

How Rotherham residents
access Health and Social
Care information



About us

Healthwatch Rotherham:

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Rotherham. We are here to make sure that those running services put people at the heart of care.

Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf. We focus on ensuring that peoples' worries and concerns about current services are addressed and work to get services right for the future.

Contents

About us.....	2
Introduction:	3
Method:	3
Findings:	4
Conclusions:	16
Recommendations:	17
Responses	17
Acknowledgments	21

Introduction:

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many services went from face to face to online/via telephone services, to ensure they could still see patients whilst following Government guidelines. As well as offering services such as GP appointments over the telephone or via video call, health and social care communications and information also made this transition.

Aside from the Covid-19 pandemic, we live in a digital world, and thanks to the internet, this means that those with access to the internet can view a wealth of health and social care information. As we emerge from the pandemic and adjust to the 'new normal', many services still use digital communications to deliver important health and social care information to patients, including hospital letters, post-operation information and care home directories.

Whilst this is an efficient, cost-saving way to communicate to patients, it is not a 'one size fits all' solution, with many Rotherham residents feeling excluded and isolated from communications and information. For those without access to the internet, or those who have accessibility issues, they risk missing out on vital information due to this not being readily available in the appropriate format.

We decided to undertake this research to establish how Rotherham residents access health and social care information, what information is currently missing and what service providers can do going forward to ensure they are providing information in ways that result in all patients being able to access it.

Method:

To gather this information, we used 'Smart Survey' to create some questions for Rotherham residents to answer. The survey was anonymous, allowing people to be as honest as they wish. The survey ran from Friday 2nd September to Monday 31st October, and this generated 91 responses. As you will see in more detail below, our age range varied from 18 years old through to 80+ years old, allowing us to analyse a wide range of experiences.

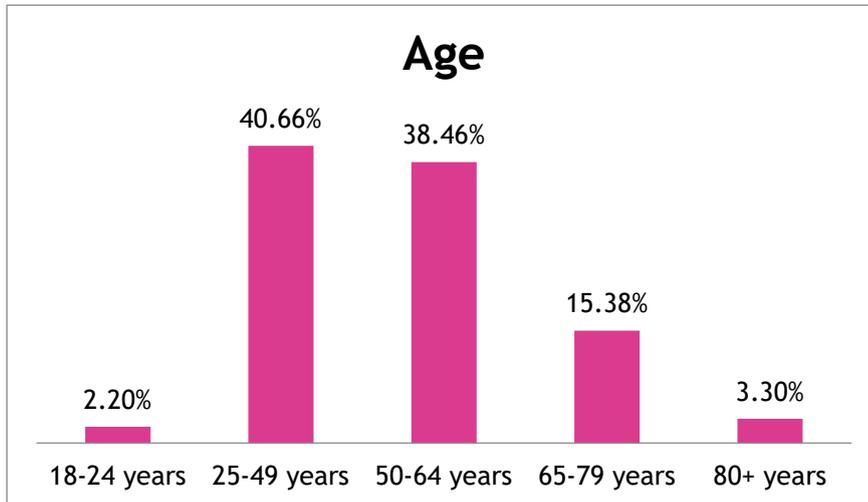
The survey was online, with it being shared in our newsletter, amongst our mailing list and on social media. We also provided printable and accessible versions of the survey upon request, to ensure we were hearing from those who did not have access to the internet or social media. We also did some in-person engagement as part of our on-going community engagement, visiting groups and services including Andy's Man Club, Dearne Valley College and the Social Supermarket at Rotherham Minster. We assisted service users in completing surveys, as well as creating a drop-off and pick up service for surveys, allowing people to complete at their leisure over a number of weeks. These survey responses were then inputted onto our digital survey, adding to the final total.

The responses were then analysed, with the findings grouped into themes and data displayed into graphs to ensure these are visually clear to read and understand. These findings will then be used to make future recommendations to service providers in order to improve the patient experience. You can view these findings and recommendations below.

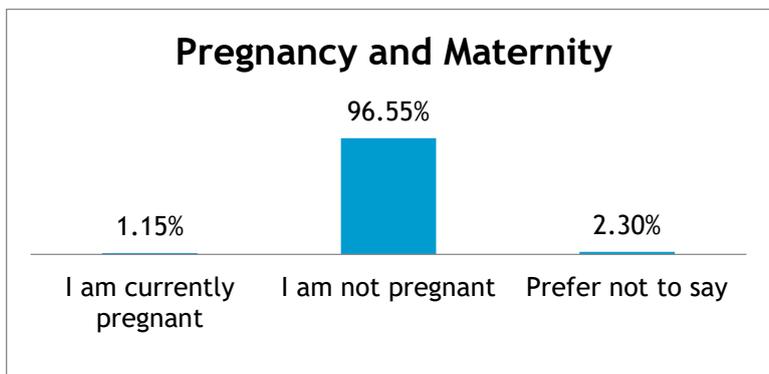
Findings:

The findings below have been analysed and converted into clear, easy to read graphs.

Demographics:

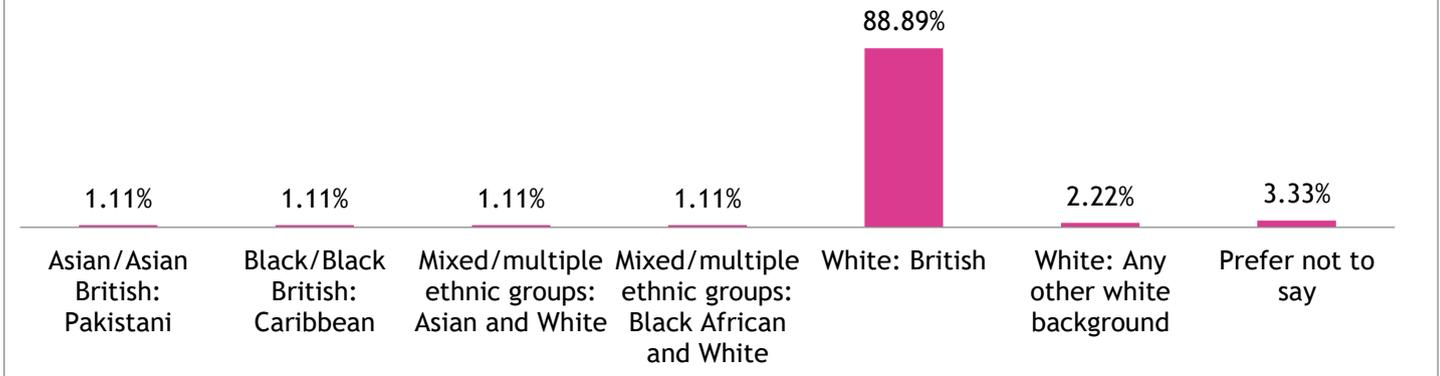


Our aim for this survey was to ensure we spoke to an audience with a wide age range to get opinions and experiences from multiple generations. Due to combining online survey promotion with in-person engagement, we were able to achieve this. We have gathered data from residents aged 18 all the way through to residents aged 80 years and above.



We asked this question to establish whether people were struggling to access information surrounding maternity and pregnancy issues.

