



Enter & View Report

Heatherbrook Medical Centre

November 2025

Contents

Report details.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	2
Disclaimer	2
Purpose of the visit.....	3
Methodology.....	3
Summary of the findings.....	3
Results of visit.....	4
Recommendations.....	7
Service provider response.....	7
Distribution	7
Appendix 1: Survey findings	8

Report details

Details of Visit	
Service Address	242 Astill Lodge Road, Leicester LE4 1EF
Service Provider	Willows Group Ltd
Date and time	10am, Tuesday 20th November 2025
Authorised Representatives undertaking the visit	Howard Marshall Kim Marshal-Nichols Debbie Watson

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Leicester and 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 Leicestershire.

Purpose of the visit

- To gather patient views of the service provided at Heatherbrook Medical Centre.
- 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 **271** responses.

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

Summary of the findings

Summary

- Heatherbrook Medical Centre is part of the Willows Group and serves over 3,700 patients, including nearby care homes.
- The practice is a small, single-storey building with step-free access and limited parking (one disabled space).
- Small waiting area with two notice boards; no Carers Charter, Social Prescribing, or Friends and Family Test information displayed.
- Self check-in screen and hand sanitiser available.
- Seating available but no chairs with armrests or bariatric chairs.
- Calls answered at the practice between 8–9am, then diverted to a call centre.
- Appointments can be booked up to one week in advance; urgent appointments within 48 hours.
- Emergency slots held daily.
- Standard appointments are 10 minutes, with flexibility for complex needs or interpreters.
- Key issues raised: appointment access, continuity of GP and online booking.

271 patients responded to the survey

- 95 (35%) of patients said that it took them **16-60 minutes** to get through to the practice by phone and 22 patients (8%) it took **over an hour** to get through to the practice by phone.
- Comments were made about not being able to book appointments when ringing in and unable to book appointments using the online system.
- 193 (71%) of patients have said they have attempted to book an appointment where they needed to see a

doctor or clinician on the same day.

- The last time a patient requested an urgent-same day appointment, 37 (19%) of patients said they were offered a same day appointment at the practice with a doctor, however 52 (27%) of patients said they were asked to call back later or the following day.
- 39 patients (15%) said the telephone service to book appointments was 'good' however 66 patients (24%) said it was 'poor'.
- 132 patients (49%) said face to face appointments was 'excellent' or 'good'.
- 125 patients (47%) said the reception service was 'excellent' or 'good'.
- Comments were made on staff being friendly and helpful.
- 125 patients (47%) said the quality of medical care and treatment was 'excellent' or 'good'.

Results of visit

The Practice

The Heatherbrook Medical Centre is located in Beaumont Leys and serves over 3,700 patients and nearby care homes.

It is a single-story building with level access via wide doors. There are four clinical rooms. The practice manager told us that having four clinical rooms is not enough to support other clinicians that visit the practice. There's a small council owned car park at the side of the building with one disabled place.

Reception and waiting areas

The internal décor is plain and clean, giving a tidy appearance.

There is a small waiting area with two notice boards with notices and information but no Carers Charter, Carers Support or Social Prescribing information. Reception is to one side of the waiting area.

There is a self check-in screen and hand sanitiser which are easily accessible by the entrance.

There were several rows of chairs, however, none had arm rests and there were no bariatric chairs. There were no queues whilst we were there with only a few patients waiting to be called. The clinician comes into the waiting area to collect the patient. There was no background noise or music.

Privacy at reception is limited. We were told that the receptionist can usually find a room if the patient requests privacy.

The toilets have emergency alarm pull cords for disabled patients. There were no wheelchairs available. A hearing loop was in place.

There is no breast-feeding room, the Practice Manager told us patients are happy to breastfeed their babies in the waiting area. There is a poster displayed 'Breastfeeding welcome here.' There were no Friends and Family boxes or forms.

There is not a children's play area.

We raised our concerns of the wording of the notice about prescriptions which states 'All prescriptions that are issued during your consultation with our clinician will be signed at the end of



the morning/ afternoon session and not at the time of the appointment.' We had asked that would patients have to go back to the surgery to collect their prescription, however, the Practice Manager said that wasn't the case. We were told "prescriptions are not handed out in reception - these go electronically to the patients chosen pharmacy - we will only ever print a script out if it's needed due to security, we rarely print prescriptions."

