

NHS Walk in Centre Review

What we're doing

NHS Lambeth Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is reviewing GP appointments across the borough. We are looking in detail at the NHS Walk in Centre in Streatham.

Why we are doing it

There are currently a number of ways patients can access GP advice:

- through the GP surgery where they are registered
- by appointment at one of the GP Access Hubs across the borough
- via SELDOC, the out of hours GP service
- at the NHS Walk in Centre in Gracefield Gardens Health Centre
- via NHS 111.

Not all of the appointments in the hubs are being taken up and they have the capacity to see patients who are currently using the Walk in Centre.

GP Access Hubs

We opened GP Access Hubs in 2015. There are currently hubs in four locations across the borough and one of these hubs is in the same building as the Walk in Centre.

The hubs are not intended to be a walk in service where patients arrive and queue, although exceptions may be made. Most consultations at the hubs are booked appointments through a patient's home practice if the practice does not have available appointments at suitable times. Most bookings happen on the day, Monday to Friday via the practice. SELDOC, the out of hours provider of GP services, can also book urgent appointments on the day. NHS 111, Guys & St Thomas' Hospital, King's College Hospital and St Georges A&E departments are also able to book appointments directly at the hubs.

The hubs are open at almost identical times as the Walk in Centre and offer over 1,500 GP and nurse appointments each week. Unlike the Walk in Centre, which is located in Streatham, the GP Access Hubs are placed around the borough.

The Walk in Centre

The NHS Walk in Centre service is delivered by separate weekday and weekend providers. The current provider of the weekend Walk in Centre has given notice on its contract and will stop providing the service from 31 March 2017. This has given us an opportunity to consider in detail future plans and to look at GP services currently available to Lambeth people, many of which were not available when the Walk in Centre was opened in 2009.



GP Diversion Scheme

This scheme diverts patients from St Thomas's Hospital to the nearby Waterloo Health Centre and was established to support the hospital to achieve its four hour waiting target by helping patients with primary care needs to get an appointment at a GP surgery. There are 14 appointments available per day, Monday to Friday, between the hours of 10am and 6pm. For Lambeth patients, a PALS member of staff contacts the patient's registered GP practice to try and secure a same day appointment. Those patients who aren't registered with a GP are helped to register with a practice close to where they live. Since the opening of GP Access Hubs in Lambeth in 2015, patients registered with a Lambeth GP are encouraged to be seen at a hub.

Our review

Our review has shown the Walk in Centre is mainly used by people who live in the south west of Lambeth and who are registered with practices in that area. The Walk in Centre also sees a number of people who are registered with GPs in neighbouring boroughs and some people who are not registered with a GP.

We have spoken to patients, GPs and other key stakeholders as part of our review. We have also looked at the cost of the various services, their capacity and how they operate. The findings suggest change is needed to ensure we offer similar and straightforward GP access to patients from all parts of Lambeth; to make sure we are making best use of our GP Access Hubs, and to make best use of NHS funds.

The options

We have been considering four options:

1. Continuing to provide GP Access Hubs and using the Walk in Centre for weekday appointments only
2. Continuing to provide GP Access Hubs and reprocurring the Walk in Centre weekend service
3. Continuing to provide GP Access Hubs and reprocurring both weekday and weekend services at the Walk in Centre through one provider organisation
4. Discontinuing the Walk in Centre and increasing the use of the GP Access Hubs.

Our preference

At NHS Lambeth Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), we are committed to providing Lambeth people with high quality GP services at flexible times and for urgent and non-urgent issues that can be dealt with by a GP or nurse.

Lambeth people have told us they want us to develop GP services that are more accessible, more equitable, more fairly distributed and that use NHS resources wisely. Opening our GP Access Hubs in 2015 was an important step for us to deliver what people need and what we believe we should offer. We do not think we now need to run both the GP Access Hubs and the Walk in Centre.

Therefore, the CCG's preferred option is Option 4. This means the CCG is minded to close the Walk in Centre and increase the use of GP Access Hubs.



The review and findings

Current national guidance tells us we should be providing GP services in a more joined up way, giving patients access to appointments and advice 12 hours a day, seven days a week. In London, we've been looking at how groups of GP practices can work together to do that.

Our review has looked at how people access GP and other primary care services in Lambeth and in nearby boroughs such as Southwark. We've looked at how the services are used and the cost of them as part of that review.

