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Executive Manager
Minster Medical Centre
Sheppey Community Hospital
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Sheerness
Kent
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Monday 8th June 2026

Dear Ms Gaylor,

Proposed Permanent Closure of Sheppey Healthy Living Centre (SHLC) Site.

I am writing on behalf of Swale Borough Council to formally express our significant concerns regarding the proposed permanent closure of the GP surgery at the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre (SHLC) in Sheerness.

The council has invested considerable capital funding as part of the Levelling-Up Fund and strategic effort into the regeneration of the Beachfields site, with the explicit intention of improving access to essential health services for local residents. This investment reflects a shared commitment across partners to addressing entrenched health inequalities experienced by communities on the Isle of Sheppey.

Swale contains multiple neighbourhoods within the most deprived 10% nationally, with a significant concentration on the Isle of Sheppey, particularly in Sheerness and surrounding wards. These areas experience higher levels of income deprivation, poorer housing, and lower educational attainment, all of which are closely linked to poorer health outcomes.

Life expectancy in Swale also remains below the regional and national averages, reflecting long-standing health inequalities. Local evidence confirms that Sheppey Healthy Living Centre serves a population with notably lower life expectancy, as low as 77.4 years for men and 81.5 years for women, compared to 83 years nationally.

At the same time, residents face significant barriers in accessing primary care, with Swale having one of the highest patient-to-GP ratios in the country (approximately 1 GP per 3,300 patients). This places considerable strain on services and makes the retention of accessible primary care infrastructure even more critical.

Against this backdrop, the potential loss of a town-centre GP provision raises serious concerns:

- **Access to Primary Care:** A reduction in locally accessible GP services risks disproportionately affecting residents with limited mobility, low incomes, or restricted transport options.
- **Health Inequalities:** Removing provision in an area of high deprivation would exacerbate already significant inequalities.
- **Transport Barriers:** Limited direct transport between Sheerness and Minster will disproportionately affect residents without access to a private vehicle, whilst the cost of public transport can be prohibitively expensive for those most impacted by the cost of living crisis.
- **System Pressure:** Displacing patients will increase demand on already stretched services across the island.

- **Impact on Regeneration Outcomes:** The Beachfields development was designed as an integrated health and wellbeing hub; the absence of primary care would fundamentally undermine both the vision and the public investment made.

Evidence of Need, Access and Population

In addition to the above strategic concerns, it is important to highlight the key evidence relating to population need and accessibility (full details are provided in *Appendix 1*).

The Sheppey Healthy Living Centre serves a registered population of 14,283 patients, making it the largest GP practice in the Sheppey Primary Care Network. This is therefore not a marginal or small-scale facility, but a core component of primary care provision on the island.

A significant proportion of patients have elevated need. 22% (approximately 3,100 patients) are aged 65 and over, a cohort more likely to require frequent GP services and more likely to face mobility and access challenges. The practice also has comparatively high levels of long-term conditions, including above-average rates across multiple long-term conditions, including hypertension, diabetes, asthma and depression, alongside a higher prevalence of risk factors such as smoking and obesity. The practice also has the highest recorded prevalence of Long Covid in the Primary Care Network (11.8%), a condition often associated with fatigue and reduced mobility, further underlining the importance of easily accessible local provision

Accessibility is a critical strength of this location. The Sheerness site benefits from multiple regular bus services and a direct rail connection, making it a key transport hub for patients across the Isle of Sheppey and beyond. This is not simply a matter of convenience; it reflects how the island's transport network is configured, with routes converging on Sheerness and enabling relatively direct, single-journey access for a wide proportion of the population. By contrast, access to the Minster hospital site is less well connected by public transport, with fewer direct routes and no rail access, meaning journeys are more likely to involve longer travel times, interchange, or reliance on private vehicles.

Given that patients registered at the practice are geographically dispersed across the island, and include a high proportion of older residents, people with long-term conditions, and those without access to a car, the location of services within a central, well-connected transport hub is a critical determinant of whether care is realistically accessible. Relocating provision away from Sheerness would therefore not simply shift location, but would materially increase the complexity, cost and time of journeys for many patients, with a disproportionate impact on those already facing the greatest barriers to care.

Taken together, the data clearly demonstrates that the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre is a strategically important site serving a large, high-need population with significant health inequalities and access challenges. Its removal would risk worsening outcomes and disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable residents. (*Full supporting evidence is set out in Appendix 1.*)

Partnership Working

In addition to the fundamental matters relating to health, access and deprivation, we would like to comment on the partnership working leading up to this consultation.

