

Response to Healthwatch Greenwich Report: On Hold GP Telephone Waiting Times in Greenwich


February 2025

We would like to thank Healthwatch Greenwich for their recent report into GP telephone waiting times in the borough and we are disappointed and sorry to read about the delays in getting through to GP surgeries during this exercise. We welcome this feedback and there is clearly more that we need to do to support GP surgeries and patients to access the services when they need them.



However, there are a number of things in the report that we feel don't accurately represent how things are in terms of access to Greenwich GP surgeries or the improvements that have been put in place following the previous Healthwatch report published in 2022. We are concerned that reporting the findings in this manner could put people off from seeking help from their GP when they need it and we would like to ask for assistance from Healthwatch to increase awareness of the following points:

The report describes repeating the mystery shopper exercise carried out in 2021 and compares findings, however we feel this is an unfair comparison as the circumstances of the two exercises were very different. In 2021 Healthwatch volunteers called GP surgeries during October and November whereas in the recent report volunteers called between late November and early January with the period either side of and during Christmas being traditionally a much busier period. As well as this, in 2021 the calls were made after 10am to deliberately avoid the busiest period however in 2024 they were made between 8am and 8.30am to test the busiest time. With this in mind we feel it is misleading to report that call waiting times were 'nearly three times longer than the average observed in 2021'.

The report didn't test, or even acknowledge, Healthwatch recommendations from the 2022 report which have now been implemented in all Greenwich GP surgeries:

Recommendation from the 2022 report	Status	
All GP practices should be contactable by telephone during their opening hours. If a practice has closed or merged, a recorded message should inform of the recent changes and divert the call to the active practice.		Healthwatch volunteers were able to contact all GP surgeries during their opening hours.



Recommendation from the 2022 report	Status	
Automated systems should tell callers their position in the line.		All GP surgeries now have automated systems which do this.
An automated menu (“press 1 for ..., press 2 for...” should be offered for routine enquiries such as test results and prescriptions		All GP surgeries now have automated systems which do this.
During peak periods, the automated message should inform the caller of quieter times to call		With the new automated phone systems in all GP surgeries patients can now select a call-back feature, which allows them to retain their position in the queue without remaining on hold. This function is widely used and reduces the actual time patients spend actively waiting on the phone.

We believe the report shows some evidence of the progress made with average waiting times during the busiest time between 2 and 5 minutes. All GP surgeries are continuing to work on improving access for their patients, including via online bookings and consultations where appropriate.

We request that the report is amended to reflect the points above or, at the least, that this response is published alongside the report.