Ethnicity:

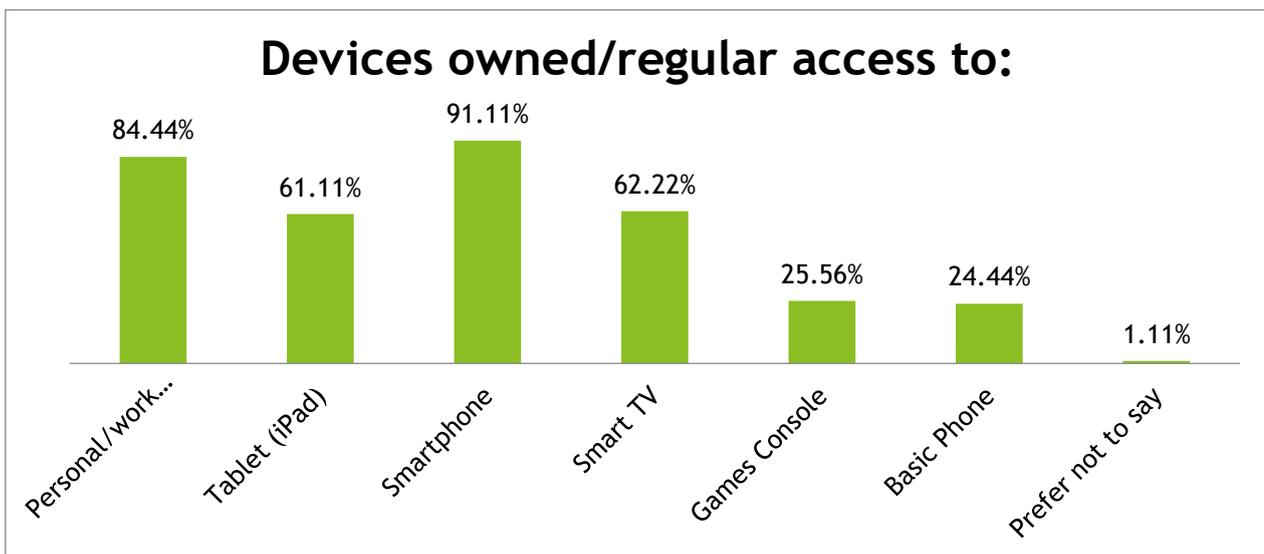


As an organisation, we have been working hard over the past few months to establish relationships with services for a variety of people and groups in different areas in Rotherham. As time progresses, we would like to target seldom heard groups more, to ensure their voices are being heard, and this is something we aim to do in future reports.

Understanding, speaking, reading and writing English:

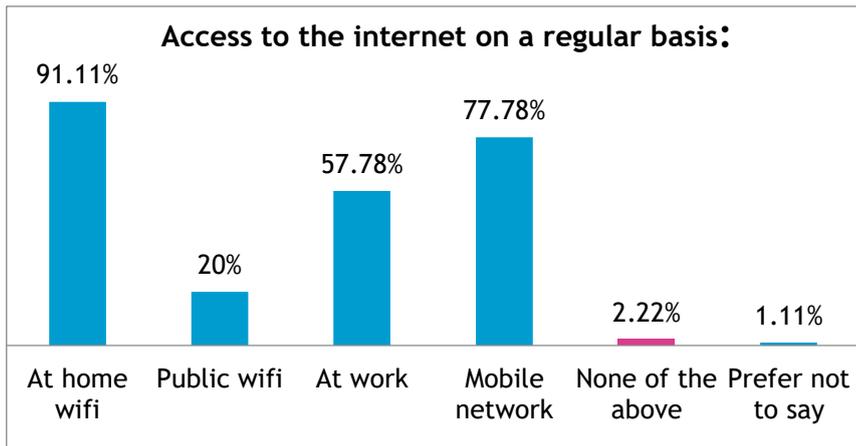
We asked this question to establish the level of English our respondents can understand, read and write in, to assess how well they can understand health and social care information when presented with it. Over 95% of respondents can speak, read, write and understand English to a very high standard. There are around 2.5% of respondents who struggle to read and write English, and it is important that these people are considered when information is being created and distributed, with alternative accessible methods being provided when necessary.

Online access and confidence:



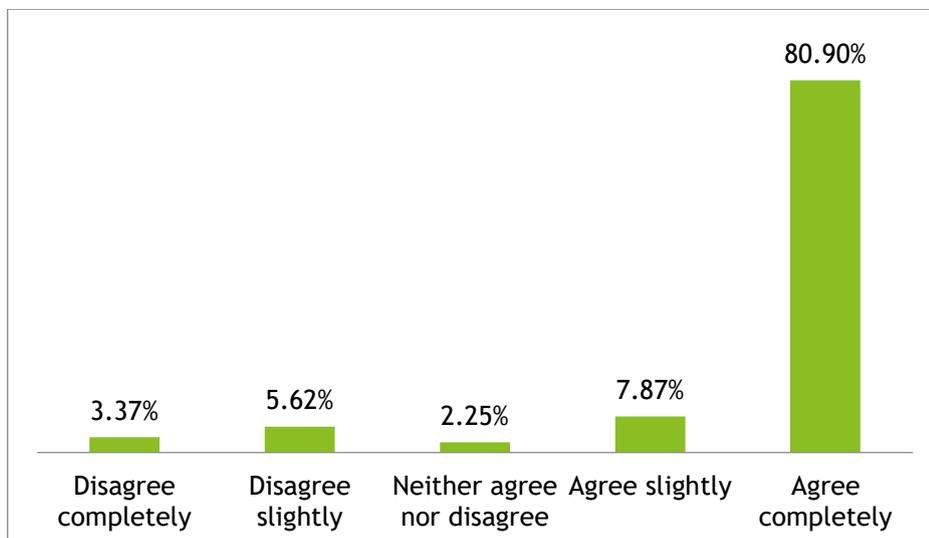
9% of respondents did not own a smartphone, with 16% not owning or having access to a computer on a regular basis.

The majority of respondents have access to a smartphone as well as a personal or work computer. Less popular answers included a games console, smart TV and a basic phone. Respondents could select more than one answer, suggesting that people possess multiple devices that they can access the internet through. It is important to remind service providers that not everybody in Rotherham has access to these devices, which should be taken into consideration when creating electronic documents.



Whilst the majority of our survey respondents can access the internet on a regular basis, **2.22% of people could not access the internet at home, in public, at work or via a mobile.** This risks people being digitally excluded from important health and social care information, feeling isolated and disadvantaged compared to others. As the cost of living crisis continues, more people may struggle to access the internet due to the cost of running devices and paying for internet. It is important service providers are aware of this and can adapt their communications to ensure everyone is able to access the information they need in an appropriate format.

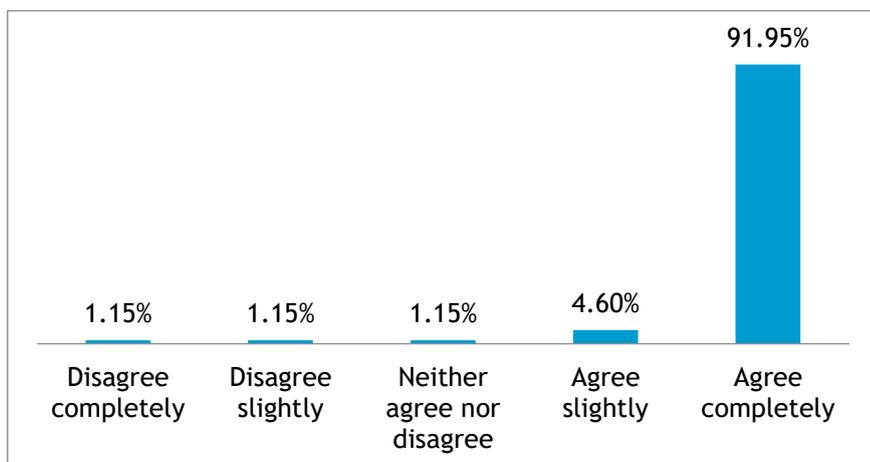
I am confident in using apps to carry out day to day tasks (e.g online banking, booking medical appointments)



Just over 80% of people agree completely that they are confident in using mobile apps to carry out day to day tasks, which includes medical appointments. 9% are not confident using mobile apps to carry out day-to-day tasks, including booking medical appointments. This

