

GPs and Primary Care Networks

A report by Healthwatch Waltham Forest



February 2022

“Everyone is caring, supportive and professional.

They treat you with dignity and respect from the receptionist right through to the doctors.”

Local Patient

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1. Introduction

Healthwatch Waltham Forest sought to compare patient experience feedback by Primary Care Network across the borough. This report is based on patient voice captured through our Patient Experience programme from Apr-Dec 2021.

2. Background

Primary care networks (PCNs) bring general practices together to work at scale and they are a key building block of the NHS long-term plan. PCNs cover populations of approximately 30-50,000 patients and most networks are geographically based, within a clinical commissioning group (CCG) boundary.

PCNs have the potential to benefit patients by offering improved access and extending the range of services available to them, and by helping to integrate primary care with wider health and community services.

In Waltham Forest there are 7 PCNs each with an accountable Clinical Director.

Healthwatch has traditionally analysed GP patient feedback data collectively, looking at themes and trends overall across Primary Care. With PCNs now more firmly established the opportunity to analyse and compare patient experience data by PCN is being more firmly embedded. This report represents an approach to this analysis.

3. Methodology

This report reflects the experiences of residents in Waltham Forest. The information was captured via our Patient Experience feedback form, through face-to-face visits taking place at GP practices and other health and community locations in the borough, through direct telephone and online engagement and through feedback left on other online platforms such as nhs.co.uk

4. Strengths & Limitations

The report is a summary of the qualitative and quantitative data shared by local residents. It provides a unique snapshot of people's experiences during a period which included further lockdowns and restrictions as a result of the COVID19 pandemic.

It should be noted that Healthwatch Waltham Forest would normally conduct outreach by engaging with residents at a variety of community locations. However, due to Government COVID-19 restrictions, we had adapt our engagement strategy and additionally incorporate both telephone and online engagement mechanisms in order to reach people during the times when face-to-face visits were not permitted.

5. Executive Summary of Findings

From January - December 2021 we collected the qualitative feedback of 836 local people, about GP services. Comments have been obtained online, and through surveys and engagement.

This is a summary of key findings - see section 6 for the analysis in full.

In Summary

Findings by Primary Care Network (PCN)

Best Performing, According to Feedback:

Forest 8

Receives the largest ratio of positive feedback (59%). It performs best overall in the staff attitude, support and quality service categories, this suggests that the PCN is more personable than peers generally.

E4 Network

Receives the second largest ratio of positive feedback (56%). It performs best overall in the waiting list, appointment booking and online service categories, this suggests that the PCN is generally more accessible than peers.

Walthamstow West

Receives the third largest ratio of positive feedback (55%). It performs best overall in the administration, advice/information and user involvement service categories, this suggests that the PCN generally has more effective systems and communications than peers.

Forest Integrated Health

Receives the fourth largest ratio of positive feedback (38%). It performs best overall in the telephone service category.

Least-Well Performing, According to Feedback:

Leyton Collaborative

Receives the lowest ratio of positive feedback (22%). It performs least-well in the waiting list, appointment booking, online, user involvement and quality service categories, this suggests that the PCN is least accessible, and potentially has the poorest outcomes.

Central Walthamstow

Receives the second lowest ratio of positive feedback (25%). It performs least-well in the staff attitude and advice/information service categories, this suggests that the PCN is not as patient-focussed generally as peers.

South Leytonstone

Receives the third lowest ratio of positive feedback (34%). It performs least-well in the administration and support service categories, this suggests that the PCN is not as effective as peers at meeting general needs.

