

June 2021 Feedback Report



The feedback presented in this report represents 290 responses from the following sources:

- Calls, emails, website, and face-to-face feedback to Healthwatch Greenwich from Greenwich residents
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and community representatives or leaders
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and groups of Greenwich service users
- Conversations as seen on social media from local community and neighbourhood groups
- Online reviews of services

COVID-19 Vaccination

Vaccination Hesitancy

Even though vaccine uptake has been high, hesitancy still exists. While some are clearly anti-vaccination, others take a more measured approach - asking for further safety evidence before deciding.

“I have asked my doctors to book me in for [vaccination] 2026. Until then I shall abide by the government guidelines and keep my mask on, stay safe and sanitised”.

“I will not be jabbed; I will wait until the trials to end in 2023.”

“I'm not getting mine. Not because I'm anti-vax but because I think it's all rushed and no real research on long term side effects. Maybe in a few years when they know more, but not right now.”

“There is no law to say you have to have the silly jab. They say it's a vaccine, but I'm no doctor, so I have no idea what the hell they are injecting into me.”

Vaccination - Booking Appointments

Some report difficulty booking vaccination appointments:

“I am trying to book my second dose but online I get an error, saying to contact my GP. I have contacted them, but they said they couldn't do anything and told me to call 119. 119 said they couldn't do anything and to call my GP. I am stuck in this situation and don't know what to do?”

“My wife has her NHS number and she is registered with our local GP. She is eligible for the vaccination but when we are trying to book online the systems shows the following message: “You are not currently eligible to book through this service”. I have called the 119, but they were not able to proceed with the booking and suggested to visit our GP. We have been to our GP, but it is impossible to understand what is the problem?”

“I tried to book my covid vaccine online, but after entering my NHS number I got a 9907 error. So it looks like I won't be having my vaccine anytime soon.”

Vaccination - General Queries

As vaccination is progressing through age groups questions are being asked about under 18s and if they can get vaccinated at pop-up clinics.

Other queries include:

- how to choose a vaccine using the National Booking System
- how to find out which vaccines are being provided where
- if it is possible to get a second dose in Greenwich if, recently moved but, still registered with a GP practice outside of Greenwich
- if/how to move the date of vaccination
- how to access leftover vaccines
- how homeless people/not registered with a GP can get vaccinated
- how to get a different 2nd vaccine after an adverse reaction to the first dose

GP Services - Access

While most health and care services have gone back to pre-pandemic levels of functioning (with a COVID-19 legacy of extensive waiting lists), services users increasingly ask why primary care services are still so difficult to access.

Some service users say they haven't been able to speak to their GP since the start of the pandemic, routine checks and tests have disappeared, and their long term or chronic conditions are not being monitored. Those that require frequent tests, like diabetics or those with high blood pressure, say they are constantly anxious about their health and having to continue with medication without knowing if their condition has changed.

Service users continue¹ to report problems with:

- long waiting lines on the telephone/ phone calls not being picked up
- communication style of the front desk staff
- practices running out of appointment slots shortly after opening telephone lines

In addition to causing extreme anxiety, inability to access timely GP appointments can lead to significant detrimental outcomes, including hospital admission.

“I ended up in resuscitation at hospital because I could not get appointment at the GP. If I had got some antibiotics, it would have cleared up my problem.”

“Well to say let down is an understatement. I have been calling the surgery since 8am this morning and its over two hours but I still can't get through. I'm disgusted I can't get my young child the help she needs. It's big massive let-down.”

¹ These have been highlighted consistently in all our previous Feedback Reports

“I have been on the phone waiting for ages so I went in person and found the reception lady just leaving the phone ringing.

When I question her, she claims I am “wasting her time”, threatens to give spaces [appointment slots] away [to other patients] even though I am the only person there.”

“I’ve tried more than a dozen times today to contact reception. In the afternoon [I tried] for over four hours.

There were a couple of times when the line was busy and call dropped [cut off], otherwise ‘on hold’.

*I also tried to fill out a form [digitally] which was apparently ‘time locked’ to this morning at 8am’. So that was a no go.
Still trying to get through on the phone.”*

“I have recently had bleeding from one of my ears and I have a long history of ear problems. I first tried an online GP who said I need to see a GP in person within 24 hours.

I immediately called the practice² at 8 am, who offered me an appointment in 2 weeks’ time!

I now need to make alternative arrangements to seek private treatment as this practice does not seem to want to help.”

