

# Urgent Treatment Centres Birmingham and Solihull

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull have been working with Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board to look at Urgent Treatment Centres (UTCs) in Birmingham and Solihull and how to improve them.

This overview is divided into two sections. The first 'Our work on urgent care' gives an overview of our investigation reports. The second section 'Experiences of people in Birmingham and Solihull' shares the feedback from residents that we have heard over the last three years.

## Our work on urgent care

In 2023, Healthwatch Solihull investigated 422 Solihull residents' experiences of trying to access urgent care. This report looks at what helped and/or hindered residents' experiences trying to access urgent care and the impact such barriers have on their health, wellbeing and/or quality of life. The key topics that people told us about included the quality of communication, the distance to services, and waiting times.

The report also found that the most important thing for Solihull residents when choosing an urgent health service included:

- location (it is easy to access/close to get to/from).
- access a healthcare professional on the same day.

Residents told us:

The closure of the Minor Injuries Unit in Solihull Hospital during the pandemic meant people had to travel further to access urgent care and this caused further stress and upset.

- The public were confused about what is available to access and where.
- People used A&E inappropriately because they could not get a GP appointment.
- Alternative urgent care options were not clear or well-advertised. Poor communication between services leads to confusion and negative experiences.

Our full report and findings can be found [here](#).

Healthwatch Solihull shared what we heard from patients with Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (ICB) and University Hospitals Birmingham (UHB). They acknowledged the need to improve on the issues we found during our investigation, and they committed to improve services.

As a result of our original report, and the actions the ICB have implemented, patients and the public should experience the following improvements:

- Improved communication and engagement following the implementation of a comprehensive stakeholder engagement programme that will ensure that patients voices inform the development of the UEC strategy.
- Improved continuation of care and communication between providers following a communications plan being developed.
- Improved signposting for alternative access to avoid unnecessary attendance to A&E or other parts of the urgent care pathways following work undertaken via Locality Hubs and integrated same day urgent care.
- Improved awareness of Solihull Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) following ongoing collaboration with University Hospitals Birmingham.
- In our original report, patients reported concerns around distance of services and the costs of travel. The ICB have committed to a 'Joint Forward Plan' over the next 5 years which will 'radically shift the way health and care is delivered– focusing on preventing ill-health while integrating services so that healthcare is provided as close to people's homes as possible'.

In addition to this University Hospitals Birmingham updated us on the following measures they took following our report:

- Undertook a comprehensive communications campaign regarding the opening and what service was available, including social media, local newspapers, local radio, and advertising on billboards and in local train stations.
- Updated the webpage to make it clearer for patients to understand how to access the two services running in Solihull UTC including how to book an appointment with BADGER for a minor illness.
- Continue to promote the UTC on social media including opening times, access routes, and conditions treated.
- If eligible, patients can claim travel costs etc through the NHS scheme and reclaim at reception.
- The ICB continue to promote Solihull UTC for urgent issues when patients cannot access a GP.

- New signage has been installed within Solihull UTC waiting area to explain how the two services work, who runs them, waiting time expectations and conditions treated.

Our follow up report can be found [here](#).

In addition, we recently looked at Community Pharmacy services, such as Pharmacy First, across both Birmingham and Solihull. This highlighted a number of challenges faced when moving the venue for certain types of care:

- Awareness – We identified a lack of awareness of the services provided by community pharmacy following these changes. This shows the need for any changes to the venues for healthcare services to be well communicated to patients to enable them to access care at the appropriate venue.
- Facilities – We identified doubts from patients that community pharmacy has the facilities to enable private consultations. This highlighted the need to assess how well suited each of these venues are for the type of care they will be providing so that patients can be reassured and feel comfortable accessing care in these venues.
- Preference for care venues – Many people told us that they simply preferred to seek treatment for minor illnesses from their GP despite the change in guidance. This again shows that more work needs to be done to make patients feel comfortable accessing care in different venues in order to effectively move care into communities.