Since early 2022, when Swale Borough Council chose to direct its Levelling-Up Fund bid to the Island and primarily to Beachfields, we have worked hand in glove with both Minster Medical Practice and the Kent & Medway CCG / ICB to provide modern, bespoke, accessible GP facilities within the Healthy Living Centre.

Minster Medical Practice submitted a premises development proposal to the CCG in April 2022, showing your commitment to the project. The CCG's letter of support for the project, which we submitted to central government with the Levelling-Up Fund bid, set out the benefits of this proposal as:

- the existing facility was undersized for the number of patients;
- the impracticalities of a first floor location which precluded wheelchair-user access;

- poor quality and outdated ventilation
- the restriction on opening hours caused by shared access
- the benefits of additional space to allow expanded service provision (including physiotherapy, podiatry, social prescribing, nursing treatments (implants, coils and joint injections) and mental health nurse-led clinics).

The CCG's letter summarised that a successful bid would "represent a step change in the GP services made available for the residents of Sheerness who would otherwise have to travel to the practice's Minster site to access these and (would) support an improvement in health and wellbeing outcomes for the Sheerness community".

Each of these bullets was positively addressed by the Levelling-Up Fund bid which has provided increased floorspace on the ground floor, improved ventilation and independent building access.

Minster Medical Practice also provided a letter of support for the bid, recognising "the longer-term and enhanced future for the co-location of health and community services by supporting the many services offered by Sheppey Matters" and concluding "this would be a transformational opportunity for our practice and patients, with innumerable positive health and equality outcomes".

These statements hold true and were the cornerstone of partnership working before and since the bid's success was announced. We have invested significant time and public money in these shared aspirations and are bitterly disappointed at this last-minute proposed change of direction. We consider this a disservice to our residents and a very poor approach to partnership-working.

Conclusion

Swale Borough Council recognises that responsibility for commissioning primary care services sits with NHS partners. However, maintaining a GP presence at SHLC is critical to achieving shared strategic priorities around prevention, early intervention, and reducing health inequalities.

We therefore strongly urge all partners to:

- Continue to explore all viable options to retain or replace GP provision at the SHLC site;
- Work collaboratively across the Integrated Care System to identify sustainable workforce and delivery solutions;
- Consider innovative models of provision, including multidisciplinary, outreach, or community-based services aligned to local need.

We urge you in the strongest terms to abide by the shared commitment to the Healthy Living Centre so clearly articulated in the Levelling-Up Fund bid and so evidently valuable to the health and wellbeing of Sheppey residents.

The council remains committed to working in partnership to secure a positive outcome and would welcome continued engagement on this issue.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Tim Gibson
Leader



Cllr Hannah Perkin
Chair Housing, Health and Communities

Sheppey Healthy Living Centre GP Surgery Data

14/05/2026



Produced by

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Purpose

This short report considers the patient characteristics, transport context and geographic distribution of patients registered with Sheppey Healthy Living Centre GP Surgery. It is intended to inform wider consideration of whether the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre location should continue to be used for GP service provision.

The analysis focuses on three main issues:

1. the size and characteristics of the registered population;
2. the public transport links serving the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site;
3. the geographic spread of registered patients across the Isle of Sheppey and beyond.

These factors are important because GP access is not determined only by the availability of appointments. It is also affected by whether patients can physically reach the site in a practical, affordable and reliable way. This is particularly relevant for older residents, people with long-term conditions, people with reduced mobility, and people without access to a private car/patients who rely on public transport.

Background

Sheppey Healthy Living Centre GP Surgery was temporarily relocated while renovation works were undertaken at the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site. During this period, services were moved to Sheppey Community Hospital in Minster. Following completion of the renovation works, the practice has expressed a preference to remain at the hospital site rather than return fully to the renovated Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site. At present, both Sheppey Healthy Living Centre and Minster Medical Group are open and operate as one administration.

This section does not seek to assess every operational, financial or estate-related factor associated with that decision. Instead, it focuses specifically on the population and access evidence relevant to the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre location.

The key question considered here is:

From the perspective of patient characteristics, transport access and patient distribution, what evidence is there to support retaining GP service provision at the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site?

Practice Profile

The information given in this section is tabulated in Table 1. [Sheppey Healthy Living Centre](#) is the largest GP practice in the Sheppey Primary Care Network. It has a registered PCIS population of 14,283 patients, which is higher than the other practices listed in the Sheppey PCN comparison.

The practice also has the largest absolute number of patients aged 65 and over. The data shows that 22.0% of the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre registered population is aged 65+, equivalent to approximately 3,100 patients.

This is important because older patients are generally more likely to require regular contact with primary care services. They may also be more likely to experience mobility limitations, long-term conditions, frailty, sensory impairment, or dependence on carers, taxis, community transport or public transport. While age alone does not determine access need, the size of the older population registered at Sheppey Healthy Living Centre means that any change in the practical accessibility of the surgery could affect a substantial number of patients.

