

Lewisham Mental Health Engagement

Patient Experience Quarterly Update
October–December 2025



Contents

Executive Summary	3
Engagement Numbers	5
Ladywell Unit	6
Speedwell Centre	8
Lewisham Early Intervention Centre	10
Primary Care Mental Health Centre	12
Mental Health Support in GPs	14
Mental Health Support at Lewisham Hospital	15
Healthwatch Observations and Recommendations	16
Demographics	20

Executive summary

Introduction

Healthwatch Lewisham is the local health and social care champion. Through our visits to mental health services across Lewisham, we listen to patients' experiences to understand what is working well and where improvements are needed. This enables us to raise issues with the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) and decision-makers who have the authority to drive meaningful change.

We produce this report quarterly to provide a snapshot of patient experiences across mental health services. This edition focuses on the experiences of **52 people** who shared feedback on the support they received from community mental health services, inpatient units, GPs, and Lewisham Hospital between **October and December 2025**.

Key Findings

- Many patients reported positive experiences with staff, who were described as respectful, compassionate, and supportive, particularly during times of distress or crisis.
- Patients highly valued clear explanations, timely referrals, and coordinated care, especially where staff took time to listen and provide reassurance. However, a significant number of patients reported not receiving sufficient information about their mental health rights, advocacy services, available therapies, and support options following discharge.
- Communication remains a key area for improvement, with patients highlighting delays, lack of updates, and unclear next steps, particularly during waiting periods and transitions between services.
- Many patients felt insufficiently involved in decisions about their care, expressing a desire for greater participation in care planning and treatment choices.
- Patients also reported ongoing challenges accessing GP and hospital services, including difficulty booking appointments, limited consultation time, and inconsistent understanding of mental health pathways.
- Wider social factors continue to impact recovery, including unemployment, financial pressures, limited social support, and challenges managing daily living needs.

Recommendations

- Ensure consistent and accessible information is provided on mental health rights, advocacy services, therapies, and post-discharge support.
- Strengthen communication between staff and patients, including providing timely updates, setting clear expectations, and offering written summaries where appropriate.
- Expand opportunities for peer support and community-based engagement, including the use of trained volunteers to support patients' emotional and practical needs.
- Promote greater involvement of patients and carers in care planning, ensuring decisions are collaborative, transparent, and person-centred.
- Improve integration between mental health services, GPs, and hospitals, with clearer referral pathways and better continuity of care.
- Work in partnership with VCSE organisations and community services to provide support with employment, financial wellbeing, and long-term recovery.

Executive summary Contd.

The findings highlight the ongoing importance of clear communication, accessible information, and meaningful patient and carer involvement across mental health services in Lewisham.

While patients consistently report positive interactions with staff, there remain system-level challenges that affect access, continuity, and overall experience.

As the local health and social care champion, Healthwatch Lewisham remains committed to working collaboratively with SLaM and partners to implement these recommendations and support continuous improvements in the quality of care across Lewisham's mental health services.

SLaM has provided their responses to our recommendations. The responses can be found in the Healthwatch Observations and Recommendations section of the report.

Engagement Numbers



52 mental health experiences were shared with us, helping us to raise awareness of this issue and improve care.

11 visits

were carried out to different mental health venues across the borough

Date of visit	Location	Number of Service Users	Number of Carers/ Family members	Total
07/10/2025	Speedwell Centre	6	0	6
14/10/2025	Ladywell Centre	5	0	5
14/10/2025	Speedwell Centre	4	1	5
21/10/2025	Ladywell Centre	5	0	5
28/10/2025	Primary Care Mental Health	4	0	4
04/11/2025	Lewisham Early Intervention Team	4	1	5
11/11/2025	Primary Care Mental Health	5	0	5
18/11/2025	Ladywell Unit	3	2	5
25/11/2025	Speedwell Centre	4	0	4
02/12/2025	Early Intervention Centre	4	0	4
09/12/2025	Primary Care Mental Health	3	2	5

