

March 2024

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.



Participants at Mental Well-Being Workshop organised by Healthwatch Greenwich and Royal Borough of Greenwich Public Health.

What did we hear this month?

We heard from 459 Greenwich residents about their experience of health and care services.

“ I have to wait for an hour to talk to the receptionist. That’s unacceptable. Doctors are good, but the service is ordinary.
GP Practice

“ Very hard to make appointments, even weeks in advance it’s still hard to make an appointment.
GP Practice

In this report

About us.....	1
What did we hear this month?	1
Community Engagement and Outreach	3
Community Engagement – Mental Well-Being	4
Community Engagement – Perinatal Health.....	5
What Greenwich residents are saying... ..	6
Primary Care	6
Hospital Services.....	8
<i>Ola’s Experience: “My son needed help, but he didn’t get it.”</i>	10
Next Steps	12
Contact Us.....	12

Community Engagement and Outreach



At the Greenwich Pensioners Forum members shared their worries about the difficulty of getting face-to-face GP appointments, with some suggesting the needs of older people were not being met. Some said they had made a complaint to their GP practice, but never received a response in return and didn't know what else they could do to raise concerns.

The increasing shift to virtual services and online platforms to access services was a challenge for those who don't have a laptop, smart phone or the knowledge, skills, or confidence to use technology. Many shared a general feeling of being left behind and unheard. Inability to use technology also affected their ability to complain as they couldn't go online, find the GP practice website, and fill in a 'comments, compliments, and complaints' form.

Only one member was very happy with their GP practice and was always able to access face-to-face appointments when requested. Interestingly, they didn't share the name of the practice for fear an influx of new patients might worsen the quality of care.

Overall, pensioners want better and more accessible communication channels, and greater responsiveness to their requests for face-to-face appointments.

Community Engagement – Mental Well-Being

Healthwatch Greenwich and Royal Borough of Greenwich Public Health held a workshop for community leaders to explore their views and experiences on mental well-being.

Participants representing ethnic minority and seldom heard groups in Greenwich, shared difficulties accessing mental well-being support within their communities, often because they do not know where to seek help. The group discussed a wide range of factors affecting mental well-being including money, housing, and food, and identified finding information on resources and services as a big challenge. *“Concerned bodies need to simplify the available information. If someone needs food, they are just desperate for food,”* said Lydia Lings Director of SEND Support. *“They won’t be browsing online or writing applications on where to find food. Why does the information need to be complicated? There are many barriers for even accessing information let alone support.”*

“People often turn to their friends and family for support, but they are not of great help very often,” said Paul Green from Avant-Gardening CIC. *“People still don’t know where to go in a time of need. There are real problems – barriers.”* Jas Sahota, from Woolwich Service User Project (WSUP) stressed that cultural barriers often stop individuals from seeking support. Where mental health is considered a taboo, there is reluctance to reach out to external agencies or services. *“Such as in certain Asian communities, mental health/ illness can be a taboo subject. Mental illness is still stigmatised”*, said Jas. Tara Masand, head coach at Train with Tara, said people face language, as well as cultural barriers in accessing support.

Community leaders shared how their projects, although not always designed to address mental well-being, played a preventative role by giving people the opportunity for social connection and informal support. But limited access to affordable and accessible spaces and sustainable funding reduced their ability to offer this. *“Space being taken away is a real issue,”* said Amarjit from the Indian Cultural Society Drop-in Day Centre. *“People would visit for informal chats around coffee/tea; now this social network is gone. There is less opportunity to get together, to check up on each-other, offer support, or signpost to local services for those in need.”*

Community Engagement – Perinatal Health



Healthwatch Greenwich joined a perinatal health event hosted by Parent Power. New mums shared how hard it was to get a GP appointment and how the communication skills of front desk staff often made the situation worse. Women said that front desk staff in GP practices didn't always display empathy or try to help when new mums were worried or confused. Women felt they were often actively discouraged by front desk staff from making an appointment without meaningful explanations leaving women feeling that a system of 'gatekeeping' was being operated.

Maternity experiences at Queen Elizabeth Hospital were a source of intense discussion and both positive and less than positive experiences. Mums shared stories of extensive waits of many hours for midwifery appointments and poor post-natal care. One mum described feeling 'abandoned' by midwifery staff in the post-natal period.

All mothers had positive experiences of community breastfeeding and baby clinics. Women highlighted the professional, supportive, and informative staff giving much needed guidance and assistance. In addition, community clinics fostered a sense of community and support during the early stages of parenthood.

What Greenwich residents are saying...

Primary Care

- “ Both staff and doctor are lovely. They are one of the best GP services, they are always ready to help.**
GP Practice
- “ My husband was on medication due to persistent stomach aches. My husband's situation(pain) got worse, and they didn't do any test to check the stomach pain to find the root cause of the problem. When I complained, only then they decided to investigate.**
GP Practice
- “ I am happy with GP. They are very good but it's very hard to make appointments—lots of queuing and the line is always busy. But they are good, they investigate your problem, and they are comforting. They want to take care of you.**
GP Practice
- “ I would not recommend to anyone my GP. The receptionists there are awful. Sometimes they behave like doctors who know about the patients. They block you from seeing a doctor by telling you doctors are on annual leave. Then why can't they book you to a different doctor? They could do better.**
GP Practice
- “ My GP is not good at all. It definitely needs improvement. Staff are not polite and there is a long waiting time.**
GP Practice

“Really hard to make an appointment with my GP. Also, reception is not patient-friendly... difficult to make appointment ... You can't even ask questions and they are dismissive. They don't listen to your problem

GP Practice

“They have let me down badly. Some doctors listen to what you want to say or what you tell them. They should close it down. I prefer to go to A&E because they are the worst.

