

GP practice report

The Beeches

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.

The Beeches Medical Centre

Date of Visit: 22 October 2025

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 The Beeches Medical Centre 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	WTE (based on 37 hours)
List Size (as at 27/11/25)	8298	
GP's	5	
Nurses	2 (no nurse currently on maternity)	1.35
GP Assistant	1	1
Severe MH/Wellbeing Nurse	1	0.1
MH Nurse	1	0.2
HCA (NHS 40-74 Health Checks)	1	0.1
Physician Associate	0	n/a
GP Registrars	0	n/a
Clinical Pharmacist	1	0.8
Physio	1	0.1
Admin	3	2.34
Care Navigators	7	5.35

Systems and Services

- *Patches system in use for booking and requests*
- *Triage system in place (not NHS Total Triage)*
- *Emergency same-day appointments available by phone*
- *Pre-bookable and online appointments available*
- *GP Extra referrals offered*
- *Active Patient Participation Group (PPG) with 14 members*

3. External Environment

The Beeches Medical Centre is a small, well-presented practice located beside a main road with a front car park for approximately six vehicles. Access is level with a push-button automatic door for accessibility.

4. Internal Environment

A small porch leads into the reception and waiting area, which is bright, clean, and painted white with non-slip flooring. A noticeboard and leaflet stand display local health information. The reception desk sits directly opposite the entrance; seating for patients is to the right. Blue chairs were clean and comfortable, in excellent condition. A self-check-in screen and TV display NHS information. A height, weight, and blood-pressure machine is tucked neatly to the left of the entrance. A repeat-prescription box and slips are available near the door. Natural light from the bay window gives a bright, welcoming atmosphere. Two consulting rooms open directly off the waiting area, with a corridor leading to further rooms and a single shared patient toilet.

5. Observations During Our Visit

We were on-site for approximately 90 minutes, engaging with patients mainly attending the flu-vaccination clinic.

The atmosphere was calm and organised, with staff managing calls and face-to-face queries efficiently. Paco Blinx had not yet been introduced at the time of the visit.

A review of the practice website found a link to '[You and your general practice](#)' which tells patients what to expect from their general practice, but no information on **Jess's Rule**¹ was displayed.

¹ **Jess's Rule** is an NHS initiative encouraging GPs to review a diagnosis if a patient presents with the same symptoms three times without improvement. Named after Jessica Brady – who died from cancer in 2020 after her illness went undiagnosed despite multiple GP consultations – it aims to catch serious conditions earlier by prompting clinicians to review the patient's full history, check for red flags, and consider further tests or referrals.

Source: [NHS England – Jess's Rule: Three strikes and we rethink](#)

6. Patient Feedback

During our visit, we spoke with a number of patients in the waiting area while the flu-vaccination clinic was taking place. People we spoke with described some frustration around how difficult it can be to book appointments. Several mentioned that telephone lines are often busy and that appointments tend to be taken quickly once they do get through. A few said this has affected how regularly they are able to attend for routine reviews such as diabetes checks.

One patient told us they had '*fallen out with the practice years ago*' 'because of difficulties booking appointments and said they were attending that day only for their flu vaccination. Another explained that they '*can never get an appointment*,' adding that when they do reach reception, all slots are usually gone and the appointment they were attending had been booked for them by a nurse a month in advance.

Additional feedback we had gathered between July and October 2025 reflected very positive experiences with the practice. One person described the practice team as '*kind, respectful, and genuinely helpful*,' adding that they felt '*truly cared for*.' Another reported a good experience using the PATCHs system, explaining that the surgery quickly arranged a convenient GP Extra appointment and that '*the doctor explained everything well*'

7. Key Findings

Positive observations

- Bright, clean, and well-maintained environment.
- Accessible entry with automatic door.
- Noticeboard and patient information clearly displayed.
- Calm, organised atmosphere observed during our visit.
- Staff described by patients as kind, respectful, and helpful.
- Flu clinic operated smoothly, with efficient patient flow.

Areas for improvement

- Website does not reference Jess's Rule.
- Limited on-site toilet provision for patients.
- Patients described ongoing difficulty accessing appointments, particularly by phone or for long-term condition reviews, and said that clearer communication about booking routes would be helpful.

8. Summary

The Beeches Medical Centre presented as a small but well-kept practice serving a large patient population. The environment was welcoming and accessible, and staff were observed to be professional and approachable throughout our visit.

Feedback gathered during and prior to the visit painted a mixed picture. Several people described difficulties booking appointments, particularly by phone or for routine reviews, while others spoke very positively about the care they received once seen. Patients described staff as kind, respectful, and genuinely helpful, saying they felt listened to and well supported.

Overall, the evidence suggests a practice with a strong and caring team, where issues around communication and access are the main areas of patient frustration.

We appreciate the time and openness shown by the practice team during our visit.

9. Recommendations

- 1. Website information** – Add a clear reference to Jess's Rule alongside the existing NHS England '*You and Your General Practice*' link.
- 2. Access and communication** – Continue monitoring appointment availability and consider proactive review invitations for long-term conditions.
- 3. Facilities** – Explore options for an additional patient toilet in future building plans.
- 4. Digital changes** – Keep staff and patients informed about the upcoming introduction of Paco Blinx and any new booking routes.

Service response

- 1. The demand on our phone lines can be very high at times, and we appreciate this can be frustrating for our patients and we are constantly working on ways to reduce the wait times on our phone lines.*
- 2. With regards to review invitations, patients are sent invitations with self-booking links and are encouraged to book their reviews in that way, as it is by far the most convenient and simple way to book. Patients also have the choice to contact the practice by phone to book their review. In addition, we have sections on our website, where patients can submit online reviews. Therefore, I believe we have a few different proactive and convenient ways for patients to book their annual reviews. It may also be worth noting that when we transfer to Blinx in early 2026, our digital front door will have direct links to book reviews without a need to contact the practice by telephone. Therefore, this will help reduce demand on our phone lines.*
- 3. Appointment Capacity – As a practice and within primary care as a whole, we acknowledge that demand exceeds capacity. We proactively encourage care navigation. We are also in the process of taking part in an improvement process to improve capacity. Please see [link](#) for more information: [General Practice Improvement Programme \(GPIP\)](#)*
- 4. Estates – Unfortunately, we are restricted by our premises and there are no plans to explore options for an additional toilet. However, we will continue to address cosmetic issues e.g. recent decorating of reception and waiting room.*
- 5. Paco Blinx launch – A text message campaign was sent to all patients in November 2025, informing them of our change to Paco Blinx and informing patients that moving forward email would be our preferred method of communication. Our Winter newsletter will also cover the launch. Our website also has information on regarding the launch.*
- 6. Jess's Rule – I believe this is a recent initiative recently introduced in late September 2025, the partners will discuss this in due course, and we appreciate you bringing this to our attention.*

7. *Dr Williamson (GP partner & Clinical Director of Widnes PCN) has recently met with Dave Wilson (Healthwatch Halton Chief Officer) to keep him up-to-date with the work that all 8 practices in Widnes are collectively working towards to help improve the health and services we all provide.*

Adam Bolton – Organisational Manager – The Beeches Medical Centre

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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.

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