Ladywell Unit

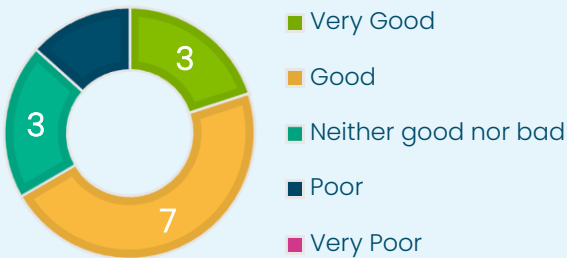
Data snapshot

Between **October–December 2025**, we spoke to

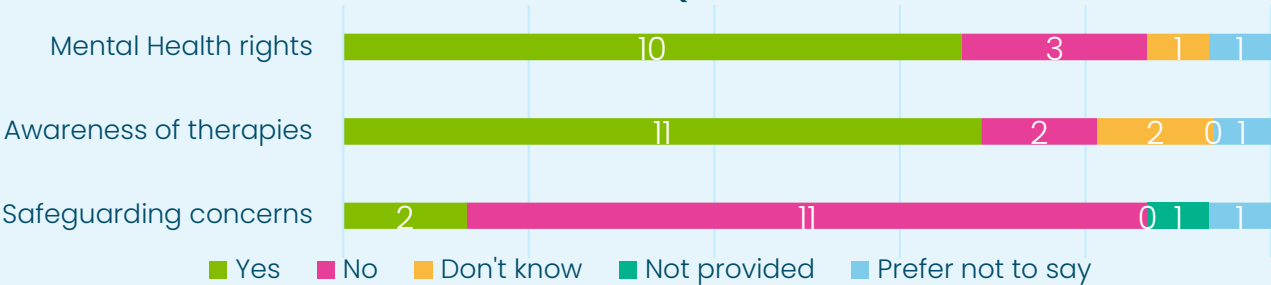
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people who shared experiences of Ladywell Centre

Overall Experience



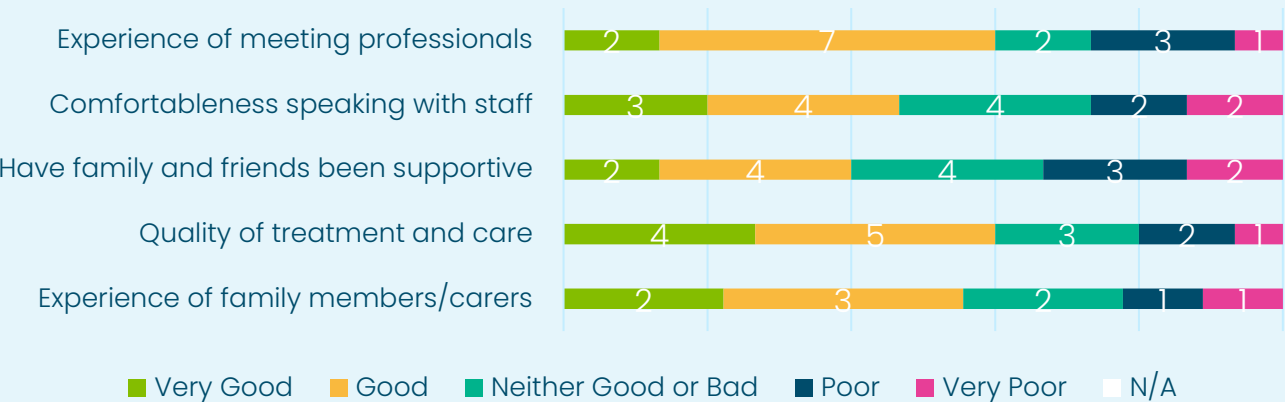
Awareness Questions



Most important aspect for mental health support



Rating of Specific Service Areas



Ladywell Unit

What people told us about the service

Positive comments

"The staff were supportive and listened carefully when I was feeling overwhelmed."

"Staff took time to answer questions about my treatment, which made things easier to understand."

"The ward team regularly checked on my wellbeing and made sure I felt supported during a difficult time."

"Staff explained my medication and treatment plan clearly so I understood why changes were being made."

Patient recommendations

"More structured activities during the day, especially at weekends, would really improve the experience on the ward."

"Clearer communication about discharge plans and next steps would help reduce uncertainty."

"I would like to be more involved in decisions about my care and treatment."

"It would help to have more information about support available after leaving the ward."

Negative comments

"There are limited activities, especially at weekends, which can make the day feel long."

"I sometimes had to wait to speak to staff, which was frustrating."

"I wasn't always clear about what would happen next and I felt hopeless about the future."

Carer/Friend/Family member comments

"As a family member, I felt reassured by staff, but clearer updates about discharge and how we can support recovery at home would really help."