Statistics at a Glance

Overall Satisfaction

- Forest 8, E4 Network and Walthamstow West receive the largest ratios of positive feedback, and generally perform best across a range of service categories.
- South Leytonstone, Central Walthamstow and Leyton Collaborative consistently underperform the borough average, in most categories.
- Overall, Forest 8 receives the largest ratio of positive feedback (59%) with Leyton Collaborative, at 22% receiving the lowest. The borough average is 44%

Service Aspects - Highest/Lowest Ranked:

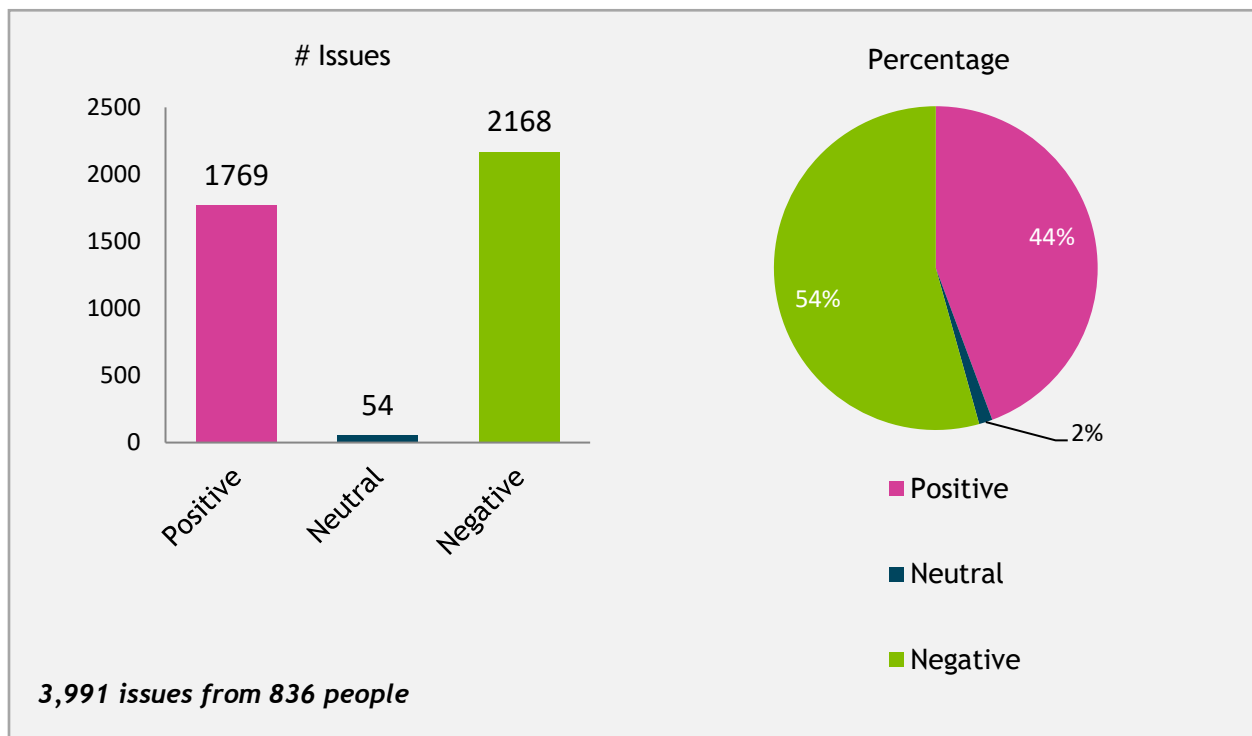
- **Telephone Access:** Forest Integrated Health scores 8% (highest) while Forest 8, Walthamstow West, Leyton Collaborative and South Leytonstone receive no positive feedback (lowest). The borough average is 5% positive.
- **Administration:** Walthamstow West scores 39% (highest) while South Leytonstone receives no positive feedback (lowest). The borough average is 15% positive.
- **Waiting List:** E4 Network scores 38% positive (highest) while Leyton Collaborative scores 7% (lowest). The borough average is 22% positive.
- **Appointment Booking:** E4 Network scores 45% positive (highest) while Leyton Collaborative scores 6% (lowest). The borough average is 23% positive.
- **Online Systems:** E4 Network scores 83% positive (highest) while Leyton Collaborative receives no positive feedback (lowest). The borough average is 38% positive.
- **Staff Attitude:** Forest 8 scores 70% positive (highest) while Central Walthamstow scores 33% (lowest). The borough average is 55% positive.
- **Support:** Forest 8 scores 73% positive (highest) while Leyton Collaborative scores 27% (lowest). The borough average is 56% positive.
- **Advice/Information:** Walthamstow West scores 83% positive (highest) while Central Walthamstow scores 20% (lowest). The borough average is 57% positive.
- **User Involvement:** Walthamstow West scores 76% positive (highest) while Leyton Collaborative scores 13% (lowest). The borough average is 58% positive.
- **Quality:** Forest 8 scores 77% positive (highest) while Leyton Collaborative scores 32% (lowest). The borough average is 63% positive.

