

Corby Willowbrook Health Centre
Community Diagnostic Services
Enter and View

July 2024



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Background and Purpose

Community Diagnostic Centres are specialised healthcare facilities that focus on providing a range of diagnostic services to patients in their local communities. These centres play a crucial role in improving access to timely and accurate diagnostic tests, which are essential for diagnosing various medical conditions and facilitating appropriate treatment. CDCs aim to enhance the overall patient experience by offering convenient appointment scheduling, shorter waiting times, and a more comfortable environment for undergoing diagnostic tests. By focusing on patient-centred care, these centres strive to provide a positive and reassuring experience for individuals undergoing diagnostic procedures. The addition of CDCs helps alleviate the burden on hospital diagnostic departments by providing additional capacity for diagnostic tests. By diverting routine diagnostic procedures to community-based centres, CDCs can help reduce waiting times for tests in hospitals, ensuring that patients receive timely diagnoses and treatment.

In December 2023 Healthwatch England initiated a project about understanding people's experiences of diagnostic services. They aimed to visit all the newly built CDCs across England and for various Healthwatch across the country to attend the new CDCs to do an accessibility audit of the buildings and to speak with patients. As a part of this process Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire volunteered to get involved, although North and West Northamptonshire's new CDCs were not finished being built, we visited one of the centres currently providing diagnostic services, which was Corby's Willowbrook Health Centre, to hear people's views and experiences of community diagnostic services and acute diagnostic services. We were asked to carry out an accessibility assessment and viewed the facility through the Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) guidelines, intended to support those with disabilities and dementia to ensure that services are accessible¹.

¹<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/areas-of-interest/estates-and-facilities/patient-led-assessments-of-the-care-environment-place>

Methods and Objectives

Our Objectives

- To review the accessibility of the building and departments through pre-defined templates from Healthwatch England. These templates included the needs of those with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and dementia.
- To collect the views of patients via a short survey about their experience and the communication received surrounding their appointment.
- To provide a short report, including recommendations that will be made available to the service provider, commissioners and public.

Method

- This was a prearranged visit.
- The visit comprised of three volunteers and one member of HWNW staff.
- Observations were conducted during the allotted period.
- Patients were asked to complete a short survey about their visit and experience at Corby's Willowbrook Health Centre for CDC services and what type of test brought them to the centre.
- Throughout the visit, the team observed the environment and interactions between staff and patients.

Summary

In December 2023, Healthwatch England initiated a project to understand people's experiences with these services. Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire participated by visiting Corby's Willowbrook Health Centre, evaluating accessibility, and gathering patient feedback. The objectives included reviewing the building's accessibility, collecting patient views via a survey, and compiling a report with recommendations. The visit involved volunteers and staff observing the environment and interactions between staff and patients.

Key Findings

1. Accessibility and Transport:
 - The centre is accessible by public transport, with a bus stop nearby.
 - There were issues with parking availability, especially for disabled spaces, which were sometimes occupied by mobile diagnostic vans.
2. Facilities and Environment:
 - The diagnostic services visited (phlebotomy and ultrasound) were quiet and pleasant, with clean and comfortable seating.
 - Some patients had to stand due to limited seating in the waiting area shared by ultrasound, x-ray, and urgent care.
3. Staff and Patient Interaction:
 - Staff were friendly and respectful of patient privacy and dignity.
 - There was a lack of usage and signage for hearing loops, and no posters informing patients about accessible information standards.
4. Patient Feedback:
 - Most patients found the location convenient and the staff to be the best part of their experience.
 - Issues highlighted included the need for improved parking and a larger waiting room.

Recommendations

- Enhancing parking facilities, including dedicated drop-off areas and increasing the availability of spaces for patients and their families and carers.

- Improving the signage and notice boards and increasing the available patient information, including relevant information for patients and ensuring notices and signage are easily visible.
 - We recommend making changes to the notices that are on white paper against a white wall which can be challenging for dementia patients.
 - Some of the signage was quite small and the contrasting colours on the reception sign we felt could be challenging for some individuals with dementia, this could be increased in size to support patients with dementia.
- We recommend that the TVs that are currently not in use, be purposed to be able to show relevant information and/or entertainment for patients.
- Considering the patient feedback, we recommend expanding the waiting room space to accommodate more patients.

Observations and Feedback

The centre is easily accessible via public transport with a bus service from Corby town centre stopping at a bus stop 2 to 3 minutes walk away (approx. 500m) every twenty minutes. The access from the train station via bus is less frequent and involves a twenty-minute journey to reach the centre.

