



Enter & View Report

The Heron GP – St Matthews Branch

January 2025

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Report details

Details of Visit	
Service Address	Prince Philip House, St Matthews Health & Community Centre, Malabar Road, Leicester LE1 2NZ
Service Provider	DHU Healthcare C.I.C.
Date and Time	Friday 24 January 2025, 10am
Authorised Representatives undertaking the visit	Chris Bosely, Debra Watson and Dulna Shahid (Staff)

Acknowledgements

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

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.

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.

This report is written by volunteer Enter and View Authorised Representatives who carried out the visit on behalf of Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire.

Purpose of the visit

- To gather patient views of the service provided at The Heron GP – St Matthews Branch.
- To observe the facilities and operation of the service.
- To observe patient access.

Methodology

This was an announced Enter and View visit.

We contacted the Practice Management Team in advance and had access to communal areas during our visit.

The visit was observational, involving the Authorised Representatives observing the surroundings to gain an understanding of how patients engaged with reception staff and the facilities.

To reach patients, we spoke to the management team prior to the visit about using the GP text messaging service. The text message was sent to the patients, and we received **350** responses.

At the end of the visit, we gave our initial findings to the management team.

Summary of the findings

Summary

- The practice serves 9,800 patients and has two locations one at the Mervyn Vaz Centre and one at Prince Philip House.
- The reception desk has two height levels, with one designed for accessibility.
- There is limited privacy at reception, but clinical rooms can be used for confidential discussions.
- Toilets were clean and well-maintained, including a disabled toilet with baby-changing facilities.
- Interpreters are available and patients can submit requests in different languages online.
- The practice is planning to implement a telephone call-back system to improve accessibility.
- A higher-than-average non-attendance rate was reported.
- Appointments can be booked in person, online or via phone; online booking is encouraged by the practice.
- The Anima automated triage system is used for online booking.
- Urgent appointments are handled by the duty GP at the end of the day.
- Home visits are conducted by the DHU Healthcare out-of-hours service, with social prescribers supporting staff.

350 patients responded to the survey

- 212 patients (76%) of patients said that it is 'very difficult' or 'difficult' to get through to the practice on the telephone.
- 143 patients (51%) said that it takes 'Over an hour' to get through to the practice on the telephone.
- Comments were made on the difficulty of navigating the online system.
- 214 patients (77%) patients were 'happy' with who they had seen at the time of their appointment.
- 102 patients (50%) patients were 'completely satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their appointments.
- 179 patients (65%) patients said they were 'completely satisfied' or 'slightly satisfied' with the reception service.
- Comments were made on staff being helpful.
- 203 patients (73%) patients said they were 'completely satisfied' or 'slightly satisfied' with the quality of medical care and treatment at the practice.

Results of Visit

The Practice

The practice has 9800 patients.

The practice has two sites one at the Mervyn Vaz Centre and one at Prince Philip House. We were informed that patients will be notified of the location of their appointment. We visited the practice at the Prince Philip House. There was clear signage from the road to the practice and to the entrance, however, there was no exterior signage displaying the opening days and hours.

There is a car park for the building located on the opposite side of Malabar Road, which had available spaces. The smaller car park directly in front of the building, with 13 spaces, was full. Five of these spaces were designated for GPs and one for the Police.

We were told there is one disabled parking space available outside the main entrance on the right hand side. However, there is a drop-off area directly outside the front entrance, providing flat access to the building through wide automatic doors.

The practice is located in one area of the ground floor of the Prince Philip House Health and Community Centre. We were informed that the building is owned by the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT), which is responsible for maintenance and décor. The overall internal ambiance feels plain and official rather than warm and community oriented. However, the GP reception area has a more colourful and welcoming atmosphere. There are lifts available for the upstairs rooms for staff use only, we were told these rooms are not used for patients.

Reception and waiting areas

The foyer is a spacious, circular room with a high ceiling, serving as the practice's waiting area. It is shared with LPT, with each having its own reception desk. One room off the foyer is occupied by the Police and a former children's area is no longer in use. The reception desk has two levels, one of which is lowered for accessibility.