6. Analysis of Feedback

From January - December 2021 we collected the qualitative feedback of 836 local people, about GP services. Comments have been obtained online, and through surveys and engagement.

Experiences have been methodically reviewed, with leading themes and issues identified. We compare findings on a borough level, and by Primary Care Network (PCN).

6.1 Satisfaction as a Whole



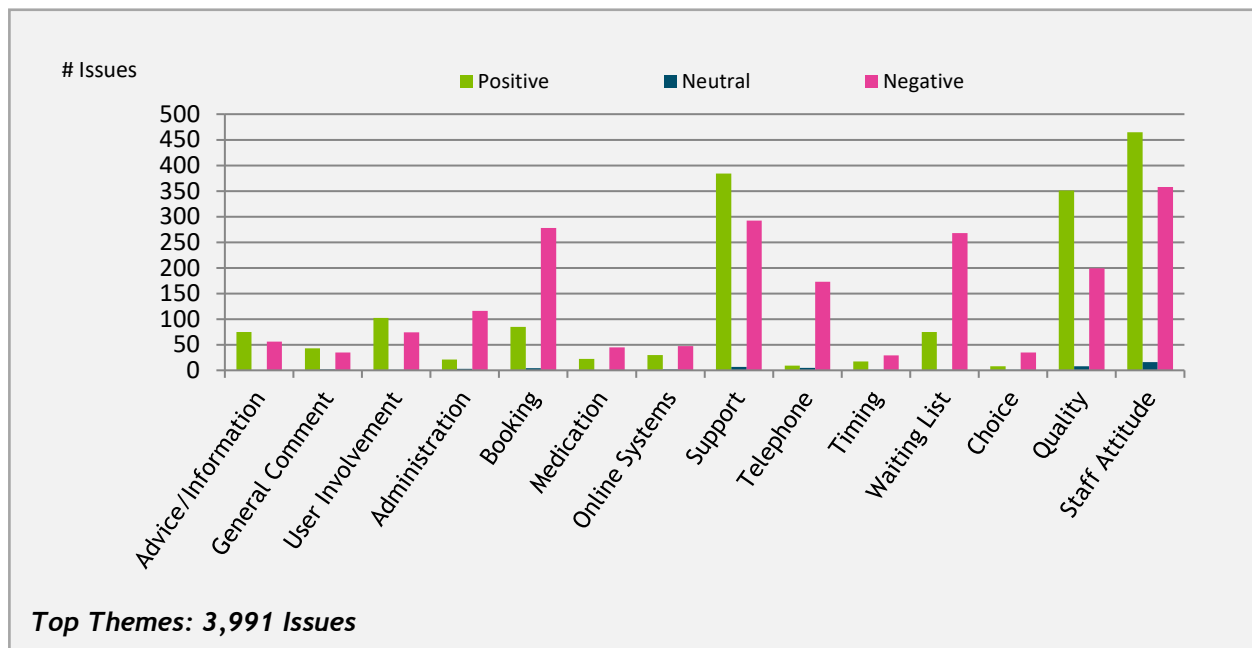
Satisfaction as a whole is 54% positive, 44% negative and 2% neutral.