We visited two diagnostic services within Corby's Willowbrook Health Centre buildings, the phlebotomy department and the ultrasound department. The spaces within the centre are quiet and pleasant. Seating appears clean and comfortable and all available space for seating was utilised. During the visit, it was observed that some patients within the large waiting room shared by ultrasound, x-ray and urgent care had to stand as the available seats were occupied. The walkways within the centre were clear of obstacles and well-kept with no visible hazards anywhere.

The signage to aid those travelling to the centre is clear, easily readable and unobstructed and the car parking is well signposted. Mobility parking is available and there is good wheelchair or mobility scooter access from the car park. There is also storage for mobility scooters and the entrance is step-free.

The reception staff for both services were friendly and approachable (patients utilise the appointment database when up and running). There are TVs that are intended to display wait times and to call patients who are currently awaiting their care in the urgent care and imaging waiting room, however, they are not currently being utilised.

Patients' privacy and dignity were respected by all the staff and patients were asked for key information in private after they had checked in. To aid with privacy there was no seating near to the reception area and private rooms were offered to patients when necessary.

Parking

Parking close to the centre's entrance is an issue, by 9.30 am on the day of the visit there were no car parking spaces available on site. After discussion with staff identified that the parking situation may have been made worse due to the lack of patient transport services in the area since the previous provision closed.

Blue badge spaces are available, but only a limited number and some of those spaces are currently taken up by mobile diagnostic vans providing imaging for patients, which has caused a loss of disabled spaces for patients. Car parking is free for visitors and patients. There is an area where people were stopping to drop off car passengers but there is not a dedicated drop-off area for patients.

Additional needs/accessibility

There are hearing loops in place but there was no sign on the receptions to let patients know about this. After a discussion with staff within the

urgent care and imaging area, they identified that the hearing loop is not used often, which could be a result of the lack of signage.

There were no posters seen within the reception area to inform patients about the accessible information standards.

Dementia Patients

During the visit, the dementia-friendly section of the Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) was used to look at how dementia friendly the centre environment was. Although most dementia patients attend the diagnostic centre with a carer, ensuring the environment is not too confusing for the patients can assist with reducing the anxiety they may feel on attending an unfamiliar setting. People with dementia may have difficulties with communication, comprehension and expression. Dementia-friendly healthcare environments incorporate communication strategies and adaptations to facilitate effective interaction between patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals. This can help reduce frustration and anxiety for patients and improve the accuracy of medical assessments.

Most of the guidance within the PLACE assessment was already in place within the diagnostic departments, but a few areas were highlighted where improvements could be made.

It was identified that most notices were on white paper against a white wall which can be challenging for dementia patients. Some of the signage was quite small and the contrasting colours on the reception sign could be challenging for some individuals with dementia. The good colour contrast between the fixtures and walls meant that that made it easier for those with dementia. Colour contrast plays a crucial role in enhancing the visual environment for individuals with dementia, promoting orientation, communication, engagement and safety. By incorporating clear and meaningful contrasts into the design of spaces and objects, caregivers and healthcare professionals can help improve the quality of life and well-being of those living with dementia.

The use of visual images on toilet signs could also help patients with dementia identify bathrooms.

No patients who identified as experiencing autism were present in the centre during the visit. When speaking to staff they said that patients with autism were not required to wait to see the GP. There was also a quiet space that was managed by the urgent care team and could be used on request and a changing room was also available for those who needed a private space.

Signage

Within the centre, signs are clear and contain graphics making them easy to understand. The print could be larger and incorporate contrasting colours, as this can aid in wayfinding and orientation within a space, helping individuals with dementia navigate their surroundings more effectively.

There are clearly marked fire exit signs in different formats and the fire alarms have lights as well as sound.

Patient information

There does not appear to be adequate information on the complaints/compliments procedure and the information there is not available in different formats. Friends and family information was visible and reception staff said they would provide information on request.

The information available could be improved, we noted that the staff and information board were not completed. There was a lack of any information available in an easy-to-read format and there was no information on how to access a translator if one was needed.

The notice board viewed within the urgent care and ultrasound waiting room contained lots of notices, making them difficult to read. The print on many was too small and it was not clear what the purpose of many of the notices was.

There are no electronic information or appointment check-in screens observed within the centre. Patients check in at a desk rather than at the main reception and patients' names are called out when it is time for their appointment.

