

Enter & View Visit Report

Wheatfield Surgery

21st November 2024

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Details of visit

Service address: 60 Wheatfield Road, Luton, LU4 0TR

Service Provider: Wheatfield Surgery

Date and Time: 21st November 2025, 10am – 1pm

Authorised

Representatives:

Vanessa Filmer, Julie Hoare, Victoria Davies

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

Contact details:

Capability House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire, MK45 4HR

Tel: 0300 303 8554

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) would like to thank the service provider, service users, visitors and staff for their contribution to the Enter and View visit.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific date set out above.

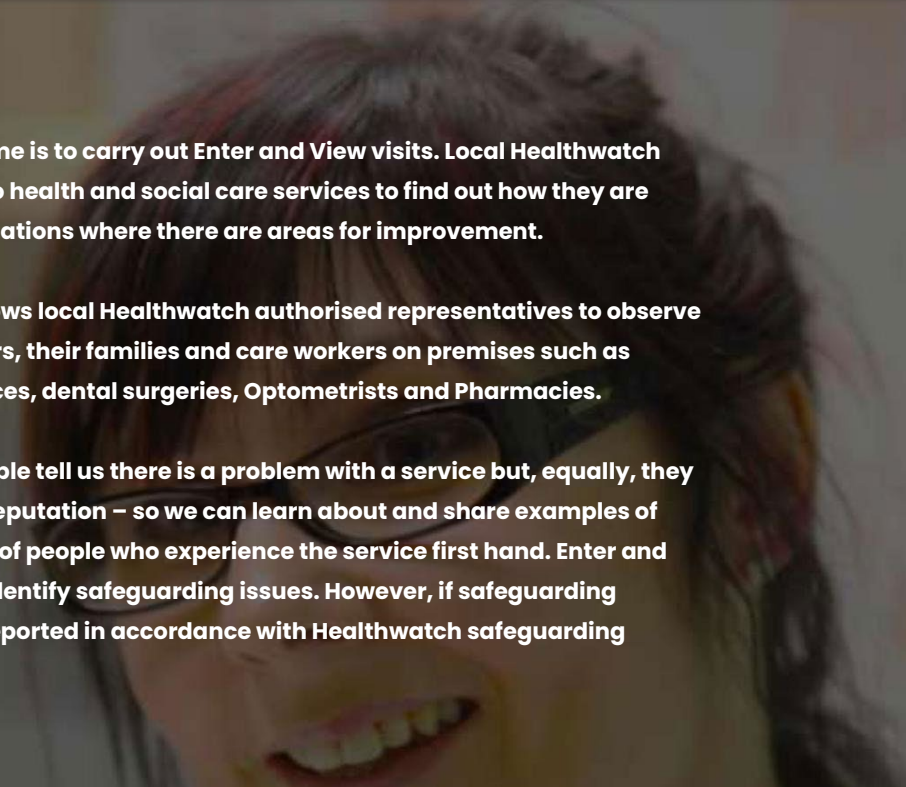
Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

What is Enter and View?

Part of the local Healthwatch programme is to carry out Enter and View visits. Local Healthwatch representatives carry out these visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being managed and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 allows local Healthwatch authorised representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and care workers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, Optometrists and Pharmacies.

Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation – so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand. Enter and Views are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies.



Purpose of the visit

- To engage with service users and understand how dignity is being respected in a GP Surgery environment;
- Identify examples of good working practice;
- Observe patients and relatives engaging with the staff and their surroundings;
- Consult with patients about their experience of the environment within the surgery and how care is delivered.

Strategic drivers

- **Assessing Implementation of Improvements:** To evaluate the progress made by the practice in addressing the issues identified in the CQC inspection, particularly in areas related to safety, effectiveness, responsiveness, and leadership.
- **Gathering Current Patient Experiences:** To collect up-to-date feedback from patients regarding their experiences with access to services, quality of care, and overall satisfaction, thereby identifying any persistent or new concerns.
- **Evaluating Patient Engagement Mechanisms:** To review the effectiveness of the practice's patient engagement strategies, including the handling of complaints and the operation of the Patient Participation Group (PPG), ensuring that patient voices are heard and acted upon.
- **Supporting Continuous Improvement:** To provide constructive feedback and recommendations that assist Wheatfield Surgery in enhancing service delivery, patient satisfaction, and compliance with regulatory standards.

Methodology

This was an announced Enter and View Visit.

This Enter and View visit to Wheatfield Surgery was undertaken to gain insights into the experiences of both patients and staff, assess the environment and service delivery, and provide recommendations for improvement. The visit was initiated following feedback that indicated potential areas for enhancement in patient access and overall service quality.

The visit was announced, with a notification letter sent to the surgery in advance. The letter included Healthwatch posters to inform patients of our intended visit, as well as a Pre-Visit Questionnaire for the Practice Manager, which was completed and returned on the day of our arrival. The surgery displayed the Healthwatch posters in prominent locations, demonstrating a commitment to transparency and engagement with the process.

