

Healthwatch visits to University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust as part of the PLACE programme

May 2025

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove conducted visits to various sites run by the University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust (UHSx). Eight of our trained representatives conducted these visits in October 2024.

Our visits to the Royal Sussex County Hospital, the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital, the Eye Hospital and various wards across the estate were part of PLACE or 'Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment'.

This report provides a summary of our observations from the visits. PLACE is delivered as a national programme, and all data is collected and formally analysed by NHS Digital. They will publish detailed reports after the programme has ended.

What is PLACE?

PLACE assessments focus on the environment in which care is delivered to people, such as hospital wards. It does not look at clinical care or how well staff are doing their job. PLACE visits were last carried out in 2023.

Good environments matter. Every NHS patient should be cared for with compassion and dignity in a clean, safe environment. Where standards fall short, this should be drawn to the attention of managers so that improvements can be made.

Assessments involve local people (known as patient assessors) going into local hospitals to assess how good the environment is.

What's it like to be a patient assessor?

PLACE gives patients and the public a voice to have more influence over the way their local health and care services are run.

Our volunteers who act as patient assessors are given training and supported by Healthwatch, using materials produced by the NHS. They visit different wards, clinics and communal areas and assess how well patients' privacy and dignity are respected, overall cleanliness and general building maintenance. They also look at the extent to which the environment can support the care of those with dementia or with a disability. Lastly, they undertake food tastings and, where possible, observe how meals are served to patients. You can read more about the PLACE programme by clicking [here](#). Healthwatch representatives also speak to patients about their experience, where appropriate.

Thank you

Healthwatch would like to express its thanks to the Trust for inviting us to participate in PLACE. This allows us to assess the patient environment first-hand and share our observations. Thank you to Barbara, Conor, Jo, Judi, Mizzie, Vanessa and Will for their contributions as patient assessors.

Where we visited

Eight trained representatives (four volunteers; one director; three staff) visited the Royal Sussex County Hospital (RSCH), the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital (RACH), and the Sussex Eye Hospital over seven different days between Monday 16th and Wednesday 23rd October. We visited the following departments:

- Endoscopy – Thomas Kemp (TK)
- Post-natal ward – TK
- Trevor Mann Baby Unit (Surgical Neonatal Intensive Care) – TK
- Lawson Unit (specialist HIV centre) – Louisa Martindale Building (LMB)
- Neurosurgery ward – LMB
- Elderly medical ward (Frailty Same Day Emergency Care) – LMB
- Discharge Lounge – LMB
- Vascular ward – TK
- RACH Orthodontics
- RACH Emergency Department
- RACH High Dependency Unit
- RACH Surgical ward
- RACH Medical ward
- Sussex Eye Hospital – Pickford Ward
- Surgical Assessment Unit – Millenium wing
- Sussex Cancer Centre
- Sussex Kidney Unit
- RSCH Emergency Department
- RSCH Emergency Department external
- Millenium building external
- LMB external
- Level 11 (West Trauma & Orthopaedics) – Food Assessment
- RACH Medical – Food Assessment



Assessors were asked **how confident** they were that a good level of patient care and experience would be delivered within the environment.

Headline positive findings

- **Maternity (postnatal; Trevor Mann):** Very confident. Calm and clean. Patients were very positive about care and environment.
- **Lawson Unit (specialist HIV centre):** Very confident. Welcoming with beautiful artwork.
- **Vascular:** Very confident. Calm and clean, the team are doing well in an old building.
- **Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital (RACH) Orthodontics:** Very confident. Welcoming and clean. There is entertainment for children.
- **RACH Emergency Department (ED):** Confident. Calm atmosphere.
- **RACH High Dependency Unit and surgical ward:** Very confident. Clean and calm. Patient feedback was very positive about clinical care.
- **Eye hospital – Pickford ward:** Very confident. Patients were very positive about care.
- **Surgical Assessment Unit (new area):** Very confident. Calm and clean. Very positive feedback from patients about care.
- **Kidney centre:** Very confident. Very bright, clean, and welcoming. Patient feedback was very positive.
- **LMB external:** Confident.
- **Food** was generally good and patient feedback was positive. There were some temperature issues.



"Nice and happy department" – patient assessor in the Lawson Unit



Areas for improvement

- **Endoscopy:** Confident but floors failed in all areas and need replacing. Dips in the main corridor are a trip hazard.
- **Neurosurgery:** Very confident overall, but inconsistent Wi-Fi is an issue.
- **Elderly medical:** Confident and generally positive but there were concerns around patients feeling isolated in rooms with no TVs. It felt very clinical, and more entertainment would improve the environment.
- **Discharge:** Confident, but some entertainment would be good. Two patients commented on the lengthy wait for patient transport – one had been waiting for 4 hours, and another had been waiting in this area for over 8 hours.
- **Emergency Department external:** Not very confident.
- **Millenium external:** Not at all confident. Conditions & cleanliness were poor. Cigarette butts and lack of signage are an ongoing issue.
- **Cancer centre:** Not very confident. The area is small and cramped and not fit for purpose. There is a large crack in the ceiling which allows water to come in when it rains. However, patients were happy with care.

Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital medical ward:

- Generally positive, but concerns were raised by one patient's family. They reported that their daughter's room had not been cleaned properly for 11 days, aside from a light mop, and that the linen and bins had not been changed regularly. They also said the communal fridge had not been cleaned. There was a dripping tap in their room, and the family had to use a bottle leaned against it to stop it.

- This was actioned immediately with housekeeping, but more needs to be done to improve communication between patients and staff about when cleaning can take place.
- Other patients seemed happy (although they had not been on the ward as long), and the environment elsewhere was generally good on inspection.

Emergency Department – Royal Sussex County Hospital

Our observations:

- Not very confident. Everyone recognises it is not fit for purpose.
- Lots of estates concerns.
- People were queuing in a small area, which was very cramped.

Positives:

- Care is generally good, and there is a plan to provide better care with the new refurbishment. It was noted that it felt calmer than a previous visit.
- There are now waiting times on a board and a booster charging box for phones.
- An Urgent Treatment Centre has been built with a GP area (four in-house GPs) for low-risk minor injuries, which is used until 10 pm.





“Some older areas are not in a good state of repair and appear to have been designed to cope with a much lower level of patient activity than is now the case and are overcrowded and cramped.

Standards of cleanliness and maintenance are nonetheless high, and patients I spoke to were complimentary about the levels of care they were receiving and were positive about the food.”



Response from the trust:

 *"We are delighted to have had Healthwatch participate in such a broad and insightful programme of PLACE visits. The feedback is greatly appreciated by our clinical teams who use the insights to improve patient care and experience. All the responses are well received and ensure the patient voice is at the heart of the Trust's engagement. Thank you!"* 

– **Nicole Chavaudra, Director of Patient Experience, Engagement & Involvement**



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