

**A follow up of the Healthwatch Wolverhampton June 2022
investigation into booking GP appointments in
Wolverhampton:**

December 2022

DRAFT

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About Us:

Healthwatch Wolverhampton is the city's health and social care champion.

We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. We are entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice to help you to get the care and support you need.

As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care.

Healthwatch Wolverhampton is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across England.

Background:

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the issue of accessing GP services has been exacerbated with improvements needing to be made to meet public demand. Healthwatch England have identified that accessing GP services remains a widespread issue which has been mentioned in an October 2022 [press release](#). Within the most recent press release it has been stated that: 'By December 2020, 75% of feedback we received about GP access was negative'. The issue of digital exclusion and remote appointments has also been raised with Healthwatch England as when people need a face-to-face appointment, they often report access becoming harder.

In June 2022, Healthwatch Wolverhampton produced a follow-up report of the GP report that had previously been produced by the Healthwatch Wolverhampton team in December 2021.

The initial purpose of this report was in response to being asked by the Health Scrutiny Panel to call all GP practices in the city to understand patient experience when booking appointments through the telephone. As a result of the June 2022 GP Access report, Healthwatch Wolverhampton have followed up the same exercise to meet a six-month cut-off point which was for December 2022.

Although direct comparisons were initially unable to be made with the December 2021 report, the June 2022 data is now able to be used to examine previous recommendations and determine whether improvements have been made since. The methodology and data analysis process used is identical to the previous report to maintain reliability.

This report presents our findings and assessment of whether patient access to GP appointments in Wolverhampton has improved since June 2022.

What we did:

Calls were made from October until the end of November 2022. Volunteers carried out the calls at the Healthwatch Wolverhampton office during the hours of 10am and 1pm to avoid disruption during busier times of the day. This also identified which Primary Care Networks (PCNs) have or have not made changes to improve patient access in the last six months.

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Key messages:

- While one PCN has not changed in terms of its call waiting system, there has been a reduction in the number of practices that offer a call waiting system for the remaining PCNs.
- Overall, improvements have been made to pre-recorded messages on the call waiting system apart from one PCN.

In particular, the number of practices with a message for both explaining that patients would need to give a reason for their call as well as a message for other times to call back has remained the same. There has not been an improvement for this particular PCN.

- We found that a significantly high number of call handlers were not made aware that Healthwatch Wolverhampton would be calling them and some of them were also unaware of Healthwatch Wolverhampton's role as a health and social care champion.
- Overall, there has been a noticeable improvement in the number of practices willing to participate. However, one PCN has worsened.
- Overall, there has been an increase in the number of practices signposting patients to pharmacies. This is particularly noticeable in the Unity East PCN, where five surgeries said that they would signpost to pharmacies.

Recommendations:

We will share our findings with the clinical directors for each PCN to highlight any issues identified.

- Raise awareness of the role that Healthwatch Wolverhampton plays in using patient and public feedback to improve services. Encourage participation by the GP practices in future work programmes.
- As the call waiting systems seemed to have worsened, we recommend that PCN leads review and improve their call waiting systems.
- Practices should continue signposting to services other than walk in, NHS 111 and urgent care to less commonly used same day services, such as pharmacists, optometrists, and physiotherapists.
- Consider having more staff members to cover the practice during busy periods to make sure they have the capacity to deal with patient queries.

What people told us:

Total Health PCN

Out of the twelve practices we telephoned:

- Zero practices could not be contacted
- Two refused to answer our questions
- Six answered our questions

The majority of call handlers were polite, professional, and co-operative in their manner. However, two practices refused to take part.

Why did they refuse?

One practice refused to answer our questions without reason while another practice did not want to take part and said that 'five minutes is too long' and 'the practice is busy right now.'

Call observations

Did all calls connect?

In June 2022, three calls could not be connected at all. One practice failed to pick up the call within the hour, another hung up twice and We were told the third is not a surgery in itself but comprises of three other practices.

During, October/November 2022, four calls could not be connected.

This shows that there has been a decline when connecting to the GP practices as four phone calls were unable to be connected in comparison to three phone calls not going through in June 2022. No practice hung up the phone although one phone call was cut off without a message.

