

## October 2023

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### 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.



Healthwatch Greenwich Community Engagement Manager Kiki Bourcha during a coffee morning at Willow Dene School.

### What did we hear in October?

We heard from 169 Greenwich residents about their experience of health and care services.

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**“Overcrowded and unhelpful for severe asthma. Very difficult. Very Poor. Dissatisfied!**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

**“Although I have various long-term problems my surgery really does not care.**

GP Practice

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## Community Engagement and Outreach Activities

This month, Healthwatch Greenwich met with the parents of Willow Dene School in Greenwich. Parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) shared their experiences, shedding light on significant challenges.

Utilising respite hours provided by the council doesn't always meet their needs and they don't feel confident leaving their children there.

Parents shared their experiences of taking their child to opticians and ophthalmologist, noting an increase in prescription errors.

Furthermore, parents worry about their children's health and well-being as a result of substantial delays in housing reviews and rehousing.

## What Greenwich residents have told us this month

**“ ...I am concerned that my daughter has never seen a dentist... I cannot get her registered at any of our local dental practices in Eltham. I have tried many, many times in the last five years to register her at various local dental practices and am always told they are not taking on new patients. My daughter should be receiving 6-month check-ups since her teeth came through but has not seen a dentist once.**

Dentistry

**“ ... I am disabled... and have found it very difficult to get hospital treatment when needed, i.e. I have had a letter from the Queen Elizabeth Hospital complaining that I missed an appointment (I have a knee injury and I am in splints.) They then offered me an appointment for 9:00AM... It is recorded on my history, and I card that I have a muscle weakening disease and cannot attend for appointments in early morning. Then I get another letter of complaint saying I missed an appointment. Why does the appointment department not have access to this important information? This not only gets me another telling off, but I do not get the treatment I need to be able to live independently.**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

**“ Moved to a new area with a seven-month-old baby. Registered baby and ourselves with new GP. Unable to contact the health visiting service, no developmental reviews performed. Have concerns so visited GP who said that we will be lucky to see a health visitor!... Baby is now 2 years 8 months old. Still unable to get hold of a health visitor. I have given up asking for help as it is very clear there is none.**

Health Visiting Service

**“ Had a breast wound from breastfeeding. Visited GP who gave oral antibiotics which did not help. Returned and GP gave me antibiotics ointment. I asked for a referral to the infant feeding team as it had been there for 5 months and was worsening. Was told the only way to see them is to be referred by the health visitor and that I won't get hold of them. Dr was right I couldn't get hold of the health visitor. Absolutely ridiculous! Breastfeeding rates in the UK are very low and there is no support.**

Health Visiting Service

**“ I have been visiting my mother who is 99 at Queen Elizabeth Hospital for three weeks now. The car parking apart from weekends is totally inadequate for a hospital of this size. I tried to park today to visit my mother and drop off items she needed. I could not get in. Cars queueing up to wait for a space. After one hour of trying I parked in drop off bay. I ran into the hospital to drop off the items my mum needed. I gave them to nurse and ran back. The guy who does the parking tickets was there. My mum is nearly 100. I am nearly 80... I think it is scandalous that there is no leaway. The volume of cars needing parking far exceeds the facility. Another money-making scam !!!**

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

## Provider Response:

### Response from Greenwich 0-4 Health Visiting Service

We are sorry to hear of the recent experiences of families trying to contact the Greenwich Health Visiting Service and would like to thank these families for their valuable feedback as this contributes to ongoing service development and improvement.

Unfortunately, due to anonymity of the feedback provided we were not able to look further into these cases to provide individualised responses. Families can contact Bromley Healthcare to feedback their experiences through [bromh.feedback@nhs.net](mailto:bromh.feedback@nhs.net) so please do get in touch for us to look into the issues raised.

We would like to reassure families in Greenwich that you do not need a referral to access the Health Visiting Service and can contact the service and speak to a Health Visitor or a member of the team for advice via our Duty line Monday to Friday 0900-1700 on 0300 330 5777 or [bromh.greenwich0to4@nhs.net](mailto:bromh.greenwich0to4@nhs.net).

We run drop-in clinics across the borough throughout the week. You do not need an appointment to access these clinics. At our well baby clinics families can access health and developmental information, advice and support and get their baby or child weighed. In our Infant Feeding drop-in's families can access support from our Infant Feeding Specialists about feeding baby. Our clinic timetable and information can be found on our website at [www.greenwich0to4.co.uk](http://www.greenwich0to4.co.uk).

GPs are able to refer or signpost families to the Health Visiting Service and we will be meeting with our GP partners in December to ensure GPs know how families can be referred in to the Health Visiting Service and how families can be supported to access the service through improved signposting.