We found:

- The Walk in Centre mainly serves patients registered in the south west of Lambeth, in particular those registered at practices located south of Brixton Hill, and practices in the south west part of south east Lambeth, eg those within 1.5 miles of Gracefield Gardens
- The Walk in Centre isn't being used as much since the opening of the GP Access Hubs
- There are around 50 per cent more people using the Walk in Centre on a Saturday compared with Sunday
- 77 per cent of patients attend the Walk in Centre for a wide range of acute minor medical problems which would normally be dealt with by self-care or by consulting a GP or nurse practitioner
- Most Walk in Centre patients are in their 20s to 40s and 62 per cent of patients lived in south west Lambeth
- Before attending the Walk in Centre, more than half of patients had first tried to get an appointment with their GP. This figure was slightly higher at the weekend, and 40 per cent of these were sent to the Walk in Centre by their GP practice, with almost all of these coming from GP practices in the south west of the borough
- The uptake of GP Access Hub appointments at weekends is significantly lower than during the week. This could be due to us providing too many appointments or because it is difficult for patients to be directed to the hubs at weekends, particularly for emergency appointments
- The GP Diversion Scheme was established to support St Thomas's Hospital to achieve its four hour wait target rather than to support patients to access GP appointments.

We have looked at data to see how many people have been using the Walk in Centre and GP Access Hubs and what capacity they have. We found none of the four options would mean we would need to increase the number of appointments available at the Walk in Centre or GP Access Hubs. However, we decided we should consider opening the GP Access Hubs at 11am from Monday to Friday if we decided to pursue Option 4 so that the current time range of appointments across all GP access services is maintained.



Our review included:

- Looking at national policy and relevant recent initiatives
- Looking in depth at current and previous documents relating to the three services
- Analysing how the services were used and how much they cost
- Interviews with key stakeholders to identify issues with current services and potential improvements
- Focussed engagement with patients at the Walk in Centre and at the Waterloo Health Centre where our GP Diversion Scheme patients are sent to understand why they have accessed these services and the barriers to using their GP
- Bringing together details about cost and how the services are used with information gathered from patients to develop potential options
- Identifying what is important to make a future service work well
- Development of options and an options appraisal
- Engagement with patients to discuss potential options and generate feedback
- Looking at each option in detail and projecting cost and appointments needed
- Identifying a preferred option together with associated risks
- Identifying potential next steps.

What we heard from patients

Interviews were conducted with 61 users of the Walk in Centre of which 31 took place during the week and 30 at the weekend. Two thirds of the patients were female and ethnicity was mainly white, black or mixed. Only five per cent were Asian; however, the ethnicity of patients was broadly in line with the Lambeth population. Patients also tended to be from the younger age groups with only small numbers in their 50s or above. The most common age group was the 20s.

Which patients were using the Walk in Centre?

We found 62 per cent of patients lived in the south west of Lambeth, a proportion that rose to 77 per cent at the weekends. Patients who lived outside of Lambeth were the next highest group. About 15 per cent of patients came from south east Lambeth, a figure that remained constant across the week, but only one patient was from the north of Lambeth. Most patients, 89 per cent, were registered with a GP and of these, 54 per cent were with a practice in south west Lambeth and 33 per cent were with an out of borough GP. Of these, more than 50 per cent had moved to Lambeth but had not registered with a GP locally; although many had tried to do so on the day of their visit to the Walk in Centre.



Why patients were using the Walk in Centre

More than 50 per cent of patients had tried to get an appointment with their GP before visiting the Walk in Centre, with this figure being slightly higher at the weekend (patients who had either telephoned their GP practice and got an out of hours message or had not tried on this occasion because they assumed that it would be closed).

Nearly 40 per cent had not tried anywhere else before arriving at the Walk in Centre with very small numbers having approached NHS 111, A&E, an out of hours service or a pharmacy. Of those who gave a response to the question of why they had come to the Walk in Centre rather than their GP (53), more than 50 per cent said that they could not get an appointment; 40 per cent of these were then sent to the Walk in Centre by their GP practice, with almost all of these coming from practices in south west Lambeth.

Patients were also asked where they might have gone if the Walk in Centre was not available as an option. A total of 30 per cent said they would have gone to A&E, while 25 per cent said they would have used another Walk in Centre and 23 per cent said they would have gone back to their GP. The remainder said they'd use NHS 111, a pharmacy or the out of hours service, while eight per cent did not know and seven per cent would not have gone anywhere else.

