

Healthcare Support & Services in the Community

A short report by Healthwatch Harrow



September 2025

“As I hadn't used the dentist for a while, I was taken off the NHS list and had to pay for the treatment.

I feel the system should be fair for everyone.”

Local Resident

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	5
2. Executive Summary	6
3. Analysis of Feedback	7
4. Glossary of Terms	19
5. Distribution and Comment	19

This page is intentionally blank.

1. Introduction

On 9th October 2025, Healthwatch Harrow hosted a forum event, which brought together roughly eighty (80) residents and local health experts to discuss how to make eye, ear and dental care more accessible within the community.

Prior to the event, a survey was sent out to gather people's views on optician, dentist and audiology services in the borough.

Please see sections 2 and 3 (below) for the full survey analysis.

2. Executive Summary of Findings

During August – September 2025, 71 local people completed our short survey.

This section summarises key findings – see section 2 for findings in full.

Survey Response – In Summary

Dentists

- Over two thirds of respondents (70%) have visited a dentist in the last 12 months.
- 88% are satisfied with waiting times, while 12% are not.
- Half of respondents (50%) find the cost to be expensive.
- Certain groups face particular challenges, such as those on low incomes, younger people generally, and older patients – who may need more treatment.
- According to comments, dentists have not given NHS patients ‘all the options’ and have encouraged uptake of private treatment.
- NHS treatment can often be basic, for example not covering crowns.

Opticians

- Two thirds of respondents (67%) have visited an optician in the last 12 months.
- 90% are satisfied with waiting times, while 10% are not.
- Almost half of respondents (48%) consider the price to be expensive.
- Due to cost, some people are skipping their annual check, or not having glasses replaced when needed.
- Inflationary pressures are mentioned. As well as rising prices, services once free (such as scans) are now charged for.

Audiologists

- Around a fifth of respondents (22%) have visited an audiologist in the last 12 months.
- 55% are satisfied with waiting times, while 45% are not.
- 30% of respondents consider the price to be expensive.
- There is a ‘contrast in quality’. According to comments, NHS services are ‘more thorough’ than high street counterparts.
- A lack of aftercare is reported.

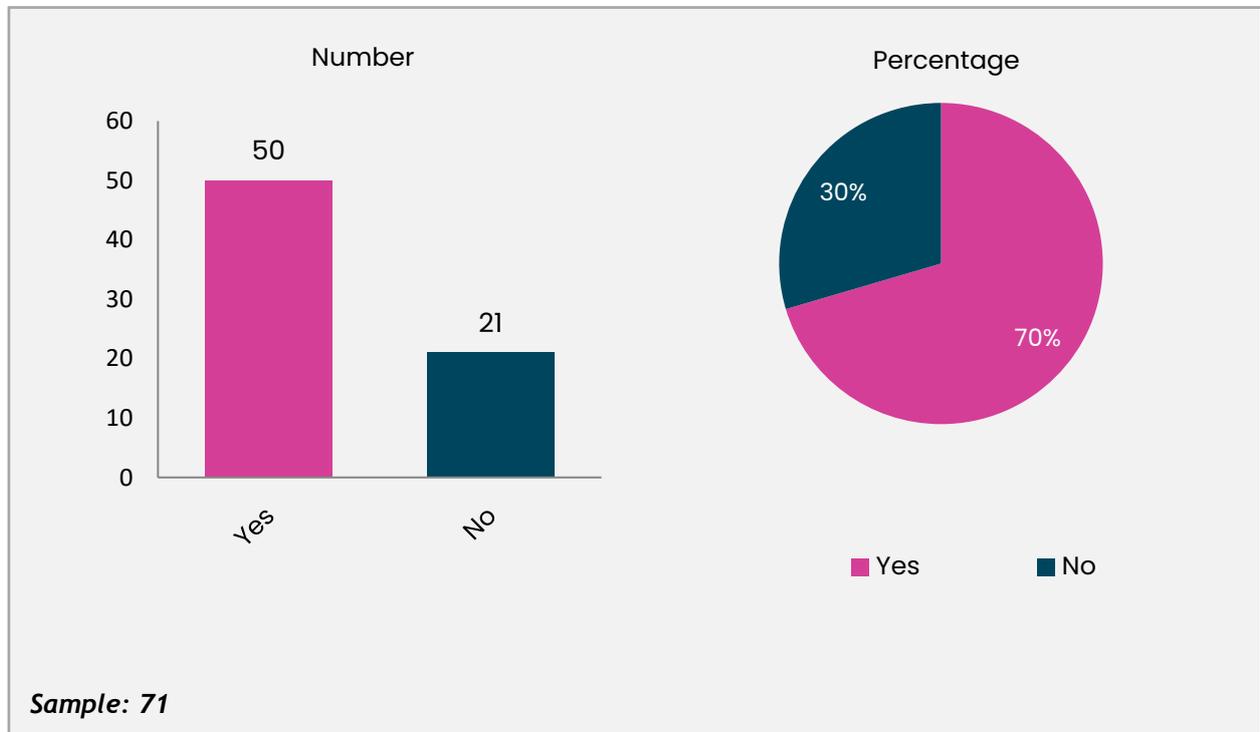
3. Our Survey – Analysis of Feedback

Healthwatch Harrow is holding a forum event on Thursday 9th October 2025.

