

GP practice report

Brookvale Practice

October 2025

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About this report

This report has been produced by Healthwatch Halton as part of our Enter and View programme. These visits allow us to observe services first-hand, speak with patients and staff, and gather feedback about people's experiences of care and access to appointments.

Our findings reflect what we saw during the visit and what people told us on the day. We aim to give clear, balanced insight into what is working well and where improvements could be made.

A draft of this report has been shared with the practice for comment, and any clarifications or updates will be included in the final published version.

1. Introduction

Healthwatch Halton is the independent champion for people who use health and care services locally. We have statutory powers to visit publicly funded services, observe how care is provided, and gather feedback directly from patients, carers, and staff. The findings from our visits are shared with providers and commissioners to help improve local services.

This visit to Brookvale Practice formed part of our wider programme of visits to GP surgeries across Halton. During our visits, we aim to understand patient experience, highlight examples of good practice, and identify any areas where improvements could be made.

2. Background Information

Practice Information	Details
Address:	Hallwood Health Centre, Hospital Way, Palacefields, Runcorn, WA7 2UT
Registered Patients:	8686
GPs:	10
Practice Nurses:	2
Nurse Associate	1
Care Navigators / Receptionists:	6
Practice Management:	Practice Manager and Assistant Practice Manager
Clinical Pharmacists:	1
Social Prescribing Link Worker:	No

Access and Systems

- Uses Total Triage (since July 2024)
- Same day emergency appointments: yes
- Pre-bookable appointments: yes
- GP Extra referrals: yes
- Phlebotomy clinic available
- PPG active: yes

Additional Roles and Clinics

- Mental Health Practitioner
- First Contact Physiotherapy
- Health and Wellbeing Coach

- MSK
- Diabetes reviews
- Asthma and COPD clinics
- Child immunisation clinics

3. External Environment

Brookvale Practice is located inside **Hallwood Health Centre**, which it shares with Weavervale Practice and various Bridgewater community services. The shared site has a large car park with level access into the building.

Automatic sliding doors support easy entry for wheelchair users, parents with buggies and people with limited mobility.

Signage is clear and visible on approach, and the main reception area is easy to find once inside the building.

4. Internal Environment

The waiting area allocated to Brookvale Practice is bright and well maintained, with comfortable blue seating spaced across the room. The environment felt calm and organised during the visit. Several patients were attending for appointments, and seating capacity was sufficient for the level of activity observed.

A TV screen displayed health information and also functioned as a patient calling system. The reception desk is positioned to the right of the waiting area, with Care Navigators providing triage and responding to queries.

Noticeboards displayed a range of health information.

4a. Facilities and Information

Brookvale Practice has access to the shared facilities within Hallwood Health Centre. This includes male, female and accessible toilets, as well as shared clinical areas used by Bridgewater services.

The practice has dedicated notice boards offering a range of information on mental health, wellbeing, carers support, children's health, exercise, medication safety and local services.

A dedicated space for submitting prescription requests and completing forms was available near reception. Posters were displayed promoting local health initiatives, support groups and enhanced access appointments.

Self-check in was available through the shared health centre screens.

5. Observations During the Visit

Staff were friendly, welcoming and willing to talk openly about the running of the practice. We were present in the waiting area for approximately ninety minutes. At the start of the visit there were no patients waiting, but the area steadily became busier. By the end of the visit around twenty patients had attended for face to face appointments and clinics. The flow of people moving through the waiting area and into consulting rooms appeared steady and well managed.

The waiting area was clean, bright and recently refurbished, with new flooring and around a dozen chairs arranged neatly. Ventilation was good and the space felt comfortable for patients using it. Although the wider health centre building is older and more dated in appearance, the Brookvale waiting area itself presented well.

Several noticeboards were displayed throughout the reception area, corridors and waiting spaces. These contained a mixture of practice performance information, health and wellbeing material, carers support information and other local resources. A patient suggestion box was fixed to the wall. While there was a large amount of information available, the displays were tidy and easy to navigate.

