

**Our focussed work on
GP services in
Brighton and Hove**

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A. Executive summary

Healthwatch is consistently monitoring feedback on GP services. Where concerns arise, issues are escalated with providers, commissioners, the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England. We have a strong partnership with Commissioning and public engagement leads within our local Integrated Care System with whom we can raise concerns or queries to ensure that insight is taken into account and helps to shape current services and planning for the future. We also ensure that patients are listened to and kept informed of developments relating to GP services which may affect them.

Key areas of investigation undertaken by Healthwatch over the last 5 years have included:

- **Providing help and guidance to members of the public** who contact our volunteer-led helpline: concerns or issues with GP services are the third main reason why people contact Healthwatch Brighton and Hove (**see page 6**).
- **Collating the experiences and preferences of the public towards remote appointments** (alternatives to traditional face-to-face appointments). This work conducted in 2020 and 2023 was led by Head of Research, Lester Coleman, and has been shared with NHS Sussex who said “*We welcome the insight from this Healthwatch report and will make sure it informs the work we have planned for this year, and how further improvements can be delivered.*” (**see page 7**).
- **Supporting patients to escalate their concerns** over practice closure, merger or reduced services and helping them to overturn decisions, working with NHS Sussex colleagues. Our most recent work, led by Project Co-Ordinator Michelle Kay, resulted in a national ‘[Highly Commended](#)’ Award from [Healthwatch England](#) (**see page 9**).
- **‘Mystery Shopping’ by our volunteers of practice websites** and ‘Out-of-Hours’ phone messaging to assess the quality of information and signposting provided to patients and the public (**see page 12**).
- **Conducting reviews of all GP practices in the city** using our [Enter and View](#) powers. Led by Michelle Kay, we published in-depth reports in 2018 and 2019. As part of this work, we have routinely highlighted the reduced number of practices in our city and increased patient volumes, but also highlighted positive user experience and made recommendations designed to bring about an enhanced patient experience (**see pages 12 and 13**).
- **Supporting our Health and Care system** to promote changes and developments to GP practice and primary care during the coronavirus pandemic, as well as future plans. Increasing access to and reducing variability in primary care is an immediate priority for our Integrated Care System – to help more people get appointments at their GP practice as quickly as possible. See Section E for details of how our system is rising to the challenge.

B. Brighton and Hove in numbers



Brighton and Hove has 44 GPs per 100,000 patients and 31 GP practices

- In 2022, a [BBC article](#) reported [Nuffield Trust data](#) showing that Brighton and Hove has some of the fewest GPs in England, with just 44 GPs per 100,000 patients, whilst other areas of the country have more than 70. The report came after a [Kings Fund report](#) showed low levels of satisfaction amongst patients with GPs nationally, at just 38%.
- Brighton and Hove currently has 31 GP practices in 6 primary care networks. In 2015, we had 48. Since then, further GP Practices have closed or merged as Primary Care Networks have been established.
- In 2019, we conducted our last [city-wide review of GP practices](#) in the city and revealed that patient caseloads had increased from 2,394 patients per doctor in 2017/18 to 2,479 in 2018/2019. This was against an England average of 1,825 per doctor. At the same time, we highlighted how the number of GP Practices had decreased from 48 to 35 in just 4 years, between 2015 to 2019.
- Across England, [2021 data](#) shows that the number of patients per one GP ranges from 1,318 to 2,804. The equivalent figure is 2,204 patients per one GP for Brighton and Hove – still higher than the average for England.
- Data on GP appointments was [published by NHS](#) for the first time in October 2022. This showed that 149,886 appointments took place within GP practices in Brighton and Hove (984,232 across Sussex). This was a record number of appointments. The data also showed that nearly 70% of appointments in that month were face to face, but that across Sussex, 5% of all appointments (circa 40,000) were 'Did Not Attends'.
- In [December 2022](#), GP practices in Sussex made 52,549 more appointments than the same month in the previous year (December 2021); another record.
- In 2019, 89% of patients rated the overall quality of care they received from GPs as good or very good.