The theme is healthcare services and support in the community – with a focus on eyes, ears and teeth.

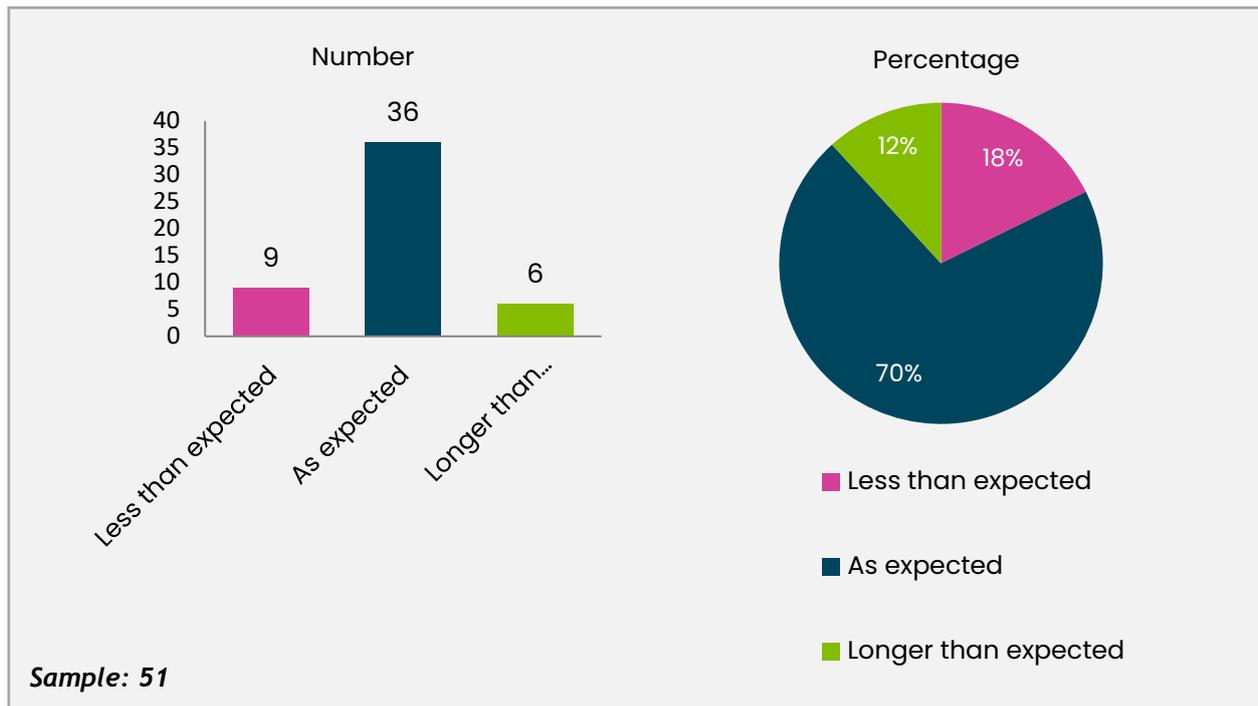
In advance of the event a short survey was conducted, to get views on waiting times, cost, and on general thoughts and experiences. 71 local people completed the survey.

3.1 Have you visited a dentist in the last 12 months?



Over two thirds of respondents (70%) have visited a dentist in the last 12 months.

3.2 If yes, would you say that the waiting time (in days) was:



A broad majority of respondents (70%) thought the waiting time (in days) was as expected. 18% waited less, and 12% waited longer than they were expecting.

Feedback illustrates mixed experiences.

Selected Feedback

"For emergencies, I am seen as soon as possible. For routine appointments, the waiting time is 4 – 6 weeks."

"I book my next appointment at the check-up."

