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## **Greater Manchester Patient Services**

**Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025

Dear Mark,

### **Re: Recommendations to Improve Accessibility and Equity in NHS GM Patient Services**

Thank you for joining the recent Healthwatch in Greater Manchester meeting and for your openness in sharing **updates** on the work of the **NHS GM Patient Services team**. We appreciated the **opportunity for dialogue** and your **engagement** with the questions raised.

This work aligns with the Healthwatch England Report; ***A Pain to Complain***, which highlights that very few people formally complain, often due to **lack of confidence** in the process, **long response times**, and **limited visibility** of advocacy support. Where complaints are made, over **half** of people report **dissatisfaction** with both the process and the outcome. These national findings underscore the importance of creating a more transparent, inclusive, and supportive complaints system at local and regional levels. So, we were pleased to see this as a **discussion** and **action point** on the recent Greater Manchester Quality & Performance Committee.

The ability for the public to **raise concerns, complaints or feedback** about NHS services is central to accountability and improvement. Healthwatch in Greater Manchester have since identified **several areas** where we **recommend** further action would support improved **equity** and **accessibility** to the **Patient Services** function across Greater Manchester.

## Recommendations

### 1. Improve Access to Information

- Ensure contact information for the Patient Services team is **clearly** and **consistently accessible** on the NHS GM website in plain English.
- Optimise search functionality so that terms like “**complaints,**” “**concerns,**” or “**feedback**” **reliably direct users** to the **correct** and current Patient Services page.
- Include a **clear, simplified summary** of the NHS Complaints Regulations alongside the full statutory document, written in plain language.
- Review the **current statement** about English not being a first language on Patient Services Page, ensure this message is not only in **English**, but also signposted in **other languages**.
- Improve **visibility** and **accuracy** of **links** to local **Healthwatch support** on the Patient Services webpages; the current link is buried in the FAQs under ‘I need support making a complaint’, appears only as the word “*here*”, and directs to an incorrect link. This should be replaced with clear, accessible information for all ten local Healthwatch in Greater Manchester
- Produce a **printable** and **accessible** public-facing **leaflet** or summary that can be shared **online, social media** and in **physical settings** with clear information on the role of patient services and how to contact them.

### 2. Expand and Enhance Communication Channels

- Offer a **broader** range of **contact methods** beyond email and online forms.
- Providing **information** in community **languages** and **alternative formats**.
- Ensure that all public-facing **mailboxes** used by the GM Patient Services team are configured to send an automatic **acknowledgment** to **confirm receipt** of enquiries, setting out expectations and **next steps** including [england.gm-complaints@nhs.net](mailto:england.gm-complaints@nhs.net).

### 3. Increase Public Awareness

- Develop a **communications plan** to raise awareness of the Patient Services function among the public and professionals across GM.

- Share **clear messaging** on what the service **can support** with and how it fits alongside **provider** and **local** complaints **processes**.

#### 4. Strengthen Local Engagement and Intelligence Sharing

- Reintroduce **locality-level intelligence sharing** to improve **collaborative** working.
- **Continue** and **maintain** regular opportunities for cross-analysis of **data** and information between **Patient Services** and **Healthwatch** to **support shared understanding** and **system learning**.

#### 5. Strengthen Advocacy Pathways

- **Increase visibility** of **advocacy** services within Patient Services **communications** and pathways.
- Explore opportunities to work with **Healthwatch** and **advocacy providers** to **better support people** with **additional needs** to raise complaints.

#### 6. Ensure Compliance with the Accessible Information Standard

- Review and confirm **current compliance** status with the **accessible information standard**.
- Set out actions to **improve accessibility** of **written** and **online information**, including **easy read** and **alternative formats**.

We look forward to receiving an **acknowledgement** of the recommendations we are raising and the **proposals** and **activity** to address these matters. We would also remind you that there is a **statutory obligation for providers** of publicly funded health and social care services to respond to Healthwatch within **twenty working days**. You can find more information on this here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/3094/regulation/44/made>

We welcome the ongoing opportunity to work with you and the Patient Services Team to **strengthen accessibility** and **improve the experience** for those who need to raise concerns.

Kind regards,

Healthwatch in Greater Manchester Network