
What we're hearing about North West Surrey

August 2024



"I have Crohn's disease and would normally see my consultant every six months. My last four appointments have been cancelled with no reason given so I have not been examined for 2 years. I hope I will get the next one booked for August as my stomach is not too good."



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Report overview

This report provides insights into local people's views on, and experiences with, health and social care services in North West Surrey. It is based on what people have told us at a series of engagement events in the area, as well as enquiries to our [Helpdesk](#), between February 2024 and July 2024.

Our report focusses on 4 key areas:

- [Spotlight on people living with long term conditions](#)
- [Spotlight on Ashford and St Peter's](#)
- [Spotlight on general practice](#)
- [Spotlight on pharmacy](#)

Please note: Any urgent or concerning experiences within this report have been escalated to the appropriate teams. All appropriate information and advice and signposting has already been given.

If you would like more information or examples of what people have shared, please get in touch.

Recommendations around pharmacy have not been included in this report as they will be shared as part of our involvement in the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment steering group in the coming months.

Insight summary and recommendations

The following table shows evidence and recommendations for the 4 themes highlighted in this report.

Theme	Evidence	Recommendations We recommend that The Alliance considers the following:
<u>People living with long term conditions feel that they are being forgotten.</u>	Appointments at primary and secondary care levels are being cancelled, some patients are going years without being seen.	1. Ensure that those with long term conditions have regular reviews.
<u>People who are waiting for elective surgery are waiting a long time.</u>	People often wait patiently for appointments, but in doing so some people's health deteriorates rapidly. -Our report in 2022 <u>Waiting for hospital care</u> set out to understand the impact of delayed treatment on the health and wellbeing of those waiting. Our aim was to deliver patient centred insight that could guide trusts in their efforts to minimise the detriment of delays.	Ensure people know their rights in terms of chasing/ following up appointments) Review processes to ensure all patients are given the information, advice, contacts and signposting they need to stay well and minimise deterioration while waiting. c) Communicate with patients regularly to reduce stress, improve trust, and reduce timewasting inbound queries. <u>Key actions which ASPH took as a result of our recommendations.</u>
<u>Experiences of general practice.</u>	Limited opening hours of branch surgeries is having a significant impact on patients. Self-management of medications is being made difficult by repeat prescription delays and confusion around the system and process.	2. Review branch opening hours – perhaps encourage the set up of a volunteer driver scheme to enable patients to access the main surgery. 3. Supporting GP practices to develop a 'how to' guide which clarifies the process for obtaining repeat prescriptions in their surgery.

<p><u>Ashford and St Peter's Hospital: clarity of communication with patients and meeting individual needs.</u></p>	<p>People are confused about the MyCare portal – how to use it and what it is.</p>	<p>4. Evaluating the communication which is shared with patients about the MyCare portal and how this could be made clearer.</p>
<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>5. Sharing any other actions related to the experiences presented within this report.</p>

Insights

Spotlight on people living with long term conditions

We have heard from several people who are living with long term conditions, whose regular appointments have been cancelled (some have not been seen for years). This is happening at both primary and secondary care.

Cancellation of consultant appointments

“I have Crohn’s disease and would normally see my consultant every 6 months. My last 4 appointments have been cancelled with no reason given so I have not been examined for 2 years. I hope I will get the next one booked for August as my stomach is not too good.”

209554 February

Lack of regular GP check ups

“My husband is on medication for a few different things. He should have check ups for diabetes, but he hasn’t had one for about 8 years. He was told to check his own blood pressure at home, we had to buy our own monitor for this. He writes his results on a bit of paper and hands it into the GP receptionist. He doesn’t have the NHS App or anything like that to log results.”

216676 Spelthorne resident, June

Spotlight on Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals

We have heard many positive experiences about Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals (ASPH) which we are happy to share here. However, we have also heard a lot of experiences about delays for elective care and delays to appointments for long term conditions.

