

# Monthly Feedback Report

December 2022

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## About us

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Royal Borough of Greenwich. We're here to make sure that those running services, put people at the heart of care.



Our Community Engagement Manager, Kiki, with volunteer, Habiba, at Queen Elizabeth Hospital this month

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## What did we hear in December?

We heard from 209 people<sup>1</sup> about their experience of health and care services in Greenwich.

**“Big thank you to Nursing staff across all the areas but also a special mention for the Orthopaedic teams who were amazing.”**

**“I've been waiting here [A&E Queen Elizabeth Hospital] for 13 hours and counting”**

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<sup>1</sup> Feedback collected through calls and emails to us, meetings between us and local groups or advocates, outreach and engagement events, conversations on social media and online reviews.

## Introduction

We are the independent champion for anyone who uses the NHS or publicly funded health or social care in Greenwich. Our role is to hold a mirror up to services by collecting and collating residents experience of health and care services. We are transparent by publishing feedback and in using this insight to work with commissioners, providers, and regulators to improve services for all.

Our open reporting, active questioning, and sharing of insights, positive experiences, and concerns offers a rich bank of learning for all with an interest and commitment to equity within health and care services.

## Primary care

### Booking GP Appointments

We heard that you can book same day telephone call-backs or appointments at several GP practices.

**“ Very good GP Practice. The receptionists have always been polite. The Doctors try their best. If you phone at 8am you will get a telephone call back from a GP on that day. I feel very lucky to have this surgery. I appreciate everyone. Thank you for supporting me<sup>2</sup>**

**“Great GP. They always will do their best to help you get a same day appointment if you urgently need help. Kind staff and attentive doctors. I lived in many places, by far this is the best GP Practice<sup>3</sup>**

However, you said your experience varied and you can't always get face to face or telephone GP appointments, despite trying various methods such as calling at 8am or using an App.

**“You can never get an appointment! Which leaves you feeling vulnerable. Most of the receptionists are unhelpful, abrupt and make you feel like you're expecting too much. Most of the time there's a phone issue. I've called multiple times within the last 26 minutes and can't even get through<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Vanburgh Group Practice

<sup>3</sup> Greenwich Peninsula Practice

<sup>4</sup> Bannockburn Surgery

**“Don't bother calling this surgery at 8am for an appointment... you will be in the queue for over 1 hour... and they will tell you that all the slots are already gone and you will need to call again the next day at 8am<sup>5</sup>**

### Primary Care Response

We are sorry to hear about the negative experiences provided to Healthwatch. We cannot comment on individual cases without knowing the details but we have passed on the feedback to the individual surgeries listed. We realise that getting access to appointments can be frustrating for patients. Primary care services are under a great deal of pressure at the moment and the Greenwich teams are working extremely hard to meet the increase in demand they face. Greenwich GP surgeries are offering around 10% more appointments than prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and all of them are providing face to face appointments when it is clinically required (in October 2022, 62% of appointments were face to face). We continue to work with our GP surgeries to try and improve access but unfortunately there is no straightforward solution.

### Waiting for GP Appointments

You told us the delay in getting a face-to-face GP appointment means:

- You feel your health is deteriorating and your long-term conditions are getting worse.
- You feel 'forced' to use private healthcare as you can't access timely face-to-face NHS GP appointments.

**“The chance of getting an appointment booked face to face is equal to the chance to win the Jackpot on National Lottery. Even a telephone appointment is a good fortune to get booked. Tried for two weeks to book an appointment to see the GP for several accumulated issues, but no luck.<sup>6</sup>**

**“I have an issue that has been ongoing for 3 years. And in this time, I have only been able to see "my" GP once ... I am going private to deal with my health problems...**

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<sup>5</sup> Ferryview Health Centre

<sup>6</sup> Thamesmead NHS Health Centre

**“ I had to wait one year for my diabetes prescription. I had to use my private insurance to find a solution...<sup>7</sup>**

**“ My 5 years old daughter [was] diagnosed with chickenpox via telephone. We found out after paying lots of money to a private GP that it was staph infection<sup>8</sup>**

**“ I was having severe swelling in my ankle, knee and thumb and I consulted my GP. She referred me for MRI in 26 days time which I managed to reduce to 10 days. Looking at the results, she told me she'll refer me for physiotherapy (minimum waiting time for which was 28 days). As a result of this extremely long waiting time and severe pain and swelling I was experiencing, I [paid for] blood tests and Xray, which showed it was Gout... I have had two gout attacks waiting [for NHS treatment]...<sup>9</sup>**

### Primary Care Response

We are sorry to hear about the negative experiences provided to Healthwatch. We cannot comment on individual cases without knowing the details but we have passed on the feedback to the individual surgeries listed. As outlined in our previous response we continue to work with GP surgeries to try and improve access and meet the increase in demand for their services.

