

Ely and Wisbech Community Diagnostic Centre

Enter and View

October 2025



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This report relates to Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough visits to:
Ely Community Diagnostic Centre, Mondy 18th August 2025 10.30-2.00
And Wisbech Community Diagnostic Centre, Wednesday 20th August 2025 1-3pm.

These accounts are of our observations and what people told us during the visit. It is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all patients, staff, and visitors.

What is Enter and View?

As the local Healthwatch for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, we have statutory powers under the Health and Care Act 2012, and Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, to carry out 'Enter and View' visits to local health and care services.

Under this legislation, Enter and View visits can be made to any premises where health and social care is publicly funded – such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists, and pharmacies.

Through an Enter and View visit, we collect evidence of what is working well and identify how the patient experience could be improved. We use what we hear and see on the day to report back to providers and others with recommendations to inform change for health and care services we visit.



What are Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs)?

Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) provide planned diagnostic care. Patients are typically referred to by their GP or specialist for scheduled tests such as CT, MRI and X-Rays and other diagnostics, including blood tests. Previously, most of these were carried out in hospitals, often in busy acute settings where urgent and emergency cases took priority.

By moving routine diagnostics to standalone centres, the aim is to reduce pressure on hospitals, speed up access to tests, and improve patient experience. As of April 2024, there were 160 CDCs across England, collectively delivering over seven million tests.

Demand for diagnostics continues to grow, and the NHS has struggled to meet targets. CDCs help bridge this gap by offering patients quicker appointments, often with the option of multiple tests in a single visit.

- Wisbech CDC opened in 2023 and Ely CDC in 2024, both managed by Cambridge University Hospitals (CUH).
- A new Peterborough CDC is planned to open in 2026, with construction scheduled to begin in August 2025.

Further information:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/diagnostic-checks-rolled-out-to-160-sites-under-cdc-programme>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9345238/>

<https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/diagnostic-test-waiting-times>

Summary

Why is Healthwatch interested?

Nationally, CDCs were established in 2021.

On the request of Healthwatch England, 18 Healthwatch teams around the country visited 22 Community Diagnostic Centres in January and February 2024. The Healthwatch England report showed almost everyone (93%) felt they had good experiences at Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs).

Almost a third of the general public (31%) said getting the tests done quickly was their top priority when choosing where to get a diagnostic test.

Nationally, most people told Healthwatch they were not offered a choice of location (78%) or time (61%) around their appointments – people said they would have liked a choice when the appointment given was not ideal for them.

<https://nds.healthwatch.co.uk/reports-library/local-diagnosis-learning-lessons-community-diagnostic-centres>

Wisbech CDC opened in 2023, and Ely CDC opened in 2024. The centres provide people with increased and more convenient access to diagnostic tests, allowing patients to have multiple tests on the same day, and reduce waiting times. All of which would lead to earlier diagnosis and help to reduce the pressure on hospitals.

The Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) in Wisbech and Ely are managed by Cambridge University Hospitals (CUH.)

A new Peterborough Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) is expected to be fully operational in 2026. Construction on the site is scheduled to begin in August 2025.

Detailed information about the services can be found here –

<https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/our-services/community-diagnostic-centres/>

Key findings

Everyone we spoke to shared positive experiences at both CDCs. The speed of testing was consistently highlighted as the top priority, and most people were happy to travel to access timely care.

Many appreciated the option to have further tests carried out on the same day, avoiding the need for re-referral.

Accessibility and Convenience

We observed good practices around accessibility, though a few changes could further improve the experience for some users.

Most people found visiting the CDC convenient. Travel times were generally within 20 minutes, though some from Cambridge reported journeys of around 45 minutes.

Information about how to reach the CDCs was described as clear and comprehensive.

Free parking was appreciated by all who travelled by car.

Areas for Improvement

Overall, the feedback reflects a largely positive experience, with a few areas where small changes could enhance patient satisfaction even further.

Most people told us they were not offered a choice of location or appointment time. When the scheduled time was inconvenient, they said they would have preferred more flexibility.

About the visit

Our local Healthwatch Enter and View visits spoke to people using and people working at these services to find firsthand what visiting a CDC is like now they have been established for a year or two.

Our visit captured the patient voice which included matters relating to internal designs, facilities, travel/other considerations that could then be part of considerations for ongoing service developments in Ely, Wisbech and the newly planned Peterborough site.