Talking to patients reinforced the picture that was highlighted in the review of data which showed how the Walk in Centre is being used.

Patients using the GP Diversion Scheme

On average there are only eight or nine patients per day who are redirected to GP services under the GP Diversion Scheme and arrival times cannot be predicted so it was not viable to conduct patient interviews face to face. Therefore, a questionnaire was produced which was handed to patients by reception staff. A total of 44 questionnaires were completed by patients.

The majority of patients were in the 20s to 50s range with very few older or younger patients. It was also notable that ethnicity was predominantly white with 61 per cent of patients being from this group.

Most of these patients, 77 per cent, did not live in Lambeth. A total of 80 per cent of patients were registered with a GP practice and only 16 per cent of patients were registered with a Lambeth GP practice (seven patients), four from north Lambeth, two from the south west of the borough and one from the south east. Of these seven patients, five had tried to get an appointment with their GP and three had been told that they would have to wait for an appointment so had gone to A&E, while two said that their call had not been answered. Another felt that they would be unlikely to get an appointment so had telephoned NHS 111 and been advised to go to A&E. One person felt that A&E was most appropriate for their needs so had gone straight there.

Across the whole group of 44 patients, 43 per cent of patients had tried to get a GP appointment before going to A&E, nine per cent tried NHS Direct and a similar proportion tried NHS 111. We found seven per cent of patients called an out of hours service, while 41 per cent did not try to access any other services before going to A&E.



Of those patients who tried other services first, half were offered a GP appointment but not within a timeframe they felt was acceptable. A quarter were advised to attend A&E and the remainder were advised to go to either a Walk in Centre or the Waterloo Health Centre.

Those patients who said they had not contacted their GP were asked why not. Of these, 42 per cent said that their GP was not nearby, 16 per cent felt that they needed A&E, 16 per cent were not registered with a GP, 11 per cent did not think they would get an appointment and 11 per cent said that it was outside of their surgery's normal opening hours.

What else data has shown us

- A greater proportion of nurse appointments are filled than doctors' appointment in all hubs with the exception of Clapham. This suggests that a rebalancing of availability between doctor and nurse appointments should be considered.
- The uptake of appointments at weekends is significantly lower than during the week. This could be due to overprovision or because it is difficult for patients to be directed to the hubs at weekends, particularly for emergency appointments. This is even more marked on a Sunday.
- While hub appointments are available, patients continue to choose to use the Walk in Centre even though their needs could be met at the hubs.

Review outcome and options

The review revealed the GP Diversion Scheme was established to support St Thomas' Hospital with the achievement of their four hour wait target rather than supporting GP access. The numbers of patients that use this service are small and attempts have been made to stream out Lambeth patients to the access hubs. Less than a quarter of patients who filled in questionnaires as part of this review lived in Lambeth and only 16 per cent were registered with a Lambeth practice.

We have therefore suggested that the GP Diversion Scheme should be addressed separately from the other GP access services and any decisions on its future should be based purely on its contribution to the A&E four hour target.



The options

As a result of our review and findings, we developed four options to consider in detail.

1. Continuing to provide GP Access Hubs and continue with the Walk in Centre as a weekday only service

Once SELDOC withdraw from providing the weekend service, the Walk in Centre would become a weekday only service.

Patient use of the GP Access Hubs is significantly lower at the weekends than during the week. Over the first five months of the financial year 2016/17, there were an average of 144 patient visits to the Walk in Centre each weekend while 360 appointments are currently available in the hubs at the same time which suggests that there is the capacity within the hubs to cope with the increase in patients should the Walk in Centre be closed at the weekends.

Hub appointments would only be available for Lambeth patients; therefore, patients registered to practices in other boroughs or not registered with a GP would have to access services elsewhere.

If this option was to be taken forward, it would require complete system buy in and clear signposting so that patients are offered a hub appointment and encouraged to take this up to minimise use of alternative services such as another walk in centre or A&E. Telephone messages at practices during closing hours should direct patients to a hub and patients should be able to make an appointment by telephone. Patients would need to book appointments at weekends through receptionists or possibly NHS 111.