Booking on-line Appointments

Online booking not available: Some service users tell us they want to book appointments on-line, as they could before the pandemic. Communication with patients has been poor and many have not been told why this facility has not been re-instated.

Instructed by practices that e-consult is the only way to book appointments:

There is a growing concern that e-consult is the only way to book appointments and no alternative is offered. Some service users find using digital platforms (e-consult and others) lengthy, complex, and difficult³ and do not always lead to a resolution or an appointment.

“We spoke to the receptionist who told us she could not give us an appointment but rather we must fill out a lengthy online form and then someone would call us back.

After doing so, a few days later a nurse called to discuss his case and refused to

² We receive similar feedback from other service users who report having to increasingly rely on A&E or pay for private care because it has become difficult to access GP services.

³ Our earlier reports have highlighted service users find e-consult long and tedious and has too many irrelevant questions. Some report leaving it midway because they find the process difficult. We also continue to receive feedback that services users are sometimes not called after submitting e-consult.

*help since he is 4 years old and so according to her - he [our son] cannot have a change in treatment from his existing meds.
We called the receptionist again to get an appointment with a doctor and were again told we must go and fill in the same online form.
It has been a week of daily asthma attacks and trying to get an appointment for my 4 year old son, and still after much back-and-forth we have no prospect of help in sight.”*

Expectations that service users must use e-consult or similar is a significant barrier in accessing care for those without digital devices or digital skills.

“My brother, who has a speech impairment, relies on others to book his appointments. He does not know how to use the internet and does not have a laptop. But doctors’ appointments are possible only this way! Only emergency appointments by phone! Only then you will get to speak to the doctor - only over the phone.

How does this service work for many who are the same as my brother? Please can these patients have another system, for booking appointments, as we are going to have patients suffering with all kinds of ailments!”

“When I wanted to talk to my GP about my meds I was told I needed to fill in an e-consult form online. But I just got an email telling me my prescription was being sent to the chemist. Luckily, I use a PC but what about the people who haven’t got a smart phone etc. I have to admit I’m baffled by this new system.”

Those with little or no English are doubly disadvantaged:

“...told to go and use e-consult...it is only in English...there are so many different questions to answer, and my English is not good. After waiting for 30 minutes on the phone if the reception tells me to go fill a form it is not helpful.”⁴

Face to face appointments

Service users are perplexed that despite national guidelines and clear requests for face-to-face appointments, their preference is not considered, and they are not given access to face-to-face appointments. Frustration is growing:

“The system is totally broken. I wonder why this isn’t more of a government priority. If it’s not possible to get a face-to-face GP appointment, for sure a lot of serious illness is being missed.”

“Now the doctor decides IF to see you face-to-face or not, you have no say. That is the problem. I haven’t seen my GP in 18 months. I am upset and cross. What the dickens has happened to our GPs?”

⁴ Cantonese speaking service user.

“Seems like the doctors went on the missing list in the midst of Covid. I think it’s disgusting of them. They are well paid for their job and they seem to leave it all to A&E now.”

Registering for GP services

One service user reports difficulty registering as a new patient.

“I filled out an application to register as a patient in March and followed up with a phone call to ensure the practice had all the documents they needed. I called back in late May when my GP was not showing up on the COVID vaccination website and was told my application wasn’t finalised.

When I asked if they could tell me by when this could be done, I was told this information could not be provided.

I contacted another practice, and they completed the registration the very next day.

I don’t expect instant service from a GP practice, but expect at least the basics in communication.

I am angry that a vulnerable person in my situation may have felt isolated or that they had nowhere to turn for information on something that was unnecessarily vague and badly communicated.”

GP Services - Safety Concerns

Service users report witnessing lax hygiene and possible confidentiality breaches.

“I had the worst smear test in my life. The nurse used the same gloves to come to the reception room, to open the door, to write on the computer and to do the smear test. This was my first appointment face-to-face at this GP but definitely my last one.”

“My child had a vaccine, and the nurse dropped the needle on the floor as she was unwrapping it - so it was partly exposed - and then jabbed my child with it.”

*“Patient blood samples were in a bag on the windowsill with identifying details such as names clearly visible.
Doesn’t inspire much confidence”*

Adult Social Care

Care Homes

Relatives of residents living in Greenwich care homes share overwhelmingly positive experiences and most are happy with the care provided by staff. They are appreciative of the extra effort made by care homes to connect them with their loved ones.

