

# City Walk-in Centre Listening Event Report

21 May 2024 and  
18 June 2024



Walk In  
Centre

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# Introduction

Healthwatch Liverpool staff visited City Walk-in Centre (WiC) on the afternoons of 21st May and 18th June 2024. There were so few patients present during our first visit that we decided to return in June.

We wanted to find out from patients what they thought of the service, where it worked well and where improvements could be made. We used a survey to ensure we asked everyone the same questions. We spoke with 17 patients, and because this is a relatively small number we decided to include all their comments in this report. We also spoke with members of staff.

City Walk-in Centre provides a nurse-led service and is managed by Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust: <https://www.mersecare.nhs.uk/our-services/liverpool/walk-in-centres>. In October 2023 the service moved to its current location at the Linda McCartney Centre on the Royal Liverpool Hospital site. This means it is very near the Royal's A&E Department, and in theory it should be easy for patients to be appropriately referred between services where they may have presented at the wrong one.

However, we were told that there were occasional misunderstandings between the services. For example, some members of staff at the Royal thought that City WiC closed at 4pm. The WiC opening times are 8am – 8pm, but WiC staff told us the service will go to 'triage only' if it is busy from late afternoon onwards (5pm or 6pm) to ensure they can see all patients before closure at 8pm. When told the service is 'triage only' some patients may decide to go to A&E instead.

City WiC also is limited in what they treat patients for. WiC staff told us that there had been a GP stationed at the WiC when it first opened in October 2023, but this had stopped several months before. WiC staff were not sure if all A&E staff were aware of this. Sometimes patients had been referred from the Royal's A&E to the WiC for things that WiC staff could not treat, so patients had to return to the A&E department. We were also told that occasionally information for patients who were referred from A&E had not been complete. We were encouraged to be told by WiC staff that regular meetings had now been set up between both services to iron out any issues.

Following our first visit to the City WiC we raised some of these issues with LUHFT and we were able to visit the Emergency Department at The Royal on the day of our second visit to the City WiC. Staff there told us that they have regular management meetings with Walk-In colleagues, at which both services exchange information and review any inappropriate referrals.

We were also told that Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Mersey Care have drawn up a draft contract to allow staff from each service to spend time shadowing colleagues in the other place or undertaking joint training. This was awaiting sign-off.

A&E staff are now aware that there's no longer a GP based at the Walk-In. A&E now has employed two 'Streamers' (Care Navigators) who cover 7 days a week to signpost patients to the correct service. We were told that the biggest problem for A&E is when the Walk-In closes at 8pm, or moves to triage (assessment) only; there is then a surge in A&E attendees.

