than one day a week."

"I don't really feel like I fit in anywhere, so the social space is hard. Sometimes it's hard to talk to other people in the social space, so having more guided activities e.g. art/craft could be helpful in breaking down barriers."

"Fruit, breathing techniques, general visual tools such as mood boards, to ascertain how I am feeling, different themes – fun facts around wellbeing, e.g. how much oxygen do you need/why exercise helps wellbeing."

"Extend to family members to help solve situation (mediators) – not just the person in front of me. Could do with a little more support e.g. counselling. Bookable slots (so I know I shall be seen) especially when in crisis."

"Counselling therapy."

"More advice and referral to counselling etc."

"Make it more accessible. I don't recognise that big, long list you had at the beginning of this survey. I live in Highfields and was told about one in pork pie library!"

"I had a GP referral, but the GPs need to be more informed to support people. I have not seen any local advertising for the café."

"The sign up was tricky, I used the Joy App, there wasn't a phone number, had to email in. The Joy App was confusing to use."

"Letting people know in advance if session is not running (have passed on email address so this will be resolved in future)."

"They need a practitioner qualified for mental health for more serious issues or when in crisis."

"I have received feedback from Wigston residents to say they would like this MH in Wigston some find it difficult to get to South Wigston."

"More money resources available."

"More funding for resources."

12. Would you recommend the Neighbourhood Mental Health Scheme to others in need of support?

39 – Yes, definitely

5 – Yes, maybe

3 – No

4 – Unanswered

13. What type of support do you think is most important in a Neighbourhood Mental Health Café? (Multiple Choice).

41 – Emotional support

25 – Practical support (e.g. help with housing, food etc.)

31 – Information or advice on mental health services

29 – Relaxation or coping techniques (e.g. breathing exercises, meditation)

29 – Peer support (talking to others with similar experiences)

23 – Crisis intervention (access to urgent mental health services)

11 – Other (please specify): *Family support, therapy, person to advocate for you accessing other mental health services, training on emotional support, guidance on healthy lifestyle.*

4 – Unanswered

14. What hours would you prefer the service to be open? (Multiple choice).

32 – Weekdays, daytime (e.g. 9am – 5pm)

10 – Weekdays, evening (e.g. 5pm – 9pm)

10 – Weekends, daytime (e.g. 10am – 5pm)

7 – Weekends, evening (e.g. 5pm – 9pm)

6 – 24/7 availability

1 – Other (please specify): *pleased with opening hours*

7 – Unanswered

15. Should the service provide access to other services or referrals (e.g., housing support, job assistance, addiction services)?

24 – Yes, definitely

13 – Yes, but only if needed

1 – No

7 – Not sure

6 – Unanswered

16. Should the service provide peer support from individuals who have experienced similar crises?

22 – Yes, definitely

20 – Yes, but with professional oversight

3 – No

2 – Not sure

4 – Unanswered

17. Do you think the name “Neighbourhood Mental Health Café” is right for the service?

31 – Yes

8 – No

8 – Not sure

4 – Unanswered

18. What accessibility features are important to you for a neighbourhood mental health café? (Multiple choice).

4 – Wheelchair accessibility

1 – Support for people with visual or hearing impairments

1 – Availability of translation/interpretation services

9 – Cultural sensitivity (e.g., offering support to diverse groups)

1 – Childcare services for those with children

3 – Clear signage and easy access for people with cognitive disabilities

22 – Other (please specify): *All of the above except childcare, I personally don't want to see children at adult services, all relevant, Electronic messages around well-being, cultural sensitivity and availability of translation/interpretation services, Support for people with visual or hearing impairments, clear signage and easy access.*

19. Should neighbourhood Mental Health Cafés be located in a specific area of the community (e.g., town centre, near public transport)?

29 – Yes, near public transport or central location

4 – Yes, but in a quieter residential area

12 – No preference

1 – Not sure

5 – Unanswered

20. Do you feel the neighbourhood Mental Health Cafés support adults of all ages?

- 40 – Yes
- 2 – No
- 4 – Not sure
- 5 – Unanswered

Comments: *"I'm happy that there is somewhere to go and air your problems... helps to deal with things in more thoughtful way."*

"So long as it is adults and not children."

21. Should Neighbourhood Mental Health Cafés provide support or resources for family members or carers of individuals in crisis?

- 24 – Yes, definitely
- 17 – Yes, but only in certain situations
- 2 – No
- 2 – Not sure
- 6 – Unanswered

22. What type of support should be available for families and carers? (Multiple choice).

- 36 – Information on how to support someone in crisis
- 26 – Peer support groups for families & carers
- 21 – Crisis management planning
- 31 – Emotional support (e.g. counselling, helplines)
- 18 – Respite services (e.g. short-term for the individual in crisis)
- 2 – Other (please specify): *how to communicate with each other*

23. Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions about the development of the Neighbourhood Mental Health Café service in Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland?

"I think the service, was real good when I started 2023, however it as changed to focus on crisis instead of general mental health support."

"There should be flexibility to meet or suit ones needs and have social calls to help person come out and prevent lonely."

"The peer support could be useful but understanding that everyone experiences things differently. The name 'Neighbourhood Mental Health Café' mental health - this may put someone off. Could the café provide a referral (quicker) process for services such as gym access/creating a foundation for emotional support (training) provided."

"It is difficult for some people to mix with others at different parts of their journey. Regarding name of service - people think it is a café where you can buy food and drink."

"Would be better if this service was available more than just 2 days a week."

"Wellbeing Centre/ Café is a better name. The café has been great - "How beneficial it's been just to be myself without the pressure of life. I feel that I have more knowledge of the way the service functions. People feel alienated against the world."

