

June 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 Bourcha at Willow Dene School where parents shared their experiences of accessing health and care services for their children.

What did we hear in June?

We heard from 494 people¹ about their experience of health and care services in Greenwich.

- “ Although the procedure was unpleasant, the staff were amazing and everything was explained to me. I was treated with the greatest of care and dignity and although I felt a little 'wobbly' after the procedure, I was soon able to go home.
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
- “ Waiting for two months now for consultation recommended by cardiac surgery department, booked online and offline appointment as well. Still no progress on the same. It seems nobody cares.
GP Practice

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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Primary care

GP services – booking appointments

You told us getting a GP appointment is a struggle and waiting more than two weeks is not uncommon, irrespective of the channels used.

- “ Every time I call for an appointment, they tell me there is none available and I need to call another day! I am not – at all – able to book an appointment with a GP!
GP Practice
- “ How can you get investigated, when all the time it’s impossible to book an appointment. Such a feeling that this clinic has 1000s of people in the queue, whenever I go there it’s empty. My worst experience with a clinic
GP Practice
- “ Their online appointment booking feature has been marked as "coming soon" for 3 years. Enough said! *[Website Checked by Healthwatch Greenwich on 10/7/23 – both 'how to request an appointment' and 'request your routine appointment' were both marked as 'coming soon'.]*
GP Practice
- “ The surgery is very contradictory. (It) States one thing then the receptionist is telling you something completely different. If the surgery doesn’t intend on contacting, you within the time scale they have stated then they need to change their response emails. People are waiting around all day for phone calls that never come because the response email states that they will get a response by this time and date yet don’t, it’s a joke! Needs to be sorted out!!
GP Practice

You shared unpleasant and difficult experiences trying to book an appointment with poor call handling and communication.

“...Politeness and manners are poor. Keep me waiting on the phone for two hours then hang up - not the first time they did that. Made appointment with the doctor and the doctor didn't call. I give up.

GP Practice

“The GPs are fine but there's at least one incredibly rude and aggressive receptionist that refuses to help book appointments over the phone (which I have done before).

GP Practice

Some of you even complained that there was no way a deaf service user can book an appointment.

“I am deaf. I don't go on-line, and they don't offer any way to book appointments except by phone or on-line. There is literally no way to book if you are deaf and not online. So deaf people living in Woolwich are just left stranded.

GP Practice

Paul's experience: "I just feel lost in the system."

Paul visited his GP at the start of the year with concerns about his foot which was making getting about, trying to keep active, and daily living harder. His GP referred him to Circle MSK for further evaluation. In March, Paul attended his MSK appointment, where the doctor requested X-rays to assess Paul's condition before starting treatment. The X-rays were done a week later at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. In April, Paul returned to Circle MSK for his consultation, hoping to start treatment. However, the doctor couldn't access Paul's X-rays because they weren't on the MSK system. *"The consultation was a waste of time, there was no consultation because there were no X-rays."*

In discomfort with his foot, worried that it was getting worse, and frustrated that his MSK consultation wasn't productive because of the missing X-rays Paul contacted Queen Elizabeth Hospital to try and find out where his X-rays were. Queen Elizabeth Hospital told Paul his X-rays had been rapidly shared with Circle MSK and the hold-up wasn't with them. Paul contacted Circle MSK to try and find out what had happened to his X-rays. *"I spoke to a receptionist, told her how painful my foot is and that my doctor couldn't treat me without the X-rays, and it was really important that my doctor got my X-rays. She was downright rude. She told me they had my X-rays, but they wouldn't be uploaded anytime soon because they're too busy and they've got a huge backlog, so I'd just have to wait. I told her how important the X-rays were for me – the difference between getting treatment or not getting treatment. I couldn't believe how dismissive she was. I even asked to speak to a manager – three times – and she just ignored me."*

Circle MSK didn't tell him when his X-rays would be uploaded – or how he would know so he could book a new appointment. *"It's been many weeks now and I don't know how much longer it will take them to upload my X-rays, so I don't know when I'll get to see a doctor again or when I'll get treatment for my foot. I feel helpless and confused".*

GP services – clinical staff

Despite facing difficulties in booking appointments, you praised staff for their commitment, high-quality service, and professionalism.

“ Love my doctor’s surgery ... Sherard road is my practice but since they combined, I talk to all different people. The reception staff are great and helpful, and I know they are stretched, and my requests are complicated and lengthy and being a nurse I needed certain thing and they went above and beyond to help. Dr Vijay also is amazing he’s helped me with 2 very important things and has been super great. Thank you for being amazing it means a lot 😊
GP Practice

“ I’ve always found all of their doctors and staff very helpful and efficient.
GP Practice

“ I have just moved into the area and registered with SSMC. Today I had my first appointment. The receptionist was lovely and polite. The waiting area was clean and quiet. I sat for 2 mins, if that, and was called in by the doctor, just on time. Dr Aherne was really kind, understanding and polite. She examined me and asked questions. She took the time to listen to me and answer my questions. It was a short visit, but I was reassured and felt cared for... Thank you!
GP Practice

“ I am extremely pleased with the practice, which has been efficiently handled under new management. My interaction experience with the practice has greatly improved, and it is now much easier to approach and access. When needed, the Practice Manager can be reached. Thank you very much for working so hard to maintain the standards high and to go above and beyond the expectations of the patients.
GP Practice

Pharmacy/prescription services

You shared difficulties getting your prescriptions.

