



### Details of visit

Service address:	Integrated Urgent Care Contact Centre, Gilbert Hitchcock House, Kimbolton Road, Bedford
Service Provider:	Herts Urgent Care
Date and Time:	11 <sup>th</sup> November 2018
Authorised Representatives:	Diana Blackmun, Dave Simpson (HWCB) Sudha Auro, Carrie Page, Kathryn Knights (HWL) Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
Contact details:	Capability House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire, MK45 4HR Tel: 0300 303 8554

### Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and Healthwatch Luton would like to thank the service provider, Herts Urgent Care (HUC), for accommodating the team on this visit.



### Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific date set out above. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all patients and staff (clinical and non-clinical), only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

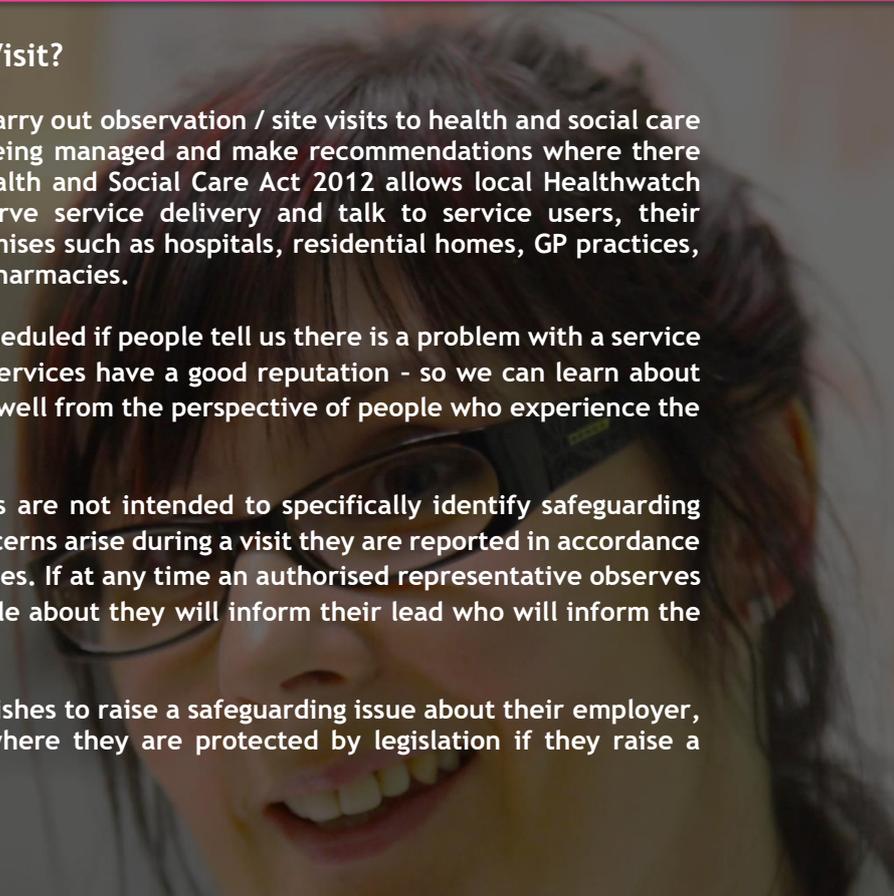
### What is an Observation / Site Visit?

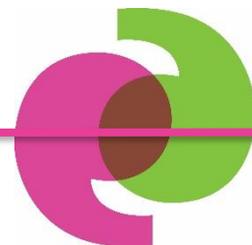
Local Healthwatch representatives carry out observation / site visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being managed and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 allows local Healthwatch authorised representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families, patients and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies.

Observation and site visits can be scheduled if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation - so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.

Healthwatch observation / site visits are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies. If at any time an authorised representative observes anything that they feel uncomfortable about they will inform their lead who will inform the service Manager, ending the visit.

In addition, if any member of staff wishes to raise a safeguarding issue about their employer, they will be directed to the CQC where they are protected by legislation if they raise a concern.





## Purpose of the visit

- To observe the working of the Contact Centre outside of normal hours.
- Identify examples of good working practice.
- Observe service users and patients engaging with staff.

## Strategic drivers

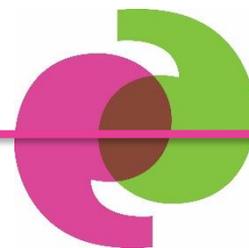
- Some historical negative feedback on the service received by local Healthwatch.
- Local Healthwatch remit to advise, challenge and support service providers to maintain and improve health and social care services.

## Methodology

This was an announced and invited site visit carried out at the Herts Urgent Care Call Centre in Bedford, pursuant to a visit made by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire representatives to the main call centre in Welwyn Garden City on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2017, which was conducted during normal working hours (9am to 5pm).

To better understand the challenges and pressures on the service outside of normal working hours, representatives from Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and Healthwatch Luton were invited to visit the Bedford Integrated Urgent Care (IUC) Contact Centre during the weekend. The visit was subsequently scheduled for Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November starting at 12 noon.





## Summary of findings

The Contact Centre is located in rooms on the first floor of Gilbert Hitchcock House, formerly part of the North Wing of Bedford Hospital. Access to the building is through a secure door entry system.

On arrival the team were met and welcomed by the Contact Centre Manager who gave a briefing on the day-to-day operation of the centre, current shift patterns, staff, recruitment and training. All Healthwatch representatives were asked to sign a visitors confidentiality agreement.

