

April 2022 Feedback Report



The feedback presented in this report represents feedback from 407 Greenwich residents, including:

- Calls and emails to Healthwatch Greenwich from service users
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and groups of Greenwich service users or advocates
- Outreach and engagement events by Healthwatch Greenwich
- Conversations as seen on social media, and on community and neighbourhood sites
- Online reviews of services

GP Services

Front Desk Staff

This month we were sent positive feedback. *“I have received poor service from other practices in the past, and so it was so refreshing today to get a smooth, straightforward service from the front desk staff. I rang to make an appointment and I was so touched by the warmth and kindness she radiates over the phone.”¹*

At another practice we were told *“...the reception team have gone above and beyond to help and provide information with step-by-step guidance whilst being so caring and patient.”²*

Not all report such positive experience, and some service users describe interactions with front desk staff as *“rude”, “unhelpful”, or “lacking in understanding”*.

Telephone waiting time

Telephone waiting times continue to be a major issue, particularly during peak hours (8am-10am). *“My phone call was answered after 50 mins. Literally 50 minutes³. They've shifted almost everything to online, yet every time I call - I am on hold for a minimum of 20 minutes, often 30 or 40 mins. Or FIFTY MINUTES!”*

“ At first we were 74 in the queue & took 20 minutes to get down to 30 something in line!”

“Quality of service at this practice has gone down over the years particularly in the area of booking appointments. It's like war of the calls - who can hit the dial and redial button quicker than anyone else to get into a queue only to be told 20mins later that there are no appointments for the day and to try again the next day!

I'm sure the staff are doing their best, but seriously in this day and age there are surely better systems that can be used for appointment

¹ Trinity Medical Centre

² Fairfield PMS

³ Burney Street PMS

bookings and management.”⁴

“Online booking is not possible. Phone lines are almost constantly busy. This has made it impossible to book an appointment over the past few months when I needed to.

The best effort was reception passing my details to an after-hours clinic which resulted in a call from an A&E doctor saying they couldn't help as it was something which would need a GP follow up! Eventually had to get a private doctor appointment.”

Access to appointments

The limited availability of appointments is a source of frustration and anxiety. *“My voice has been like a frog for months now—I managed to get seen at the hospital so I know it's not cancer, which is good, but still cannot get into see a GP. I've been waiting for a phone appointment since February”*

“...My 8-month-old was diagnosed with a hole in the heart last December and GPs are meant to be keeping a close eye on him but no – he's got a phone appointment in May.”

Petition to improve access

Service users from a⁵ local surgery have created and signed an online petition asking for improved access to same day appointments. Over 100 people have signed the petition. Service users suggest the available window to book appointments (asking service users to call at 8am) is not sufficient and many find all available appointments have already been allocated.

eConsult

Many service users find eConsult easy to use and commend it. *“They are very, very efficient at responding to eConsults and always book quick*

⁴ Manor Brook PMS

⁵ Royal Arsenal Medical Centre. Find link to petition at https://www.change.org/p/improve-accessibility-of-services-at-ra-medical-centre?recruiter=54372160&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=facebook&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&utm_term=psf_combo_share_initial&recruited_by_id=8d32f690-bc00-0130-01a8-3c764e04a112&utm_content=fht-32847767-en-gb%3A6

appointments where necessary

While eConsult has been a positive change for many, it has created an additional barrier to access for some. Particularly those:

- who do not speak English or have limited English language
- with sensory disabilities or cognitive limitations
- who have difficulty in expressing themselves and describing their symptoms on the eConsult form
- who don't know how to, or find it difficult to, upload additional information such as sending photos before telephone consultations

“I am not a fan of the e-consult at all and trying to call for an appointment will lead to them telling you to use the eConsult, which is a nightmare when you don't know how to word things.”

“Have to sit on hold for at least 20 minutes or fill out some online form and wait for days for them to get back to you. Can't get an appointment for at least 2 weeks.”