6.1.1 Satisfaction by Primary Care Network

	% Positive
Forest 8	59%
E4 Network	56%
Walthamstow West	55%
Borough Average	44%
Forest Integrated Health	38%
South Leytonstone	34%
Central Walthamstow	25%
Leyton Collaborative	22%

When looking at satisfaction by PCN, Forest 8 outperforms the borough average by 15%, while Central Walthamstow, at 25% and Leyton Collaborative at 22% noticeably underperform.

6.2 Top Identified Themes



We reviewed all feedback to identify themes, with positive, neutral or negative sentiment applied.

When ranking themes by ratio of positive feedback, it is clear that people are least satisfied with telephone access, which is just 5% positive as a topic. Administration, Waiting List, Booking and Online Systems are also clearly negative themes.

6.2.1 Top Themes by Ratio of Positive Feedback

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
Telephone	173	5%
Administration	119	15%
Choice	44	18%
Waiting List	331	22%
Appointment Booking	423	23%
Medication/Repeat Prescriptions	67	33%
Waiting Times	47	36%
Online Systems	77	38%
Staff Attitude	810	55%
Support	660	56%
Advice/Information	125	57%
User Involvement	168	58%
Quality	535	63%

6.3 Analysis of Themes

In this section, we look in detail at the top themes, with positive and negative examples given.

6.3.1 Telephone

As a topic, telephone is 5% positive overall. 187 people mention the telephone while just 79 cite online systems.

A requirement by practices to call at certain times undoubtedly leads to congestion on the lines. While some people have been able to get in touch without difficulty, the vast majority describe long waits on the phone, and in many cases then being disconnected, by the system, or reportedly by staff.

The accuracy of queuing systems is also called into question - some people have remained stuck in certain positions, or received inaccurate updates on their call position. Accounts of attempting to make contact for hours, or even days are not uncommon.

Some practices are praised for queuing systems that offer automatic callback, we also receive examples of calls being answered timely.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“Really just want to commend the practice for the updated telephone system, being able to keep your space in the queue and being called back when you are near the front (position 2) is fantastic.”

“I’ve always managed to get through in just a few rings.”

“Prompt at picking up the phone, grateful to be at this surgery.”

Negative

“Was on the phone for 50 minutes this morning, waiting from number 20 in the queue only to be told the doctors are fully booked and I should try again tomorrow. I have multiple issues I need seeing to now.”

“The service isn’t very good because you can’t get through on the phone. There have been times when I’ve hung on until I’m first in the queue and then the phone just goes dead.”

“This is unacceptable. I tried to call every minute from 8 O’clock because I need an appointment, and nothing. You don’t give people a chance either to stay on the line - you just put the phone down.”

“They have changed the phone system which tells you you’re number 8 in the line via default. This is not true.”

“My husband has been trying for weeks to get an appointment but no-one answers the phone. He has turned up in person and been told at the door to phone and given an alternate number but continually dialling from 8am every day for a couple of hours per day has produced no response from either number.”

When looking at experiences by Primary Care Network (PCN), just 3 receive positive feedback.

6.3.1a Telephone by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
Forest Integrated Health	38	8%
Central Walthamstow	28	7%
E4 Network	36	6%
Borough Average	173	5%
Forest 8	19	0%
Walthamstow West	20	0%
Leyton Collaborative	12	0%
South Leytonstone	20	0%

6.3.2 Administration

As a topic, administration is 15% positive overall. Examples of administrative errors and issues are varied, such as appointments booked incorrectly (or not at all), cancellations not conveyed, messages not passed on from reception to clinicians and missing paperwork. Some patients experience difficulty in accessing or updating medical records.

We also receive accounts of timely administrative support.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“Very helpful admin staff, quick response to my emails.”

“The receptionist was very friendly and helpful, even finding a number for the correct practice when it turned out that this was not the right GP.”