A second waiting area is located along the corridor leading to the 5 clinical rooms, opposite a door to LPT services. The seating consists of ten small, freestanding chairs with soft plastic seats, none of which have armrests.

The foyer is well-lit, tidy, and features plain décor. An electronic sign-in screen is positioned near the entrance, alongside a hand sanitiser dispenser. During our visit, only a few chairs were occupied, as patients were called in quickly with minimal waiting time.



Privacy at reception is limited due to the echo in the room and the absence of background noise or music. However, we were informed that any available clinical room can be used for confidential discussions if needed.

The video screen and scrolling text display next to the desk were not functioning. We were told they were awaiting repair after flood damage and are typically used for displaying health messages. Currently, clinicians come out to collect their patients.

A large roll-up banner display by the front door publicised online appointment booking. Another stood next to the reception desk publicising the fastest way to book appointments.



Appointments

Appointments can be made online or by telephone. Online bookings is encouraged by the practice. We observed patients entering the practice and being attended to promptly by the reception staff. The Anima automated triage system is used and is overseen by the on duty GP. Appointments can be made for 2 weeks in advance. From February, patients will be able to request appointments 4 weeks in advance. The Anima system will also signpost patients to services such as Pharmacy First.

Despite text reminders, we were told by staff that the practice has a higher non-attendance rate than most other practices. This may be attributed to the complex and challenging circumstances some patients and families experience. GPs will telephone patients if their missed appointment is clinically important.

If all appointment slots are taken urgent appointments are handled by the duty GP at the end of the day.

Home visits are made by the DHU Healthcare out-of-hours service. Social prescribers are also available to support home visits alongside practice staff.

We were told the patient demographic is very ethnically diverse covering deprived areas with some patients living with drug and alcohol addiction. Sometimes liaison with other agencies is required. Patients often require much longer than the allocated 10 minutes for consultations. The practice is considering 15-minute appointment slots.

If patients do not have a translator, the staff are able to cover a broad range of common languages. 360 Language Line translation service and online translation services are also used. Information is available to patients.

Accessibility

A disabled toilet was located near the reception area, equipped with baby changing and breastfeeding facilities. The toilet has adequate space, was clean and well-maintained, and an alarm cord was present.

Other toilets are off a corridor from the foyer but not signed from the foyer. The toilets were clean with checklists showing daily cleaning.

A hearing loop sign is clearly displayed at the practice desk. Additionally, one section of the desk is lower, providing accessible service for wheelchair users. We were told Braille can be requested.



Additional needs are accommodated through supportive leaflets for special educational needs, and staff are required to undergo regular training in learning disabilities (LD) to stay up to date. Patients with additional needs are given priority, with longer appointment times, and the system will alert staff if a patient has any additional requirements.

We were told that when patients use the online booking system, they can submit requests in their own language, and the practice will receive them in English. Also, the patients can get help from reception staff to fill out the request if patients are unable to use the booking system.

Information available to patients

The practice website is clearly written and easy to navigate. The commonly accessed topics are given a high profile. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) rating and Complaints process are easily found online.

Various practice notices were displayed around the reception desk, including a large stand-up sign guiding patients on using the online system and its available services. Leaflets encouraged patients to share their views, provide feedback, and learn how to make a complaint or give compliments. Displayed on the reception desk is the feedback given from patients for the month of December, what the patients have said and what the practice is doing about the concerns brought up.

Smaller notices covered a range of health messages, including data privacy. Leaflets on Data Privacy and Complaints & Compliments were available in a rack as well; Friends & Family feedback forms are available on a table near the waiting area chairs.

A small-print notice on the LPT board in a corridor provided information on Leicester Health Hubs and the NHS 111 service.



We were told the practice is unable to display information boards, the boards get taken down if any are displayed.

Staffing

Social prescribers are shared across the Primary Care Network (PCN). The practice has three in-house pharmacists who handle medication reviews, along with Advanced Practitioners as some of the Advanced Practitioners are Paramedics and two physiotherapists, one of whom is qualified to administer joint injections.