Speedwell Centre

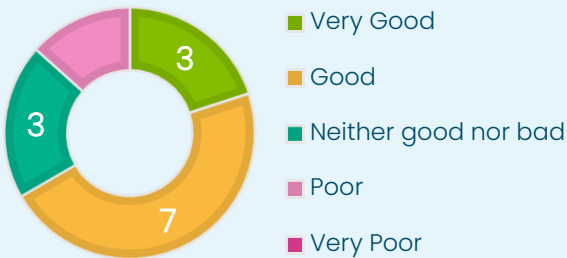
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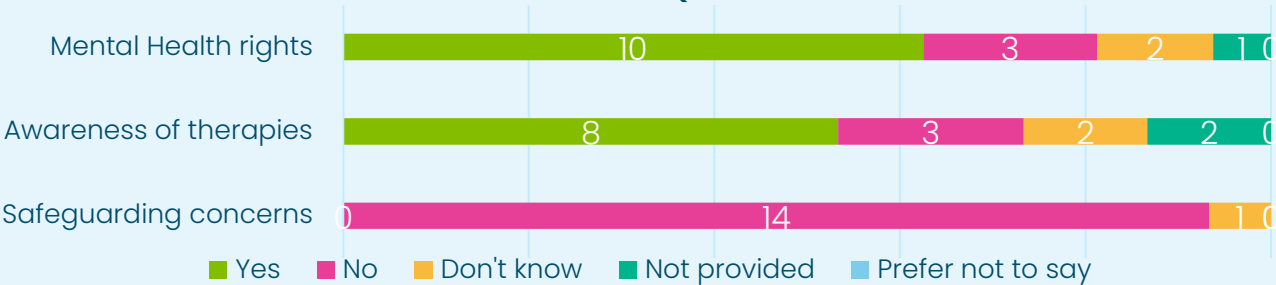
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people who shared experiences of Speedwell Centre

Overall Experience



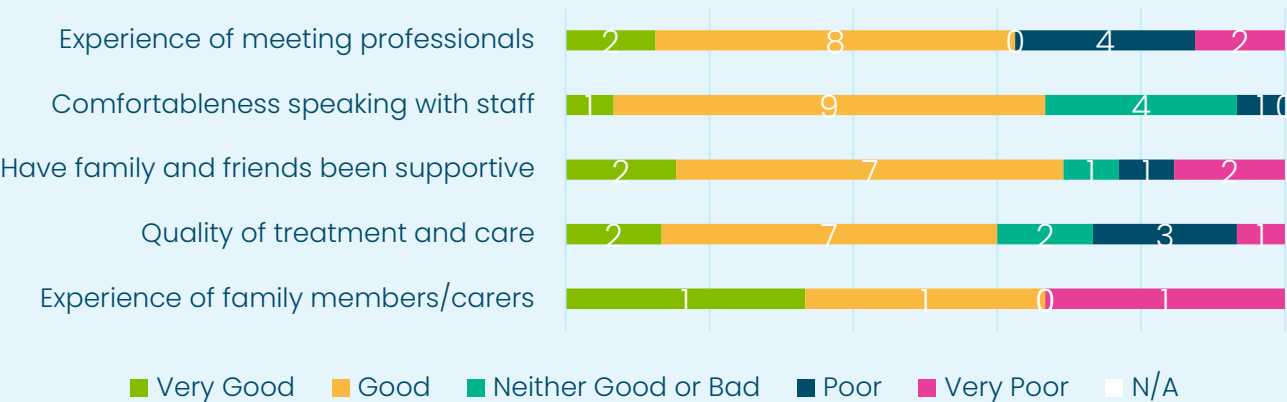
Awareness Questions



Most important aspect for mental health support



Rating of Specific Service Areas



Speedwell Unit

What people told us about the service

Positive comments

"The staff were supportive and listened carefully when I was feeling overwhelmed."

"Staff took time to answer questions about my treatment, which made things easier to understand."

"The ward team regularly checked on my wellbeing and made sure I felt supported during a difficult time."

"Staff explained my medication and treatment plan clearly so I understood why changes were being made."

Negative comments

"Sometimes the gap between appointments are quite long which can make it harder to maintain progress."

"Some appointment times are difficult to attend due to me having other commitments."

"It can sometimes be difficult to reach the service by phone."