If the families concerned wish to discuss their experiences further I am happy to meet with them and can be contacted on the details below.

-- Caroline Whitford, Service Lead, Greenwich 0-4 Health Visiting Service, Tel 07511414377 or email [carolinewhitford@nhs.net](mailto:carolinewhitford@nhs.net).

## ***Athena's Experience: "I felt abandoned."***

Athena, originally from Laos, is a single mother of a 14-year-old boy with autism and global developmental delay. Her only family in the UK consists of her close friend, Lisa, who also has a son with learning disabilities. Athena and Lisa both work full time.

In July, Athena, in intense pain, called 111 who advised her to go to the hospital.

*"My body was on fire; I was in so much pain I couldn't think. I had to call my friend for help, and she had to call another friend to care for her son who also has learning disabilities, and he is in a wheelchair as well."*

Once Lisa arrived, she called an ambulance for Athena. Not having anyone to look after him, Athena had to take him to the hospital with her. Despite being in pain and having her son with special needs with her, they were waiting for 7.5 hours at Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

*"I couldn't move and my feet started getting purplish blue, then they realised that I was going to collapse and they finally took us in to a ward."*

Worried about who would be looking after Athena's son, Lisa tried to reach out to the duty social workers from Children's Social Services. Multiple calls went unanswered. Helping her friend, Lisa tried her best to find support for Athena's son, although her time was limited due to her responsibilities at home.

*"I was calling and calling but nobody answered the phone, I was desperate and felt completely alone. Where are the social services when you need them," said Lisa.*

When Children's Social Services returned their call after a couple of hours, they tried to persuade Lisa to take Athena's 14-year-old son with her. Lisa explained that she cares for a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and couldn't commit to looking after both children. Lisa said offers of financial assistance and persuasion to accept the boy were made. Frustrated and upset by the suggestion of placing a child with someone Social Services hadn't vetted or known; Lisa rejected the offer.

*"Athena wasn't able to make decisions and I was talking to social services. They were trying to convince me to take her son Anuson. The lady on the phone kept saying to me, you take him, you take him. I told her everything about my son that he is on a wheelchair. He's severely disabled. And Anuson also needs one-to-one support, but they didn't want to understand," said Lisa.*

After anxious discussions with Athena and Lisa, the hospital reluctantly decided to admit the boy to the "Safari" ward, as there were no other suitable options. Athena was really upset that her son had to stay in Safari ward even though he was not sick, taking him away from his home and everything he was used to.

A couple of days later, a Safari ward staff member visited Athena asked her why her son's father was not taking care of him.

*"The matron came and started asking me where is the father and why is he not taking him? I started to cry, I wanted to die. I am a widow why you make me feel bad?," said Athena.*

After eight days, they returned home. Athena is still struggling with her health. Her experience has made her worried about her future and what will happen to her son if she becomes sick again.

*"I am sharing my story to help others. There must be a plan for people in my situation," Athena added. "I felt abandoned, but People shouldn't feel abandoned."*



## Dentistry

We often receive feedback from residents on their experience of dental services, often when things are not working well. Incidences of services not meeting the needs of residents, however small in number, are important in identifying where and how services can improve. However, these examples may not always be a good reflection nor representative of how most people experience dental services in Greenwich. Therefore, we wanted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how Greenwich residents experience local dental services.

### Methodology

We surveyed 161 Greenwich residents using face-to-face interviews to understand their experience of local dental services. Residents were interviewed in a range of places across the borough including health and care venues, libraries, children’s centres, community centres, and advice hubs.

Ethnicity		
Ethnic minority	White British	Prefer not to say
110	46	5
161		

Gender		
Woman	Man	Prefer not to say
113	44	4
161		

Disability/long term condition (LTC)		
Living with disability or LTC	Not living with disability or LTC	Prefer not to say
26	130	5
161		

Age					
Under 18	18-24	25-49	50-64	65+	Prefer not to say

3	16	86	30	23	3
161					

Carer		
Carer	Not a carer	Prefer not to say
20	129	12
161		

## Summary of Findings

Most residents have seen a dentist in the past 2 years (73% overall) with mixed experiences of how easy or difficult it is to get an appointment. Long waiting times are the main challenge, and some found it difficult to register at or contact a dental practice at all.

Most residents hold a positive sentiment towards their dental practice, with age and ethnicity driving variation in answers. The quality of service received is the most significant factor influencing sentiment with difficulty securing an appointment the key reason given by those with a negative sentiment towards their dental practice.

## Limitations

While our survey captures the experiences of a cross section of Greenwich residents, it is a small sample of 161 residents. As such, we do not attempt to suggest that our findings are representative of all who live, work, or use dental services in Greenwich.

