Healthwatch Southampton GP Website Audit Report May 2025

About us

Healthwatch Southampton is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and other decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Contents

Introduction

In Spring 2024, Healthwatch Southampton asked Southampton residents to feedback on what is most important to them in relation to health and social care in the city. GP services continued to be people's top priority, which included how they access their GP services/practices. GP websites are a key tool for practices to communicate with patients accessing their services. GP websites also support practices to manage patient expectations and improve patient experiences. Healthwatch Southampton had previously completed a GP website audit for all NHS practice websites in Southampton in 2023 (GP-Website-audit-report-V3.pdf). The audit evaluated websites' accessibility and useability against 36 criteria which have been developed by NHS England (https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/gp-website-benchmarking-and-improvement-tool/).

Healthwatch Southampton repeated the same website audit from November 2024 until February 2025 but this time we not only assessed the websites against the patient priorities (36 criteria), but also the practice priorities (14 criteria) from the NHS GP website benchmarking tool.

The only Southampton practice website this audit did not assess was Hampshire Foundation Trust's Homeless Healthcare as this website offers services that are different from the typical general practice and will need to contain different information.

This report summarises the key findings of the GP website audit, focusing on common areas of improvement and examples of best practice. Healthwatch Southampton has also sent each practice its own practice-level results separately and stay connected with practices to observe how they implement the improvements suggested by our audit.

Overall results

A website could meet each of the audit's tool criteria well, adequately, or inadequately. Ideally, all criteria should be met well. If all criteria are met well, then the website is likely to be the most user friendly for the patient.

The average score for the patient priority criteria across the 24 GP websites in Southampton on the 2024-2025 audit was 23 well, 14 adequate, and 14 inadequate (out of the 36 total metrics).

In comparison, the average score for the 2023 audit was 10 well, 15 adequate, and 11 inadequate (out of the 36 total metrics). However, there was significant variation in GP websites' scores. The highest-scoring website received 46 well and 0 inadequate (out of the 50 total metrics for both patient and practice priorities). Whereas the lowest-scoring website received 10 well and 28 inadequate. Figure 1 displays the overall results of the GP website audit. The 36 metrics in the table run in order from the highest to lowest number of well scores across the 24 GP websites.

Figure 1: Summary of Southampton GP Website audit results.

#	Requirement	Total well	Total Adequate	Total Inadequate
13	Information about ordering repeat prescriptions	23	1	0
31	Navigation: Practice name/logo in the header links back to home	18	2	4
1	Overlays and pop ups	17	4	3
21	Finding the 'Contact Us' page	17	5	2
17	Content on the prescriptions page is well structured (with clear headings and short paragraphs)	16	6	2
11	Home visits	15	6	3
6	Information about routine/ pre bookable appointments	14	4	6
26	Online accessibility statement	14	5	5
7	Information about changing/ cancelling an appointment	13	6	5
10	Explanation of when and how to use NHS app or alternatives	13	7	4
35	Volume of copy on the homepage	13	7	4
12	Finding the prescriptions page	12	3	9
14	Information about online ordering	12	5	7
27	NHS look and feel	12	8	4
30	Menu visibility	12	12	0
5	Information about urgent on the day appointments	11	9	4
9	Using recommended terms to describe Online form/OC - content	11	10	3
2	Finding the appointments page	11	10	3
23	Opening hours on the 'Contact Us' page	11	10	3
3	Appointments page	10	4	10
19	Get my test results via phone	10	9	5
16	Find your nearest pharmacy	10	9	5
24	Out of Hours information on the 'Contact Us' page, including information about 111	10	11	3
8	Information about using an online form/OC to request help from the practice	8	3	13
4	Length and structure of the content on the appointments page	8	5	11
28	Using NHS design components	7	13	4
25	Physical accessibility statement	7	15	2
32	Search box visible to users	6	10	8
20	Get my test results online	6	12	6
18	Finding test results information	5	6	13
15	Information about how to raise a query about my medication.	4	1	19
29	Main menu	4	4	16
36	Homepage provides quick links to key patient tasks	4	6	14
33	Search results delivering relevant results for key patient tasks	4	12	8
22	Information on the 'Contact Us' page	4	15	5
34	Reading age of key copy	0	4	20

