

GP practice report

Weaver Vale 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 Weaver Vale 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	Weaver Vale Practice Hallwood Health Centre, Hospital Way, Runcorn WA7 2UT 01928 711 911
Practice list size	9,000 patients
GPs	8
Nurses	2
Paramedic	1
Health care assistants (HCAs)	1 (three days a week)
Clinical Pharmacists	Part-time
Care Navigators / Receptionists	8
Practice Manager	1
Administrative Staff	4

Systems & Access

- Uses PATCHS to manage fit notes, administrative tasks, and triage clinical requests, in line with the new requirements introduced from 1st October.
- Pre-bookable appointments up to 4 weeks in advance
- Same-day urgent appointments available
- Does not operate as a Total Triage practice

3. External Environment

Weaver Vale Practice is based inside **Hallwood Health Centre** in Runcorn, a shared building also used by Brookvale Practice and Bridgewater Services. The site benefits from **ample on-site parking**, and access into the building is straightforward through **automatic sliding doors**, which provide level entry for wheelchair users, parents with buggies, and people with mobility needs.

On entering the centre, Weaver Vale's reception area is located clearly on the right-hand side. The wider building includes several **digital screens**, which allow patients to check in for appointments, register their car for parking, and drop off samples or prescription requests. These systems help reduce queues at reception and contribute to smooth patient flow across the shared premises.

4. Internal Environment

Inside the practice, the building—although older in design—was **clean, tidy, and well maintained**. Noticeboards were up to date and sensibly organised, avoiding the visual clutter seen in some busy practices. A wide range of health and wellbeing information was displayed clearly.

Weaver Vale's dedicated waiting area is located away from the main reception desk, offering a **quieter, more private space** where patients can wait comfortably. The seating was in good condition and well spaced, with **privacy screens** available for anyone who required additional confidentiality.

A **TV screen and electronic patient calling board** were both in use, and **soft background music** contributed to a calm, welcoming atmosphere. During the visit, around **15 patients** were observed using the waiting area.

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.

5. Observations During the Visit

Throughout the visit, staff were consistently **polite, professional and welcoming**. Both clinical and non-clinical staff engaged openly with Healthwatch Halton representatives and were happy to explain how the practice operates.

The overall atmosphere was positive and organised. Reception staff were managing enquiries confidently, and clear processes supported efficient patient flow. The combination of digital check-in options, clear signage, and a calm environment helped patients move smoothly through their appointments. Staff teamwork was evident, and interactions with patients appeared respectful and reassuring.

6. Patient Feedback

During the visit, we spoke with several patients in the waiting area to understand their recent experiences of care and access at Weaver Vale Practice. The feedback shared was generally positive, with many patients expressing long-term confidence in the service, although a few practical issues were highlighted.

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](#)

One patient told us they had been registered with the practice for six years and felt very well supported in managing long-term conditions, saying:
"I can't fault the service since I moved here 6 years ago and turned 50. They have been brilliant. I was diagnosed with diabetes and high blood pressure, but they really look after me. Sometimes you do have to wait a few weeks for an appointment, but that's expected in the NHS."

Others described mixed experiences when trying to book appointments online. Several people advised that they could not find appointments available through the NHS App. As one patient explained:
"NHS App – never any online appointments. This appointment was made when I was here last time."

Despite this, satisfaction with the care itself remained consistently high. A patient who had been with the practice for over 15 years simply said:
"No issues at all – been a patient for 15 years."

Another described a largely positive experience but echoed concerns about online booking, saying:
"Quite happy. Checking in is great. I waited two and a half weeks for this appointment, wasn't too long. On the NHS App you try to get an appointment but there's never any available so you have to ring."

We also spoke with a long-standing patient who had been with the practice for half a century. They had experienced sudden illness the night before but were able to walk in and be seen promptly on the day:
"Been ill all night, just walked in and was given an emergency appointment. I've been a patient here for 50 years."

Another patient told us they had contacted the practice earlier in the week about stress related to work and received a timely appointment, saying:
"Rang Monday, got an appointment for today for stress at work. First time I've visited the surgery in ages."

Together, the comments reflected strong confidence in the staff and clinical care at Weaver Vale, with most concerns focused not on treatment but on the availability of appointments through digital channels.

7. Key Findings

Positive Observations

- Clean and tidy environment throughout.
- Spacious waiting area providing privacy and comfort.
- Clear signage and multiple digital check-in options for convenience.
- Friendly, professional, and well-organised staff and management team.
- Good availability of health and wellbeing information materials.
- Background music created a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

Areas for Improvement

- The practice website does not clearly display key patient information, including details about Jessica's Rule and what to expect when contacting the surgery.
- The building is showing signs of age, although this does not affect cleanliness or functionality.
- Some patients reported difficulty booking online appointments via the NHS App.