The practice has reception staff, management, and doctors. We were informed that a new GP will be joining the practice in March.

Patient Participation Group (PPG)

The PPG meet quarterly and is regularly consulted on communication issues including the practice website and social prescribing. They provide helpful links with other community groups for communication health messages.

Additional information

We were told the practice faces several challenges and difficulties. Limited space and lack of control over the premises prevent them from making desired improvements such as improving seating area, information boards etc. Staff recruitment, particularly for receptionists, is challenging, as areas with lower deprivation tend to be more attractive workplaces. Additionally, some patients, struggling with personal difficulties, can be abusive towards staff. To address this, staff receive conflict resolution training, and DHU provides health and wellbeing support.

We were told the practice is looking to implement a telephone call-back system as part of its ongoing developments to improve patient communication and accessibility.

Patient feedback

A survey was completed on the visit, where we asked if patients would like to take part in the survey, and we received **350** responses. See Appendix 1 for the survey responses. Where we asked for comments, we have themed the responses and provided a selection of patient comments.

Recommendations

We recommend that The Heron GP – St Matthews Branch:

1	Consider all the comments recorded from patients and what the implications are for the operation of the practice.
2	Produce a guide to help patients navigate and make the most of the new online booking system, providing clear instructions on how it works.
3	Explain to patients why they are given a particular clinician at the time of their appointment.
4	Consider displaying practice opening days and hours at the entrance of the practice.
5	Liaise with ICB (Integrated Care Board) to address challenges faced regarding making improvements to the practice.
6	Goes ahead with implementing a telephone call-back system for patients.
7	Considers adding a separate telephone line that people can call if they need to cancel their appointments to reduce the number of no shows/ missed appointments.

Service provider response

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

DHU Healthcare C.I.C. acknowledges the findings and recommendations from the January 2025 Enter & View Report by Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire regarding The Heron GP – St Matthews Branch. We are grateful for the feedback, which reflects both strengths and areas for improvement. In response to the recommendations, we will look at implementing the following actions:

1. **Enhancing Communication and Accessibility:** To improve accessibility and reduce waiting times, we will explore ways to refine our online booking system, making it more user-friendly and easier to navigate, in collaboration with our patients. We will undertake a thorough review of all patient comments received, categorise them into themes, and develop targeted actions to address the common concerns and suggestions. This will ensure that our improvements are aligned with the specific needs and preferences of our patients.
2. **Operational Improvements:** We acknowledge the need for clearer signage at our facilities. We will ensure that practice opening days and hours are prominently displayed at the entrance. Additionally, we are examining ways to better optimise our appointment scheduling system to more effectively manage urgent care needs.
3. **Patient Engagement and Feedback:** We will maintain our engagement with the Patient Participation Group (PPG) to incorporate their insights into improving patient communications. We are also refining our processes to ensure that patient feedback is promptly addressed and integrated into our service improvement plans.
4. **Staff and Patient Support:** We will enhance our conflict resolution training to better equip our staff to manage patient interactions, especially under challenging circumstances. We also aim to expand support for our diverse patient demographic through improved translation services and accessibility measures.

Overall, while the feedback has been predominantly positive, there are themes requiring further improvement, which we are committed to addressing. We acknowledge that access remains a recurring theme and are dedicated to providing assurance that both access and overall communication with our patients will improve. DHU Healthcare is committed to working collaboratively with Healthwatch, our patients, and the community to enhance the quality of care provided at The Heron GP – St Matthews Branch.

Distribution

The report is for distribution to the following:

- The Heron GP – St Mathews Branch
- LLR Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Leicester City Council (LCC)
- NHS England (Leicestershire and Lincolnshire) Local Area Team
- Healthwatch England and the local Healthwatch Network
- Published on www.healthwatchll.com

Appendix 1: Survey Findings

350 Patients

Q1. When did you last visit your GP practice?