HWS GP Website Audit 2024-2025: Patient Priorities (36 metrics)
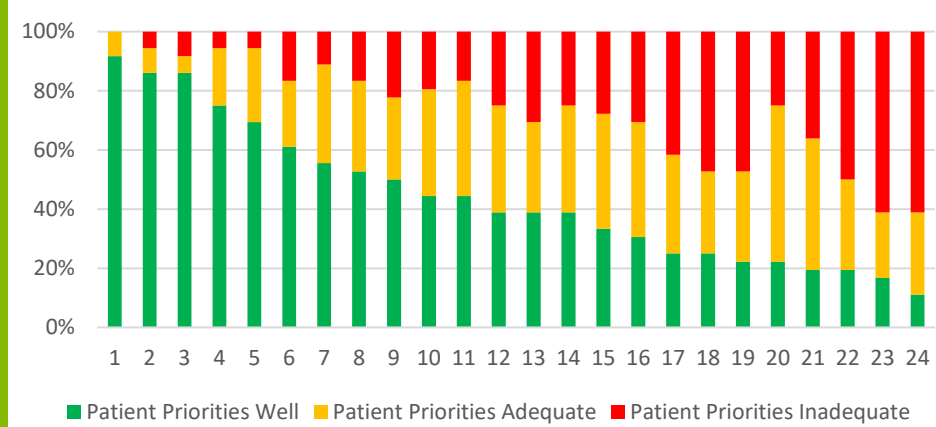

Figure 2: Column chart showing the patient priority scores (36 criteria) of the 24 Southampton GP Practices in the 2024-2025 audit

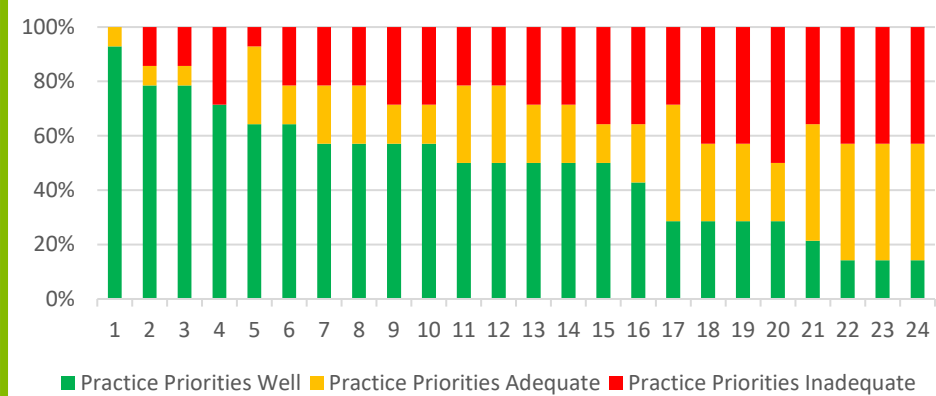## HWS GP Website Audit 2024-2025: Practice Priorities (14 metrics)

Figure 3: Column chart showing the practice priority scores (24 criteria) of the 24 Southampton GP practices in 2024-2025 audit

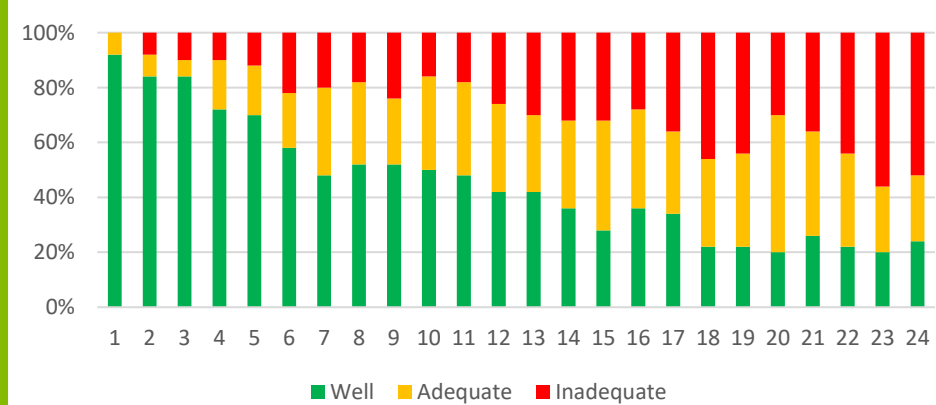## HWS GP Website Audit 2024-2025: Patient and Practice Pririties (50)

Figure 4: Column chart showing the patient and practice priority scores (50 criteria) of the 24 Southampton GP practices in the 2024-2025 audit