8. Summary

Weaver Vale provides a calm, well-organised, and caring service for its patients. Overall, feedback from patients was very positive, particularly from long-standing patients, who praised the quality of care, the availability of urgent appointments, and the supportive attitude of staff.

The physical environment is clean, tidy and functional, although the building itself is older in design. While patient experience of care is strong, improvements could be made in how key information, such as Jess's Rule and guidance on accessing appointments online, is displayed and communicated.

9. Recommendations

1. Update the website to clearly display the Patient Charter and Jessica's Rule.
2. Review online appointment availability and communicate clearly how and when appointments can be booked.
3. Maintain the positive environment, including background music and calm waiting spaces.
4. Consider future refurbishment to refresh older areas if funding allows.

Service response

We are pleased that the recent Healthwatch report reflects in the main positively on the care provided at the practice and it is good to hear that our patients feel they are receiving good quality care.

We also acknowledge the concerns raised around access to appointments and would like to outline the steps we are taking to address these:

- **Appointment Access:** We continuously review our appointment system to improve patient access. One challenge we face is a high rate of "Did Not Attend" (DNA) appointments, which unfortunately results in longer waits for other patients. To help reduce this, we are actively encouraging patients to cancel appointments they no longer need through posters in the waiting room, letters/ SMS reminders, and other communications. Following a recent audit, we noted that a high percentage of DNAs occur when

appointments are booked far in advance. To try to reduce wasted slots, we are in the process of shortening the booking window from four weeks to two weeks, in the hope this will reduce DNA and increase appointment availability.

- **Online Appointments:** We do make appointments available online, but only those that do not require clinical triage. These slots are released most days at 10:30am and are often booked quickly. We prioritise urgent needs by ensuring same-day appointments are available for patients who require them.
- **Jess's Rule:** While our GPs already follow Jess's Rule, with posters in all clinical rooms reminding clinicians to "Reflect, Review, Rethink," we have now asked our provided to add information about this to our website so patients can see our commitment to this process.
- **Practice Environment:** We recognise the importance of a welcoming and safe environment for patients. We have recently repainted the walls and are replacing old lighting with new LED fittings as and when required. Unfortunately, we do not currently have funding for a full refurbishment, but we remain committed to making incremental improvements wherever possible.

We remain committed to listening to patient feedback and making improvements where possible, while ensuring that those with the most urgent needs are prioritised.

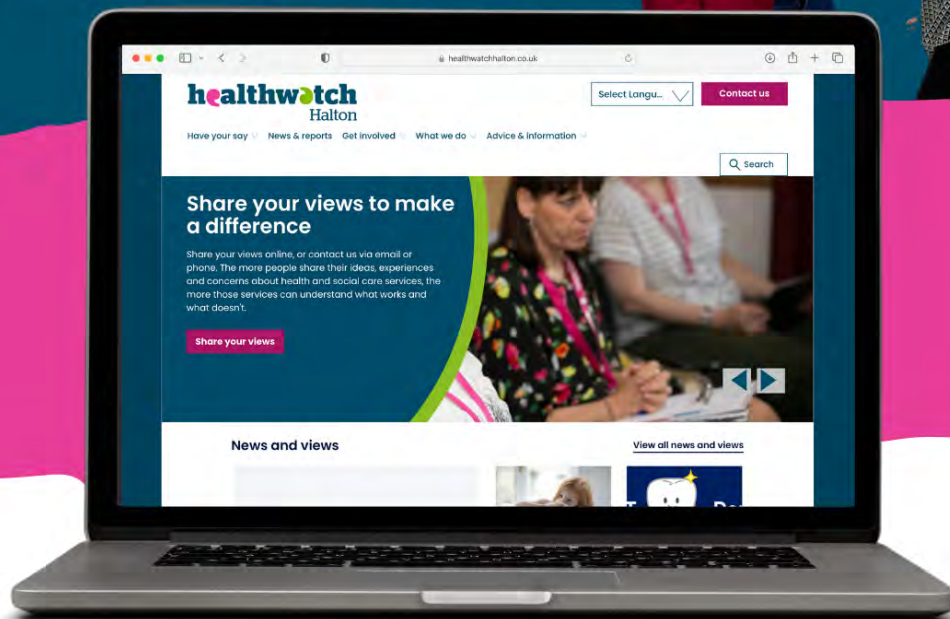
Thank you

Dawn Nuttall – Practice Manager – Weaver Vale Practice

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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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