

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield

Key issues from April 2022

In April 2022 we received 81 pieces of feedback about health and social care services in Sheffield. This month we have heard reoccurring themes of people experiencing difficulty accessing GP appointments, NHS dentistry and mental health services. We have received mixed feedback about a wide range of GP practices across the city and have also heard people's views about the 5 new proposed healthcare centres. In addition, we have received feedback from those who have experienced hospital care and treatment.

GPs

In March we heard 63 pieces of feedback relating to 21 different GP practices in Sheffield. Those reporting positive feedback told us they had received good care from their GP, felt listened to and had encountered friendly staff.

Roughly half of the people we heard from reported difficulties getting through to their GP, booking appointments and long waiting times to be seen which is a continuation of existing concerns we have heard in previous months. Some people reported they had been on hold for up to an hour waiting to get through. Others stated that they had difficulty booking non-urgent appointments and receptionists were not clarifying what type of appointment was needed at the start of the call. We heard reports from people who described receptionists as unhelpful when finally getting through to speak to someone. Due to work commitments some patients could not phone their GP first thing to get an appointment, when they tried later on in the morning all the urgent appointments were taken leaving them feeling helpless.

'Staff are very caring, don't rush or hurry you, listen to concerns and thorough in treatment.'

'Very, very rarely do I contact the GP for anything. I am currently waiting for my call to be answered. 50 minutes and still waiting!!'

One person reported whilst attending a Covid 19 group vaccination session the GP waiting room was crowded with people sitting in very close proximity of each other. Windows were not open for ventilation and reception staff were not wearing masks. As the individual was an at risk patient they were initially told that they wouldn't be waiting long to be seen however were waiting over 20 mins before being called in. They commented 'they were horrified of the appalling organisation and failure to create a Covid safe environment'. Another individual told us that they could not get access to their Covid 19 booster as they were housebound; they had tried to call their GP to get a home visit and had called NHS 119 but were going around in circles, they didn't know what to do.



Proposed New Healthcare Centres for the City

Sheffield has been awarded £37m to transform Sheffield GP practices in different areas of the city. The money could be used to build up to five new healthcare centres bringing together GP services, health and other services under one roof. If the proposal is agreed this would mean that affected GP buildings would close and the staff would relocate into the new centres, with each practice maintaining its own identity within the new building.

We spent a day talking to the public in Firth Park and also attended five public meetings about the proposals, giving us a chance to hear people's views. People's opinions were mixed – some liked the idea of the new healthcare centres being built as they said their current practice was outdated and needed improvement. Comments included new buildings would hopefully be better equipped and would be able to run more efficiently. However, the majority of people we spoke to expressed concerns; issues raised included the potential locations of the new centres, limited public transport to get to them, and questions about how the new centres would run efficiently with a number of different GP practices being under the same roof.

Some people also shared concerns about how people were being told about the changes and asked for their views – for example they

'The location of my current service is very good however I feel a new service would be beneficial. My practice has gone downhill, it is run down and drab.'

'The new site would be much further away for me. I would have to get two buses which would cost a lot more.'

wanted to know how older people, people with English as an additional language, and people without access to the internet were being involved.

Hospitals – unequal experiences

In April we heard 11 people's experiences of hospital services. Largely, people who had visited hospital were positive about their experiences, describing good treatment and caring staff. We did however hear about some specific issues impacting particular individuals and groups. For example, we heard concerns from a local group who told us that when autistic patients had booked appointment support and quiet spaces, staff had been unaware of their requests. It was also reported that if autistic patients were shown to a quiet space they felt that they had been left there and forgotten about. Furthermore, we heard from transitioning patients who had informed both hospital staff and their GP of changes to their name. They were assured by staff their details would be corrected on the computer systems, however when attending appointments previous names were still being used. Feedback was also given regarding gendered toilets being widely available but no offer of any neutral options limiting individual choice. We also heard that the audiology department telephone number was not working even though this was publicised on the hospital website. As this individual had a hearing impairment they also made us aware of the communication barriers they were experiencing with the department as no email or text options were available for patients.



Dentists

This month the theme continued around people struggling to access NHS dentistry. The majority of people we heard from had not been seen by a dentist for a significant period of time.

They raised concerns about their children's oral health as well as their own. We also heard reports that patients had been removed from their dental practices without any prior warning. Unfortunately waiting lists in Sheffield still remain to be a long process.

'I am sure both of my children have tooth decay, they haven't seen a dentist for the past 2 years.'

We continue to advise people if they are experiencing pain , ask to be triaged by any local dentist or alternatively phone NHS 111.

We continue to raise issues accessing dentistry at a regional level, and continue to support Healthwatch England's national campaign to #fixNHSdentistry. We believe that contract reform and meaningful, sustained funding is urgently required to get people the care they need.

Mental Health Services

We continued to hear from individuals who are experiencing difficulties accessing NHS mental health services. One person reported that they had been trying to access NHS mental health services for the past 8 months, they were struggling to cope and needed some support. In addition, we heard about a concern when contacting SPA (Single Point of Access) through initial telephone call staff were not empathic or compassionate. They were told to expect a call the following day but the individual didn't receive a call.

'The call handler today showed zero empathy and zero compassion'

This summary of key issues is a snapshot of what we are hearing about. We want to reflect the experiences of people who share their stories with us, and we hope that it can help services, and commissioners of services, by indicating potential areas of focus. It is based on:

- Experiences that members of the public share with us through our information and advice service
- Feedback shared by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion, who we've partnered with to provide a feedback-sharing platform

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

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A green speech bubble with the text 'Talk to us...' in white.