C. Context and the changing shape of GP practice

Primary care services in Brighton and Hove are exceeding patient expectations in many respects and nationally nearly three quarters of the public report having a good overall experience of their GP practice. However, practices are faced with the challenge of ever-increasing caseloads, increased complex and long-term conditions, in the context of an [ever-ageing population](#).

Our local GPs are working harder than ever before, yet many of the challenges patients face accessing their GP stem from the staff shortages that have affected services for many years. Nationally, practices struggle to recruit enough GPs, nurses or other professionals to meet the rising levels of need, because in many cases those staff simply do not exist. The fallout from the COVID pandemic has also seen a worrying rise in abuse towards GPs caused by delays in being able to access appointments, leading to patient frustration.

This overall sentiment is reflected in the [2022 annual GP Patient Survey](#) which found that 72% of patients reported having a good overall experience of their GP practice, which was down from 83% in 2021 and 82% in 2020. Whilst 53% said they found it easy to get through to their practice by phone, this was less than the 68% in 2021 and 65% in 2020.

Despite the challenges currently being faced by primary care, more than 52,000 appointments were held each working day in Sussex in December, a record number for 2022, with numbers of appointments being offered rising every month since the start of the year. This number is expected to increase. On average 43% of appointments are taking place on the same day as booking, nearly 17% within two to seven days of booking and 12.5% within 8 to 14 days. This is comparable to pre-pandemic and is above the national and regional average.

The same 2022 annual GP survey also found:

- 90% of patients felt involved as much as they wanted to be in decisions about their care and treatment (93% in 2021 and 93% in 2020)
- 85% of patients felt listened to (89% in 2021 and 88% in 2020)
- 83% felt they were given enough time (89% in 2021 and 86% in 2020)
- 83% felt treated with care and concern (88% in 2021 and 87% in 2020).

The changing face of general practice

Small scale general practice has held many benefits for both patients and providers over the last 50 years, but the traditional model of general practice is under pressure to provide primary medical services on a larger scale, delivered from larger units. This is driven by the need to strengthen and sustain general practice by achieving improved economies of scale and tackle workload and recruitment problems.

The following is a potted history of some key developments affecting GP Practice:

- Published in October 2014, the [Five Year forward View](#) (FYFV) highlighted the triple challenge facing the NHS of: responding to demographic change, improving quality/patient experience and maintaining financial control. Following the publication of Five Year Forward View (FYFV), NHS England published the [GP Forward View](#) in April 2016, setting out how the NHS sought to address some of these challenges in general practice. It stated: *“General practice must change to meet the needs of our changing populations. It needs to change the way it works, moving away from small single units to working across practices and across the primary–secondary care interface.”* Providing primary care services at scale will allow GP practices the opportunity to provide a wider range of services to their patients, while also retaining the personalised care that patients value.
- Prior to the formation of the Sussex [Integrated Care System](#) in 2022, primary care was already an area of focus for our Clinical Commissioning area. An earlier joint strategy for transforming health and social care in Brighton and Hove, called [Caring Together](#), had six Care Programmes which included Primary/Urgent Care Access. The primary care strategy included key themes, such as the creation of primary care at scale, improving resilience and delivering economies of scale, as well as the integration of services across communities, with a focus on workforce, skills and capacity. The vision for general practice in Brighton and Hove was to enable more working together in small groups covering populations of 30,000 to 50,000 registered patients.
- The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) (LTP), published in 2019, provides a framework for improving NHS services over the next 10 years. At that time, the Brighton and Hove Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) submitted to NHS England their response to the NHS LTP to form a coordinated Sussex Plan overseen by the Sussex Health and Care Partnership (SHCP), previously known as the Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs). The SHCP aimed to create an Integrated care system (ICS)¹ and as part of this, GP practices were forming [Primary Care Networks](#) (PCNs) in partnership with other practices. GP Practices within PCNs are expected to offer additional services to their core GP function, including extended access including virtual and roving GPs, extended hours, physiotherapy, minor surgery and social prescribing (wellbeing services such as support for long-term conditions, complex social needs and mental health support).² PCNs are led by clinical directors who may be a GP, general practice nurse, clinical pharmacist or other clinician working in general practice. Over 99% of general practices are part of a PCN.
- During the same period, changes within the Emergency Department in hospitals (A&E), were affecting GP capacity. GPs have been present in A&E for some time, working shifts alongside hospital doctors. In 2017, GP Streaming (Primary Care Front Door) was