“ I am totally frustrated that I cannot get an emergency prescription for an item that is not on my regular repeat prescriptions at weekends. Boots cannot supply another issue of this one-off prescription because it is not part of my repeat prescription list. They recommended I try 111 for Emergency Prescriptions but again that would only apply to my recorded repeat prescriptions. I had expected the pharmacist could have issued 3 days of medication to bridge until my online request to the surgery placed on a Saturday could be processed. In the meantime, I am left in limbo with no access to the medication I require. So much for passing more responsibility to pharmacies to ease the load on GPs.

GP Practice

“ A hospital prescription was prescribed for our granddaughter by her consultant. We were advised to take prescription to our own surgery and a doctor would prescribe for us to collect from our local chemist. Our granddaughter’s hospital appointment was on a Tuesday. No prescription sent to local chemist for collection until the following Monday. This was despite making constant telephone calls to the chemist and the surgery. The Friday before medication was available for collection, we were assured everything was with the doctor awaiting signature and would be sent electronically to the chemist that night.... surprise, surprise this didn’t happen until we started chasing, again, on Monday morning... No empathy, especially after having made numerous phone calls in regard to the medication...

GP Practice

Hospital Care

Emergency Department

You told us about your poor experience at the emergency department.

“ I arrived by ambulance with worrying stomach pains that were thought to be appendicitis. Once my bloods were taken, I was sat waiting for no less than 8 hours being refused any type of painkillers. I have severe depression and anxiety all sorts of things were going through my mind and my friend told them this. I even suffered a panic attack which only made things worse. I was tired and starving and I have celiac disease, so I was worried about eating anything there... I left still upset not knowing what is wrong. I feel like I was rushed out with medication, and I was told if my condition worsens feel free to come back. I don't think so! I'm appalled and annoyed, it was horrendous.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

“ I waited 1 hour for the triage to see an inexperienced nurse. After going through the triage (with an inexperienced nurse), I waited 8 hours to see the doctor and found out that my condition was serious. I was hospitalised and operated on in a hurry. There should have been more prepared people in the triage to know when it's an emergency...

University Hospital Lewisham

Outpatient Departments

You praised outpatient departments for ease of access and how well you were cared for.

“ I had two appointments and two very unpleasant procedures to be done. At all times the doctors, nurses & reception staff were respectful, considerate & just really kind to me...

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

I had No problems it was less than 5min waiting

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

“ I would like to express my gratitude to the midwives and doctors at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. I'm pregnant and had to be hospitalised. The service provided by the midwife on duty was incredible, fast, and very loving. They explained all the time what was going on and that made me feel confident and comfortable. Everyone was very receptive to us, and I would like to thank this wonderful team...

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

“ I Have had very positive outcome from attending both Podiatrist team at Lewisham Hospital outpatients clinic and local community foot clinic at Downham. Cannot fault their care, commitment and skill in caring for their individual patient's needs. Have always felt listened to when explaining what the problem is and have always been explained to about what procedure they are undertaking, to assist in rectifying the problem.

University Hospital Lewisham

“ Friendly and personal. Easy to navigate once inside.

Eltham Community Hospital

“ A big shoutout to Dr. Laura and her team giving such support during my labour... It was a fantastic experience that I'm willing to do again just because of her...

University Hospital Lewisham

Katie's experience: "Where is the dignity for my sister?"

Katie lives with her husband and son and is a carer for her sister Mary, who has cerebral palsy and learning disabilities. Mary can't stand or move easily and uses a moulded wheelchair, which means that it's designed to fit her perfectly. At her regular appointments at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Mary needs access to a community hoist to get her in and out of her wheelchair for examinations or treatment. Unlike standard hoists, which are not compatible for moulded wheelchairs, community hoists are specifically designed to safely lift and transfer moulded wheelchair users. Despite ringing ahead on multiple occasions and explaining the need for access to the community hoist for her sister, Katie says it's never provided. *"Every time I ring ahead. I explain to the clinic that she needs the community hoist and every time we get there – nothing – no community hoist. It doesn't matter what clinic it is or how many times I ask for it, they just ignore us. They don't provide safe equipment to lift my sister."* Katie worries the use of incompatible hoists compromises the quality-of-care Mary receives and prevents accurate assessments. During their last visit, due to not being provided with a community hoist, they struggled to lift Mary out of her wheelchair, and she couldn't be properly examined or receive the treatment she needed. *"I called before we went and told them if you want her out of her chair, she will need a hoist. When we arrived, there was no hoist whatsoever, not even the wrong one. So, she couldn't be examined properly. She could only be examined in her chair."* Katie says the lack of accessible facilities at Queen Elizabeth Hospital goes beyond the absence of a community hoist for Mary demonstrates a lack of respect and dignity. *"I was with my sister at Queen Elizabeth for an appointment and I could smell she needed to be changed. So, I asked the staff where I could go, but they didn't know! No one offered to find out for me – they could see I was with my sister in a wheelchair. They told me to go and ask the information volunteers in the foyer. I asked the volunteers, and they directed me back to the same corridor I was waiting in – to a baby change room! I felt humiliated – where is the dignity for my sister?"*

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

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