### GP services: Quality of care

You praised the quality of communication and care from front desk staff.

**“ I spoke to the receptionist who went above and beyond to help mum out and was very reassuring that the doctor was going to phone. She was very friendly and helpful. I wondered if mum may have a UTI [so] the receptionist said to get a sample for the doctor to dip test to rule out infection and to save time as it's three days before Christmas. She was locking up [the surgery] but**

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<sup>7</sup> Vanbrugh Group Practice

<sup>8</sup> Royal Arsenal Medical Centre

<sup>9</sup> Ferryview Health Centre

**she waited for me to get there and still took time to talk to me even though she was going home.... a very kind and thoughtful receptionist<sup>10</sup>**

**“ Reception staff go above and beyond to help get appointments booked...they listen and try and work around certain times and appointments. I called this morning but missed all of the emergency appointments – instead of just telling me to call back in the morning (which I understand is the advice) one of the kind ladies went above and beyond to check when a medic would be around to discuss the prescription I need and managed to book me in for the following week. Thank you to the staff for always being so polite, kind and caring<sup>11</sup>**

### Strep A Outbreak response

The UK Government announced an increase in the incidence of Strep A and Scarlet fever infections<sup>12</sup>. In line with medication supply issues reported in the national press<sup>13</sup>, we heard that you struggled to get medication for your children infected with Strep A and not all practice staff were well informed.

**“ [when asking for advice] Receptionist told me that she 'googled' Strep A!<sup>14</sup>.**

**“ I cannot find a local pharmacy that has kids' penicillin in stock**

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<sup>10</sup> Waverley Practice

<sup>11</sup> Eltham Palace Surgery

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/group-a-streptococcal-infections-activity-during-the-2022-to-2023-season/group-a-streptococcal-infections-second-update-on-seasonal-activity-in-england-2022-to-2023>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pharmacists-able-to-supply-alternative-penicillin-to-treat-strep-a>

<sup>14</sup> St Mark's Medical Centre

### **Response from NHS south east London ICB (Greenwich):**

Before Christmas there was a national surge in demand for the liquid (the suspension form) of penicillin and some antibiotic tablets. This led to a temporary interruption of supply which has been addressed nationally. In the interim, we asked GPs to take alternative temporary measures to ensure children who needed antibiotics received them (eg prescribing antibiotics in tablet form and advising parents how to crush the tablets if necessary).

The feedback relating to St Mark's Medical Practice has been passed on to the St Mark's team.

## **Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust**

### **Queen Elizabeth Hospital: A&E**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital's (QEH) A&E department is extremely busy<sup>15</sup>. Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust advise you to call 111 for non-life-threatening emergencies.

You told us you waited many hours to be seen:

**“I couldn't believe it. It was wall to wall [with] people**

**“I've been waiting here for 13 hours and counting**

You told us NHS staff at Queen Elizabeth Hospital are working hard to deliver high quality compassionate care despite the extreme pressure:

**“Nurses were amazing... they looked after me very well**

**“There was a long wait for a bed, however [the] level of care, compassion, kindness, and communication was excellent despite the department being completely full. Staff [were] extremely busy and never standing still. Every member of staff introduced themselves and kept us fully informed regarding her results, treatment and bed wait.**

**“Getting brilliant attention from all [Queen Elizabeth Hospital] staff who are buzzing around like bees**

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.lewishamandgreenwich.nhs.uk/latest-news>

### **Response from Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust:**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, along with wider NHS services has seen extreme pressure on emergency pathways. We strive to deliver the best possible care and it is difficult knowing that we cannot offer quicker wait times at the moment. This winter has been one of the most challenging so far, and we are working very hard to make changes both inside the hospital and with our system partners across Greenwich & Bexley to improve flow.

### **Orthopaedics department**

You told us you received high quality care from the orthopaedics department. You found staff compassionate, understanding and communicative.

**““ I have MS and last month I damaged my wrist, I went to the orthopaedics department at QE. I was genuinely impressed with the service. They are very good at listening and they have a clear understanding of the pain I was getting and took on board everything I explained to them. They seemed to know that my pain threshold is different because I have MS and they acted on it. I can't praise the service enough**

**““ Big thank you to Nursing staff across all the areas but also a special mention for the Orthopaedic teams who were amazing. They came to update early morning, late night and at routine ward round times to review and update. One Dr took extra time to actually come back, pull up a chair and spend quality time sitting and explaining the procedure to reassure my daughter as she was extremely anxious and upset. This action by the Dr was hugely beneficial, effective and greatly appreciated.**





A group of Healthwatch Greenwich volunteers.