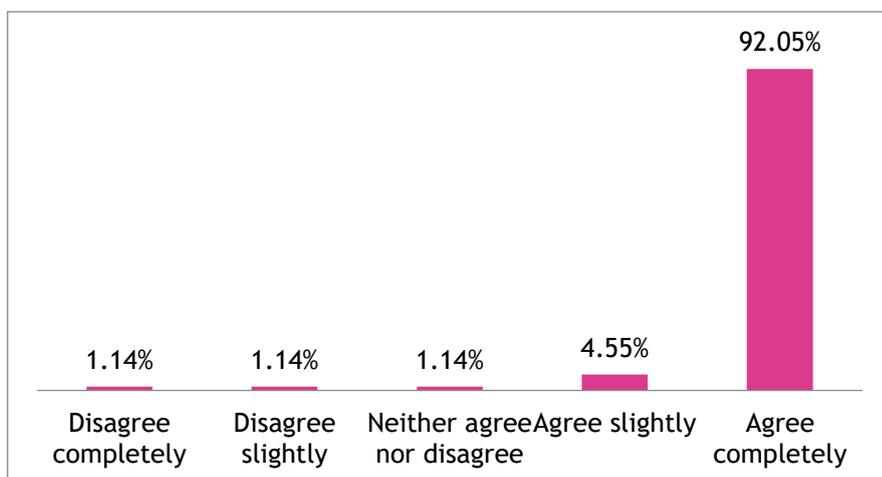
means they may not be able to use tools such as the Rotherham Health App or the NHS app to access health and social care information, book medical appointments and access test results.

I am confident in using online search tools to look for information (e.g Google)



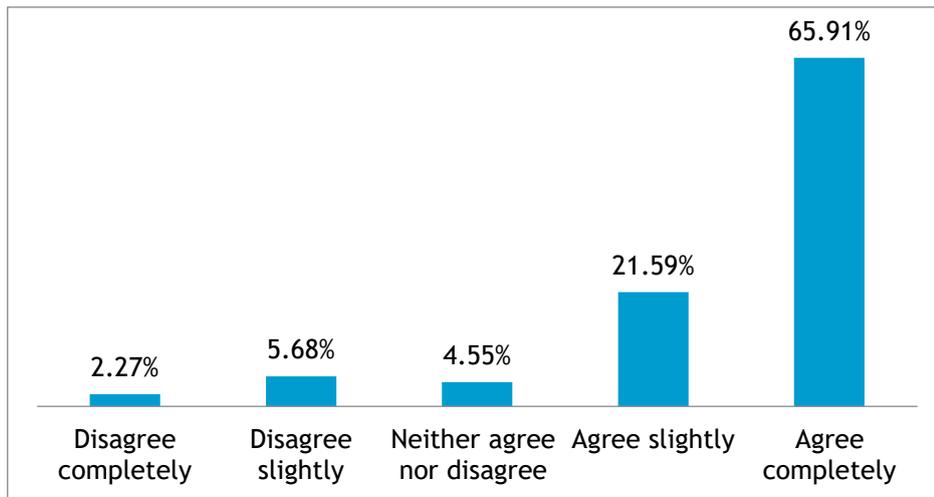
The majority of respondents feel confident in using Google to look for health and social care information, meaning they can access information independently should they have the resources to do so, such as a laptop or smartphone.

I am confident using online written communication such as email, Whatsapp and text:



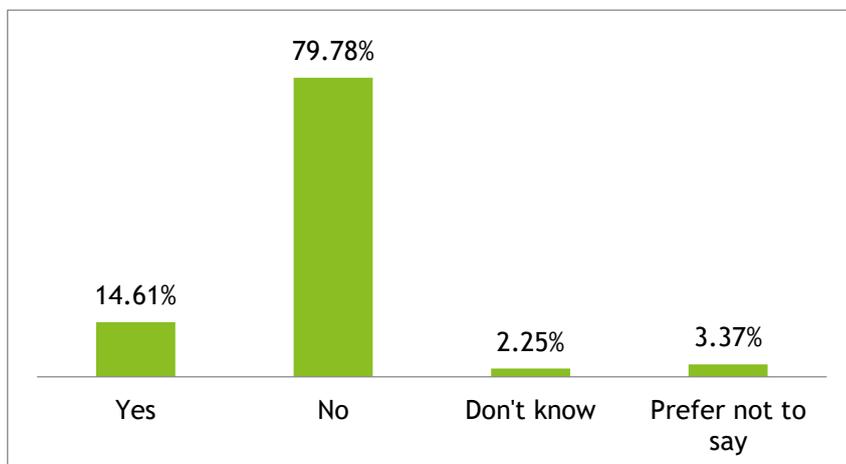
92% of people agree completely that they are confident using written communications such as e-mail, Whatsapp and text messaging.

I am confident using onscreen/video communication such as Facetime, Zoom, Skype or Teams:



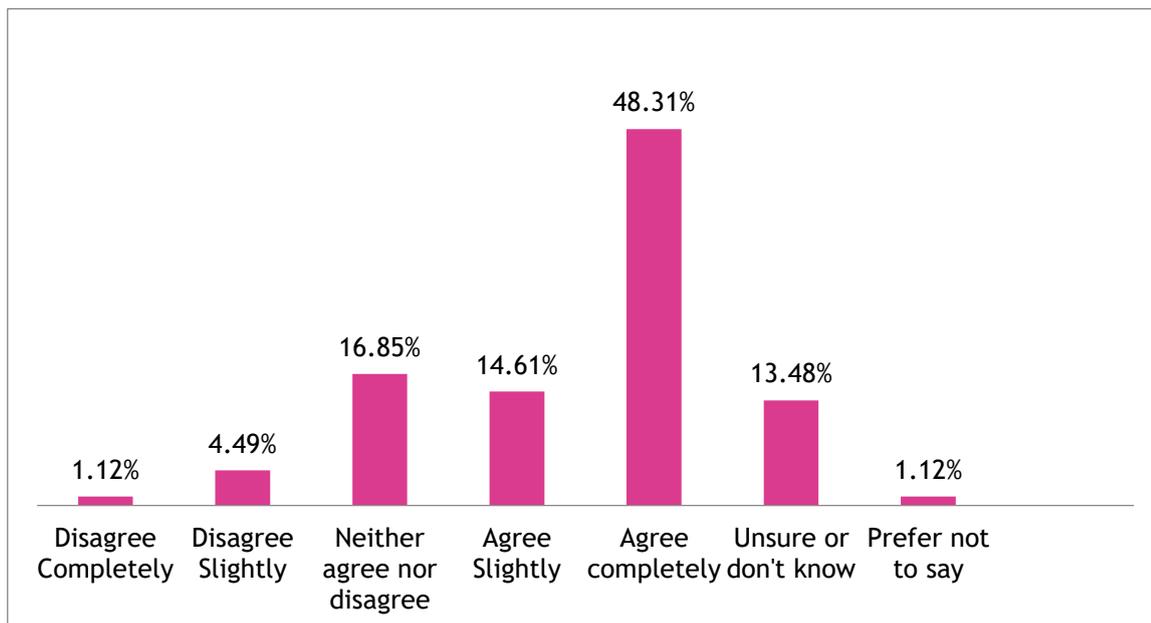
66% of respondents were completely confident in using apps such as Facetime, Zoom, Skype or Teams. This is a reduction on the other online methods, although this figure may have been even lower before the Covid-19 pandemic. Many services increased their usage of video communications during the pandemic, requiring people to communicate via these for medical, work and personal reasons.

Do you have a disability, impairment or sensory loss that can make accessing information challenging?



Just under 15% of respondents have a disability, impairment or sensory loss that can make accessing information challenging. This may require them to have information printed in different formats, and it is important that health and social care services can provide this, which the next question examines in more detail.