Methodology

This was an announced visit.

3 Enter and View Authorised Representatives carried out the visit:

- Janine Newby-Robson, Project Manager at Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
- Sue Allan, Head of Engagement at Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
- Rachael Peryer Authorised Representative volunteer.

We spoke to people in the waiting area before and after their treatment and members of staff. We asked a set of questions around referrals, how people received appointments, how efficient is public transport and for any examples of good practice which can be shared to assist the planning of the new site at Peterborough.

How are people referred?

People are referred for a diagnostic procedure directly by Addenbrooke's. (CUH) CUH sort the referrals and send appointments to individuals, which could be at Addenbrookes, Ely or Wisbech CDC.

Often the CDC offer a reduced waiting time for appointments. For example, there is typically a 2 week wait for Ely CDC whereas it could be many months for a large hospital. People are not given an explanation to why they may have to travel a longer distance than normal.

The CDC operates a specialist older persons clinic where very local people receive extended consultations with a senior clinician. Diagnostic tests deemed necessary are typically conducted on the same day, which streamline care and reduces delays.

Since starting this service, only 1 out of 80 patients has required hospital admission.

This integrated care model represents good practice in older people's healthcare. It is especially appreciated by patients, many of whom prefer to recover in the comfort of their own homes rather than in a hospital setting.

Ely CDC

Our visit

We visited Ely CDC Monday 18th August 10th, 2025, 10.30–2.00pm

We spoke to:

- 18 people using the services at Ely CDC,
- 4 staff at Ely CDC to gather feedback about what works well and what could be better.

Ely Community Diagnostic Centre is known as a Hub and offer a range of diagnostics services at the Princess of Wales Hospital.

These include:

Fibroscan, Telederm, Phlebotomy, Respiratory, Echo, 24 Hr ECG, RADAR, TB Clinic, CT, MRI, Ultrasound, X-Ray, and Young Adult Hip Pathway.



Waiting area overview

- Free parking for 270 cars, with Blue Badge bays, electric charging points, and a new multistorey car park.
- Clear signage and maps.
- Two waiting areas (main zone and smaller MRI/CT area).
- Modern, well-lit environment with wide corridors, sanitiser points, water dispenser, vending machines, and hearing loops at reception.

- Areas for improvement included lack of corridor seating, insufficient variety of chairs, and toilets with awkward outward-opening doors.



Patient feedback (18 people)

- Travel: Most lived locally, though some came from Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire, and further afield. Most travelled by car, with a few using bus, taxi, or hospital transport.
- Tests: Patients attended for CT, MRI, ultrasound, blood tests, echo, Fibroscan, and specialist scans.
- Appointments: Appointment letters included maps and travel options; text reminders were sent. People valued shorter waiting times, though some felt unclear why they had to travel further.
- Transport: Free parking was praised. Public transport was described as limited and sometimes poorly timed. Hospital transport could involve long waits for return journeys.
- Experience: Patients highlighted the speed and efficiency of appointments, though some struggled to hear their names being called in the waiting area.
- Access to results: Many used the CUH MyChart portal and appreciated receiving results within hours.

Staff feedback

- Staff enjoyed working in a modern, calmer environment compared with a large hospital.
- They felt able to give personalised care.
- A chaperone service is available.
- Suggested improvements included an additional room for fitting cannulas to speed up patient flow.

- Everyone we spoke to said they find the staff are very pleasant and treat everyone as an individual and do not seem rushed.
- The staff are supporting the “Hello my name is” campaign.
- We observed a frail older person with reduced mobility who faced a long wait for hospital transport. The Service Manager responded by providing them with a drink and a sandwich.

Quotes:

“Nice and easy to get to and no parking issues, unlike Addenbrooke’s.”

“I was referred for an MRI at my review. I live in Cambridge but was given Ely on a Sunday – public transport was a challenge.”

“Within 15 minutes I had arrived, checked in, cannula fitted, and CT scan done.”

