



# High Oak Surgery

## Listening to the DIHC Public Conversation

A Healthwatch Dudley Report for Dudley Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee

10 January 2023



## Healthwatch Dudley is the champion for people who access health and care services

- Healthwatch Dudley listens to views and experiences about health and care and we share what we hear with people who make key decisions about local services.
- We are trusted because we are independent. We are a principled critical friend for our local healthcare system.

### High Oak Surgery – context

- In March 2020, the High Oak GP Surgery in Pensnett was transferred to the Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre, with the surgery's High Street site being transformed into a Respiratory Assessment Centre for Covid-19 patients.
- When Covid assessment centre services ceased in June 2021, Dudley Integrated Health and Care NHS Trust (DIHC) started a process to consider where best to locate the High Oak Surgery for the foreseeable future.
- A listening exercise that would engage patients, the local community and key stakeholders was planned to better understand local health and wellbeing needs.

Additional background information can be found in the 10 January Dudley Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee documents, which can be viewed at:

<https://cmis.dudley.gov.uk/cmis5/Meetings/tabid/116/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/543/Meeting/6573/Committee/502/Default.aspx>



DIHC stated:

"It was important to ensure that the pre-consultation engagement exercise did not itself become the public consultation, as its purpose was to seek feedback from the local service users in order to inform the development of the proposals and the consultation."

In July 2021 Healthwatch Dudley was invited to join a stakeholder reference panel, where we helped to develop and promote a residents survey that would support the DIHC with their pre-consultation listening exercise.

**DIHC received 343 survey responses, comprising of 253 online responses and 90 paper returns.**

## Survey findings

- The overwhelming majority of respondents (80%, 265) said that if the High Oak Surgery continues to remain at Brierley Hill Health and Social Care, "this will not be good for me".
- Good location, ease of access, and walking distance repeatedly came up in responses as reasons for why High Oak Surgery should be based in Pensnett.
- A sizeable number of responses recognised that facilities in Pensnett were not suitable and change was required. However, most responses indicated a preference for improved infrastructure and services in Pensnett, as opposed to moving to Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre.
- The lack of an adequate bus service to reach Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre from the Pensnett area was a strong recurring theme across the responses.
- 46% (153) of respondents said that they had either an 'extremely poor' or 'poor' experience of accessing services at Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre. This is in comparison to 20% (65) of respondents who said they had a 'good' or 'very good' experience'.

## Further In depth listening

In late 2021 DIHC commissioned Healthwatch Dudley to independently listen to a sample of people through a series of telephone calls to capture the views of individuals who had been using the High Oak Surgery on the Pensnett site. We asked about their preference for location and how it could best meet the health and wellbeing needs of local people.

DIHC provided us with the contact details of 12 local people, as a result we conducted in-depth interviews with 8 men and 4 women, who were mostly older people and White British.

We were keen to ensure that the 12 people were Pensnett residents who may have been most affected by the proposed change.

## What we asked

We used a semi-structured conversation approach to carry out the interviews where we asked people to tell us more about:

- How you access GP services and what has your experience been of this?
- How important is the location of your GP surgery?
- What works well for you when you need healthcare help or advice?
- What could be improved?

## What people told us...

People are concerned about how they get access to the surgery and GP services. There is a strong preference for a surgery in the Pensnett area and reference was made to the High Oak Surgery and plans for the development of improved healthcare facilities on the site that had not come to fruition. The desire is for convenient and easy access to local healthcare services on foot or using local direct bus services, especially for older people or those with mobility problems or chronic health conditions.

People expressed strong feelings regarding the local location of a surgery and its connection with the community and individuals it serves. They elaborated on it being an integral and valued part of the community and mentioned well established and trusting relations that had existed with GPs and other staff at the High Oak Surgery in Pensnett.