For analysis purposes, we have combined groups to create two ethnicity categories, white and ethnic minority. However, combining groups for the sake of analysis risks masking the differences in experiences between groups.

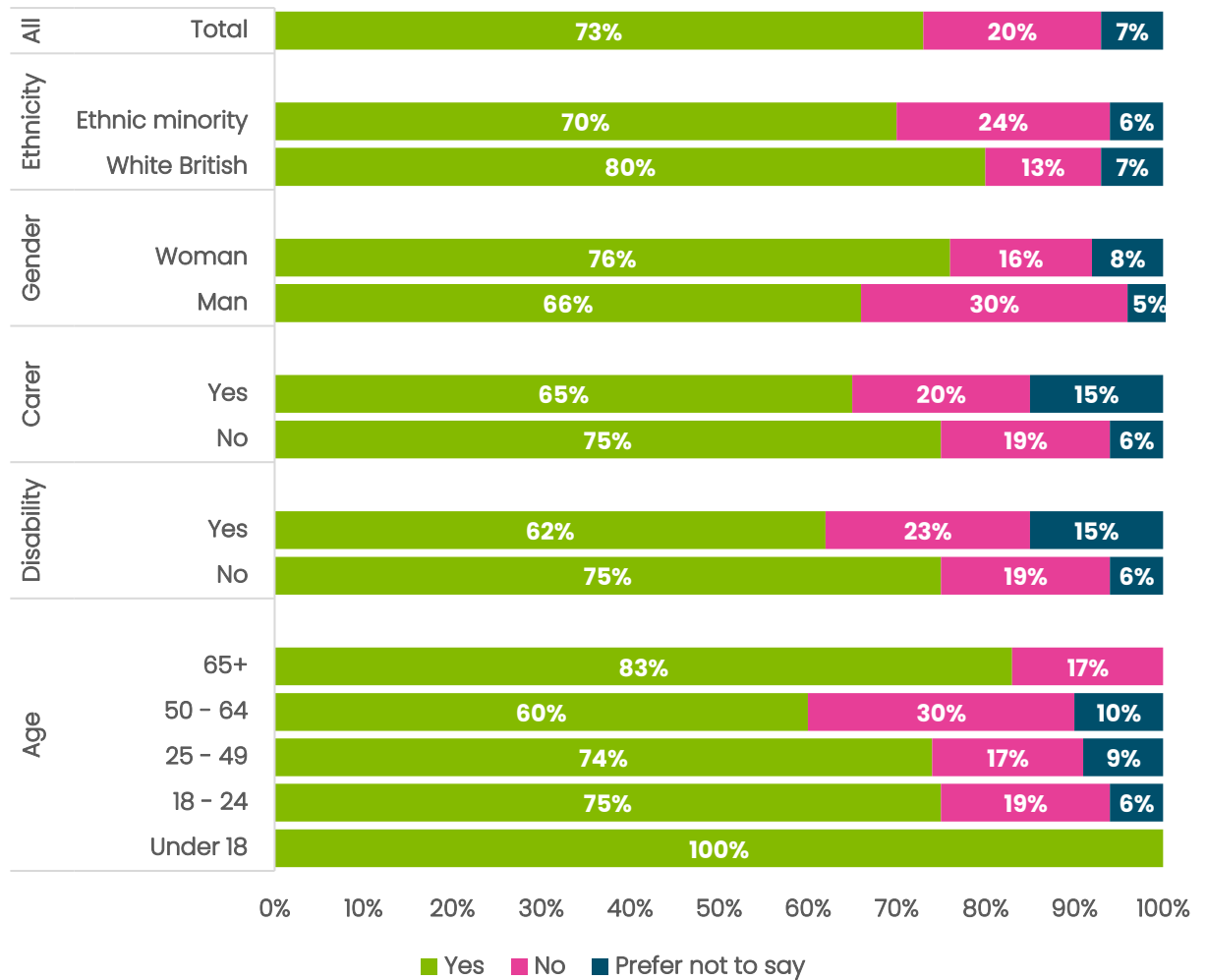
## Seen a dentist in the past two years

Most people have seen a dentist in the past 2 years (73% overall). This is the case in almost all groups but with some variations.

- Nearly a third of those aged 50–64 report not seeing a dentist in the past two years. This is the highest proportion out of all age groups.
- Women were more likely to have seen a dentist than men (76% vs 66%) and white British residents were more likely to have seen a dentist than ethnic minority residents (80% vs 70%).

- Those living with a disability or long-term condition and those who identify as carers were less likely than those not living with a disability, or to be a carer, to have seen a dentist in the past two years.