¹ See NHS England’s explanation of the ICS here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/integratedcare/integrated-care-systems/>

² See NHS England’s “Social prescribing” for further information: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/>

introduced at the Royal Sussex County Hospital A&E from 8.00am to 11.00pm each day. This was a dedicated GP service and an alternative to seeing a hospital doctor. In 2021, [Urgent Treatment Centres³](#) were also introduced as a distinct service operating at the Royal Sussex County Hospital. The new centre focuses on the care of patients who do not need to stay in hospital. It has increased the capacity in A&E for these patients and allowed for better patient flow through all parts of the department.

- In January 2023, our new Integrated Care strategy '[Improving Lives Together](#)' was published. At the same time, health and care partners have set out the immediate and long term priorities for Sussex. These priorities make it clear that over the coming year, improvements will be made across four key areas, including *"increasing access to and reducing variability in primary care – to help more people get appointments at their GP practice as quickly as possible"*
- Integrated care boards (ICBs) which in Sussex is called "[NHS Sussex](#)" will be expected to 'hold practices to account' under the [health secretary's new plan](#) to improve access to primary care and provide support to those GP practices 'with the most acute access challenges to improve performance'. The plan has already seen data on how many appointments each GP practice is offering being published, alongside waiting times (see above).

D. Patient experience and research on GP services gathered by Healthwatch Brighton and Hove

In this section, we have highlighted some of the key reports, surveys and collation of public opinion that Healthwatch has worked or collaborated on since 2018. Some projects were delivered in partnership with the two other Healthwatch teams in East and West Sussex under the banner "Healthwatch in Sussex". The projects are listed in chronological order, starting with the most recent first.

Our helpline

The Healthwatch Brighton and Hove helpline service helps people to access the right health or social care service or organisation for their needs. We also offer information if people want to share their experience or make a complaint. Two trained volunteers help to run the service. Between April to December 2022 we provided help and support to 206 people. 33 of the queries we received related to GP services and were complaints.

³ Read this article by Brighton and Hove Independent for further information on UTCs:

<https://www.brightonandhoveindependent.co.uk/health/new-urgent-treatment-centre-to-open-at-royal-sussex-county-hospital-1-9003072>

2023

Access to GP appointments across Sussex – public opinion

The aim of this project was to assess people's views about accessing GP appointments. A total of 851 people responded to the survey across Sussex and nearly 41% were from Brighton and Hove. For some questions, we were able to see whether people's views and experiences about remote GP appointments had changed from a [survey](#) undertaken in June 2020 completed by 2185 people). The survey provides comparative results with the 2020 survey, identifying some trends:

- The proportion of people delaying a GP appointment had increased to 56% in December 2022, up from 37% in June 2020.
- 38.5% of people had used an online GP booking system but a notable 59% had not.
- People with disabilities and younger people were more likely to have delayed making a GP appointment.
- Booking online increases with age – 4% more are likely to use an online booking system for every year increase in age.

Healthwatch is concerned that people are putting off or delaying making a doctor's appointment because they cannot get through on the phone. Some people think their health condition is not serious enough but 13.5% of those people who did not see a GP went straight to A&E or an Urgent Treatment Centre. We have raised our concerns and shared our report with NHS Sussex but also issued a press release. You can read our full report [here](#), or an [executive summary](#) or view our [infographic](#).

