

# **Waltham Forest Community and Family Health Services**

**Proposed Closure of Branch Site at Forest Road Heath Centre**

**Stakeholder Engagement Report**

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## Introduction and Background

Waltham Forest Community and Family Health Services (WFC&FHS) currently operates across two sites within the London Borough of Waltham Forest:

- Wood Street Health Centre (main site)
- Forest Road Health Centre (branch)

Our practice is led by Dr Ivbijaro, who is the Principal GP and is responsible for overseeing the care of our patients, which is approximately 10,000+ patients. This is the combined patient list size of both our sites as of 1 April 2020.

We are proposing to close our branch site at Forest Road Health Centre and only operate from our main site at Wood Street Health Centre. This is following a report published by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in March 2019 who identified a number of failings at our practice, predominantly the variability in care across both sites. Over the years we have grown significantly, which has made it difficult to manage across both of our practice sites effectively. As a result this has led to a decrease in the quality of care provided to our patients. We are keen to address this issue and therefore feel that by consolidating onto one site will help us to provide a much better level of care to our patients. In addition, the CQC are in support of our practice operating from only one site, as it is anticipated that patient care will improve as a result.

We understand that proposing to close the branch site will have a significant impact on our patients and therefore have been actively engaging with patients from the outset. We initially undertook a six week consultation process with our patients from 10 June 2019 to 19 July 2019, however based on feedback from our patients the consultation period was extended by a further six months until the end of January 2020. We held public meetings on 29 October 2019 and 28 January 2020 at Wood Street Health Centre and Forest Road Medical Centre respectively. Our public meetings were well attended by both our patients and other stakeholders within the local community.

This report provides a summary of the engagement which took place with our patients and other local stakeholders during the consultation period. We acknowledge there has been a delay in publishing this report, however this has been due to the Covid-19 pandemic whereby the practice has had to prioritise other pieces of work.

## Methodology

Engagement with patients and other stakeholders took place using a number of different mediums. Below is a breakdown of the engagement methods used and a description of some of the outcomes:

Engagement Method	Timeframe	Detail / Outcome of Engagement
Patient Participation Group (PPG)	May 2019 – January 2020	Between May 2019 and January 2020 a total number of four PPG meetings took place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 29-05-2019</li> <li>• 18-06-2019</li> <li>• 23-07-2019</li> <li>• 27-01-2020</li> </ul> Concerns raised by the PPG regarding the closure has been incorporated in the final set of published FAQs.
Practice website	June 2019 – January 2020	A section of the practice website has been dedicated to the proposed branch closure. All relevant documents has been uploaded onto the website during the consultation period. Link to the website available here: <a href="https://www.wfcafhs.co.uk/info.aspx?p=12">https://www.wfcafhs.co.uk/info.aspx?p=12</a>
Patient survey	June 2019	We had a very low response rate to the patient survey (0.2% of the patient register). Survey link was sent out to patients via SMS and hardcopies were also made available at both practice sites. Feedback from the survey has been incorporated in the final set of published FAQs.
Comments box	June 2019 – January 2020	4500 comments were received in regards to the proposed branch closure. All comments received has been addressed in the final set of published FAQs.
Practice leaflet	June 2019 – January 2020	1000 practice leaflets were printed and made available at both practice sites explaining the proposed branch closure. In addition, copies could be printed on demand by receptionist staff.
SMS to patients	June, October and December 2019	8,000 SMS messages was sent to patients during the consultation period to participate in the practice survey and attend the public engagement events.
Email to local Councillors and MPs	July 2019 and January 2020	Local Councillors and MPs were notified of the branch closure in July 2019 and a further update was provided in January 2020. This was supported by Waltham Forest CCG.
Letter to vulnerable patient groups	July 2019	750 letters was sent out to patients over the age of 75 and classified as

		vulnerable.
Patient drop-in sessions	July 2019	Weekly drop-in sessions took place in the month of July 2019, inviting patients to meet with practice staff and have any queries answered in relation to the proposed branch closure. 400 patients attended in total. Key themes from the drop-in sessions has been incorporated in the final set of published FAQs.
Email to patients	October 2019	3450 emails were sent inviting patients to attend the patient engagement events.
Patient engagement events	October 2019 and January 2020	Five patient engagement events took place between October 2019 and January 2020: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 29 October 2019 x 2 events</li> <li>• 28 January 2020 x 3 events</li> </ul> 150 patients attended in total. Key themes from engagement events has been summarised as part of this report and also reflected in the final set of FAQs.
Coffee morning with local Councillors	January 2020	Coffee morning took place on 23 January 2020 prior to the final patient engagement event at the end of January 2020. Included representation from three Councillors and also Healthwatch. Feedback from Councillors and Healthwatch was incorporated as part of the final patient engagement session.