This comparison shows that Sheppey Healthy Living Centre is significant within the Sheppey PCN in three ways. First, it has the largest registered population of the listed practices. Second, it has the largest absolute number of patients aged 65 and over. Third, it has the highest reported GP workforce full-time equivalent, at 8.35 FTE, indicating that it is a substantial primary care site within the local system.

Taken together, these points suggest that the location of Sheppey Healthy Living Centre is not a minor access issue affecting only a small branch surgery. It relates to the largest registered practice population in the Sheppey PCN, including a sizeable older population.

Sheppey Healthy Living Centre has the highest recorded percentage of patients suffering with Long Covid among the listed Sheppey PCN practices. The recorded figure for Sheppey Healthy Living Centre is 11.8%, compared with 6.0% at Sheerness Health Centre, 3.8% at St George's Medical Centre, 7.4% at The Om Medical Centre and 6.9% at Vel Surgery.

This is relevant because Long Covid can be associated with fatigue, breathlessness, reduced stamina and fluctuating symptoms. For some patients, this may make longer walking distances, less frequent transport, or journeys requiring changes more difficult. The data should be interpreted carefully, as the recorded percentage does not indicate severity, functional impairment or travel behaviour. However, it does suggest that Sheppey Healthy Living Centre has a comparatively high proportion of patients with a condition that may affect ability to travel comfortably.

In the context of service location, this strengthens the argument for considering not only distance but also journey complexity. For patients with fatigue or breathlessness, a shorter and more direct journey may be materially different from a longer journey involving walking to and from stops, waiting outdoors, or relying on less frequent services.

This does not mean that every patient with Long Covid would require the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site. It does, however, support the need to retain accessible local provision for a patient population with potentially higher levels of mobility-related access need.

Table 1. Summary of relevant practice characteristics for GP practices in the Sheppey PCN. (Source: Organisational Data Service, April 2026 and Fingertips, May 2026).

Name of Practice	PCIS Population	Percent of population 65+	GP Workforce FTE	Percentage of patients suffering with long covid
Sheppey Healthy Living Centre	14,283	22.0%	8.35	11.8%
Sheerness Health Centre	6,849	17.0%	1.04	6.0%
St George's Medical Centre	10,946	23.4%	5.87	3.8%
The Om Medical Centre	7,248	16.7%	5.75	7.4%

Vel Surgery	9,739	18.6%	6.18	6.9%
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Sheppey Healthy Living Centre serves a population with poorer health outcomes compared to the England average. Life expectancy is notably lower, at 77.4 years for males (compared to 79.1 years nationally) and 81.5 years for females (compared to 83.0 years nationally).

Risk factors for long-term conditions are also higher. Smoking prevalence is 1.8% above the England average, while obesity prevalence is 2.6% higher.

The burden of chronic disease is elevated across several key conditions. Hypertension prevalence is 3.4% higher than the national average, and diabetes prevalence is 2.7% higher.

In addition, prevalence rates for several other conditions exceed national benchmarks: depression, +2.9; asthma: +6.7%; rheumatoid arthritis: +0.4%; heart failure: +0.1%.

All these statistics suggest that the population served by the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre may struggle with their GP removing a location providing provision.

Public Transport

The Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site is located at: Sheppey Healthy Living Centre, Royal Road, off The Broadway, Sheerness, Kent, ME12 1HH.

There are several bus and rail services serving the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre area. These include the 334, 335, 360, 361 and 362 bus services, as well as rail services to Sheerness-on-Sea station. All bus service data is from bustimes.org. Train data is from South-eastern rail.

The 334 service operates on the Sittingbourne, Iwade, Queenborough, Halfway, Minster/Marine Town and Sheerness corridor, with practical access to the Catholic Church/Broadway area which is outside the SHLC. It is a regular daytime service, broadly hourly in the timetable extract, with journeys from morning to early evening. The frequency reduces in the afternoon.

The 360 service operates between Sheerness, Minster, Eastchurch and Leysdown, with access to the Catholic Church/Broadway area or Sheerness Railway Station/Tesco area. It is a regular daytime Sheppey service, broadly hourly or near hourly in the timetable extract.

Other services, including the 335, 361 and 362, provide additional but more limited connectivity. The 335 is described as a limited daytime service, the 361 as a schooldays limited public service, and the 362 as a Monday–Friday daytime local service with journeys mainly between late morning and early afternoon in the timetable extract.