We understand that the emergency department, (ED) maternity and stroke are key focus areas for ASPH. (Although we did not visit ASPH during our spotlight month, we have continued to hear experiences, via our Helpdesk

and over the course of other engagements). [We have included the maternity experiences in the appendix.](#)

We have a programme of 4 Enter and View visits planned for September in the ED. This will be reported on in October.

Praise

“I had a heart problem and needed stents fitted. My artery perforated during the procedure. I bled out for 15 minutes. The cardiologist saved my life. I had to stay in for 4 days. I had to then go back a month later to have it done again. I was obviously extremely nervous. My care was second to none. I was talked through it and supported. My cardiologist sat with me before the procedure and reassured me.”

215781 June

“I would like to praise the nursing staff on, Robin, Clinical Assessment and Maple ward. Their care and professionalism were outstanding. I do hope that my appreciation will be passed on.”

214623 Spelthorne resident, May

“I’ve got nothing but praise for Ashford and St. Peter’s Hospitals. My husband has a heart condition as well as other medical complaints. I really can’t fault them.”

216723 Spelthorne resident, June

Waiting for elective care

Our report in 2022 [Waiting for hospital care](#) set out to understand the impact of delayed treatment on the health and wellbeing of those waiting. Our aim was to deliver patient-centred insight that could guide trusts in their efforts to minimise the detriment of delays.

- a) Review processes to ensure all patients are given the information, advice, contacts and signposting they need to stay well and minimise deterioration while waiting.
- b) Communicate with patients regularly to reduce stress, improve trust, and reduce timewasting inbound queries.

The **key actions** which Ashford and St Peter's said they took as a result of our recommendations were:

- Recently reviewed communication across the trust to improve clarity and reduce the number of different communications patients receive

The case below demonstrates the impact of delayed surgery, in all of the situations below there has been a deteriorating in the patient's health.

"My husband has had a hiatus hernia and gastric polyps for three years. He has also had stomach ulcers.

He has been unwell for 3 years and is now bedridden. His health has further declined since January. He has been suffering from severe nausea and has now been unable to eat for 19 days. He has recently been sent to A and E for his severe nausea and vomiting. The only solution that he has been offered in the short term is anti-nausea drugs, which do not work.

We are still awaiting surgery for the hernia. He has lost his job due to this condition and the length of time he has been awaiting surgery. His mental health has suffered, and we are in the situation of being unable to pay the mortgage. We have an autistic son and an elderly relative to care for and the strain on the family is becoming unbearable. We have written to our MP and have lodged a formal complaint. I do not understand how a case as urgent as this, for a very common condition, is taking so long to sort out.

I would be more than happy to speak to the media about this. I have some limited experience of this and am confident to articulate my views".

210167 February

"I was referred for an urgent endoscopy and colonoscopy back in November 2022 by the gastroenterologist. I had a traumatic experience and so it was decided for me to do the procedure under general anaesthetic. I was put on the waiting list but they reassured me it was not a long waiting

list. Now a year later and after several promises of dates for surgery and then 3 dates for the procedure being organised and cancelled. Now today I have been told the referral has been cancelled which is extremely upsetting and confusing. My health has deteriorated waiting for this procedure for over a year and I don't know who to reach out to as I need help with this. I don't know what I need to do next to ensure I receive the treatment that I was referred for over a year ago. It's so upsetting, and I am at a loss what to do."

210996 Woking resident, March

"I am looking for some guidance on how to escalate a complaint regarding my father in law. He recently had hand surgery for release of quite severe trigger finger.

He is an independent paraplegic, who also has limited use of his right hand. Last year he had a bout of trigger finger to his left hand that was left untreated/addressed for several months, which ended up requiring surgery to release. This surgery was only pushed forward and addressed after I had raised it with PALS [Patient Advice and Liaison Service] at Ashford and St Peters.

Due to the delay in his treatment/surgery, he is now completely dependent on care / his wife to complete day to day tasks. He has lost strength, so it is borderline impossible to transfer from his chair. He has required assistance maintaining his hygiene and he now cannot leave the house without assistance. He has been further disabled by the NHS.