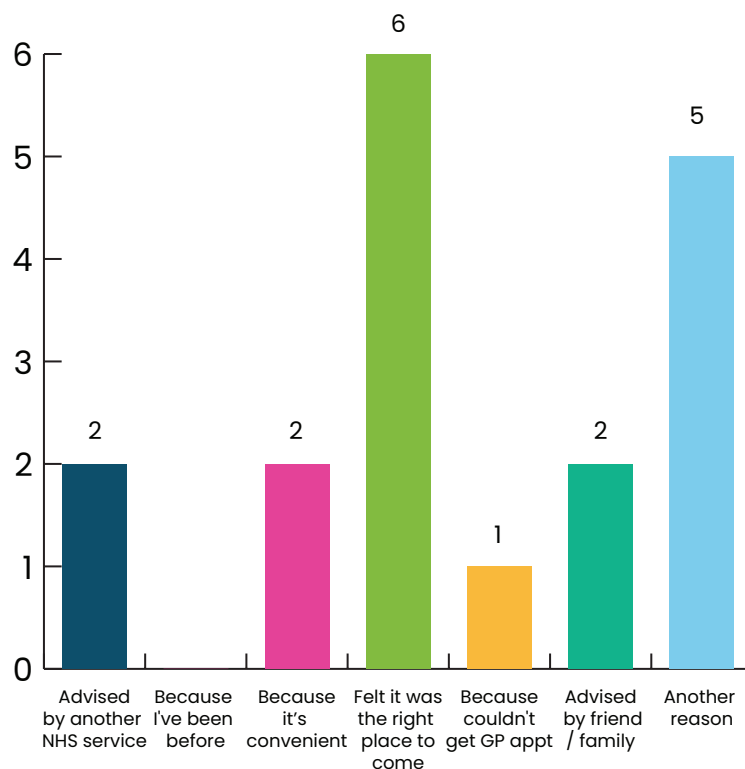
# Key findings

- The reason people mentioned most for choosing to go to City WiC was that it was the right place to come to for treatment.
- Most people we spoke to had not been to a Walk in Centre (WiC) in the previous year.
- Most positive comments were about friendly, helpful staff followed by fast triage.
- The main improvement people wanted to see was about waiting times, although many understood there were pressures.
- Most people had not been informed about expected waiting times.
- We saw no signage to distinguish the triage waiting area from the (post-triage) waiting area for treatment.

# Survey responses

## We asked: Why did you come to City WiC today? (tick all that apply)

Most people said they felt the WiC was the right place to come for their treatment, closely followed by a variety of other reasons. The responses are outlined in the graph below:



Other reasons given were:

(I was advised to come here) by a staff member at my mum's care home. I live out of area and have been visiting my mum and have a persistent issue with a bad leg.

I self-referred.

I was advised to come here by the people in the office of where I live.

I went to A&E first and was sent here. I've been triaged and am now waiting again.

My GP gave me medication but it's not working, and a friend said this place is better than the GP.

My friends usually come here.

I Googled it.

I came yesterday, went on NHS111 and then to A&E first, then here. At 6.30 pm yesterday I was told my symptoms don't look too serious and to come back tomorrow. ('Today' when we spoke to the patient).

## If you were advised by another NHS service to come here, which service?

Although only 2 people initially said they had been advised to come to the WiC by another NHS service, the comments below show more people attended after first having tried other NHS services:

I originally went to my GP but they sent me to A&E.

I came for information. I can access information quicker here than via my GP.

Women's hospital

NHS 111

## We asked: Have you used the WiC in the previous 12 months, and if yes, how often?

Three people we spoke to said that they had attended the WiC before. One person had been once before, another 2-4 times and the third respondent more than 5 times.

## We asked: What is good about the WiC?

Most positive comments were about the staff, mentioned by 6 people, followed by 4 people who mentioned being triaged quickly. Assessment, advice and treatment was mentioned by 3 people, and the location was mentioned by 2 people:

It's brilliant. It's like a civilised A&E. I was triaged in no time.

I was seen fairly quickly by triage and then called back in to get my leg wound cleaned/sterilized. I now have to wait for that treatment to take effect before I'm called back in again for any further treatment.

The wait times are not as long as at other places.

The people are OK here.

It's been ok so far. I went to A&E for basic checks and was then sent here. I've been waiting 2.5 hours so far.

It was quick and informative. They put me at ease and explained everything. I was bricking it before I came here. I think it's a bloke thing. I'll now have to try to get an appointment with my GP tomorrow.

Triage was really helpful and nice. I was sent for an x-ray where they were also really nice and helpful. I've only been here about 40 minutes. It's been different to previous A&E experiences.

It's accessible, in a prime location, and if you need to be referred elsewhere the hospital is there.

There is a shorter wait here, my kids are at school and I need to pick them up, otherwise there can be a long wait. Usually the nurses have good experience, they are like a doctor, they have the experience but a new doctor doesn't have that.

It's all organised - it's fine.

It's been pretty quick to get triaged. They're helpful.

They always help, it's always better. Our friends' recommendation brought us here, word of mouth. Triage was very relaxed. It's also the ease of coming here and be seen.

The staff - reception went out of her way to help me. My phone died, and I'm on a curfew (tagged) so they charged it for me, and I've got to have an attendant letter which they were sorting out.

The staff are really friendly.

It's quite close to where I live, really nice staff and they are helpful in general.

Not really sure, there's nothing I can point out. It seems clean.

## We asked: what could be improved?

Waiting times were mentioned by 7 people, 2 people said nothing could be improved and 4 people made positive comments about the service. All comments including other suggestions for improvement follow below:

I feel sorry for the person who has to shout for patients to come through. A display screen would be easier.

Nothing: 2/ It's fine/ It's OK.

