

GP practice report

Tower House

November 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 social care services. We collect local feedback to help improve how services are delivered across the borough.

Healthwatch Halton has statutory powers to conduct Enter & View visits. These enable representatives to observe services first-hand, speak with patients, and gather views on the quality of care being delivered. This visit to Tower House Practice forms part of our wider programme of GP practice visits across the borough.

2. Background Information

Practice Information	Details
Address	42 High Street, Runcorn, WA7 1AB
Telephone	01928 567404
Practice list size	12,776
GPs	4 GP partners, 3 salaried GP, 2 GP registrars
Advanced nurse practitioners (ANPs)	0
Paramedics:	1
Care Navigators:	13
Managers:	3
Admin Staff:	13
Healthcare Assistants (HCAs):	1
General Practice Assistants:	3
Clinical Pharmacists:	2
Practice Nurses	3
Mental Health Nurse	1

Systems in use and services offered

- *Systems in Use: Patches (admin and some clinical), NHS Total Triage: Yes.*
- *The practice do offer on the day and pre-bookable appointment but these are all allocated now via Total Triage.*
- *GP Extra referrals: Yes*
- *PPG: Yes – 17 active members*
- *Phlebotomy Clinic: Yes (3 days per week)*

3. External Environment

Tower House Practice is located within St Paul's Health Centre on a busy road in Runcorn Old Town. While the building is easy to identify, parking availability varies. The small car park behind the building sits on a sloping hill and offers limited capacity. Additional parking is available at the Brindley car park and a nearby council car park, but both are shared with the public and may be unsuitable for patients with mobility difficulties.

Access into the building is clearly defined. A set of steps and a sloping ramp led to automatic sliding doors. Once inside, patients enter a shared foyer area where repeat prescriptions can be dropped off before moving into the main reception. Tower House and Grove House each operate two reception windows from this shared space, contributing to a busy but functional reception area.

4. Internal Environment

Inside, Tower House Practice occupies the waiting room to the right of the main reception. The environment was **clean and well maintained**, although several areas felt dated and would benefit from refurbishment.

Chairs were arranged in rows facing the TV calling screen. They were wipeable and sturdy, but the colour closely matched the flooring, reducing visual contrast. This can make it harder for some patients—particularly older people or those with visual or cognitive impairments—to navigate the space comfortably.

Radio Halton was playing quietly throughout the visit, providing a gentle

background atmosphere. A wall-mounted hand sanitiser dispenser was present and full.

Two noticeboards displayed information about health services, local support groups, and practice updates. A large PPG poster was prominently visible, encouraging patients to join the group.

A suggestion box was available, but no slips were provided, limiting its usefulness. Toilets shared between Tower House and Grove House were clean but visibly dated. Some health information leaflets had been placed on sinks, which is not an appropriate location due to the risk of water damage.

Despite the high use of the building, the practice maintained a welcoming and orderly environment.

5. Observations During the Visit

Throughout the visit, more than 20 patients attended the practice. Staff interactions were consistently professional, friendly, and supportive. We observed reception staff helping patients with digital barriers and offering clear explanations when needed.

The patient calling screen was functioning, although a small number of patients mentioned that parts of the sign-in screen were confusing. Staff were attentive and monitored the waiting area, ensuring patients were seen in turn and offering help where appropriate.

Some patients attending routine checks or annual reviews noted longer waits for these appointments. However, once patients were seen, their interactions with clinicians were described positively.

The practice felt calm and patient-centred, with staff maintaining good visibility across the waiting room and supporting the steady flow of patients throughout the visit.

6. Patient Feedback

During the visit, we spoke with patients to gather their experiences. Several

patients expressed confidence in the care they received but noted delays in accessing routine or non-urgent appointments.

One patient described feeling anxious while waiting for follow-up results, saying *"I waited three weeks... waiting this long can be worrying."*

Another patient attending an annual check told us, *"I've been waiting a couple of weeks for this appointment. It's my annual check, and I booked online."*

Digital access elicited mixed experiences. One patient commented, *"The sign-in screen is confusing – it shows all numbers, but it should have a keypad."*

Another said, *"Patches is long-winded and too difficult, but you do get a response within 48 hours."*

Parents and carers also shared challenges with phone access:

"Sometimes the phone lines are constantly busy, so you have to come in."

Older patients often relied on phone or family support:

"I'm 93, so I ring or my family do. Staff are very nice... they got me in straight away."