### Have you seen a dentist in the last 2 years?



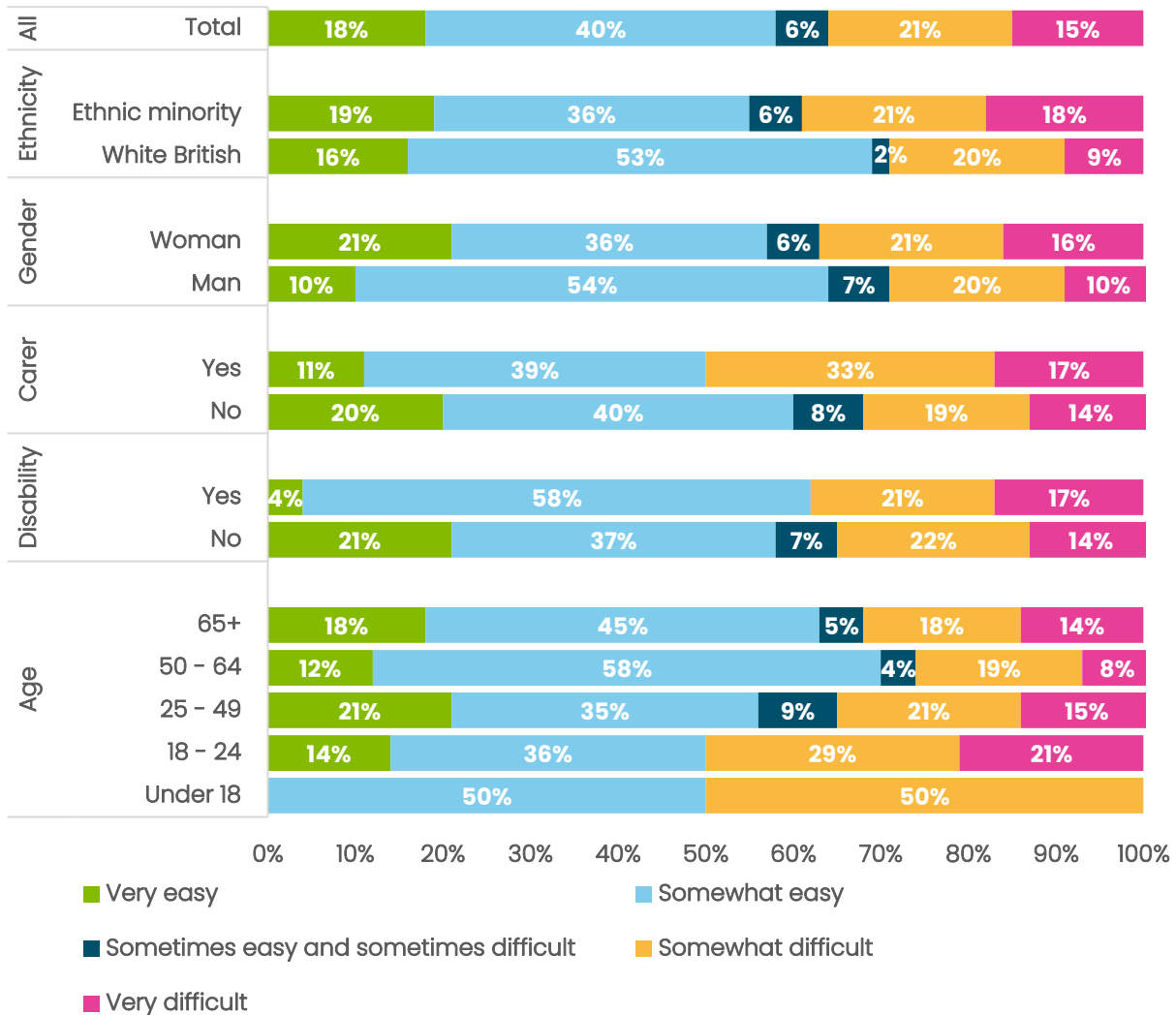
### Getting an Appointment

Ease or difficulty of getting an appointment is mostly evenly split but most residents say that getting an appointment is somewhat easy. Our survey found:

- Younger people aged under 24 find it more difficult to get an appointment compared with older age groups.
- Carers find it more difficult to get an appointment compared with non-carers.

- Residents identifying as white British find it easier to get an appointment compared with those from an ethnic minority background.

