

Monthly Feedback Report

January 2023

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 two of our volunteers, Morgan and Lydia.

What did we hear in January?

We heard from 165 people¹ about their experience of health and care services in Greenwich.

“**Dr A is the best GP there is. Always professional, calm, and kind. Never makes you feel like an inconvenience. Every appointment with him feels easy and productive. I trust him with my life. Reception staff at all the surgeries always lovely and patient.**”

- GP practise patient

“**Being ill or having medical issues fills me with anxiety because I know how impossible it will be to get support from the GP.**”

- GP practise patient

¹ 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.

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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

GP services – booking appointments.

You told us that reception staff at some GP practices are kind, friendly and professional, and same day appointments over the phone or through e-consult are possible.

“I have 2 little girls and I ALWAYS get an appointment within 24hours. Doctors and receptionists are always extremely nice and go the extra mile to help if I am attending an appointment on my own.”

-Service user, primary care

“Easy booking and in-person appointment.

I find the online consultation very accessible and quick. Doctors give a ring back a day or less after submitting consultation- online and booking face to face appointment was easy.”

-Service user, primary care

However some of you told us that reception staff at some surgeries are unhelpful and in a few cases, rude or unprofessional. You struggle to get through to your GP practice on the phone, often finding the line disconnected after 30 minutes.

“The receptionist is often unfriendly and rude, making me feel stressed every time I meet her and often behaving in an offhand manner that I find unprofessional. I don’t feel like I am valued or respected – or indeed being looked after – when I am there.”

- Service user, primary care

“Impossible to ever get appointments. The line often hangs up after you’ve been in the queue for a while and when you call back they’re all gone and you have to go through the whole 30 mins waiting process again when calling back at lunchtime.”

-Service user, primary care

GP services – Clinical staff

Most GPs and nursing staff are praised for their professionalism, care and compassion.

“My experience at this GP is always great. Very polite, very diligent and doctors always take the time to discuss and analyse.”

-Service user, primary care

“Would like to thank Dr B for quick and efficient dealing of my most recent consultation – great example of how online consultation can be useful.”

-Service user, primary care

“Appointment with Dr C was very good. She was caring and did her best to help and got things sorted.”

-Service user, primary care

“I would like to thank the medical receptionists for the warm, friendly and welcoming environment they provided the minute I stepped in and thank you nurse D for being so lovely throughout my consultation. We need more amazing NHS workers like them!”

-Service user, primary care

Experiences are mixed. You don't always feel listened to or treated with kindness. Some people felt the staff at their practise showed little care or compassion. They worried about getting sick because they did not think their surgery could give them the care they needed.

“They should learn to listen properly to patients, not ignore some complaints or shove them off like its nothing.”

-Service user, primary care

“This place is unapproachable, I don't feel like I can contact them for any issues anymore.”

-Service user, primary care

“I was refused a follow-up in-person appointment with a doctor and instead, an unknown doctor called me who was rude, did not listen to me and instead mentioned that he has to follow protocol. No kindness, no compassion or effort to understand me. This left me feeling very anxious, hopeless and confused.”

-Service user, primary care

Response from Primary Care

We are pleased to hear the positive feedback provided to Healthwatch as staff in GP services are working extremely hard to meet a significant increase in demand for their services. However we are sorry to hear about the negative experiences. 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 nationally 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. We continue to work with our GP surgeries to try and improve access but unfortunately there is no straightforward solution.

Hospitals

Queen Elizabeth hospital

Staff at Queen Elizabeth are thanked for their hard work and professionalism.

“I always have a pleasant experience when I attend QE hospital. The staff always work hard and deal with the issues promptly.”

“The staff were great, I have no complaints about them.”

Waiting times at A&E are a concern and the cleanliness of treatment rooms could be better.

“I woke up on an examination bed that had not had the paper covering changed from the previous patient- it was crumpled and dirty.”

“My dad has been in and out of this hospital. I had to come up twice. Had no letter or follow ups. Left him in pain. Now we're here again waiting 5 hours and still no help.”

Gina's experience: “No one offered me a BSL translator, I just wanted someone to talk to me.”

Gina, a deaf service user, was admitted to Queen Elizabeth Hospital after two days of severe pain. Her son, Adam, had to drive her to the Emergency Department as they couldn't get an ambulance. *“I tried to call the ambulance using my minicom (textphone), but no one was picking up the phone. Adam tried to call the ambulance and was on the phone for an hour. They said they would call back in the next hour or so but they never did. I was in so much pain he had to take me to hospital in his car.”* After arriving at the hospital Gina waited 12 hours for a bed. *“They finally found me a bed at midnight.”*

Despite repeatedly telling staff she was deaf, Gina wasn't offered a BSL interpreter. When she asked for an interpreter, they never showed up. Adam had

to stay with Gina to act as her interpreter. *“I had to stay for 3 days. The whole time I was in Queen Elizabeth I was not offered a BSL interpreter. My son couldn’t go to work, he couldn’t leave me because he had to translate for me.”*

Gina described how she was treated as a deaf patient. *“The nurses are terrible – they don’t have the patience or the knowledge to interact with deaf patients. The nurse on my ward was explaining something to me but I couldn’t understand her because she was wearing a face mask. I asked if she could wear a face shield instead so I could lip-read, but she refused. My son had to explain everything to me, he was very upset with the nurse, who still refused to wear a face shield even after he explained that I was deaf.”*

After 3 days, Gina was transferred to St Thomas’ Hospital by ambulance. Gina described ambulance staff as being “very helpful” but she still wasn’t offered a BSL interpreter.