Best performing and improved metrics

Prescriptions

The metric (13) where the most GP websites scored Well (23 out of 24) was on giving information about ordering repeat prescriptions. The prescriptions page should have information on how to get a repeat prescription and the channels through which a patient can order a repeat prescription. The page should also include how to nominate a pharmacy and how this is required for online ordering of prescriptions. When scoring well, the GP Practice website showed clear instructions on how to order repeat prescriptions, with a contact number/email/link. Many of the websites (16 out of 24) also scored well on metric 17, which asks that the content on the prescription page is broken into sections with clear headings and that the copy is made up of short paragraphs (30-60 words). However, finding the prescription page was an area that could be improved for many GP practice websites. Only 12 out of 24 of the websites audited scored well in this area. This should include a page or section called 'Prescriptions' is visible in the main menu and a link to prescriptions page in the top third of the homepage (ideally above the fold).
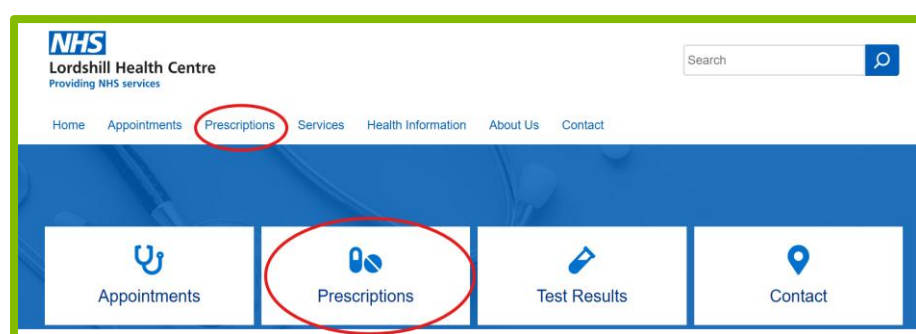

Figure 5: An example from Lordshill Health Centre Website showing a clear menu item and quick link for the prescription page.

Appointments

One of the most notable improvements between 2023 to 2025 is on the metric on providing information about routine/ pre bookable appointments. This is one of the key functions of a GP website and therefore important to get it right for the patients. In 2023 only 6 out of 25 websites that were audited scored well for this metric which requires them to have "a distinct, easy to find section in the appointments page, called 'routine appointments'. A clearly written explanation of all options available with relevant additional information and links e.g.: clearly labelled links to online consultation or direct booking tool or a phone number. During the most recent audit (2024-2025) there was a significant increase (17 out of 24) in websites scoring well on this metric.
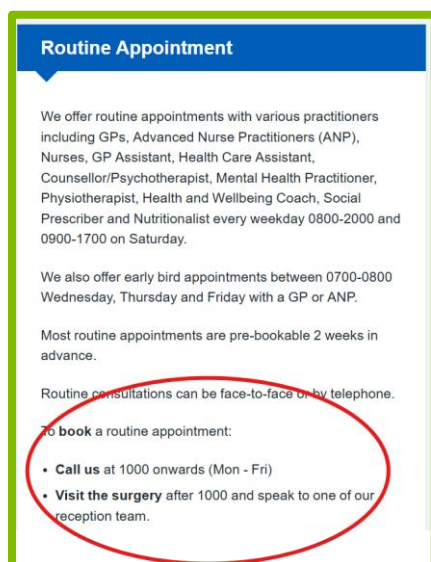
Routine Appointment

We offer routine appointments with various practitioners including GPs, Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANP), Nurses, GP Assistant, Health Care Assistant, Counsellor/Psychotherapist, Mental Health Practitioner, Physiotherapist, Health and Wellbeing Coach, Social Prescriber and Nutritionalist every weekday 0800-2000 and 0900-1700 on Saturday.

We also offer early bird appointments between 0700-0800 Wednesday, Thursday and Friday with a GP or ANP.

Most routine appointments are pre-bookable 2 weeks in advance.

Routine consultations can be face-to-face or by telephone.

To **book** a routine appointment:

• **Call us** at 1000 onwards (Mon - Fri)
• **Visit the surgery** after 1000 and speak to one of our reception team.

Figure 6: An example from St Peter's Surgery Website showing clear instructions on how to book a routine appointment.

