

# Assessing Complaints Information GP Websites



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## 1. Introduction

### [What is Healthwatch Lewisham?](#)

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We exist to ensure that people are at the heart of care. We listen to what people like about services, and what could be improved and we share their views with those with the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area.

We have the power to ensure that people's voices are heard by the government and those running services. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them. Our sole purpose is to improve care for people.

In summary - Healthwatch Lewisham is here to:

- help people find out about local care
- listen to what people think of services
- help improve the quality of services by letting those running services and the government know what people want from those services.



## 2. NHS Complaints - Good practice

Service user feedback is an important aspect of any organisation's growth and stability. Complaints are a form of feedback that can be used to improve services. It serves two primary functions. Firstly, to allow an organisation to identify gaps in its service and provision, and secondly to measure how well an organisation deals with constructive criticism from patients. Complaints show that service users concerns and comments are valued by an organisation and used to improve service delivery.<sup>1</sup>

According to the NHS Constitution, services should encourage and welcome feedback on the service they provide. Everyone who uses the NHS has the right to make a complaint if they are unhappy with a service. All complaints should be acknowledged within three working days and must be properly investigated.

Services should also inform the patient about:

- The manner in which the complaint will be handled.
- The timeframe within which the investigation is likely to be completed and a response sent to the complainant.
- The progress and outcome of any investigation into a complaint, including an explanation of the conclusions and confirmation of any actions that will be taken as a result of the complaint.
- How to escalate the complaint further if the patient is not satisfied with the way the complaint has been handled.

Patients should expect to:

- Be treated with courtesy and appropriate support throughout the handling of their complaint. It would be useful to reassure patients that making a complaint will not adversely affect their ongoing or future treatment.
- Receive an appropriate explanation or apology if appropriate, which would be delivered with sensitivity and recognition of the trauma experienced.
- Reassurance that lessons will be learned to help avoid a similar incident occurring again and that the organisation uses complaints to improve the service.<sup>2</sup>

Patients who use GP websites should be able to access complaints information and documents needed to file a complaint. Patients should not have to contact the surgery directly to get information about how to make a complaint. Being asked to

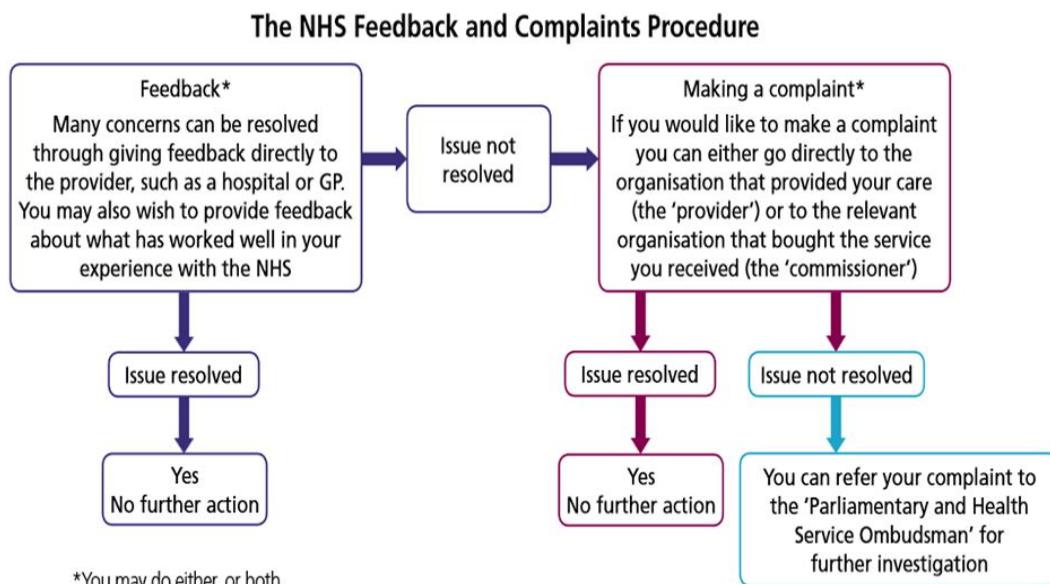
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<sup>1</sup> General Medical Council, (2018). Your supporting information - compliments and complaints <https://www.gmc-uk.org/registration-and-licensing/managing-your-registration/revalidation/guidance-on-supporting-information-for-appraisal-and-revalidation/your-supporting-information---compliments-and-complaints>

<sup>2</sup> The NHS Constitution. The NHS belongs to us all. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/480482/NHS\\_Constitution\\_WEB.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/480482/NHS_Constitution_WEB.pdf)

speak to Reception staff is not acceptable - they may be the subject of a complaint.