More information regarding these findings can be found here:

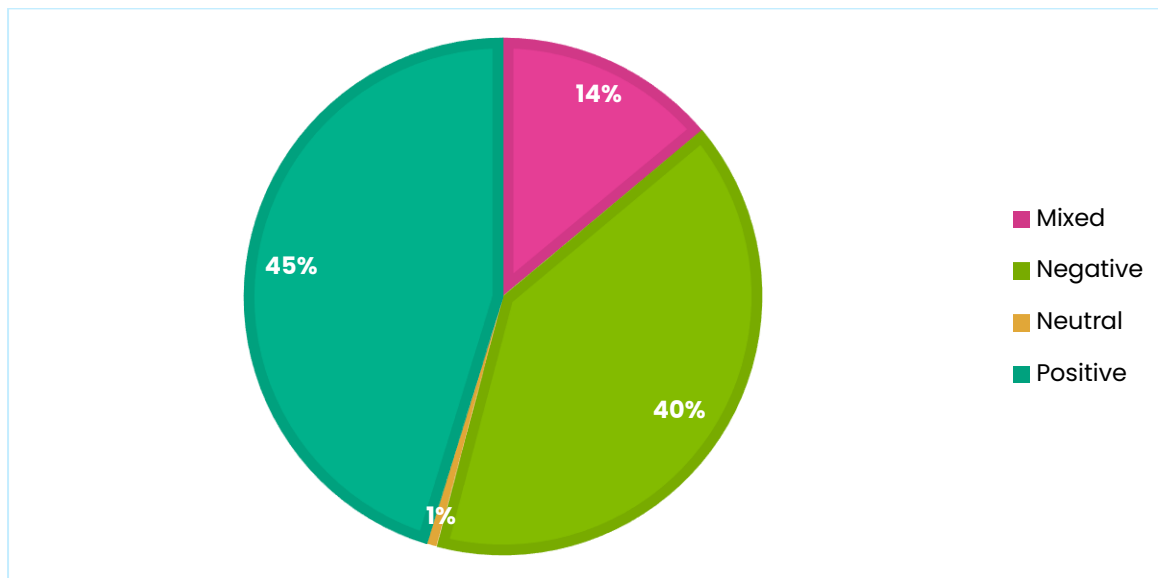
[Access and barriers to NHS Community Pharmacies in Birmingham - Healthwatch Birmingham](#)

[Access and barriers to NHS Community Pharmacies in Solihull - Healthwatch Solihull](#)

## Experiences of people in Birmingham and Solihull

We have heard from over 300 people about their experiences at different UTCs across Birmingham and Solihull over the last 3 years. This includes the 6 current UTC services, as well as the previously running services at Warren Farm, Hurst Lane Castle Bromwich, and Birmingham NHS Walk in Centre. We have however noted that when people are telling us about which centre they have visited, there is confusion about whether they have accessed Erdington UTC or North Birmingham UTC, due to their current close locations.

The sentiment of this feedback varies, with 45% being positive, 40% negative, 14% mixed and 1% neutral.



We have also heard 150 additional comments from the public about urgent care services in Solihull, mostly regarding the closure of the A&E and the reopening of urgent care services post the pandemic.

### Access to services

People told us about difficulties using the online booking system for appointments.

*"I was very disappointed, when told to book an appointment at the urgent treatment centre, to find that the online booking system was not working. I was therefore unable to book an appointment."*

*"An appointment was made with the urgent treatment centre to be seen by a doctor after having no luck getting an appointment with my GP. The system for booking an appointment is quite difficult needing to know your NHS number and registering etc. This could be made simpler or better still you should be able to just walk in to see a GP."*

*"The actual service was great but the booking was a nightmare. Awful website, no clarity around how/when appointments are released, no tie in with 111. If the doctor on 111 thinks you need to be seen they should be able to book you an appointment. We managed it but it would be really difficult for older people without the IT knowledge."*

*"Very efficient once you understand the online booking process. Pleasant staff and clean waiting room. Older people don't understand apps nor online booking processes"*

However, opinions on the online booking system were mixed, with other people telling us that they found it easy to access.