Navigating the Website and Main Menu

There has been an improvement in the metric for the main menu. To score well on this metric, a website needed one main menu with seven or fewer items. The menu needed to contain sections for home, appointments, and prescriptions.

- 2023 audit - 21 out of 25 scored inadequate, only 2 websites scored well.
- 2024-2025 audit 13 out of 24 scored inadequate and 8 scored well.

However, being able to navigate a website to find information is of primary importance, HWS would like to see further improvement in this area going forward.
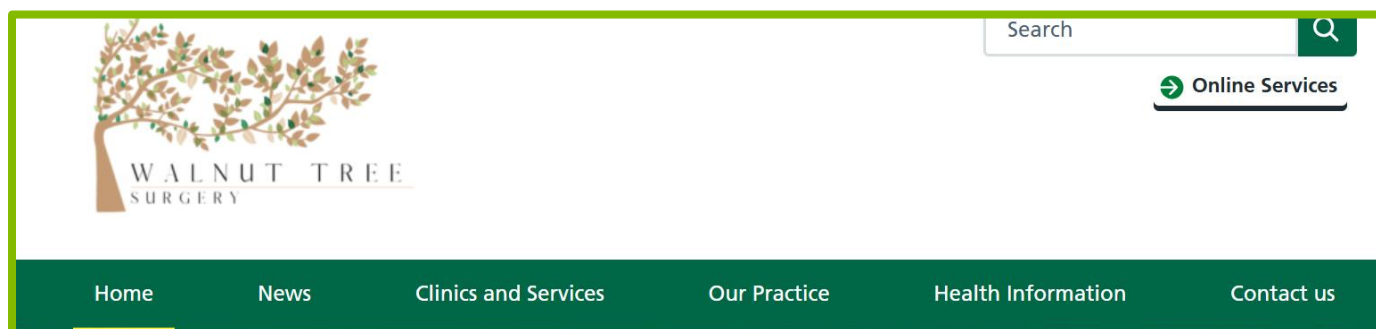

Figure 7: Example from Walnut Tree Surgery website showing on 6 main menu items.

There were also some metrics that many of the websites scored well in, but it was a reduction in the audit results of 2023:

- 17 out of 24 websites scored well for the "Finding the 'Contact Us' page" metric. To score well on this metric, a website required one click to navigate from the main menu to a 'contact us' page. This is a reduction from the last Healthwatch Southampton website audit in 2023 where 20 out of 25 websites scored well.
- 13 out of 24 websites scored well for "menu visibility". To score well on this metric, websites needed a main menu that is visible on the desktop view and accessible on the mobile view, such as by clicking a clearly labelled button. This is a reduction from the last Healthwatch Southampton website audit in 2023 where 16 out of 25 websites scored well.

Finding your nearest pharmacy

To score well on this metric, a website needed to include information about what pharmacies can do, including information on finding a local pharmacy. To score well, this information needs to be on the website's main prescriptions page.

In the 2023 website audit 20 websites scored inadequate for this metric, 4 adequate, and 1 well. When a website scored inadequate, it was usually because they had little to no information about pharmacies on their website. The most recent audit (2024-2025) saw an improvement in this area with 14 websites scoring well, 4 adequate and 6 inadequate.

Key areas for improvement

Reading age of website text

In the UK, 7.1 million adults read at, or below, the level of an average nine-year-old. More than four in ten adults struggle to understand health content written for the public.

The Hemingway Editor (https://hemingwayapp.com/) provides automated estimates of a text's reading age. For a website to score well on this metric, the text on both the "appointments" and "prescriptions" pages needed to score grade 5 or below on the Hemingway Editor. This would indicate a reading age of 10-11 years or lower. A website scored inadequate if either of these pages scored grade 8 or above, which is a reading age of 13+ years.

- 20 out of 24 websites scored inadequate on this metric and 4 scored adequate. None of the websites scored well, and this is the only audit metric for which this was the case.

Although the Hemingway Editor is one of many methods to assess a text's reading age, the fact that none of the websites had an estimated reading age at or below 10-11 years suggests the text reading age is a key area of concern. If users are unable to understand the website text, they will be unable to source the information needed to access the correct GP services.

Homepage provides quick links to key patient tasks

Research has found that the homepage is the first place that 80% of users will look when searching for a task on a GP website. To score well on this metric, a website homepage needed the five most common patient tasks in the top 1/3 of the homepage. These five tasks were appointments, prescriptions, sick/fit notes, test results, and registering with practice.