Negative

“Wrong appointments booked, wrong information given out and worse of all nobody at this surgery cares for you as a patient.”

“I came down for my GP appointment to find out that it has been cancelled and nobody bothered to notify me.”

“The receptionists are poor and refuse to pass messages back to doctors and hang up the phone during a conversation.”

“They lost my paperwork for a year.”

“Despite several attempts I cannot speak to the practice manager to get my incorrect vaccination record updated.”

“I called to get access to my medical records and to update my existing information, I was rudely spoken to by the receptionist and she proceeded to hang up on me instead of helping me with my query.”

Walthamstow West outperforms the borough average by a significant 24%, while Forest 8 and Forest Integrated Health notably underperform. South Leytonstone receives no positive feedback on administration.

6.3.2a Administration by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
Walthamstow West	23	39%
E4 Network	17	24%
Central Walthamstow	18	17%
Leyton Collaborative	13	15%
Borough Average	119	15%
Forest 8	11	9%
Forest Integrated Health	24	4%
South Leytonstone	13	0%

6.3.3 Waiting Lists

As a topic, waiting lists is 22% positive overall. Those making contact are commonly told that ‘all appointments are gone’ and having to call again the next day is a cause of frustration - and may result in the same outcome.

While some people have received timely appointments, a much larger number experience waits of days or longer. Some people have not been successful at all in obtaining appointments.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“The doctor got back to me quickly (within a few hours) with blood tests and a referral for a scan.”

“I believe there is a change in management and I can already see an improvement - I get to speak to a doctor with 3 days.”

Negative

“Was on the phone for 50 minutes this morning, waiting from number 20 in the queue only to be told the Doctors are fully booked and I should try again tomorrow. I have multiple issues I need seeing to now.”

“After an hour of telephone line queue for an appointment, the receptionist said the doctor will call back. My husband waited all day without going to work and no phone calls.”

“Hardly ever pick up and when they do they make you wait for days if not weeks to be seen.”

“Don't even bother to call them because you can never get appointments.”

E4 Network and Forest 8 outperform the borough average by double-digit percentages. Leyton Collaborative underperforms by a noticeable 15%.

6.3.3a Waiting Lists by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
E4 Network	45	38%
Forest 8	44	32%
Walthamstow West	46	24%
Borough Average	331	22%
Central Walthamstow	48	19%
Forest Integrated Health	83	18%
South Leytonstone	37	16%
Leyton Collaborative	28	7%

6.3.4 Appointment Booking

As a topic, appointment booking is 23% positive overall. Triage for appointments by reception staff is a cause of discomfort and inconvenience, and some people, with apparently good reason to see a doctor have been denied timely access. The inability to book advance appointments is a common cause of frustration and some booking on the day have been directed to A&E.

While most feedback is critical of booking processes, we also receive appreciation for supportive and accommodating staff.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“Quick booking, helpful receptionists, fast service.”

“The surgery was quick to give me an appointment.”

Negative

“Called to get a doctor to call me back, had to give a reason, was told that I didn’t need to see doctor, I didn’t know the receptionists were qualified doctors now!! Not the first time they think they are above everyone, it’s supposed to be a caring environment.”

“Reception like to ask questions that are none of their business and can be very rude and insensitive the majority of the time.”

“Avoid, especially if you have small children who can’t wait days when they are in pain.”

“It is a sad and frustrating practice where you can only book same day same slot appointments, you cannot book in advance.”

“Constantly told to go to A&E or the out of hours emergency GP instead.”

E4 Network outperforms the borough average by a significant 22%, while Forest 8 outperforms by 16%. Leyton Collaborative underperforms by a noticeable 17%.