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### 3. Strategic drivers

One of our statutory functions is to provide information and signposting to the population of the London Borough of Lewisham.

Earlier last year we conducted a project to assess the quality and accuracy of the out-of-hours phone messages at GP services. We found that several GP practices had outdated information, for example, directing their patients to the New Cross Walk-In Centre that was no longer operational. Our audit helped the surgeries to address this issue and supported many patients to have access to accurate information on local services.

The NHS Constitution outlines key responsibilities and highlights patients' rights that NHS services should adopt when dealing with clients wishing to make a complaint.

Through the Lewisham Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service, we found the quality of the information on local GP websites was limited and would benefit from improvement. As a result, many clients who were not familiar with the complaint process struggled to find appropriate information. This added to their frustration with the service. We believe that the provision of clear and concise information would make it easier for patients to understand how to raise their

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england/how-do-i-give-feedback-or-make-a-complaint-about-an-nhs-service>

concerns, leave feedback and support them in making a complaint should they need to.

#### 4. Methodology

We obtained an up-to-date list of GPs within the London Borough of Lewisham from the Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The list comprised 38 GP practices. A list of the surgeries can be found in the appendices.

We accessed individual practices' websites and assessed the existence and then quality of information. A specific criteria was developed and used to understand the following information:

- Ease of access
- Quality of information
- Clarity of information
- Accessibility for people with additional communication needs.

We also checked if the page provided advocacy information and signposted patients on how to escalate their complaints.

In order to help GP practices to improve their complaints information, we highlighted GP surgeries with good practice in this area. We have also created a template that can be easily adopted.

The assessment table we used to analyse the information is available in the appendices. The complaints information template for GP services to amend and adopt can also be found at the end of this report.



## 5. Aims and objectives

The aim of this report is to assess how the 38 GP practices within the London Borough of Lewisham inform their service users of the complaints process on their website.

In addition we set out to provide examples of good practice, including a template that GPs can use to improve the quality of information.

### We set out to find out:

- How many GPs have clear, detailed and concise complaints information on their website?
- What are the available options for service users to make a complaint?
- Are there provisions made for disabled service users?
- Do GPs inform people how to escalate the complaint and sign post to support organisations such as advocacy services to assist with the complaints procedure?

Following this, the report will be shared with:

- GP practices in the London Borough of Lewisham
- Lewisham Health and Wellbeing Board
- Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Lewisham Healthier Communities Select Committee
- Healthwatch England
- Other relevant stakeholders.

It will also be published on the Healthwatch Lewisham website where members of the public can view the report.