Patient recommendations

"Reduce the gap between therapy sessions where possible."

"Make it easier to contact the team between appointments."

"Offer more flexible appointment times when you're the ones making last minute changes."

"Provide clearer information about next steps and other support available."

Carer/Friend/Family member comments

"We had a 9-week wait for a therapy start; clearer timelines would reduce anxiety. Care plan wording was clinical - co-writing in plain English would help."

Lewisham Early Intervention Centre

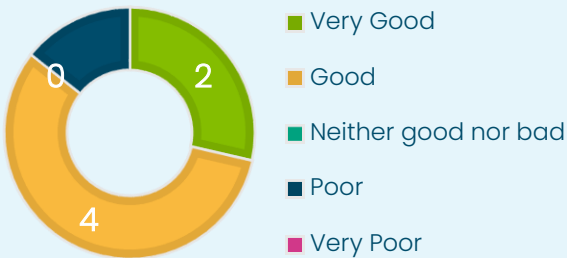
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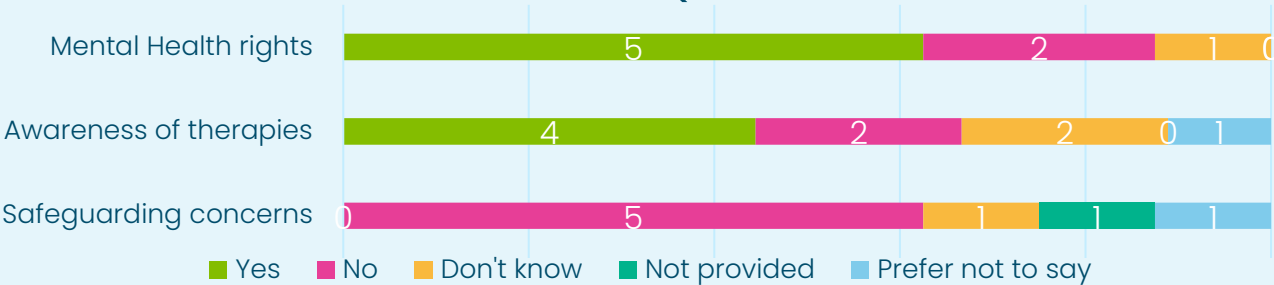
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people who shared experiences of Lewisham Early Intervention Centre

Overall Experience



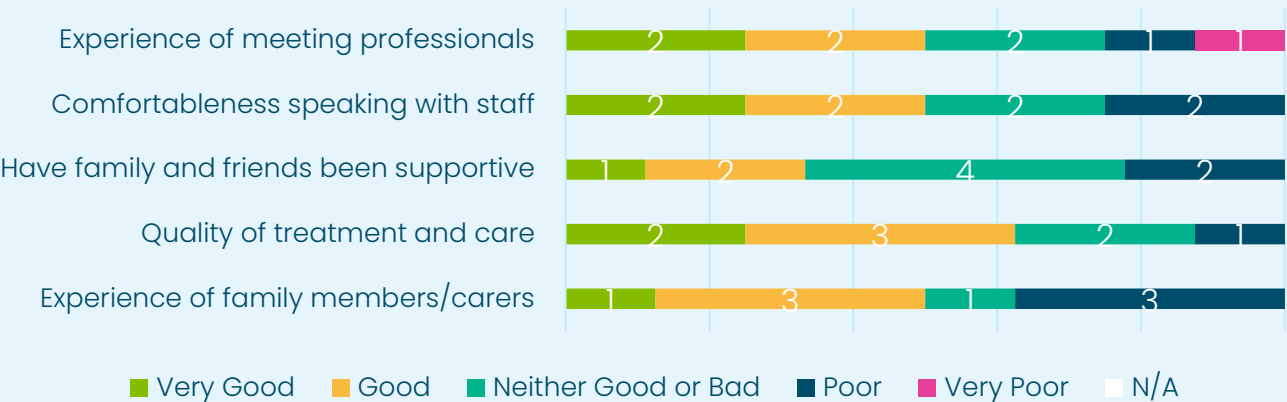
Awareness Questions



Most important aspect for mental health support



Rating of Specific Service Areas



Lewisham Early Intervention Centre

What people told us about the service

Positive comments

"Some staff members were very supportive and made time to listen when I needed reassurance."

"The care coordinator explained my treatment plan clearly and involved me in discussions about my recovery."