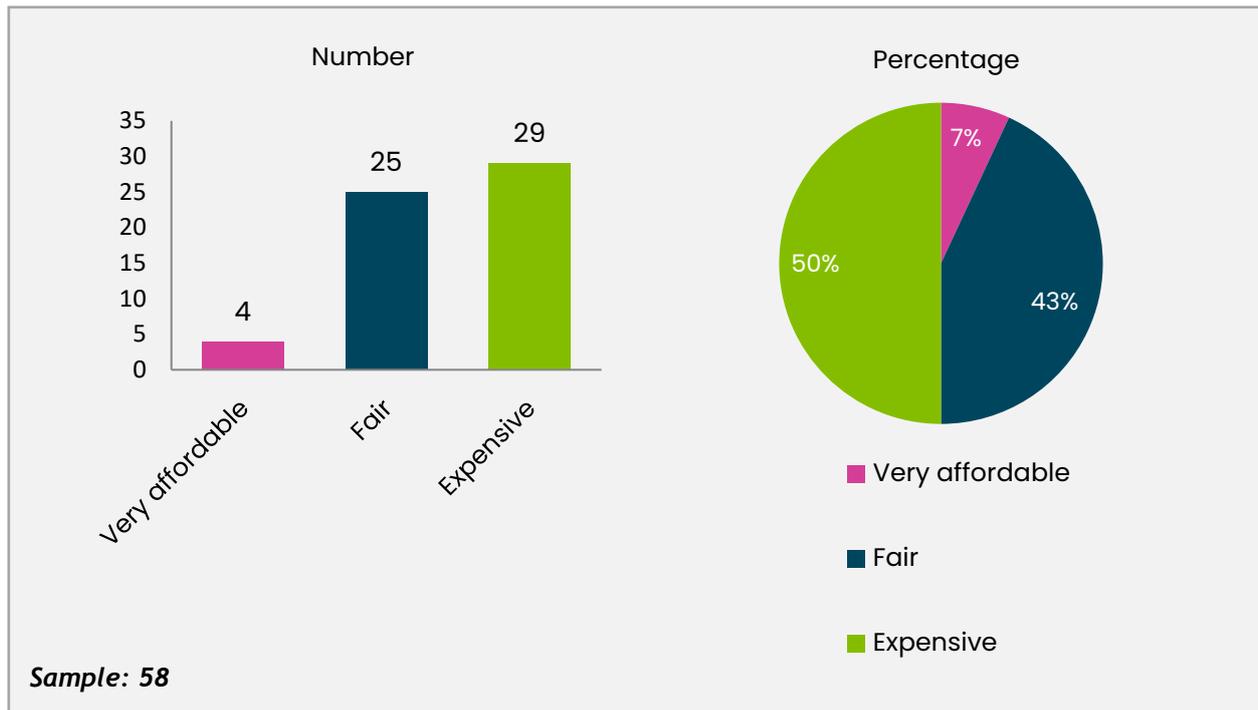
"They booked me in without any problems."

"Usually getting an appointment is fine, and I can book ahead and I get reminders for checkups."

"Make the waiting time shorter."

"Unable to access an appointment in an emergency."

3.3 Do you feel the price was:



Half of respondents (50%) considered the price to be expensive. 43% found it to be fair, while 7% thought it was 'very affordable'.

Prices should be 'more affordable', we hear.

Selected Feedback

"I have been going to the same dental practice for 40 years. When my dentist decided to work privately I was offered another NHS dentist within the practice so a good outcome."

"The price should be made more affordable, but doctors do a nice job."

"£30 to tell me my teeth were absolutely fine after making me wait an hour from my appointment time."

"Expensive but have to go because my teeth are not good."

"Not affordable to most and I went private as in pain."

"Those who need real dental work end up going abroad due to the high costs."

Certain groups face particular challenges, such as those on low incomes, younger people generally, and older patients – who may need more treatment.

Selected Feedback

"I have never been able to afford dental care. My income has always been just above the limit to claim help."

"For teens it's sometimes unaffordable."

"For pensioners it's expensive. We spent almost £3,000 on dental care this year."

According to comments, dentists have not given NHS patients 'all the options' and have encouraged uptake of private treatment.

Selected Feedback

"I go to a dentist which does NHS and private work. I have noticed that they don't always give you the options for what is covered on the NHS and go straight to private options."

"I had to have a private consultation before I was taken on as an NHS patient and I had to have a private hygienist appointment as well."

"The dentist tried to convince me to pay for private treatment even though I am an NHS patient, saying NHS fillings wouldn't last as long."

NHS treatment can often be basic, for example not covering crowns.

Selected Feedback

"I am fortunate to be able to continue with the dental practice that I have used for the past 40 years as an NHS patient. However, crowns and bridges etc., are private only and are extremely expensive. The necessity of needing a front tooth replaced is not apparently within the NHS remit, so there is no choice – look awful or pay privately!"

Other feedback mentions customer service, waiting times at appointments and administration.

One patient has been 'de-registered' for NHS treatment.

Selected Feedback

Positives:

"I happen to have found a good dentist who does NHS work."

"The people are nice."

