

HOSC BRIEFING

Unity Healthcare seek views on their proposal to close Steeple Bumpstead branch surgery

Unity Healthcare in Haverhill is running an engagement exercise seeking views on their proposal to close Steeple Bumpstead branch surgery.

Background

The Steeple Bumpstead Surgery became a branch of Unity Healthcare (previously known as Christmas Maltings and Clements) and part of Suffolk GP Federation CIC from 31 October 2019. The change happened because as a small, stand-alone surgery, it had become difficult to attract and retain staff. The surgery was in a very difficult situation with no permanent doctors or nurses at the site.

WECCG and WSCCG looked at the options at the time and felt it was in the best interests of both Steeple Bumpstead and Unity Healthcare patients for Suffolk GP Federation CIC to step-in and provide as orderly a transition as possible. Without such a move, Steeple Bumpstead patients may have been dispersed with less time for neighbouring practices to plan and adapt.

The aim was to extend Suffolk services to the people in the practice area to help minimise disruption and build a sustainable practice for the future. The patients registered with Steeple Bumpstead Surgery have since had access to a full range of general medical services provided by Unity Healthcare at the Clements Surgery, four miles away. Parking facilities are available and public transport includes a bus service and Connecting Communities Rural Transport.

Reason for Unity's proposal to close Steeple Bumpstead branch surgery

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the Steeple Bumpstead Surgery building has not been utilised since early 2020. Patients are being supported remotely with consultations at Clements Surgery in Haverhill if they need to be seen face to face, where social distancing and infection control measures are in place to ensure they can be seen safely.

The Steeple Bumpstead building is small and limited in the provision it can offer, and it is felt that patients who were originally registered at the surgery now have access to better quality healthcare at the main Clements Surgery site, approximately four miles away.

The Clements Surgery has historically relied on a 'first come, first served' appointment system which has diverted resources away from patients with potentially concerning symptoms, to patients with minor illness or non-medical concerns that can be self-managed with support by more appropriate health and care professionals.

By introducing triage that embraces innovations and technology, and a 'demand led' rather than 'capacity led' approach towards service delivery, the practice has been able to ensure that everyone is able to access the healthcare that they need in a timely fashion. Most contacts with the surgery are dealt with on the same day, and if not, by the end of the next working day.

Part of this has involved centralising services at the Clements Surgery and working together in a 'hub' based environment. This allows clinicians to share best practice, to share ideas about patients with more challenging problems, and to be able to allocate the time needed to patients with more complex needs.

The Clements Surgery has better facilities, and a range of staff on hand to help. The Steeple Bumpstead Surgery building does not offer facilities that are adequate for 21st century healthcare, and staff working there would be isolated and unsupported. This innovative approach towards service delivery has helped to turn around both Clements and Steeple Bumpstead surgeries, from surgeries that could not maintain a workforce of regular staff and were failing on almost every regulatory indicator, into a thriving practice that is regularly recruiting to expand the clinical team and is now involved in training and education to secure services for the future.

Engagement exercise

Unity would like to gather the views of their patients and the local community about their proposal to permanently close the Steeple Bumpstead branch surgery and to continue providing a full range of quality healthcare services for all patients from the Clements site.

The engagement exercise will run between August 23 and October 11 and seek views on any possible impact this would have on patients transferred to Unity Healthcare from the Steeple Bumpstead Surgery and other patients in Unity Healthcare's catchment area.

- Two online events will provide an opportunity for people to hear more information and the background to the proposal, and to ask questions: Monday September 6 from 6.30pm to 7.30pm and on Thursday September 9 from 10.30am to 11.30am.
- Engagement information, Q&As, links to join the two online events and an online survey are available on the Unity Healthcare website:
www.unityhealthhaverhill.org.uk
- A limited number of printed information sheets (including Q&As) and surveys are available at the Clements Surgery reception for anyone without internet access.
- Feedback can also be sent in writing to Unity's Service Manager or shared with Healthwatch Suffolk and Healthwatch Essex.
- The practice is in communication with the local press and stakeholders including WECCG, WSCCG, MPs, local councils, LMC (Suffolk and Essex), Haverhill Family Practice and health providers.
- Request for information to be disseminated has been sent to local NHS organisations, councils, and libraries.
- Feedback will be logged and monitored throughout the engagement period.
- All feedback received during the engagement exercise will be considered by Unity Healthcare prior to a final decision being made on the proposal.