



## **Patient Engagement regarding Erith Urgent Care Centre**

**Date of visits: December 2018**

### **Acknowledgements**

Healthwatch Bexley would like to thank the Erith & District Hospital, including their patients and staff, the Mind Carer's Wellbeing Group - Goldie Leigh Hospital, Northumberland Heath Children's Centre, Crayford Library and to the general public, for their valuable contribution and for participating in this series of engagements.

### **1. Introduction**

Healthwatch Bexley visited the Urgent Care Centre at Erith Hospital, and other local groups in response to the proposed move of the Urgent Care Centre at Erith Hospital to the first floor of Erith Health Centre, located in Erith town centre. The Hurley Group currently provide Urgent Care Centres in the London Borough of Bexley at two sites, Queen Mary's Hospital Sidcup and Erith Hospital. The Hurley Group have raised concerns with the local Clinical Commissioning Group regarding the suitability of the site at Erith Hospital. An independent review of the site at Erith Hospital found it unfit for purpose for a number of reasons, staff safety being one. As a result Bexley Clinical Commissioning Group propose to move the Urgent Care Centre (UCC), from Erith Hospital to Erith Health Centre. The purpose of this engagement is to explore the views of local resident who may use Erith UCC and how the proposed move may affect them.

### **2. Methodology**

The findings are based on quantitative and qualitative data which was captured through a structured questionnaire, consisting of 16 questions. The questionnaire prompted respondents to 'tick' the relevant box, which most accurately reflected their experience and comment on their responses. The questions generally related to experiences of:

- Why patients attended the Urgent Care Centre (UCC)

- Waiting times
- Overall patient satisfaction
- Knowledge and views regarding a possible move of Erith UCC to Erith Health Centre

Generic details, such as the age and gender of participants were also captured. Leaflets explaining the role of Healthwatch were offered to participants and left within the premises for future reference.

In total, 3 visits to Erith UCC were carried out on various days between 9.45am and 11.45am. Healthwatch also visited a Mind Carers Wellbeing Group, Childrens Centre and local libraries.

A total of 105 participants were spoken to and questionnaires were filled in. Of these, 70 were obtained from Erith Urgent Care Centre and 35 from other Healthwatch Bexley engagements.

### **3. Key findings**

- 53% of respondents presented at UCC on the days we visited, because they could not get a GP appointment and 11% stated they hadn't even tried to get a GP appointment, but had just come straight to Erith UCC.
- The majority of respondents were aware of the NHS 111 service, but not of the GP Hubs available at Erith or Queen Marys Hospitals. 4% of respondents were at UCC after being referred by NHS 111.
- 28% of respondents were "very satisfied" and 54% were "satisfied" with the level of care they received whilst at Erith UCC.
- Of the 81 responses, nearly two thirds of the respondents (65%) were unaware of how to make a complaint or comment on services.
- 50% supported the proposed move of Erith UCC to Erith Health Centre
- 79% would use the UCC if it moved to Erith Health Centre

### **4. Summary of questionnaire at Erith UCC**

#### **4.1 Reason for visiting Erith Urgent Care (n105)**

A significant number of respondents 53% (Figure 1) stated that their reasoning for attending the UCC was due to the fact that they could not get an appointment with their GP and 11% stated they hadn't even tried to get an appointment and had just come straight to UCC. This

was demonstrated during one of our visits, when we observed a lady calling her GP practice from the waiting room of UCC, to see if any GP appointments were available, as she had been told there was at least a 2 hour wait that morning.

Another lady told us that she had been on hold with her GP practice for 45 minutes, only to be then told there were no appointments available. In another instance, a patient had tried to call their GP 15 times that morning, got through, waited on hold for 40 minutes and then the phone went dead.