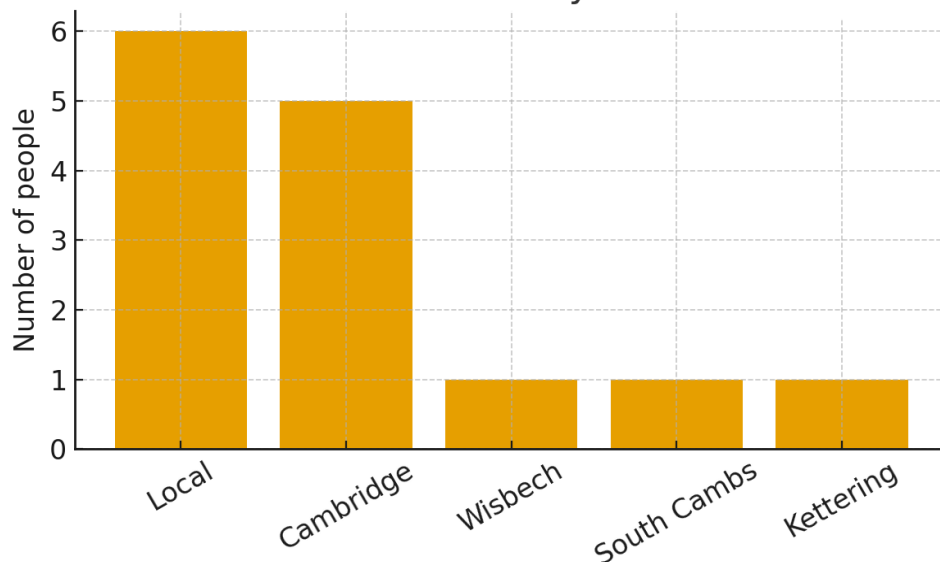
“This is much preferable to Addenbrooke’s.”

“I like it, isn’t all NHS blue paint and that the walls were not full of notices and posters. It’s well designed and feels more like a private clinic”.

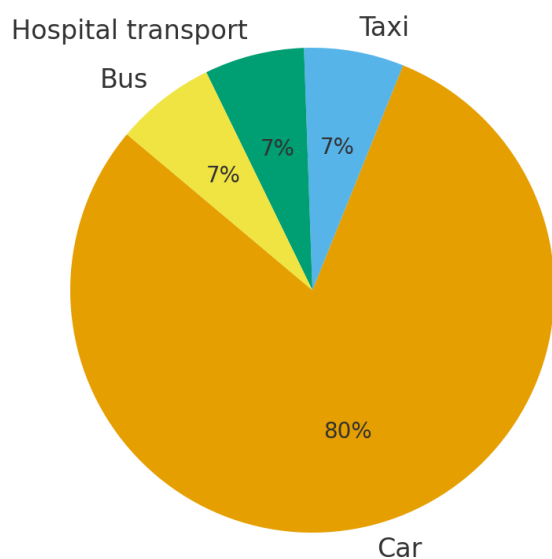
‘We’ve had CTs in lots of different locations, but this is the best’

“Literature sent out with appointment letter was very informative, good clear directions”