An electronic patient calling screen was installed, although during the visit staff were calling patients into appointments personally. Consulting rooms were located around the side of the waiting area, and staff moved between the waiting space and these rooms throughout the session.

Staff on duty were observed interacting with patients in a friendly, helpful and efficient manner. Reception staff responded quickly to in-person queries and patient flow appeared calm and well organised throughout the visit.

6. Patient Feedback

Healthwatch representatives spoke with patients attending the practice during the visit to understand their recent experiences of accessing appointments, using the online system and receiving care. Feedback reflected a mix of positive experiences, practical challenges and concerns about support for specific conditions.

Several patients described the system as straightforward and effective for their needs. One person told us:

“Everything is fine, no issues. The system is easy to use and you get a quick response. Also easy to request repeat prescriptions.”

Another patient highlighted how helpful continuity had been when dealing with a recent health concern:

“I can usually get in, but today it said no appointments until tomorrow. I rang up and they sorted it for me. Seeing the same doctor over several visits has really helped.”

Others described positive experiences with online booking and communication. One patient said:

“All okay. I use online services with no problems.”

Another commented on the efficiency of same day online access:

“First time I’ve visited in four years. Got an appointment online this morning and received a text confirmation. Dr O’Brien is great.”

Several patients, however, reported challenges using digital systems or booking appointments. One person explained:

“I’m not very tech-savvy but finally managed it this morning. They’ve now stopped calls for appointments and tell you to go online.”

Some found particular processes difficult, including prescriptions and

access for housebound relatives:

“No problems being triaged, but I struggle with repeat prescriptions.”

“It’s hard to get appointments for my nan, who’s housebound – sometimes they expect you to bring her in.”

Digital access barriers were also raised by patients who required help navigating the system. One person said:

“I can’t use online services so my daughter books for me. Had to call twice today to get an appointment.”

A number of patients described experiences where they felt more support or clearer communication would have helped. One patient told us:

“I feel my baby is prioritised but not me. I have postnatal depression and haven’t had support from the surgery – just told I’d go on a waiting list. My health visitor has been great though.”

Another patient, seeking help for IBS, described receiving conflicting advice from different services:

“I saw a GP last week about IBS. English wasn’t his first language and he offered no support, just told me to go to A&E. My IBS nurse later prescribed steroids and advised not to return to the GP for IBS issues.”

Some patients also commented on the pressure of early morning online access and delays in administrative processes. One person said:

“It’s frustrating trying to get online at 8am. If you log in any later, there are no appointments left.”

The practice advised that online triage was previously reopened at 12.30pm to better accommodate working patients and school runs. Since 1 October 2025, online triage has been available throughout core opening hours. While this change may help improve flexibility for some patients, feedback suggests that clearer communication about when and how online requests are reviewed may help manage expectations and reduce frustration.

Another described the impact of delays in issuing a fit note:

“I needed a fit note continuation. Mine ran out on 24 October but was told it wouldn’t be looked at until 4 November. This impacts benefits and employment, even if it’s backdated.”

Overall, patients shared a wide range of experiences. Many described the practice as supportive and approachable, particularly when they were confident using the online system or had continuity with the same clinician. Others reported difficulties linked to digital access, early morning appointment pressures and delays in administrative tasks. Experiences of communication and follow up varied, with some patients describing challenges that affected their confidence in the process.

7. Key Findings

Positive Observations

- Friendly, supportive and approachable staff
- Clean, calm and well maintained environment
- Clear signage and good use of waiting area
- Same day appointments available when clinically appropriate
- Good range of clinical roles and additional services
- Active support from Care Navigators
- Effective use of shared health centre facilities

Areas for Improvement

- Mixed patient experiences using online systems
- Some delays in follow-up appointments for ongoing conditions

8. Summary

Brookvale Practice provides a friendly and supportive service, with staff observed interacting with patients in a helpful and efficient manner. The waiting area is clean, bright and recently refurbished, and the wider health centre environment appeared well maintained during the visit.