I am looking to raise this further and require some guidance. [Signposted to Surrey Independent Living Charity (SILC) and complaints, Action for Carers for mother in law, Surrey County Council for care assessments.]

212240 March

Emergency Department

We heard a couple of positive experiences of the care received in A&E. However, we have also heard about the impact of over stretched services, with long waiting times in the corridor, even when admitted by ambulance, and long waits for the ambulance.

“Phoned 111. Decision taken to send ambulance. Ambulance arrived quickly. Paramedics excellent and taken to hospital. Very kind in A&E but waiting was in corridor for about 3 hours then into cubicle for a further 9 hours. Admitted to ward. Sent home following day but readmitted 5 days later.”

212797 April

“I was treated really well in casualty for an undiagnosed exacerbation of COPD. But the GP follow up is not happening. I was sent an inhaler. That's all. I didn't know I had COPD.”

212242 March

“Husband had a stroke. Ambulance didn't arrive so I drove him to hospital urgently. But I was forced to queue for a long time in A&E and had to leave my husband in the car alone. Very upsetting as I didn't know if he would survive or not. No one in the emergency ambulance area would help me even though I told them all the problem. Vital minutes lost.”

213664 April

“111 is a bit useless they just tell you to go to A&E when I've used the service before I ended up going to A&E. I went at 8am and left at 8.30pm. No food was given, when I saw the nurse and the doctor I got good care and they could help me.”

215134 Elmbridge resident, May

Maternity

We have not heard a lot of maternity experiences, one when we held engagement at St David's practice in Stanwell, and one at Bronzefield prison in Ashford.

"I've just been to the St David's practice for my child's 16 week vaccination. It was really easy to book. I booked straight after the eight weeks appointment. I called up to book the appointment. I had my baby at St Peters, the care was lovely. I had consultant led care with midwives. The health visitor has been to my home. I also call in and do weight checks at the Ashford drop in but it's a bit further to go. I've also been to Stanwell, at the family centre, I've been able to call them and it's amazing I was checked at two weeks for weight. I didn't know about booking online via the website – thanks for showing me. I downloaded the app but haven't been using it."

215145 Spelthorne resident, May

"I am 30 weeks pregnant. I'm having my baby in prison and I'm on Methadone. It's far from ideal. I only found out I was pregnant when I came into prison 6 months ago.

When I came in, I was on Pregabalin for anxiety, but they stopped me taking it when they found out I was pregnant. I was on 50ml Methadone, now on 30ml but I wanted to completely come off it. The paediatrician at St Peter's is against me coming off it. The substance use doctor here in prison thinks I should come off it but is being overruled. I really don't want the baby being born addicted to Methadone. It worries me. I want her healthy.

I'm too scared to refuse treatment in case this causes me issues being released. I am worried about the repercussions.

The care at St Peters with midwives has been very good."

215248 Spelthorne resident, May

NHS MyCare

Feedback on the MyCare portal has been less positive, with people feeling confused about how to use it.

"I've just signed up to MyCare after I received an appointment to attend an appointment at Ashford and St

Peter's Hospital. I can see my appointment but when I try to print it, it just comes out blank – what do I do?" [advised to contact ASPH PALS and gave the number]

209389 Spelthorne resident, February

We reported the following feedback in our [‘What we’re hearing about Guildford and Waverley’ report](#) in April 2024.

"I received a text about joining NHS MyCare. I tried to join but I am 84 years old, and I have dyscalculia. I am unable to register as the Patient Portal validation code appears on the screen for only a few seconds. I have tried several times, but this is insufficient time for me to remember the numbers and to add them to the appropriate box. I received a text which started – ‘as a patient of Ashford & St Peter’s Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust or Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust...’ and then it invited me to ‘register for MyCare our joint patient portal.’ When I started to plough my way through the complicated ‘registration’ bit, I did wonder if it was a scam. However, I found a website which seemed to indicate it was genuine. What should I do?"

Spotlight on general practice

GP access difficulties

We have heard from several patients who are frustrated by the lack of available appointments at Chobham Surgery, which is a branch surgery, attached to West End Medical Practice. West End is difficult to access for elderly residents and non-drivers.