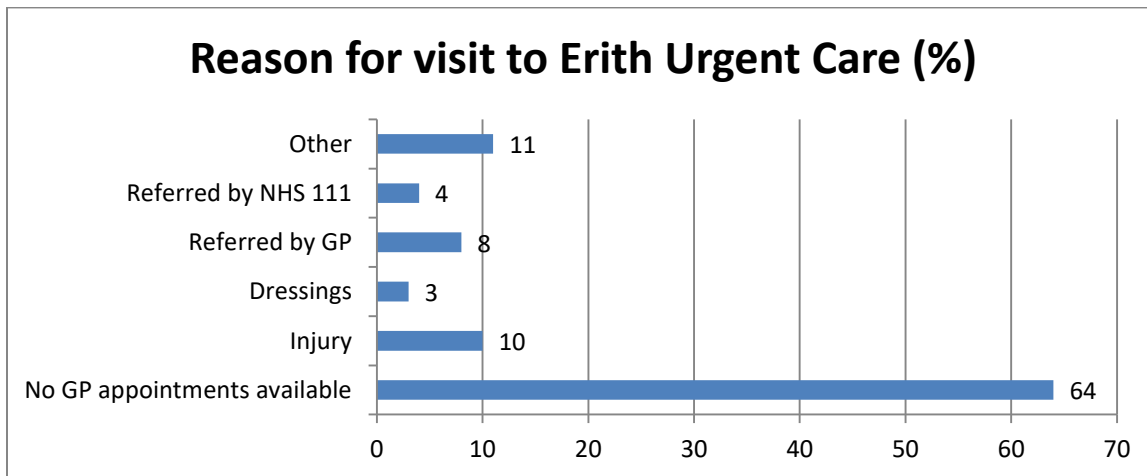
This figure has greatly increased from our previous Enter & View visits to Urgent Care back in June 2016 when 29% of respondents presented at UCC because they could not get a GP appointment.

[http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk/sites/default/files/enter\\_and\\_view\\_report\\_comparative\\_report\\_urgent\\_care\\_bexley\\_final.pdf](http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk/sites/default/files/enter_and_view_report_comparative_report_urgent_care_bexley_final.pdf)

The majority of respondents were aware of the NHS 111 helpline, but only 4% reported being referred by the helpline during our visits. The GP hub service was also unknown to many of the people we spoke to, however a quarter of patients would have used the service if offered to them by their GP practice.

A small minority of respondents, 3%, reported attending the UCC to have a dressing changed and 10% presented at UCC for injuries requiring an X-ray.

Figure 1.

