

September 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 volunteers, Selin and Samson, supporting patients to register with GP practices due to the closure of Clover Health Centre.

What did we hear in September?

We heard from 113 Greenwich residents about their experience of health and care services.

- “ I've been stuck here, stuck indoors, and they said, 'Well, I'm sorry, but you've missed your appointment. You have to start all over again.'
Circle MSK Greenwich
- “ No one from NRS showed up, and Greenwich council had to step in and handle the installation of the shower and toilet bars instead. It should have been done weeks ago. My mother could not have a shower the whole time and she had to have strip washes.
NRS Healthcare

In this report

About us	1
What did we hear in September?.....	1
Primary care.....	2
GP Survey.....	2
Summary of Findings	4
Overall Sentiment	4
Booking Appointments.....	4
Appointment Challenges	4
Most Recent Experience	5
Experience Challenges.....	5
Summary	5
Anna’s Experience: "You’ll have to start the referral process all over again."	6
Vanessa’s Experience: "Mum went weeks without a shower because of this... she was so desperate for a proper wash."	6
Next Steps.....	8
Contact Us.....	8

Primary care

GP Survey

At Healthwatch Greenwich, we regularly receive feedback from service users on their experiences with local GP surgeries. Often, people come to us when things have not gone well, or they are unhappy with interactions at their GP practice. While this feedback is valuable in contributing to service improvements, demonstrating adhering to regulatory standards, and establishing greater trust within the community, the feedback we receive is often in response to specific incidents and may not always offer a comprehensive view.

Earlier in 2023, we conducted a small survey among Greenwich residents to gain a broader view of peoples’ experiences with their GP practice. The primary goal was to gain a deeper understanding of how residents perceive GP services and the underlying reasons for these perceptions, whether positive or negative.

We surveyed 100 Greenwich residents face-to-face. Each survey interview took approximately 10 minutes. The demographic breakdown of participants shows that most of those we spoke to identified themselves from an ethnic minority group, with a smaller proportion identifying as white British. This does not reflect the most recent census findings in which over 55% of Greenwich residents identified as white British¹. We also spoke to more women than men. A small proportion of those we spoke to live with a disability or long-term condition which may be related to the age profile of participants as less than a fifth were 65 or over. A small proportion of those we spoke to were carers.

Ethnicity		
Ethnic minority	White British	Prefer not to say
69	29	2
100		

Gender			
Women	Men	Intersex	Prefer not to say
56	36	2	6
100			

Disability/long term condition (LTC)		
Living with disability or LTC	Not living with disability or LTC	Prefer not to say
10	86	4
100		

Age					
Under 18	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Prefer not to say
5	16	45	19	14	1
100					

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000011>

Carer		
Carer	Not a carer	Prefer not to say
11	85	4
100		

Summary of Findings

Overall Sentiment

The majority of those we surveyed spoke positively about their GP practice, indicating that the quality of care offered is consistently regarded as high. This trend is consistent across demographic groups, with age being the primary factor influencing variations in responses. That is to say that while most people across all age groups were overall happy with their GP practice, positive sentiment increased with age. Older age groups were more positive than younger age groups.

Booking Appointments

Ease or difficulty of getting an appointment is mostly evenly split 50/50. However, younger people (aged 24 and under) find it easier to get an appointment with more than 50% indicating it's somewhat or very easy to get an appointment. This proportion decreases for those aged 25 and over. The challenge of booking an appointment is something we hear regularly from residents, and we often feature this issue in our monthly feedback reports.

Although the numbers are small, there also seems to be a divide between those living with a with disability or long-term condition and those who are not. 63% of those living with a with disability or long-term condition find it somewhat or very difficult to get an appointment, compared to 46% of those not living with a with disability or long-term condition who also found it hard to get an appointment.

Appointment Challenges

The most common reason given for finding it difficult to get an appointment was long waiting times/lack of availability of timely appointments. Three quarters of those who indicated difficulty getting an appointment gave this as the reason. 12% said that it was difficult to get through on the phone to even attempt to try to book an appointment. Conversely, those who found it easy to get an

appointment, cited reasons such as using an app. While technology and the use of apps and electronic forms has undoubtedly made the process easier for some, others are finding this to be a barrier.

Most Recent Experience

Most people had a good or very good experience when they last interacted with their GP practice (64%). The youngest and oldest age groups had the best experiences. Interestingly, 40% of carers reported a poor or very poor experience compared to 22% of those who are not carers.

Experience Challenges

When it comes to patients having a good or bad experience as well as waiting times/difficulty to getting an appointment, the behaviour and communication style of staff play an important role. For those who had a poor recent experience, 75% said it was due to rude or unhelpful staff, while 63% of those who had a good experience said it was due to helpful/polite staff.

Summary

Most people hold a positive view of their GP practice and had a 'good' or 'very good' experience last time they visited. The key concern revolved around long waiting times for appointments and was cited by a large proportion of individuals who reported a 'poor' experience during their last visit. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the significance of staff communication and behaviour as it emerged as pivotal in affecting people's overall experiences. This suggests that, even when faced with long waiting times, the communication and behaviour of staff can have a significant impact on individuals' experience and perceptions of their GP practice.

Limitations

The survey findings are derived from a modest sample size. Our findings are not designed to reflect the experience of all patients who use GP practices in Greenwich. Additionally, our survey contains an uneven distribution in the coverage of GP practices. As such, we do not suggest our findings are applicable to all GP practices in Greenwich. Despite its limitations, our survey offers valuable insight and serves as a useful tool for shedding light on potential issues and areas that warrant further exploration.