This suggests that Sheppey Healthy Living Centre benefits from several public transport options, including regular daytime bus links serving the Sheerness area. For patients without access to a car, this is a significant consideration. In comparison, the Sheppey hospital site has poorer transport links with two other buses (351, 352; not included in Table 2) and the 360-bus going to the hospital, where only 360 is regular. This location also lacks a train station.

The presence of Sheerness-on-Sea railway station is an important access factor for the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site. The Southeastern rail service operates between Sittingbourne and Sheerness-on-Sea, via Kemsley and Swale.

Approximately 450 registered patients are not shown on the patient distribution map shown in Figure 1 because they do not live on the Isle of Sheppey.

For some of these patients, rail access may be important. A patient travelling from Sittingbourne, Kemsley or Swale may reasonably be able to use the train to reach Sheerness-on-Sea, followed by onward access to the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre area. This makes the Sheerness location potentially more accessible for some off-island patients than a site requiring additional onward travel after reaching the island.

It should not be assumed that all 450 off-island patients travel by train, or that they attend face-to-face appointments frequently. The more balanced point is that rail access gives the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site an additional mode of accessibility that may be relevant to patients living off the island or along the railway line.

This is particularly important where patients do not drive, cannot afford taxi travel, or need a relatively direct public transport route.

Table 2. Table of public transport options for Sheppey Healthy Living Centre. Address used: Sheppey Healthy Living Centre, Royal Road, off The Broadway, Sheerness, Kent, ME12 1HH. This table excludes school-only routes and routes not currently showing active journeys. Frequencies are indicative and potentially subject to change. (Source: bustimes.org, South Eastern Railway).

Mode	Service	Operator	Route / corridor	Nearest practical stop / station	Indicative frequency / pattern
Bus	334	Chalkwell Garage & Coach Hire	Sittingbourne – Iwade – Queenborough – Halfway – Minster / Marine Town – Sheerness	Catholic Church / Broadway or Sheerness Railway Station / Tesco area	Regular daytime service; broadly hourly in the timetable extract, with journeys shown from morning to early evening.
Bus	335	Chalkwell Garage & Coach Hire	Sittingbourne – Iwade – Queenborough – Rushenden – Halfway – Sheerness	Sheerness Railway Station / Tesco area; onward short walk to Royal Road / Broadway	Limited daytime service; timetable extract shows roughly hourly journeys over a shorter operating window.
Bus	360	Travelmasters	Sheerness – Minster – Eastchurch – Leysdown	Catholic Church / Broadway or Sheerness Railway Station / Tesco area	Regular daytime Sheppey service; broadly hourly / near-hourly in the timetable extract.
Bus	361	Chalkwell Garage & Coach Hire	Queenborough – Rushenden – Halfway – Leigh Academy Minster – Sheerness	Clock Tower / Broadway	Schooldays limited public service, one morning, one afternoon.
Bus	362	Travelmasters	Sheerness – West Minster local route	Sheerness Railway Station / Tesco area	Monday–Friday daytime local service; roughly hourly between late morning and early afternoon in the timetable extract.

Train	Southeastern rail service	Southeastern	Sittingbourne – Kemsley – Swale – Queenborough – Sheerness-on-Sea	Sheerness-on-Sea station ;	Direct trains between Sittingbourne and Sheerness-on-Sea; Southeastern reports an average / fastest journey time of about 18 minutes and 28 services on the checked journey page.
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Patient Distribution

Figure 1 shows a map showing the number of patients registered with Sheppey Healthy Living Centre by Lower Layer Super Output Area. For simplicity, the map only shows LSOAs with more than 20 registered patients.

This type of patient distribution mapping is important because it shows whether the surgery is located close to the communities it serves. A surgery may be clinically suitable and operationally convenient, but if it is less accessible to a large proportion of its registered population, this may create barriers to care.

Figure 1 indicates that Sheppey Healthy Living Centre has a patient population spread across the Isle of Sheppey.

The location of the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site in Sheerness is therefore relevant because it sits within an area served by several bus routes and rail access. This is particularly important if a sizeable proportion of registered patients live in or near Sheerness, or in areas connected to Sheerness by direct bus or rail routes.

For patients living close to the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre site, retaining GP provision there may support easier access by walking, short bus journeys, rail, taxi, or lifts from family and carers. For patients with mobility limitations or limited income, reducing travel time and complexity may make the difference between attending and not attending an appointment.

Since the patients that attend this GP are spread over the entire island, it may be important that a transport hub such as Sheerness retains the provision

Figure 1. Number of patients registered to the Sheppey Healthy Living Centre GP Practice (G82799) by LSOAs with 20+ patients. Source (NHS digital, April 2026 Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS), [LSOA boundaries BGC], [2021]. Licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right [2026])