2. Continuing to provide GP Access Hubs and reprocure the Walk in Centre weekend service

Continue with the current provider of the weekday Walk in Centre and tender for a new provider of the weekend service (which could be the weekday provider).

This option would provide a 'like for like' reprocurement of the existing service; however, it would not address the potential over capacity within the system which would continue to exist. Potentially, there would still be multiple providers of the Walk in Centre across the week.



3. Continuing to provide GP Access Hubs and reprocore both the weekday and weekend Walk in Centre service through one provider

A single procurement process which rules out separating the weekday and weekend providers. As the weekend provider has given notice to the CCG and the CCG has given notice to the weekday provider, there is an opportunity to reprocore both the weekday and weekend service from one provider. This option has the potential to reprocore the service at lower cost than Option 2. However, like Option 2, this option would not address the potential over capacity within the system.

4. Discontinue the Walk in Centre and increase the use of the GP Access Hubs

Close the Walk in Centre and increase the use of the GP Access Hubs to cater for Lambeth patients who might have previously attended the Walk in Centre. This would include nurse appointments and the ability for NHS 111/A&E/London Ambulance Service to book appointments.

This option would be similar to Option 1 except that the Walk in Centre would close completely with the GP Access Hubs providing the capacity for an alternative service. As with Option 1, hub appointments would only be available for Lambeth patients; therefore, patients registered to practices in other boroughs or not registered with a GP would have to access services elsewhere unless this issue was addressed. The issues identified within Option 1 relating to ensuring access for patients, particularly at weekends, would also apply to this option.

While it is believed that there is capacity within the system to absorb the additional activity from the Walk in Centre, consideration should also be given to opening the hubs from 11am, Monday to Friday.

Given that notice has been served by the weekend provider, a do nothing option is not appropriate; Option 2 is the minimum change option.



Feedback on options

We are seeking feedback on all options. To help test our thinking at an early stage, we discussed the four emerging options with a staff member and two representatives from the Lambeth Patient Participation Group Network. There was agreement that it would be sensible to simplify GP access services, however, the following points were also made:

- Walk in centres were set up several years ago and before the current drive towards 24/7 services and so initiatives such as GP Access Hubs duplicate services
- Should the Walk in Centre not be recommissioned either at weekends or at all it is essential that patients should be able to access appointments at these times
- Flexibility around appointment types would be required
- Many visits to the Walk in Centre are planned around the convenience for the patient, particularly at weekends, so the GP Access Hubs should be a viable alternative to the Walk in Centre
- Clear plans are needed for how to deal with unregistered patients, but particularly the minority, often with mental health issues, and other hard to reach groups who might find it difficult to access normal GP services
- If GP access services are to be consolidated in the hubs, communication about the range of services and how to access them is essential, both for patients but also for practice staff to ensure that patients are given the best opportunity to access hub appointments
- A clear route for using the hubs and communication is especially important at weekends when many practices are closed.

What happens next?

Our review has revealed we need to:

- Remove overlap in the services we provide
- Enable patients from across Lambeth to access GP services in the same way
- Get better value for money.

We have looked at the cost of the services, the benefits and opportunities and the risks of each option and have decided Option 4 is our preferred option.

This means the CCG is minded to close the Walk in Centre and increase the use of GP Access Hubs from 31 March 2017.



Get involved

We are continuing to gather views from patients and stakeholders to inform our decision. We are especially keen to hear views on:

- the potential benefits of our preferred option and how we might increase these
- potential drawbacks or negative impacts of our preferred option and how we might reduce or remove these
- the best channels for communication with Lambeth patients and people about our plans and our decision.

You can give your views by:

Emailing us: lamccg.getinvolved@nhs.net

Writing to us at: Walk-in views, NHS Lambeth CCG, 1 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7TP

Filling in our short [survey](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Lambeth_NHS_Walk_in_Centre): www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Lambeth_NHS_Walk_in_Centre

We aim to reach a decision at our Governing Body meeting on January 18 2017 at The Foundry, SE11 5RR from 1pm to 4pm.

You can attend the Public Forum before our Governing Body meeting (from noon to 1pm) where the Walk in Centre will be among the topics being discussed, and stay for the full meeting.

You can also visit our [website](http://www.lambethccg.nhs.uk) for a more detailed report on the options and the information we've considered to come to a decision about our preferred option – www.lambethccg.nhs.uk