"The staff explained my condition clearly which helped reduce my anxiety about what I was experiencing."

"The support provided early on helped me feel less alone and more confident about recovery."

Negative comments

"More information about talking services would be helpful."

"I would appreciate clearer communication about treatment timelines."

"Some information leaflets are difficult to understand."

"Translated information materials would help patients whose first language is not English."

Patient recommendations

"Give more guidance on community support and recovery pathways."

"Make it easier for carers and families to know who to contact."

"Offer more translated and accessible materials."

"Give more guidance on illness and what will happen in the future."

Carer/Friend/Family member comments

"I felt listened to when raising concerns about my family member's mental health. They're very patient with my family member I wish they could teach me that."

Primary Care Mental Health Centre

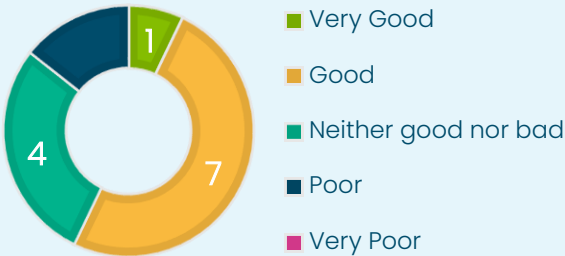
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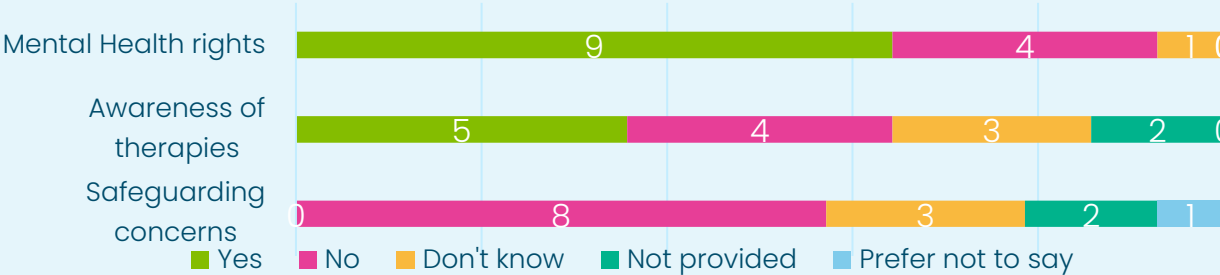
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people who shared experiences of Ladywell Centre

Overall Experience



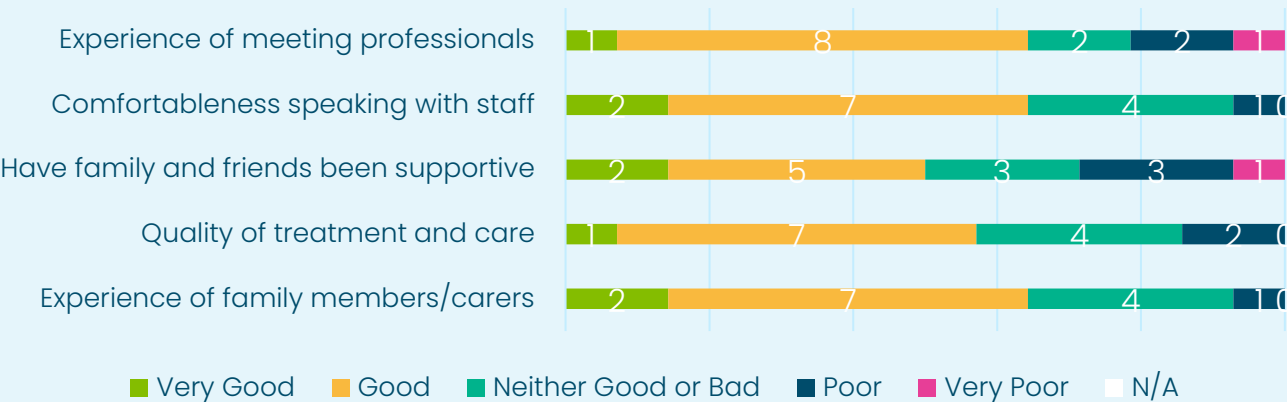
Awareness Questions



Most important aspect for mental health support



Rating of Specific Service Areas



Primary Care Mental Health Centre

What people told us about the service

Positive comments

"Staff were approachable and supportive during appointments."