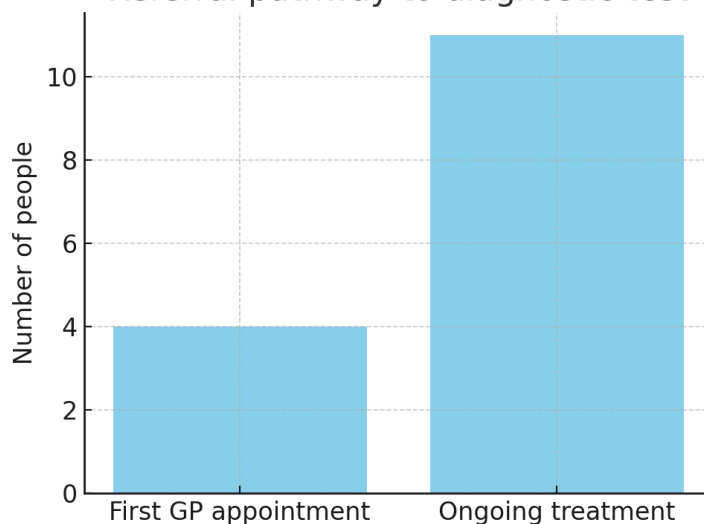
Travel distance to Ely CDC



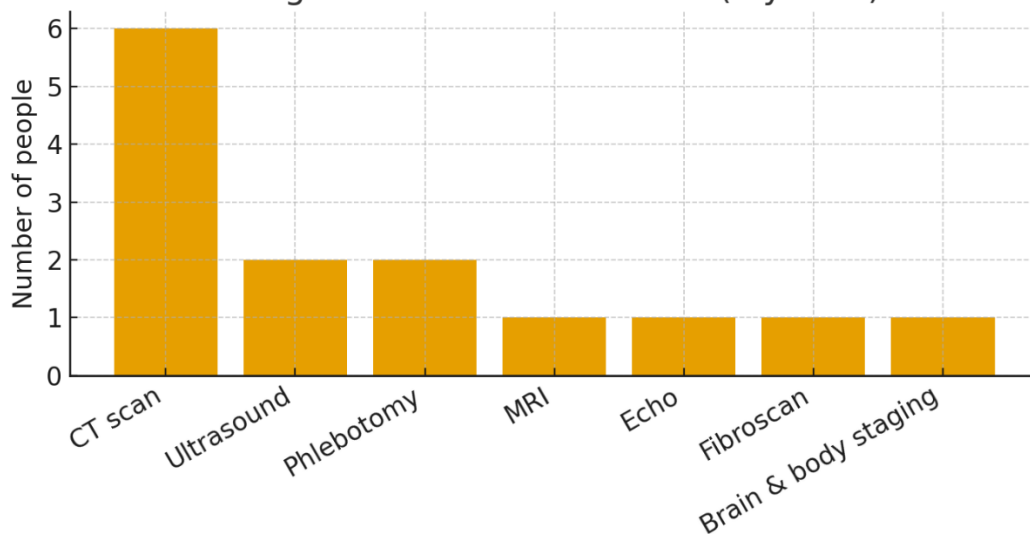
Mode of travel to Ely CDC



Referral pathway to diagnostic test



Diagnostic tests undertaken (Ely CDC)



People told us:

Appointments

Most of the people we spoke to travelled locally to the CDC, however a few travelled from Cambridge, one from the Kettering area.

Appointments by letter include patient information about what to expect at the test and includes a map and travel options.

A text reminder is also sent.

Obtaining appointments in a timely way was appreciated by people in the waiting area, however one person commented the length of waiting time to see a GP for the CDC referral was a bigger issue for them.

The Service Manager informed us that some of their patients travel from as far as Brighton or Ireland if their consultant is based at Addenbrooke's. In these cases, people receive all the treatment required in one day.

Several people told us they did not understand why they had an appointment in Ely when they lived closer to Addenbrooke's.

"I was referred for an MRI at my review. I live in Cambridge. I wasn't asked where I would want the MRI to be done. I received an appointment by letter at Ely for a late afternoon Sunday. Getting to Ely on a Sunday from Cambridge on public transport is a challenge."

When we enquired about this issue, the Service manager explained the CDC waiting time for an MRI is around 2 weeks, whereas elsewhere it is many months.

When we explained this to people in the waiting room, they said they preferred to travel further to get a test sooner rather than later.

The Service Manager explained that the Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) offers a "one-stop shop" for individuals requiring multiple diagnostic tests. Often if someone requires additional tests, they may be able to have these on the same day.

Refreshments

Access to nutritious food is particularly challenging for individuals who rely on public transport. The café opposite the CDC closes at 3pm on weekdays and remains closed during weekends, limiting food options during those times. While a vending machine is available, it only offers snacks such as crisps and chocolate bars, which do not meet the nutritional needs of for some users.

Travelling to the CDC

At the time of our visit, there were road closure signs which caused issues for some. Although road signage is out of the control of the CDC a carer said it could have been mentioned in the reminder text message they received that morning.

One person said this was their first visit to the CDC and did not know the multi-story carpark was for patients as they saw a different sign saying this was for residents only.