Average time to answer call

The overall average time for a call to be answered was 2 minutes and 6 seconds. The shortest time was 10 seconds and the longest time to pick up was 12 minutes.

In June, the average time taken for a call to be picked up was seven minutes and 22 seconds. The shortest time for a call to be picked up was one minute and ten seconds, while the longest time for a call to be picked up was 26 minutes and 16 seconds. This suggests that the time taken to answer calls has improved significantly.

Messages on the call system

Our research showed that 6 out of the 12 surgeries has a message system in place with their phone call system stating that patients will be asked to explain why they need the appointment. A message about times to call the practice for other reasons such as blood tests etc. was also available on 6 out of 12 practice messages. There was also a cut-off message for one surgery which stated that all admin staff are busy at the moment and recommended that patients call back later, another surgery did not have a cut-off message when the phone hung up.

In June 2022, ten out of eleven surgeries had messages explaining that patients should give a reason for their call and a message explaining when to call back for other reasons, whereas as only six out of twelve practices did in December 2022.

Call waiting

Our June 2022 report found that, out of 11 practices, only seven had a call waiting system. Of these seven, only four said what number we were in the queue. For the three that did not, one picked up fairly quickly, so it may have been too soon for the queuing system to initiate. For the other two, we were on the call for enough time to expect a queuing system.

The December 2022 results found that out of 12 surgeries, 10 had a call waiting system, however one surgery had a constant calling sound rather than a system in place. This indicates that there has been an improvement and more surgeries are using a call waiting system. All 10 call systems failed to provide information on what number we were in the queue, which shows a deterioration as four surgeries stated queue numbers in June 2022.

Availability of appointments

From the time that appointments were released, out of the six practices that answered our questions, one surgery said that they were unsure how many appointments they had left that day, and another did not answer this question. Three surgeries stated that they had appointments available which included, 10 appointments for one, 15-30 for another and 37 for the final surgery.

The number of appointments left at the time the call was made had decreased a lot with four surgeries stating that they had no more appointments left and another answered with the fact that they have 15 doctors' appointments and four nurse appointments left.

Out of the six surgeries that we spoke with, four surgeries had appointments available specifically for children, which is one more than the three surgeries in June 2022. Out of the six practices, one surgery did not answer our question

about the availability of routine appointments, and four surgeries said between 1-2 weeks (with a possibility for 24-48 hours for one). A major difference between the surgeries was that one surgery mentioned that a routine appointment could be received within 3-4 days. Similarly, three out of the four surgeries that answered in June 2022 stated that patients could expect to receive routine appointments within one to two weeks.

Type of appointments

The types of appointments offered were varied, with all options available. Five practices said that they offer face-to-face and telephone appointments, four said that they offer home visit appointments and three offered video appointments. When deciding which appointment type is offered to patients, we found that three out of six surgeries stated that patient preference comes first. Two surgeries stated that the type of appointment offered is dependent on the nature of the issue or is dependent on the problem, but that face-to-face appointments are possible if the appointment is pushed forward. One surgery did not answer.

The June 2022 report showed that three practices said that they offer all four appointment types and one practice said that they offer all appointment types apart from video appointments. When asked how the type of appointment is decided, all practices said that patient preference would come first.

It could be said that there has been an improvement as in June 2022 only three surgeries said that they offer all four appointment types, whereas five practices offered all appointment types in December 2022.

Signposting

One surgery said that signposting advice given to patients is dependent on the nature of the call and that staff always follow normal procedures. Another surgery mentioned that they do offer a call back service if no appointments are available. Two out of the six practices said they would direct patients towards 111. Three out of the six practices said they would direct patients to an urgent care/walk in centre. One out of the six practices said they would direct patients to a partner surgery. One out of the six practices said they would direct patients to A and E. One out of the six practices said they would direct patients to a mental health specialist. One out of the six practices said they would direct patients to a physiotherapist.