GP Practice

“It is very difficult to get an appointment at my GP. The waiting times are very lengthy. Also, staff are very rude and abrupt sometimes. However, the surgery nurse is very nice as well as some doctors. Receptionist staff are better behaved too. Please change the waiting times!

GP Practice

“I am really not happy with my GP surgery because it is impossible to get an appointment. Last week I had to talk to the receptionist who is the one who decides on your medical condition. Everything is negative nothing is positive with that GP surgery.

GP Practice

“Very heartbreaking process to just see a GP. You have to wake up early and go queue between 6.30-7 am before you can get booked to see a GP that day. You have to queue outside the GP surgery until they resume work about 8.30 and open the door before you can go in, and then you go in, and you have to queue again for the reception. Sometimes you get told there are no more slots, and you have to come back and queue the next day again. Sometimes they say there are no appointments for weeks... the experience is horrible.

GP Practice

Hospital Services

- “ I went to Queen Elizabeth Hospital for breast cancer screening. The waiting times weren't bad and I'm generally very happy about my care. The nurses and doctors were professional and very efficient. They should keep up the good work.**
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
- “ I went to Queen Elizabeth Hospital – outpatient, for a blood test. The queue was quite long but it went quickly. I was seen by a male phlebotomist who was very patient, kind, and lovely. I could not even feel the needle in my arm. It was quite gently done. All staff should be like that gentleman.**
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
- “ When I visited the hospital last time in March last year, I had to get admitted at the end for 10 days. I was given the best treatment—no complaints.**
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
- “ I had to go to the A&E because I had cut my finger. Service was OK but I had to wait for a long time.**
Queen Elizabeth Hospital
- “ I nearly lost my baby in the hands of some of the staff – doctors, midwives. I had been diagnosed with placenta previa which is a very serious situation and was told that I would deliver via Caesarean. However, the doctor I met on the day of my delivery refused to take me to the theatre as she said I could deliver naturally. I was kept the whole day on a bed without anything being done. After 8 hours when the staff changed over, I got a good doctor who rushed me to the theatre and delivered the baby in less than 10- minutes because the baby was in distress.**
Queen Elizabeth Hospital

“ I took my dad to the A&E by the ambulance. He had temperature and shortness of breath. However, we had to wait for a long time before he was seen by the medics. They should have treated the situation as an emergency. They should have gotten someone to do an initial assessment to reduce the lengthy wait.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

“ Ambulance team were great. I called for an ambulance to transport my mum to the hospital. They arrived on time. They handled my mum with care. They were patient and very compassionate. They continued monitoring her until we got to Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Ambulance Service

Ola's Experience: "My son needed help, but he didn't get it."

Ola migrated from Nigeria over 20 years ago, and now lives in Greenwich with his wife and five children. Ola cares for his eldest son who lives with significant disabilities.

"Being a carer is a passionate and emotionally demanding role, it's different from being a father—it demands much more, takes a toll on you..."

Recently, Ola found himself in a bureaucratic maze, trying to get and understand information on what support was available for his son.

"... It was hard. It was tough because so many things I didn't understand. So many things. There's so many. I didn't have the experience of being a carer. I didn't know about a lot of information. It was not really clear to me... because the truth of the matter is that all the information you need is not available, it's not really out there... you're struggling to get information... So you have to go extra miles to get some information... You don't know about it, so you're missing out from those information... Some of them [information] they'll be tricky, but when you want to find out more about them, you're stuck..."

While finding and understanding information was difficult, accessing support was no easier.

"My immigration status played a very negative role because I wasn't born in United Kingdom... I was told I was not entitled to a lot of things like tax credits, disability allowance, carers allowance just because of my immigration status. I went through a lot. So, at that time when I was going through all of this, my son needed assistance. But he wasn't getting it because of my immigration status."

Ola spoke about a lack of empathy when engaging with some services and being made to feel sidelined or that his son's well-being was 'not important'.

"Sometimes I've been treated fairly. Sometimes I have not been treated fairly, but I think one of the reasons why I'm treated unfairly because the people or the person I'm dealing with don't understand the gravity. You don't understand. You don't know what I'm going through... So, you will see from your own side..."

Being excluded from support and having financial worries affects the whole family.

"I can't put in so many hours in my workplace because I need to spend time to care for him. Sometimes I want to do some social activities, but I cannot because I need to think about my son, because he depends on me for so many things... So, it's eating up my salary... I have to provide more for my son because he needs certain things. He needs certain activities; he needs social activities. These things cost money. So, I have to bring [it]."

Getting support for his son highlights a web of barriers at the intersection of immigration status and the responsibilities of being a carer.

"Because at the end of the day, regardless of your status, you are a carer and the child needs that assistance. So, what happens then? Just because of immigration status, you're not going to get the help you need..."

(We are awaiting responses from RBG commissioners. Once we receive the response, we will publish it on our website.)

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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