Appointments

The Practice Manager explained to us how appointment booking was managed.

Between 8.00am and 9.00am incoming telephone calls are directed to the receptionists at the Practice. After 9.00am, they go to a call centre in India. We were told that there are 30 call handlers, which are split into small groups, each dedicated to a specific practice in the Willows Group.

Patients can book appointments up to one week ahead. Urgent appointments can be up to 48 hours ahead.

Two slots are held vacant for emergency appointments - one in morning and one in afternoon. These are kept available up to 1 hour in advance.

Appointments are usually 10 minutes, but longer time can be allocated for patients with multiple health conditions. Extra time can also be allowed for patients who require an interpreter. If the patient does not bring their own interpreter, phone interpretation services are used.

If a patient cannot physically attend the surgery and a telephone appointment is not adequate, a home visit is possible. 30 minutes are allocated for the GP to travel, see the patient and return.

When a patient calls, the receptionist/ telephonist will follow a 'template' of questions to carry out a 'non-clinical triage' and decide who the patient should be seen by (i.e. Pharmacy First, GP, nurse etc.)

Automated text reminders are sent out 24 hours before the appointment. Appointments can be cancelled via the NHS App, online, telephone or in person.

We were told that the Practice will call the patient directly if the patient requests a direct call when initially speaking to the call centre.

Medication

An in-house Pharmacy team at the Willows Group HQ manage patient reviews and contact patients as required (e.g. when tests are needed). If something arises that the Pharmacist cannot deal with, they will refer to a GP.

Batches of blood test results are received 3 times a day. GPs review the results and send texts to patients whether the results are okay or not. Specific details of the results can then be accessed via the NHS App. Similar procedures are followed with X-Rays, scans etc.

Accessibility

Step free access is via the wide front door. There are no wheelchairs available for patient use.

All publicly accessible rooms, including reception, are located on the ground floor.

The toilet is equipped with emergency alarm pull cords.

Information available to patients

Two noticeboards with health information are on the main wall in the waiting area. There were information posters on Data privacy which can be viewed via QR code, chaperone information, CQC report and a mental health poster.



We did not see any information on the Carer's Charter. We were told the 'Friends and Family Test' box has been removed from reception as it is not used for its purpose so it is kept away from reception and the team hand the forms out. There was a notice about Appointment and Complaints Procedures.

The practice does not have its own website; it is included within the Willows Group corporate site. There is limited information about the specific practice and it does not include the names or photographs of GPs.

Staffing

The practice employs two GPs but only one visits at a time.

Patient Participation Group (PPG)

The Practice Manager told us that the practice does not currently have its own PPG, but one that is spread across several of the 'Willows' practices.

We were told that the PPG, collect patient feedback via emails and through the website. The top three key challenges raised by patients are appointment access, seeing the same GP each time and online booking.

Additional Information

The Practice makes use of an outside service provider 'CHEC' Community healthcare, who offer Ophthalmology, Gastroenterology, Dermatology and Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) services, 7 days a week.

We were told that the biggest difficulty/challenge is patients coming from different GP Practices, expect to see their usual GP.

There is a care home team based at the Practice that look after the care homes in their area.

Patient feedback

A survey was shared with patients and we received 271 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 Heatherbrook Health Centre:

1	Review the responses and themed comments to prioritise improvements in booking appointments, telephone/call centre processes, group practice concerns and clinical concerns.
2	Review the 'prescription' notice on the notice board to help patients better understand why prescriptions will not be given during consultation.
3	Review the online booking system to ensure patients can easily access and use it to book appointments.
4	Consider offering more same-day appointment slots when feasible, if not offer clear alternatives (such as Pharmacy First) and communicate the pathway consistently.
5	Consider expanding the information displayed on the two noticeboards in the waiting area to include the Carers Charter, Social Prescribing services and details of the Friends and Family Test so that forms and a collection box are available for patients.

Service provider response

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

"Pharmacy First is offered as an alternative service depending on the patients concerns and on the day appointments are booked accordingly. We do not advise patients to see GP's at other sites - we only offer Nurses/ HCA appointments across the group."