I've been waiting for a long time between here and A&E. If I don't get seen again soon I'll have to leave to collect my children from school. So far I've just had my temperature taken, that's all.

Reduce waiting times. I'm here with a skin reaction and I'm itchy all over. I need to see a doctor.

How can you improve perfection? They work damn hard.

They're doing a great job

Everything is ok - maybe have more services on the same site, like x-ray.

It's my first time here. When I googled 'city centre walk-in' the old one in Hanover Street still came up; I nearly went there but one of my colleagues said it was here now.

That there only is 1 WiC in the city centre.

The waiting times - our friends told us about that, but for now it's ok.

Nothing, just the waiting time. I've been here 4 hours but I'm not asked.

The waiting time.

The wait.

The waiting times - I've been triaged but have been here 3 hours.

## **We asked: Have you been informed of expected waiting times since you arrived?**

Three people told us they had been informed about expected waiting times. On our second visit we noticed a display screen showing the estimated waiting time which was updated regularly throughout our visit. This was in the area where patients were waiting to be triaged and was not that noticeable; the configuration of the chairs in that area meant that several patients sat with their backs to it.

There was no working screen in the waiting area near the main entrance for people who had been triaged and were waiting for follow-up and/or treatment.

We received the following additional comments in response to this question:

They said they can't say how long it will take.

They said it would take a while.

It's potluck with Walk-In Centres.

The nurse said about 1.5 hours.

But our friends told us to keep in mind that it might take long.

But I knew that there would be a wait, it's all over the news all the time.

But I was told that it might be a while.

It was on the screen, and the nurse also told me it's a 4-hour wait.

There is a screen with information, but I couldn't see it properly because I'm not wearing my glasses.

## **We asked: If you have any additional support needs (for example with communication, mobility, or because of neurodiversity or a learning disability etc.) how well do you feel that this service supports you with this?**

Thirteen people said that this question did not apply to them, 2 said they didn't know, 1 said neither well nor badly, and 1 said very well.

Additional comments included:

About supporting people with additional support needs I think they would (offer support).

They look after special needs very well.

They could cater a bit more to additional needs, if you feel overstimulated or overwhelmed to have a room where you can sit, or have someone to speak to.

My friend is here as an interpreter (HWL staff explained that interpreters should be provided).

## **We asked: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about the service?**

Six people had further comments:

I speak another language so when no interpreter has been arranged it's difficult (we checked with reception staff who said the nurses would call interpreters).

I wasn't aware of the difference between this service and A&E. I'm fine with everything but I am worried about the waiting time.

There's not enough GPs and the Tories are running the health service into the ground.

No. It's been surprisingly quick and painless. (NB We spoke to this patient when we first arrived. They were still waiting when we left a few hours later)

It's good, not busy, not a lot of patients, good for infection control. It's spacious.

It's a service that we need; you can't get an appointment for the GP. At the GP you have to phone at 8am, they will phone back if they think you need an appointment. There are no more advanced appointments now.



# Other observations

One patient told us that on Google maps the WiC still showed the details for its previous address. When we checked on 09/07/24 this was still the case. We informed Mersey Care on that date and Mersey Care staff assured us they were addressing this immediately. When we checked again on 15/07/24 it had been amended.

During our 2nd visit we observed clinical staff asking patients in the pre-triage area who had been triaged to move across to the other waiting area near the main entrance. On arrival patients were asked by reception to go to the right waiting area, but patients were not always clear they had to move waiting area once triaged, and we saw no signs to indicate this.

We also noticed a patient being escorted by staff to the Royal for further diagnostics not available at the WiC (e.g. X-Rays). This showed personalised support and is welcome for patients who have additional needs (we don't know if that was the case). We imagine that due to limited staff time it would not be possible to do this for everyone.

We do believe that examples like this show that the WiC's relocation to the Royal Liverpool hospital site should improve patient experience, as patients can access more services instead of having to travel somewhere else.

# Conclusion

Overall we received lots of positive feedback from the 17 patients we spoke to during our visits. Patients liked the friendly and helpful staff, and being triaged quickly.

We were not surprised that waiting times were mentioned most often as something that could be improved. We observed that people often had long waits after triage, but from some of the comments we received it was clear that people understood some of the pressures faced by these – and other NHS – services.

