

Dear Mr Derry,

Thank you for the correspondence on behalf of Healthwatch Richmond regarding the Boots pharmacies in Hampton. We welcome feedback from local stakeholders on how we can improve the healthcare services being delivered in our pharmacies, and I can assure you that a consistently high-quality patient experience is very important to Boots.

The context to your email is the consolidation of our store operations in Hampton, with the recent closure of the pharmacies at Tangle Park Road and Priory Road. These changes were implemented as part of our store optimisation programme which involves the consolidation of 300 stores across the UK, especially those that are in close proximity.

This programme is enabling Boots to better focus store investment and concentrate our workforce, notably pharmacists, more efficiently, which is important as we prepare to offer the NHS Pharmacy First service in the coming months. It also reflects the challenging operating environment in the community pharmacy sector, which has been experiencing inflationary pressures, funding constraints, and workforce shortages.

Following a review of our portfolio, Boots decided to close our pharmacies at Tangle Park Road and Priory Road and to consolidate operations into the stores at Hampton Station Approach and Bear Road. This consolidation was completed in November, and we worked closely with the NHS and GP surgeries in the run up to the closures to support patients to transfer their care and prescriptions to ensure there was continuity in access to medicines and the provision of healthcare advice and services.

Staff were offered alternative roles in other Boots stores, with many team members choosing to take up the option of redeployment. It is pleasing to hear that the hard work and dedication of staff has been noticed by the local community and we will ensure that this feedback is shared with the team.

We recognise there was some initial disruption for patients following the closures, but thorough and detailed planning was undertaken by Boots to ensure that the Station Approach and Bear Road pharmacies were equipped to handle the extra demand.

The Station Approach property has undergone a substantial refit to expand the capacity of the pharmacy. The building work was completed on 20 December which was just after the second visit by your team. We had hoped for the refit to

be finished sooner but it was a complex project with work having to take place overnight when the store was closed. This intervention has helped the team to manage the transfer of patients, prescription items, and the dispensing workload. We have also bolstered store resource and made operational changes to improve efficiency and workflow processes and to enhance storage and waiting space in the pharmacy.

Opening hours are in line with the closed stores and the Station Approach pharmacy is now open over the lunchtime period. Seating arrangements will be kept under review, although there are no plans to change the electronic door which is a necessary feature of the property to provide appropriate levels of accessibility for customers, with a sliding door not judged to be suitable.

It is not correct to state that the pharmacy is prescription-only. Some stock was unavailable during the property refit, but over the counter medicines, consumer healthcare products and retail items such as toiletries are once again available for purchase by customers.

We are also signposting patients to use the text message service for collecting prescriptions and the pharmacy is able to offer private and confidential healthcare advice and services to patients in the consultation room.

We are confident that the changes will enhance the patient experience and the Station Approach store is reporting improved service levels, fewer queues, and shorter waiting times.

Regarding the Boots store at Bear Road, a refit has been implemented to increase the capacity of the pharmacy as patients transferred following the closure of the Tangle Park Road store and staffing levels have also been increased. The Bear Road pharmacy has been supported to catch up on its workload and further dispensing process enhancements are planned which will improve the pharmacy's service levels and prescription fulfilment times. A change in store leadership has also had a positive impact and the store has reported fewer queues and shorter waiting times in recent weeks. Therefore, we believe the disruption that was initially experienced at Bear Road as the pharmacy absorbed new patients has been mitigated. Staff are also being supported with new capability, training, and guidance to minimise the incidence and impact of stock loss.

We recognise that we are asking local patients to travel further to visit our pharmacies in Hampton following the consolidation, but both the Station Approach and Bear Road stores are in close proximity (less than 1 mile away), and

we are confident that the healthcare needs of local patients can be well served from these two locations, especially after the resource and property interventions that have been made. Robust business continuity and resource contingency plans are also in place at both stores and these are regularly reviewed and updated in line with company requirements.

Additionally, both the Station Approach and Bear Road pharmacies can arrange for prescription delivery on a case-by-case basis, subject to patient eligibility and agreement, and we are considering what more we can do to expand this service locally.

As you would expect, the local Boots leadership team is in regular communication with the NHS South West London regarding local pharmacy provision and we have been keeping them updated on developments in Hampton. Boots also followed the established NHS regulatory process and checklist for community pharmacy closures to ensure that patient care has been maintained throughout.

I hope this response provides you and your colleagues with reassurance that Boots is committed to supporting the local community and continuing to deliver the highest standards of healthcare service and advice to all our customers and patients in Richmond.

Thank you again for your correspondence and please contact me if you require any further information.

Best regards,

Sebastian James

Senior Vice President and Managing Director, Boots UK & ROI

Walgreens Boots Alliance – Retail Pharmacy International

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