Upon arrival, the team was welcomed by the Practice Manager, who provided an overview of the surgery's operations, layout, and accessibility features. Structured interviews were conducted with the Manager, a GP, a Nurse, administrative staff, and a selection of patients. Observations of the surgery's environment and patient interactions were carried out over the course of the visit to gain a holistic understanding of the day-to-day service provision.

As the visit concluded, Healthwatch leaflets were distributed to patients to encourage further feedback and ensure patients had a platform to share their ongoing experiences.

Summary of findings



Wheatfield Surgery is a busy general practice serving a patient population of 12,208. The surgery is well-established in Luton and offers a broad range of healthcare services, including Phlebotomy, coil clinics, and enhanced access appointments. These services reflect the surgery's commitment to meeting the varied needs of its patients.

The surgery is situated in an accessible location with a small on-site car park, which includes two designated disabled bays and bike parking facilities. However, the limited parking spaces may pose challenges during peak hours. Ample street parking is available nearby, providing an alternative for patients.

Inside, the surgery is clean, well-maintained, and welcoming. The waiting area has a warm and inviting atmosphere, with facilities designed to accommodate all patients. Comfortable seating is provided, along with sufficient space for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Toilets are clean, easily accessible, and include a private area for breastfeeding mothers. The surgery's thoughtful layout ensures that it is fully accessible to individuals with disabilities, with no stairs or lifts required.

A notable feature of the waiting area is its inclusivity and attention to patient comfort. The space is decorated to celebrate and raise awareness for events such as LGBTQ+ Pride and Breast Cancer Awareness, creating a vibrant and welcoming environment. Additionally, the surgery recently introduced a sensory room, designed to provide a calm and quiet space for patients with sensory needs, demonstrating the practice's commitment to inclusivity.

The check-in process is efficient, with a clear system in place to support patients. Reception staff were observed to be polite, professional, and approachable, contributing to the surgery's welcoming atmosphere. Hand sanitiser, tissues, and a range of informational leaflets are readily available, alongside Healthwatch leaflets and posters encouraging patient feedback and engagement. However, no visible complaints procedure was observed during the visit, which may limit patients' understanding of how to raise formal concerns.

The waiting area is family-friendly, with a play area featuring regularly cleaned toys for children. Translation services are available for patients, with several languages spoken by staff members to support effective communication during appointments. The surgery also provides leaflets in multiple languages, further supporting its diverse patient population.

Wheatfield Surgery operates efficiently, offering appointments through various methods, including face-to-face, telephone, and e-consult services. The surgery's phone lines operate from 8:00 am to 6:30 pm, ensuring accessibility for patients throughout the day. Enhanced access services, including early morning, late evening, and Saturday clinics, provide additional flexibility for patients with busy schedules.

The surgery manages its medication and prescriptions effectively, with a 72-hour turnaround time for prescription requests. Patients are notified via text when their prescriptions are ready, adding an extra layer of convenience to the process.

Staff feedback and observations reflected a positive work environment and culture. The surgery's leadership has created a supportive atmosphere, which staff members describe as respectful and inclusive.

Wheatfield Surgery continues to demonstrate a commitment to providing high-quality care, although there are areas, such as appointment accessibility and the visibility of the complaints procedure, where improvements could further enhance the patient experience.

Results of Visit

Patients

Five patients were interviewed during the visit, providing mixed feedback about their experiences at the surgery.

Two patients expressed dissatisfaction with the telephone booking process, citing long wait times and difficulties in securing appointments. One patient said, ***"It took three days to secure a telephone appointment. I had to come in and speak face-to-face in the end."*** Another shared, ***"It's always a big queue on the phone. It's difficult to get an appointment. Last time, I tried for two days with no success and had to go to A&E."***

Despite these challenges, three patients reported positive experiences, stating that they were eventually offered appointments with the appropriate clinicians.

All patients felt listened to and involved in decisions about their care, describing staff as polite, helpful, and professional. Waiting times upon arrival for appointments were reported to be minimal, further contributing to a positive experience once inside the surgery.

Patients also noted the surgery's diverse workforce, which supports communication in multiple languages, and they appreciated the text reminder service for appointments. All patients were aware of how to access out-of-hours care and described the care received from this service as excellent.

Staffing

Seven staff members were interviewed, representing a variety of roles, including GPs, Nurses, administrative staff, and the Practice Manager.

All staff provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about the surgery, describing it as a supportive and inclusive workplace. One staff member shared, ***"I love it here. There is a big support network."*** Another remarked, ***"GPs are very supportive and approachable. They respond immediately to my questions."***

The Practice Manager was commended for her open-door policy and dedication to upskilling the team. Staff noted that they received appropriate training, including sessions on learning disabilities and Autism, which enhanced their ability to support diverse patient needs. One staff member stated, ***"The Manager invests in us and ensures we are always improving."***

The introduction of a sensory room in the waiting area was highlighted as a key innovation, reflecting the surgery's commitment to inclusivity and patient-centred care. Staff expressed pride in this addition, which has created a calming space for patients with sensory sensitivities.

Ongoing Care Needs

Wheatfield Surgery is actively working to improve patient access through enhanced services such as early morning, late evening, and Saturday clinics, all of which can be pre-booked. The surgery also provides home visits for eligible patients and has a robust medication management system supported by remote Pharmacists.