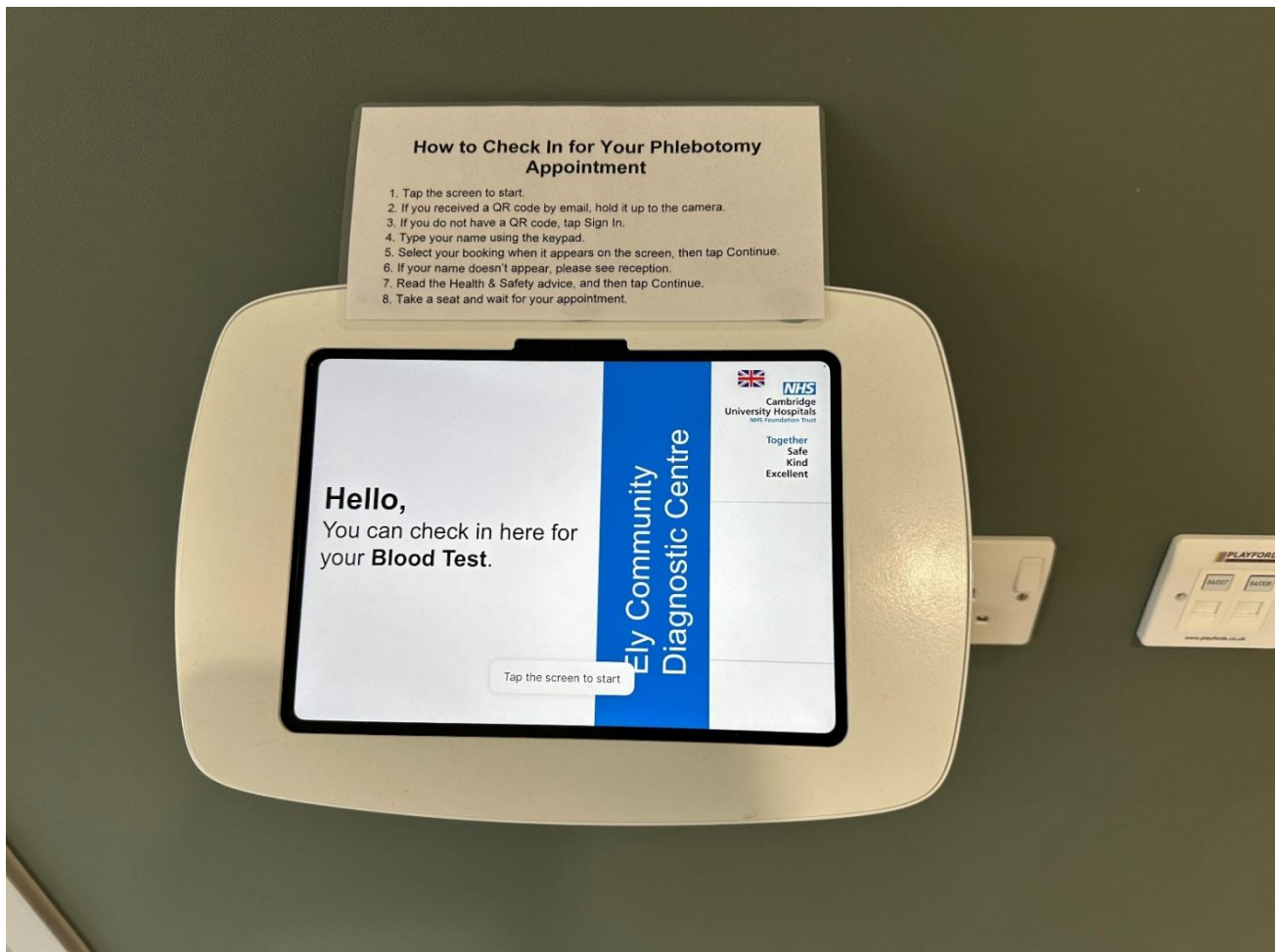
People who drove valued the free parking, particularly when compared to the charges at Addenbrooke's hospital.

Some people rely on buses to get to the CDC. These are becoming more infrequent. A regular user of the CDC mentioned buses which run from Cambridge City to Ely (via the hospital) only run 4 times a day and stop at about 4pm.

Some people arrive via hospital transport, which arrive on time for the appointment, but people can wait hours for a return journey.

People said their appointment letters do not clearly state they are able to reschedule. One person said although their appointment was on time and fast, they had to wait 3 hours for a return bus to Cambridge.

The Service Manager told us 18% of appointments are rescheduled due to transport and geographical issues.



Calling patients to appointments

During our visit, we observed that some patients found it difficult to hear their names being called for diagnostic appointments. Background noise from the television and cooling system contributed to this issue, making announcements unclear. On one occasion, a patient's name was displayed in reverse order, which caused confusion and almost led to a missed appointment.

Although appointments generally ran on time, some patients told us that when they were scheduled for multiple tests, the overall process could involve several hours of waiting, with little occupation between.

Phlebotomy service

Some blood tests can be booked directly by patients online, while most appointments are arranged through GP surgeries or hospitals. During our visit, some patients were unsure whether they needed to collect paperwork from their GP before attending the CDC for phlebotomy.