## Key Themes from Stakeholder Engagement

There were a number of key themes identified from the engagement with patients and local stakeholders. A summary of the main themes has been summarised in the table below.

Key themes from patient engagement	Practice Response
<p><b>Inconvenient location</b> – A number of patients raised concerns in regards to only having one site located at Wood Street Health Centre. Patients who reside close to Forest Road were not happy to travel to access services from Wood Street, as it's not walking distance and will require using some form of transport.</p>	<p>Transport links are available to access services from Wood Street for patients who reside close to Forest Road. This includes both bus and train options. For patients who do not wish to travel to Wood Street have the choice to register with another GP closer to where they live. This includes the option of joining Dr Shantir's Practice which will remain at Forest Road Health Centre.</p>
<p><b>Poor transport links</b> – Some patients commented on the poor transport links from Forest Road to Wood Street. In regards to public transport, the simplest option is to use the bus, however this does involve quite a bit of walking which is not convenient for the elderly or those with mobility issues. Also patients complained with the lack of car parking provision near to Wood Street Health Centre.</p>	<p>Patients with disabilities or who have mobility issues can sign up to the Dial-a-ride scheme to help with transport issues. This scheme is operated by Transport for London (TfL) and more information is available on their website: <a href="https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/dial-a-ride/">https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/dial-a-ride/</a> Disabled parking is also available at the Wood Street site. In general, street parking is an issue across the borough and is not exclusive to Wood Street. Local councillors are aware of the parking issues faced by residents.</p>
<p><b>Financially driven</b> – Patients felt that the proposal to close the branch surgery is part of a cost cutting exercise in order to save money for the NHS. This is primarily due to the government reducing spending within the public sector.</p>	<p>The practice has always made it clear from the outset and during the consultation period that the proposal to close the branch surgery is not financially driven. The primary driver is to improve the delivery of healthcare to patients, as currently by operating across two sites there is a variation in the quality of patient care. This was also highlighted by the CQC. Therefore consolidating onto one site will help the practice to streamline services and ensure patients benefit from improved quality of care.</p>
<p><b>Reduced patient access</b> – A number of patients were of the view that patient access would deteriorate as a result of consolidating onto one site. Patients are already unhappy with telephone access at Wood Street and feel that the lines will become overwhelmed once the practice only operates from one site. Patients also felt that the branch closure would have an impact on the availability of appointments.</p>	<p>The practice is aware of the ongoing issues in regards to patient access and particularly the telephone system. Through this consultation process it has heightened this particular issue and as a result the practice is taking action to introduce an improved telephone system. Ongoing discussions are taking place between the practice and telephone system supplier. Enhancement work has started and it is scheduled that</p>

	<p>the new improved telephone system will be live by the 28<sup>th</sup> September this year. Further enhancement will continued to enable the Practice to manage the performance of the service. The new telephone should help reduce waiting times on the phone and ensure patient queries are dealt with efficiently.</p>
<p><b>Potential close down of Forest Road Health Centre</b> – Patients commented that the branch closure would lead to other services being taken away from Forest Road Health Centre, which includes the possible closure of Dr Shantir’s Practice which is located in the same building. This would ultimately result in the whole health centre being closed down in the near future.</p>	<p>The proposal to close the branch surgery has no impact on the delivery of other services from Forest Road Health Centre. Dr Shantir’s Practice is not at risk of closure due to the proposed branch closure and will continue to operate from Forest Road. Waltham Forest Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) who are responsible for commissioning healthcare services for people living locally has no intention to reduce services at Forest Road Health Centre.</p>

## Conclusion

We are aware that that a number of our patients have raised concerns in relation to the proposed branch closure and fully appreciate that if the proposal was to be approved would be unsettling for some of our patients. However we as a practice are committed to work with our patients to ensure a smooth transition does happens and would be involving patients through every step of the process. The concerns which have been raised can be mitigated and we will be working closely with our patients and stakeholders to overcome any barriers. Our aim is to improve the level of service and quality of care provided to patients. If the proposal to close the branch surgery were to be approved, the practice is happy to provide the relevant level of support to ensure the minimum level of disruption to patient care.

Overall, we are committed to offering our patients the best care possible and the proposed branch closure is with the intention to improve services. We wish to retain all of our patients and have the ongoing support of our patients if the proposal is to be approved. We will be communicating with our patients over the coming months with an outcome of the proposal which has been put forward.