"The team helped me understand what was happening and reassured me during a difficult time."

"Staff listened carefully to my concerns and explained the different treatment options available to me."

Negative comments

"More follow-up support between appointments would help."

"I am not always clear about what is happening with my care."

"It can sometimes be difficult to contact the team between appointments."

Patient recommendations

"Provide clearer communication about care plans and next steps."

"Increase follow-up between appointments."

"Make it easier to contact the team when support is needed."

"It feels like there is not enough support in the community and the system does not respond early enough."

Carer/Friend/Family member comments

"Staff explained the treatment and what we could expect clearly and helped us understand the support available through the service."

Mental Health Support in GPs

Key Q3 themes



Areas of good practice

- GPs are generally respectful, responsive and good at initial listening
- Strong examples of quick referrals and physical health follow-up
- Patients value clear explanations when provided

Areas for improvement

- Over-reliance on medication-focused consultations
- Limited time in appointments
- Inconsistent knowledge of mental health pathways
- Lack of clear follow-up and continuity

Positive comments

"The GP listened carefully and treated me with respect. They took time to explain what the next steps would be and made sure I understood the referral process, which helped reduce my anxiety."

"I was able to get a same-day telephone appointment, and the GP arranged blood tests and provided safety advice. I felt better that my concerns were taken seriously and acted on quickly."

"The GP recognised my mental health needs early and made a referral without delay. That early response made a real difference in accessing the right support."

Negative comments

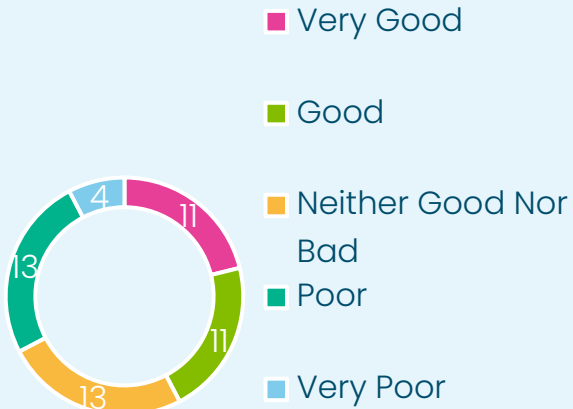
"I did not always feel listened to, and at times staff seemed focused on symptoms rather than understanding the wider situation."

"The waiting time for assessment felt far too long and had a real impact on getting support when it was needed."

"The appointment felt quite brief and I didn't have time to discuss everything."

Mental Health Support at Lewisham Hospital

Key Q3 Themes



Areas of good practice

- Staff are consistently described as kind, respectful and reassuring, particularly during distress or crisis situations
- Strong triage and initial response, with mental health needs often recognised quickly
- Good examples of joined-up working and handovers between teams, helping patients feel supported

Areas for improvement

- Busy and noisy environments that are not always suitable for people in mental distress
- Inconsistent communication about next steps, including discharge plans and follow-up care
- Lack of clear timeframes and expectation-setting, leaving patients feeling uncertain during their care journey

Positive comments

"Staff treated me with dignity and respect throughout. Even in a busy environment, they remained professional and made an effort to explain decisions about my care."

"The nurses were supportive and regularly checked in on my wellbeing."

"Hospital staff were polite, calm and took time to explain what was happening, which helped reduce my anxiety during what was a very stressful experience."

Negative comments

"The environment was often busy and noisy, which made it difficult to feel calm or safe while waiting for support. A quieter space would have made a significant difference."

"The staff just stayed focused on medication rather than wider emotional support when I was in crisis."

"I was not always given clear updates about what would happen next, particularly around discharge or follow-up care, which left me feeling uncertain."

Healthwatch observations and recommendations

1. Support

1. **Observation:** A significant proportion of patients reported that they did not receive clear or consistent information about their mental health rights, advocacy services, or available support options. While some patients were informed during appointments, others described gaps in communication, particularly during transitions between services and after discharge.

- a. **Recommendation:** Ensure all patients are consistently provided with clear, accessible information about their rights and advocacy services at multiple points in their care pathway, including admission, review meetings, and discharge.