“High Oak in Pensnett was right on the doorstep for me. Brierley Hill is a £10 return fare in a taxi. It is a very nice venue at Brierley Hill but it is inconvenient getting to Brierley Hill. My preference would be to have a surgery that is local and the majority of people I talk to want the surgery back in Pensnett.” [Bill, aged 75, who has heart failure, poor circulation and poor mobility]

“Who wants to go back to a prefab as opposed to a modern surgery? But, we need a surgery in Pensnett with doctors we can see easily ... The High Oak Surgery, I could walk there, the buildings were not fit for purpose but we were promised a new surgery. Later we were told the council could not afford it.” [Norma, aged 70, who has neuralgia, arthritis and heart disease]

“I have cancer and suffer with my nerves, I have severe anxiety and depression. We have the surgery in Brierley Hill but I want something in Pensnett. The Brierley Hill buildings were nice enough with 4 or 5 consultation rooms, a nice reception area and the staff and services were okay’. The surgery still needs to be central in Pensnett.” [Leonard, aged 80, describes himself as housebound, with cancer and mental health problems]

"I'd rather have the surgery in Pensnett, it is ridiculous to have it in Brierley Hill. I'm disabled. I would have to traipse all the way to Venture Way to see a doctor. It's difficult on public transport, the bus to Brierley Hill, the walk past ASDA then to the Health Centre. At one time they had plans to have a surgery permanently at High Oak, we saw the plans, but, nothing came of it." [Simon, aged 67, who has one kidney, arthritis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease].

There was some support for the surgery to remain in Venture Way based on the facility being cleaner and more modern:

"I prefer the surgery where it is in Venture Way. It's a modern building, it's nice to be in, it's cleaner, not so tired as the building in Pensnett, which was meant to be temporary." [Alan, aged 33]

We also heard concerns about future access where a digital divide could further disadvantage people not able to get online, or who lack the skills needed to get the most from the internet and digital services.

"I get GP appointments using the telephone I can't use the internet, I don't know how to use it." [Ranjit, aged 71, who has mobility problems]

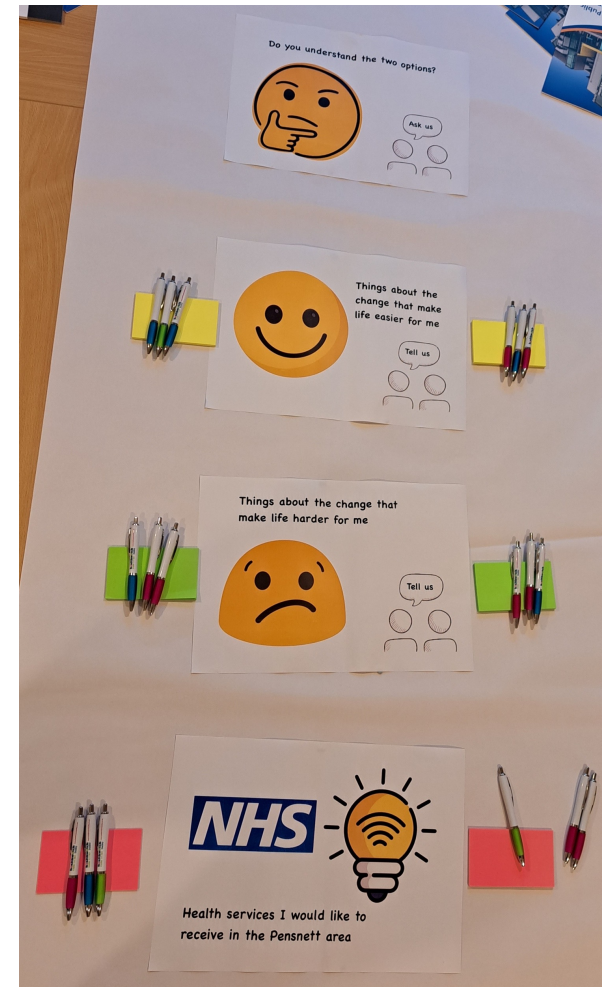
"I was not brought up with computers, if things are straightforward it's okay. But the online [virtual] surgery is not straightforward for me. The surgery needs to be central in Pensnett to use." [Norma, aged 70, who has neuralgia, arthritis and heart disease]

"I'm not online, I've never been online. I use the telephone when I need to book a GP appointment. You can't easily get GP appointments now and it wasn't so easy before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic." [Helen, aged 78]

# Reaching out to autistic people and people with learning disabilities

In October 2022, DIHC launched a High Oak Public Conversation. To support this Healthwatch Dudley was asked to engage with autistic people and or people with learning disabilities to gather views about the proposed options.