## ***Saffia's experience: "My GP practice told me they don't have a complaints procedure"***

Saffia is a Muslim woman in her 50s with fibromyalgia and arthritis. Her conditions are worsened by colder weather and make it difficult for her to work.

***"By the end of the working day, the pain is so overwhelming I have to sleep so I don't feel the pain"***

Saffia wants to retire, because of her health, but her employer says they've not received the information they need from her GP<sup>16</sup>. Saffia has been struggling to contact her GP. ***"It's standard practice for me to use two phones to phone my GP practice. I always phone just before 8am so that I can be one of the first in the queue – and this doesn't always work. I feel like I'm being sent around the houses – there's no one helping me and it should be quite a simple thing. I need***

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<sup>16</sup> Royal Arsenal Medical Practice



***to prove my medical records and communicate them to my employer. It's causing me a lot of anxiety and stress"***

Saffia's condition, especially during the winter months, is making her feel low and is affecting her mental health. To manage the stress and anxiety, Saffia uses 'Time to Talk': Talking Therapies provided by Oxleas NHS Trust. ***"Time to Talk are very helpful. On Monday I had my session and spoke about the issues I've been having with the GP and occupational health. At the moment, I feel like the only thing keeping me sane is my faith [Muslim]"***

Saffia woke up one day in extreme pain. ***"I tried to get through to my GP practice but it was impossible – I was number 20 in the queue at 8am and then when I finally got through, there were no appointments left"***

Left with no other option, Saffia phoned 111. ***"111 advised me to go to A&E. It was absolutely horrendous in there – it was just so busy. I was waiting for over 8 hours in pain, just to be told caffeine was irritating my stomach and sent home with painkillers"***

After many months spent (unsuccessfully) trying to get her GP practice to share information with her employer's occupational health, Saffia decided to make a formal complaint. ***"I went into the practice and asked the receptionist for the complaints process. She told me that they didn't have one! I looked on their website and there is no complaints process or contact details for complaint information"***

At her next appointment, Saffia asked her GP about making a complaint. In contrast to what she was previously told by the receptionist, the GP said there was a complaints process. ***"The GP told me that she could print out the process for me but completely forgot. I left the GP practice for the third time without the complaints process, despite asking them three times".***

Not knowing how to proceed, Saffia addressed a complaint letter to the practice manager and handed it into reception. ***"I asked how long it would take for them to respond to my letter and the receptionist said it would take up to 6 months. Weeks later, and I've not even had an acknowledgement that they have received it and I'm not sure I've even submitted a proper complaint"***

### Response from primary care:

All GP surgeries are required to have a complaints procedure

We have passed Saffia's feedback on to the Royal Arsenal Medical Centre. They have contacted Saffia and arranged a follow up discussion with her. The surgery have published a summary of their complaints procedure on their website, including how to complain. They have also committed to ensure all of their staff are aware of the complaints procedure and how to access it through staff training.

***Nina's experience: "It's like no one is listening to me. It feels like people don't want to help you and that is extremely depressing"***

Nina is a carer and has power of attorney for her husband Michael who has Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis (PPMS). Nina and Michael were given his diagnosis over the phone. ***"The way we were told that my husband has incurable cognitive decline last year was not very sensitive... They delivered the information in such a blasé way... They asked if he had any more questions. Michael is forgetful and confused – he didn't have any questions – I don't know what would have happened if I wasn't there to probe and get more information out of them. I came away from that call feeling shocked, upset, and unsupported. Michael could not possibly navigate this system by himself. He can't remember things he has been told. I'm worried about what could have happened if I wasn't there to support him"*** Nina would have preferred a face-to-face appointment to receive this distressing news and to have been given some written information about the condition to take away.