"While the cost of going to the dentist and getting a cleaning is a bit pricey, the waiting time was short and the staff at my practice were kind and understanding."

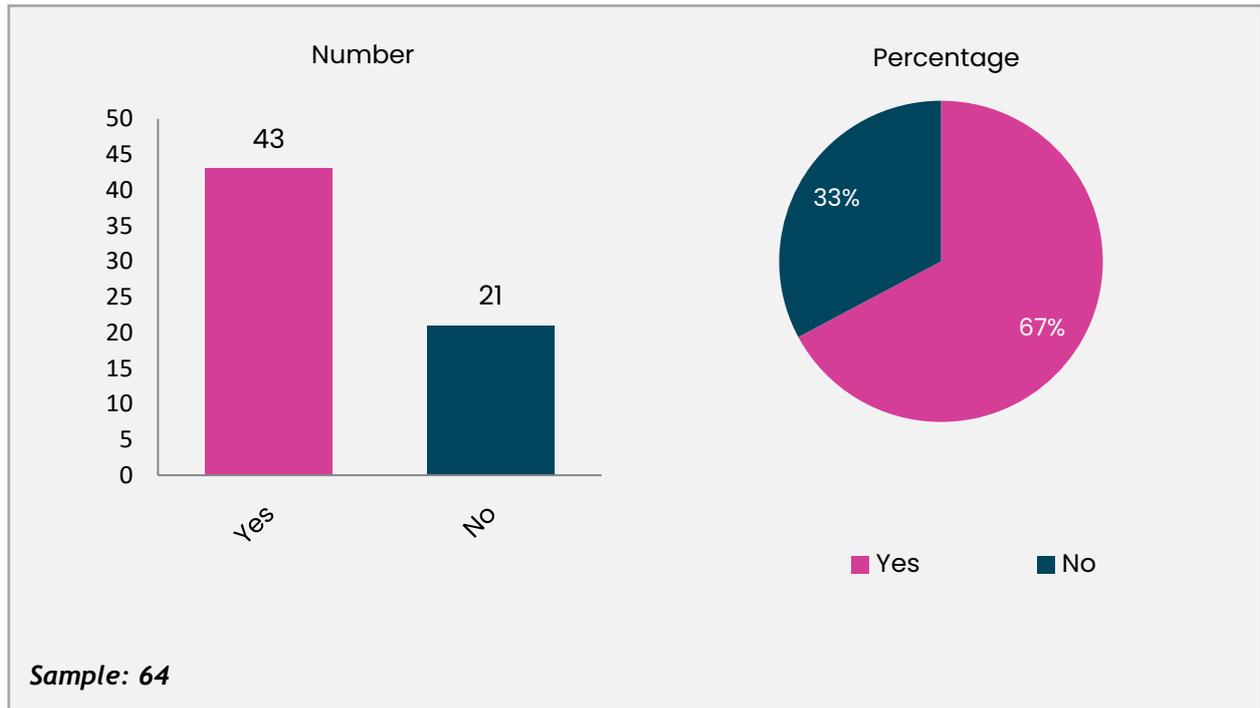
Negatives:

"I waited one hour over my appointment time."

"I'd like text reminders when check-ups are due."

