



# Community event on 26 February 2026 - report

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## 1. Overview

**“This event demonstrated the strength of partnership between PAHT and the community - a shared commitment to openness, accountability, and better care.”**

This report summarises the One Vision, One Care engagement event held in Epping on Thursday 26 February 2026, attended by senior representatives from The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust (PAHT). The event drew strong community interest, with over 120 people registered and 100 attending on the evening.

The meeting was formally opened by Councillor Janet Whitehouse, Town Mayor of Epping, and Ann Nutt, Chair of the Patient Panel.

Although Thom Lafferty, Chief Executive of PAHT, was unable to attend, he provided a written statement, read aloud by the Chair of the Patient Panel (see Appendix A).

### Key areas of discussion

- Trust strategy and future priorities
- The future role of St Margaret's Hospital
- The new Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC)
- Progress toward a new hospital
- Integrated Care System (ICS) collaboration
- Digital developments including My Alex Health



## 2. The Patient Panel: What is it?

**“The Patient Panel ensures that the voices of patients are not only heard - they shape the future of care.”**

For more than a decade, the Patient Panel has played a central role in ensuring patient voices shape the work of the Trust.

### What the Panel does

- Produces annual reports
- Hosts public engagement events
- Facilitates focused discussions on key topics
- Supports trust-wide improvement work

### Topics covered in recent years

- Long-term conditions
- End-of-life care
- Hospital discharge
- Emergency preparedness
- Cancer services
- Nutrition and wellbeing

### Recognition

- ‘Outstanding’ rating from the Care Quality Commission
- Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service (2020)
- British Empire Medal (2024) awarded to the Chair

## 3. Public engagement and community feedback

**“Public feedback plays a central role in shaping the Trust’s priorities.” - Tom Burton, Chief Financial and Infrastructure Officer and Interim Deputy Chief Executive**

Attendees were invited to share views during the question-and-answer session and through written feedback. Discussions highlighted PAHT’s focus on patient-centred care and its determination to work in partnership with the community.

## 4. What is the Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC)?

### 4.1 What a CDC does

The CDC brings essential tests closer to home. Across England, more than 165 CDCs now provide the following:

- CT and MRI scans
- X-rays
- Heart and lung investigations
- Endoscopy
- Blood tests

### 4.2 Why West Essex needed one

- Long distances to travel
- Parking pressures at The Princess Alexandra Hospital
- Long outpatient waits



- Delays in diagnosis

**“The CDC is a gamechanger for local access to diagnostics.”**

### 4.3 New clinical pathways and innovations

#### Expanded pathways

The CDC now supports nine pathways, including:

- Chest pain and breathlessness
- Children’s asthma
- Adult sleep studies
- Women’s health
- Gastroenterology and liver checks
- Prostate cancer diagnostics



#### Diagnostic innovations

- Trans nasal endoscopy
- Third MRI scanner
- Nurse-led models

#### Benefits for residents

- The need for fewer appointments
- One referral for multiple tests
- Faster results
- Less travel

## 5. What are the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs)?

Six neighbourhood teams now support communities of 30,000–50,000 residents each. Teams include:

- GPs
- Community health
- Mental health
- Social care
- Voluntary and community partners

#### Focus areas

- Frailty
- Multiple long-term conditions
- Personalised care

## 6. Getting access to your health data

My Alex Health Portal has over 50,000 users who can now access:

- Appointment letters
- Test results
- And very soon, appointment management



## NHS App integration

The important point to remember is that we are focused on enabling you to stay included in changes to how we work. Many people asked if they can still receive paper letters. The digital lead explained that these will always remain an option for anyone that wants them. You can contact the hospital to make this request if you need to.

The hospital will be introducing new ways of communicating through the web portal, continuing to support the community and offering devices for local people to use, working with our voluntary sector partners.



## 7. Performance highlights

### A&E improvements

- 11th best nationally for the four-hour target
- Largest improvement in the country

### Corridor care

No patients are being cared for in A&E corridors.