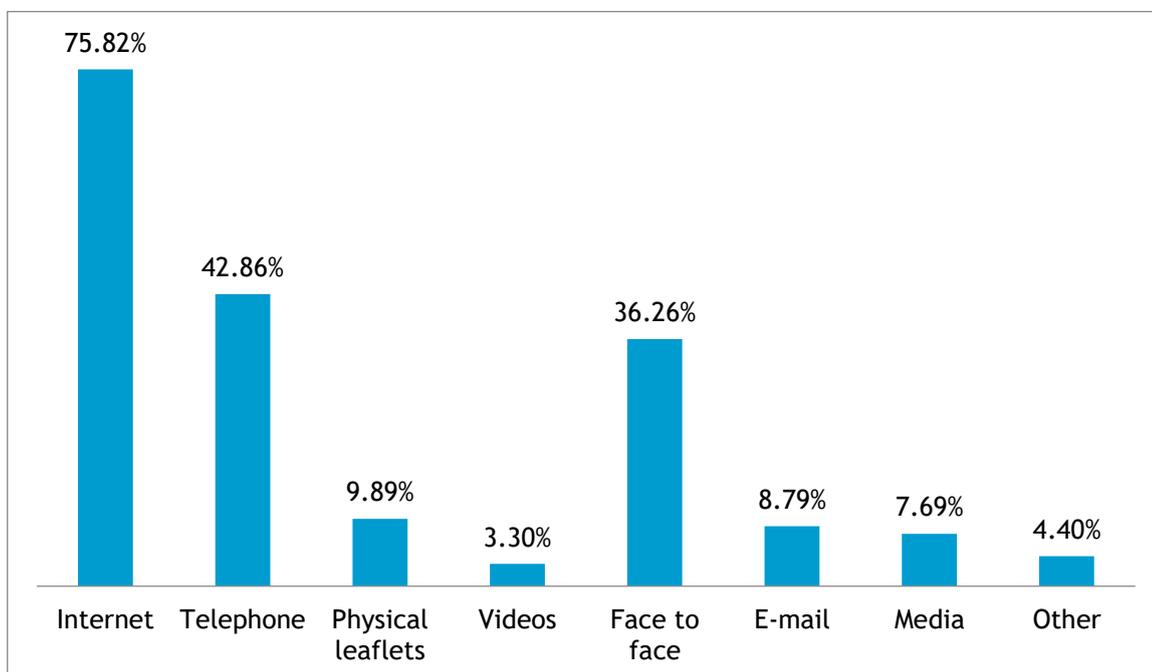
To what extent do you agree that the communications you receive from the NHS about your care or treatment are accessible? (available in braille, translated to other languages, BSL, easy read)



“Less than half of respondents completely agree that the communications they receive from the NHS about their care or treatments are accessible”.

These results show that some Rotherham residents are being provided with inaccessible communications, resulting in them missing out on important information regarding their care and treatment. Just under 15% of respondents stated they had a disability, impairment or sensory loss that can make accessing information challenging. Around 6% of those respondents believe NHS communications are inaccessible.

What is the main method you use to access health and social care information?



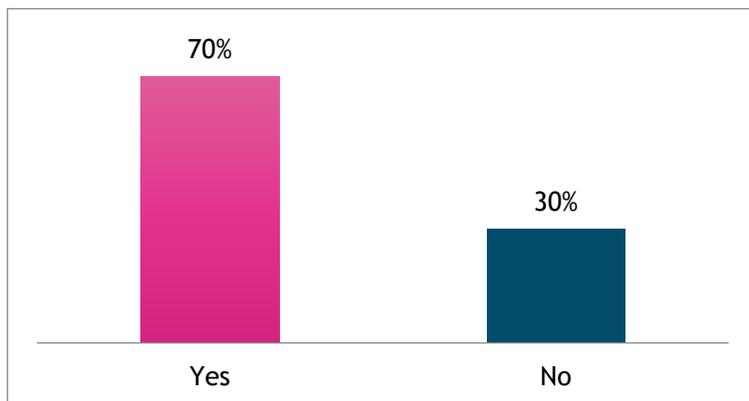
The main

method that respondents use to access health and social care information is the internet, followed by telephone and face to face methods.

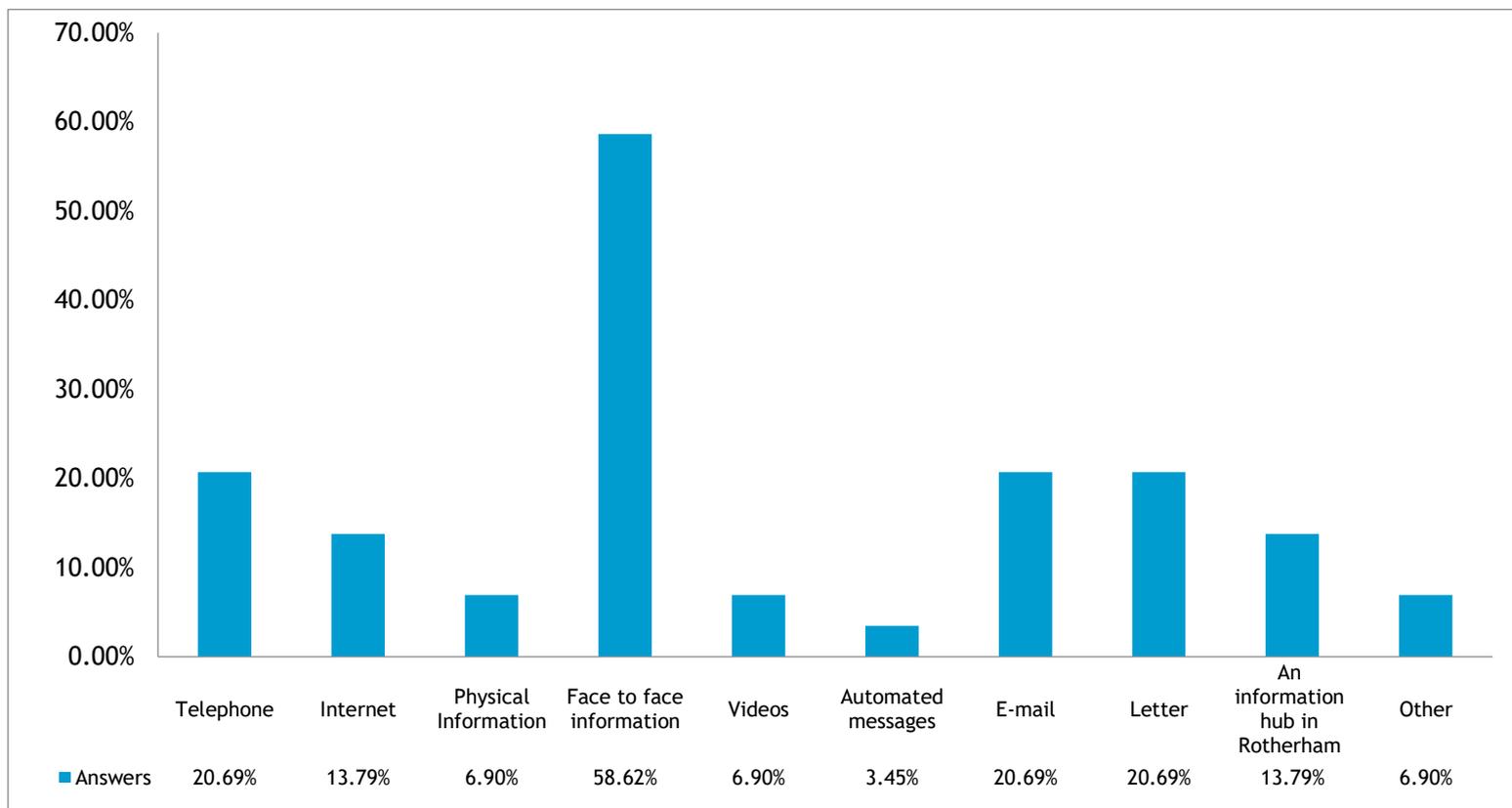
Other comments:

- Letters in the post
- Being partially deaf I find telephone updates particularly challenging.
- I find it difficult to access the NHS app and Rotherham Health App - logging into these I find difficult as I struggle to remember passwords
- I use websites that offer specialist information, such as CCUK for Crohn's and Colitis
- My Husband has regular hospital appointments for ongoing health conditions, we are sent text messages with a link to click on to accept or decline these appointments, even after numerous requests for this method of communication to stop, due to not having any access to the Internet, I have to visit a friend who then sends this text message to her Mobile phone, to click on the link and accept these appointments. This is extremely inconvenient and it cannot be guaranteed that this option is always available.