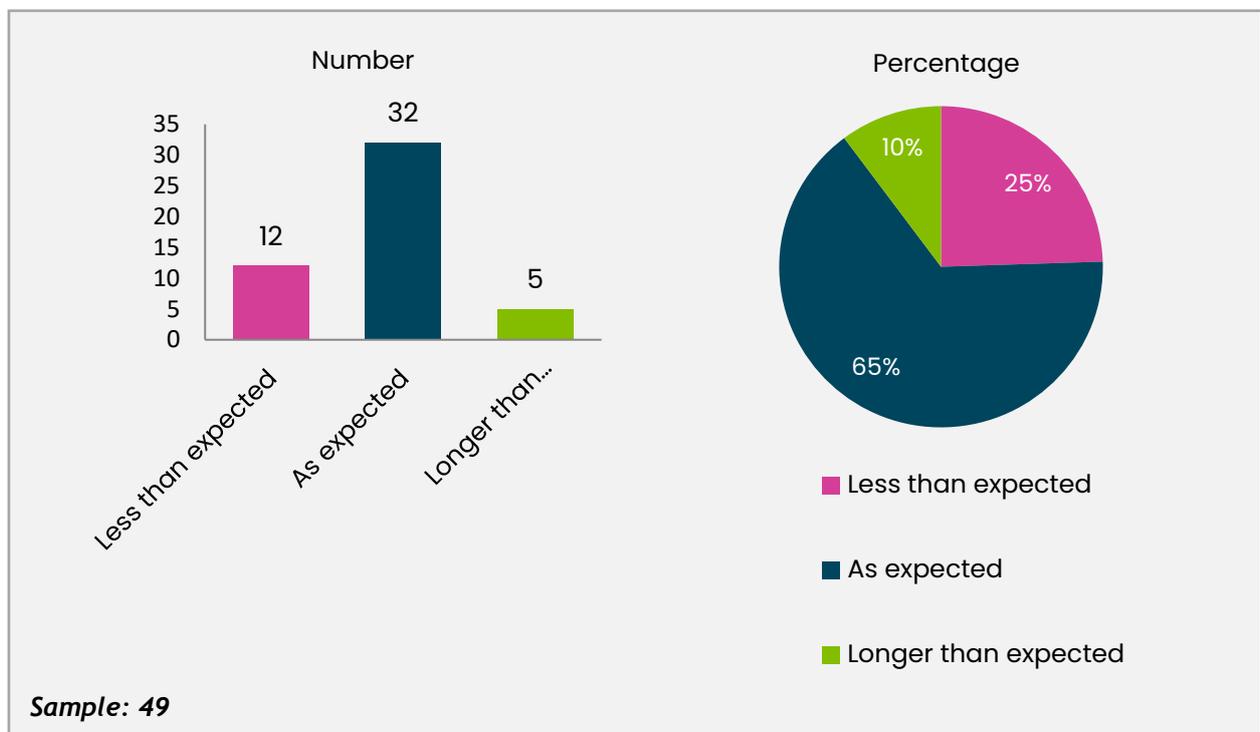
"As I hadn't used the dentist for a while, I was taken off the NHS list and had to pay for the treatment. I feel the system should be fair for everyone."

3.4 Have you visited an optician in the last 12 months?



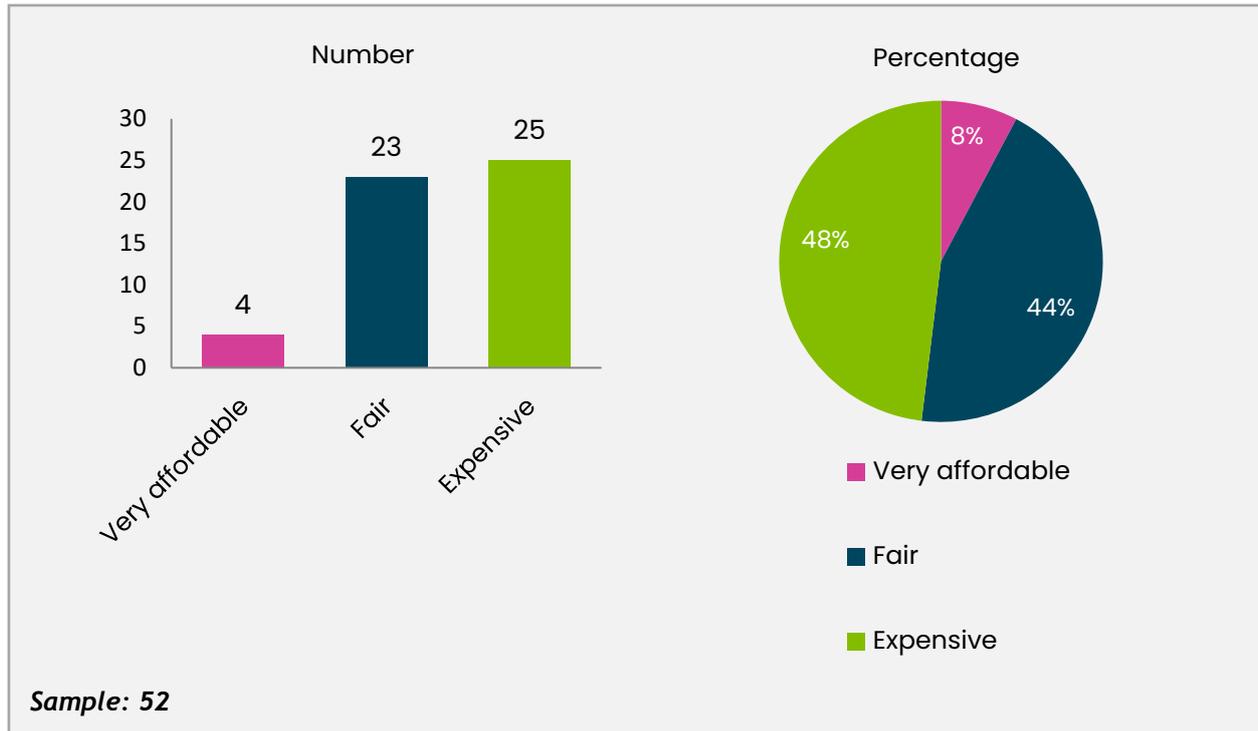
Two thirds of respondents (67%) have visited an optician in the last 12 months.