273 (81%) - In the last 2 years

66 (19%) - Over 2 years ago

11 - Unanswered

Q2. How did you book your last appointment? (Percentage exceeds past 100% as patients choose multiple answers.)

97 (34%) - Telephone

124 (44%) - Online Booking Services

75 (26%) - In Person

28 (10%) Other (please specify): NHS 111, visited the surgery, invitation back for tests

67 - Unanswered

Q3. How easy is it to get through to your surgery on the telephone to make an appointment?

19 (7%) - Very Easy

36 (13%) - Easy

45 (16%) - Difficult

167 (60%) - Very Difficult

12 (4%) - Not sure

71 - Unanswered

Q4. When you last contacted the GP Practice, how long did it take you to get through on the telephone?

4 (2%) - Less than 1 minute
17 (6%) - 1-5 minutes
15 (5%) - 6-10 minutes
17 (6%) - 11-15 minutes
82 (30%) - 15- 60 minutes
143 (51%) - Over an hour
72 - Unanswered

Q5. Are you happy with who you have seen at the time of your appointment?

214 (77%) - Yes
64 (23%) - No
72 - Unanswered

Q6. In the last 2 years have you had a telephone or online consultation with a practitioner?

203 (72%) - Yes
78 (28%) - No
69 - Unanswered

Q7. How satisfied were you with the appointment?

38 (19%) - Completely Satisfied
64 (31%) - Very Satisfied
43 (21%) - Neutral
26 (13%) - Slightly satisfied.
32 (16%) - Not at all satisfied
147 - Unanswered

Q8. In the last 2 years have you had to book an urgent appointment?

139 (50%) - Yes
139 (50%) - No
72 - Unanswered

Q9. Were you able to see a doctor or clinician on the same day for urgent appointments?

64 (46%) – Yes

74 (54%) – No

212 – Unanswered

Q10. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the practice opening hours?

35 (13%) – Completely Satisfied

64 (23%) – Very Satisfied

98 (35%) – Neutral

32 (11%) – Slightly satisfied

51 (18%) – Not at all satisfied

70 – Unanswered

Q11. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the reception service?

85 (31%) – Completely Satisfied

94 (34%) – Slightly Satisfied

30 (11%) – Slightly Dissatisfied

68 (24%) – Completely Dissatisfied

73 – Unanswered

Q12. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the prescription service?

123 (44%) – Completely Satisfied

78 (28%) – Slightly Satisfied

20 (17%) – Slightly Dissatisfied

30 (11%) – Completely Dissatisfied

28 (10%) – Not used it

71 – Unanswered

Q13. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of medical care and treatment at this surgery?

103 (37%) – Completely Satisfied

100 (36%) – Slightly Satisfied

32 (11%) – Slightly Dissatisfied

44 (16%) – Completely Dissatisfied

71 – Unanswered

People were asked for any other comments including what they like and dislike the most about the GP practice.

Like:

"I am very happy when I see a certain doctor, as some always seem to say it's my age. I know locum doctors don't know me, it must be hard. One doctor gives me a 110 and more."

"Online system is easy to use."

"The Heron GP is an amazing surgery with very professional doctors and staff. I particularly appreciate the convenience of booking appointments through the online system, although I understand it might not be as easy for others. However, it can be challenging to book an appointment over the phone when the online system is not working."

"Very happy with our doctor."

"Wow, that doctor on call visits was so nice and caring."

"Very professional and understood my needs."

"The staff are polite, helpful professionals."

"Considering what a busy practice this is, I think all the staff are doing a fantastic job. They try and accommodate whenever possible. They all listen to your concerns."

"GPs are great once you see them, and they do follow up with me."

"The Anima online service and Airmid App are good. Telephone appointments with the doctor allow arranging an actual exam if necessary, which is good. I would like to be able to request a prescription review on Anima."

"It's a long time since I have used the telephone service. It's easier to use the online service."

"It's a very good practice. I live close to the surgery and pharmacy, so it makes going to my appointment and picking up my prescription easy!"

"There are literally two doctors I can mention who seem to have some level of care for their patients."