“I have found all the staff extremely helpful, and they keep our family informed of any changes or needs of my mother. The home itself is always clean and offers a good environment with activities available. The staff have looked after my mother through this very difficult time and kept us up to date when we were unable to visit, and the only way was via FaceTime.”

We heard last month:

- relatives wanted clarification on their right to be tested as frequently as staff members (PCR testing/lateral flow tests)
- concern with optician access/assistance given to residents

After receiving feedback from us, officers from the Royal Borough worked closely with Healthwatch, relatives and friends, following up on each concern and resolving issues. Following their intervention:

- care homes are working with opticians to arrange overdue eye tests missed due to lockdown and a programme is underway registering residents and arranging appointments
- care homes were reminded they can offer and facilitate weekly testing for essential care givers
- relatives have been connected with other council departments to take forward additional issues.

QEH Hospital

Service users praise the quality of care received:

“Amazing place in which to come to get checked out at A&E if you need to, seeing consultants at the various departments etc. This would be my second time that I have been to critical care unit due to a loved one being admitted to the unit. Although I haven’t been able to visit my relative at the times that I would like, due to covid-19, the staff has been tremendously helpful and graceful enough to allow me to visit my relative every day at a certain time and to answer any questions that I may have regarding my relative’s health and stay.”

Not all have such a positive experience of QEH:

“We had an appointment arranged by 111 at 15.45. Two hours and a half later, I asked how many people were to be seen before us, and it turned out that they had never booked us in! They didn't even know where our registration paper was. We had to fill out a new form. They said it wouldn't take too long since we had already been waiting a long time.

Two hours later, they realised we shouldn't be seen at UCC but at A&E, so they changed us to A&E.

One hour later, I found that, for A&E, we hadn't been waiting for 5 hours, but only one! All the time we spent at the hospital before the swap to A&E was disregarded.

Plus, they had put us in the Hot Covid Waiting Room, only because my brother had just come back from Spain. He had no fever, no cough and had been in a country with a better Covid-19 ratio than the UK, but they made us go into a closed room full of people with Covid-19 symptoms, many of them with no mask.

For 5.5 hours! Our masks had lost efficacy by then.

We left because we didn't feel safe. People wouldn't stop coughing around us, our masks had been worn for too long.

The hospital refused to take into consideration all the time we had spent there even though it had been their staff's mistake and we had many hours ahead of us before being seen.

Such inhumane treatment, putting our lives at risk... We walked in with one problem; I hope we didn't walk out with two.”

Relatives whose loved ones visit A&E alone - because of COVID-19 restrictions, want better communication:

“With the COVID-19 Pandemic going on it would be useful to have more staff able to answer A&E phone lines as people cannot be with their loved ones. We are desperate for an update I have been trying to get through to A&E for an hour and half to check on my mum taken in by ambulance.”

Physiotherapy

While staff sickness and redeployment in the MSK service created lengthy telephone waits during the first lockdown, service users continue to report their calls going unanswered:

“I've spent the past week trying to arrange an appointment by phone after a GP referral. I work from home so it should be pretty easy right? WRONG. No one has answered my calls or responded to my messages.”

Service users tell us referrals are not always processed in a timely fashion:

“I’ve been referred to the MSK twice. I find them extremely incompetent. They don’t process referrals until you chase them, trying to call their booking line is near impossible - they request you leave a message but don’t call back. Their so called ‘specials’ who conducted my assessment said she doesn’t have enough experience to comment on my medical condition. NHS money not spent well!

Wouldn’t recommend if you are considering them for a private appointment based on my NHS referral experience.”

Others feel forced to turn to private treatment:

“I have had a back pain for more than a year. I have spoken to physiotherapists over the phone, face to face, and I have even seen a doctor who, in nice words, told me that there was nothing they could do.

The exercises they asked me to do didn’t help and worsened my pain. I have told them over the phone and face to face. The impression I got from them is that they didn’t care, they didn’t even pretend they care.

I never had a proper diagnosis of the pain and I had to pay a private service to find out why did I have so much pain and why I didn’t get any improvement.

...I can’t have a normal life and the biggest problem is that I can’t even work because of the pain. I am on the verge of losing my job...Is it worth it to have a service that do nothing to help you when your life is about to fall apart?

...My health insurance is the NHS and MSK Greenwich doesn’t deserve my money”.

Next Steps

We will follow-up on all concerns or issues raised. We will work with commissioners, providers, and service users to understand both where services are working well and where further development may be needed.

Contact Us

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