*"NHS 111 provided me with the booking details and I was able to access a GP appointment at the Urgent Treatment Centre at Solihull Hospital."*

*"I was given the booking details by NHS 111. The online system was easy to navigate. The service was very good I was seen and treated quickly."*

*"I have used the online booking system to get appointments which is good."*

*"Easy to book an appointment. No waiting times at the centre. Was seen quickly and no issues at all."*

*"Appointments are easy to book online. The doctors I have seen have been excellent and I have never had too long of a wait."*

*"Booked an appointment on line very easily. The service was very good."*

We have also heard how people were unaware that they needed to book an appointment to access services.

*"The information provided online is very unclear. You can't walk in and have to book an appointment. This meant that I had to walk out and book an appointment for an insect bite."*

*"Lady on the desk said I needed an appointment which I was confused about as thought it was a walk in service like A&E. She wouldn't book me an appointment on the desk and said I had to use the online route. She had to talk me through step by step as it was complicated (and I'm tech savvy!) The appointments came and went and I was stood there knowing she could have just booked me on the system in front of her on her computer but refused too! Not sure the point of a receptionist if they aren't booking you in?? The desk next to her is for another service at the hospital and that is a walk in service!!! Really need to sort this out. They should let the receptionist book the appointments at the desk as the people arrive."*

*"Confusing 111 told me to go there, when I got there they said no go online and come back get your own appointment - with no Wi-Fi at the building impossible!"*

*"They don't allow you to book directly with them. You have to call NHS 111 who books it for you. They were helpful and gave me medication but not happy I can't just go direct to them."*

*"The service at Solihull isn't as good as it used to be Apparently you now need an appointment. We used to have a walk in centre plus the MIU and now don't seem to have any of what we had. We need a proper A&E there too and fully staff each unit, I am not criticising doctors or nurses but I just don't think we have what we need"*

*"Since covid its not a walk in centre, you used to be able to walk in and see a nurse. Now its an appointment based service. It's not good and not helpful if you can't get a doctor appointment."*

*"They were good when you could walk in with no appointment, but since Covid you need an appointment. There's no services that are available anymore so you end up going to the hospital or a pharmacy, its not good. They were so helpful but it's not there now."*

## Patient caps and waiting list closures

We have heard how frustrated people have felt when they are unable to access UTCs due to patient caps, running out of appointments or closures of waiting lists ahead of closing times

*"I fell down the stairs and injured my ankle. I arrived at 18:00 to be told there was a four hour wait so I wouldn't be seen. I asked if I could make an appointment for the next day and after a 20 minute wait while the person on reception left to check I was told no I couldn't. I felt completely vulnerable and uncared for."*

*"I got there at 6pm and they said they were closing at 8pm and it would be best to go to the A&E department at City Hospital. You would think that they would close the doors at a certain time and then see those already there. But maybe they did I'm just not sure why they would send me to the hospital."*

*"Went with an issue the doctor said they couldn't see me. It was close to them closing so they were not taking any more patients. So I had to go to the A&E at the hospital."*

*"[All] occasions we was at clinic by 6 pm and they were refused to register us as they mentioned we not able to accept anymore patients when there is less than 10 patients waiting. The clinic closing time is on website is 8pm and staffs are rushing to go home and don't want to see patients. On my last visit there was two girls was on reception and on of the girl was ready to book me in as my ear was bleeding but the second one was refusing which is really unprofessional [...] I wanted to register formal complaint regarding the same as the timing I am also working in NHS but we clearly mentioned the last patient appointment time clearly"*

*"It's always fully booked when you try to go there which makes it inaccessible. It's so hard when your ill and can't see a GP or the walk in for help and guidance."*