"I see Doctor every time I go as he knows me well and knows my history. He is very good."

Neutral:

"I like that the doctors are always kind, explain very well, and listen to patients. However, I dislike that the reception staff never listen to or understand patients' needs for appointments."

"Overall, it's okay. The only thing is that when you are waiting to see the doctor, you can hear everything when speaking to the receptionist, so it's not private."

Dislike:

"Some of the receptionist are so bad when you tell them something they not helpful and ignore you."

"One of the worst health centres in Leicester staff at reception RUDE very rude have no clue what's going on. At one point I thought they were not being serious so I went to the gp sat down without having an appointment and called the receptionist from my phone and they knew the phone was ringing and just kept chatting with other colleague one of the worst experiences I have ever experience in my 30 years of life."

"I am not happy with online booking because it is difficult to understand."

"Online appointment questions are too many and repetitive. That time is very busy because children are going to school, and I need to get them ready. If I'm busy with kids, then I miss my appointment, or if I book my appointment, then I'm late getting the kids to school. Same issue with call appointments as well. Please find an easier solution."

"The phone line are so busy and couldn't get any appointment over the phone."

"I'm 86 years old and find trying to get an appointment is virtually impossible my son has to request everything on line."

"Ordering medication not on repeat is not easy as I can't always speak with someone about why I require certain meds. There should be another phone number available for this service."

"It is a complete nightmare booking an appointment on the anima system, due to not getting appointment have had to call 111. It should not be this way. Need to go back to old ways by telephoning for an appointment or the way a lot surgeries do it via NHS app. This way I can actually get an appointment not just some leaflet. Too many questions to fill out on the anima system too."

"Receptionists, doctors, prescriptions—everything is very good, but online appointment booking is a very, very bad system."

"Unable to book appointments during any time of the day. Only available to book in a very small window at 8am. Older people struggle with online system as they are not very familiar with it. Booking unavailable over weekends. Unable to cancel the appointment or change an appointment as online website gives error message. We cannot even use telephone either so it's impossible to do either way. We are then penalised for not attending."

"It is very difficult to book an appointment online. You can only book at 8 AM, and by 8.20 AM, nothing is available. That's a bad situation, and then Ill or emergency is the only option, with a minimum 8-hour wait."

"Difficulty accessing relevant services (the online system should have made things easier to access—in short, it hasn't)."

"Discouraged by deception on multiple occasions that an appointment was booked to be with a doctor, only to discover this was not the case. In more than one instance, the healthcare professional did not identify themselves, and I had to ask their role to confirm that they were not a doctor."

"The only thing I like is getting my medicine after suffering to get an appointment and being dealt with in a very unprofessional manner. Honestly, worst GP in the world ever, period."

"I have been prescribed medication from a nurse, not a doctor, which I refuse to take."

"I have said many times that the telephone system is really bad. You can never get through. I had to ring the pharmacy to remind them that my brown inhaler was due. The prescription hadn't been signed. I have to say the pharmacy dealt with it very quickly."

"Didn't get any medication prescribed after being ill for four weeks. Now ill for seven weeks."

It took a few days for a prescription to be sent to the pharmacy for my daughter. Not very efficient."

"Waiting for someone to answer the phone after 3 hours of being caller number 1 and still didn't answer. Sorting prescriptions out when they should be on repeat and deciding to give on different days, although you have mental health issues and expect to keep going back is not good enough."

"It is often the case when calling the surgery, it can take between 2 hrs - 6 hrs to get through, and sometimes the call is cut off from the surgery before getting through after waiting hours on the call."

"I think telephoning the surgery is not very good as quite often it is not answered, and also not being able to see a doctor can be frustrating."

"Cannot get booked in at all. The phone just keeps ringing and ringing and ringing, and I cannot get any further."

"Waiting for someone to answer the phone after 3 hours of being caller number 1 and still didn't answer."



Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire
9 Newarke Street
Leicester
LE1 5SN

www.healthwatchll.com
t: 0116 257 4999
e: enquiries@healthwatchll.com



@HealthwatchLeic