Service users report not always receiving call-backs after completing the eConsult form. ***“Never received a call after filling up the eConsult form.”***

“I've used their online booking system as requested and have not received any follow-up email/call from their reception team as it indicates should happen!..”⁶

Receiving calls within 2 days, without a specified time, can make it difficult to ensure privacy to have a confidential conversation. ***“...the appointment system where someone will call me at an unknown time simply doesn't work for me when I have a job and don't know when I'll be free”***

“I don't wish to have conversations about medical issues when I'm in the office with colleagues. I don't understand how this system can work for anyone who doesn't work from home”

⁶ Burney Street PMS

For others, waiting up to 2 days to receive a call back is simply too long. ***“... my current GP takes 2 days to get back to you after you fill out a form online – it’s quicker to call 111 and ask them to arrange a call back”***

Telephone consultation

Some service users are anxious about telephone consultations. Some are worried it might not be as safe as face-to-face consultations and symptoms could be missed. ***“How can you make a diagnosis over the phone!.. Who’s making these rules?”***

“I suspect my daughter has eczema but due to not having the one year health visit I just want to make sure that the rash is an eczema flare up. Not sure how the doctor is going to do this without looking at her in person”

Those who prefer to be seen in person say they are not given the option. ***“Consultations at the moment are only offered over the phone..”***

“...frankly I don’t want to discuss my ailment over the phone. I’d like to actually speak in person”

Prescriptions

Missed prescription requests, delays in getting prescriptions, and changes in the way prescription requests are made are all themes we’ve heard about this month. We’re also hearing that the NHS app (that can be used to request prescriptions) is difficult for those with limited digital literacy.

“... came out [of hospital] and ran out of medication within 7 days. The GP receptionist wouldn’t let me apply for more medication – because their policy is that you have to have a GP appointment after a hospital admission before more meds can be given. But there were no appointments available! I had run out of what was given at the hospital. I had to cry before they agreed to get me an emergency prescription to last me until I could have an appointment. I am listed as a family carer who cares for someone 24/7. The system has gone mad”

“I am totally disappointed with my surgery, no one picks up the call, website does not work, I wanted to order a prescription, but I do not know how to get it. Totally desperate”

“They ignored an urgent request for a repeat prescription from my local pharmacist so that I was left for a week without much needed medication for my heart condition.”⁷

Vaccines and COVID-19 testing

Updating vaccine status on the NHS app

Service users report their vaccination status hasn't been recorded weeks after getting booster shots at local pharmacies. *“Keep getting pestered by NHS to have my fourth jab. It was done a month ago”⁸*

“We had a problem with our daughters not being loaded-had to go through the 119 resolution team”

“I was told they just do block notification every few months. I just kept ringing them and eventually it was updated”⁹

“ I called the helpline and they could not help, advised me to go via GP who updated it in 24 hours”

Those with travel plans are worried they might have to cancel. *“I had my booster Covid vaccine at the pharmacy in December, but it hasn't been logged on my NHS record. I had no idea about this error until trying to complete a passenger locator form today to go on honeymoon. Now if I can't get this error corrected the whole thing will have to be cancelled”¹⁰*

⁷ Manor Brook PMS

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Aspire Pharmacy

¹⁰ Steven's Pharmacy

Lewisham and Greenwich Trust (LGT)

We've heard some very positive feedback about LGT this month with volunteers directing service users to the right places, and plenty of large banners encouraging people to get in touch with PALS¹¹ if they have problems or raise issues if service is poor. ***"...incredibly friendly and even though a few admin errors, these were sorted very quickly, and staff could not have been more helpful."***

Waiting times at A&E and Urgent Care

Service users report extensive waiting times at A&E and Urgent Care. ***"...severely ill and dehydrated child had to wait more than 8 hours, not given any liquids or assessment... what a joke... How is this possible in 21st century in London?"***

"If you want to go for A&E prepare for about a 6 to 8 hour wait."

"6h wait to see doctor in "Urgent Care". Had to pick up child from nursery 4 hours later so couldn't wait. Understaffed and absolute shambles..."

Elective Procedures

Service users report long waits for elective procedures. ***"I am liver transplant patient, they thought I had a double hernia, it's not. My stomach is badly swollen, still waiting to hear about colonoscopy for 3 months now... Terrible the way things have changed."***

"My 2 year old has only just been invited for his first ever heart scan which should have been done at birth to 6 months of age so they can see if he has any problems like his big sister (hole in heart) or a leaking heart, if he has got my illness, but nope, nothing - 2 and half years later..."

Phlebotomy Service

Despite considerable improvements made to the booking process, we've been told some service users have lengthy waits for an appointment. ***"Got my paperwork from the doctor in late March, couldn't get an***

¹¹ <https://www.lewishamandgreenwich.nhs.uk/pals/>

appointment at QEH for two and a half weeks”

“...There were no appointments available this or even next week in QEH”

“I was told today my 6 year old needed a blood test as he isn't eating. Called and got an appointment for mid-May - earliest app they had!”

“ I was put through the cancer path without blood tests and that was February and I've still not had bloods taken”

This can be particularly stressful for service users with complex conditions.

“I have got multiple sclerosis and I'm constantly up to the hospital to get blood tests done.”