The Service Manager explained that the service operates via two distinct pathways:

General Practice requests (tQuest system): Tests ordered by a GP require forms printed on specialist paper with pre-aligned labels. These labels are essential, as emailing forms can cause formatting issues that prevent samples being accepted by the laboratory. Without the labels, blood samples are destroyed. If

the CDC were responsible for storing and printing these forms, around 50% of phlebotomy appointments would be lost due to the extra administration required.

Hospital requests (EPIC system): Tests ordered by hospital clinicians are arranged through the trust's clinical system and do not require additional forms.

Patients are not required to use the CDC for blood tests and may still attend their GP surgery. However, the CDC usually offers same-day or next-day appointments, compared with a 3–4 week wait at many GP practices (outside peak holiday times).

Test results

Several people said they were happy being able to find some test results on occasions within a couple of hours via the Cambridge University Hospital (CUH) patient portal "MyChart"

"I waited 3 months for a CT scan and 2 months for an MRI at Queen Elizabeth Hospital (Kings Lynn). A limb was lost as cancer had spread whilst waiting. I now attend Princess of Wales as its nearer and a seamless process. I book my appointments via MyChart. They are always on time, and I sometimes have more than one test/scan to save me coming back. The centre is new and clean; the staff go above and beyond."

Accessibility

- Appointments are managed by CUH, and patient records should highlight any accessibility or translation needs. An iPad is available to access real-time translation services, though there is no visible information in the reception area to let patients know this support exists.

Key accessibility features at Ely CDC include:

- Step-free level access throughout the building.
- High visual contrast between walls and floors.
- Clear signage with consistent design, colour, and typeface.
- Seating available in waiting rooms, though most chairs do not have arms.
- Simple environmental changes can make a significant difference for people living with dementia, helping them to feel more confident in using facilities. To assess dementia-friendliness, we applied the King's Fund and University of Worcester Health Centre Assessment Tool, which supports health and care staff, alongside patients and carers, to review and improve environments. This tool is freely available to download from the University of Worcester website.
- We found Ely CDC to be mostly dementia friendly. However, three dark entrance mats in the doorway may appear to some people with dementia as holes in the floor, potentially causing hesitation or anxiety when entering.

Comprehensive information covering accessibility is available by following this link - <https://www.accessable.co.uk/cambridge-university-hospitals-nhs-foundation-trust/ely-community-diagnostic-centre/access-guides/community-diagnostic-centre#c62f21ea-4002-394c-ad2a-e5848180a8f4>

Wisbech CDC



Our Visit

We visited Wednesday 20th August 2025 1-4pm.

We spoke to 6 people using the Ultrasound diagnostics as this was the only clinic available at that time.

Wisbech Diagnostic Centre is based at North Cambridgeshire hospital and is known as a "spoke service," is around the fifth of the size of Ely and provides the following services: "Respiratory" (which includes spirometry, full lung function, Feno, Reversibility) Ultrasound and Fibroscan.

The site does not currently offer specialised imaging services such as CT, MRI, or X-ray scanning. This decision is primarily due to limited demand and the high operational costs associated with these technologies. For example, an MRI

scanner alone costs approximately £1.6 million and requires a purpose-built room along with highly trained personnel to operate and maintain it.