### How easy or difficult is it to get an appointment?



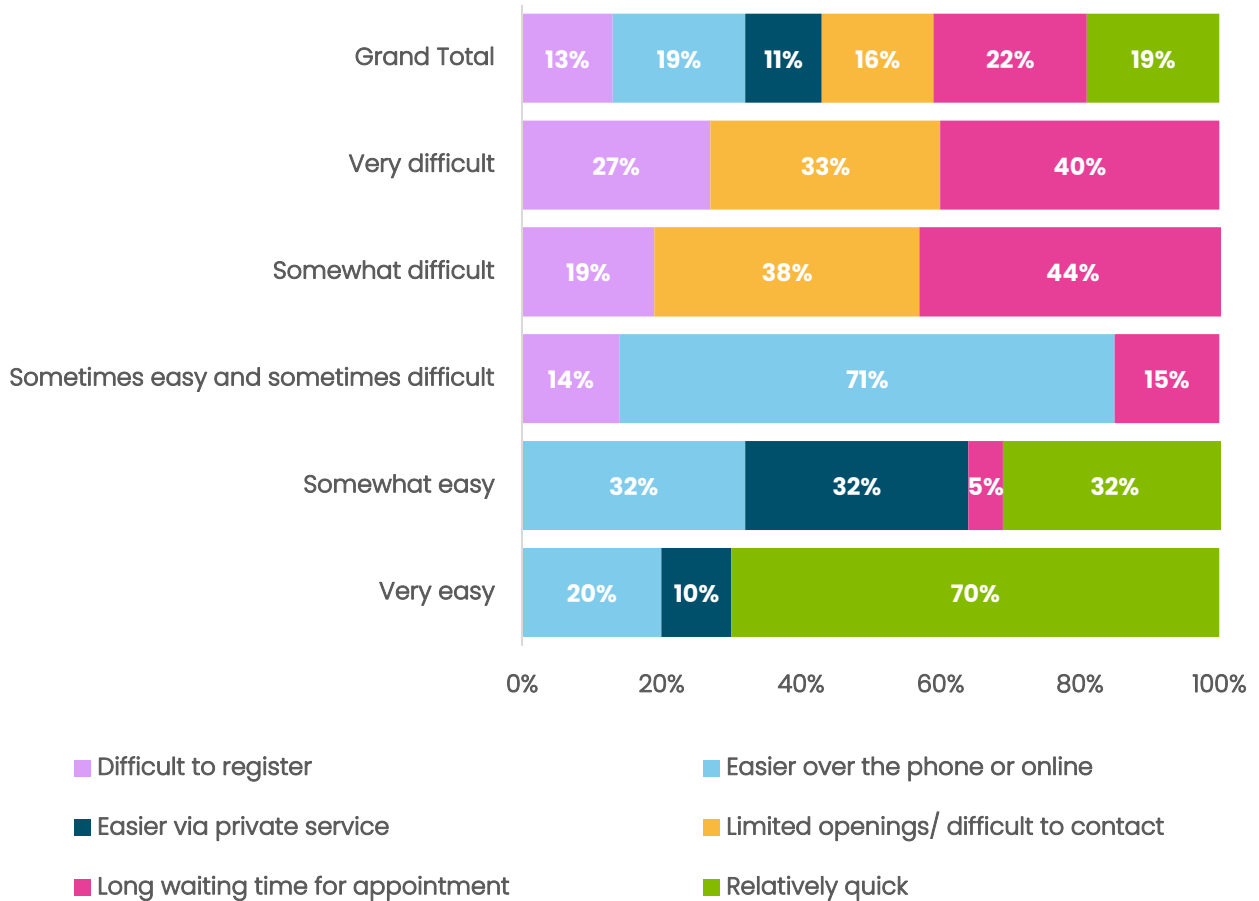
### Waiting Time

The most common reason given for difficulty in getting an appointment is long waiting times. Conversely, residents finding it very easy to get an appointment, cited reasons such as the process being relatively quick or that it was easier over the phone or online.

- It is of note that 11% of residents used private dentistry services, all of these found it somewhat easy or very easy to get an appointment.

- 13% of residents said it's difficult to register with a dentist at all, and a further 16% said it was hard to contact their dental practice.