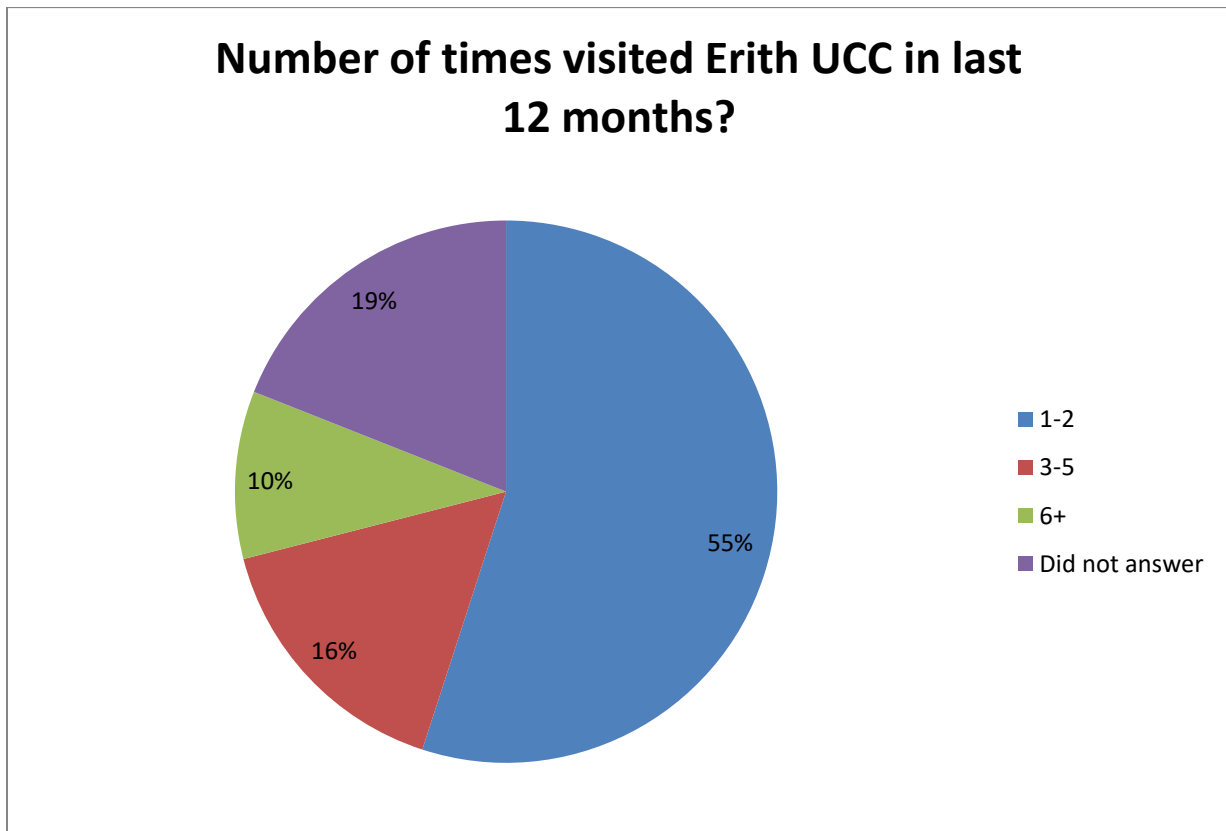


#### 4.2 Why do you choose to use services at Erith Hospital UCC (n89)?

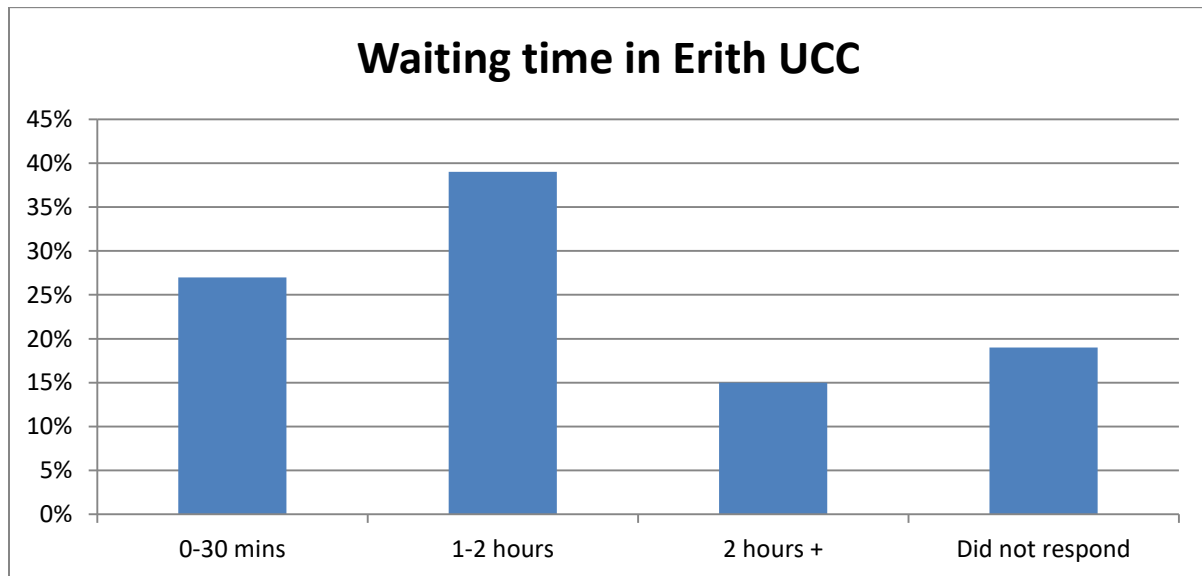
89% respondents stated Erith UCC was the closest location to where they live, 18% stated transport links made it easy to get to, 13% stated due to ease of parking, 11% chose Erith UCC due to the standard of care provided and 6% due to length of waiting times.

#### 4.3 How many times have you visited Erith Hospital in the last 12 months?

10% of respondents had visited the UCC 6 or more times in the past 12 months, 16% had attended 3-5 times and 55% had visited 1-2 times. This includes adults visiting themselves or bringing children or those they care for to the UCC.