- We asked DIHC to write to autistic people and or people with learning disabilities registered to High Oak surgery on our behalf due to privacy / GDPR constraints.
- We provided a template letter stressing our independence and inviting people to come to our drop-in. The session took place from 8.30am to 7pm at Pensnett Community Centre but did not have any attendees. We were told that some letters had arrived late which may have been a consequence of postal strikes.
- A follow up text message was sent by the surgery to those registered offering further and flexible ways to engage with Healthwatch Dudley, including the offer of receiving a home visit.
- Local councilors also helped share our contact details and encouraged people to get in touch with us.
- Healthwatch Dudley contacted Lunch on the Run, Side by Side, Discover You and Dudley Voices for Choice to ask if they worked with registered patients of the practice.
- We also contacted CQC registered properties including Beatrice House and Eve House (managed by Alphonsus Care Services) and were told that residents were registered elsewhere.
- Dudley CVS delivered a session to engage with young people at a High Oak Youth Club in Pensnett.



## Our observations and recommendations

- ❑ Healthwatch Dudley has a limited resource and a large remit. We have been reassured by the levels of scrutiny during the process provided by Dudley Council, Public Health, local Councillors, the Consultation Institute, the Integrated Care Board and other Dudley Health and Wellbeing Board members. Most importantly, we would like to recognise the local people who have shared their views.
- ❑ Healthwatch Dudley recognises the work that DIHC has done to involve Pensnett communities in their Public Conversation, including outreach drop-in sessions, questionnaire surveys, online information sharing and the production of easy read documents.
- ❑ The numbers of people responding to the Public Conversation were low, we have heard anecdotally that there is a feeling in the community that decisions have already been made. We have also heard frustration that the two options presented in the public conversation, both outlined plans for High Oak surgery to remain located in Brierley Hill.
- ❑ Pensnett is one of the most disadvantaged areas in Dudley borough. Residents told us that car ownership and digital access is lower than their more affluent neighbours and this makes GP access in Brierley Hill particularly difficult for people who rely on public transport. This is further compounded if mobility is poor or for people with chronic health conditions, as this can mean two bus journeys or an expensive taxi. Parents with young children told us about their concerns of travelling on a low income.
- ❑ As the NHS digital offer is widened, we would want reassurance that people who lack IT skills or who may not be able to afford Internet access will not be further disadvantaged and will retain fair access to healthcare support and services.

continued...



## Our observations and recommendations (continued)

- ❑ Compared to bordering areas, Pensnett residents do not appear to have equal geographical GP access to that of Kingswinford or Brierley Hill, where residents have a number of options to potentially choose from.
- ❑ We are concerned that the permanent removal of a GP practice in Pensnett will deter people from accessing early interventions through primary care and will result in additional pressures on Accident and Emergency and the Urgent Treatment Centre, as Russells Hall Hospital is much closer than travelling to Brierley Hill.
- ❑ The area is impacted by high levels of health inequalities and we strongly support a collaborative commitment to improving health outcomes for local communities, that continues to act on the experience, views and ideas of local people.
- ❑ We understand that GP access is just one important element of ensuring there is a measurable impact on improving healthy life expectancy in the area and we are supportive of conversations to making additional health improvement measures available to Pensnett residents.
- ❑ We have heard how Pensnett residents value having access to a clean, modern GP facility and their strong preference is to be able to access this in their own neighbourhood. Healthwatch Dudley would welcome DIHC and ICB's consideration of this strength of feeling when determining a way forward.



## Supporting information:

- Healthwatch Dudley's contact details were included in the DIHC public conversation documents to enable residents to express their views to an independent service.
- We maintained involvement throughout the process and attended the majority of community meetings to independently listen to residents and to support transparency of the process.
- Throughout the process Healthwatch Dudley has shared and boosted Facebook posts and promoted messages using our twitter account, which is linked to our website.
- Our local rate number and email address has remained available for people to make contact with us.
- Dudley CVS with Healthwatch Dudley explored additional engagement opportunities for collaboration. DIHC progressed conversations with the Consultation Institute.




## Healthwatch Dudley

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Dudley