*"The caller was ill in hospital last year with a serious case of gastritis. Over the easter weekend he felt he was suffering a reoccurrence of it, he is a nurse so recognised he needed help. Urgent care centre said they were full and could not help. He didn't think he was ill enough for A&E as he knows the pressures the services are under, so decided to ring urgent centre back. Again at 8am they said they were full and couldn't help. Eventually the receptionist arranged for a doctor to call him instead. They called and said it's probably a stomach bug and he didn't need to be seen. He disagrees. He is frustrated that he is trying to avoid A&E but can't get the help he wants."*

## Waiting times

People have told us how much they value short waiting times when visiting the UTCs

*"We were seen very quickly and treated accordingly. Very happy with the service provided."*

*"The service was fantastic. I was seen very quickly and I received excellent care and treatment"*

*"I had an ear infection and they were great. Very good staff. They gave me drops and sorted me out quickly when I couldn't get in with the GP."*

*"I received an excellent service from the minor injuries department at Solihull Urgent Treatment Centre. I was seen and treated very quickly, and it saved me a visit to A&E, which was a huge relief. I was very happy with the service provided."*

*"I attended the urgent treatment centre with an open wound. I was seen quickly and the nurse cleaned the wound and dressed it. I was happy with the care and treatment received."*

*"Really good. Went to them when I burnt my arm. They dressed the wound and were really good. Great staff and I was seen quickly. Brilliant service."*

*"Daughter was seen after an appointment was made through NHS 111. They saw her quickly."*

*"Easy to book an appointment. No waiting times at the centre. Was seen quickly and no issues at all."*

*"Solihull hospital's urgent treatment centre have provided a fantastic service. I came here to avoid a busy A&E department, and was treated as a walk in patient. I was seen, x-rayed and treated within an hour. I am amazed how quickly we have been seen. I am really happy with the service I have received."*

*"I walked in and was seen quickly. I am very happy, they wrote me a letter for my GP. I felt listened to for the first time in a long time. They were fantastic."*

This is not a universal experience however with some people experiencing longer waiting times to be seen

*"Hours of waiting in an urgent treatment doesn't give you much to celebrate if I'm honest"*

*"I've been three times, twice before Christmas where the wait time was over 3 hours - and once last week and it was less than 1 hour. I think it's getting better but at busy peak times I imagine urgent treatment as a priority isn't happening because of the amount of people"*

*"Waiting time at Solihull is much more than Heartlands A&E for kids! I left and went there when my son broke his fingers. 1 hour in and out at heartlands, 4 hours in Solihull."*



*"My daughter was taken there at 1:15 pm from work as she was not feeling well and she was seen at 7:15 pm by the GP. She waited for 6 hours which is horrible."*

*"Long waiting time, whenever you go have to wait 3 to 5 hours."*

*"Tired of waiting 5 to 6 hours and walk out with more than you go in with. Should be able to see own GP. It's just not working."*

*"I waited 9 hours for the treatment which is horrible."*

*"I waited 3 hours the last time I went there. There were at least 50 patients waiting to be seen. 3 hours is too much."*

*"They're good but shouldn't have to go there when I am registered with a GP. You wait hours to be seen and they don't know you or your history."*

*"They are waste of time. If you get referred you have to wait for ages and don't get any answers. It was much better when it was a walk in centre but its not great now. You wait so long for nothing."*

## Staff

We have heard from people who have told us that more staff are needed at UTCs

*"The Urgent Treatment Centre is not working. Staff numbers are limited with only 2 nurses working most mornings. Demand is very high and we can just not meet the demand. There have been in excess of 5 hour waits to be seen. The patients are getting fed up, and the staff are fed up of it too."*

*"I've experienced the UTC to be completely overrun - I've been there a few times in the past few months for different reasons and each time something silly has happened, like a Hygiene issue, a long wait time, lack of staff, arguing with the staff, being ignored for hours I just think something isn't working over there"*

*"Excellent service, staff under a lot of pressure, more staff needed, very helpful"*