### Appointments - reasons given

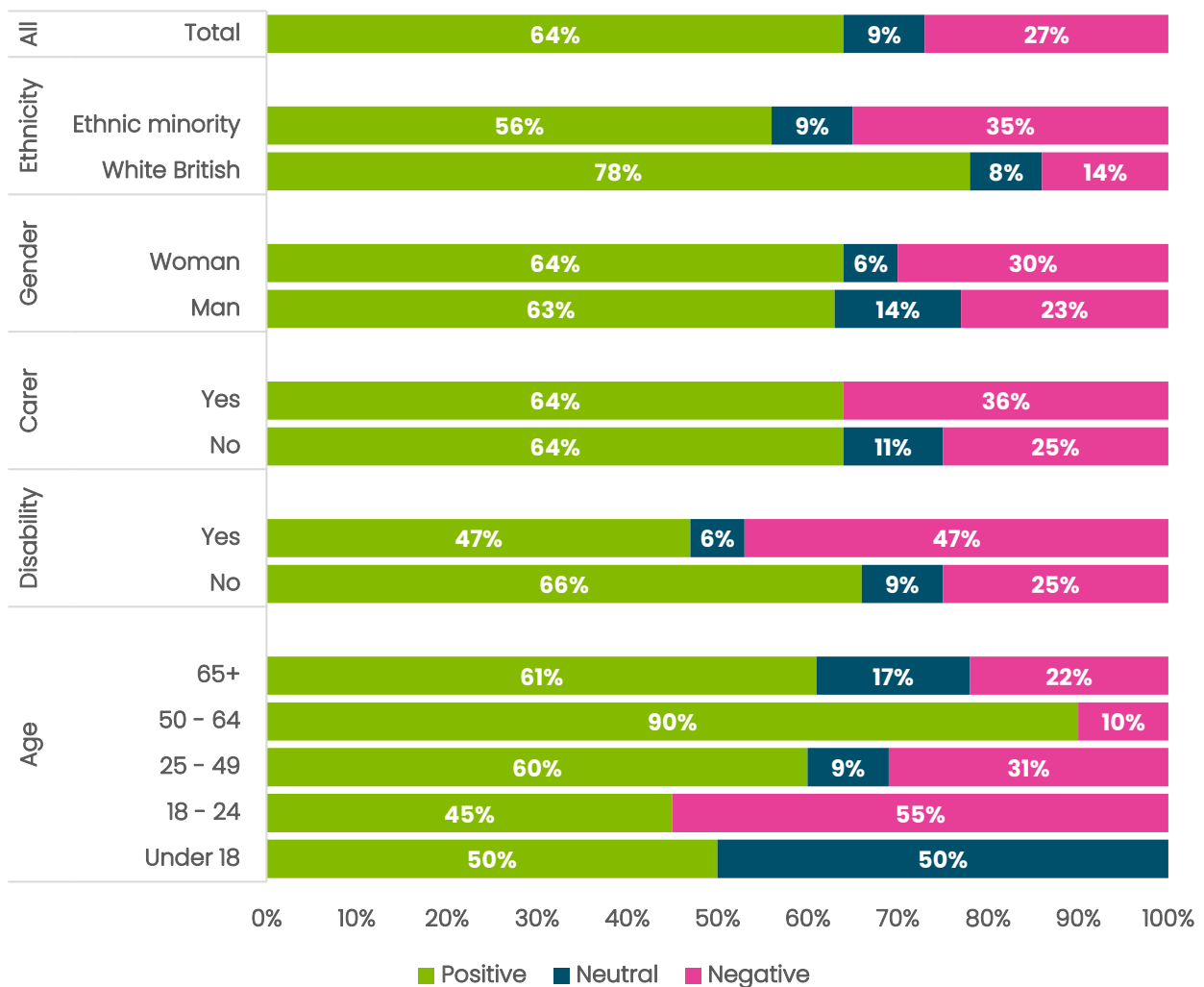


### Sentiment

Overall sentiment towards dental services in Greenwich is positive, however, there are differences between demographic groups:

- Older residents express more positive sentiment towards their dental practice than younger residents.
- There is 22 percentage point gap in positive sentiment between ethnic minority residents and those who identify as white British.
- Residents living with a disability and those who are carers are more likely to be dissatisfied with their dental practice.