Do you believe that the way you access health and social care information currently is the best way for you?



If you answered ‘No’ to the previous question, which way would you prefer to access health and social care information, given the choice?



“30% of respondents believe that the way they currently access health and social care information is not right for them”.

58% of residents would prefer to be given face to face information, followed by telephone, e-mail and letters. Just 13.79% opted for the internet option. We are aware from previous reports and engagement with the public that residents are keen to get back to face to face interaction with medical professionals, particularly GP’s.

Other comments:

- Live chat
- Range of options would work best, depending on what the problem is
- My elderly mother is unable to access things in such a way (via the internet) and it is a complete nightmare for her and those of her generation.

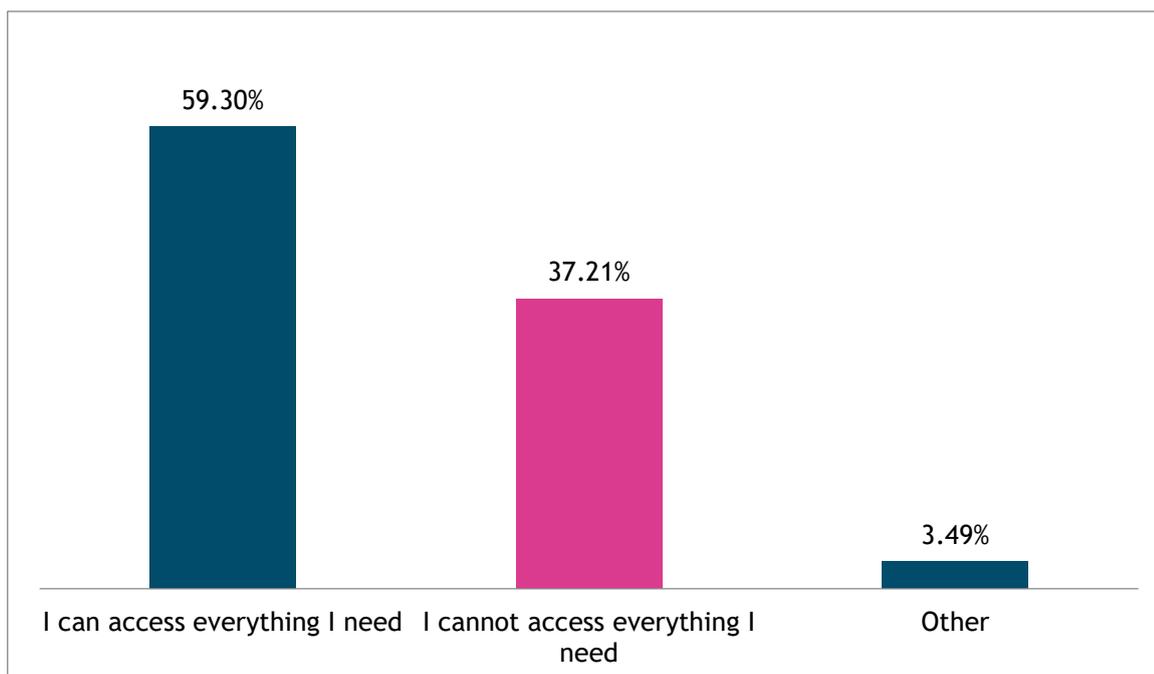
What are the main types of health and social care information you access?

We asked respondents to tell us about the main types of health and social care information that they access, in whichever format they choose to use. We analysed the results and grouped them by similarity and themes. The most popular type of health and social care information accessed was regarding symptoms. Multiple people accessed information relating to symptoms, how to treat the symptoms, self-diagnosis, home remedies and when to see a GP.

The most popular types of information people access are:

- **Symptom checkers:** information about symptoms, advice, treatments, self-diagnosis and information about specific health conditions
- **Covid-19:** Government guidelines, Long Covid, vaccination dates
- **Hospital:** accessing online hospital letters, reading follow-up information regarding operations, accessing information via The Rotherham Foundation Trust Website
- **Autism and ADHD:** Information about NHS referral pathways for autism or ADHD assessments and waiting times, ADHD and Autism support
- **GP's:** Appointment booking, accessing medical records and test results
- **Dentists:** How to register for a dentist, finding a dentist accepting new patients
- **Vaccinations:** Information on vaccines, travel vaccinations, flu vaccinations and side effects
- **Diabetes:** Pre-diabetes information, side effects, treatment
- **Cancer:** Local cancer services, breast cancer information
- **Adult social care:** Information regarding social care in Rotherham
- **Minor injuries:** ailments, pain management
- **Mental Health**

Do you feel you can access all the health and social care information you need, or are there areas missing you feel you cannot access?



Other comments:

- The Rotherham Council website information is not always complete or that easy to understand (and so I can't imagine how it would be for someone who has literacy difficulties or has English as a second language). Information about eligibility for care act assessments or another way to contact the team other than the online form is difficult/ impossible to find.
- Working for the local authority I am probably better placed to navigate the Council internet than most of Adult Care's users. (I also have access to the internet and internal directory.) I found the task confusing and cumbersome; I often had to make several calls to find the relevant contact information. I found the task took much longer than expected.
- The Rotherham Council website does not offer much information re services and contact details for those services. A search on the website using key words brings up

very long lists of report etc. that the customer does not want or need to see. Online contact forms are provided but these are not helpful if you need to speak to someone and can be frustrating if your needs are urgent. Telephone enquiries (when you have tracked down the number) are via a contact centre that will not give you access to a specialist worker - they take your details and these are very often not followed up. It's an additional frustration for people with vulnerable relatives who are at their wits end. For the service user themselves (elderly, impaired, vulnerable and without family members or advocates) it is downright dangerous and unsatisfactory!

“37% of respondents feel they cannot access all the health and social care information they need. “

Multiple respondents commented on their difficulty in navigating and using the Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council website. They found it difficult to access information, with the website feeling incomplete, information missing and irrelevant information being offered when using the search function. Respondents found it very difficult to find relevant contact details, sometimes impossible, having to contact several people to eventually get the correct number. There is an online form, but respondents feel this is not satisfactory when the query is urgent, or your form submission is ignored and there is no follow up to contact you.

