



Spotlight Series

Spotlight on Gravesham



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In October 2018 we visited Gravesham Borough Council to talk to staff about their experiences of local health and social care services.

39 people shared their experiences of health and social care with us.

The most frequently mentioned topic was GP services

16

people talked about struggling to get an appointment with their GP

“I can’t get an appointment with my GP for 10 weeks but I can’t book more than 12 weeks in advance at which point all the appointments go. I can’t attend ‘on the day’ appointments as I am at work”

“The system is weighted in favour of people who don’t work”

“I find getting an appointment is increasingly difficult”

“If I can’t get an appointment, I go to the walk in centre”

“I can’t always ring at the specific time to try and get an appointment due to children and caring”

“You often have to wait weeks on end”

“My GP wanted to see me on the same day but there is no way I can get an appointment. He didn’t seem to realise how difficult it was”

“If I need to see the GP, I have to queue outside the surgery at 7am in the dark. My 82 year old Mum has to do the same. By 7:30am there are 40 other people waiting. You can never get through on the phone so you have to queue. By 8am all the appointments are gone.”

2 people shared **positive** stories about their GP

“I can get an appointment on the same day as long as you don't mind seeing a different GP each time.”

“Very efficient, even though they are rushed off their feet.”

“My Mum's Doctor is a lovely caring lady. She is always smiling and pleasant even though she must be very busy.”

6 people reported **negative** experiences about their GP

“I couldn't understand the GP at all. In the end he had to type out what he was trying to say. It was very embarrassing for both of us.”

“He made my cry. He didn't listen to me and was very aggressive. I moved surgeries after that”

Several people talked about concerns caused by GP surgeries merging with other practices

“My surgery is going to merge with another so we are very concerned about the future. We’ve always been able to get an appointment easily.”

“My surgery is currently merging so they’ve told me I can’t make an appointment for my Mum during this time. It’s making the wait even longer than usual.”

“They have merged with another surgery and now it is impossible to see anyone.”

3 people talked about their health records

“My Mum has Alzheimer’s and my phone number is on her records. When she was admitted to A&E after an accident, the hospital didn’t ring me. What is the point of keeping records if they are not used.”
Medway Maritime Hospital

“I’ve had years of screening but each time I move hospital (within Kent) I have to start over again with a new team. Why? The new team can’t access my previous scans.”



What else did we hear?

6

people talked about hospital services

"I feel very let down. I don't understand why different hospitals have different thresholds for breast cancer screening" Darent Valley & Kent & Canterbury Hospitals

"We were put in a side room with no furniture and forgotten about. The care was lacking due to the level of staffing, not the staff themselves" Tunbridge Wells Hospital

"The aftercare at both hospitals after surgery was appalling" Medway Maritime & Darent Valley Hospitals

"I had an Outpatients appointment in March and I am still waiting for a letter for the next appointment" Medway Maritime Hospital

"My Mum needs an operation. She keeps getting different appointment letters but they don't really explain why she needs to go and there are no contact details for her to verify it. She is frustrated and confused. I have to take the time off work to take her as the bus links are so poor. If she knew why she had to go, it would make it easier." Darent Valley Hospital



We heard lots of positive stories too

“The dietician at Herne Bay was excellent, really helped me to feel well again”

“My dentist is so friendly and helpful and I am never waiting too long”

“I got an appointment at the Medway Breast Clinic within 2 weeks. It was a very pleasant visit despite the circumstances.”



We also heard about....

“I have found mental health services really hard to tackle.”

“My Mum was supported well by social services.”

“I regularly get my prescriptions from my pharmacy which was a great service. Now I have to ring the CCG phone system. It was meant to reduce wastage but they have never actually asked me if I need all these medicines or if I am wasting any.”

“My Mum was in a Care Home at the end of her life and there wasn't enough staff. I had to go in every morning before work to check on her. The other residents would call out to me for help as I passed. I used to take wet wipes with me to wipe the poo off her chair. The Home forgot to give my Mum medicine for 3 days which meant to started to be sick again. The Hospice staff spotted it.”



How did we go about it?

We visited Gravesham Borough Council and spoke to 284 people. We visited every desk and gave people the chance to share their experience of local health and social care services. We spoke to people from every department including the postroom team, Public Health, Housing, Finance, the Call Centre, the Mayor and the Chief Executive.

People were offered the chance to give us feedback on the day or to send their stories by freepost, online or by calling our Helpline.

39 people gave us detailed feedback (14%) about recent experiences of local services.

Thanks to everyone who took the time to talk to us. We hope that you can encourage other Gravesham residents to get in touch and share their stories too.



What next?

- We are sharing with Gravesham Borough Council everything we heard that is affecting their workforce. We've also shared the stories with the relevant organisation and the people who commission that service.
- We'll ensure these organisations have read and understood the feedback and where necessary take action.
- We would encourage anyone to share their experience with us #itstartswithyou



Healthwatch Kent is the independent voice for local people in Kent.

We have a freephone helpline on 0808 801 0102 or email us anytime on info@healthwatchkent.co.uk

We can arrange home visits too