### Sentiment

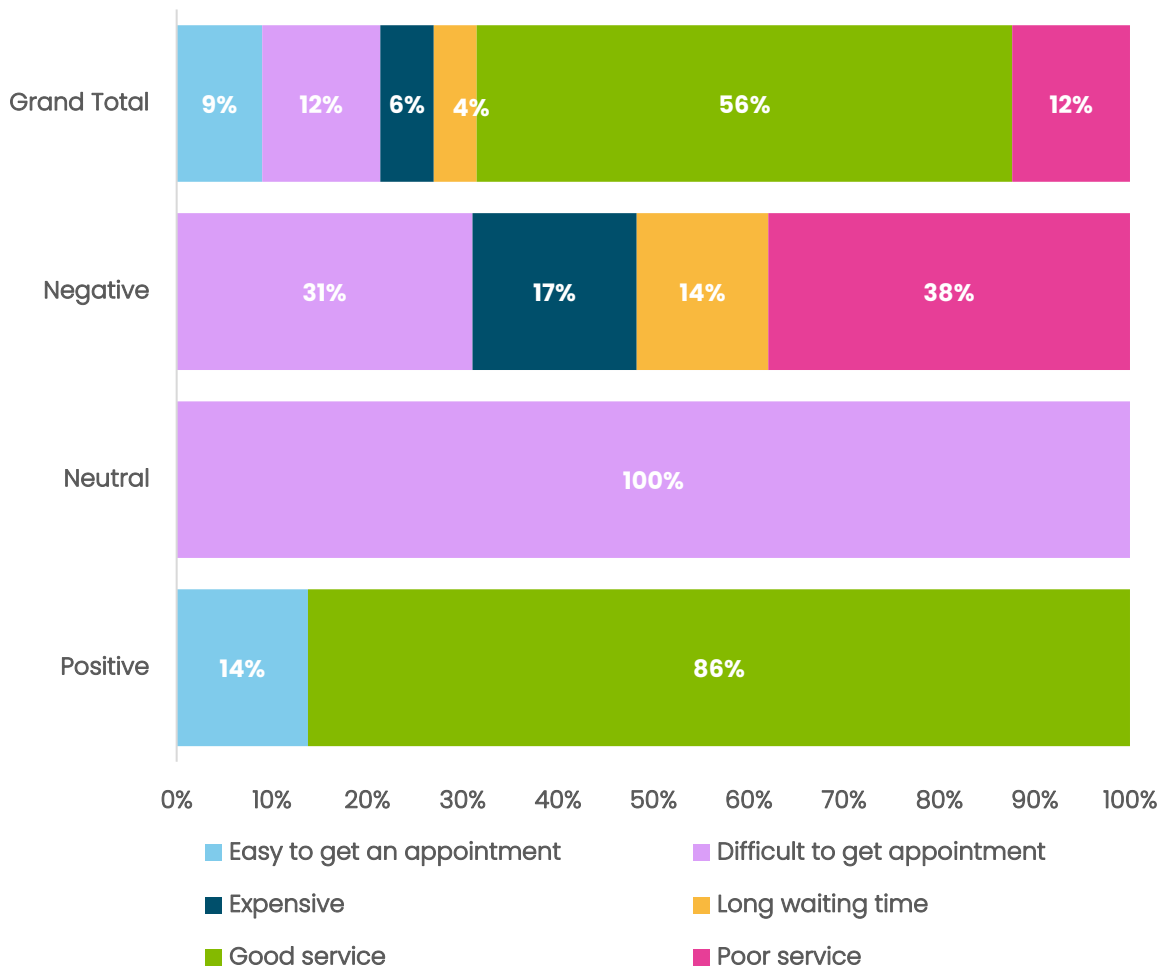


### Reason for sentiment

The quality of the dental service and difficulty of getting an appointment play important roles in dictating sentiment.

- For residents who have a negative sentiment, 38% said it was due to poor service, while 31% said it was due to the difficulty of getting an appointment.
- Similarly, 86% of residents with a positive sentiment attributed this to the good service they receive from their dental practice, with the remaining 14% positive due to the ease of getting a dental appointment.

### Reasoning for sentiment



### Conclusion

Our survey to better understand residents' experiences with dental services highlights several health inequality issues, especially with reference to equity in access to dental care. While most residents have seen a dentist in the past two years, there are disparities based on age, ethnicity, disability or long-term conditions, and caregiving responsibilities.

A proportion of residents' report difficulty when attempting to either register with a dental practice or simply get in touch with them. This represents an accessibility problem as residents trying to access essential dental care services often find themselves unable to do so. For those who have not yet established a relationship with a dental practice, the inability to register effectively acts as a barrier, leading to delays in receiving treatment.

A major concern emerging from the survey was the issue of long waiting times. Long waiting times can contribute to a range of poor outcomes. Residents may have to endure prolonged discomfort, pain, worsening of dental conditions and a decline in their oral health. This not only affects their quality of life but can also result in the need for more extensive dental treatment.

The importance of good service should also be recognised as this was the most important factor that influenced residents' overall sentiment. This suggests that, even in the context of long waiting times, the quality of the service can play an important role in improving residents' perceptions of their dental practice.

However, what makes this issue even more complex is the variation in how residents navigate waiting times. Some residents turn to private dentistry as a way to access timely appointments and avoid long waits for NHS dental care. This raises equity concerns, as not everyone has the financial means to access private dental care. These findings suggest a need to address disparities in access to dental care based on socio-economic status, ensuring that everyone has equitable access to timely dental services.



## Provider Response:

### Response from South East London LDC

The South East London LDC is the representative body for dentists providing NHS primary care services in south east London. The LDC welcomes Healthwatch Greenwich's interest in dental services and the opportunity to respond to the findings of the survey.

The LDC is working with the South East London Integrated Care Board to improve dental services in the area and welcomes the evidence provided by Healthwatch Greenwich. As the report notes the sample is small and not necessarily indicative of wider trends of access and experience of care.

On the positive side of the report, it is heartening to see that the majority of patients who do access NHS dental services are happy with the service they receive. This reflects wider national trends where experiences of NHS dental services is generally very high. We do note the disparity in age and ethnicity however and would welcome the opportunity to work with Healthwatch Greenwich to understand more about this.