Survey results

- Due to the nature of the centre, some patients had to leave to attend their appointments before they could complete all the survey questions.
- Sixteen patients participated in the short survey.
- Ten were attending for blood tests, one for a hip scan and one for an x-ray.
- Ten patients had arrived by car, two had used public transport and two had arrived by taxi because they were aware of the parking problems at the centre.
- Twelve patients had travelled less than 30 minutes to arrive at the centre and one had used public transport.
- Nine had experienced difficulties with parking at the centre.

All participants said the location was convenient for them and everyone had easily found their way to the centre once on site.

Ten had been referred by a GP and one by a specialist. One patient had waited four weeks for their appointment, three had waited one week and two were seen on the same day.

Two patients had not been offered a choice on where they were seen. Of the five who were, two had chosen the CDC as it was the closest and one had chosen it for its convenience. Out of the seven participants only two had been offered a choice around the date or time of their appointment.

One patient was waiting for a further chest scan and had not been offered the choice of having it done at the same time as the test they were attending for.

When asked what the most important consideration around the date or time of their appointment would be, convenience, being seen quickly and fitting appointments around other commitments were priorities.

Everyone who completed the survey said that the staff were the best thing about their overall experience.

" Staff were helpful."

"Nurses are friendly."

"Staff were very good and explained well."

"Nice friendly nurse."

Improved car parking and a larger waiting room were mentioned as things that would improve the overall experience of patients.

Response from Service Provider

Claire Day, the Community Diagnostic Centre, Deputy Programme Manager said "I would just like to say thank you to Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire for their visit. We would like it noted that this is a temporary solution for us to deliver our CDC services, whilst our building is built on the Willowbrook site.

I do however note the comments and suggestions made about improvements which could be made to make things better for patients, and I am happy to share this with the manager of the building, to see if they could incorporate in future.

Regarding Dementia patients, we have pursued this as an area of focus, we have already engaged with some patients and dementia groups whilst designing the new CDC building, and from this we have taken on board some of the suggestions and comments to ensure that this space will be dementia friendly.

NICB has also been successful in winning a bid of money from NHSE , to implement and pilot a new dementia pathway in the new CDC, so again we will be able to update you on how this is progressing in the future.

I do hope that you will be able to come back to look at the new premises when we open which will be in the Spring 2025."

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire is grateful for the time, efforts, and cooperation of the NHS Community Diagnostic Centre Programme leads. We appreciate the ability to be allowed into the Willowbrook Health Centre in Corby to evaluate and assess the premises, as well as being able to speak with staff, parents/carers and patients to better understand their experiences. Thank you to our volunteers for their hard work and time dedicated to gathering the data and valuable information needed for this Enter and View.

About North and West Northamptonshire Healthwatch

Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire is the local independent consumer champion for health and social care. We are part of a national network of local Healthwatch organisations. Our central role is to be a voice for local people to influence better health and wellbeing and improve the quality of services to meet people's needs. This involves us visiting local services and talking to people about their views and experiences. We share our reports with the NHS and social care, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (the inspector and regulator for health and social care), with recommendations for improvement, where required.

Our rights and responsibilities include:

- We have the power to monitor (known as "Enter and View") health and social care services (with one or two exceptions). Our primary purpose is to find out what patients, service users, carers and the wider public think of health and social care.
- We report our findings of local views and experiences to health and social care decision-makers and make the case for improved services where we find there is a need for improvement.
- We strive to be a strong and powerful voice for local people, and to influence how services are planned, organised and delivered.
- We aim to be an effective voice rooted in the community. To be that voice, we find out what local people think about health and social care. We research patient, user and carer opinions using many different ways to discover views and experiences. We do this to give local people a voice. We provide information and advice about health and social care services.

Where we feel that the views and voices of Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire and the people whom we strive to speak on behalf of are not being heard, we have the option to escalate our concerns and report our evidence to national organisations including Healthwatch England, NHS England and the Care Quality Commission.

Find out more at www.healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk

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About Connected Together

Connected Together Community Interest Company (CIC) is the legal entity and governing body for Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire.

The remit of the Connected Together CIC includes:

- Contract compliance
- Legal requirements
- Financial and risk management
- Sustainability and growth
- Agreeing strategy and operations
- Agreeing policies and procedures



Connected Together CIC is a social enterprise. It aims to be the first for community engagement across the county of Northamptonshire and beyond.

By using our expertise and experience, we can help you in delivering community engagement programmes including workshops, research, surveys, training and more. Contact us to find out how we can help your community.

We welcome ideas and suggestions for projects that benefit Northamptonshire and its community.

Find out more at www.connectedtogether.co.uk

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