If you feel you cannot access every area of Health and Social Care information that you require, please let us know what areas are missing:

Common information areas missing:

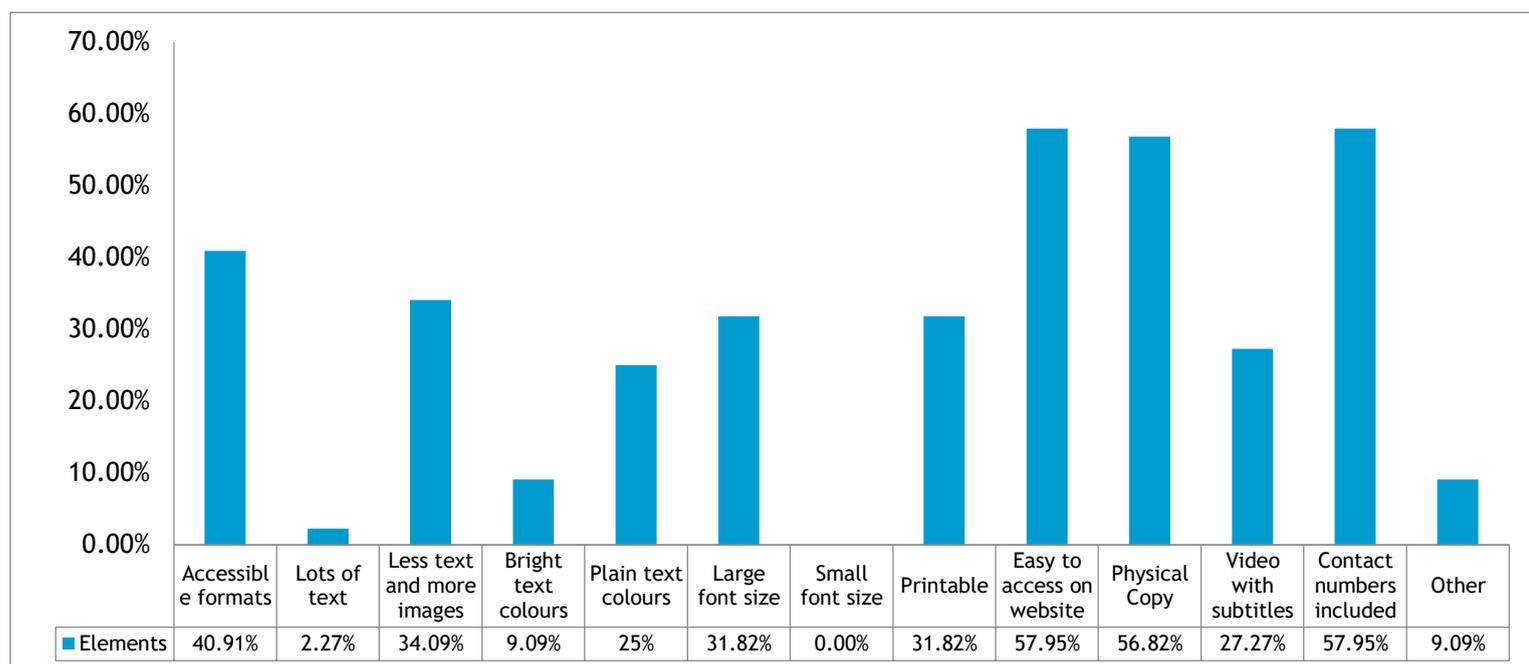
- Face to face contact with medical professionals to deliver information and advice
- Information on dental practices taking on new patients
- Information given in letters, leaflets and text messages rather than online
- Hospital appointments do not appear on the NHS App
- Advice and information about menopause: signs, symptoms and support available and where to access this support. More open discussion on the menopause is needed as many women suffer in silence
- Local information on social activities in the community to make me more active

Note: Information on dentists:

We know from our previous work on dentists that the NHS 'Find a Dentist' online tool states which dental practices are taking on new patients. This is ever changing, so please check regularly for the most updated information. You can find this tool here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist> and for those without access to the internet, you can contact: 0300 311 2233

What do you think makes a good health and social care information document?



Top 5 Health and social care document must-haves:

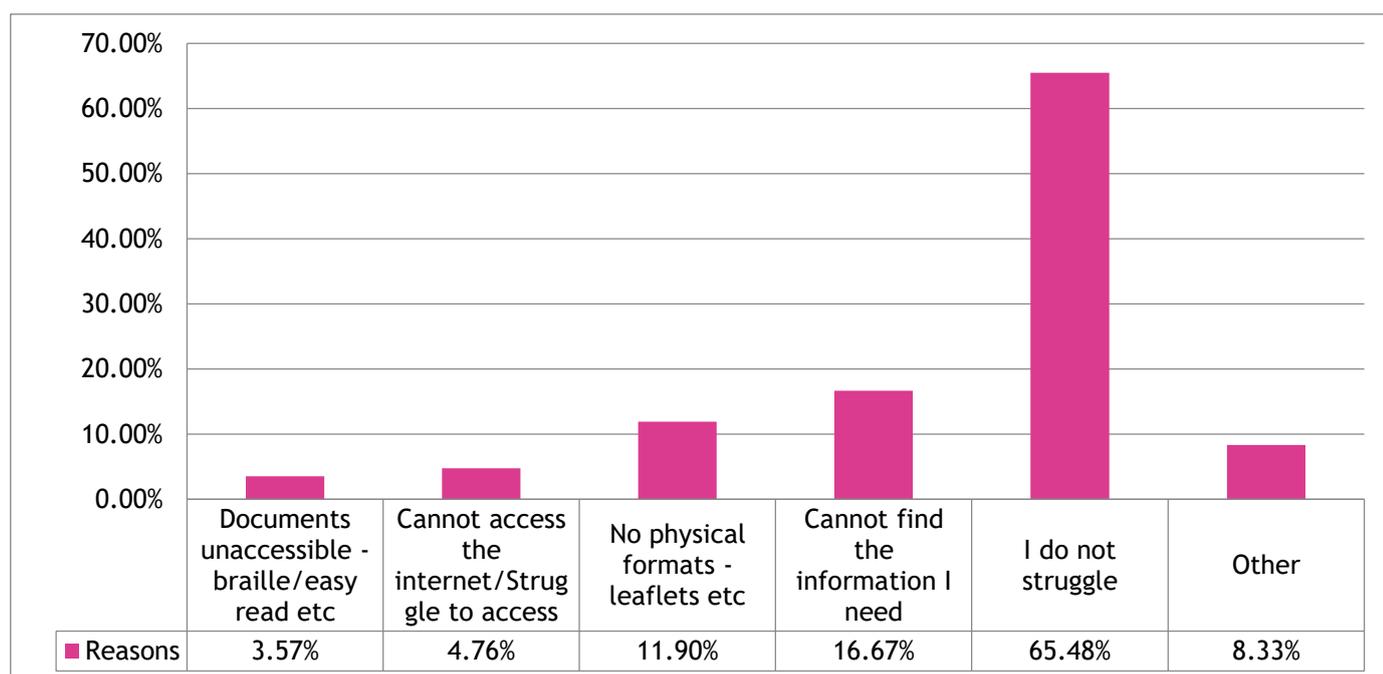
- Easy to access on a website
- Contact numbers included
- Physical copies of the document/printable
- Accessible formats
- Less text and more images

Other comments:

- Easy to understand and things explained simply. Less medical jargon
- When available online, things should be easy to find when searching within the website. Sometimes it is easier to find things by googling rather than searching on the website, which can bring up information from other sources which may not be relevant.
- If the font is too small, then it is difficult to read. Coloured writing can also be difficult to read without glasses.
- Easy to understand, clear and relevant information. Not too long but containing all the necessary information. Simple language and terms used
- Too many leaflets do not support adults who may have literacy issues. Also, contact numbers are always out of date and not current
- I received physio with a link in a text to access my exercises and this didn't work

Respondents wish to see up to date contact numbers displayed on information documents, accessible versions for those with disabilities, information written in Plain English and less text with more images.

What is the biggest factor currently stopping you from accessing health and social care information?