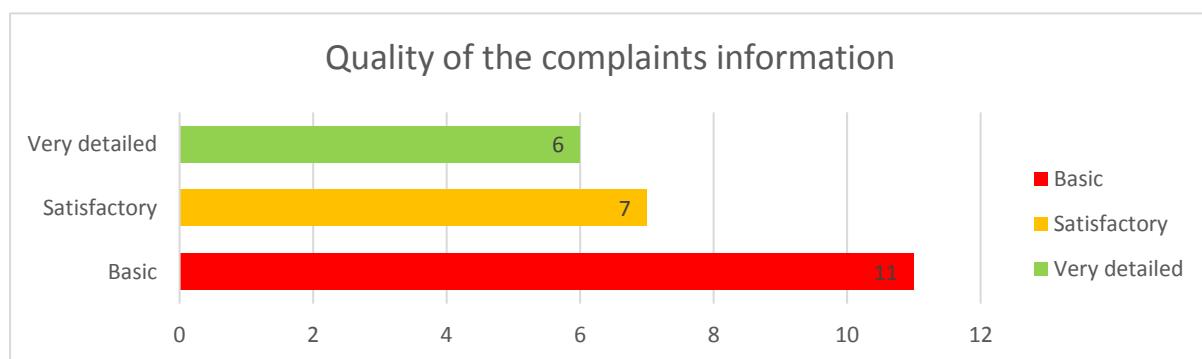


## 6. Findings

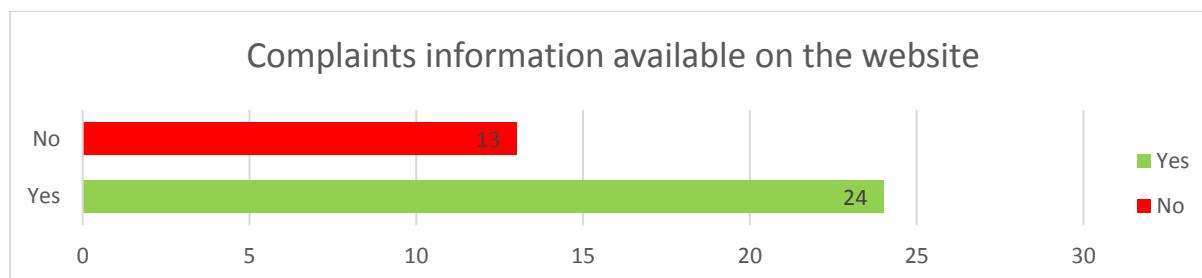
We were able to access 37 out of 38 GP surgeries. Grove Medical Centre's website was not working at the time of writing. Two GP surgeries shared one website, however, we treated them as individual websites to reflect the true number of GP surgeries in the borough.

### Quality of information

The findings suggest that the quality of the information about complaints on local GP websites is not consistent.



Six out of 24 GP surgeries that list complaints information on their websites provided very detailed information and seven provided satisfactory level of information.



Thirteen of the GP surgeries either had no information or extremely limited text. We found that a common practice amongst websites with poor information was to refer patients to visit reception to obtain further details about the complaints procedure. Eleven GP practices provided very basic information. Both numbers combined account for 65% of the websites analysed.

Of the websites listing the complaints process, the information was easy to find on the websites' menus. On average the process information was found under a clear heading such as 'How to...' or 'Feedback'.

### Ratings rationale:

**Very detailed** - Content well laid out, concise and would enable a patient to make a complaint. One or two omissions present.

**Satisfactory** - Reasonable amount of details about the complaints procedure with multiple omissions, for example, out-of-date information, no signposting to advocacy information, or difficult to access.

**Basic** - There is information about the complaints procedure however it is very limited and does not provide enough information to be able to file a complaint without further contact with the GP surgery. Limited or no signposting to external support organisations or how to escalate complaints.

Focusing on the 24 GP practices that provided complaints information on their website:

- Fifteen GP practices informed patients that their complaints will be acknowledged within three working days as stated in the NHS Constitution.
- Thirteen GP practices informed patients of what the next steps will be following the acknowledgment of their complaint.
- Fourteen GP practices provided the name of the practice manager or an equivalent person to whom the complaint should be addressed.
- Ten GP practices provided outdated information about PALS, advocacy, Healthwatch Lewisham and CCG (some information refers back to details of the former Primary Care Trust).

### Recommendations:

We were pleased to see local examples of good practice in provision of the complaints information on GP practices websites. However it would be helpful if the information provided locally was consistent and of good quality. To enable this we have created a template that GP practices can adopt and incorporate on their websites.

We based the template on good practice supported by information included in the NHS Constitution.

Based on the findings in this report we would recommend GP practices update their websites, where necessary, to include:

- Placing the information in an intuitive place such as under a 'How to' or 'Feedback' tab.
- Provide information describing how the complaint will be handled, times scales and expected steps.
- Provide a named person that the complaint should be addressed to.
- Inform patients what options they have to escalate their complaint (Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman).
- Inform patients of alternative ways to complain - via NHS England.
- Provide contact details to local organisations that can provide support and capture feedback independently, such as advocacy services and Healthwatch.
- An annual audit of the information to ensure accuracy.

## Accessibility

As set by the NHS Accessible Information Standard, health services should provide information in an accessible way in order to ensure equality of access for people who may have additional communication needs.