Distribution

The report is for distribution to the following:

- Heatherbrook Health Centre
- 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

271 Patients

Q1. When did you last visit your GP practice?

(166) 61% - In the last 3 months

(38) 14% - In the last 6 months

(28) 10% - In the last year

(24) 9% - 1-2 years ago

(15) 6% - Over 2 years ago

Q2. How did you book your last appointment?

(155) 57% - Telephone

(39) 14% - Online booking services

(17) 7% - NHS App

(39) 14% - In person

(5) 2% - Someone else booked for me (e.g., family, carer)

(16) 6% - Other (please specify): "Nurse prebooked for bloods." "Referral." "NHS 111." "Airmid." "They contacted me." "Text from surgery." "Had to get my then therapist to contact the surgery regarding an appointment as I couldn't get one (had been trying for 4-6 weeks to make an appointment by phone)."

Q3. When you last contacted the practice by phone, how long did it take you to get through?

(4) 2% - Less than 1 minute

(41) 15% - 1-5 minutes

(38) 14% - 6-10 minutes

(56) 21% - 11-15 minutes

(95) 35% - 16- 60 minutes

(22) 8% - Over an hour

(3) 1% - I used the call-back function

(10) 4% - Not applicable - I have not contacted the practice by phone

2 - Unanswered

Q4. In the last two years, have you attempted to book an appointment where you needed to see a doctor or clinician on the same day?

(193) 71% - Yes

(58) 22% - No

(20) 7% - Can't remember

Q5. The last time you requested an urgent same-day appointment, what was the outcome?

(37) 19% - I was offered a same day appointment at my GP practice with a doctor

(5) 3% - I was offered a same day appointment at my GP practice with a different professional

(12) 6% - I was offered a same day appointment elsewhere (such as at a nearby practice or healthcare hub)

(17) 9% - I was offered an appointment for another day

(15) 8% - I was signposted to an alternative service

(52) 27% - I was asked to call back later or the following day

(54) 28% - I was not offered an appointment or any of the alternatives listed above

79 - Unanswered

Q6. Please rate your most recent experience with the practice on the following aspect: A total of 271 people responded; however, not all selected from the provided answer choices.

Answer Choices	Excellent	Good	Neutral	Poor	Very poor	Not applicable/ Not used	Response Total
Telephone service to book appointments	6% (17)	15% (39)	13% (34)	24% (66)	38% (103)	4% (12)	271
Practice Opening hours	8% (21)	35% (96)	33% (89)	15% (40)	6% (17)	3% (7)	270
Reception Service	14% (37)	33% (91)	24% (66)	15% (40)	11% (30)	3% (7)	271
Repeat prescription service	21% (56)	38% (103)	14% (39)	5% (13)	6% (17)	16% (43)	271
Quality of medical care and treatment	11% (28)	36% (97)	30% (82)	13% (35)	5% (14)	5% (14)	270
Face to face appointments	14% (38)	35% (94)	23% (63)	13% (35)	11% (29)	4% (12)	271
Online appointments	4% (11)	12% (31)	17% (45)	13% (35)	18% (49)	36% (98)	269
Telephone appointments	8% (21)	16% (42)	24% (65)	17% (47)	19% (52)	16% (43)	270
Ease of accessing information (website, emails, SMS reminders)	9% (25)	32% (87)	26% (70)	12% (30)	11% (29)	10% (28)	269

Q7. Do you have any other feedback about your experience with your GP practice? What do you like most and what could be improved?

Key themes: booking appointments, phone system/call centre, issues with group practice and clinical concerns.

Like:

"I feel like my GP practice is great, the receptionist is friendly. Doctor is of the best GPs I've ever seen, so understanding and down to earth can really look at things from a patient's perspective. Not patronising or demeaning, looks at things as a whole and is so reassuring. I feel like the surgery could improve on having more GPs employed to reduce waiting times, but I work for the NHS too I completely understand with funds and cuts. I don't blame the doctors I blame the system."

"All the doctors, nurses, pharmacists, support staff and reception staff who are always very helpful and clinically excellent. Your time and clinical expertise are greatly appreciated. I've been at the Heatherbrook practice since 1988 and I've always had excellent healthcare."

"The nurses have been great, polite cheerful, a pleasant experience."

"Good GP."