For 65% of respondents, there is currently nothing stopping them from accessing health and social care information. For others, they struggle to access this information due to:

- Not being able to find the information they require
- No physical versions of the information, such as a leaflet
- Cannot, or struggle to, access the internet to view information
- Information being too complicated to understand

Other comments:

- I have family and friends who work in health and social care and often rely on their support, interpretation and advice, particularly when I can't access face to face services.
- Local Covid-19 vaccine van visiting Rotherham areas on specific days but does not give times. Visited Parkgate today to use it but it had been cancelled with no notice on the website. When advertising the date, please give the time. I was looking for a van but when I phoned I was told it was a tent. Please state what it is, times and if cancelled so don't have to make a wasted trip.
- I would find other ways to get the information as I am lucky that my job involves contacting people who work in health and social care but others do not.

Going forward, what would you like health professionals to take into consideration when creating health and social care information for patients to access?

A number of answers were given in response to this question. We have grouped them into common answers and themes.

- Information being easily accessible on a website. Having the information in one area of a website so patients can find what they require quickly and easily.

- Information being accessible in other formats for those with disabilities, impairments or sensory loss.
- Information being accessible in other ways aside from online. Consider what is best for patients rather than what costs the least, and ensure there are options to receive information via telephone calls, letters and face to face. Texts are easier to access for many, but some people prefer letters or telephone calls, particularly those without smartphones.
- Whilst the majority can access the internet, there are still large groups in Rotherham which cannot, leaving them feeling excluded.
- Ensure information is dated so patients know that the information they have been given is as relevant as possible.
- Improve search functions on websites such as Rotherham Hospital and Rotherham Council so people can find information easier. Currently, if you search for a word, every page that mentions this word appears, with most of it being irrelevant
- Summarise the main points of the information and use easy to understand language, including a glossary for any technical terms that must be used.
- Include details of charities relevant to the information being discussed, to provide additional support for the patient and to ensure they do not have to solely rely on the NHS
- More focused information on specific illnesses and diseases on the Rotherham Hospital website, with information on when and where to get help if required.

Conclusions:

Whilst the majority of the 91 responders to our survey can currently access the internet on a regular basis through one or more devices, it is important to highlight those who cannot access digital communications for a variety of reasons. As the cost of living crisis continues into 2023, we may see more Rotherham residents unable to access the internet as freely as they can now, resulting in them requiring health and social care information in other formats. It is essential that health and social care providers can re-produce all information they create in a variety of formats, including braille, easy read, multiple languages and physical versions.

Providers should focus on what is best for the patient and the patient experience, as opposed to what is most cost-effective and convenient.

We hope that providers will acknowledge our recommendations below and take them on board, reviewing their current communications and future one's going forward to make them accessible and understandable.

As a service, Healthwatch Rotherham are currently producing a service booklet, highlighting services in the local area from a variety of different areas including primary care, urgent care, adult social care, sexual health, homelessness and healthy living. This booklet will be available both digitally and as physical copies. We have also produced a mental health service directory that is available to view on our website, and will be looking at producing further directories for various areas and topics of health and social care based on feedback from Rotherham residents.

Recommendations:

Recommendations to all services for the production of future health and social care information:

- Have all information in one area of the website, allowing it to be found easier by residents
- Contact numbers included on documents, reviewing these regularly to ensure they are correct and in working order
- Create physical copies of any documents produced, ensuring those without internet can access them just as readily as those with digital access
- Accessible formats provided upon request for those with disabilities, impairments or sensory loss
- Less text and more images on documents, using plain English. If medical/technical terms are required, create a glossary to allow people to understand these terms easier.
- Include details of other charities and organisations related to the subject matter of the information, allowing patients to access support from other areas rather than relying solely on the NHS

Rotherham Council:

- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council to review their website, ensuring it is user-friendly and accessible.
- Review the search function on the website and adapt this so it reflects what the user is actually searching for, only providing relevant pages and information.
- Review how contact numbers are displayed on the website, examining how easy they are to find, the relevance of them and if significant areas of the website are missing contact numbers.
- Ensure the online form is operating correctly and that service users are being contacted promptly. Provide a contact number for website users as an alternative to the online contact form.
- Healthwatch Rotherham recommends testing out any new website developments on focus groups made up of Rotherham residents, to get direct feedback from service users

Responses

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council were sent this report before publication and were offered the opportunity to make any comments on the recommendations mentioned above, as well as the general contents of the reports. If you have any comments or questions for Rotherham Council regarding their response, please contact us and we can pass these on.

You can view their response below:

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council to review their website, ensuring it is user friendly and accessible.

We take several steps to make sure our website is user-friendly and accessible. We have a review process as part of our everyday workflow.

- Website content is firstly written in draft by the service to make sure it's factually correct.
- Draft content is shared with the Communications team to check it meets writing standards, such as spelling, grammar and readability.

- Content is then supplied to the website team to make sure it is formatted correctly (HTML) and meets accessibility regulations.

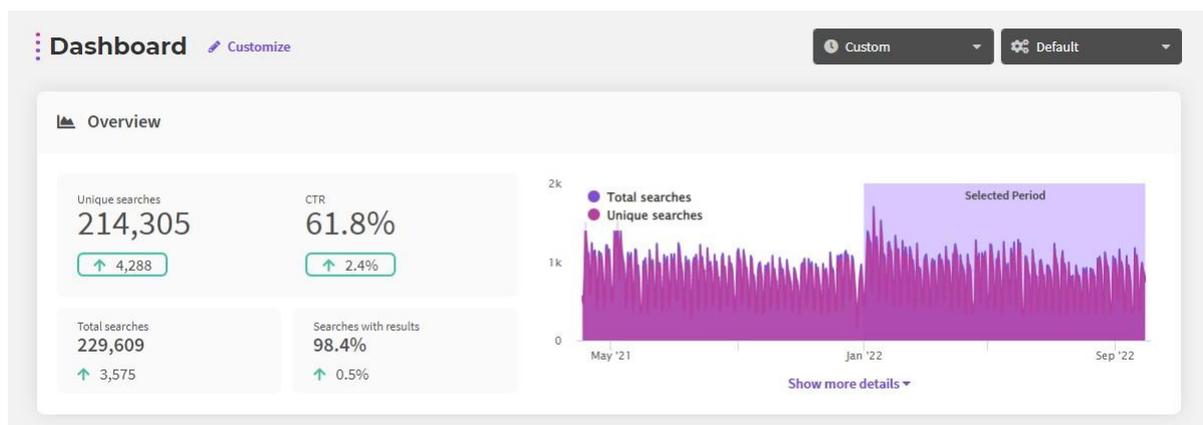
To meet accessibility regulations, the Council uses tools such as WAVE Web Aim which evaluates web content for accessibility issues. And we use Silktide Accessibility simulator which simulates a range of disabilities, such as colour blindness, Myopia and Dyslexia. We also use 'read-aloud' services to make sure our content is understandable when spoken.

Our website is also independently audited for accessibility by Silktide. The audit by Silktide highlights accessibility issues and recommends fixes. The website team look at the issues and fix the one's which can be fixed by the team. Some of the issues are technical and are raised with our website supplier. Our website is currently scoring 97 out of 100 on the [Silktide index](#) and has been in the top 30 of UK councils for over the past 24 months.

Review the search function on the website and adapt this so it reflects what the user is searching for, only providing relevant pages and information.

The search function is determined by the quality of the content on the website and in particular the title of the document. We have done lots of work to make sure our page titles accurately describe what the page is about. Where possible we would use an action word such as 'request' or 'suggest' on page titles and links so our users know what to expect will happen next.

The search function on the website is provided by a service called Cludo. We monitor the search queries daily and can improve the search success by either changing the content or adding page rankings to present certain pages from given or known search terms. For example, the search term 'telephone' will present the user with a link to our 'contact' pages. The image below shows the accuracy of the search over the last 3 full quarters and shows a search accuracy of 98.4%



The wording the customer uses for their search query does of course influence the results. For example, a single word query for 'bins' will be far less effective than 'report a missed bin' or 'missed bin collection'.