#### 4.4 How long do you normally have to wait at the UCC ?

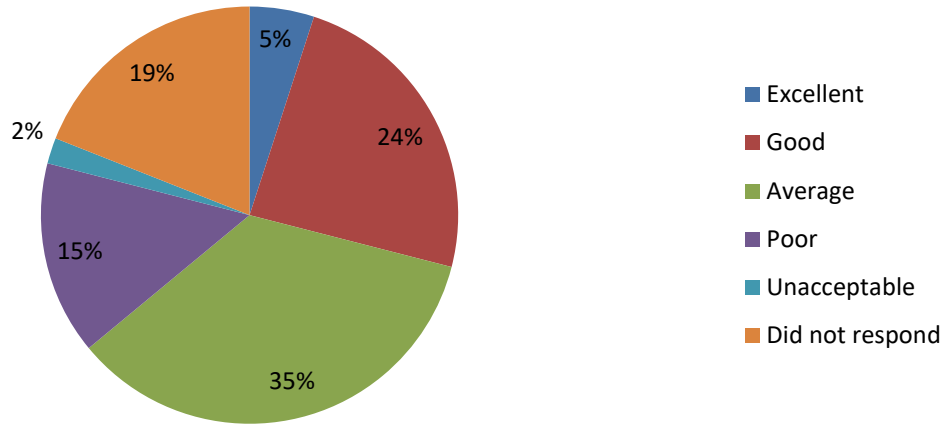


At Erith UCC, waiting times are displayed on a board behind the reception desk and even though waiting times are on average between 1-2 hours, patients are happy to sit and wait if they cannot get an appointment with their own GP. Many patients stated they would prefer their own GP practice to have a walk in service.

#### 4.5 How do you rate the facilities provided?

When asked about the facilities at UCC, one first time visitor commented that "It will be ok when the refurbishment is finished." She thought the building was in the process of being refurbished at the time of her visit. When she realized a refurbishment was not in progress she was shocked and said she could understand why the building could be considered unsuitable. She felt a move to newer building with better facilities would be better.

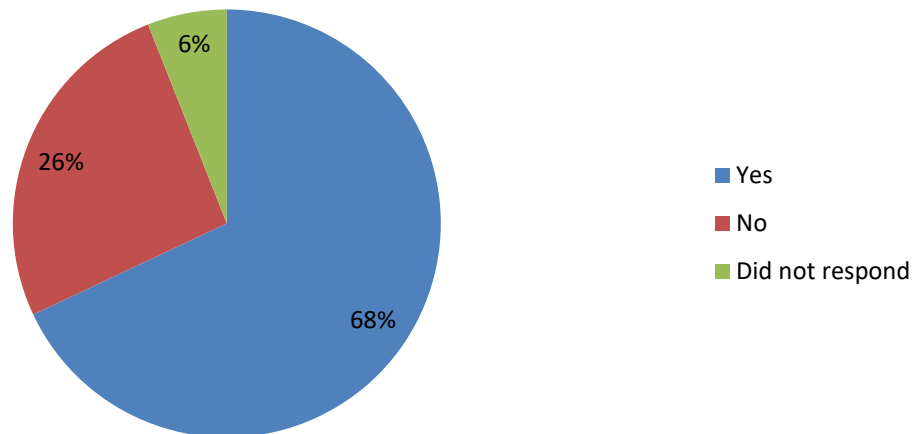
## How do you rate the facilities provided at Erith UCC?



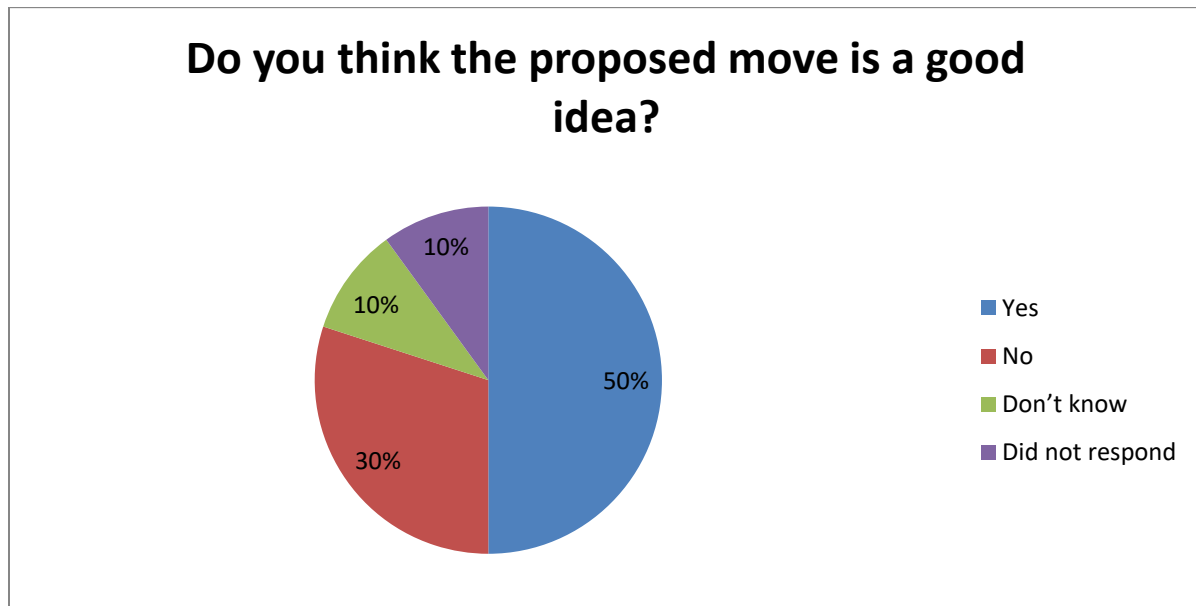
## 5. Views on proposed move of the UCC to Erith Health Centre