Demand for both City WiC and the Royal's A&E department is likely to continue to be high. The WiC is a popular, accessible service in a national health service that is often stretched to its limits, despite the best efforts of staff. It is therefore important that patients as well as staff at the A&E department are clear about what City WiC can and can't treat. Good communication and information sharing between both services should make the patient journey as smooth as possible and without duplications. Regular contact between staff at the 2 services will help to improve understanding of the possibilities and limits of each, so we were pleased to learn from both WiC and A&E staff that this is being put into place.

# Recommendations:

1. Ensure that estimated waiting times are clearly and regularly communicated to help manage patient expectations. During triage explain that the wait for treatment may be or even is likely to be substantially longer.
2. Install clear signage in the respective waiting areas explaining which area is for patients who have not been assessed, and which area is for those patients waiting for treatment.
3. Agree a protocol with the Royal's A&E department to ensure that it is informed when the WiC goes to 'triage only' service. Conversely, also ensure that WiC staff are made aware when there is an above usual level of demand/ pressure on the A&E service during WiC opening hours.
4. Explore if there are ways at each centre to make the experience (from the environment to staff) more Neurodivergent- and Learning Disability-friendly where practicably possible.

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the patients we spoke to for their time and feedback. Their contributions were anonymous, but very much appreciated. We would also like to thank Mersey Care staff for their support, and A&E staff for their time to speak with us.

# About Healthwatch

Healthwatch is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We're here to make sure that those running services put people at the heart of care.

One of our main purposes is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.

As part of a national network made up of local Healthwatch organisations in every local authority area of England (and Healthwatch England, the national body) our work contributes to a nationwide perspective on health and social care services.

At Healthwatch we also provide an information and signposting service which helps to put people in touch with services and activities that can help maintain and improve their health and wellbeing.

If you require a copy of this report in another format or language, please contact us and we will provide it.

July 2024

# Contact

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# Appendix A: Survey

## City WIC LE Dec 2024-25

1.

**Feedback only about City WiC or also A&E?**

- City WiC
- Royal A&E

**1. First part of your postcode (e.g. L8, L12, L25)**

**2. Are you:**

- A Patient
- Relative or friend
- Professional Carer
- Other (please specify):

**3. Why did you come to City WiC today (tick all that apply)?**

- Advised to come here by another NHS service
- Because I've been here before
- Because it's convenient
- I felt it was the right place to come for my treatment
- Because I couldn't get an appointment with my GP
- Advised by friend or family
- Another reason (if you'd like to tell us more please use the box below)

Comment:

**4. If you answered 'Advised by an NHS Service' at the previous question, were you advised to attend by:**

- NHS 111
- NHS 999
- GP (clinical staff)
- GP (Receptionist)
- A & E
- District nurse
- Midwife
- Other (please specify):

**5. Have you used a UTC/Walk in Centre previously in the past 12 months?**

- No
- Yes, once
- Yes, 2-4 times
- Yes, 5+ times

If so, which one? (e.g. City, Old Swan, etc.)

**6. What is good about this Walk-in Centre?**

**7. What could be improved?**

**8. Have you been informed about expected waiting times since you arrived?**

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Comment:

**9. If you have any additional support needs (for example with communication, mobility, or because of neurodiversity or a learning disability etc.) how well do you feel that this service supports you with this?**

- Very well
- Well
- Neither well nor badly
- Badly
- Very badly
- Don't know
- N/A

**10. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about the service?**

## 2. Some questions about you

### 11. What age group are you in?

- 12 and under     13 to 15 years  
 16 to 17 years     18 to 24 years  
 25 to 49 years     50 to 64 years  
 65 to 79 years     80+ years  
 Prefer not to say

### 12. Are you:

- A woman  
 A man  
 Non-binary  
 Intersex  
 Prefer not to say  
 Prefer to self-describe (please specify):

### 13. Is your gender identity the same as your sex recorded at birth?

- Yes  
 No  
 Prefer not to say  
 Not known

### 14. What is your sexual orientation?

- Asexual  
 Bisexual  
 Gay man  
 Heterosexual / Straight  
 Lesbian / Gay woman  
 Pansexual  
 Prefer not to say  
 Not known