Some spoke warmly about continuity of care, referrals, and clinical communication. Others described barriers accessing specialist mental health services despite multiple GP referrals:

"My GP keeps referring me to secondary services, but they keep refusing. I haven't been seen at hospital level."

Despite frustrations around access, most patients praised staff helpfulness and the quality of care once in consultation.

7. Key Findings

What's Working Well

- Staff interactions were consistently positive, friendly, and supportive.
- The environment was clean and well maintained.
- Patients reported good experiences once they secured an appointment.
- Phlebotomy clinics were available three days per week.
- Clear visibility of PPG materials.
- Radio Halton and information boards contributed to a welcoming atmosphere.

Areas for Improvement

- Waiting area décor is dated and would benefit from modernisation.
- Low contrast between flooring and seating may reduce accessibility.
- Lack of suggestion box slips limits patient feedback opportunities.
- Some leaflets were placed in unsuitable or unhygienic locations.
- Patients experienced:
 - Delays for routine and annual checks
 - Challenges navigating Patches
 - Busy phone lines at peak times
 - Confusion with the sign-in screen

8. Summary

Tower House Practice provides a friendly and supportive environment, with staff observed to be professional, approachable, and patient-focused throughout the visit. The practice was clean and well maintained, and patients generally reported positive experiences once they were seen by a clinician.

However, décor and facilities are dated in several areas, and the waiting room would benefit from refurbishment to improve comfort and accessibility. Some patients reported delays for routine appointments, busy telephone lines at peak times, and difficulty using Patches or the self check-in screen. Despite these access challenges, most patients praised the quality of care received and valued the availability of phlebotomy clinics three days per week.

9. Recommendations

1. **Refurbish the waiting area** to improve décor, contrast, and accessibility.
2. **Ensure suggestion box slips** are readily available.
3. **Relocate patient leaflets** to appropriate, hygienic areas.
4. **Improve usability and visibility** of the self check-in screen, especially for older or less confident users.
5. **Review phlebotomy capacity** in line with patient demand.
6. **Continue offering multiple appointment access routes** for both digital and non-digital users.
7. **Explore options to improve phone access**, especially during peak periods.

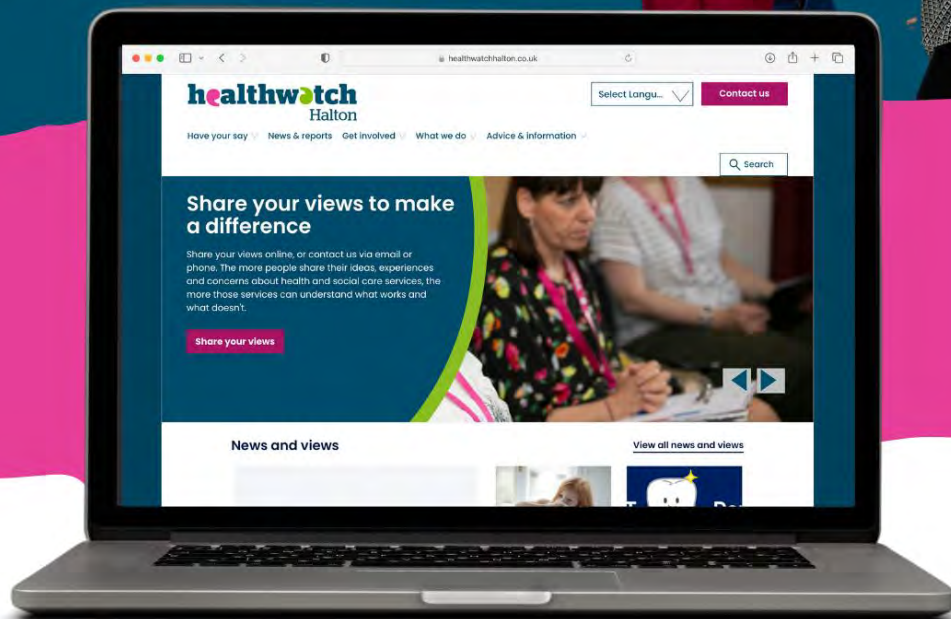
Practice response

Thank you for your recommendations. The Practice aims always to provide a friendly and supportive environment for the whole practice population. We will review these recommendations at our PPG meeting and also with our Practice staff

Have Your Say

Share your experiences of health & social care services in Halton on our website or with your mobile phone.

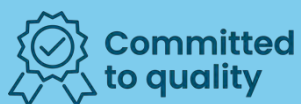
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We are committed to the quality of our information.
Every three years we perform an in-depth audit
so that we can be certain of this.



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