Nina and Michael have an MS Nurse (from the National Hospital for Neurology). In more than a year, they've received two calls from their nurse. ***"I feel like I have to hound them just to get a follow-up. If you don't hound them – you're not on their radar.*** Nina said she came away from the two calls feeling like something might happen – that she might get support, but nothing happens. ***In the last video call we had in September, she said that she would look into allocating us***

***an Occupational Therapist (OT) and source some support for filling out benefit forms as a carer. I came away from the call feeling enthused... I thought, "finally, someone is going to help us on a practical level". But, months later... I haven't heard anything from her since... I've been left on my own with all the stress and worry and to sort out all the paperwork"***

Michael can't use the toilet and Nina has to find/order catheters for him. This is not always straightforward. ***"I went to my local pharmacy and they had run out. I phoned III and they told me to just go to the pharmacy – who had run out. I went to Lewisham hospital and to my GP and they both said they didn't have them – which I just can't believe. The GP told me to go to the pharmacy, again, so I was just getting sent around in circles. It would have been really good to know how to sort out this type of practical arrangement from the very beginning. It would have been great to have a repeat order set up in advance, so I don't have to run around like a headless chicken"***

Navigating the healthcare system has made Nina feel depressed and despondent. It's affected her work and social life as her caring duties take all her time and energy. ***"It's like no one is listening to me. It feels like people don't want to help you and that's extremely depressing... they could at least say something like, "I'm sorry I cannot help you" Instead of fobbing you off onto the next person. It's as though people are deliberately trying to make a really difficult situation even harder."***

Nina's husband saw a neurologist at Lewisham Hospital who advised the importance of Vitamin D levels and ordered blood tests for Michael at his GP practice. ***"This was one of the very few things we can actually do to try to improve his condition. So it was important that we found out how much Vitamin D he could take safely"*** Michael had the blood test and was told the results would be ready in a week's time. Nina did not hear from the GP practice for nine days, so she phoned reception to ask for the results. ***"The receptionist said that the results were "normal". I tried to probe more – to find out if they had any more information – I explained that the point of the test was to find out about Vitamin D levels. The receptionist said she couldn't tell me and if I wanted to know more I'd have to make an appointment for three weeks' time or tell the neurologist to request the results himself"***

Poor communication between the GP and neurologist is adding to her stress. ***“I wrote to the neurologist and he said he was “surprised” the GP practice would not share the results with us, and that if we gave him an email address, he would of course request them for us. I finally got through to the GP surgery only to be told they don’t give out their email address to patients and the neurologist should have it. I told the receptionist he clearly doesn’t have it since he asked me for it. They said his secretary could ring and get it, but they won’t give it to me.*”**

***I doubt the neurologist’s secretary has half an hour to spare to spend on hold as we do every time we try and get through. I just want to get some help for my husband but every experience with the GP surgery feels like another mountain to climb and makes me feel extremely depressed”***

Nina has lost faith in the GP practice<sup>17</sup>. ***“The last time my husband had a GP appointment, the GP did not even know that he has MS, even though he is very badly affected by it”***

Her husband’s diagnosis and treatment has impacted Nina’s mental health. She’s finding it difficult to enjoy life and feels isolated. She’s not been given information of where or how she can find informal support or of any carers organisations. She’s self-referred for Talking Therapies via Time to Talk. ***“As I’m caring for my husband full-time, it was hard for me to find the time to talk privately with the mental health assessor. I was disappointed that they phoned me late – with no apology”*** Following her initial mental health assessment, Time to Talk have followed up with Nina telling her they are extremely busy and are working with an organisation called Xyla who will be in touch with an expected waiting time for treatment (from assessment) of 4.5 months. ***“If I’d known it was going to take this long to start talking therapies, I would have come forward a lot sooner... It was just so hard for me to make that first step... I had to get to a point of desperation”***

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<sup>17</sup> Vanbrugh Group Practice

### Response from providers:

Michael is currently receiving support from Hospital services and his GP. In addition, Oxleas provide community based support including a community Neuro Rehabilitation service and the Joint Emergency Team (JET), both of which can be accessed following a referral by his GP. The teams can establish if his needs are urgent and where his needs would best be met, for example, both teams have access to Occupational Therapy and JET can facilitate a carers assessment. In these circumstances we recommend contacting the GP to refer to the Neuro Rehabilitation service. The team will be able to identify how community health services can best support Michael and Nina.

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital, along with wider NHS services has seen extreme pressure on emergency pathways. We strive to deliver the best possible care and it is difficult knowing that we cannot offer quicker wait times at the moment. This Winter has been one of the most challenging so far, and we are working very hard to make changes both inside the hospital and with our system partners across Greenwich to improve peoples experiences. All parts of the system are striving to work together to provide a seamless service. As integrated care systems develop it will be really important to listen to patient stories such as Nina's so that system partners can work collaboratively to address and ensure the experiences are improved, safe governance processes are in place to support to access support when and where they need to.

## Next Steps

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

## Contact Us

For more information on our feedback report, contact Steve:

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