Some other key findings were:

- People said they preferred a mixture of remote and face-to-face depending on condition (65%).
- Of the alternatives to face-to-face appointments, people generally preferred phone over sending photos (40% and 35% respectively), appointment by video (35%), and other online means (29%).
- 17% objected to all remote options and preferred exclusively face-to-face appointments.
- Knowing who to contact when the surgery was closed and how to make appointments were the most heavily rated in terms of importance (79% and 78% respectively rated these as 'very important'). However, 72% and 69% also rated advice on mental health and data security respectively as 'very important'.
- Compared to the earlier survey in 2020, a greater proportion of people showed some criticism towards remote GP appointments – more agreeing that 'only having phone or video appointments with my GP would put me off from getting support' (from 36% agreement in 2020 to 57% agreement in 2022) and less agreeing that 'I think you can get just as much advice from a GP by phone or video compared to a face-to-face' (from 43% in 2020 to 31% in 2022).
- A preference to see a GP as soon as possible had increased significantly between 2020 and 2022 – 38.0% rated this as 'very important' in 2020 compared to 62.2% in 2022).

“We are committed to ensuring that people across our communities can get the help and support they need. Our key message to the public is that no-one should delay coming forward and accessing NHS care if they are concerned about their health.

“In terms of access to GP services, we recognise how important this is and we have been working with our GP practices to make improvements and this week ‘further increasing access to GP services’ was announced as one of four top priorities for the NHS in Sussex this year.

“We invested more than £3million over the winter to support practices, and will continue to drive forward plans which include increasing the range of health professionals at GP practices, supporting practices to offer evening and weekend appointments, and working with GP practices to improve their phone systems.

“We know that phone lines have been an issue for patients, and some practices have now introduced a new system where incoming calls to practices are via the internet rather than by a phone line, which means it will be easier to get through to your practice. Call back options are also now in place in many practices, so this will mean less waiting in telephone queues.

“We welcome the insight from this Healthwatch report and will make sure it informs the work we have planned for this year, and how further improvements can be delivered.”

- Amy Galea, Chief Primary Care Officer at NHS Sussex

2022

Patient engagement



Healthwatch recently supported patients of [Coldean's New Larchwood Surgery](#) after they had expressed their concerns about changes to opening hours, which were forcing them to travel for up to 30 minutes and on two buses to the alternative service at Carden Surgery.

Working with patients, we brought these concerns to the attention of the Clinical Commissioning Group (which existed prior to the formation of the Sussex ICS) and pressed hard for changes which helped to reverse a decision by the Practice to reduce its hours and services. But more action is needed to reverse the reduction in GP practices across the city which has been ongoing for years. For our work, we received '[Highly Commended](#)' by a national awards scheme. You can read more about this project on page 14.

“We are very pleased to see our residents' views are being listened to in such a meaningful way and thank Healthwatch for their work in highlighting how the reduced hours in New Larchwood Surgery in Coldean is having a detrimental impact on more than 2000 registered patients that use the service, and

especially so for some of the more vulnerable groups. We support the recommendations from Healthwatch to revert to the original opening hours and reinstate the nurse practitioner role and call on the CCG to consider this seriously."

— **Councillors Zoe John and Martin Osborne**

2022

GP website review

Healthwatch were informed that the NHS Brighton and Hove Clinical Commissioning Group had ring-fenced funding to support GP websites which needing improvement. The funding was being made available in 2022–2023 and some GP practices and surgeries had submitted applications accordingly.

At the time, Healthwatch Brighton and Hove were asked to review the websites of all 34 GP practices in Brighton and Hove. We were asked to provide an independent view as to which websites we felt were mostly in need of support, to help inform the CCG's decision around awarding funding. Healthwatch used a high-level review for each website, focusing on the following criteria:

- Important information including COVID information, booking appointments, repeat prescriptions, and contact information.
- Information to new patients.
- Emergency information.
- Getting involved (including Patient Participation Group details).
- Further information (for example, regarding mental health, young people, safeguarding and GDPR)
- Accessibility of the website and information about physical access to the surgery.

We recommended several GP surgeries who we felt – from a patient's perspective – would benefit most from the funding to make changes to their website. We shared our findings with NHS Sussex who are using them to take forward this work. We did not publish our findings given that this work did not constitute a full review.

2021

Healthwatch insight highlights pressures on GPs and A&E

Healthwatch in Sussex published a [report](#) that shared its insight on the pressures being faced by local health services across the county. Our report drew together findings from 20 publications and data sources and highlighted increased demands on GP practices and Emergency Departments (A&E), including:

- People who were experiencing delays in obtaining GP appointments were going to A&E instead.
- There was low public awareness of alternatives to A&E, such as Pharmacies and [NHS 111 First](#).