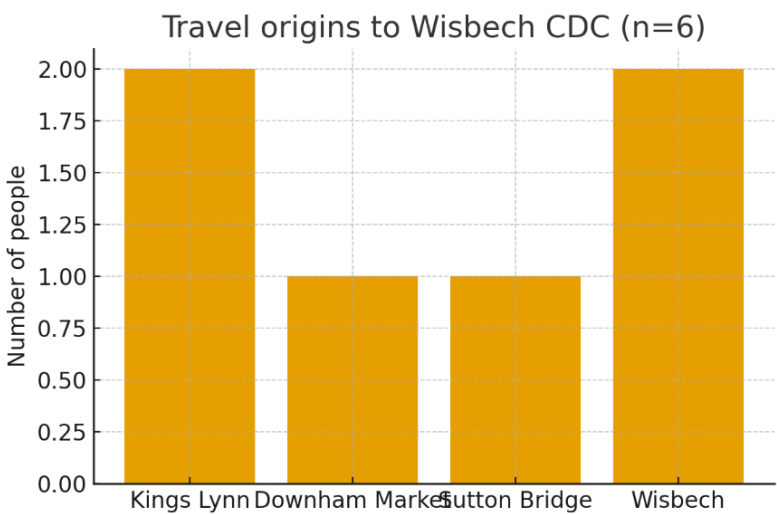
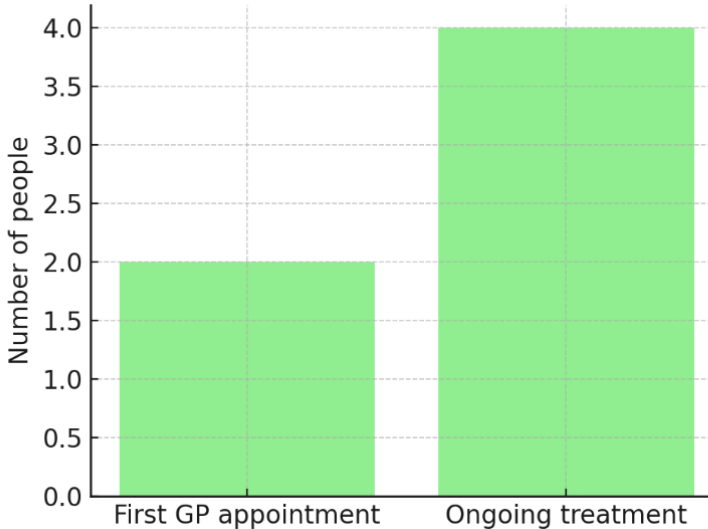
During our visit in the afternoon, only ultrasound testing was available, as staffing levels were reduced due to illness. As a result, a single staff member was responsible for conducting tests. Recruitment and retention of health professionals in the Fenland area has historically posed significant challenges for health and social care services.

We spoke to 6 people using the service.

The CDC is found within the North Cambridgeshire Hospital.

Travelling to the CDC

Referral pathway to diagnostic test (Wisbech CDC)



There is free parking on the site, or alternatively the bus station is a 4-minute walk away. There is also some offsite parking options should there be no spaces available at peak times.

The hospital has recently improved signage to departments from outside access points.

Appointments

Appointments sent by letter include patient information about what to expect at the test and includes a map and travel options.

A text reminder is also sent.

“The appointment letter and a reminder is very informative and helpful”

Waiting Area

The CDC waiting room accommodates approximately 12 individuals and features a mix of chairs with and without armrests. However, it lacks seating options with higher seats or supportive backs, which may pose challenges for individuals with mobility issues. Additionally, the current layout makes it difficult for wheelchair users to sit adjacent to a carer.

Amenities in the waiting area include a large television, a hand sanitiser station, a small wall-mounted clock, and a water station. For refreshments, visitors can access a vending machine located in the outpatient area or visit nearby cafés within walking distance.

Because there were few people waiting, there were no issues with hearing names being called.

"I had my appointment at Kings Lynn hospital cancelled. This CDC sorted a new appointment within days."

On the day of our visit, we entered through Entrance Four, which has a blue floor mat. This is much more dementia-friendly than darker mats, which can appear as hazards.

Key accessibility features at Wisbech CDC include:

- Clear signage with high-contrast colours.
- Seven consultation/medical rooms available.
- Manual doors with high visual contrast.
- A mix of chairs with and without armrests in the waiting area.
- A clearly signed portable hearing assistance system.

Areas for improvement:

- Public toilet signage does not use recognisable symbols, which is not dementia-friendly and may confuse people whose first language is not English.
- The adapted toilet may not be suitable for larger electric wheelchairs.

For further details about accessibility, please visit this link –

<https://www.accessable.co.uk/cambridge-university-hospitals-nhs-foundation-trust/wisbech-community-diagnostic-centre>



Supporting people with additional needs

At both sites, staff described how they support individuals with additional needs by introducing them gradually to the diagnostic environment. For example, toys may be used to demonstrate how an X-ray machine works in a friendly and reassuring way. To reduce sensory discomfort, music or streaming services are offered to help mask the noise from MRI machines.

Both Ely and Wisbech CDCs have portable devices that provide translation and British Sign Language (BSL) support via phone or video call. These devices can be adjusted to different heights, making them accessible for wheelchair users.

Staff also have access to a laminated Easy Read card pack, based on the Hospital Communication Book used in other healthcare settings. This resource helps support communication with people who have learning difficulties or who speak languages other than English.