At St Thomas’, Gina wasn’t offered a BSL interpreter. *“Again, I wasn’t offered a BSL translator. My son couldn’t work or do anything because I had to keep asking him to translate. Eventually my sister had to take over and translate for me via face time on my mobile phone.”*

The lack of interpreter made communicating with the staff difficult and frustrating. As a result, Gina didn’t fully understand the details of her treatment. *“They (the doctors) said they could not give me anaesthesia for my procedure and didn’t explain why. I wanted them to put me to sleep so I didn’t feel any pain. I asked for a consent form to sign because I wasn’t sure if I was comfortable going through the procedure yet, but they said there wasn’t one. When I asked if I had any other treatment options, they told me this was the only one.”*

Gina found the experience uncomfortable and frightening and felt the doctors treating her didn’t seem to care. *“The doctor was so rough with me – I was screaming, but he ignored me, even when I told him he was being too rough with me. The nurse just told me to calm down. I ended up fainting and don’t know what happened next. The next day I had a big bruise under my arm. I called for a nurse, who was very kind– she got me the forms to make a complaint. Another doctor came and apologised for all the trouble and the*

doctor who treated me apologised for being so rough, but he should have been more careful in the first place.”

Gina found her experience terrible. *“Not having a BSL interpreter impacted on how involved I could be with my care. I just wanted someone to talk to me. I was really upset- every time the doctors and nurses came round, they just wrote things on paper. People often don’t realise that deaf people don’t always understand written English because it is many deaf people’s second language. BSL is our first language. It’s a very visual language, so many deaf people miss important context or underlying meanings when things are written down. Anything I wasn’t sure about, I had to call my sister to interpret for me. After I was discharged, I had Greenwich community nurses looking after me - but they still didn’t arrange for any BSL interpreters, so I still couldn’t communicate. No one has been trained on deaf awareness.”*

Gina stressed the importance of deaf services users having access to BSL interpreters when they use health and social care services. *“They really should provide a translator as soon as they realise they have a deaf patient. Hospitals need more deaf awareness training and there needs to be more BSL interpreters or communication support workers.”*

Response from Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust:

The Trust offers a face to face and video BSL interpreting service in the Emergency Department and on wards, and we’re disappointed to hear that this was not offered to Gina. We have reminded staff that they should always offer the BSL service to patients who are deaf. We would also encourage anyone with concerns about their care to contact our PALS and complaints service, which will carry out a full investigation.

Response from Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust:

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust community nurses in Greenwich can arrange for a BSL translator. We have been informed that there is a national shortage of qualified BSL interpreters and are advised to book as far in advance as possible and to be flexible. We are sorry for the impact of this experience and will remind our staff of the importance of booking BSL translators.

Response from Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust:

We are very sorry to hear about Gina's experiences at the Trust, both in terms of the quality of care she received and the lack of appropriate interpretation support. On both counts, this has clearly fallen short of the high standards we set for ourselves. As an organisation we strive to meet the needs of all of our patients, which includes the provision of BSL interpreters for our deaf patients, and we apologise that Gina was not offered this service. We will continue to learn from this incident and Language Support Services will undertake a campaign to remind our staff about when and how to arrange language support for patients who need it. We will be pleased to update Healthwatch Greenwich in the near future. We would always encourage any patients, or their families or carers, to contact the Trust directly with any concerns about their care, so we can try and address them as quickly as possible.

London Ambulance Service

Interactions with the London Ambulance Service (LAS) are very positive with 'kind and reassuring' staff.

“Their tone of the voice, they listened to what I had to say. They didn't question me too much about what I had to say. The person answering the phone was very good.”

You are given information clearly and understand the next steps in your care.

“I think the system of being able to call 111 is working well and the procedure of, you speak to someone, you're triaged and then you're told what the next step will be. So, I think it's a clear system and the process works well.”

Waiting times are a concern. Not knowing how long to wait for a response is frustrating.

“Over 5 hours I was just waiting, and I was not informed of any updates or whether they would definitely be coming.”

Cost of living crisis

Impact on health and wellbeing

During our outreach and community engagement, you told us how rising prices are affecting every aspect of your lives – from sitting at home in the cold, buying cheaper processed food (often high fat/salt content), going without toiletries, putting off buying essentials like winter clothing, and not visiting family and friends because of transport costs.

