

ICB Primary Care Commissioning Committee

Date of meeting	18 January 2024
Title of paper	Withnell Health Centre public and patient engagement
Presented by	Neil Greaves, director of communications and engagement
Author	Dan Clough, communications and engagement manager David Rogers, head of communications and engagement (insight)
Agenda item	5a
Confidential	No

Executive summary

A public engagement exercise was undertaken during September and October 2023 working closely with patients of Withnell Health Centre.

The engagement programme aims to support the procurement process and consisted of patients and public in the local area being asked to provide feedback on the service provided by Withnell Health Centre and to indicate what, if anything, could be improved about the service currently on offer.

Patients have also been asked to identify what aspects of primary care provision they feel are most important to them.

The feedback from the patient engagement exercise is summarised in the evaluation report. The report is intended to be used to support the development of the service specification and to support the procurement process.

Advise, Assure or Alert

Assure the committee:

- The approach to engagement and involvement has been responded positively by the patient steering group and adheres to our principles of working in partnership with people and communities

Advise the committee:

- It is advised that the insights contained within the evaluation report are used to contribute to any procurement process which is agreed for Withnell Health Centre

Recommendations

The Primary Care Commissioning Committee are asked to:

- Note the engagement evaluation report and the insights from patients and public of Withnell Health Centre

Which Strategic Objective/s does the report contribute to

Tick

1	Improve quality, including safety, clinical outcomes, and patient experience	✓
2	To equalise opportunities and clinical outcomes across the area	
3	Make working in Lancashire and South Cumbria an attractive and desirable option for existing and potential employees	
4	Meet financial targets and deliver improved productivity	
5	Meet national and locally determined performance standards and targets	
6	To develop and implement ambitious, deliverable strategies	

Implications

	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Associated risks			✓	
Are associated risks detailed on the ICB Risk Register?			✓	
Financial Implications			✓	

Where paper has been discussed (list other committees/forums that have discussed this paper)

Meeting	Date	Outcomes
Withnell Health Centre Patient steering group	November 2023	Feedback and insight was captured on the draft of the report and findings were taken into consideration.

Conflicts of interest associated with this report

Not applicable

Impact assessments

	Yes	No	N/A	Comments
Quality impact assessment completed			✓	
Equality impact assessment completed			✓	
Data privacy impact assessment completed			✓	

Report authorised by:

Craig Harris, Chief Operating Officer



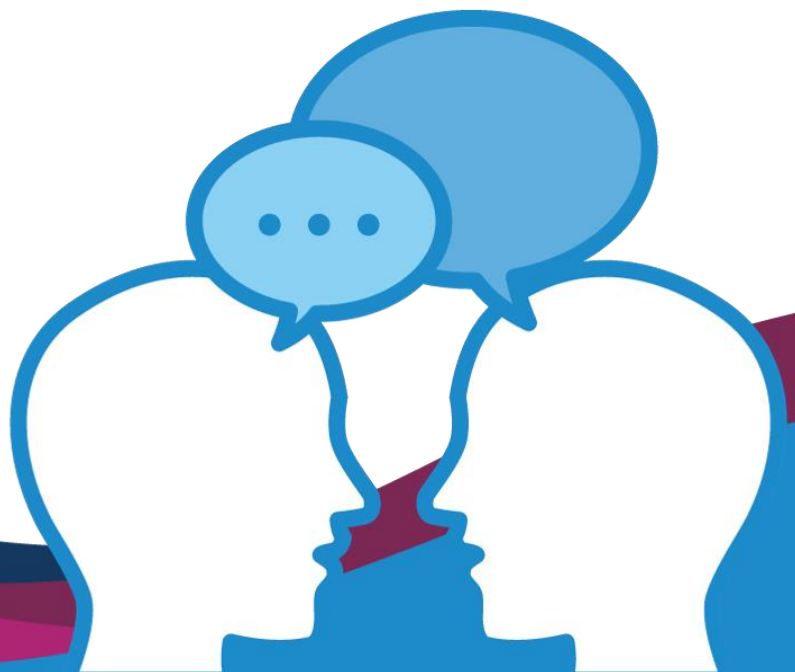
**Lancashire and
South Cumbria**
Integrated Care Board

Withnell Health Centre

Listening to communities report

November 2023

NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB
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Acknowledgements

The ICB would like to thank all participants of this engagement exercise, most notably the Withnell Health Centre patient-led steering group which has supported and advised the communications and engagement team throughout this process.

Introduction

NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) is the organisation responsible for organising primary care services – including GP practices – across the region.

As a statutory NHS body, we have a legal and moral duty to consider how changes to services will affect local people and seek the views of patients.

Patients of Withnell Health Centre and representatives of the ICB for Lancashire and South Cumbria have met regularly since February 2023 to discuss a way forward for the procurement of the GP practice. The unsatisfactory level of patient engagement during a previous procurement exercise and the concern and anxiety this caused have been acknowledged. The ICB is keen to work together with the community to identify how patients at the practice can be involved in the process going forward and how they can contribute to any decisions made.

A steering group representing patients of Withnell Health Centre was formed which met regularly with the ICB to support and advise. This group, together with the ICB representatives, aimed to put in place collectively the best ways to reach out to other patients across the practice community to get their support, involvement, and feedback on developing and testing the new procurement process.

Executive summary

During the engagement around Withnell Health Centre, the ICB heard from more than 2,500 people both during face-to-face engagement sessions in the community and via a survey. The overwhelming response to much of this was that patients report high levels of satisfaction with the current management and service received at Withnell Health Centre. There are real concerns about the impact both of the current procurement process that has been undertaken and a fear about the future running of the practice.

Patients value the relationship built with Dr Robinson over a number of years and have high praise for the standards of care provided by the current team at Withnell Health Centre. Asked what was most important to them, respondents said they most valued permanent GPs and nurses with minimal reliance on locums, and a caring, understanding, person-centred team based at Withnell Health Centre. Access to same-day appointments was also a priority for the majority of patients engaged in the process.

While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, some survey responses indicated that there were some concerns about issues such as access to appointments, the number of locum GPs currently working at the centre and concerns about the practice reception. However these concerns were hugely outnumbered by the number of patients stating they were happy with the practice as it currently is.



What have we been talking to people about and why?

We want to make sure local people...



...Are aware and informed about proposals...

... Know how they can get involved...



... Understand why decisions are made...

...Feel enthusiastic about what is possible...



...Have trust in the process.

The GP partnership at Withnell Health Centre was dissolved in December 2021 which meant the contractual arrangements for running the practice were no longer valid and required actions from commissioners.

The NHS rules governing GP contracts at this time meant the practice had to be put out to procurement. The contract went out to tender, during which 'any willing provider' can submit a bid to run the practice. This action was put in place by Chorley and South Ribble Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), as the delegated responsible body by NHS England.

While the process was under way, Dr Robinson, as the sole remaining partner, continued to run the practice under an interim contract to ensure continuity of service and stability.

To support the procurement process, patients have been asked to provide feedback on the service provided by Withnell Health Centre and to indicate what, if anything, could be improved about the service currently on offer.

Patients have also been asked to identify what aspects of primary care provision they feel are most important to them.

The feedback from the patient engagement exercise will be used to support the development of the service specification and any potential scoring criteria which will be needed as part of a procurement exercise.

Who have we heard from?



Developing and involving the patient steering group

The recommendation made by the ICB for the award of the contract in the original procurement exercise caused a great deal of concern for patients of the practice and resulted in many patients campaigning against the award the ICB proposed. Following patient representation, the ICB undertook a detailed review of the procurement process and, finding patients had not been sufficiently informed or engaged in the process, abandoned the original procurement exercise.

The need to arrange a long-term contract remained and the ICB sought to work much more closely with patients on a new procurement process. Patients of Withnell Health Centre and representatives of the ICB for Lancashire and South Cumbria met to discuss a way forward for the procurement of the GP Practice. From this meeting the group of patients from Withnell Health Centre agreed amongst themselves the size and membership of a steering group. Once established, with a Chair and governance arrangements, this group met regularly with, and worked alongside, the ICB to reach out to patients in the practice and ensure the patient voice was heard and fully represented. The steering group was instrumental in supporting and developing the engagement process and sharing views to support the development of a new procurement evaluation strategy to be used for all future primary care procurement processes in Lancashire and South Cumbria.

How many people got involved?

Considering previous similar engagement exercises and the demographics of the population, a target of 15 per cent of the practice population was set for the numbers of people we would like to be reached. This would be approximately 830 people.

15 have been the core members of the steering group and have provided valuable support, feedback and advice throughout the process.

451 people attended six face-to-face public engagement sessions at community venues around the Withnell area.

2,409 completed responses to the survey were received, including online and paper copies. With a list size of 5,530, this means around 43.5 per cent of patients responded to the survey.

How did we speak to people?



To ensure feedback opportunities were as accessible as possible a range of engagement techniques were adopted.

Public engagement sessions

The ICB ran six face-to-face engagement opportunities at community venues across the area. These were attended by more than 450 people in total. The sessions took place as follows:

- 31 August, 5pm to 7pm, Hillside Methodist Church
- 7 September, 4.30pm to 6.30pm, Wheelton Village Hall
- 14 September, 5pm to 7pm, Hillside Methodist Church
- 1 September, 3pm to 7pm, Withnell Fold Sports and Social Club
- 13 September, 3.30pm to 5.30pm, Abbey Village School
- 27 September, 2pm to 4pm, Holdens Ice Cream Parlour, Abbey Village

The sessions were run on a drop-in basis with people invited to attend at any time to speak to a member of the ICB team so their views can be captured – particularly for those who may struggle to complete a paper or online survey so they can be supported by engagement staff. Volunteers from the patient steering group gave extensive support to each engagement session, booking and organising each venue, greeting attendees, supporting the completion of survey questionnaires and talking to fellow patients.

In some of the earlier engagement sessions there was an ask for more understanding of the procurement process to be available in the drop-in sessions and as a result more senior management within the ICB attended the events taking place towards the end of September.

The patient steering group supported the events by identifying the venues which would best suit the community and promoted the events in a variety of ways including putting information leaflets, which the ICB produced and printed, in key locations and sharing information within community groups and forums.

To support the engagement sessions, frequently asked questions were published on the ICB website from recurrent questions and concerns which were raised in engagement sessions.

Survey

An online survey was developed with paper questionnaires made available in the practice and at community venues. The questions asked in the survey were coproduced with the steering group. The survey was tested and developed in partnership with the patient steering group which included a testing exercise by group members with small numbers of people to determine how appropriate the questions were and which example options would be included within some of the questions.

In order to effectively analyse feedback given in the online survey, responses to qualitative questions, where respondents are given a free text box to say what they wish, have been grouped into themes. These are outlined below.

What did we hear?



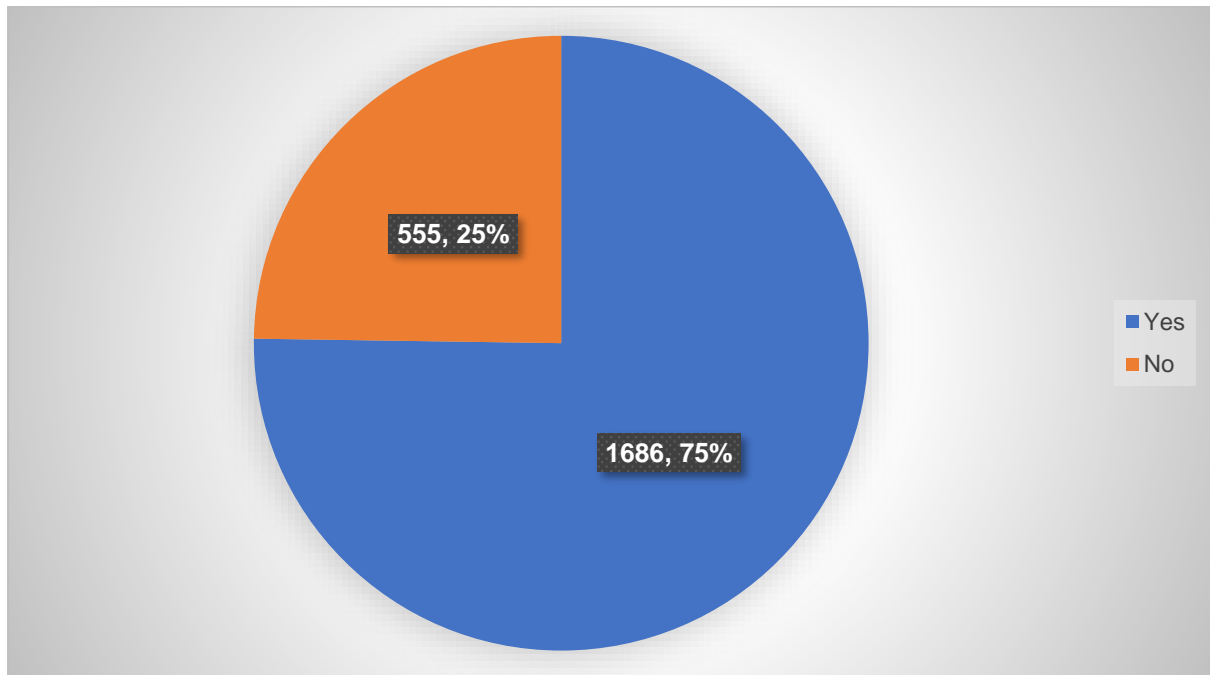
A summary of feedback received to the questions asked during the engagement is below.

In relation to the GP practice at Withnell Health Centre, how important are each of the following to you?

Answer Choices	1	2	3	4	5
Permanent WHC based GPs and nurses with minimum locum use providing continuity of care	3.69% 82	0.95% 21	3.15% 70	10.32% 229	81.89% 1818
Advance booking for non-urgent appointments and other services (online or telephone)	2.86% 63	4.50% 99	13.77% 303	29.62% 652	49.25% 1084
Easy access direct to the surgery by telephone	3.08% 68	1.54% 34	4.21% 93	14.79% 327	76.39% 1689
Caring, understanding, person-centred Withnell Health Centre based team	3.45% 76	0.91% 20	2.55% 56	11.41% 251	81.68% 1797
Easy and quick repeat prescription requests via your preferred communication method - online/phone/app/surgery	3.30% 73	3.07% 68	10.08% 223	21.46% 475	62.09% 1374
Proactive follow up on all test results	2.54% 56	2.04% 45	5.77% 127	22.21% 489	67.44% 1485
Proactive follow-up appointments with the same GP/Allied Health Professional	2.50% 55	1.54% 34	7.63% 168	23.83% 525	64.50% 1421
Same day appointments (face to face/telephone/virtual according to patient preference)	2.63% 58	2.22% 49	5.53% 122	16.09% 355	73.54% 1623
Home visits by known member of Withnell Health Centre clinical team	8.38% 182	9.94% 216	25.64% 557	23.66% 514	32.37% 703
Provision of pro-active health check-ups and monitoring	3.01% 66	3.01% 66	13.49% 296	29.84% 655	50.66% 1112
Prompt referrals	2.94% 64	1.10% 24	3.95% 86	14.73% 321	77.28% 1684
Effective and pro-active management of long-term conditions e.g., diabetes	3.52% 77	2.61% 57	9.75% 213	23.66% 517	60.46% 1321

The numbers above show how many people who completed the online survey ranked each of the specified areas by importance from one to five. The majority of respondents have indicated that all the options provided were very important to them, with most being scored either four or five.

Do you know how to access support for your healthcare needs when your GP practice is closed?

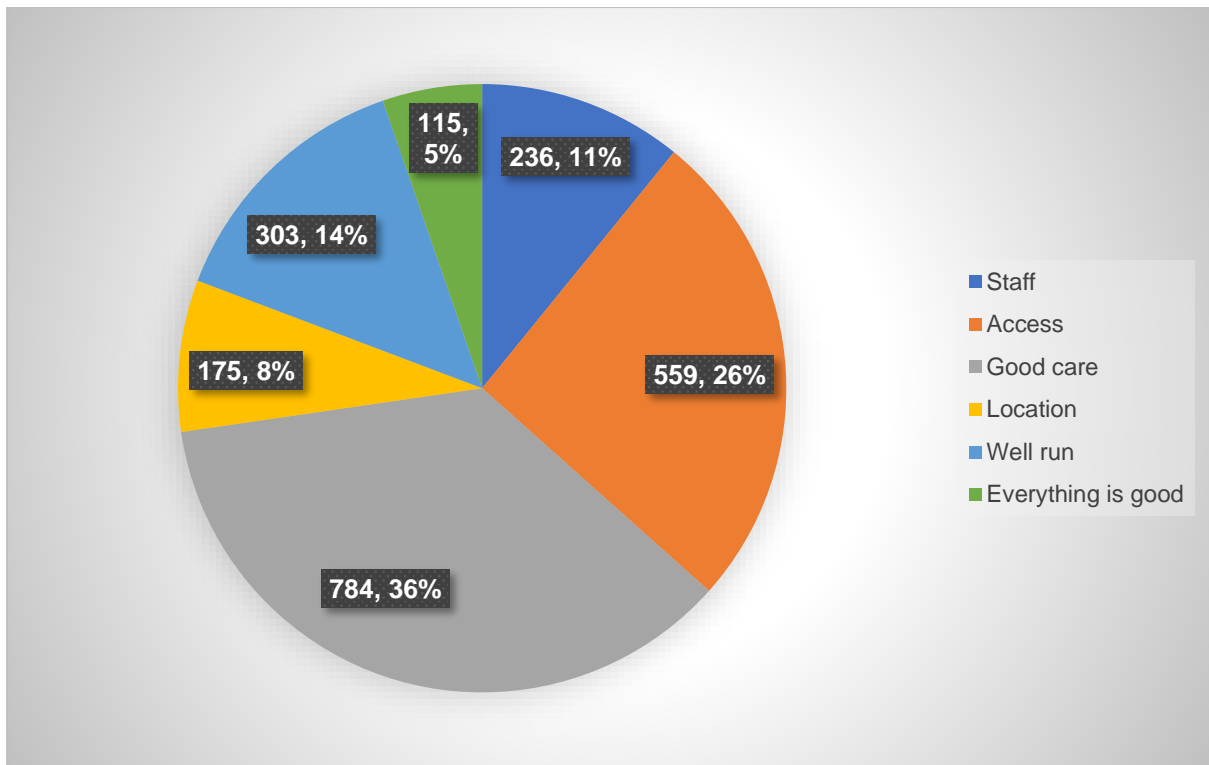


What do you think is good about Withnell Health Centre?

Survey responses:

Responses to this question could broadly be themed as below:

- Praise for staff
- Access to services and appointments as and when required
- Good care
- Location of the practice
- Well run practice
- Everything is good about the practice



Of particular note was the number of comments relating to the high standard of care received at the practice under its current management. A large number of respondents also praised the ease of access to appointments and services.

- “Understanding the communities needs. Easy access. Continuity of care.”
- “It is very caring and understanding to all my needs and I have no worries about anything.”
- “The staff know the community and have a genuine interest in service users’ wellbeing.”
- “The way it’s run, Doctor Robinson and the team at Withnell Heath Centre care about their patients, the work they do and the local community.”

Engagement sessions:

Feedback from patients attending the drop-in sessions was extremely positive, with many patients expressing their gratitude and support for the doctors and staff at Withnell Health Centre. Attendees were happy to give personal testimonies of the care they or their loved ones had received from the practice, demonstrating the excellent level of service that almost every attendee felt the practice delivered.

Some attendees combined these comments and examples with their concern or anger at the previous and/or current procurement processes. A few focused on this latter element only, but this was done from the deep-seated desire to preserve the level of service they were currently receiving and there was a real concern that this excellent care was under threat for what many felt to be a second time. The high attendance levels at all the engagement sessions were testament to this. Patients wanted to make it clear how much regard they had for Withnell Health Centre and the staff working there, and how willing they were to fight to keep it as it is now. A phrase several attendees used sums this up, “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Many praised the ability to have a same day appointment whenever one was needed, the continuity of care and the personal approach provided by the practice. There was a strong feeling that the practice worked well and had strong connections with their local pharmacy and with hospital services. Many patients also indicated that the practice was pro-active, caring and supportive, that all the staff work well together and often “go above and beyond.”

This can be seen in a few brief quotes from what people told us:

- “The practice is absolutely wonderful.”
- “Exceptionally pleased with the service we receive.”
- “We are so blessed with what we have. We are treated as human beings. They provide proactive support and care.”
- “Nothing can be too onerous.”
- “They are an exemplar. Absolutely first class. They are a professional, dedicated, caring group of staff.”

Many attendees at the engagement sessions felt that patient satisfaction was a key indicator of how well the practice was delivering care to the community and wanted to demonstrate how satisfied they were with what they received; indeed, many felt this could not be bettered anywhere else in the Lancashire and South Cumbria area, or beyond its borders. A few examples of the level of care patients experienced help to demonstrate this.

- “Here you can always speak to a doctor and if you need to see one you can. The health conditions I have, have been managed so well. I had to give up my job whilst I was being treated for cancer. I am now freshly employed as a result of the care and support they provided.”
- “Best GP I’ve ever been with. Always get an appointment when needed. Very positive care for me and my child. They rang us up several times to check how the baby was doing; they are so pro-active and caring. A wonderful practice.”
- “Dr Robinson and her staff go over and above for their patients. When we were away, they came out to see our housebound relatives (mother and father). They came out and took tests, sorted out their medication. They even ran my father down to the surgery and took him home again afterwards. The practice goes above and beyond for their patients. Why would we want to give this up?”
- “This GP saved my life. They responded so quickly and investigated what turned out to be stage 4 ovarian cancer. Their prompt response meant that my life was saved. If they delayed the outcome would not have been positive.”
- “We have only been here 12 months. It is so much better than our previous practice. I have got diabetes and my medication wasn’t right. I was not seen for ages by my previous GP. Since I’ve come here my medication has been sorted and I have been seen 4 times in 12 months, with proactive follow-up care.”
- “I have knee problems; I’ve had surgery. In my previous practice it was so hard to get referred to Wrightington for treatment. Had to ask repeatedly. Here at Withnell, I was referred on the same day to Wrightington. They provide an exceptional, personal service. It is simply so much better than our previous practice.”

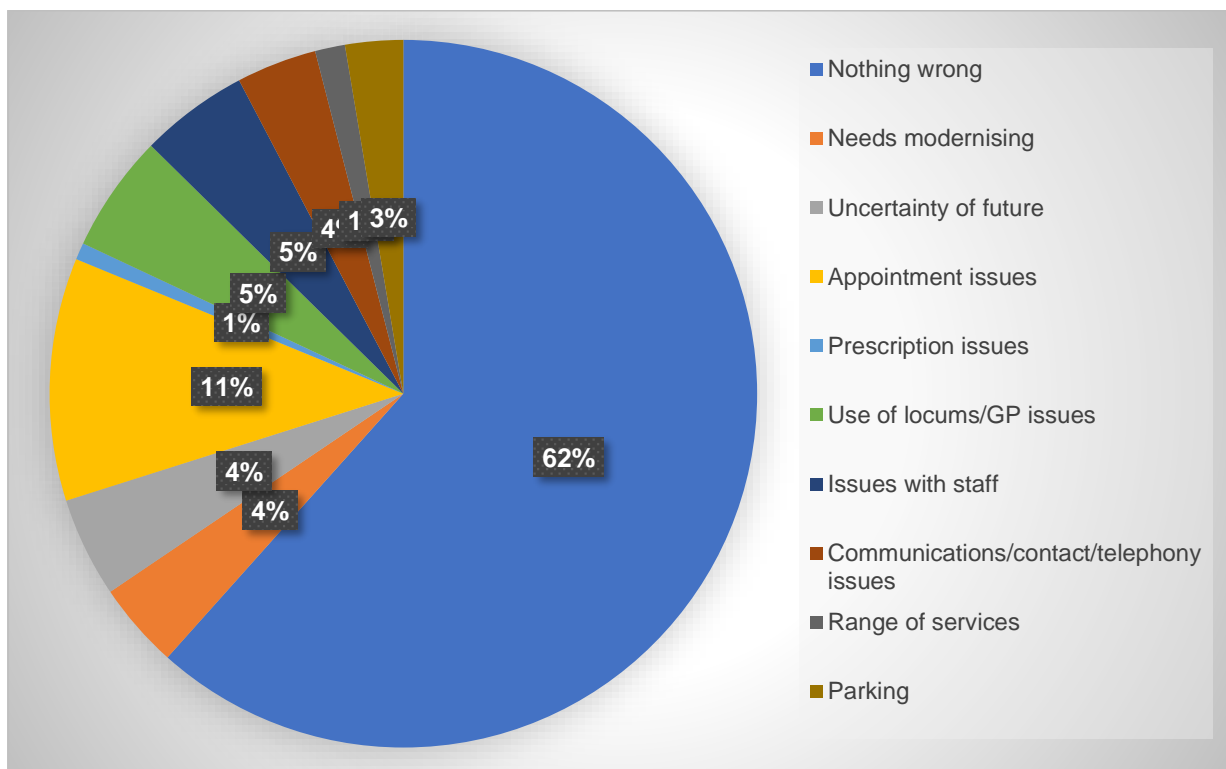
These were just some of the examples provided about what is good about Withnell Health Centre. Attendees at the engagement sessions provided many more.

What do you think is not so good about Withnell Health Centre?

Survey results:

Almost two thirds of respondents to this question said there was nothing they didn't like about Withnell Health Centre. Issues that were mentioned can be broadly themed as below:

- The building needs modernising/improving – this includes comments about the reception area not being private enough
- The main issue is the uncertainty about the future brought about by this process
- Appointment issues, including difficulty in booking appointments
- Prescription issues, including access to prescriptions and ordering
- An over-reliance on locum GPs and other issues about GPs
- Issues with staff – mainly complaints about the reception staff
- Issues around communications and telephony, primarily concerned with difficulties getting through on the phone
- Range of services – some felt the practice should offer additional services to those it currently provides
- Parking



While 62 per cent of respondents said there was nothing wrong with Withnell Health Centre, around 11 per cent raised concerns about appointments. These concerns focused primarily on difficulty accessing same-day appointments if unable to join a telephone queue at 8am and a lack of ability to book appointments in advance. A number of respondents also commented on waiting times once in the surgery.

- "Not being able to get same day appointments when needed, long waits on the phone."

- “My son is autistic. I think that sometimes when appointments overrun meaning our appointment is delayed there should be a provision for this. He hates waiting. It causes stress all around.”
- “You can’t currently make future appointments for less urgent health issues other than those for the nursing team.”
- “Difficulty in getting appointments, the 8am scramble.”
- “Appointment system is archaic.”

Other than appointment issues, the main concerns raised were around the lack of permanent GPs employed at the surgery and issues with reception staff.

- “Too many locums.”
- “The doctors keep changing.”
- “Would be nice to have regular doctors which we’ve had in the past before the partnership dissolved.”
- “Reception staff are sometimes a little less than friendly.”
- “The unwelcoming rudeness when phoning for an appointment from certain front of house staff.”

It is also worth noting that while 62 per cent stated there was nothing wrong with the practice, an additional four per cent commented that the current uncertainty of the future was the main issue currently facing the practice. Comments included:

- “The threat to change it.”
- “This process when WHC is voted one of the best in the country. Absolute waste of time when WHC team could be focusing on their people instead.”
- “Risk that it might be taken over, we want Dr Robinson to stay.”

Engagement sessions:

Very few attendees of the engagement sessions mentioned anything that they felt was not so good about Withnell Health Centre. The few patients who did say something usually mentioned it in passing, almost as an add-on to the conversation.

A few patients referred to waiting beyond their appointment time but tended to feel this was part of each patient getting the best from their consultation/treatment. Reference was also made to not being able to access the practice outside working hours (although some people specifically indicated they could) and that removing the ability to ‘phone prescriptions through made some people unhappy. These were the only points raised during face-to-face discussions.

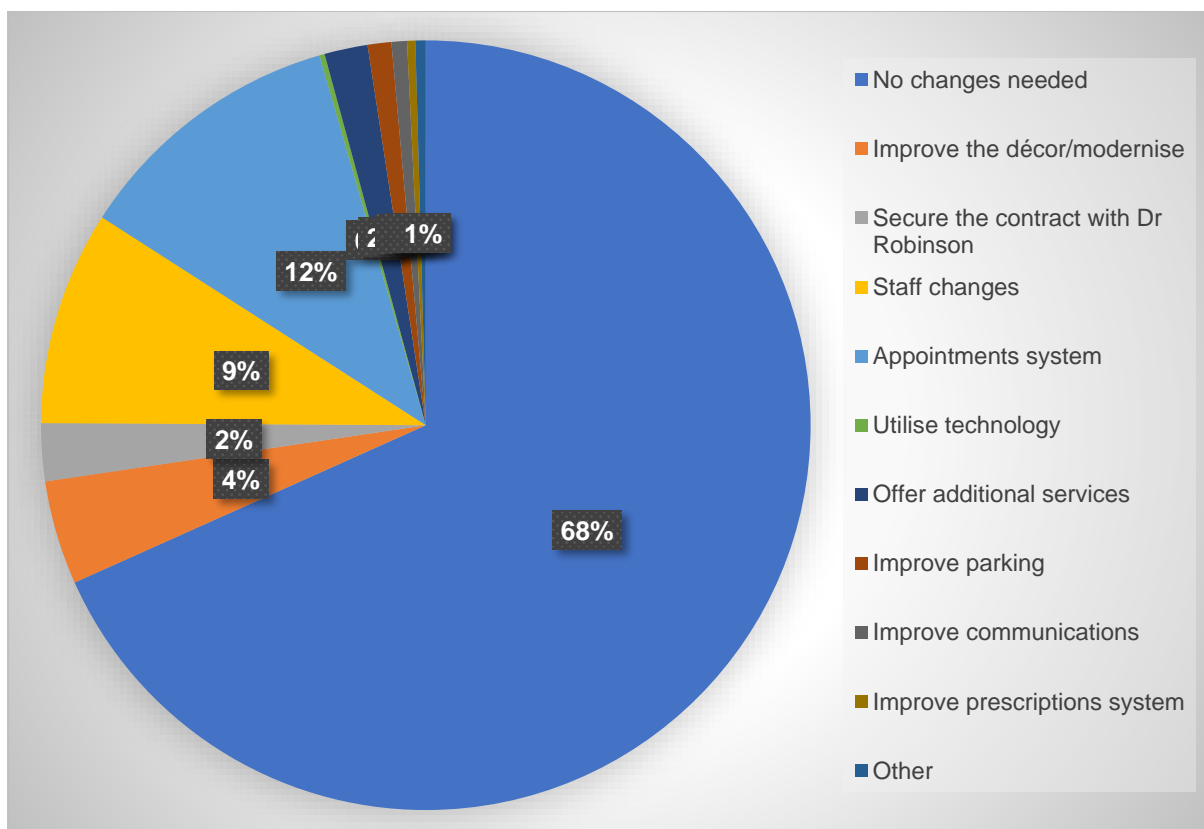
What, if anything, would you change at Withnell Health Centre?

Survey results:

Responses to this question were consistent with the responses to the previous question. Around two thirds of respondents said there was nothing they would change about Withnell Health Centre. Issues that were mentioned can be broadly themed as below:

- Modernise/improve the décor*
- Secure the contract with Dr Robinson
- Staff changes – again, these were mainly around recruitment of new GPs and also concerns regarding reception staff
- Improve the appointments system
- Utilise technology, including video appointments and online ordering systems
- Offer additional services
- Improve parking*
- Improve communications and/or telephony system
- Improve prescriptions system

*It should be noted that these elements are the responsibility of the landlord and not the practice.



As with the previous question, by far the greatest response to this question was a desire to see nothing change at the practice. There were, however, some concerns raised about specific aspects of the surgery, the most prominent being the appointments system.

- "Ability to prebook with more doctors in advance."

- “Increase pre-bookable appointments. Evening and weekend surgeries.”
- “The 8am appointment system.”
- “I would like it to be easier to get book ahead appointments.”

Almost 10 per cent said they would like to see staff changes, which included both the recruitment of new clinicians and changes to existing staff.

- “More ARRS (additional roles reimbursement scheme) roles, eg physio, health coaches, paramedics.”
- “More permanent doctors as good as the ones that are there.”
- “The reception staff could appear more eager and welcoming.”

Suggestions of additional services that would improve the offer at the practice included*:

- Dentist
- Treatment room
- Blood tests
- Diabetic checks
- Family planning
- Physiotherapy
- Dressing changes
- Health checks

*This list includes several services that are already on offer at the practice, but some of the patients responding were not aware of this.

Engagement sessions:

The only areas for improvement mentioned by attendees were a natural progression from the points raised in the section above. A few patients indicated they would like to see the opening hours extended, perhaps twice a week, to accommodate working people, and that the choice of requesting repeat prescriptions via telephone be restored. These were the only improvements any attendees suggested.

Any other comments

Survey results:

Responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive towards the current management of the practice. Almost all said they were very happy with the practice currently and did not want to see any changes to the running of the surgery.

Engagement sessions:

Most of the additional comments made by attendees at the engagement sessions related to their concerns about the old and/or new procurement process, the unnecessary risk this was considered to pose to the future of the practice and their own health care, why the ICB intended to pursue it and how and when this would be done. Many attendees were clear that they did not want to see any changes at the practice and saw no need for it, whatever the grounds the NHS considered made it necessary, and there was dismay at the fact another procurement process was going ahead.

There was a broad range of comments and questions that attendees raised on all these issues, some of which were very detailed. A proportion of the questions raised could not be answered there and then and were used to populate a 'frequently asked questions' document that was added to throughout the engagement period.

Many attendees felt patient satisfaction was the most important element of any evaluation criteria and wanted to understand the weighting that would be applied to this by the ICB. Others felt that the low level of Withnell Health Centre patients attending emergency departments needed to be considered. Overall, there was a very high level of interest in the procurement evaluation criteria, in understanding what this would be and that it reflected, primarily, patient wishes.

Other concerns and comments related to issues of transparency and accountability. A notable proportion of attendees therefore, expressed negative views about the procurement process being led by the ICB: this included comments that it was unfair, undemocratic, unnecessary and/or corrupt. Others questioned the legal or contractual grounds for initiating this process, with many also seeking answers or explanations of decisions made about the previous procurement process and the implications these held for the future. There was, in addition, a vibrant call for patient representation in any decisions going forward. Some attendees also felt the engagement process on this occasion was not markedly better than the previous one, was poorly promoted, especially the early sessions, and some also felt it amounted to lip service on behalf of the ICB.

Insights we have gained from this process



This engagement exercise brought with it many challenges

Undertaking an extensive engagement exercise with patients and members of the public in an emotive environment where a previous engagement process did not take place or failed to deliver a reasonable level of engagement is always going to be challenging. It highlights the importance of engaging and involving patients and the public every time it is required as fully as possible, or the seeds of anxiety, mistrust and anger are sown. This was certainly the case for Withnell Health Centre, where patients felt they must fight for the level of care they receive and had previously been denied the opportunity to do so.

Additional challenges also existed around levels of misinformation, supported to some degree by social media, which can be difficult to counter. However, this also places an onus on the ICB to have a fully planned, cohesive and transparent process of sharing information before the engagement commences.

Some patients came to the engagement exercise feeling significant levels of mistrust, and this sometimes resulted in the ICB engagement staff being spoken to in an inappropriately hostile way. The motivation for this was undoubtedly their unhappy experience of the previous procurement process and the threat posed by the new procurement process.

Although there was a degree of misinformation, quite firmly believed by some attendees, others undertook a great deal of research and took the time to obtain and read various documents relevant to the procurement process.

More could be done in future to describe the purpose of the engagement sessions as these were planned as listening events to ensure those may experience difficulties in completing online or paper surveys and to ensure their views can be captured and contribute to the process. The feedback at some of the events were that there was an expectation for their to be an update on the procurement process which caused concern why some ICB executives were not in attendance. It is important to note that in planning the engagement and process, Craig Harris, Chief Operating Officer for Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB, met with the patient steering group to provide updates and respond to concerns along with other senior colleagues within the ICB.

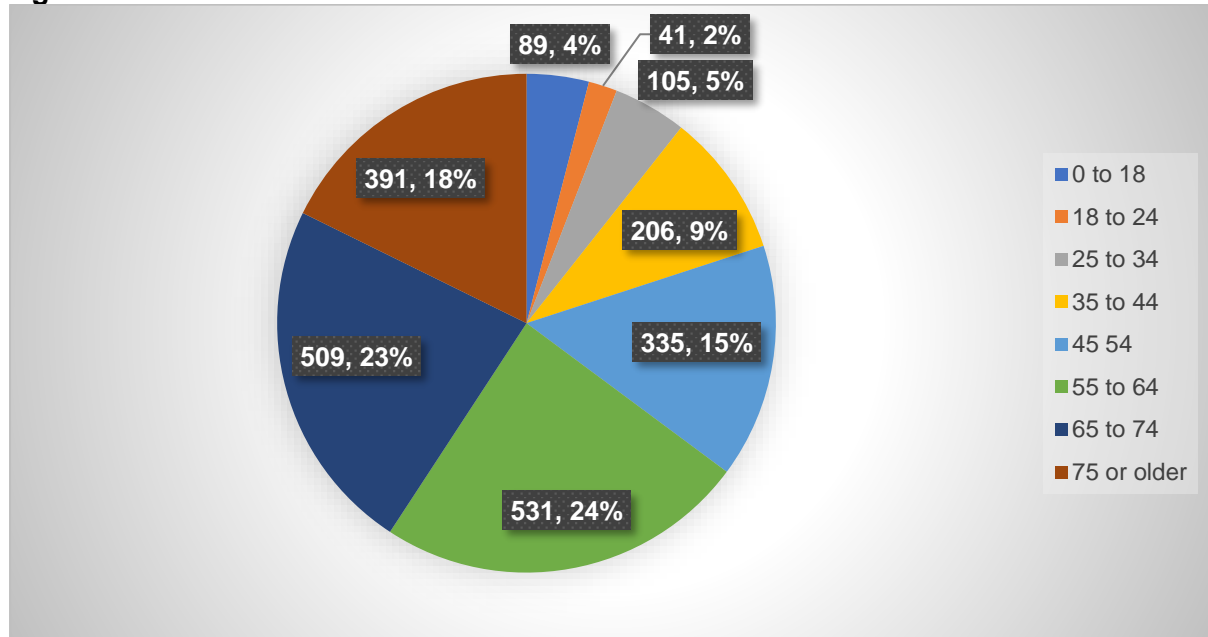
Next steps



This report will be shared with the Withnell patient steering group to enable constructive feedback regarding the thoroughness and accuracy of the content. It will also be shared with the primary care team within the ICB and considered as part of decision-making on the procurement exercise regarding Withnell Health Centre by the primary care commissioning committee.

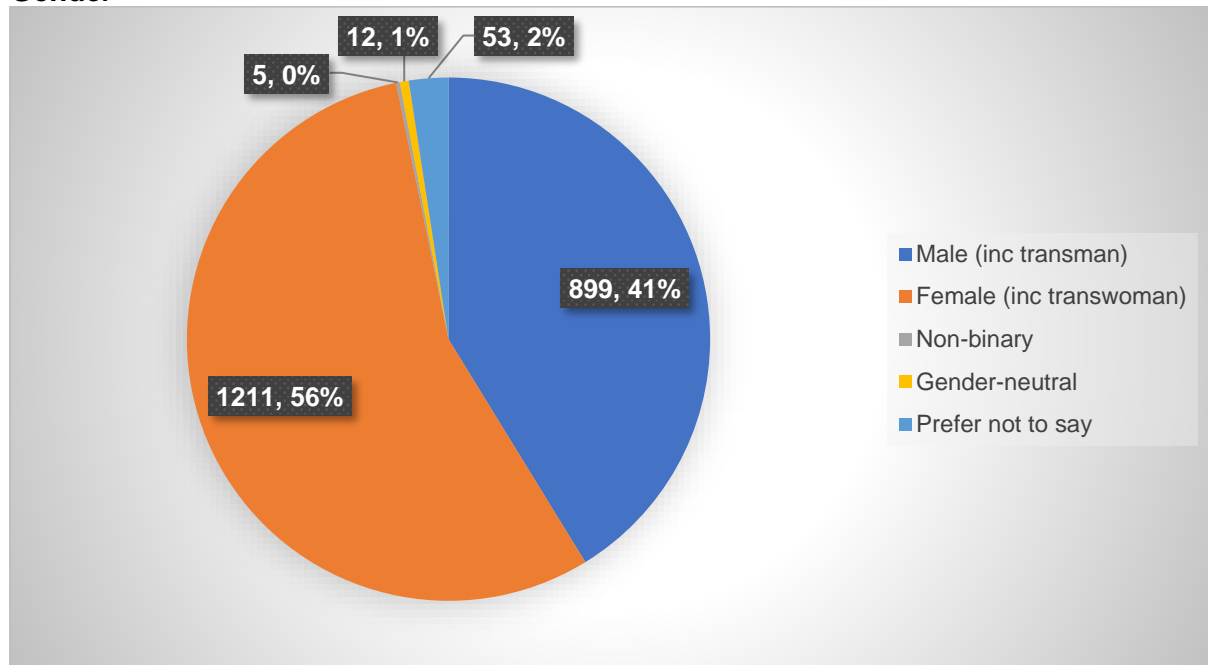
Appendix 1 – Survey demographic monitoring

Age

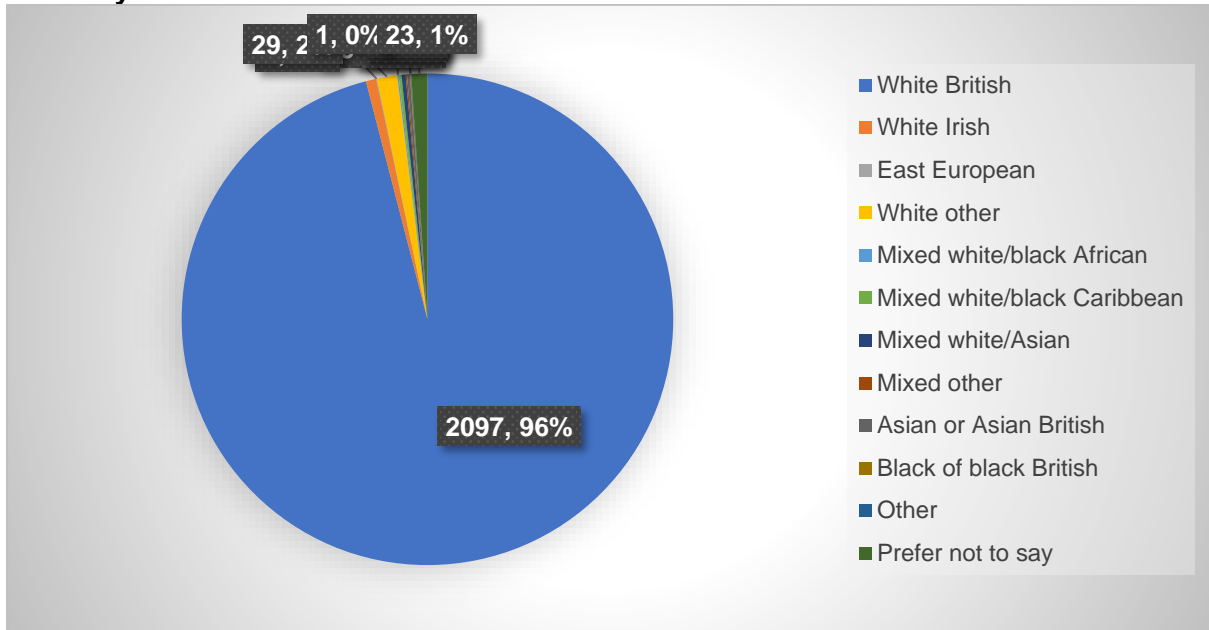


Around 80 per cent of respondents were aged 45 and older. However, with 206 responses from people aged 35 to 44 and 235 from people younger than 34 (including 89 from under-18s), it is felt the sample is sufficiently representative of the practice population.

Gender

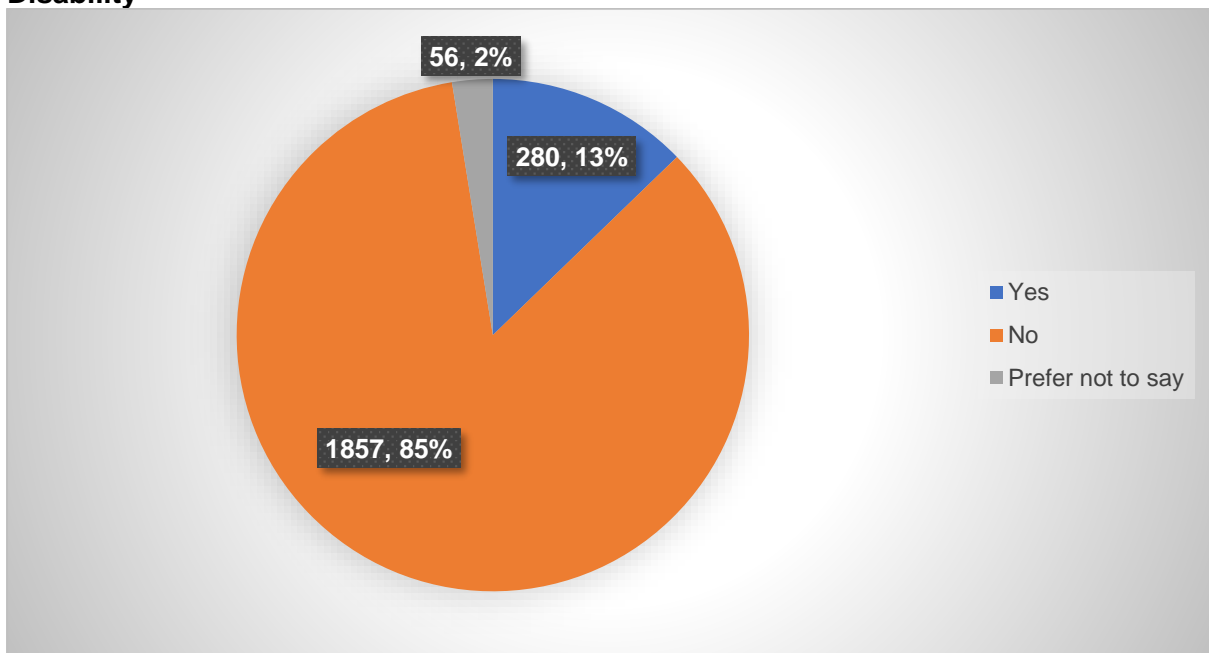


Ethnicity



Almost all of the respondents were white British, however this is generally representative of the practice population as a whole.

Disability



Carer