### 5.1 Do you know where Erith Health Centre is?

## Do you know where Erith Health Centre is?



## 5.2 Do you think the proposed move is a good idea?



### Comments made in favour of the proposed move.

Half of the people we listened to told us they thought the move was a good idea, with 10 saying it would be a good move if there would be better facilities, and it improved services, with a couple commenting that it would be better if it was bigger with a better waiting area. A further 2 people told us that the move was a good idea if there would be more doctors to cater for the large number of patients using the service but also told us any improvements would be good. 3 residents told us that Erith Health Centre was on a better bus route and would therefore be more convenient.

### Comments

*"Yes move or improve the current facilities"*

*"Yes but I'm concerned Health Centre will be too small"*

*"Yes as the B12 bus route no longer goes to Erith Hospital"*

*"Yes as long as you can go straight in"*

*"Yes if it is able to take more patients"*

*"Yes as it's above my GP surgery"*

### **Comments made against the proposed move.**

30% of those we listened to; told us they felt the move was not a good idea. Reasons given were that there are no X-ray facilities and concerns were raised about what would happen, and where they would go if they needed an X-ray. Suggesting that at present X-ray was convenient as it was on the same site, meaning less visits and travel for local residents. 2 people told us they were against the move as they felt the current site would be redeveloped for flats. Concerns were raised that the Erith Health Centre is already a busy overcrowded site, and if the service is on the first floor what would happen if the lift broke down. People told us that there was not enough parking close to Erith Health Centre, especially for those that have limited mobility, stating that the limited parking for the Health Centre was often busy. In comparison they felt parking was easier at Erith UCC as people could be dropped off right outside the door. One gentleman commented that Erith UCC was a community service that should not be moved away from a residential area into a busy town centre, away from where people live. Comments were also made about the regular traffic congestion around the roads leading into Erith town centre which could affect journey times and those visiting the UCC would add to the congestion.

### **Comments**

*"Lots of injuries occur at the local school which is nearer to Erith UCC"*

*"No too far from where I live"*

*"Health Centre is overcrowded as it is"*

*"No I like the idea of a separate UCC, the Health Centre would get too busy"*

*"Can't cope with volumes at Erith Health Centre as it is. I had to wait for 3 weeks for an appointment there, service is appalling. NHS need to invest to improve what they have. It will down grade the service"*

*"I've been going to Erith Hospital for a long time"*

*"Parking is better at Erith Hospital, there's limited parking at the Health Centre"*

### **5.3 Is Erith Health Centre accessible to you and would you use the UCC service if it moved?**

79% of the respondents stated that Erith Health Centre was accessible to them and the same amount stated they would still use the Urgent Care facilities in the new premises rather than go elsewhere.