Response from SLaM: *"Lewisham community mental health teams governance meetings are used to check that people's rights are being discussed. Work is underway to ensure standard information about advocacy and complaints services is available across our 5 community mental health centres – which are currently being restructured."*

POhWER (advocacy service provider) attended the community managers meeting in 2025 and once the community teams are restructured, we plan to continue to build close links between POhWER and our 5 community teams."

2. **Observation:** Several patients were not fully aware of available talking therapies or support options beyond medication. While some reported being offered CBT or group-based support, others expressed uncertainty about what therapies were available or appropriate for them.

- a. **Recommendation:** Strengthen how information about talking therapies is shared, ensuring patients receive tailored explanations of available options and how to access them, both verbally and in written formats.

Response from SLaM: *"We plan to develop a more consistent approach to sharing information with service users in our community mental health centres, to highlight the therapy options available to them, along with other interventions."*

More accessible information about psychological therapies and voluntary sector support available is being trialled in Heather Close Community Mental Health Centre (the national pilot site for a neighbourhood mental health centre in Lewisham)."

3. **Observation:** Most patients reported feeling comfortable speaking to staff and described staff as supportive, respectful, and approachable. However, a notable minority experienced delays in responses, difficulty getting staff attention on busy wards, or inconsistent communication about requests.

- a. **Recommendation:** Continue to promote open and responsive communication, ensuring staff acknowledge requests promptly and provide clear updates where delays occur to manage expectations.

Response from SLaM: *"Service users will have a named contact in each community mental health centre, who is best placed to meet their priority needs, and to liaise with other team members. Each centre will provide clear and accessible information about how to contact the team and when, and what to do out of hours. These changes are intended to improve communication and updates between service users and the team.."*

Healthwatch observations and recommendations

1. Support

4. **Observation:** Many patients expressed a need for more holistic and ongoing support to help them remain well in the community. This included support with daily living, emotional wellbeing, peer support, and access to structured activities. Patients also highlighted limited ward-based activities, particularly at weekends.

- a. **Recommendation:** Expand access to structured activities, peer support, and wellbeing programmes both on wards and in the community, including weekends where possible.

Response from SLaM: *"A new programme of evening and weekend activities on the wards at the Ladywell Unit began in May 2026. These are run by commissioned voluntary sector organisations – who will also encourage service users to continue to access their activities after they leave hospital in the community."*

The new VCS Collaborative has also been commissioned to provide a range of support from grass roots and community organisations to promote mental wellbeing and peer support/structured activities. [Working in partnership with our community – South London and Maudsley](#)

- b. **Recommendations:** Work with patients and carers to identify individual support needs and ensure continuity of support beyond discharge.

Response from SLaM: *"See recommendations above and below."*

5. **Observation:** A proportion of patients reported not feeling fully involved in decisions about their care. While some described positive examples of collaborative planning, others felt unclear about treatment plans, medication changes, or next steps.

- a. **Recommendation:** Actively involve patients and carers in care planning discussions, ensuring information is clearly explained and decisions are made collaboratively.
- b. **Recommendation:** Provide written summaries of care plans, medication changes, and next steps to improve clarity and shared understanding.

Response from SLaM: *"The use of Dialog + is being rolled out across the Trust to improve conversations with service users/carers about their needs in different areas of their lives and to agree together the actions needed – which will inform their care plan. These will be reviewed regularly and updated and also include questions about people's experience of their care and treatment."*

Healthwatch observations and recommendations

1. GPs and Hospitals

6. **Observation:** Patient experiences of GPs and hospital services were mixed. While many patients described positive interactions, including timely referrals and respectful care, others reported challenges such as difficulty booking appointments, limited consultation time, and inconsistent understanding of mental health pathways.

- a. **Recommendation:** Strengthen communication and coordination between GPs, hospitals, and mental health services to ensure a more joined-up approach to care.

Response from SLaM: *"Community mental health teams are reintroducing link meetings with the GP practices in their areas. Service managers will meet with GP practices to coordinate care, escalate issues and develop shared solutions. This is part of our community services development programme but also supports the wider NHS goal to develop more neighbourhood-based care."*

In addition, we continue to provide some primary care mental health nurses who work across a group of GP practices to support practices in responding to people with mental health needs.

We work closely with University Hospitals Lewisham, by providing a mental health specialist matron supporting those with mental health needs in the acute hospital and liaising with our inpatient and community services."

- b. **Recommendation:** Improve accessibility of GP appointments, including options for longer or more flexible appointments for mental health concerns.