The introduction of the sensory room and a child-friendly waiting area demonstrates the surgery's commitment to creating a welcoming and supportive environment for all patients. However, the challenges with the appointment booking system remain a priority for improvement to ensure equitable access to care.

Record Keeping

The surgery monitors quality of care through regular audits, policy reviews, and functional role leads, such as the infection control lead. Patient outcomes are evaluated using the Quality Outcomes Framework (QOF), which has highlighted recent improvements in childhood immunisation uptake.

Medication reviews are managed efficiently by remote Pharmacists, with patients able to request prescriptions online or in person. The surgery's 72-hour prescription turnaround time and text alert system have been positively received by patients, reflecting its commitment to timely and effective service delivery.

Manager's Comments / Observations

The Practice Manager at Wheatfield Surgery provided valuable insights into the improvements and developments implemented at the surgery over the past 18 months. Under their leadership, the surgery has focused on enhancing patient care and operational efficiency to meet the needs of its diverse local community.

One of the key advancements highlighted by the Manager is the introduction of new AI software designed to scan documents and letters automatically. This innovation has streamlined administrative tasks, significantly reducing waiting times for both staff and patients. The system has enabled the surgery to handle routine processes more efficiently, allowing staff to focus on delivering quality care.

Additionally, the surgery has recently introduced an e-consult platform, providing patients with a convenient digital option for accessing medical advice and booking appointments. This service has improved accessibility, particularly for patients who may find it difficult to visit the surgery or use traditional telephone systems. The Manager noted that this new system has been well-received by patients and has helped reduce the pressure on in-person and telephone appointment bookings.

The Manager emphasised the dedication of the surgery's staff to providing outstanding care, with a collective focus on creating a welcoming and supportive environment for patients. They also expressed pride in the surgery's proactive approach to implementing new initiatives and technologies that enhance the overall patient experience and align with the needs of the community. These efforts underscore the surgery's commitment to continuous improvement and delivering high-quality healthcare services.

Environment

The Exterior

The surgery is located in a residential area, with a small car park that includes two disabled bays and bicycle parking facilities. Whilst the parking spaces are limited, ample street parking is available nearby. The surgery's location is convenient and easily accessible, but the restricted car park size may present challenges during busy periods.

Staff

Staff at Wheatfield Surgery are well-dressed, wearing appropriate uniforms and ID cards, which makes it easy for patients to identify them. This professional appearance, combined with the polite and approachable demeanour of the staff, enhances the patient experience.

Patients provided positive feedback about the reception and clinical staff, describing them as kind, patient, and attentive. Staff were observed interacting warmly with patients, which fosters a welcoming and supportive environment within the surgery.

General Décor

The interior of Wheatfield Surgery is clean, tidy, and well-maintained, with a welcoming atmosphere.

The waiting area is bright, comfortable, and well-organised, featuring amenities such as hand sanitiser, tissues, and informational leaflets.

The child-friendly environment includes a play area and a sensory room, which provides a calm and supportive space for patients with sensory needs.

The reception area is well-staffed, with helpful and polite receptionists, although no visible name badges were observed.

A "You Said, We Did" board in the waiting area demonstrates the surgery's commitment to acting on patient feedback and promoting transparency. However, the complaints procedure was not prominently displayed, which could leave patients unclear about how to raise concerns.



Recommendations

1. **Reintroduce the Patient Participation Group (PPG)**

Focus on re-establishing the PPG to provide a structured platform for patient engagement and feedback. Ensure the group is inclusive and representative of the surgery's diverse patient population.

2. **Implement a Practice Handbook**

Develop a practice handbook to provide clear and comprehensive information about the surgery's services, policies, and procedures. This would enhance communication and ensure patients have easy access to essential information.

3. **Enhance Visibility of the Complaints Procedure**

Ensure the complaints process is clearly displayed in the reception area and on the website.

4. It is recommended that **this report is shared** with interested parties, and for the Practice to encourage patients to advise HWCB direct if they wish to contribute any additional comments about the Practice or to this report. Contact Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire direct on 0300 303 8554 or by email to info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

5. **The Surgery's website** to empower patients to share their concerns and provide constructive feedback.

Service Provider response

We very much welcomed the opportunity to be visited by Healthwatch and felt confident during the visit that our improvements were noted and well received.

We have since introduced name badges for all staff members along with matching fleece jackets this now completes the uniform look of all staff.

Our new PPG will be taking shape next month thanks to the support from Annette Brown's guidance, Project Lead, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, and the invaluable PPG toolkit recently introduced to us by her.

We are currently developing the new Practice Handbook and will be distributing this in our waiting room and on our website shortly along with a clearly illustrated complaints procedure.

We also will be adding a feedback addition to our website encouraging patients to use it and know their experiences and comments are heard by the Team.

Michaela Campbell
Practice Manager
Wheatfield Surgery
60 Wheatfield Road, Luton, LU4 0TR



Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
Capability House, Wrest Park,
Silsoe, Beds, MK45 4HR
www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

t: 0300 303 8554
e: info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

Registered Address: Capability House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire, MK45 4HR

Registered Company No: 08399922

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