*"Overcrowded and understaffed. They make you sit for hours before offering any support."*

The negative attitude of some staff towards people has also been highlighted

*"Straightforward experience. Nurse was rude and 'uninterested'. Their consultation skills should be improved. However, seen within a reasonable amount of time."*

*"An appointment was booked by 111. When we attended the staff queried why we were there. They did not have the correct equipment to assess me. I attended with my mum for support. She is medically exempt from wearing face masks but the staff were not happy about this and were very rude and unhelpful. I had a very poor experience."*

*"I just want to get improved emergency care if I need it and the service is poor with staff who do not care at all by their attitude."*

*"Rude reception staff and so unhelpful."*

*"Son went was left waiting 4 hours and told come back another day awful experience reception staff were very rude! They need more welcoming reception staff, and to get actually seen not sent home"*

*"I contacted 111 due to a suspected miscarriage. They gave me an appointment at the UTC in Solihull for the following day at 9am. Upon arrival I explained I had an appointment. I was completely shut down and was told that this was not warranted as they had nothing to do with 111. I was sent to the main reception to then be sent back. Again, completely shut down. I was told to fill a form in as a walk-in, despite the insensitive, argumentative demeanour I endeavoured from the receptionist. I was in tears, given my situation. My partner was appalled that a human being could be so spiteful and cruel to a woman losing her baby. I felt as though I was making the appointment up. As if it was my fault that there was an issue with appointments. We took ourselves to Warwick hospital and had a fantastic, supportive and empathetic experience with them. Solihull Urgent Treatment Centre has left a huge imprint on our hearts, for a negative reason. That receptionist needs some training in decent human interaction, amongst other things."*

Despite this, several people also told us about positive experiences with staff

*"My experience at Solihull Hospital's Urgent Treatment Centre was very good. I was a walk in patient and used the minor injuries service. The staff were very nice and I was happy with the service. The department itself was very clean, calm and quiet. It was a much nicer experience than attending an A&E department."*

*"Waited for an hour but was seen by a very helpful and kind GP. The GP sorted out a hospital appointment for me for the next day."*

*"I had to go in November/December because I couldn't get in with the doctors. They were brilliant, really very good, really helpful. Didn't even end up waiting long at all, it's mad."*

*"They are friendly and they are helpful. They helped me with my leg. I lost my balance and it was scary but they reassured me."*

*"They provided excellent treatment and care to my wife. The GP was very helpful and even phoned us the next day for a follow up."*

*"The staff were very helpful, the environment is pleasant, clean. Dr was lovely and reassuring. A pleasure to visit."*

People also expressed concerns that they should have been seen by a doctor rather than a nurse or nurse practitioner.

*"Poor clinical care - no introduction from staff member, sent to A&E. They then said they had sent everyone from the afternoon to A&E. Transpires it was a nurse that I saw. Well known that using AHPs causes an increase in unnecessary investigations and onwards referrals. Why not staffed with GPs?"*

*"Seen nurse practitioner. Was in the room 3 mins barely checked her. Told viral. Go home and rest. Was told " you know how it is mom kids get poorly" Same day visited Erdington was in there 20 mins thoroughly checked over & given antibiotics for chest & ear infection. It needs more time checking patients, and a doctor not a very tired sweaty nurse practitioner."*

## Referrals to other services

People told us how they were unable to be helped at UTCs and were sent on to A&E departments elsewhere

*"It is disappointing that I have now been referred on to Heartlands Hospital to see a doctor and that you cannot be referred to see a doctor at Solihull Hospital. I have been given a letter to hand in at Heartlands A&E so hopefully this means I will be seen quicker there."*

*"I came to the walk in minor injuries unit after suffering a fall, and injuring my face. The service was good, the nurses were lovely, but I was unable to see a doctor and was directed straight to Heartlands Hospital so that I could be examined by a doctor. I was given a letter to hand in at Heartlands Hospital but it would have been far more convenient if I could have been referred to Solihull Hospital as the UTC is located there."*