Neutral:

"I usually access my GP by texting my GP personally. It is otherwise very difficult for me to get appointments at a time suitable for me. My GP is very helpful in seeing me at short notice. I am frustrated at the multiple appointments for blood tests which can all be clubbed as one and aligned better."

"Online appointments need putting back on. Surgery hours extending. With a building extension and still not enough for an appointment. Autism understanding and support (GPs need training). I'm having to look at moving to get the help needed. Reception staff brilliant."

"The GP practice is very good; the problem is getting to see your doctor. I ring at 8am I get an answer at 9am and that all the appointments have gone, ring tomorrow or ring an ambulance, NHS 111."

"Whilst the consultation with the doctor is good, the appointment system is not. The last time I needed to see a doctor it took me 4 days before I could get an appointment. Very frustrating."

"When you can get an appointment, the service is good. Very difficult to get appointments for blood tests at my own surgery. As I get older, I would like to be seen by my own surgery and not have to travel."

Dislike:

"Booking an appointment is like getting blood out of a stone! You call at exactly 8am & you're 20th in a queue- after 19 minutes holding, you are told to call the next day & the same thing happens again! Likewise with booking online at 6:30am! Very poor service indeed."

"Never any appointments to book online either face to face or telephone or bloods. And trying to speak to someone on the phone is terrible you wait ages."

"I have tried to see a doctor a few times without any success I was only offered a telephone appointment which was ridiculous, so I had to visit the hospital instead."

"In the last 2 years I have been unwell on 2 occasions and tried to book an appointment to see a doctor, on both occasions after ringing every day for a fortnight I gave up. I have had to attend work when unwell as I was unable to access a GP for a Fit Note. I am fearful for my health if I need to see a GP in an emergency. To be honest I feel as if I do not have access to a GP."

"Need to be able to book appointments in advance, especially when told by doctor that I need a follow up appointment but cannot book one."

"Answering the phone. Listening to the patients concerns. Too quick to treat the symptoms not cause."

"The new system you have in place where the call goes to a main line/call centre is horrible. The people who man that phone have no initiative. Example - I called asked to book an appointment for my 2 year old son. They said he was registered at another surgery further away rather than the one 5 minutes from the house when I told them this was a mistake the answer was there's nothing we can do. Not to check if this can be changed or how or call the surgery to confirm anything. Just no sorry nothing we can do. In this case I had to travel to my surgery at which point the receptionist realised the error corrected it and booked the appointment."

"Don't like having to use a call centre abroad to try and get an appointment to see a doctor. I am never able to get one. When I was able to ring my surgery direct, they were usually able to fit me in."

"The call centre staff are extremely unhelpful and ask personal in detail information about medical issues even when you tell them it's private and personal and that you don't want to tell them they behave extremely difficult. They're rude. They repeat back incorrect information when I ask them to pass on information to the receptionist at the surgery for them to contact me back with medical information and they give me incorrect advice stating the pharmacist stated it on the system and everything is a nightmare when dealing with them."

"Everyone calling at 8am on the same day isn't working - I haven't been able to get in for so many issues and now I am suffering again."

“Cannot get an appointment and cannot get a call back off from the reception staff. Absolutely appalling service.”

“Don’t like going to other practices for bloods and other appointments when Heatherbrook is on my doorstep. ”

“There is no availability of appointments when required and even though I’m registered at Heatherbrook, I’ve been asked to visit the partnered GP practice which on the other end of town for me. I don’t think this is very helpful for patients who should be able to access primary care close to home. There is a wait of 1 to 2 months sometimes to get a regular appointment which again is not beneficial to patients. The medical staff need to have better training as I have had personal experience of incorrect diagnosis leading to major risk to life.”

“I had to have a blood test and had to go to the other side of the city to have them done. So took me two buses and nearly 2 hours to have a blood test that should take 15 minutes. I have also been asked to have a health check and again, no appointments at my local surgery. The cost of both time and money is ridiculous.”