In June 2022, four practices responded to our question on signposting. Two mentioned that they signpost patients to the cross-organisational booking system if no appointments are available (to be booked into a different GP practice in the PCN). Just one practice mentioned that they may refer a patient to a clinical pharmacist. Two out of the four mentioned that it

depends on urgency, and if it is urgent, they would direct patients to a walk in, 111, 999 or A&E

It would appear that the number of practices stating that they would refer to NHS 111 has remained the same as two practices stated that they would do this. Similar to the June 2022 data, one practice mentioned that they would signpost to a partner surgery. Signposting to a pharmacist was a new signposting option mentioned in December 2022. When signposting to a walk in, the number of surgeries signposting to them increased by one. Additional signposting was mentioned in December 2022, with physiotherapy and mental health specialists services being mentioned.

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Wolverhampton South East PCN

Out of the eleven practices we telephoned:

- Zero practices could not be contacted
- Five refused to answer our questions
- Six answered our questions

The majority of call handlers were very polite and informative, although one receptionist was new in post, she continued to answer our questions. Two practices refused to answer our questions. Two surgeries redirected us to another surgery as they stated that they were connected to each other, however this resulted in no answers from either practice. We withdrew the call after the appropriate amount of time.

Why did they refuse?

One practice refused to answer as they said that Healthwatch were making people who needed appointments wait, while another surgery had us waiting over an hour after stating that we should call back later to speak with the manager.

Call observations

Did all calls connect

Three of our calls did not connect as we had waited over an hour, therefore had to disconnect. The remaining eight practices were contacted successfully. The call data for surgeries who did not answer within the hour has been included below as they may have answered the call after the hour.

Our June 2022 report showed that one practice could not be contacted due to waiting over an hour and another practice claimed that no patient line existed for that practice.

Average time to answer call

The average time to answer a call was 17 minutes and 34 seconds. The shortest time to pick up was 33 seconds and the longest time to pick up was one hour and 23 minutes.

In June, the average time taken for a call to be picked up was seven minutes and 36 seconds. The shortest time for a call to be picked up was two seconds, while the longest time for a call to be picked up was 22 minutes and

ten seconds. It would appear that there has been a noticeable change as the calls have been picked up much quicker than before.

Messages on the call system

Nine out of eleven practices had a message stating that patients would need to give a reason for their call while two did not. Only two practices have a message explaining when to call back for other reasons, such as blood tests etc., two surgeries did not.

The same number of practices had a call waiting system in place in both the December and June 2022 investigations.

Call waiting

Out of the eleven practices, call waiting was available for all seven out of eleven practices and six practices told us what number we were in the queue. We were cut off by two practices.

In June 2022, seven practices had a call waiting system and three practices did not indicate our position in the queue.

Availability of appointments

Five surgeries had no appointments left at the time of our calls and one surgery had eight appointments left. In June 2022, three practices did not have any appointments left.

Type of appointments

Our December investigation showed that three practices had appointments available for children under the ages of 1 that day, while two of these surgeries only offered emergency children's appointments. In June 2022, only one surgery stated that they had appointments for children under 1 left that day only if necessary, however, this is not something that is typically offered.

All six surgeries who answered our questions offered both face-to-face and telephone appointments whereas, none of the practices offered video or home visit appointments. In June 2022, all three practices that answered said they offered all four types of appointments. It seems as though video and home-based appointments may not be given as much priority as of now.

One surgery stated that the type of appointment offered was decided by the doctor and another surgery said that it was dependant on where the doctor is working but they would try to accommodate for face-to-face. Two practices refused to answer this question. One surgery stated that the type of appointment offered was decided on the presented case. Another surgery stated that there are special care plans in place in relation to covid and

therefore telephone appointments are recommended. Two surgeries stated that patient preference is given sometimes.

Signposting

Six practices stated that they would signpost patients to the walk-in centre, while two refused to answer. Urgent care, pharmacy and 111 were also given as signposting resources.

In June 2022, two surgeries stated that they would signpost to NHS 111 or walk in centre.

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Unity West PCN

Out of the six practices we telephoned:

- Zero practices could not be contacted
- One refused to answer our questions
- Five answered our questions

Three out of the five practices refused to answer until the Healthwatch service manager called back, after explaining who Healthwatch Wolverhampton were, the receptionists were more than happy to take part in our survey. Two practices were informative and easy to talk to, although one call handler was reluctant to start with. One call handler refused to answer our questions.