Anna's Experience: "You'll have to start the referral process all over again."

Anna lives with a long-standing musculoskeletal condition and faces daily challenges. She is reliant on her partner, who doubles as her carer. Her health has got worse over recent months, leaving her in pain and with limited mobility, restricting her ability to carry out daily living tasks leaving her feeling helpless and frustrated. "I can't move, I can't even lift to cross my arms. I can't do nothing, I've got hands like claws."

After a long wait, Anna was contacted by Circle MSK to say she'd missed her appointment. Anna said she never received the appointment letter and had no idea she had an appointment. "I've been stuck here, stuck indoors, and they said, 'Well, I'm sorry, but you've missed your appointment. You'll have to start the referral process all over again.'"

After a CAT scan and an MRI, Anna was told she'd be referred to a neurosurgeon for further evaluation. "When I inquired weeks later, calling my GP at Eltham Palace, they told me the musculoskeletal department hadn't even sent the referral to the neurosurgeon," Anna says she's been left with no diagnosis, no support, and no explanations. "I feel like I am being strangled; I am afraid I will choke while eating. My muscles don't work, and nobody cares about me."

Vanessa's Experience: "Mum went weeks without a shower because of this... she was so desperate for a proper wash."

Vanessa is a carer for her mother Penny. Earlier in the year, Penny, aged 91, fell and broke her hip. Penny was in hospital until she was able to return home and begin rehabilitation. Vanessa, who lives in Spain, had to return to England to look after her mum. "She's always been fine, and I've never had to worry much about her. But after this fall, I had to come back from Spain and move into her house to care for her," Vanessa says. "Mum was always out, she had local church group meetings, a social club lunch and other clubs that she regularly went to. She hasn't been able to do any of that since the fall, she's desperate to get back to it all".

As part of Penny's rehabilitation, the physiotherapist placed an order with NRS Healthcare, for a shower stall and grab bars for the shower and toilet. These aids would help Penny to have a shower and use the toilet without assistance. The delivery arrived. "The delivery driver came in and asked where the shower stall was going, I pointed to the bathroom, he left the stall in there and said the bars were out of stock and just left". The shower stall was too big for the shower cubicle so Penny couldn't use it. It was left in their lounge. "Mum already had to move her bed down to the lounge, I had to move furniture around to find a place for the wet room chair, its awkward"

The following week, NRS staff arrived to install grab bars in the shower and toilet. "He came in and said he wouldn't fit them because he had no measurements or photos and claimed not to know where they needed to go. I told him that the physio and OT had already sent the details to NRS. I emphasised that it wasn't difficult to see where they needed to be placed, considering it's a small bathroom. I asked him if I needed to sign anything or receive a receipt – he said no." He repeated that he would not be doing the installation and left.

Upset, Vanessa contacted the physio team and told them the grab bars hadn't been installed, and the shower stall was too big. They promptly ordered a smaller shower stall and again requested NRS, to install the bars. Another NRS delivery driver came, with another wet room stall which was not any smaller than the first one. "I refused it on the doorstep, and he took it back, but he wouldn't take the one in the living room because I didn't have a return form or number."

Vanessa contacted NRS to arrange for collection of the too big shower stall and to enquire about the delivery of a smaller shower stall. "I phoned up NRS and spoke to someone and explained. She booked the collection for the 25th. No one came on that date. I phoned on 26th to enquire and they said that they can't take orders from me, it has to go through an OT or physio. So I said why didn't the previous person I spoke to on the phone, who had booked a collection for the 25th, not told me that. When I asked when the smaller shower stall was coming, she said there's nothing on order! The staff on the phone made me feel like I'm asking for the moon. It's my coffee break, I don't get any time to myself and they want me to sort it out like it's my job, not theirs. They made me feel guilty, like I was asking them to do me a favour, imposing myself on them. She said I should try Amazon or Argos or a mobility shop instead of NRS... Mum went six weeks without a shower. We even tried to get a kitchen chair in the shower because she was so desperate for a proper wash."

Penny also had a walker ordered via NRS to help her regain her mobility and walk outside without assistance. A familiar pattern emerged. "They delivered a walker and assembled it, but they didn't provide any guidance on how to use the brakes. It's a safety issue, if mum was out and alone, the walker could roll away from her. Thankfully, the physiotherapist stepped in to show us how to operate it properly. It's not very good, with its four wheels, it tends to move if not secured."

Eventually, NRS delivered a small shower stall. "No one from NRS showed up to install the toilet and shower grab bars, and Greenwich council had to step in and do it. It should have been done weeks ago. My mother could not have a shower the whole time and she had to have strip washes. The carers couldn't provide her with proper training in the shower, so she could shower herself, to boost her confidence and help her regain her independence. If Greenwich council hadn't come to do the bars- I'd still be waiting. NRS are useless—totally useless. They've got no customer care or service; they assume she doesn't need it or care because she's old, but she does. That's what I've picked up that because she is old, she doesn't need it. That's the feeling I get when I talk to them."

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, or to request it in large print or easy read format, contact:

- Chandan@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk
- Telephone: 020 8301 8340
- Email: Info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/>
- Twitter: [@HWGreenwich](https://twitter.com/HWGreenwich)
- Facebook: [healthwatchgreenwich](https://www.facebook.com/healthwatchgreenwich)