Through our engagement with local people with sensory (sight and hearing loss) and learning disabilities, we found that it would be useful for services to provide the means for patients to communicate with services. To enable equality of access for disabled people it would be helpful to remove possible barriers. This includes providing an opportunity to enlarge text, provision of easy read and provision of alternative methods to contact the service such as telephone number, email and address.

Twelve 12 GP Practices had an option to enlarge website text and 17 had an option to translate text into other languages.



### How to make your complaint

#### 1. Talk to staff at the place you got healthcare from.



Ask them how to make a complaint.



They may say you can

- talk to someone about the problem
- write to them
- fill in a form.



Say if you find it hard to read or write. There may be other ways to make your complaint.



It may also help to talk to the person you are unhappy with first. It may solve the problem.

Disappointingly none of the GP practices provided the information in easy read format.

Seventeen GP practices provided a telephone number and address for complaints, however, only six provided an email address.

### Recommendations:

Through our engagement with local people with sensory (sight and hearing loss) and learning disabilities we found that services should provide the means for patients to communicate with services. To enable equality of access for disabled people, it would be helpful to remove possible barriers. This includes providing an opportunity to enlarge text, offer easy read and alternative methods of contact such as: telephone number, email and address.

## 7. Appendices

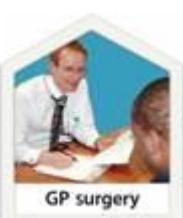
### Complaints page template

We have created a template that GP surgeries can use as a guide to structure information on their websites.

### Suggested format for complaints information on a GP website

We make every effort to give the best service possible to everyone who attends our practice and we welcome any feedback or helpful suggestions you may have.

We know that sometimes things can go wrong resulting in a genuine cause for concern or complaint. If this happens, we hope that we can sort most problems out easily and quickly, often at the time they arise and with the person concerned.



**What to do if you are not happy with your healthcare? Please [click here](#) to get a document in an easy read.**

[insert link:  
[https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/sites/default/files/Easy\\_read\\_Tips\\_on\\_making\\_a\\_complaint\\_NHS\\_lealfet.pdf](https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/sites/default/files/Easy_read_Tips_on_making_a_complaint_NHS_lealfet.pdf)]

For more information in easy read please [click here](#). [insert link: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/learning-disabilities/about/ask-listen-do/people-information/>]

### How to complain

We believe that the quickest way of resolving a concern is by raising it directly with a member of the practice team as soon as you can.

We will try to deal with your concern as quickly as possible. You can also contact the reception or ask for the Practice Manager in order to discuss your issues.

If we are unable to resolve your complaint and you wish to make a formal complaint, please do so in writing as soon as possible after the event, ideally within a few days. All complaints should be addressed to the Practice Manager [insert name], [insert email address], [insert phone number], [insert address]. Please use the form below and describe your issue as concisely as possible. This will help us to establish what happened more easily.

[insert complaints form]

If you are unable to complain immediately after the event then your complaint should be submitted within 12 months of the incident that caused the problem; or within 12 months of discovering that you have a problem.

If you are not comfortable complaining directly to us, or if you feel this is not appropriate, you may choose to complain to NHS England.

**NHS England**  
PO Box 16738  
Redditch B97 9PT  
Email: [england.contactus@nhs.net](mailto:england.contactus@nhs.net)  
Tel: 0300 311 22 33

If you are making a complaint please state: 'For the attention of the complaints team' in the email subject line.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your complaint resolution by us or NHS England, you may contact the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, who is independent of the NHS and government.

**The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman**  
Millbank Tower, Millbank  
London, SW1P 4QP  
Tel: 0345 015 4033  
[www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)

## What we will do

Our Practice Manager will make sure that your concerns are dealt with promptly and will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 3 working days. They will aim to have looked into the case within 10 working days. If the case is likely to take longer we will let you know and keep you informed as the investigation progresses.

Your care and treatment will not be affected as a result of making a complaint.

We will look into your complaint to:

- Find out what happened and what went wrong
- Invite you to discuss the problem.
- Identify what we can do to make sure that the problem does not happen again.

You will receive a written response setting out the result of the investigation.

## Complaining on behalf of someone else

Medical records are protected by the Data Protection Act and GDPR 2018. If you are complaining on behalf of someone else we need to know that you have their permission to do so. You will need to provide a note, dated and signed by the patient with their consent, agreeing that they are happy for you to act on their behalf.