3.5 If yes, would you say that the waiting time (in days) was:



Around two thirds (65%) thought the waiting time (in days) was as expected. A quarter (25%) waited less, and 10% waited longer than they were expecting.

3.6 Do you feel the price was:



Almost half of respondents (48%) considered the price to be expensive. 44% found it to be fair, while 8% thought it was 'very affordable'.

Prices can be 'expensive', especially for those on low incomes – such as students.

Selected Feedback

"Free as it was my 2 yearly check-up."

"It's expensive to get what you need."

"So expensive and a big chunk of my monthly pay just to be able to see."

"I'm on minimum wage and find it to be expensive."

"Glasses should be free for students."

Due to cost, some people are skipping their annual check, or not having glasses replaced when needed.

Selected Feedback

"It's too expensive to get checked every year."

"Due to a medical condition my glasses prescription is complex and always very expensive. This means I am unable to replace my glasses as often."

Inflationary pressures are mentioned. As well as rising prices, services once free (such as scans) are now charged for.

Selected Feedback

"The prices are higher than they used to be."

"You're now asked to pay extra for scans."

Customers can feel pressured into spending, one comment suggests.

Selected Feedback

"I felt pipelined into purchasing glasses and walked out having spent over £300."

Other feedback mentions customer service, waiting times at appointments, administration and staff training.

Selected Feedback

Positives:

"I can't praise my optician enough."

"Again, I happen to have an excellent optician."

Negatives:

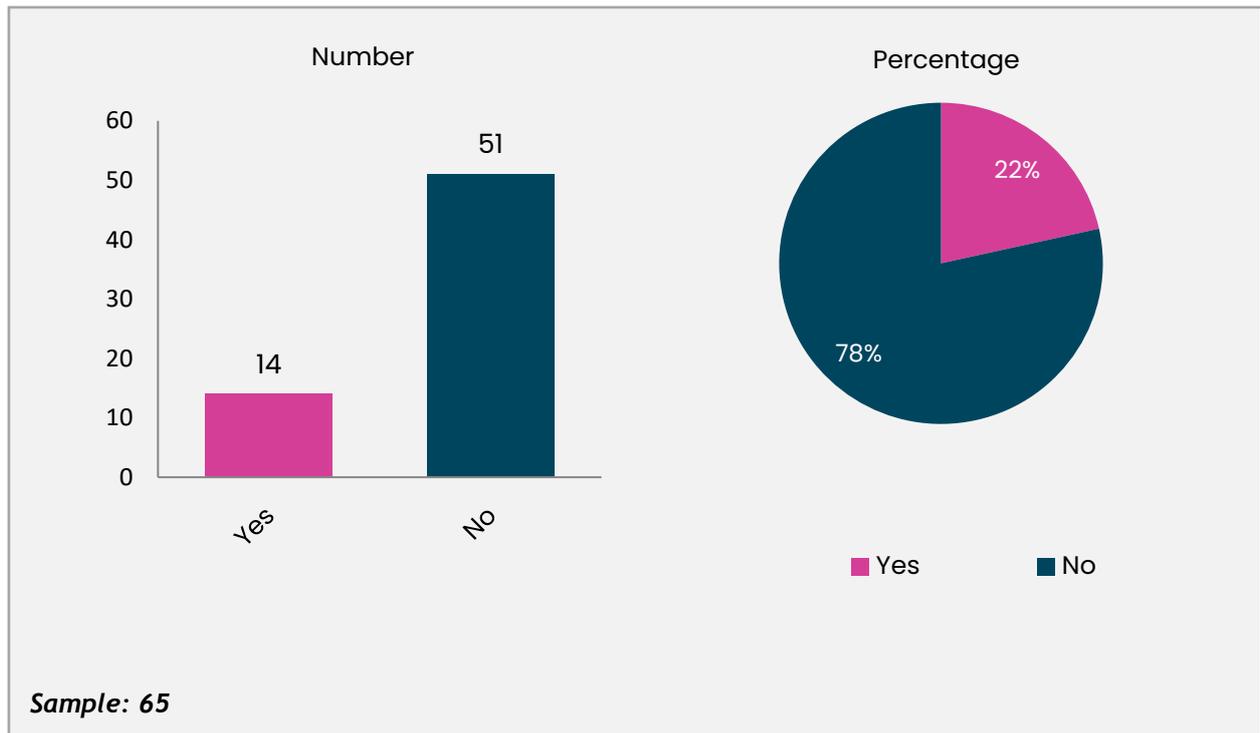
"It's a long wait to be seen – they need more staff."

"They don't let me know when check-ups are due."

"Staff are not experienced and lack knowledge."