14 practices scored inadequate for this metric, meaning that not all five of these tasks were on the homepage. 6 were adequate, meaning all five tasks were on the homepage but difficult to find. Only 4 scored well, meaning all five were identifiable in the top third of the homepage.
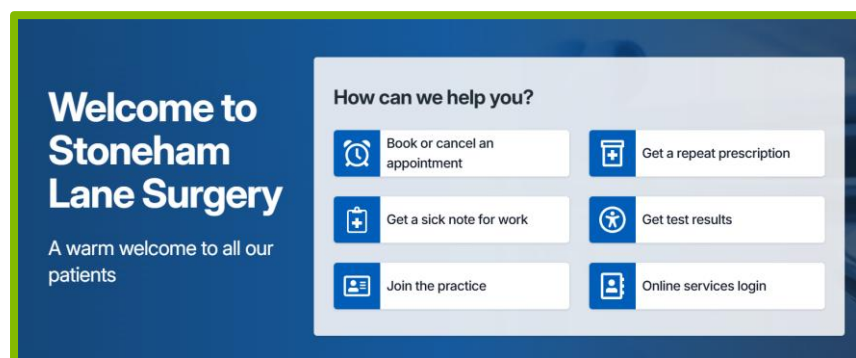

Figure 8: An example from Stoneham Lane Surgery showing quick links on the homepage to the main tasks that people visit the website for.

Search results delivering relevant results for key patient tasks

For this metric, auditors entered the search terms of the five most common patient tasks on a GP website to see whether the search tool generated relevant results. These five search terms were "Appointments", "Prescriptions", "Sick note", "Test results", and "Register with practice".

16 websites scored inadequate on this metric. 4 scored adequate and only 4 scored well. For the websites that scored inadequate, this was either because they did not have a search tool or because three or fewer terms returned relevant results.

Using the search bar is one of the three main strategies patients use for finding information on a website – alongside links on the homepage and using the main menu. Therefore, ensuring GP websites have search bars that return relevant results is a necessary focus.

Physical Accessibility Statement

In the 2023 HWS website audit, 14 out of 25 websites scored inadequate for the level of information about physical accessibility on the website. Only 2 websites scored well.

In the 2025 audit, 8 out of 24 scored inadequate, 12 adequate and only 4 well. Although there has been some improvement, this remains one of the lowest scoring metrics.
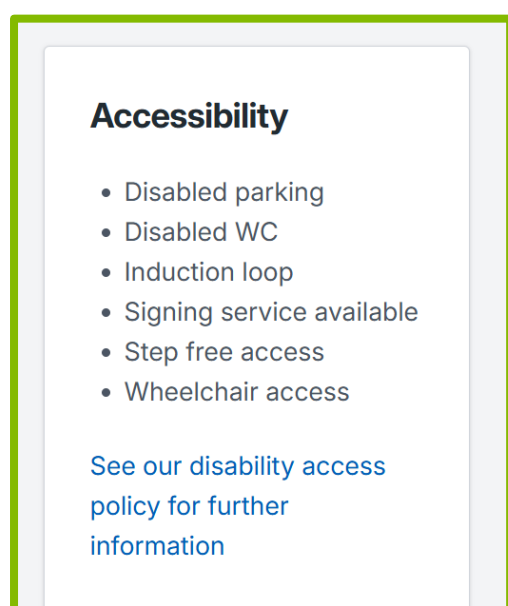

Figure 9: Stoneham Lane Surgery's website which scored well on this as best practice for this metric. They also have an additional disability access policy with helpful information and links.

Conclusions

Overall, the GP website audit (2024–2025) identified significant variations in the accessibility and usability of GP websites within Southampton. However, the audit found common areas of best practice and improvement. The website areas that most often performed well were the principles of web design, such as having a visible practice logo, contact us page, accessibility statement and main menu.

Key areas of improvement were:

- The text's reading age
- Website search tools
- Physical access information
- Homepage quick links to key patient tasks

As a result of this work, we have provided each practice with a detailed website report to help them improve the information, and accessibility of their website which in turn will help their patients access the services they need.

References

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care System. "Primary Care Networks". Available at: [Primary Care Networks :: NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight](#) [Accessed 07 May 2025].

NHS England. "GP website benchmarking and improvement tool". Available at: https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/gp-website-benchmarking-and-improvement-tool/ [Accessed 07 May 2025].