A third² of you told us you were cutting back on buying food, or switching to buying cheaper, more highly processed food.

3 in 4 of you said you worry about how to pay bills, and more than half of you told us you suffer from low mood or feel more anxious as a result.

Increases in the cost of living does not affect all groups equally and can exacerbate existing inequalities in health and wellbeing. Read the full report here: [Cost of Living Crisis in Greenwich | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

Fatima's experience: "My daughter is sad and lonely. She just wants to go to school."

Fatima and her daughter Bolade arrived in the country from Nigeria last year. Bolade is 16 and has special educational needs. ***"I have a daughter who is autistic. I want her to go to school but the council told me she needs an assessment first."***

Fatima asked the council for an appointment so Bolade can have the assessment she needs but was told to get a referral from her GP first. ***"The council says Bolade needs a plan, and they sent me a 25 page assessment form to fill out, but that she needs to see a GP first."*** Fatima wasn't offered any help or support to complete the form. When she asked her GP for a referral, she was told she'd have to wait at least 3 months. ***"I asked for an appointment back in November and they said the earliest they could see her was in February. No one explained this system to me. I don't understand why it takes so long."***

² In total, we spoke to 106 Greenwich residents.

Bolade is missing out on her education. She just wants to go to school but the process is too long.

The long wait is stressful for Fatima and Bolade. Unable to go to school, Bolade feels sad and lonely and has no friends to spend time with. Fatima feels overwhelmed and isolated and her physical and mental health is suffering as a result. ***“She just stays at home all day with nothing to do. I don’t know anybody here. My daughter doesn’t have any company here apart from me. She cries every day-it’s too much for her, and it’s affecting my health as well.”*** Fatima is studying but she struggles to attend classes and concentrate. ***“I am a student and have classes that I can’t attend because I can’t leave her alone at home.”***

As new arrivals to the UK, Fatima and Bolade don’t have family, friends, or a support network they can turn to for help or to find out how the ‘system’ for children with special educational needs works. This makes their experience even harder. Fatima is frustrated that the council hasn’t given her any information about any support groups for herself as a parent or any activities or places Bolade can meet and socialise with other children. ***“They have not told me anything. I have heard there are children’s activity centres in Greenwich, but I don’t know how to access them. Bolade is not in school, she needs to be with other children but how and where can I do this?”***

Still waiting for a school assessment, Fatima tried to get a GP appointment.³ ***“I was trying to call the surgery because Bolade was unwell. We went to the surgery at 9am, but there were no appointments available. I was told to ring at 8am the next day to get an appointment, but when I called the next morning, I couldn’t get through. It kept transferring me to an answerphone. I ring and I supposed to do? So I am not happy, not happy at all.”***

Without information and support, Fatima feels she has been left to cope on her own with a system she is unfamiliar with. ***“I just want Bolade to go to school but they say she can’t attend school because of her needs, but she can’t just stay at home all day either. It’s not good for her and it’s not good for me.”***

Response from Royal Borough of Greenwich:

We have requested permission from Healthwatch if the parent would agree to share their details with the Local Authority in order to enable a review on the particular circumstances of the case. The following response is based on not holding the full details of the individual circumstances but it is hoped will provide clarity on the support offered locally for the family mentioned and others in potentially similar situations.

In instances where a request is made for a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), Greenwich has a set process in place to manage requests. Further information on the process and the support available is set out on the Greenwich Local Offer Page. Where families would like independent advice and guidance on the process our Greenwich Special Education Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) is available. SENDIASS also has the role to support individuals to understand differences between a statutory needs assessment providing more general support for families and children with additional needs and EHCPs. The contact details are set out below and have been passed to Healthwatch in order to signpost and promote with families.

SENDIASS Contact: Tel: **020 8921 8402**; Email: sendiass@royalgreenwich.gov.uk;
Mail: **SENDIASS, The Woolwich Centre, 35 Wellington Street, Woolwich, London, SE18 6HQ**

Where a family is arriving into the UK there are particular requirements around immigration status and the admissions process and this may vary dependent upon the particular Government Scheme. Further information on this is set out on the Royal Greenwich website and [can be found here](#). In order to ensure a fair and transparent system, school aged children who do not have an EHCP apply via central admissions system, irrespective of the level of special educational needs. The central admissions application process is available through the Royal Greenwich website. Where a family has queries on the admissions process they can contact the School Admissions Service on 020 8921 8043 and school-admissions@royalgreenwich.gov.uk. Where a child is 16 and over applications

are made directly to the college and would not ordinarily involve the Local Authority Admissions Service.

Families are welcome to contact SENDIASS for support in respect of both school and college admissions for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

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:

- info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk
- Telephone: 020 8301 8340
- Email: Info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/>
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