Access to services is a problem. We would draw a distinction, however, between those who are unable to access a service and those who cannot access a service in a timeframe they wish. Services can become particularly busy during school holidays as this is a popular time to access care. If patients require urgent care, there is the dedicated NHS 111 dental triage service and urgent dental care hubs where patients will be referred to.

In terms of access more generally, services are still recovering from the effects of the pandemic. In March 2020 access was at its usual level of around 111,112 (50.8 per cent of the adult population) adult patients accessing care within two years, but fell to a low of 78,675 (35.8 per cent of the adult population) by March 2022. Children's access suffered the same drop from 40,386 (58.5 per cent of the child population) in March 2020 to 14,581 (21 per cent of the child population) in March 2021. By March 2022, however, children's access had doubled to over 30,000 showing the profession responding to concerns around children's oral health and access to dental care. The data shows that even prior to the pandemic commissioned capacity would only support 59 per cent of children in the borough and 51 per cent of adults, automatically leaving some people unable to access dental care.

The NHS commissions a set amount of activity from dental practices. Access rates in 2022 varied by ward from 40.7 per cent of all residents in Eltham West accessing care within the maximum NICE recall guidelines to 27.7 per cent of all residents in Greenwich West accessing NHS care within the maximum NICE recall guidelines.

A note on terminology: The report references "registration" with a dental practice. While this term is frequently used by both patients and practitioners it is no longer correct. Since 2006 when the current dental contract was introduced there has been no registration of patients at NHS dental practices. While we understand that it is a convenient term it is also unhelpful and should be avoided, as per Healthwatch England's own advice. Without registration patients access care wherever possible meaning that patients may have to travel further than their closest practice and indeed outside of the borough to access care.

**LDC Recommendations:**

- Healthwatch Greenwich to contact the LDC before embarking on further investigations into dentistry to ensure that terminology is current and practices are engaged.
- Healthwatch Greenwich to work with the LDC in highlighting access issues to the South East London Integrated Care Board and local care partnership in Greenwich.
- The LDC would be happy to work with Healthwatch Greenwich on some local patient facing information about dental services in the borough.

## Provider Response:

### Response from Circle MSK Greenwich on September Report<sup>1</sup>

We were unable to respond before the initial Healthwatch report was published because we had been given incorrect contact details, but have now been able to review this case and make contact with Anna.

We are very sorry that Anna felt so uncared for, but would like to give reassurance both to Anna, and to other patients in the area, that she was not left in the lurch, and to explain what happened in this particular case.

Anna had previously been referred to Circle in June 2019, but she hadn't responded to the letter we sent to her which invited her to contact us to make an appointment; she was then discharged in November 2019 and we sent a letter to her GP explaining this (which is our standard protocol). It is not clear exactly when Anna tried to contact Circle again but, unfortunately, if it has been several months or even years since her previous referral was closed, we couldn't simply reopen it, as a lot could have changed over that time (changes in symptoms, different management strategies tried etc.) which would mean that a different care pathway would be appropriate. We did, then, receive a new referral from her GP in April 2023 and she saw one of our clinicians at the end of June, after which an MRI spine scan was arranged. The report came back to us and, in response to that, she was referred on to the neurosurgery team at King's College Hospital in mid-July for their opinion on whether or not surgery might help. It is not clear why her GP surgery told her that we hadn't sent the referral on to neurosurgery.

At the time this case was raised to us via Healthwatch we had not received a response from King's, but when chased by us it transpired that King's had discussed this lady's case in their multidisciplinary (MDT) team meeting at the end of July, but unfortunately the outcome letter had not been sent to Circle (we are addressing this issue with King's). The King's neurosurgery MDT advised that no surgery was indicated, but instead recommended a referral to the Pain clinic. Based on this advice, we have now referred her on to the local pain team.

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<sup>1</sup> [What did we hear in September 2023? What action has been taken? | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

We All of this was explained to Anna on the phone, and she understood that we would be making that referral to the Pain team, who would hopefully be able to help her manage her symptoms, which she understood. However, on speaking with her, she explained that one of her most significant problems was her hands: we have arranged an appointment for her to see one of our clinicians in our community MSK clinic, to see if anything can be done to help specifically with her hands. We very much hope that that appointment, and input from the Pain team, will help her going forward.

If any patients need to check what is happening with their care with us, we urge them to contact our admin team on 020 3893 8382. However, if any patients feel their care is not up to standard, they can contact our PALS team – the easiest way to do this is via email:

[circle.integratedcare.pals@circlehealthgroup.co.uk](mailto:circle.integratedcare.pals@circlehealthgroup.co.uk) or via telephone: 020 3893 8382.

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