6.3.4a Appointment Booking by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
E4 Network	56	45%
Forest 8	62	39%
Walthamstow West	69	29%
Borough Average	423	23%
South Leytonstone	46	20%
Central Walthamstow	64	19%
Forest Integrated Health	94	18%
Leyton Collaborative	32	6%

6.3.5 Online Systems

As a topic, online systems is 38% positive overall. The vast majority of comments are about punctuality (rather than functionality). We hear that some people receive a prompt response after form submission, while others comment on waiting days - with accounts given of having to resubmit forms multiple times. In some cases, online booking is not available outside of core hours.

It is also reported that those making contact by phone have been instructed to complete the e-consult form.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“e-Consult form completed (takes 5 mins) in the morning - call back and telephone consultation with the GP that afternoon. This is typical of our experience with the practice and we’re very happy.”

“The last two e consultations I sent have been resolved the same day - one for a referral and one for urgent medication. This is an excellent service.”

Negative

“Even when you complete the online form, and you wait until the next day, they might not contact you. If so, you have to fill it in again and wait again until the next day to see if you are called.”

“It’s awkward that e-consult is closed outside surgery hours.”

“When I called for an afternoon appointment, the receptionist just kept telling me to complete the e-consult.”

E4 Network and Forest 8 outperform the borough average by percentages of over 35% (however this is based on limited feedback). Forest Integrated Health underperforms by 10% and Leyton Collaborative receives no positive feedback.

6.3.5a Online Systems by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
E4 Network	6	83%
Forest 8	16	75%
Borough Average	77	38%
Central Walthamstow	14	36%
South Leytonstone	3	33%
Walthamstow West	19	21%
Forest Integrated Health	16	13%
Leyton Collaborative	3	0%

6.3.6 Staff Attitude

As a topic, staff attitude is 55% positive overall. Patients and carers give examples of empathetic and respectful reception staff and doctors. On reception, we hear equally about a lack of empathy and basic support.

Selected Feedback

Positive

"I have had really good experiences here recently with the reception staff. They have been helpful and quick to respond and the doctors are great."

"From the receptionists who are always polite to the GPs that I have seen face to face every month. Today again I have been offered an on the day appointment for an unwell child and again seen face to face within a few hours by a very kind GP."

"I bring my elderly father to appointments and his GP is so patient and helpful."

Negative

"I needed an appointment for my child and the reception just brushed me off."

"The receptionist has an awful character, she shouldn't be doing the job she is, it requires empathy, courtesy and some degree of sympathy."

"Called, was rushed off the phone and she hung up while I was speaking."

Forest 8 outperforms the borough average by a noticeable 15%, while Leyton Collaborative and Central Walthamstow underperform by margins of over 30%.

6.3.6a Staff Attitude by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
Forest 8	153	70%
E4 Network	120	64%
Walthamstow West	163	62%
Borough Average	810	55%
Forest Integrated Health	145	51%
South Leytonstone	87	48%
Leyton Collaborative	72	35%
Central Walthamstow	70	33%

6.3.7 Support

As a topic, support is 56% positive overall. We receive mixed reviews on levels of general support, with feedback marginally positive overall.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“Our GP practice is just brilliant - cannot fault them. They go above and beyond in very challenging circumstances, and the team is always polite and friendly.”

“Everyone is caring, supportive and professional. They treat you with dignity and respect from the receptionist right through to the doctors.”

“The Practice Manager is always willing to go the extra mile to help.”

Negative

“There is a clear lack of customer care and empathy towards the patient and an unwillingness to try to resolve an issue.”

Forest 8 and E4 Network outperform the borough average by double-digit percentages. South Leytonstone, Central Walthamstow and Leyton Collaborative underperform by significant margins.

6.3.7a Support by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
Forest 8	134	73%
E4 Network	94	67%
Walthamstow West	138	65%
Borough Average	660	56%
Forest Integrated Health	126	48%
South Leytonstone	61	44%
Central Walthamstow	52	35%
Leyton Collaborative	55	27%

6.3.8 Advice/Information

As a topic, advice/information is 57% positive overall. We receive many accounts of helpful and informative staff, of all categories, while a similar volume of feedback suggests that staff have given incomplete or inaccurate information, and have not been supportive with enquiries. As well as a lack of detail on medication changes, many people say they have struggled to obtain test results.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“My experience with the GP was very good and informative, on all aspects of the visit.”