"I live in Chobham and I'm looking for advice about our local GP surgery Chobham and West End surgery. It is 2 surgeries for 2 neighbouring villages West End and Chobham. However, in recent years the Chobham surgery is barely open and nearly all appointments are taking place at West End.

For some elderly and those who don't drive it's becoming increasingly difficult to get an appointment at Chobham

and the West End surgery is just not accessible to many people in the village.

No one seems to have an explanation as to why there has been a change.

I can get an appointment same day at the West End surgery when I asked for Chobham I'm given a 3 week wait.

The whole community is having issues and numerous people have written letters of complaint to the doctors.

The doctors have replied but it isn't satisfactory.

Do both practices receive funding? Why is one used more than the other? I now have to wait over 1 month for a blood test as apparently no nurses at the Chobham surgery.

Chobham is only open part time. There's less doctors than before. Elderly patients have no way of getting to the other surgery as there is no bus. The roads have no path or street lighting. Chobham practice is essential.

I'm unsure on how funding works whether it's given per patient. Or if they receive more funding as they are operating two buildings.

Most of the village seems to have moved to an entirely different GP in Lightwater. Complaints have been made to Michael Gove.

Something needs to be done by someone."

214115 Woking resident, May

We escalated this experience to Surrey Heartlands Primary Care commissioner for North West Surrey, who said they had requested a response from the Practice Manager regarding the balance of appointments between the 2 sites and whether there's a discrepancy in waiting times between the sites.

Prescription difficulties

People have told us that managing medications is being made more difficult and stressful by repeat prescription delays and confusion about the system and process.

"I have my husbands' heart tablets on repeat prescription. The dose was upped to 3 a day which meant that he ran out sooner and so needed the prescription sooner. The heart nurse at Woking community hub told me that that she would do this on the Thursday. I then went to collect the new prescription on the Monday and was told by the surgery [Goldsworth Park] that they couldn't give out a new prescription without written permission from the heart failure team at Woking community hospital. I told the nurse that this had been sent last Thursday. I waited until they found the letter. The prescription would normally go to the pharmacy to be collected by me on Tuesday morning. This time I went on Thursday morning [Boots, Knaphill] They said that they didn't have the prescription. I then drove to the surgery and wouldn't leave until I got the prescription. I had to wait half an hour.

Then in early January, the same thing happened again. I didn't receive the prescription and tablets until mid January and he was due to run out completely on the next day. It's just so stressful. It's lucky that I can drive and that I have the time to sort all this out."

208764 Woking resident January

"I use Knaphill Pharmacy - recently changed from Boots to EniMed which also has pharmacies in Horsell and Goldsworth Park.

I took 3 separate prescriptions stapled together. They separated them and this became 3 orders which needed to be collected on different days involving travel and inconvenience."

216996 Woking resident, June

Language needs not being met

We met a patient at our engagement in Stanwell at St David's family practice who needed help with language difficulties.

“I book my appointments over the phone. I do all the appointments for my wife as well she can't speak very good English. We would like an Asian Urdu Hindi speaker at the practice. We have both had chest infections recently and would have liked to have spoken to a GP about it. We're both asthmatic, my wife was checked by the nurse, there's a long wait for the for a GP appointment. I don't do online but my daughter helps me to book appointments I also ask my daughter to help me when we are sent a questionnaire.”

[Signposting: Explained about requesting translation services]

215148 Spelthorne resident, May

Spotlight on Pharmacy: the value of pharmacy and the impact of local closures

In April 2024 Healthwatch England released their report “[Pharmacy: what people want](#)” exploring the current state of pharmacy services and offering recommendations for healthcare leaders and the wider sector. The report is based on a national poll as well as interviews undertaken by local Healthwatch, including Healthwatch Surrey.

In addition to contributing to this national report, we have also been working with 2 specific communities in Guildford and Waverley (Cranleigh and Burpham/Merrow), as well as Thames Ditton, to explore how people have been affected by recent closures and what people want from their local pharmacy provision. We will be using this insight to inform our position as part of the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment steering group in the coming months.