[Hospital-communication-book.pdf](#)

Recommendations

People we spoke to value the short waiting times between referral and appointment. However, many were unclear about why they were asked to attend a centre outside their local area. We recommend that CUH clearly explain in appointment letters that waiting times at CDCs are significantly shorter than at Addenbrooke's or King's Lynn Hospitals. In line with Healthwatch England's recommendations, appointment letters and emails should also include a contact number, making it easier for people to reschedule if needed. This would be especially helpful for those who rely on public transport or carers.

Accessibility

We recommend updating the entrance door mats at Ely CDC to use colours that are much more dementia-friendly, which would improve visibility and safety for people with cognitive impairments. At Ely, we also noted that the toilets in the waiting area have outward-opening doors, creating a risk for individuals walking toward the reception desk. This could be addressed by adding a warning sign inside the door or marking the floor with yellow hatch lines to alert users.

At Wisbech CDC, toilet signage does not currently use pictograms. Updating this to mirror the clearer signage at Ely would improve accessibility. We also suggest that CUH review and update the CDC webpages to include links to AccessAble, giving patients detailed information about accessibility before they travel.

[Home](#) | [AccessAble](#)



Both Ely and Wisbech serve people whose first language is not English. While translation services are available, accessibility could be improved by including multiple languages on information screen slides. Similarly, introducing seating or handrails in long corridors would help people with reduced mobility.

At Ely, patients told us it was sometimes difficult to hear their names being called in waiting areas, and one person reported discomfort at having personal details requested publicly. To improve both audibility and privacy, we recommend

encouraging the use of “Hard of Hearing” stickers on seating and considering visual aids such as digital screens or a numbered ticket system. Privacy could be enhanced by exploring more discreet ways of collecting information, such as using tablets.

Seating

In the waiting areas, we recommend introducing chairs with higher seats and supportive backs to better meet the needs of people with limited mobility. At Wisbech CDC, the current layout makes it difficult for wheelchair users to sit next to a companion. Reconfiguring the seating would help create a more inclusive and comfortable environment.

Information screen

At Ely, the information screen cycles through slides quickly, which can make it difficult for patients to read and take notes. We recommend reviewing the total number of slides and adjusting the display speed to improve readability. Including translations in commonly used languages would also help make the information more accessible to a wider audience.

Future Peterborough CDC

We encourage the team developing the new Peterborough CDC to review this report and draw on the examples of good practice identified at Ely and Wisbech. We also recommend reflecting on the areas for improvement we have highlighted, so that the new Centre can be designed to provide the best possible experience for patients from the outset.

Response from Cambridge University Hospitals

We welcome this report from Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and are committed to acting on feedback from patients to improve their experience of care with us.

There are several recommendations within this report for which we can provide additional information:

- **Patient consent for test locations**

Patients are asked to give express consent regarding the location of their tests. We explain why a location has been chosen and always offer alternatives if patients are unable to attend Ely. (*Ref – Page 5*)

- **Corridor and safety measures**

The main corridors are designated fire escapes, and we strive to keep them clear at all times, not only in case of fire but also to provide patients with additional space. We actively encourage patients to avoid waiting in areas where they cannot be observed, for their own safety.

Additionally, the toilet doors open outwards in accordance with building regulations. This ensures they can be opened in an emergency, such as if someone has fallen and blocked the door. This design was mandated by our Health and Safety team during the building stage. We acknowledge that additional signage would be beneficial. (Ref – Page 8)

- **Cannulation facilities**

We have an additional room for fitting cannulas, and cannulation is also carried out in specialised clinical spaces, including the CT and MRI scanning rooms. (Ref – Page 8)

- **Text message service**

The text message service is automated and cannot be easily amended. It also has a limited character count, which restricts the amount of information that can be included—such as transport updates.

(Ref –Page 12)

Thank you for your visit to our Community Diagnostic Centres and for working collaboratively with us. We appreciate the time that you took to engage with patients and staff, and your thoughtful feedback. We strive to make the patient experience as comfortable as possible, and our team has developed an action plan to make improvements based on the recommendations in the report.

Gareth Whyte, Community Diagnostic Centres – Service Manager

Thank You

We would like to thank all the patients and carers who shared their experiences with us during our visits. Their feedback is invaluable in helping to improve local services.

We also extend our thanks to Gareth Whyte, Service Manager, and his team for their support.



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