Some also report long waits after arriving for a scheduled appointment. ***“ I went yesterday...very busy and short staffed...waited about 1 hour after my appt time”***

Service users unhappy with the wait time for appointments, and who can afford to do so, are turning to the private sector. ***“It's ridiculous! I ended up paying £80 for a private blood test”***. And those that can't afford it are also considering this option. ***“...I know the prices of these tests are expensive. The tests will come to a lot of money, or I would have done them privately, that's probably what they want us to do.”***

Maternity services

We continue to hear from service users with mixed experiences of giving birth at QEH. A small number of women say they have been refused epidural pain relief when in labour, despite multiple requests. ***“Too many midwives try to talk women out of having epidural when the women are asking for one. Birth pain relief is a personal choice and should be honoured. It happened to me three weeks ago”***

“One midwife at Queen Elizabeth Hospital was so rude with me when I was in labour and in pain. She said to me if I keep screaming then the doctor won't come and do the epidural for me and even said if I didn't do the gas and air properly she was gonna take it off me.”

On social media, service users shared a recruitment advert for midwives at LGT¹². In the light of findings from the Ockenden report¹³, that both mothers and babies had died or come to harm through the pursuit of 'natural births', service users were concerned with some of the wording in the LGT job advert - including '**champion of normality**' and '**keep birth normal**'. Service users note that LGT subsequently removed the job advert.

¹² <https://beta.jobs.nhs.uk/candidate/jobadvert/C9197-22-6359>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/final-report-of-the-ockenden-review/ockenden-review-summary-of-findings-conclusions-and-essential-actions>

Bushra's experience of maternity services at QEH

Bushra and her husband, who are first time parents, were born outside of the UK. While overjoyed with the pregnancy, they did not have a family network in the UK to support them. Not familiar with having a baby, Bushra says she looked for information online, taking notes from NHS websites to familiarise herself on what to expect.

Bushra's contractions started late at night, and steadily grew in intensity. ***"I was in pain and had to ask for an epidural several times and was told "but you are doing great - we will see". I got so annoyed. This is the last thing you want to hear as a labouring woman in massive pain. I kept persistently asking until they came and did it."*** The situation took a turn for the worse when Bushra's placenta ruptured. ***"The only positive thing during the whole stay was when this happened, they reacted quickly, and I had a C-section. Everything went downhill when I woke up in the recovery ward. I woke up and was asking for my baby, asking if my baby had survived. But no one would answer me, and I was left wondering if my baby had died and I was crying."***

After being rolled out of the recovery area into another room, she saw her husband holding their baby. It was only then she knew their baby had survived. ***"I was overwhelmed when I saw both of them. I was happy and I was crying. I had gone through a procedure which was potentially dangerous for my baby, but I had to wait to see my partner to know our baby had survived. Staff on the recovery ward saw how distressed I was but no one would tell me if my baby was alive or dead - that was the least they could do."***

Bushra gave birth in the afternoon and at 5pm a nurse came in and said her husband had to go. ***"Until then, no one had said anything about visiting hours. We only knew one birthing partner was allowed. We didn't know about restricted visiting hours, we were given no prior information. I felt vulnerable and alone, and he felt helpless."*** Without her husband, Bushra said she needed help. ***"Because of the C-section I could not get up and hold my baby properly. "When I would ring the bell to ask for help, no one would come, so I would ring again and again. When I would ask the staff to do something, they would come, eventually, and JUST do the task - like changing his diaper and disappear - no interaction. Probably they were tired, but I had not slept in two nights-I was more tired than anyone else. There was only one nurse who visited in the morning who was cheerful and supportive, maybe she was a volunteer not a nurse - because she was dressed differently than others. But her presence helped-she told me 'It's going to be ok' and that helped me calm down a bit."***

Bushra's experience of maternity services at QEH

Bushra says she was not given adequate support to feed her baby. *“My baby was born tongue tied. I didn't know how to breast-feed. Because of the C-section I was unable to hold my baby properly but was also reluctant to ring the bell because of their attitude. My baby was hungry, and he kept crying. I couldn't breastfeed and the nurses said there was no formula. It was traumatic. I was begging them to let my partner come with some formula, but they said he could come only at 11 or 12 in the morning which was hours away. Why does the hospital not have emergency formula? I checked everything on the NHS website “Pack your bag for labour” and packed everything that was on the list. There was no mention of formula. I couldn't breast feed, they said there was no emergency formula on the maternity ward, and they wouldn't allow my partner to get it. It was harrowing and traumatic for the baby, for my partner and for me. I just couldn't stop crying seeing my baby in that state and being unable to help because the nurses were so adamant about visiting rules. I couldn't heal, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't feed my baby. I didn't even want to use the toilet - there was a big puddle of pee in the bathroom that no one would clean.”*