Why did they refuse?

The surgery refused to answer as they stated that there was a long queue of callers waiting.

Call observations

Did all calls connect

All six of our calls connected, however one practice refused to answer our questions.

In June 2022, four practices refused to answer our questions and no calls were cut off before a call was connected or afterwards. In December 2022, two of our calls were cut off and the service manager called back. It could be said that more practices were willing to participate in comparison to June 2022, whereas the number of times being cut off during a call has increased as no calls were cut off before.

Average time to answer call

The average time for a call to be answered was 5 minutes and 16 seconds to pick up the phone. The shortest time to pick up was 11 seconds and the longest time to pick up was 12 minutes and 13 seconds.

In June for the six surgeries that picked up, the average time taken for a call to be picked up was three minutes and 34 seconds. The shortest time for a call to be picked up was 2 seconds, while the longest time for a call to be picked up was five minutes and 50 seconds. It appears that there has been an improvement in the time taken for a call to be answered.

Messages on the call system

For our June report we found that, four out of the six practices had a message saying that receptionists will ask patients what their symptoms are to direct them to the most appropriate clinician. Two out of six practices had a message on their phone asking patients to call the practice at different times for different reasons.

In December, we found that four out of six had a message explaining that patients will be asked about their reason for calling and only one practice had a message explaining call times for other reasons. We found that four practices did not have a message in place explaining the times to call back for other reasons.

It seems that the number of practices with a message explaining that patients will be expected to explain why they are calling and times to call back for bloods etc. has roughly stayed the same as one less practice has a message about re calling at different times for different reasons as opposed to last time.

Call waiting

Out of six calls that connected, two out of six practices had a call waiting system in place and one of these told us about our position in the queue while the other did not.

In June, five out of six practices had a call waiting system and four of those five told us our position in the call waiting system.

Availability of appointments

All five of the practices who answered our questions did not have any appointments left at the time we called. For routine appointments, the time taken before being seen ranged from a week to six weeks.

Our data collected in June 2022 showed that out of the two surgeries that answered, one surgery had five appointments left, while the other did not have any.

Type of appointments

Our June 2022 report highlighted that one of two practices that answered, said that they do offer specific appointments for children. In December 2022, all five practices that answered said that they offered children's appointments, with three offering same day appointments and one offering appointments for children under the age of one.

All five surgeries offer face-to-face and telephone appointments, with one stating that they offer video appointments too. All of the surgeries stated that it is the patient's choice what appointment is offered. One surgery stated that it is dependent on the individual and if a patient cannot come in for a face-to-face, they will switch the slot to telephone instead. Covid 19 was also mentioned as a reason for switching from face-to-face to telephone appointments for one of the practices.

In June, one of two practices who answered said that they offer all four types of appointment while another stated that patient preference is valued, and another practice stated that children's appointments must be face-to-face.

Signposting

In June 2022, both practices who answered mentioned that they would direct patients to the walk-in centre and one of them would direct people to book a GP appointment directly through their PCN (Unity West). Similarly, four practices called in December mentioned that they would recommend visiting a local walk in. One practice mentioned visiting a pharmacy. One surgery did not answer this question.

RWT PCN

Out of the eight practices we telephoned:

- Zero practices could not be contacted
- Five refused to answer our questions
- Three answered our questions

Two receptionists were very polite and answered although one needed to be convinced to co-operate. Four receptionists did not have a welcoming phone manner and refused to answer our questions. One call handler redirected us to someone else; this was the assistant manager of the practice who then answered our questions.

Why did they refuse?

One surgery refused to answer as they said they had a shortage of staff, while another refused to answer as they requested that the questions be emailed to them beforehand. One surgery put down the phone on us, another stated that they simply did not want to take part and the final surgery asked that we call back later to speak with the practice manager.

Call observations

Did all calls connect

Our calls connected to all eight practices, however only five practices agreed to answer our questions. One surgery simply did not want to answer, whereas two others stated that they had a staff shortage and that they would prefer the questions be emailed over to them first. Another surgery stated that we should call back another time, that she couldn't disclose any information and we needed to speak to the practice manager. Another practice answered, however the call handler kept saying that the call was unnecessary, and the phone was repeatedly muted during the call.