Patients shared a broad mix of experiences. Many described positive interactions with staff and found the online system straightforward to use, particularly for booking appointments and requesting repeat prescriptions. Others reported challenges linked to digital access, early morning appointment availability and delays with administrative tasks such as repeat prescriptions and fit notes. Some patients also described varying experiences of communication and follow-up, including for more complex or ongoing health needs.

Overall, Brookvale Practice was described by most patients as approachable and supportive, though there are opportunities to strengthen access for those who struggle with digital systems and to ensure consistent communication and timely administrative processes.

9. Recommendations

1. Ensure clear and accessible information on all appointment booking routes.

The practice confirmed that staff routinely support patients who experience difficulties completing online triage forms, and that paper copies are available for those who prefer or require them.

To build on this good practice, clearer and more visible information about *all* available booking routes (online, telephone, and in-person support) would help ensure patients are consistently aware of the options available to them and feel confident choosing the route that best meets their need.

2. Strengthen support for patients who experience digital barriers

A number of patients described difficulties using online systems, early morning booking pressures, or relying on family members. Offering simple

guidance or support materials may help reduce barriers for digitally excluded patients.

3. Monitor follow-up and communication processes for patients with ongoing or complex needs

Patients shared differing experiences of clinical advice, follow-up and administrative delays such as fit notes. Reviewing internal communication pathways and expected timescales may help improve consistency and reduce frustration.

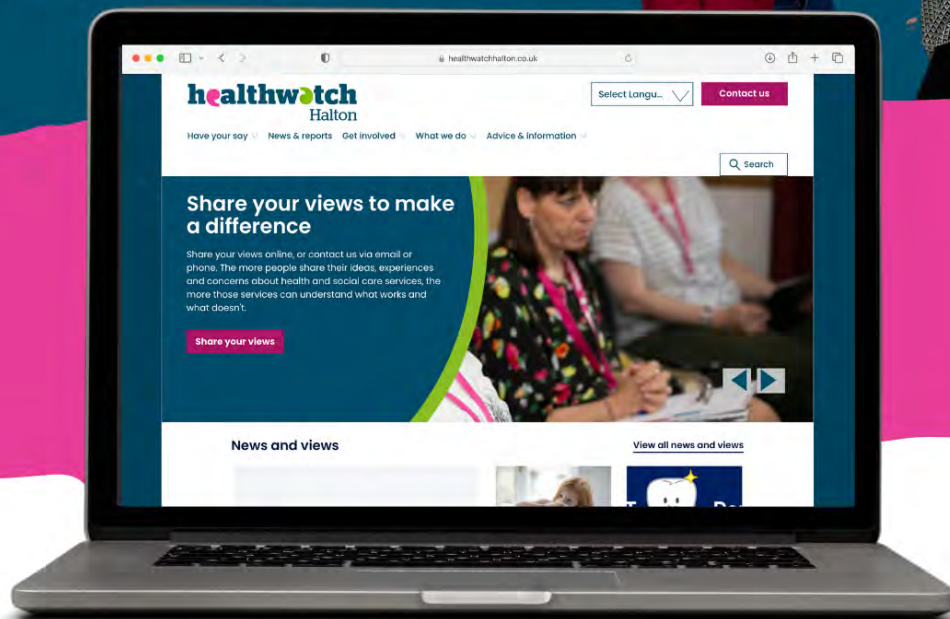
4. Reintroduce or clearly signpost hand sanitiser stations

No hand sanitiser was visible during the visit. Ensuring sanitiser is easily accessible may support patient confidence and infection control.

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We are committed to the quality of our information.
Every three years we perform an in-depth audit
so that we can be certain of this.



A.R.T. Centre

Tan House Lane

Widnes

WA8 0RR

Tel: 0300 777 6543

E: feedback@healthwatchhalton.co.uk