*"The Urgent Treatment Centre needs a new name because it is misleading. It should be advertised as the minor injuries unit. When you say urgent treatment you think of people with serious symptoms. So many patients have attended with chest pains and serious symptoms and they just refuse to even see them and tell them to go to A&E at Heartlands. The department has been kitted out to do much more than what is being done in there. There is capacity for it to be an A&E department. The way the centre is being used at the moment is a complete waste of money. Staff go in there to hide away and do their paperwork. Loads of empty rooms not being used to treat patients. Its a disgrace."*

*"I had hurt my right hand and went in at 11am and didn't leave until after 4pm, I was told the GP couldn't help me. They sent me to A&E."*

*"I was disappointed by the service and level of treatment available at Solihull Hospital's Urgent Treatment Centre. I attended with a minor injury but they said they could not help me and sent me to A&E at Heartlands Hospital. We need a better equipped Urgent Treatment Centre, ideally we need an A&E department!"*

*"We were advised to go there with our Daughter, we were told by 111, to do this . We queued at the UTC, then after 30mins we're seen and advised to go to A&E at Heartlands. Like everybody in Solihull we would like our A &E department back. Around 220,000 people live in Solihull area. Trying to make out the UTC is adequate is wrong. We will just go to A&E next time, maybe try Warwick? Or dreaded Heartlands. Solihull hospital is now just an annex of the QE NHS trust, local population have no say"*

*"Went in with an issue with my Knee and was sent to another Hospital"*

*"Went in with a pain in my leg and they sent me to A&E saying it was a big issue."*

We also heard how people were frustrated that they needed to go back to their GP for further treatment or to be referred on.

*"I booked an appointment here when I could not get in at my GPs. They told me that I needed an urgent blood test but they could not do it or refer me to the phlebotomy department at Solihull Hospital which is in the same building. The doctors here are good but they were not helpful at all during this visit. In the end I was told to go back to my GP even though I was there due to issues getting an appointment at my GP."*

*"The doctors have been good but it is no good for ongoing care with long term medical conditions, and you just get told that you need to be referred by your own GP."*

*"I was told that I needed a GP referral when I visited for an urgent issue and that there was nothing they could do to help me."*

*"They did a number of checks but told me that they couldn't help without a referral from a doctor. This is an issue because I can't get in to see my GP."*

*"I could not get an appointment with my GP but managed to get an urgent out of hours appointment at Hurst Lane. The service was ok, but its inconvenient when it is not your own GP because you need to see them for referrals and/or testing etc, so although you can access urgent care you still have to battle to get an appointment if the matter is ongoing."*

*"I understand that there are only certain things that will be seen by the UTC - my son attended with a possible infected wound which he required antibiotics for and was told that they couldn't deal with it. Then Badger told him to go to his own GP they were still open - he wasn't able to get an appointment"*

*"I called 111 on Saturday, they said I should go to the UTC. I booked an appointment. It turned out they can't do blood tests, don't have an ultrasound, don't do anything. Just sent me home to wait for Monday and an appointment with GP or go to A&E if I get worse. What's the point of having a UTC where they can't do simple medical checks?"*

## Facilities

Some people told us how facilities at UTCs could be improved

*"The waiting room is very very small and not adequate room for times when busy and parents need to accompany children. It needs a bigger waiting room and a quicker turnaround in being seen initially."*

*"Pretty good, my daughter is disabled and they found us a quiet room and some toys for her. They did really well. The radiologists were lovely to her. They could do with a larger waiting room maybe, more accessible for wheelchairs as it was a bit tight getting her around"*

*"The room was absolutely packed hardly a chair available."*

*"I went there and waited for 3 hours before seeing the GP. The place was over crowded and toilets were dirty. They didn't even have a water dispenser."*

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull look forward to working with Birmingham and Solihull integrated care board further on this topic, as we look to hear more experiences from people about their care.

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull