

Alfred Barrow Health Centre, Duke St, Barrow

Supporting patients with additional
mobility needs to attend appointments

August 2024



Introduction

In April 2024, a member of the public contacted us regarding an issue getting physical access to his GP's surgery.

Restrictions had recently been imposed on a certain class of mobility scooters using the lifts at Alfred Barrow Health Centre, Barrow-in-Furness and, as a user of such a mobility vehicle, this limited his access to his GP, who is based on the first floor.

Under the Equality Act (2010), a legal duty for all health and care services to ensure that services are as accessible to people with disabilities as they are for everyone else. This duty recognises that disabled people might appear to have equal access to care and services but, without specific adjustments being made, that access may not be equitable.

We contacted the following services located on the first floor within the health centre directly to ask what alternative and reasonable adjustments were offered to their affected patients attending appointments:

- Atkinson Health Centre (GP Practice)
- Abbey Road Surgery (GP practice)
- Diabetic eye screening services
- Podiatry services
- Cumbria Health Partnership (CHP)
- Talking Therapies

We have taken this opportunity to produce some recommendations to all services at Alfred Barrow Health Centre to raise awareness of the reasonable adjustments needed by patients with additional needs.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness (HWW&F) would like to thank the services contacted for responding promptly to our communications and providing the information requested.



About Healthwatch

We are the independent health and social care champion for the unitary authority of Westmorland and Furness.

Healthwatch England (HWE) acts as the national consumer champion for all local Healthwatch, enabling and supporting Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness (HWW&F) to bring important issues to the attention of decisions makers nationally. We do this by:

- Making the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England, helping us to carry out our role as national champion.
- Making recommendations to Healthwatch England to advise the CQC (Care Quality Commission) to carry out special reviews or investigations into areas of concern.

HWW&F undertakes a range of community engagements, from pop-ups in towns and villages, attending existing support groups and networks, holding focus groups, and visiting services to see them in action (this is called Enter and View).

Defined by the Health and Care Act 2012, our statutory role is to:

- Gather the views of people about their needs and experiences of local health and social care services. Local Healthwatch make these views known to those involved in the commissioning and scrutiny of care services.
- Make reports and make recommendations about how those services could or should be improved to decision-makers on how to improve the services they are delivering, enacting positive change.
- Promote and support the involvement of people in the monitoring, commissioning and provision of local health and social care services.
- Provide information and advice to the public about accessing health and social care services and the options available to them.



Healthwatch works to reduce inequalities and barriers to services by seeking out the experiences of those who could be classed as seldom heard and sharing intelligence gathered to drive improvements.

Summary

Responses to our request for information on reasonable adjustments available to patients

Atkinson Health Centre Practice

We were informed that it would be better to contact the building landlord, Cumbria Health Partnership (CHP), for full information on the lifts in the building and were provided with their email. However, from what they were told by CHP they believed it to be the class 2 and 3 mobility scooters that are meant for outdoor usage that are not permitted in the lifts in the building.

The reasonable adjustments that could be offered for affected patients were:

- Telephone appointments
- Home visits (if needing an in-person assessment)
- The possible use of ground floor rooms – if given some advance notice

Abbey Road Surgery

The practice informed us that as tenants they were required to follow the rules set out in their tenancy agreement, which included the use of motorised road legal vehicles in the building.

Reasonable adjustments that could be offered to affected patients were:

- Arranging the use of a consultation room on the ground floor – given sufficient notice.
- Offering a home visit appointment
- Offering a telephone/video consultation (this is a universal offer to all patients)

Talking Therapies

Talking Therapies informed us that patients who access their service complete an initial form which includes a section on any reasonable adjustments needed. This would enable practitioners to address any required adjustments before any sessions began.

Summary continued

Podiatry Service

We spoke to the podiatry team collectively while in a team meeting. They explained the measures they had already put in place to aid accessibility to their first-floor service:

- The patient to inform the main reception in the ground floor foyer of their appointment and accessibility need.
- The reception would contact a member of podiatry who would bring a wheelchair (which belongs to podiatry) to reception for patient to transfer into.
- The member of podiatry staff would help support the patient to the lift and their first-floor appointment with the service.

It was felt that a follow up email was not necessary from the comprehensive answer given during this phone conversation.

They also provided with contact details for CHP to pursue the matter further.

Cumbria Health Partnership (CHP)

Following on from the information provided by the services already contacted, HWW&F contacted CHP regarding the restrictions of mobility scooters within the lift and accessing the first-floor services.