- Public information about which services they should seek medical support from could be inconsistent and challenging to access or understand.

Our report also highlighted proposals by the Clinical Commissioning Groups in Sussex to improve GP appointment systems, and better promote of alternative services. Healthwatch has continued to work with commissioners since our report was published. Our recommendations made to commissioners related to improved access for patients, clearer information on which services people can access and when, and ensuring consistency of signposting across the health and care system. We issued a press release which can be read [here](#).

“Sussex NHS Commissioners would like to thank Healthwatch in Sussex for their report; we know that there have been issues for some of our patients in accessing GP care, and we are working with GP practices to take action to try to make sure patients can get appropriate advice and care quickly and easily. Feedback from the public about access to health services is important in ensuring we continue to make changes and improve information and routes to access, in order that people can get the right care, in the right place at the right time - and in a way that works for them.”

– **Sussex NHS Commissioners**

2021

‘Ask us / Tell us – public opinion’

During the second COVID Lockdown, Healthwatch in Sussex launched a ‘Tell Us – Ask Us’ campaign to encourage and support members of the public to share their experiences of services. GP comments were the most numerous and broadly positive once patients had accessed services. Many patients however had struggled to obtain timely appointments and access to GPs, with delays commonly reported. In extreme cases, patients reported over 100 calls to get through to a receptionist. We also found that GP preferences for phone and video appointments caused anxiety for people with Autism, learning difficulties and those unfamiliar with the technology. Read our full report [here](#).

“We would like to thank Healthwatch in Sussex for this insight. The last year has been an unprecedented time for the NHS and it has been challenging in terms of the delivery of health and care services. It is encouraging to hear what has worked well but equally important to hear where we can do more to improve the patient experience.

“We will continue to work with Healthwatch in Sussex in order to demonstrate how the issues they have highlighted are already being addressed, and are present in our ongoing plans to ensure that the population of Sussex continue to be able to access safe and appropriate care.”

– **Sussex NHS Commissioners who commented:**

2020

Review of GP websites and Out of Hours messages

In response to reports over the COVID period, from local people experiencing difficulties contacting GP surgeries our volunteers gathered information on GP websites, telephone contacts and 'out of hours' GP surgery telephone answerphone messages. We found a high degree of assurance that GP surgeries were 'open for business' and that Primary Care had acted, and adapted quickly, to maintain services. There was some evidence that in adapting quickly to COVID, systems and processes had been put in place that were not always 'customer friendly'. We identified that the use of remote solutions e.g. phone and e-consult was not always done in the best way. At the time, Healthwatch recommended the further development of a mixed offer of digital solutions and face-to-face contacts with GP's and other Primary Care services and the development of local but also system-wide solutions to address digital disadvantage and more consistent messaging.

2019

Patients' experiences of primary care in Brighton and Hove during 2019

In 2019, we carried out our [second city-wide review of GP Practices](#) and presented our report at the Health and Wellbeing meeting. 998 patients were surveyed from all 35 practices and 5 branch surgeries in Brighton and Hove at that time. Our objectives were to assess patient experience of using their GP practice in terms of their satisfaction, perceptions over the quality of care, patient accessibility, preventative services, surgery environment and comparisons with the earlier 2018 Healthwatch survey.

Our overall findings were:

- 89% of patients rated the overall quality of their care as good or very good.
- However, patient caseloads had increased and the number of locations were decreasing.
- Patients asked for opening times outside of normal working hours e.g. evening and weekend.
- Patients advised that waiting times could be long (for all appointments).
- Patients said they wanted a choice of GP.
- Longer appointments and continuity of care was particularly important for patients with long-term conditions.
- There was low awareness of preventative services e.g. annual checks and cancer screening. This is especially the case for those who were at higher risk.
- 92% of patients booked an appointment by telephone but only 68% of patients found booking this way to be easy.