In June 2022, seven out of eight practices were able to be contacted. This shows that there has been an improvement since June 2022 as all eight of our calls connected, although we were cut off by one of the practices before our call was answered.

Average time to answer call

The average time for a call to be answered was 12 minutes and 14 seconds. The shortest time to pick up was 53 seconds and the longest time to pick up was 45 minutes and 10 seconds.

In June, the average time taken for a call to be picked up was three minutes and 22 seconds. The shortest time for a call to be picked up was two seconds, while the longest time for a call to be picked up was ten minutes and 37 seconds. There has been a significant improvement in the time taken for a call to be answered.

Messages on the call system

All seven out of eight practices who answered our call had a message telling us that patients would be expected to give a reason for their call. In June 2022, all eight practices had a message explaining that a reason for calling would have to be given.

Six out of seven practices who took part had a message explaining what times to call up for other reasons, such as blood tests etc. In June 2022, all practices had a message for asking patients to call back at different times.

Call waiting

In December 2022, we found that seven out of eight practices had a call waiting system in place, we were cut off by one practice before the call was answered. Six out of seven practices told us what number we were in the queue.

Our June 2022 report found that all eight practices had a call waiting system in place. However, in December we were cut off by one practice after 2 minutes and 41 seconds of calling, which left us unaware of whether there was a call waiting system in place. All practices had a call waiting system in place during June 2022. As we were cut off so soon by one practice, we are unable to make an accurate comparison on the call waiting system. One of our calls cut off repeatedly during the survey.

Availability of appointments

For the seven practices that answered our questions, four refused to answer, two said no appointments left, and one practice had five available. In June 2022, three practices had no appointments left, while the remaining surgeries did have some appointment slots remaining. These included one appointment, two appointments for another surgery and seven for another surgery.

Three practices said that patients are able to make a routine appointment, whereas four refused to answer. Our June 2022 report found that four of six practices offered the option of booking a routine appointment.

Three practices told us how long patients were expected to wait for a routine appointment, which ranged from one week, up to two weeks and both same-day and up to two-week routine appointments are available to book in

advance. In June 2022, four practices answered this question while two did not. These practices said that the wait time for routine appointments ranged from, one week, two weeks, up to 48 hours and another said 1-3 weeks depending on availability.

Type of appointments

When asking whether the surgeries offered routine appointments, only three practices answered the question, while the remainder refused to answer. All three practices said that they offered both face-to-face and telephone appointments, while one said that they offered video appointments. Home visit appointments were not offered by any of the three surgeries.

In June 2022, five out of six practices said that they just offer telephone-based appointments and the other practice said that both telephone and face-to-face appointments were offered.

In December 2022, four practices refused to tell us how the type of appointment offered is decided, two said it depended on the patient's problem and one said that it is case dependant with face-to-face appointments being offered although patients tend to ask for telephone appointments.

In June 2022, five out of six practices who answered our questions said that the doctor first makes a call and then decides whether a face-to-face appointment is necessary. The other practice said that the doctor makes the decision of which appointment type is offered.

In December 2022, four surgeries refused to answer whether appointments were offered specifically for children. Three surgeries answered yes. One surgery stated that under 1's are seen by the GP straight away. One surgery said that they have urgent slots available and another said it is dependent on the age of the child. In June 2022, only one practice said that they offered children's appointments while the five others said they didn't. It seems that there has been an improvement as in December 2022, three surgeries stated that they did have appointments for children available.

Signposting

Four practices refused to answer our question about signposting. Out of the three surgeries that did answer, one said they would signpost to the walk-in centre, pharmacy and urgent care. Another practice said the walk in centre and next day extended access appointments. The final surgery answered that they would signpost to the walk-in centre/urgent care or recommend calling back the following day.

In June 2022, all six surgeries who answered our questions said that they would refer patients to the nearest walk-in centre or out-of-hours service. Four

recommended contacting NHS 111 and one surgery said that they would ask patients to either pre-book using the Babylon app or to call back the next day.