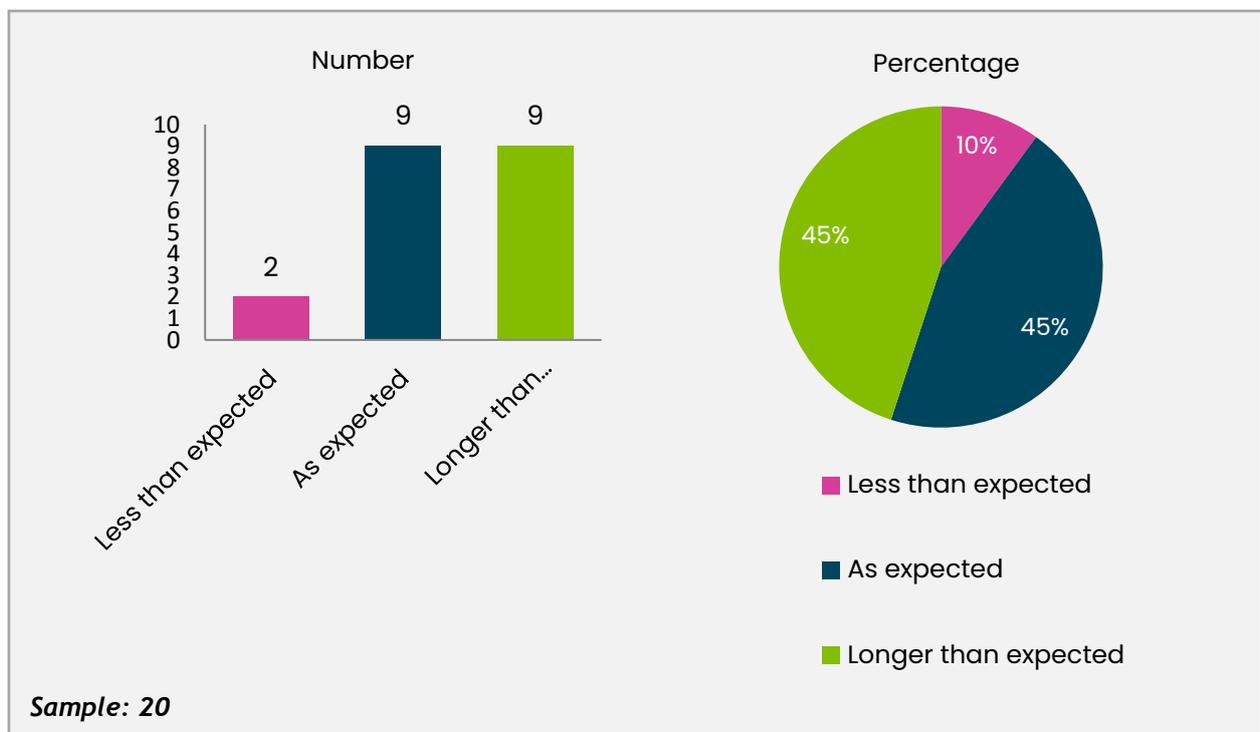
"I recently had need for cataract procedures at Moorfields. The administration was poor and the outcome clinically was not as good as I had been led to believe."