Not a place for treatment". Crisis team – the communication is poor and they do not help to get the support that you need. More support is needed."

"Everything here is perfect, there's coffee, biscuits, board games, sofas to chill out. They have thought of everything. Staff here have been fantastic, they make me feel at ease, I was in crisis and they helped me get out of that."

"To offer as much support and guidance as possible and have information at hand on other support or information."

"To me it's the best thing that's happened. There should be more, open more days a week."

"Keep up present café services. Provide more. Maybe some specialising in young adults. Name "Chat Café" to remove stigma."

"I like calling it wellbeing café. Good to have access to qualified mental health members."

"Should be named "The Neighbourhood Mental Health Mental Wellbeing café."

Recommendations

We recommend that Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust:

1	Consider all comments recorded from individuals and whether practice or delivery needs to be amended to reflect feedback.
2	Consider a change in name for the cafés that better reflect their current function.
3	Consider improving local visibility and promotion of the cafés, collaborate with GP practices, Local Area Coordinators, pharmacies, community groups and local libraries to display clear posters and leaflets with café details.
4	Review café opening hours and days based on feedback from people.
5	Streamline the use of Joy App and ensure phone-based referral/ contact options are available for people and professionals to be able to contact the cafés when needed.
6	Consider setting up a text or email notification system to alert people if a session is cancelled or changed.
7	Review the staff training programme and ensure consistent training for all staff running the cafés.
8	Ensure that all staff and volunteers receive a welcome pack that contains relevant and current information and resources.
9	Provide ongoing opportunities for shadowing or peer learning between cafés for all staff and volunteers.
10	Provide information about the Neighbourhood Mental Health Cafés to GP Practices so that they can provide information to patients as needed.

11

Explore the use of interpretation tools or community language support.

12

Look at ways to strengthen the delivery and sustainability of the service.

Service Provider Response

The report was agreed with the Service Provider as factually accurate. They have provided the following response to the report:

Response to 'Enter & View' Healthwatch report (April 2025):

Leicestershire Partnership and
Northamptonshire Healthcare
Associate University Group



Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) oversees the Neighbourhood Mental Health Café scheme on behalf of the Mental Health Collaborative. LPT has managed the scheme since 2021-22, and during this time has increased provision from four café sessions to over forty café sessions per week, delivered by fifteen Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) providers. In 2024/25 over 9,000 visits were made to neighbourhood mental health cafes from people looking for support for mental health.

LPT welcomes the feedback from the 'Enter and View' report that Healthwatch captured from visits to cafes in April 2025. The following responses may provide additional information for readers of the report.

- A comprehensive café service specification has been shaped through best practice and learning from café providers to ensure a higher degree of continuity across the cafes.
- A quarterly provider meeting & bi-monthly information sessions take place, which invites all organisations delivering cafes to receive information, share best practice and identify areas for support or improvement.
- Each café is allocated a Neighbourhood Lead who they meet with on a regular basis to discuss any issues that may have arisen, share ideas for development.
- A pathway is in place that enables each of the providers to escalate individuals into the urgent mental health system, including the Mental Health Urgent Care Hub (MHUCH) and Central Access Point (CAP) when required.
- Information about the cafes has been shared across Primary and Secondary Care, with all information about the cafes available on the LPT website plus information can also be accessed via the JOY platform marketplace.
- A comprehensive training offer has been developed to enable recovery workers to have the skills and knowledge to support individuals.
- The title of the cafes was coproduced by providers and service users in response to suggestions that Crisis Cafes were not favourable

Our next steps from this report will be,

- To continue working with each individual provider based on the feedback from the report.
- Review communication and engagement activity with Primary Care partners.
- Review existing processes on cancelling sessions and informing the public.
- Review locations of the cafes to ensure they are in the areas of highest need.



Neighbourhood Mental Health Cafés	Providers
Beaumont Leys Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	ZamZam Unlimited
Blaby Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Beacon Care and Advice
Braunstone Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Mind
Coalville Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Marlene Reid Community Action
DeMontfort University Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Mind
Earl Shilton Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Rural Community Council
Enderby Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Beacon Care and Advice
Eyres Monsell Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Eyres Monsell Club for Young People (EMCYP)
Highfields Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Jamila's Legacy
Hinckley Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Turning Point
Leicester City Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Turning Point
Leicester University Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Mind
Loughborough Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Turning Point
Loughborough University Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Mind
Lutterworth Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Beacon Care and Advice
Market Harborough Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Turning Point
Measham Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Age UK Leicestershire and Rutland
New Parks Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Team Hub

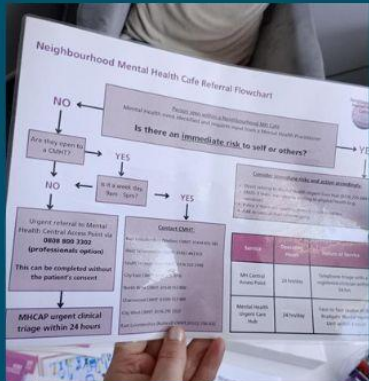
Oadby Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Age UK Leicestershire and Rutland
Saffron Neighbourhood Mental Health Café (Saff Caff)	Saffron Lane Neighbourhood Council
Syston Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Rural Community Council
The Peepul Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	The Peepul Centre
Thurnby Lodge Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Jamila's Legacy CIC
Wigston Neighbourhood Mental Health Café	Age UK Leicestershire & Rutland

Distribution list

The report is for distribution to the following:

- Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT)
- LLR Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Leicestershire County Council (LCC)
- Leicester City Council (LC)
- NHS England (Leicestershire and Lincolnshire) Local Area Team
- Healthwatch England and the local Healthwatch Network

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