Despite the climate of increased caseloads and a decrease in number of locations, when we compared our findings in this report against our 2018 report findings, overall patient satisfaction with the GP surgery had increased since 2018. Overall, the story was good news about patient satisfaction with the GP services and their perceptions over the quality of care

they have received. Nonetheless, there were continuing areas of concern also borne out in our 2018 survey:

- a preference for longer and more flexible opening hours.
- having continuity of care with the same GP.
- reduced waiting times for routine appointments.
- low awareness of preventative services.

“The main issue of concern is the long-term sustainability of Primary Care/GP services in the City and the capacity to deal with sharp peaks in demand. Looking beyond this Healthwatch report many practices have GPs who are part time or working on a locum basis. A high proportion of GPs, Practice Nurses and Practice Managers are approaching an age where they may choose to retire.”

– David Liley Chief Officer of Healthwatch Brighton and Hove

This report was also shared with the Care Quality Commission and we were pleased to receive this response from Emily Hempstead, on behalf of the South East Region CQC:

“We would like to thank you for sending us this report. I have shared it internally here at the CQC. We will use the details to inform our monitoring and inspection scheduling for Brighton and Hove. I meet with Healthwatch regularly and so I look forward to discussing the report in more detail.”

2018

GP Review, 2018

Healthwatch carried out [a comprehensive review of all GP practices](#) in the city throughout 2017. We found high patient satisfaction for GP's and nurses but highlighted some significant challenges. This was a comprehensive review involving all GP practices in the city – observational visits to 29 of the 36 practices at the time and an online survey involving 1500 local people. The results have a high degree of reliability in terms of statistical significance. This is a positive report with 85% overall patient satisfaction with the quality of care provided by GP's and even higher 90% for GP Practice Nurses.

We made several recommendations which we believe the NHS locally could embrace, however we acknowledged the difficulty in achieving fundamental change without more doctors and more nurses.

We highlighted the falling number of GPs in the City which seemed insufficient to meet need. At the time, the number of practices in the city had fallen from 44 to 36. Our findings revealed that 20% of people who could not get a timely GP appointment had sought support from other parts of the NHS – many went to A&E creating more pressure on that part of the system. We also found that patients saw Practice Nurses as an alternative to seeing a GP but that waiting times for these appointments were even higher than for GP's. Interestingly, we also found that telephone consultations and online booking & pharmacy arrangements were all popular with patients but were not well developed or widely used in the city.

E. How our local system is responding

In this section, we briefly highlight some of the initiatives that our local system is progressing in order to enhance the primary care offer to patients.

Throughout winter 2022/23, our local NHS worked with GP practices across Sussex to improve access to primary care, which [included](#):

Supporting communities

- £1.5 million new funding allocated to practices in areas that have the highest number of patients living in deprivation to provide more accessible and responsive services.

Providing evening and weekend appointments

- It is now possible to get an appointment between 8am and 8pm Mondays to Fridays and between 9am and 5pm on Saturdays.

Recruiting a bigger workforce

- Recruiting additional GPs, Health Care Assistants, Practice Nurses or other key staff working extra sessions to increase appointment availability for patients.

Making it easier to get an appointment

- Local practices are growing and adapting to make it easier for patients wishing to make appointments. A new system has been introduced where incoming calls to practices are via the internet rather than by a phone line, which means it will be easier to get through to your practice.

Providing community pharmacy consultations

- A new service is available for patients with minor illnesses to be referred for consultations on the same day with a community pharmacist. This means patients can get help more quickly and those who need to see a GP can do so more easily.