### **Comments made regarding the accessibility of Erith Health Centre**

*"Might be more convenient to travel there by bus, even though further away"*

*"Don't like the idea of moving"*

*"Closer to where we live, but accidents always happen at school"*

*"Urgent care here is more accessible"*

*"Yes but parking could be a problem, you get 3 hours free but that could get busier"*

*"Yes and the parking will be so much better"*

*"Would need to get two buses"*

*"Not a good idea, due to parking and volume of traffic getting there"*

*"It will still be accessible, but will be more difficult"*

### **Comments made in relation to using the new UCC at Erith Health Centre**

*"Wouldn't go to Queen Mary's (QM) or Queen Elizabeth (QE) as too far"*

*"Yes I'd use Erith as QE/QM are too big and you would have to wait longer"*

*"If can't see GP within 1-2 days then definitely I would use the new services"*

*"Yes I would use, as no choice, because much closer than QMH or QE"*

*"Yes I would use it as better parking, facilities and warmer"*

*"Possibly more spaces so patients will be seen quicker"*

*"Yes I would use, depending on what the emergency is. Ideally would rather see GP' (3 people made similar comments)*

*"I would still use it as there will still be no GP appointments"*

## 6. Discussion

The questionnaire provided the opportunity for Healthwatch Bexley to speak to patients about their experiences of GP practices, UCC and the proposed move of the UCC from Erith Hospital to Erith Health Centre. Principal themes derived from these discussions are:

- Why patients attend an Urgent Care Centre
- Waiting times / Awareness of GP Hubs
- 50% in favour of the proposed move of UCC
- 79% would use Urgent Care Services if they moved to Erith Health Centre

### 6.1 Why patients attend an Urgent Care Centre

Inappropriate use of urgent care for non-urgent conditions is a growing problem that has significant economic and healthcare consequences. Individuals are using the Urgent Care Centre as a regular alternative to the GP due to lack of available appointments and its convenience. Due to 53% of respondents being unable to get an appointment with their GP and 11% not even trying, this was the main reason for attending the UCC. Respondents cited “Tried to get GP appointment but couldn’t”, several told us that they had tried to attend a walk in clinic but could not get seen “Went to GP practice for a walk in appointment, but doors closed (already full- 8.15am)”, ‘Just wanted a walk in appointment’.

An example of this occurred on our 2<sup>nd</sup> visit. We were talking to a gentleman who had attended the UCC on the previous day as he had been feeling poorly, and after being seen, the doctor called an ambulance and sent him to King’s Hospital. He was there all day for observations and the hospital decided the medication he was on from his own GP for heart problems were not effective and needed to be changed. Kings Hospital gave him a letter and said he needed to see his GP urgently the next day to get the prescription amended.

He returned to UCC the following day, as after visiting his GP in the morning with the letter, he was told he could not be seen as there were no available appointments and to call back later. As the medication needed changing urgently, the gentleman decided to come back to UCC. Whilst waiting in reception, talking to ourselves, the doctor from UCC who saw him the previous day came out and was shocked to see him back in the waiting room, as a letter had also been sent to his GP advising them of the situation by Erith UCC.

Figures from the Hurley Group, show on average 120 patients presenting on a daily basis at Erith UCC and they are considerably busy first thing on Monday mornings. When Healthwatch visited on a Monday morning in December, we found the doors already closed at 9.45am due to

overcrowding. Urgent Care remained closed until about 11am, when the backlog of patients had been cleared. The doors were also closed for a short period of time during a further visit.

## **6.2 Waiting times and access to GP Hubs**

As mentioned previously, the beginning of the week can be much busier at Erith UCC, with waiting times exceeding 2 hours. Most people however were happy to sit and wait, although one lady we spoke to, on discovering the wait at the UCC was in excess of 2 hours, called her own GP from the UCC waiting area to see if they could see her quicker, she was told by her GP that none were available for that day. Other comments we received were “Came earlier but was shut, waited outside until re-opened appx 1 hour”, “Arrived earlier but was shutting due to overcrowding, rang 111 who made appointment at UCC”, “Arrived at 9.45 closed as too busy, reopened 11.45”.

Even though waiting times can be long, 92% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received whilst at Erith UCC and only 2 people commented that the wait was too long.

Whilst discussing waiting times and the reasons for attending UCC, Healthwatch asked respondents whether they were aware of the availability of appointments with the GP Hubs. There were 2 or 3 posters advertising this service on the walls of the UCC waiting room, but the majority of patients were unaware this service existed and had not been offered this option when contacting their GP practice to see if a doctor’s appointment was available.