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Wolverhampton North PCN

Out of the ten practices we telephoned:

- Zero practices could not be contacted
- One refused to answer our questions
- Nine answered our questions

It seemed as though the majority of receptionists were unaware that Healthwatch would be calling up the practice. One receptionist stated that she was new and therefore spoke with her manager who afterwards answered our questions. One surgery did not realise the significance of the call and the Healthwatch manager gave user discretion to call back again as a very dismissive tone of voice was used. Three other practices were very polite and keen to answer our questions.

Why did they refuse?

One practice refused to participate as the receptionist stated that their practice manager was on their break. Similarly, in June 2022, two practices stated that their manager was on their break and could not answer the questions. In total, four practices refused to take part in our June 2022 investigation.

Call observations

Two practices shared a phoneline, which meant that the call could be answered by either one. In June 2022, three practices shared a phoneline.

Did all calls connect

All calls connected; however, one practice refused to answer our questions.

Average time to answer call

The average time for a call to be answered was 3 minutes and 21 seconds. The shortest time to pick up was 30 seconds and the longest time to pick up was 8 minutes and 53 seconds.

In June, the average time taken for a call to be picked up was four minutes and 54 seconds. The shortest time for a call to be picked up was one minute and 18 seconds, while the longest time for a call to be picked up was 20 minutes and 18 seconds. This shows that the average time for a call to be answered has increased along with the shortest time for a call to be answered. However, the longest time to pick up has decreased.

Messages on the call system

Out of the ten practices, eight have a call waiting system explaining that receptionists will ask the patient's reason for calling. However, only three out of ten practices had a message stating different times to call back for other reasons, such as blood tests etc.

In June 2022, nine practices had a message stating times to call back for reasons other than appointments. This indicates that there has been a notable decrease in the number of practices offering additional information in terms of calling up for other reasons.

Call waiting

In December 2022, nine out of ten practices had a call waiting system in place, this is identical to the results obtained in June 2022 which indicates there has been neither an improvement nor decline. Five out of ten practices told us what position we were in the queue in December 2022, while nine had a call waiting system in place during June 2022.

It appears that the number of surgeries stating what number you were in the queue has declined.

Availability of appointments

Out of the nine practices that answered our questions, six surgeries did not have any appointments left. The remaining three practices had appointments left. One surgery said that they had one under 5's appointment and one NHS 111 slot left after we called. Another surgery said that they did not have any appointments left at the time we called, however eight appointments would be getting released at 02:00pm on that day.

In June 2022, four practices had no appointments left for the remainder of the day. One practice had 15 appointments left and another had just a few left with a duty doctor. As the number of practices who took part in June 2022 was lower than December 2022, we are unable to make any true comparisons.

Type of appointments

Appointments specifically for children were offered by six surgeries while the other three surgeries did not. One practice said that children are seen face-to-face, and two others said that children in urgent need would come first. Another surgery said that children under 1 are sent directly to the GP. In June 2022, two surgeries said that they offer children specific appointments.

Seven out of nine surgeries who answered stated that they offered both face-to-face and telephone appointments. Two surgeries refused to answer

this question. Two surgeries offered video appointments and three offered home appointments.

In June 2022, all six practices who answered stated that they offered all types of appointments and five of these practices stated that patients choose the appointment type. In December 2022, five surgeries stated that the appointment type would be dependent on patient preference, another three did not answer and two practices said that the appointment type was dependant on an individual case basis, along with what symptoms presented.

Signposting

Out of the nine surgeries who participated, one surgery did not answer. Three surgeries mentioned directing towards 111 and five surgeries mentioned signposting to a pharmacy. Additionally, a surgery mentioned phoning the following day and three surgeries mentioned urgent care and A&E.

Similarly, four out of six practices who answered in June 2022 all mentioned walk in clinics/A&E/urgent care centres/999 if necessary for signposting resources.

Unity East PCN

Out of the nine practices we telephoned:

- Zero practices could not be contacted
- One refused to answer our questions
- Eight answered our questions

Most call handlers were polite and answered our questions in a very pleasant manner. One practice was not co-operative and refused to take part.

Why did they refuse?

There was no reason given for the receptionist choosing not to take part in our questionnaire although we explained that we were from Healthwatch.