The Manager explained that recruiting and retaining staff had been difficult over the summer months following the departure of some staff members and due to being only operational in the out of hours period. However recruitment had recently improved as the service had adapted to the needs of its staff by changing the working shift patterns in September 2018, which then resulted in the service being able to attract more staff. Coupled with the excellent training programme for new staff, this has resulted in a more efficient service. The Manager confirmed that they were hoping to be fully staffed by the end of November 2018 or early 2019.

The overall impression gained by representatives was of a well-run service which is attentive to its challenges, including feedback received, and which strives to improve. Within the Contact Centre, Healthwatch representatives observed a happy, calm and efficient working environment.

### Results of visit

Representatives were escorted into the Contact Centre and distributed to an individual Health Advisor (Call Handler) to observe and listen-in to various calls.

### Environment

The first floor in Gilbert Hitchcock house was not purpose-built to house a call centre, but the team have made it as acceptable an environment as is possible. The Contact Centre itself is light and airy but was very warm. This was partly due to the number of people in the room coupled with the electronic equipment, but also due to the fact that the heating was 'on' on the ground floor (unoccupied at the weekends) and this heat rises through the building.



### Staff

The Service has the following members of staff in the Contact Centre;

- Health Advisors (Call Handlers),
- Floor Walkers (to give additional advice to Health Advisors)
- Clinical staff - nurses/paramedics for expert clinical advice.

The Health Advisor shifts patterns are varied across the opening hours of 07.00 to 23.00 seven days per week. The majority of the patterns are on a 10-week rolling rota which

equates to 4 days working, 4 days off, so that staff can achieve a better work/life balance.

The available shift patterns are as follows:

- 28 hours per week
- 18 hours per week
- 16 hours per week
- 14 hours per week
- Various bespoke weekend patterns are available.

## Training

Health Advisors (HA) take part in a month's distance learning prior to undergoing four weeks on site training; three weeks in the well-appointed classroom and one week in the actual Contact Centre. The Health Advisor is then paired with a 'buddy' until his/her training is complete. All Health Advisors' are required to pass an exam in order to be appointed. Representatives were advised that the current pass rate is 95%.



## Other observations included:

The software used by the Health Advisors whilst taking calls appeared impressive; guiding and supporting the Health Advisor.

After initially taking basic contact details' i.e., name, address and telephone number from the caller, the software 'pop-up' screens provide questions and prompts which eventually specifies the best course of action for the Health Advisor to take and communicate to the caller.

If the caller is ringing from a mobile phone in a moving vehicle, they are advised to pull over for safety reasons. In addition, if they are moving across localities this could affect the way in which they are directed to the nearest appropriate service.

Some clinical staff, particularly the Clinical Advisors, felt that there were not enough breaks, especially considering that some calls last 15-20 minutes, and if there is a queue of calls for their advice and input, they cannot leave their position. One clinical staff member advised that they had been at their position for six hours recently which is not ideal.

Clinical staff have access to TOXBASE - the clinical toxicology database of the National Poisons Information Service for advice and information on possible poisoning calls.

## Additional Findings

Representatives were shown the IT system which is displayed on a 'real-time electronic screen'. STORM is the call monitoring system/software used by the Contact Centre which can:

- Manage breaks
- See calls waiting
- See who is available or on the phone, break etc...
- See what stage the call is at
- Can patch a call through anywhere in the UK within 5 seconds



In addition, all calls should be answered within 60 seconds and this can be monitored by the software system. The average wait on the day of the visit was recorded as 3.46mins.

In the event of a non-English speaker calling the service, the service use 'Language Line'. Calls are answered together with an interpreter; a three-way call. According to the monitoring data this was used 43 times in the last month.

Some calls are received from out of area, e.g. Manchester and Yorkshire; these calls are signposted.

In times of very high volumes of calls, neighbouring Contact Centres in Cambridge and Peterborough will assist with the excess capacity.

The Health Advisors are equipped with two A5 sized cards, one red and one amber which they use according to the urgency of the call. These are held aloft to indicate to the Floor Walker that they need assistance with a call. At the time of the visit representatives witnessed the cards being used on various occasions which were responded to very promptly by the Floor Walkers.

### **Future Visits**

As part of our continuing programme of visits, the Manager of the IUC has invited Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and Healthwatch Luton to also visit and observe the out of hours services in Bedford and Luton in the near future. These visits will be scheduled as soon as possible.

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## **Recommendations**

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire recommends that this report is shared with the staff (clinical and non-clinical) of the Contact Centre and to advise that if they should wish to contribute any additional comments about the report, to contact Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire direct.

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## Service Provider response

The Contact Centre Manager, Kate Merridan, thanked Healthwatch for the report and added a couple of notes for clarification as follows:

**Under Recruitment & Retention of staff, Kate advised:**

*'The rota patterns were reviewed as part of the extended opening hours. We had previously only been open weekday evenings from 18.00 to midnight and weekends 7.00 to midnight, and from the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018 we are now operational 7.00 to 23.00 7 days a week, this gave us better rota patterns for recruiting and retaining staff'.*

**Under the heading - Training, Kate advised:**

*'Health Advisors undertake a taster session prior to commencing employment at which they receive a distance learning pack for completion at home prior to commencing the 4-week pathways training at GHH'.*

Kate also stated that *'all staff have designated breaks, as well as the facility to take comfort breaks when required'* in response to a comment from a clinical staff member who felt that there were not enough breaks in their shift.

**Kate Merridan**

***IUC Contact Centre Manager Luton & Bedfordshire***

**HUC**

**Gilbert Hitchcock House, Kimbolton Road, Bedford, MK40 2NS**