“Very frustrated that they push for me to have appointments at surgeries other than my local one. I don’t drive and it would mean me getting two buses to get there and two to get back home. I live a few minutes’ walk away from my local surgery. I have very poor eyesight and do not know the areas where the other surgeries are so to get to them is quite scary and intimidating for me. On the phone I am made to feel like I am very awkward in wanting to be seen at my local surgery. When trying to book appointments online there are rarely local ones available. After some effort I managed to get a local appointment in October for my annual routine blood tests etc which the surgery cancelled the day before. I rang and was told they couldn’t fit me in again until mid December. Which is fine as I am happy to wait, but I keep being sent texts to book an appointment, so they don’t seem to recognise that I have already rebooked it. Things don’t seem to be very ‘joined up’. Once I actually get to any appointments at the surgery and I am seeing the staff face to face I can’t fault them, but getting an appointment there is an absolute nightmare.”

“Stop palming off appointments to clinics the other side of Leicester that are part of your “practice” or business.”

“Online appointment booking currently seems non-existent and trying to book an NHS check in person, at the surgery, results in appointments being offered for many weeks ahead at practices all over the city which are part of the Willows group. There is never any availability at our local surgery.”

“Online booking is not available even when trying to book at the time they are supposed to be

accessible. Even though I am supposed to have full access to my account, blood test results or scan results are never document.”

“I don’t even know how to use the GP anymore. It used to be that the NHS app worked, but it doesn’t seem to work anymore. I tried to use the system connect service the website tells you to use, but it doesn’t have my conditions. I tried the old app, but that doesn’t seem to work anymore. I tried emailing but never got a response. Tried the online triage, that didn’t get a response. Every service the website points you to either doesn’t work or isn’t applicable. I don’t know which still work let alone what the best route for support is. I’ve given up trying. The website should have simple routes on how to get help. Whenever I have a problem, I go on and try all the online triage services and they all send me in circles. I’m actually looking for another GP because despite the fact I actually like the doctor and they are very convenient I just can’t work out how to actually get help.”

“I am a full-time carer and it is difficult for me to get to an appointment. I cannot understand why you have to book a blood appointment at another surgery further away and weeks in advance when it is the surgery who want me to have the bloods done. There also needs to more be done to make things easier, less stressful and more accessible for people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Heatherbrook surgery is nowhere near as good as it used to be. Appointments are non-existent and it takes an age to get through on the phone.”

“Clinicians do not listen to patients, delays in referrals for onward treatment. More interested in sending out surveys about unrelated health conditions than dealing with existing ones.”

“There’s nothing I like. Some reception staff are rude and disrespectful. I feel there’s no care or duty of care in my personal case.”

“I don’t like much to be honest. My last visit was an awful experience. I went in with multiple joint pains, very painful. The doctor was very dismissive of my condition. Didn’t even examine me. Told me it was quite normal to be in excruciating pain.”

“The medical staff need to have better training as I have had personal experience of incorrect diagnosis leading to major risk to life.”

“Worst medical treatment I have received in the UK. Try to get an appointment is near impossible hopeless service.”

“Being treated with better respect with some of the GPs. Some of the receptionist treating you with better respect and being more helpful.”

"Can't get appointments when needed. Whenever we ring, we are told all the appointments have been booked though we have rung at 8am sharp. Even online appointments are gone if we are late few minutes."

"NHS App won't connect to practice, NHS digital confirmed it was a practice issue. The practice said they can't help, not been trained. I asked for an appointment because the app wouldn't work. Not interested. The NHS GP system is broken, took me 3 weeks to get a phone appointment, an absolute joke."

"I am at present trying to get a GP appointment everyday for 3 weeks now never any available and told to ring back following day or use the app that I don't use. Often very poor response from reception and at times very rude."

"After 3 weeks daily trying to get online appointment, no success, final appointment, to have assistance in getting Champix to stop me smoking after four months of trying, couldn't understand the doctor who had poor language skills in English, was advised she would call me back, heard nothing back."

"It's very difficult to get an appointment with a doctor. Every day you call at 8 a.m., and there are no available slots. There are never any appointments online either. They send you for a blood test, but then it turns out that the person taking the blood has nothing in the system, and you end up going home with nothing. The online app is unclear, and when you finally manage to book a visit, it says 'online face-to-face'. So, is it online or face-to-face? It should be much more understandable."

"Improve online booking system. Do not outsource call centre - where line is unclear."



Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire
9 Newarke Street
Leicester
LE1 5SN

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



@HealthwatchLeic