Call observations

Did all calls connect

All of our calls connected to all nine practices with eight practices agreeing to answer our questions. In June 2022, four practices refused to take part which is reflective of a more co-operative manner. Our June 2022 report also showed that all nine calls connected.

Average time to answer call

The average time for a call to be answered was 2 minutes and 45 seconds. The shortest time to pick up was 28 seconds and the longest time to pick up was 11 minutes and 10 seconds.

In June, the average time taken for a call to be picked up was four minutes and 21 seconds. The shortest time for a call to be picked up was 22 seconds, while the longest time for a call to be picked up was 26 minutes and 31 seconds. All three averages have decreased regarding the surgeries that answered.

Messages on the call system

Our data showed that six out of nine practices had a message in place explaining that patients will need to give a reason for their call. In comparison to June 2022, there has been a significant improvement as only three surgeries had a message in place. In December 2022, three out of nine practices had a message explaining what time patients should call for other reasons.

Call waiting

In December 2022, a call waiting system was available for four out of nine practices, however one surgery picked up the phone after 28 seconds, therefore we were unaware if a call waiting system was in place. Additional to this, only one surgery told us what number we were in the queue. In June 2022, just three of the nine practices had a call waiting system in place. This shows that there is still room for improvement.

Availability of appointments

Out of the eight practices that answered our questions, six surgeries had appointments left. These numbers ranged from 40, 22, 9, 4 and 8 left for afternoon appointments. In June 2022, six out of nine practices had appointments left, ranging from 3 to 34 appointments.

Type of appointments

Seven out of eight practices that took part stated that routine appointments are available. Three surgeries stated that there is a three-week waiting time for booking a routine appointment, another practice said, 1-2 weeks while two others stated that there would be a waiting time of two weeks. One surgery however stated that there was a waiting time of three to six months for a routine appointment. It seems that there has been a significant decline with one of the surgeries as six out of nine practices in June 2022 offered routine appointments all within the space of 1-2 weeks.

Our December 2022 report showed that five out of eight surgeries offered appointments for children with two surgeries stating that children under one would be given a same-day appointment, another would try to accommodate same-day appointments and two practices said that the likelihood of a same-day appointment would be dependant on age, with same-day appointments for children over five being decided by a GP dependant on an individual case basis. Our June 2022 data showed that four practices offered child specific appointments.

Zero out of eight surgeries offered all appointment types within our December 2022 data, which has declined since June 2022 as four out of six surgeries offered all appointment types. In December 2022, our data showed that six surgeries offered face-to-face appointments and all eight surgeries offering telephone appointments. For five of the eight surgeries, the type of appointment offered is dependent on the nature of the problem with three surgeries stating that it would be the decision of the GP or clinician and one surgery saying that they try to accommodate for face-to face appointments.

In June 2022, we were told by three practices that the type of appointment offered was dependant on patient preference and the other three surgeries stated that a doctor would make an initial call to a patient and then triage them for the most appropriate type of appointment.

Signposting

In our December 2022 investigation, all eight surgeries answered this question with one practice stating that the doctor was on call all the time, therefore they did not feel the need to signpost. Five surgeries said that they signpost to pharmacies and five recommended visiting the walk-in centre. Two surgeries mentioned the urgent care centre and two surgeries also mentioned that they offer weekend appointments if the patient can wait.

Only one surgery mentioned the Unity Centre whereas our June 2022 findings found that three practices said they would recommend booking through the Unity Centre for an appointment. However, previously in June 2022, although five surgeries recommended calling NHS 111 or visiting A&E, five recommended visiting the walk-in centre.

DRAFT

Stakeholder Response:

This report is being presented to Wolverhampton's Health Scrutiny Panel at their meeting on 19th January 2023. They will be invited to include a formal response to our findings afterwards. This report will be updated to include their comment and then published to the Healthwatch Wolverhampton website.

Individual practice data will be shared with each PCN to ensure they can use the findings to share good practice and improve the experiences of their patients.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to all the staff at the medical practices who gave up their time to respond to our questions.

Limitations:

All survey answers could not be compared from June 2022 – December 2022 as not all practices took part in both surveys. Also, calls were made at various times in the day, meaning we contacted some practices at busier times and other practices at quieter times.