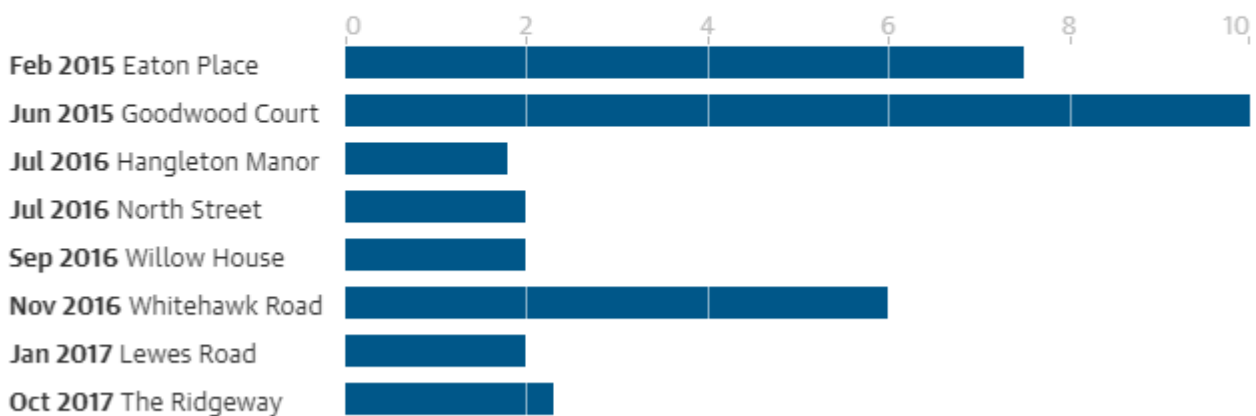
F. Practice numbers in Brighton and Hove – closures, mergers and other changes

Brighton and Hove currently has 31 GP practices in 6 primary care networks; in 2015, we had 48.

Between 2015 and 2017 eight GP contracts ended in Brighton and Hove. This was due to GPs retiring, termination of contracts and patient safety concerns. The following Guardian newspaper graphic shows what happened during this time.

Over 33,000 patients in Brighton and Hove have been affected by surgery closures since 2015

Patients affected, thousands



Guardian graphic

Since then, further closures or mergers have happened. Below, we have summarised some of the changes Healthwatch has been involved in.

2017

Ridgeway Surgery

The practice terminated their contract in 2017. The previous Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) decided to disperse the 2200+ patient list across other practices rather than procure a new service which would run counter to the strategic objective of achieving primary care at scale. Healthwatch became involved after receiving patient concerns about the change. Healthwatch also heard from other GP practices who felt they had not been properly consulted or listened to. In some cases, other practices applied, or did not lift, patient caps meaning that not all of the 2200 would be able to register at nearby practices. Patient concerns related to complicated and long journeys to receive future primary care; future lack of continuity of care and adequacy of provision of prescription medication during the period of transfer to a new GP; future lack of Doctor-patient rapport at a larger practice; and inability to register.

“The doctor at my old surgery was really good on women’s health. It really counted during my pregnancies. Now I’m not sure who I will see. OK, they’ve got your records, but the relationship with a family doctor is about more than that.”

- **patient**

2018

The Meadow Parade Branch Surgery in Rottingdean closed in 2018. The Practice signalled that it was difficult to keep this branch surgery open as it did not, for instance, have a nurse to support the GP. The closure affected 1200 people in Rottingdean but fortunately they did not need to re-register because they were already with the practice which also ran the Meadow Parade sub branch.

"I live in Rottingdean and I am in my eighties. I have a number of health problems and no car. I have to walk to a bus stop, wait for a bus to come back again, I have got problems walking. One of the reasons we moved to Rottingdean is that we had a surgery and a bank. Now the bank's gone, and next the surgery. What's the point?"

- **patient**

2018

Hove Park Villas Surgery closed in 2018 but reopened on the 1st October as a merged entity with Trinity Medical Centre. This was due to the retirement of the practice doctor and the inability to recruit a replacement. Patients received communication regarding this from the practice and were invited to engagement events at the start of this process. Patients who wished to stay with the Trinity Centre did not need to do anything further as their notes were transferred automatically.

2018

Ardingly Court

When The Practice Group gave notice to withdraw from its contract in Brighton and Hove to provide five practices, one of the practices concerned was taken on by the Ardingly Court practice – a well-established and respected practice based in the city centre. The practice effectively doubled in size and started working across two sites, rather than its original single site. Due to operational pressures in the year, the practice requested to split into two which the CCG agreed to. This was on the basis that it created the opportunity to achieve:

- One practice in the Whitehawk area of the city, focussed on the needs of that population and working to integrate their primary care services with the other services in the same building and locality.
- A second practice in the city centre, focussing on the distinctive needs of the city centre population, and moving into the new Palace Place premises in the autumn of the following year.