## 8. Prevention and system efficiency

Priorities include:

- Physical activity
- Smoking reduction
- Health literacy
- Early intervention

### Resource shift

Closing one hospital bay could release **£750,000** for prevention.

## 9. Community question and answer session

**Q1.** Why was the CDC built in Epping? To reduce travel, ease hospital pressure, and speed up diagnosis.

**Q2.** Does the CDC replace hospital services? No - it supports the hospital by increasing diagnostic capacity.

**Q3.** Can my GP refer me directly? Yes. One referral can now cover multiple tests.

**Q4.** What if I'm not confident with digital tools? Paper letters remain available, and support is offered locally.

**Q5.** Can you please stop using so many acronyms? They're confusing for the public.

This point was strongly acknowledged. The Trust agreed that acronyms can be unclear and committed to reducing their use in public communications, ensuring full terms are written out and explained.



**Q6.** Will St Margaret's Hospital continue to have a meaningful role in local healthcare?

Residents expressed concern about the future of St Margaret's Hospital. The Trust confirmed that the site remains an important part of local service delivery, particularly for diagnostics, outpatient care, and community-based services.

**Q7.** Why do appointment letters sometimes arrive after the appointment date?

Attendees raised concerns about delays in postal communication. The Trust recognised this issue and explained that improvements are underway, including digital options and streamlined processes to reduce duplication and delays.

**Q8.** How will you ensure older people and those without digital access aren't left behind?

The Trust emphasised that digital tools are optional, not mandatory. Paper letters will continue, and support is available through community partners. Devices can also be provided for those who need them through our voluntary sector partnerships.

**Q9.** What is being done about parking pressures at The Princess Alexandra Hospital?

Parking remains a challenge. The Trust outlined ongoing work to improve flow, expanding the services on our other sites such as Herts and Essex Hospital, at St Margaret's such as the CDC, blood testing at the Harvey Centre, and work to reduce unnecessary hospital visits, all of which help ease parking demand.

**Q10.** Will the new hospital happen, and when?

Residents asked for clarity on timelines. The Trust confirmed that the new hospital remains a strategic priority, with progress continuing through national processes. Updates will be shared as milestones are reached.

**Q11.** Why do different departments sometimes give conflicting information?

This concern was acknowledged. The Trust explained that work is underway to improve internal communication, standardise processes, and ensure patients receive consistent, accurate information.

**Q12.** How will you make sure community voices continue to influence decisions?

The Trust reaffirmed its commitment to ongoing engagement, including regular public meetings, Patient Panel involvement, and opportunities for feedback through digital and in-person channels. You can join the patient panel by emailing [paht.patient.panel@nhs.net](mailto:paht.patient.panel@nhs.net)



## 11. Appendices

### Appendix A – Chief Executive’s Statement

Good evening, everyone,

I’m very sorry not to be with you tonight. The severe snowstorm along the East Coast of the United States earlier this week has left my wife stranded, meaning I’m currently at home caring for our three children.

I’m disappointed to miss the opportunity to be here and speak with you directly, but I know my executive colleagues will represent us well this evening.

Over the past year at PAHT, we have been working hard to reset the organisation. This has included establishing a new executive team, introducing a new operational structure, and taking fresh approaches to areas of care that have historically faced challenges — particularly cancer services and urgent and emergency care.

We are also exploring a new approach to our New Hospital Programme, alongside developing a clear organisational strategy and vision. At the heart of this is a commitment to work closely with our communities and local partners, so that we provide care that truly reflects local needs — especially those of our residents in West Essex.

We know we cannot achieve this without listening to the people we serve. That is why we are committed to holding more events like this in the months ahead, and I’m delighted to see such strong attendance in Epping this evening.

Please do share your views, concerns and ideas. It is only by listening and learning from you that we can improve and become a healthcare provider our communities are proud of.

Thank you.



**Thom Lafferty**  
Chief Executive