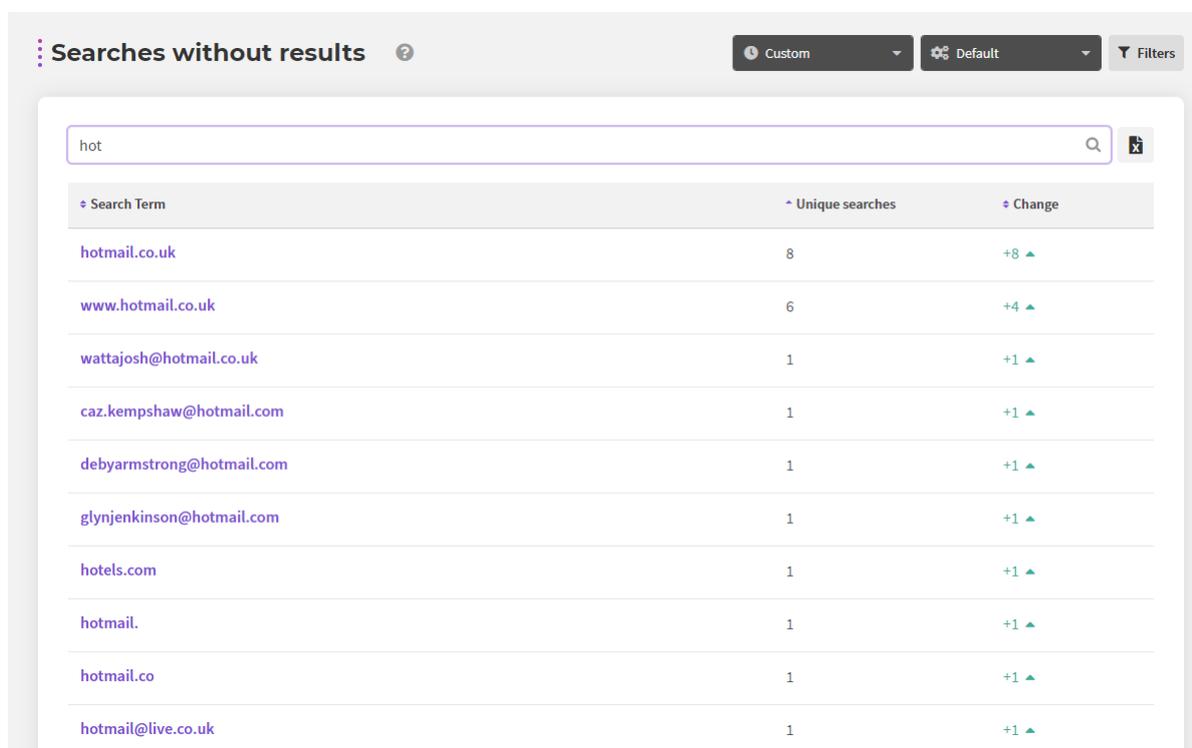
We do our best to pre-empt the wordings/phrases our customers enter to minimise any potential issues and are currently working on a series of help pages to help people make best use of the website.

Through regular review we also aware that despite having a good ratio of successful search results, some users think the search function is an internet search rather than a site search, which could affect users' perception of effectiveness.

For example:



The search function clearly states, 'Search this site', but some users search for things such as 'Hotmail', 'google' and 'EasyJet'



The image shows a dashboard titled 'Searches without results'. At the top, there are dropdown menus for 'Custom' and 'Default', and a 'Filters' button. Below is a search bar with the text 'hot'. The main content is a table with three columns: 'Search Term', 'Unique searches', and 'Change'.

Search Term	Unique searches	Change
hotmail.co.uk	8	+8 ▲
www.hotmail.co.uk	6	+4 ▲
wattajosh@hotmail.co.uk	1	+1 ▲
caz.kempshaw@hotmail.com	1	+1 ▲
debyarmstrong@hotmail.com	1	+1 ▲
glynjenkinson@hotmail.com	1	+1 ▲
hotels.com	1	+1 ▲
hotmail.	1	+1 ▲
hotmail.co	1	+1 ▲
hotmail@live.co.uk	1	+1 ▲

Review how contact numbers are displayed on the website, examining how easy they are to find, the relevance of them and if significant areas of the website are missing contact numbers.

Our website users have chosen to interact with us online in the first instance, so our website is designed to keep them in this channel by enabling customers to do as much as they can online. This includes finding information, requesting services from us and reporting problems.

We use a combination of website content, online forms, and case management systems to keep the customer informed of their enquiry. This also enables our customer service team to track the progress of enquires.

Despite common misconceptions, we do publish telephone numbers on our website for situations where it would be more appropriate to make contact over the phone, such as reporting a concern about a child or for emergencies.

Our aim first and foremost is to provide a website that has all the information needed to satisfy a customer's enquiry through self-serve. We know from experience that adding phone numbers across our web pages can result in people making a phone call they shouldn't need to make; or choosing to call a service that they think they need rather than being guided to the more appropriate route through web navigation.

A 'contact us' web form is however provided for anyone unable to find what they're looking for, or unsure of what it is they need; and regularly analyse the type of enquiries customers use this facility for so we can identify any improvements we need to make to the website.

Ensure the online contact form is operating correctly and that service users are being contacted promptly. Provide a contact number for website users as an alternative to the online contact form.

We have a rigorous process designed to ensure contact forms operate as they are intended to:

- Our online forms are built in a test environment and are tested by the owners of the service
- Wherever possible, and particularly for high demand/sensitive/complex processes, we involve members of our customer user testing group. We have around 50 residents who have expressed interest in helping, together with established groups such as the Digital Inclusion Stakeholder group with representation from the 3rd sector such as Age UK.
- Once tested and approved, our online forms are moved over to the live website.
- Once live, our online forms are open to the public. The same forms are also used by our customer service staff. When a customer makes a telephone or face to face enquiry, the exact same form is used by a customer who self serves. This also enables our staff to highlight issues and recommend improvements.
- Once submitted, our forms will either show the form data on screen before the form is submitted or send the customer a receipt email, often with a service request number.

Our newest services are designed to provide automated updates to the customer throughout the lifecycle of an enquiry so that the customer is kept informed at every step. We still have some work to do to redesign some of the more established contact forms but continue to work with departmental colleagues to review and identify any improvement opportunities to enhance the customer's experience.

Regarding a contact number for anyone unable to self-serve online, we publish our main switchboard number on our contact us page. We also publish our telephone number and address on our Google profile, so customers can find out how to contact us by using a google search, without even visiting our website.

Healthwatch Rotherham recommends testing out any new website developments on focus groups made up of Rotherham residents, to get direct feedback from service users

In addition to the information provided to the last question:

Departmental colleagues utilise community groups and individual customers to review their service, and this includes the online offer. For example, our housing teams use residents' groups and housing associations to provide both mystery shopping and direct website testing. This is usually conducted using common or specific user journeys, such as 'Check my rent balance'. The feedback from users is analysed by the service, and then brought to the website team as a change request if needed.

It can be difficult to attract volunteer testers, but we remain committed to seeking input and ideas wherever possible; accepting that it isn't always possible or appropriate. Information about how people can become part of the User testing group can be found on the '[Your Account](#)' page of the Council's website.

We also encourage customers to share their comments using:

- [Website Feedback form](#). This is designed for customers to share their thoughts about their website experience
- [Customer Access Strategy](#) - this web form encourages customers to tell us what we can do to make it easier for customers to access the services they need and to share ideas about new features we might not already offer.

Acknowledgments:

Thank you to all respondents who took the time to complete our survey, both online and in-person. We hope you have found the results interesting and that the response from service providers can improve your experience of accessing health and social care information.