The Operations and Relationship Manager told us that there were no restrictions on the use of wheelchairs or mobility scooters using the lifts at the centre, apart from those which are designated unsuitable for indoor use (some class 2 and class 3 mobility scooters which are designed for outside use only).

Diabetic Eye Screening Service

We telephoned the Diabetic Eye Screening Service to ask for the correct contact to address our enquiry to. They told us that the issue of mobility scooters had come to their attention and currently patients were offered alternative appointments at Ulverston Health Centre.

At the time of this report's publication we had not received a response to our written communication.

Recommendations

In September 2023, a Reasonable Adjustment Digital Flag Information Standard was published (under section 250 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012) that details what all NHS and social care organisations in England are required to do about the flag. As organisations must ensure that they identify and record the disability and associated reasonable adjustment requirement for each of their registered or known patients or service users during routine appointments or interactions with the service.

Organisations must ensure that systems are established to place a flag on the records of all people who have any type of disability and are identified as needing reasonable adjustments, using currently available systems, and flagging processes, which is highly visible to all those within the organisation who are involved in the care of the patient. The following recommendations have been suggested to help raise awareness.

1

Identify patients who may need these reasonable adjustments to attend health appointments, giving them the choice to be seen at home or within the health centre. Opportunities to do this include:

- Registering as a patient
- Annual health checks
- Long term condition review
- Flu vaccination surgeries

2

Look into possibility of adding these to the NHS England reasonable adjustment digital flag scheme or explore other ways to identify applicable patients whenever they contact surgeries/services for health appointments.

3

Share this information to patient participation groups

4

Enable and encourage patients to come forward and inform health services within the building of any reasonable adjustments they may need by:

- Having a publicity campaign on relevant services/surgeries' social media platforms and on posters/leaflets within the building.
- Dissemination of information through social prescribing team, health, and wellbeing coaches etc.
- Adding information around reasonable adjustments on practices/services' websites.

Original case study

The name within this case study has been changed to maintain anonymity.

“Richard,” contacted Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness to highlight the lack of reasonable adjustments within his doctor’s surgery, Atkinson Health Centre, located within the Alfred Barrow Health Centre.

Richard is happy with the overall treatment he has received from his doctors in the past. However, within the last four weeks this has changed.

A ban has now been imposed within the Alfred Barrow Health Centre preventing disabled people using mobility scooters from accessing the purpose-built lift to reach the first floor. This is where his GP, nurse and all his other health professionals are located.

The reason for this, Richard had been told, was that a patient with a scooter had caused some damage when using the lift, which had cost a lot of money to repair. Notices have been posted throughout the building with Richard believing the maintenance people implemented this. Patients have been given an option of bringing their own wheelchair and transferring into it when getting to the centre but, as Richard said, this could be dangerous.

He said: “How can I carry another wheelchair? It wouldn’t be too bad if they [the health centre] had a wheelchair we could all use, but they haven’t.”

Richard also asked if his GP and nurses could use a ground floor consulting room instead when disabled patients could not access the lift and was told this was not an option, as the ground floor rooms are used by another GP surgery. He also discussed the option of moving surgeries with his current GP’s receptionist, however he was told that this would be hard as the other surgeries are not taking on patients.

He added: “This has made me feel very uncomfortable, they’ve blanked us because of one person and given me no alternative. I’m over the moon with my doctors and don’t want to have to move surgeries because of this.”

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Appendix

Response from Diabetic Eye Screening Service following first report publication.

The Diabetic Eye Screening Service takes the matter of restrictions facing patients attending Alfred Barrow Health Centre seriously and tries to offer the best support possible to patients. The service has amended some of their processes to help identify patients who may struggle with the restrictions and options for them to receive their screening. The service:

- Mostly operates an open booking model, meaning the majority of eye screening patients are asked to call the service to book their appointment. Call centre staff are trained to enquire about the patient's mobility and if they need support. Their electronic patient record is updated with their ambulatory status, which allows the service to make reasonable adjustments.
- If patients state they are in a mobility scooter staff explain to site restrictions to them, that the service is located on the first floor, and ask if they feel they can still attend.
- If the patient states they cannot reach the first floor without their mobility scooter then alternatives are discussed. However currently the nearest alternative site is Ulverston Health Centre.
- The service is also working with University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust ophthalmology department to provide access to their clinical area at Furness General Hospital for patients who are not able to attend diabetic eye screening at Alfred Barrow Health Centre due to the restrictions. This allows a diabetic eye screening clinical session for these patients as and when needed so that they can maintain regular eye screening. This will continue for the foreseeable future and be reviewed if restrictions at Alfred Barrow change.



healthwatch

Westmorland and Furness

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