Bushra wonders if the hospital expects all birthing mothers to breast-feed and that's why there was no formula. *“But every woman is different. What about those that can't breast-feed. The nurse didn't even ask anyone who could come and show me how to breast-feed to help me. I was desperate to get out. They were reluctant to discharge me but let me go after some tests.”*

“A lot of midwives saw him after I left hospital, but only one was able to identify that he was tongue tied and referred me to a lactation consultant. But - this was only online! You cannot teach through the camera, but every time I voiced my difficulties, they would only say 'keep latching, shouldn't be a problem'. It was hurting me so much.”

Bushra's experience of maternity services at QEH

Bushra says the whole experience left her so traumatised that she had to seek counselling and she says she referred herself to 'Time to Talk', a service delivered by Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust. ***"In the end the NHS had to spend more money, because I had to seek therapy because of what I had to go through. This could have been prevented. I was scared, my partner was scared. Our baby was left hungry for so long. They should have midwives or staff in the maternity ward who have some training in supporting women emotionally. There should be some support in the wards after giving birth. We are not robots or machines who produce a baby, it affects us deeply. It is such an important event in your life."***

"The whole experience was appalling. I hope no mum has to go through this. I am never going back to Queen Elizabeth Hospital."

Baby Clinics

Parents want to know if community baby clinics have resumed their services. They say information is not easy to find and given changes to community midwife and health visitor appointments – they don't know what baby services are, or are not, available. ***"It would be nice for them to tell us if baby weighing clinics are open or not. I have got a 2 and half year old who hasn't not had his weight done since the start of covid and my 9month old last time had it with the midwife home check."***

"I need to get my baby to a baby weighing clinic. I used to take my first born to Eltham Community Hospital one year back. I have not had a health visitor with my 2nd, so don't know what to do"

"The only reason I want to go is because my little one has health issues and has had issues with weight in the past, so I need to keep regular checks on her weight - they knew all this, and I still never got a call back from them either! One appointment at 1 week old and not seen or heard from them since"

Paediatrics

We hear from parents who say they don't know or understand who is responsible for providing treatment or support for the health needs of their child. Some say they are passed from one service to another, in a frustrating circle. ***" My daughter has a genetic condition, we got referred to paediatrics and they phoned me after 5 months on the waiting list to say "just to let you know we won't be helping her with any medical issues only development". The GP has refused referrals as the paedes are meant to do it, the paedes are refusing because the GP is meant to do it. I feel let down hugely and I feel my only option to stop my daughter suffering any longer is to try and go privately"***

"My daughter was born with a disorder that means she is supposed to have hearing tests every 6 months. I was advised by paediatrics that this was something done through the GP. I booked an appointment to arrange this. When I spoke to the GP he was particularly unhelpful and came across as quite rude to be quite frank. He said that this should have been something done through the health visitor. I didn't get my 1st year health visit. I'm a first-time parent and had no idea that there was supposed to be a year 1 health visit"

Communication

Service users report poor communication at QEH. Some say they've not been told about cancelled appointments. ***"I've just been informed that my planned surgery has been cancelled and nobody thought it a good idea to tell me before turning up for the pre surgery Covid-19 test"***

Others say they have to physically go to the hospital to see if their loved ones are ok because calls go unanswered. ***"Why do I have to drive 20 miles in order to find news on my sick father, simply because they do not answer their phones. Very, very, frustrating..."***

Jammi's experience of health and social care

Primary Care

Jammi, who uses the pronouns he/they, is a single parent with complex physical medical issues and mental health needs. Jammi started the process of transitioning five years ago. ***"Some GPs were abysmal - it took ten appointments to get referred to the gender clinic. One GP, who I saw often, had not even recorded in my notes that I wanted to be referred to the gender clinic, this was after several appointments. When I told the GP 'I am trans', he insisted I was a woman, 'You are a woman' he said, 'You're just confused.' He said I was too sick to transition, because of my disability, and I believed that for years, which I now know is entirely false. However, there were two GPs that were inclusive and understood and straight away referred me when I asked. They even changed my gender pronouns on my medical records."***