Response from SLaM: *"This recommendation is for GP colleagues."*

- c. **Recommendation:** Provide additional training and guidance for GP practice staff on mental health pathways to ensure patients are appropriately supported and referred.

Response from SLaM: *"See above response about improved links with GP practices and our primary care nurses."*

- d. **Recommendation:** Improve continuity of care by ensuring patients have clear follow-up plans and a named point of contact where possible.

Response from SLaM: *"The community mental health services development programme currently underway includes work to ensure that service users have a named person in each team to best suit their follow-up plans. See above for the changes we are making to our care plans to better identify and respond to service users' needs, based on the Dialog questions."*

Healthwatch observations and recommendations

1. GPs and Hospitals

7. **Observation:** Patients frequently highlighted communication challenges within hospital settings, including long waiting times, lack of updates, unclear discharge processes, and limited information about next steps. Environmental factors such as noise and lack of quiet spaces also affected patient experience.

- a. **Recommendation:** Improve communication during hospital visits by providing regular updates on waiting times, clearer explanations of processes, and written discharge information.
- b. **Recommendation:** Enhance the hospital environment by considering quieter waiting areas and improving patient comfort during periods of distress.

Response from SLaM: *"These recommendations are for University Hospital Lewisham."*

- c. **Recommendation:** Ensure discharge planning is clearly communicated, including access to community support, follow-up care, and crisis support options.

Response from SLaM: *"The Trust has integrated its crisis line with NHS 111 to make it easier for everyone to reach urgent mental health support. Heather Close Community Mental Health Centre is running an extended service 8am–8pm Monday to Friday and 9–5 at weekends. In partnership with Waythrough, we run the Mountsfield Recovery House for people who may need short-term 24-hour support in the community."*

Lewisham has commissioned Together for Mental Wellbeing to provide more outreach support to those who may not access services easily. The new voluntary sector partnerships programme is in place – of which this is part."

8. **Observation:** Patients continue to face wider social challenges following discharge, including difficulties accessing employment, financial instability, and limited support networks, which can impact recovery and increase vulnerability.

- a. **Recommendation:** Strengthen partnerships with VCSE organisations to provide support with employment, financial advice, and community integration.
- b. **Recommendation:** Expand peer support opportunities to reduce isolation and support long-term recovery.
- c. **Recommendation:** Introduce more structured discharge support, including social prescribing and practical guidance on accessing housing, employment, and ongoing care.

Response from SLaM: *"See the previous response."*

Demographics

Gender	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Man(including trans man)	37	19
Woman (including trans woman	48	25
Non- binary	13	7
Other	0	0
Prefer not to say	2	1
Not provided	0	0
Total	100%	52

Sexual Orientation	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Asexual	0	0
Bisexual	8	4
Gay Man	2	1
Heterosexual/ Straight	79	41
Lesbian / Gay woman	4	2
Pansexual	0	0
Prefer not to say	4	8
Not provided	0	0
Total	100%	52

Ethnicity	Percentage %	No of Reviews
White	29	15
Black (African / Caribbean / Other)	38	20
Asian (all categories)	10	5
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	15	8
Other / Not stated	8	4
Total	100%	52

Age	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Under 18	0	0
18-24	6	3
25-34	23	12
35-44	31	16
45-54	21	11
55-64	19	10
65-74	0	0
75-84	0	0
85+	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
Not provided	0	0
Total	100%	52

Religion	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Buddhist	0	0
Christian	35	18
Hindu	12	6
Jewish	0	0
Muslim	19	10
Sikh	0	0
Spiritualism	0	0
Agnostic	0	0
Other religion	10	5
No religion	15	8
Prefer not to say	10	5
Total	100%	52

Demographics

Employment status	Percentage %	No of Reviews
In unpaid voluntary work only	0	0
Not in employment & Unable to work	13	25
Not in Employment/ not actively seeking work - retired	9	17
Not in Employment (seeking work)	9	17
Not in Employment (Student)	0	0
Paid: 16 or more hours/week	10	19
Paid: Less than 16 hours/week	9	17
On maternity leave	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
Not provided		
Total	100%	52

Borough	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Lewisham	92	48
Out of borough	8	4
Total	100%	52

Role (Service-user/Carer)	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Service-User	88	46
Carer/Family member	12	6
Total	100%	52



healthwatch

Lewisham

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