“My health coach was knowledgeable, compassionate and kind and helped me at a very difficult time. She knew the right questions to ask, gave good advice and reassured me, making sure the situation would be followed up.”

“I received the information I required. The receptionist was very efficient and friendly.”

Negative

“I was given incorrect advice regarding missing information and as a disabled person this resulted in me queuing up at a centre with 146 people in front of me.”

“Not being informed of urgent test results - multiple times.”

“Doctors seem very unwilling to see me as a patient after reporting deterioration in mental health and prefer to prescribe medication with no follow up.”

Walthamstow West outperforms the borough average by a noticeable 26%, while South Leytonstone, Leyton Collaborative and Central Walthamstow underperform by margins exceeding 20% (this is based on limited feedback).

6.3.8a Advice/Information by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
Walthamstow West	35	83%
E4 Network	20	65%
Forest Integrated Health	19	58%
Borough Average	125	57%
Forest 8	26	50%
South Leytonstone	12	33%
Leyton Collaborative	8	25%
Central Walthamstow	5	20%

6.3.9 User Involvement

As a topic, user involvement is 58% positive overall. Many people have felt involved in their treatment and care, with accounts of being listened to, respected and given options. While some prefer telephone consultations, others report a lack of support in obtaining in-person appointments.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“I had a phone call from the GP to discuss my blood results. She was very calm and clear, and spent time listening to me and my concerns.”

“Good doctors who listen to what you’re saying instead of making assumptions and push you out of the door.”

“I had a phone call from the GP to discuss my blood results. She was very calm and clear, and spent time listening to me and my concerns.”

Negative

“The nurse did not introduce herself, did not check my identity before the procedure.”

“Lack of understanding and concern from reception staff when topping up my prescription.”

“The receptionists and some of the doctors and nurses are very rude, they don't listen to what the patient has to say.”

“The GP I spoke with was not interested wanting to accommodate my request for a face to face appointment.”

Walthamstow West outperforms the borough average by a noticeable 18%, while Central Walthamstow, South Leytonstone and Leyton Collaborative underperform by significant margins.

6.3.9a User Involvement by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
Walthamstow West	46	76%
Forest 8	31	65%
E4 Network	30	60%
Borough Average	168	58%
Forest Integrated Health	24	54%
Central Walthamstow	12	42%
South Leytonstone	17	29%
Leyton Collaborative	8	13%

6.3.10 Quality

As a topic, quality is 63% positive overall. We hear about high professional standards generally, while some patients have been disappointed with interactions and levels of support from administrative staff and clinicians.

Selected Feedback

Positive

“The reception staff(all of them together collectively) are genuinely outstandingly professional, especially with having to deal with the current situation..!!”

“I've been with this practice for a long time and have only met absolute professionalism and unfailing efficiency.”

Negative

“The staff behind that telephone are useless, rude and unprofessional.”

“Really disappointed with the doctor as she is very rude and unprofessional. I have visited the GP several times for knee and back pain but she says there is no need of a scan, tests or medication while I am unable to walk properly due to pain.”

Forest 8, E4 Network and Walthamstow West outperform the borough average by margins of over 10%, while South Leytonstone, Central Walthamstow and Leyton Collaborative notably underperform.

6.3.10a Quality by Primary Care Network

	# Issues Identified	% Positive Ratio
Forest 8	108	77%
E4 Network	82	77%
Walthamstow West	101	76%
Borough Average	535	63%
Forest Integrated Health	101	56%
South Leytonstone	56	48%
Central Walthamstow	43	40%
Leyton Collaborative	44	32%

7. Glossary of Terms

PCN

Primary Care Network

8. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public, and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

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