Although this research was not conducted in North West Surrey the findings are relevant here.

Findings at a glance:

- Residents **value the service and clinical expertise** which their local pharmacy can provide – this supports the [Healthwatch England report](#) which found that pharmacies are often the most visible and accessible part of the health system.

- 64% of people would consider going to their pharmacy instead of their GP practice for minor illnesses or health advice.
- The impact of the closure of one pharmacy on the alternative provision in the area is a huge concern for local residents – if alternatives don't meet their needs in terms of capacity, space or opening hours **the value of the service is hugely reduced.**
- **Travel distance from home** is the most important core indicator for people when visiting a pharmacy, but this is more complex than a crude mileage value – **people need to be able to walk or have reliable / accessible / affordable public transport options.**
 - The ease of getting to a pharmacy impacts how often 71% of people go
- Good customer service is also considered to be critically important, but people's **confidence in this is eroded if a pharmacy is seen to not have sufficient capacity.**

Impact of pharmacy closures

"I know from our local councillor that Superdrug is going. The lease upstairs has already gone. I don't know where I'll go where this happens. The shelves at Boots are always empty. Brakespear doesn't open at weekends which isn't good for me. The old Lloyds has limited stock. Tesco in Ashford and Sunbury don't usually have what I need. Ashford isn't a good place to live anymore generally when it comes to things like this. I feel all the money gets ploughed into places like Guildford and Woking. Ashford is forgotten about.

I wouldn't go to a pharmacist instead of a GP as I have epilepsy. I need to see a GP. The things that Pharmacy First deals with don't apply to me. And a pharmacy advisor can't prescribe my medication. I've been affected by shortages on a specific drug that I need. Every pharmacy in Ashford didn't have it in. In the end I went to Boots in Staines.

At the moment my GP sends my prescription to Superdrug. They have a shortage of pharmacists in there though so there is always a wait."

218436 Spelthorne resident, July

“I have had appointments on the phone to get repeat prescriptions for tablets that I take. I used to collect them from the Boots in Knaphill but then I heard it had closed and so I changed to the one in St Johns [Woking]. The one here [Knaphill] is so much more convenient for me as I can collect them and then pop in here for a coffee. I’m going to swop back. They don’t text you when your medication is in like Boots used to, they just said to turn up in 4 days and it should be there. I liked the texting as then you knew that it was definitely there, and you wouldn’t waste a journey if it wasn’t.”

217036 Woking resident, June

Appendix

“I had my baby at St Peter’s, the care was lovely. I had consultant led care with midwives. The health visitor has been to my home. I also call in and do weight checks at the Ashford drop in but it’s a bit further to go. I’ve also been to Stanwell, at the family centre, I’ve been able to call them and it’s amazing I was checked at 2 weeks for weight. I didn’t know about booking online via the website – thanks for showing me. I downloaded the app but haven’t been using it.”

215145 Spelthorne resident, May

About Healthwatch Surrey

Healthwatch Surrey champions the voice of local people to shape, improve and get the best from NHS, health and social care services. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure decision makers listen to the experiences of local people.

We passionately believe that listening and responding to local people's experiences is vital to create health and social care services that meet the needs of people in Surrey. We seek out people's experiences of health and care services, particularly from people whose voices are seldom heard, who might be at risk of health inequalities and whose needs are not met by current services. We share our findings publicly and with service providers and commissioners to influence and challenge current provision and future plans.

We also provide reliable and trustworthy information and signposting about local health and social care services to help people get the support they need.

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We are proud to be commended in the National Healthwatch Impact Awards, recognising our work helping to improve local NHS and social care. You can view [our video](#) highlighting how feedback has enabled us to make positive changes to health and social care services.



We are committed to the quality of our information. Every 3 years we perform an audit so that we can be certain of this.

Luminus

The Healthwatch Surrey service is run by Luminus Insight CIC, known as Luminus.

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