3.7 Have you visited an audiologist in the last 12 months?



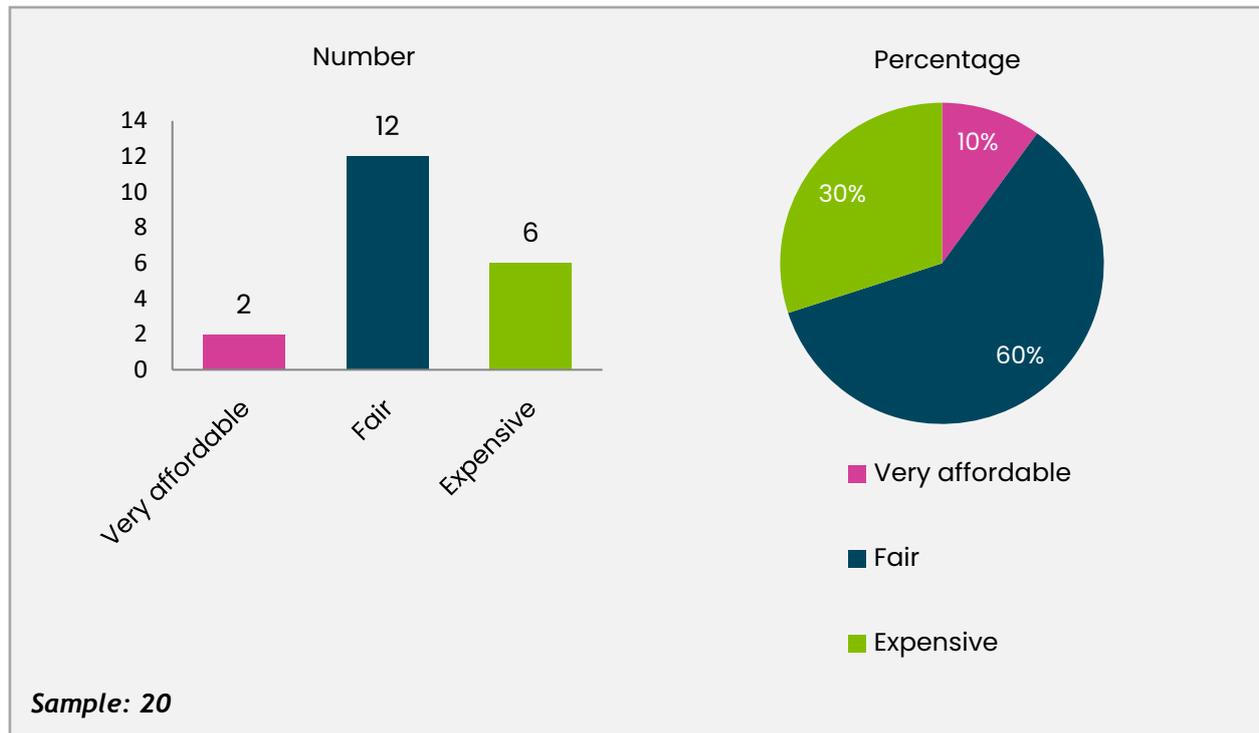
Around a fifth of respondents (22%) have visited an audiologist in the last 12 months.

3.8 If yes, would you say that the waiting time (in days) was:



45% thought the waiting time (in days) was as expected, while the same number (45%) considered it to be longer. 10% were seen sooner than expected.

3.9 Do you feel the price was:



30% of respondents considered the price to be expensive. 60% found it to be fair, while 10% thought it was 'very affordable'.

For some, prices can be 'expensive' and according to one person – 'eye-watering'.

Selected Feedback

"Too expensive to get checked."

"I have problematic ears - narrow ear canals, wearing hearing aids and producing much ear wax. I need my ears de-waxed (by micro-suction, which is used by all good agencies) three times a year. Each session is £60 to £70. Therefore I have to spend £180 to £210 each year just to be able to hear. I wonder why this is not available via the NHS?"

"Surely being able to hear is important? I feel discriminated against. Incidentally I am in my late seventies, so the amounts are quite eye-watering."

The quality of 'high street' treatment is questioned by one person.

Selected Feedback

"The high street audiologists are not up to standard. Varying skills and inaccuracy. The NHS services are more thorough."

Also, after-care can be lacking.

Selected Feedback

"Even though I have 60% hearing loss, they don't give you aftercare. I only know I can't hear that well and haven't been able to watch TV for over 3 years. My GP doesn't know what to do either!"

3.10 Please let us know if you have any other comments about any other community health services in Harrow.

Finally, we asked for any other feedback – about community health services.

We detect themes on parks and walking, and community pharmacies.

Selected Feedback

Parks and Walking

- I really enjoy my weekly rental health walk in the park!
- I also go on Harrow Health walks.
- I really like the Harrow Health walks. They are available every day, so they fit in with other commitments you may have. They are so good for exercising and social interaction to combat loneliness. All the groups are so friendly and make everyone welcome.
- Parks are not comfortable and at times I feel unsafe.
- At my local park the exercise equipment is old.

Community Pharmacies

- Community pharmacists are great.
- Good access to my community pharmacist who is very helpful.

- Excellent and they deliver my numerous repeat prescriptions.
- Pharmacy first should cover children, as not all parents can get to a GP.

Other Feedback

- I did use an NHS physiotherapist as well as a private one. On the NHS, you only get monthly appointments plus an injection, which is not enough. Hence a private one in between.
- More activities for young people.
- Social prescribing is not the answer to everything.
- As mentioned, hearing needs to be taken more seriously, it seems to be the 'Cinderella' of services. There is no pre-payment card scheme for ear wax removal so I pay between £180 and £210 each year just to be able to hear. If I was younger and needed frequent prescriptions, I could pay one lump sum. Why is this not applicable to hearing?

4. Glossary of Terms

There are no acronyms in this report.

5. Distribution and Comment

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

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

Healthwatch Harrow, 3 Jardine House, Harrovian Business Village, Bessborough Road, Harrow, HA1 3EX

020 3432 2889

www.healthwatchharrow.co.uk

info@healthwatchharrow.co.uk

“It’s worth shopping around if needing prescription glasses as in Europe the costs are between 30–50% cheaper.”

Local Resident