## I need help with my complaint

If you feel you are unable to make a complaint yourself and need support, you can access an Independent Health Complaints Advocate.

Healthwatch Lewisham  
2nd Floor, Old Town Hall  
Catford Road  
London SE6 4RU  
Tel: 0208 690 5012  
[info@healthwatchlewisham.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchlewisham.co.uk)  
[www.healthwatchlewisham.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchlewisham.co.uk)

## Independent Feedback

You can also contact your local Healthwatch to leave your feedback and comments on a service. The feedback is anonymous. Healthwatch Lewisham is independent and acts as a patient champion in health and social care services.  
Healthwatch Lewisham at the above address.

## Useful organisations

Lewisham Citizen Advice  
Leemore Community Hub  
Bonfield Road  
London SE13 5EU  
Tel: 0800 231 5453

## Lewisham Speaking Up

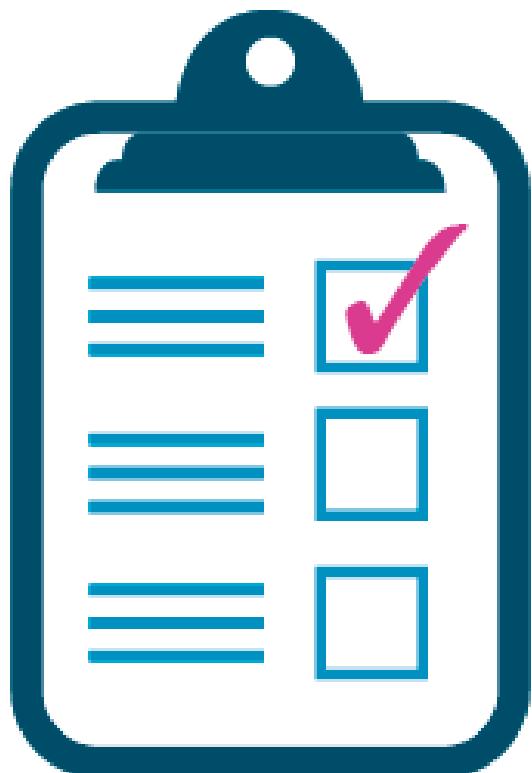
Lewisham Speaking Up is an independent charity for people with learning disabilities.  
Albany Centre & Theatre  
Douglas Way  
London SE8 4AG  
Tel: 020 8691 7198  
[www.lsup.org.uk/](http://www.lsup.org.uk/)

## Good Practice Checklist

Easy read version

Breakdown of the complaints procedure  
including:

- How to complain
- Complaining on behalf of someone else
- Complaints form
- Acknowledgement
- Complaints and response time frame
- What will happen after the complaint
- Practice Manager name and contact details including: phone, email and address
- Information on how to escalate the complaints including Ombudsman details
- NHS England complaints department details
- NHS Complaints Advocacy Service details
- Independent Feedback - Healthwatch Lewisham and other useful local services.



**List of GP surgeries assessed**

Grove Medical Centre

Amersham Vale Training Practice

Novum Health Partnership - Baring Road Medical Centre

Bellingham Green

Belmont Hill Surgery

Brockley Road Surgery

Burnt Ash Surgery

Clifton Rise Family Practice

Deptford Medical Centre

Deptford Surgery

Downham Family Medical Practice

Dr Batra's Practice

Hilly Fields Medical Centre

Honor Oak Group Practice

ICO Health Group - Moorside Clinic

Kingfisher Medical Centre

Lee Road Surgery

Lewisham Medical Centre

Morden Hill Surgery

Mornington Surgery

New Cross Health Centre

Nightingale Surgery

Oakview Family Practice

Park View Surgery

Queens Road Partnership

Rushey Green Group Practice

South Lewisham Group Practice

St John's Medical Centre

Sydenham Green Group Practice

Sydenham Surgery  
The Jenner Practice  
The Vale Medical Centre  
Torridon Road medical Practice  
Triangle Group Practice  
Vesta Road Surgery  
Wells Park Practice  
Woodlands Health Centre  
Woolstone Medical Centre

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