## **6.3 50% of residents were in favour of the proposed move of UCC**

Half of the residents that we listened too felt the proposed move of the UCC from Erith Hospital to Erith Health Centre would be a good idea. Several thought it was a good idea as they believed a move would mean increased service provision and shorter waiting times. They felt a move to a newer building would mean better facilities including a better waiting area, better bus routes and more parking. In contrast, 30% of people were opposed to the move, with a further 10% being unsure. Concerns were raised regarding the traffic congestion in and out of Erith town centre, as many said the traffic was already very bad and with the move would only get worse. Comments were made that Erith Health Centre is already busy and overcrowded, with little parking nearby for those unable to walk very far. Although there is parking for up to 3 hours in a local supermarket, some elderly people said it was still too far for them to walk and it may be difficult to be dropped off right outside, as is possible at Erith Hospital.

#### **6.4 79% would use Urgent Care Services if they moved to Erith Health Centre**

Over 3/4 of those we engaged with told us that they would use the Urgent Care Centre if it moved to the proposed site at Erith Health Centre. Some stated that they would have no choice but to go there. 79% also told us that the proposed site would be accessible to them, although it may take longer to get there and involve changing buses, but that it would be better than going to QM or the QE hospital, where the waiting times were longer and they were further to travel to.

### **7. Demographics**

Postcodes of UCC visitors: DA1 (16), DA5 (2), DA6 (2), DA7 (20), DA8 (27), DA11 (1), DA15 (1), DA16 (5), DA17 (13), DA18 (1), SE2 (5), SE28 (7)

Age: 0-18 (3), 18-24 (8), 25-34 (24), 35-44 (18), 45-54 (8), 55-64 (12), 65-75 (6), 75+ (12)

Male: 18      Female: 84

GP Practices of patients at UCC on days Healthwatch visited:

Belvedere MC (8), Cairngall (5), Crayford (4), Northumberland Heath (4), Galleons Reach (3), Erith HC (3), Bexley Grp Prac (2), Burstled Woods (2), Mill Rd, Lakeside, Westwood, Slade Green, Welling Med, Nuxley Village, Temple Hill Dartford, Red Hall Dartford, East Hill Dartford, Pilgrims Way Dartford, Ferry View Woolwich, Gravesend practices (2)

### **8. Conclusion and questions raised**

The results presented within this report, suggest the majority of residents we spoke to are satisfied with the service they receive at the current Erith UCC and the care they receive from the staff working under difficult circumstances.

The move to Erith Health Centre however, was thought to be a good idea by nearly half of the respondents and just over three quarters would continue to use the service if it moved to new premises. Certain qualities of Erith UCC are attractive to patients who cannot get an appointment with their own GP, such as prompt diagnosis and treatment and not needing an appointment, with flexible hours/opening times.

However, a great deal of negative comments regarding the move, were around the location of Erith Health Centre and the issue that could arise with regards to parking. Currently, a local supermarket offers 3 hours free parking, but their store in Sidcup has just introduced a fee

unless you spend a specified amount in store and have your receipt validated. **Will/Could this happen at Erith and if so, what affect may this have on parking and visitors to the UCC?**

One lady mentioned ***“It is okay saying we can use the ..... carpark, but it is too far to walk if you are old and not very mobile.”***

One gentleman also commented that ***“The UCC was in a residential area for the local community, and should not be moved to a busy shopping area, where people don’t tend to live. There should be more community based services in residential areas, taking services to the people, not people to the services”***. Many of the people we engaged with had walked to Erith UCC.

A member of staff also commented ***“Where will the staff park, the 3 hour free parking is no good for us. Think the move might make some staff leave. I also have concerns re X-Ray, it’s not fair on patients going backwards and forwards.”***

## **Recommendations**

1. The reasons people attend the Erith UCC rather than visiting their own GP should be considered. The main reason appears to be a lack of GP appointments and residents not being able to get through to their GP on the telephone. Those we listened too suggested that walk in clinics should be available at all GP practices on a regular basis.
2. GP practices (reception) should routinely offer appointments at the GP Hub if appointments are not available at the practice.
3. The NHS 111 service, the GP Hub and the services provided by local pharmacies should be promoted to help people select the most appropriate service to visit when they are unwell. This may help in decreasing the number of people presenting at UCC and A&E for minor problems that could be treated by a GP or pharmacist.