Jammi is on the waiting list to be seen at the gender clinic. ***"At one point I became massively suicidal, not being able to access trans care - so I got testosterone privately which was barely affordable. As a disabled person on universal credit accessing private care was prohibitive. For a month I literally just ate beans. It was food or testosterone. Now my GP has agreed to a bridging prescription-which is a massive relief but has taken five years. This could have been done in one appointment. It leads to so many issues for people transitioning from Female to Male and it's not just about feeling suicidal for months and months... It felt like my whole life just crashed. I felt I almost died to become myself."***

Jammi's collects the testosterone from a local pharmacy. The experience is humiliating. ***"The staff find it highly amusing. They are laughing saying "Here you go MISS - here's your testosterone MISS", when the label clearly states my title is Mr... I don't expect them to be psychics, but my title is clearly written - how difficult is it to read off a page? I am privileged to have a support group - otherwise it would kill me."***

Jammi's experience of health and social care

Lewisham and Greenwich Trust (LGT)

Jammi has a long-term disability and accesses treatment at LGT. ***“One doctor refused to acknowledge my gender... according to him everything was a mental health issue and suggested I be in therapy. I have been in therapy lots and lots of times, but it felt disturbing for a medical professional to suggest I was not trans, just traumatised.”*** At another appointment, in the same department, Jammi was accompanied by an advocate for support. Jammi said the doctor refused to listen. ***“He even wrote in my notes that I was ‘a really lovely lady’ and in a letter that was addressed to me as Mr. He disempowered both me and my support officer”***

Mental Health Support

“We only have one health advocate for trans people in the whole of London-how is that going to work? I have been on that waiting list for months and I am yet to have my first appointment. We don't have Greenwich specific trans organisation to provide us support.” Jammi is making out of pocket expenses to access private mental health support. ***“The waiting lists are very long and at the moment they are not able to provide me with anything other than a workshop, which is inadequate for my needs. There is a local organisation that provides low-cost therapy on a sliding scale but their waiting lists are full they have closed referrals. I have tried researching all the places I can access mental health support but everywhere either the waiting lists are full, or the waiting times are very, very long.”***

Jammi's experience of health and social care

Adult Social Care

Jammi has paid agency carers for support at home. ***"Before I legally transitioned to Mr and "he" pronouns as a trans-masculine person, the support from carers was life-saving and brilliant. My social worker from the council is amazing and inclusive too."***

Since transitioning, Jammi says the experience of support from carers has been completely different. He says it was ***"...traumatic and almost killed me. One carer would insist I was a woman. Another would come and shout "strip-wash" at me in front of my children.!"***

"I come from a multi-racial background and there was one carer who would come and shout - in front of my children - that my health problems, particularly my mental health problems were 'White people's problems'. I don't see this as a problem with carers - they have been just as let down as me because they're not given adequate training and don't know about the inappropriateness of saying these things."

Jammi's poor experience included being left on the floor by a carer and, on another occasion when he was bed-bound, refusal to call a doctor, claiming it wasn't their job. Jammi said there were also carers with poor literacy who couldn't read the care plan properly. Jammi felt there was nothing he could do, and the system lacked accountability. ***"They just did tick, tick, tick on their app and I had no way to dispute that on a daily basis, even when they neglected their duties"***

"For all the inappropriateness what was more important was that my wider health needs were not being met. Being an LGBTQI+ person being forcefully, wilfully mis-gendered in my own home is illegal. It felt as if care professionals were being paid to come to my own home and abuse me and my children. It was essentially forcing me inside the closet in my own home and it intimidated my children."

Jammi's experience of health and social care (contd)

Jammi has found a care agency for LGBTQI+ people and is on the waitlist. *"...so there is probably a happy ending to my story...I might finally have an inclusive carer who is sensitive to my needs. But it's obvious people from other care agencies have been treating LGBTQI+ people like they did with me, if not worse – particularly older people in the community – they are less empowered and wouldn't even know how to raise a complaint and that is burning in my mind."*

Dental care

Service users continue to report difficulty accessing dental care¹⁴. This month we heard from parents. *"My son had an awful fall last night and has pushed 3 of his teeth up into his gum. My dentist won't see him because their NHS books are full"*

" I called all of them and none of them taking on children without their parents being registered there."

"My son has a condition that requires regular treatment & appointments but since moving during lockdown no dentists are taking on new patients. Having to call 111 every time he needs an appointment and being sent all over the borough! All we are being told is 'Keep trying' but we have had no luck at all"

¹⁴ <https://healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/news/2022-05-10/lack-nhs-dental-appointments-widens-health-inequalities>

Next Steps

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

Contact Us

For more information on our April 2022 feedback report, contact:

'info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk'

Telephone: 020 8301 8340

Website: www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk

Twitter: @HWGreenwich

Facebook: @healthwatchgreenwich