2018

Benfield Valley and Brighton Health and Wellbeing

Benfield Valley Healthcare Hub in Portslade and Brighton Health and Wellbeing Centre in Hove merged in July 2018 to form a single partnership, while still providing services from their existing locations. Patients registered at either surgery did not need to do anything to get a new GP, as their registration and medical records were automatically transferred. The two practices in Old Shoreham Road and Western Road remained open, and patients still had access to the same services, including being able to see their current doctor in the same location. The partnership meant the GPs could make more efficient use of space and share facilities while providing more services. This means both practices benefited from extra resilience and cover for staff sickness and annual leave and better cover for clinical and administrative staff.

2021

New Larchwood surgery

On 1st April 2021, New Larchwood surgery reduced opening hours from every day to 2 mornings a week. Patients expressed their concerns to us about the changes, which were forcing them to travel for up to 30 minutes and on two buses to the alternative service at Carden Surgery. Healthwatch Brighton & Hove was asked to facilitate an online meeting that brought together patients, the Brighton & Hove Clinical Commissioning Group and Carden & New Larchwood GP Practice. Patients spoke about mobility issues, carer responsibilities and mental health concerns that have been negatively affected by the reduced service. Healthwatch also conducted a patient survey, which confirmed the negative impact of the Practice's changes. As a result, the Practice promised to recruit staff and extend hours. This is part of our ongoing work challenging the Clinical Commissioning Group about a reduction in GP access.

"We need the surgery open every day for the elderly, vulnerable and those unable to access Carden surgery."

– **Patient**

2022

In 2022, the GP surgery in Burwash Road, Hangleton, reopened its doors. The surgery had closed because it needed refurbishment. A councillor for Hangleton and Knoll who campaigned for its return, cut the ribbon at the reopening, saying:

"This surgery reopening is really important. This ward has a high number of elderly residents, families and young mothers and it was really difficult to get to the other surgery. People would have to get two buses, one into town and then one back out. A lot of residents were considering moving surgeries as it was so inconvenient and costly to get two buses."

- **Councillor**

The surgery has been refurbished and now has three clinic rooms. It will be offering nurse services such as flu jabs as well as GP appointments. There will also be a greater focus on pharmacy services.

2022

The closure of **St Luke's Surgery** in Saltdean resulted in the transfer of patients to the Rottingdean Medical Practice. Although this is not too far away, it will be of great inconvenience to some patients, especially some elderly ones who will now have to travel further away to see a GP.

2022

School House surgery

Healthwatch received negative patient feedback about School House Surgery/Church GP Surgery. Patients contacted us saying that they could not get appointments or prescriptions or were disappointed by the service they received. The practice answer machine message provided no information. We raised this with Sussex Health and Care partnership (SHCP), who

shared with us changes that were affecting the service, as well as patient communications explaining these. We were then able to share this information with patients. We also shared the patient feedback with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as they had recently rated the practice as inadequate. We learnt Integrated Care 24 (IC24) will be permanently taking on the contract with the NHS to run the surgeries, which is part of Allied Medical Practice, but that services will continue to operate as usual and staff will continue to deliver high-quality and safe care to patients. Patients did not need to do anything and can still be able to access the same services, in the same location.

Case study

“Patient needs a re-prescription for cancer pills before going on holiday. They are about to run out (they don’t allow them to have any more until they have 7 days left!) and the receptionist told them to go to the Brighton walk-in (patient said they could not do this) and then to phone 111 which after trying to fight their case, they did and got a further 10 tablets. Patient also had serious symptoms of a urine infection – they have had this before and knows it is serious, (patient was up all night) and asked to speak to a doctor – none was available – no future date offered either. The surgery were completely unmoveable on both accounts.”

With thanks

Healthwatch would like to express our thanks to NHS Sussex for their partnership working. Healthwatch works closely with NHS Sussex to ensure our insight is taken into account and helps to shape current services and planning for the future. NHS Sussex colleagues are willing to listen and open to the outcomes from our work.

Contact us



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