

Supporting patients during GP practice mergers and closures

The Healthwatch East Sussex Guide

Patients tell us that changes to local GP practices – such as mergers, closures and boundary changes – are often a source of concern.

This checklist has been developed to support commissioners and providers to ensure engagement and communication with patients occurs before, during and after such decisions are made. It sets out how Healthwatch East Sussex would expect them to support patients during this time.

Before and during the decision making process

<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the Patient Participation Group (PPG) been consulted and involved in plenty of time before any decision has been made?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Has the impact of the closure/merger on vulnerable groups been fully assessed and have they been communicated with? Has an EHIA been completed?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have relevant community groups, leaders or organisations been involved in these discussions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have neighbouring GP practices been informed and any impacts on them assessed? Can they cope with extra demand?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have local people been asked for their views (through websites, social media, parish magazine, local networks, posters in pubs, village halls)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are any public meetings being held in a suitable and accessible local venue to enable as many people as possible to share their views?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you reached all parts of the community, including those with protected characteristics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have any patient communications been shared with local Healthwatch and the PPG prior to distribution to ensure the content is clear and in plain English?

After the decision has been made

<input type="checkbox"/>	Are communications to patients and carers about the decision written in plain English and available in alternative formats*?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is sufficient support being offered to patients who may need additional help to register with a new practice?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are the clinical needs of long term or complex patients being considered during the handover period to ensure they get the care they need?	<input type="checkbox"/>	What plans are in place to inform those in temporary or transient accommodation of any changes?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are patients being provided with an informed choice about where to re-register if they wish to do so?	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the learning, knowledge and enthusiasm of the PPG group being utilised?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is sufficient support being offered to neighbouring practices to enable them to cope with any movement of patients or increased demand?	<input type="checkbox"/>	What plans are in place to monitor re-registrations and to reach people who haven't re-registered?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you utilised NHS Sussex ICB's communications and public involvement best practice guide for GP practices undergoing a merger, relocation or branch closure?		* Any letter or communication to patients needs to consider their individual communication needs as set out in the Accessible Information Standard.

This guide has been produced by local Healthwatch in the South East: Healthwatch Kent Healthwatch East Sussex, Healthwatch West Sussex, Healthwatch Brighton & Hove, Healthwatch Medway and Healthwatch Surrey.

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