

Disability Festival in the Park

Engagement Report
September 2025



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Introduction

The annual Disability Festival is a free, pan-disability event celebrating the talents, abilities, and inclusion of disabled people across the borough. In 2025 the Disability Festival was held on Wednesday the 23rd of July at Christchurch Green in Wanstead. As north east London's only fully accessible festival and one of a small number of festivals of its kind across the country, the Disability Festival is a unique opportunity to speak with disabled Londoners about their experiences. Taking an informal approach to our conversations, we spoke to 84 people including those with physical and learning disabilities, people with chronic conditions, carers and the staff of community organisations across Redbridge.

Engagement opportunities like the Festival allow us to better understand general themes in the care people receive and identify areas for further investigation. We heard both positive and negative comments, with the positive feedback helping to illustrate what people value in their care as much as the criticisms.

Healthwatch Redbridge joined local community organisations, [One Place East](#), [Colours of Redbridge](#), [Redbridge Forum](#), [WEL Enterprises](#), [Catholic Fellowship Disability Network](#) and [Snaresbrook Arts Project](#), on the steering group which is supported by [Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure](#), and Redbridge Council.

Staff members were supported throughout the day by longstanding Healthwatch Redbridge volunteers.

Engagement

As part of the festival environment, we wanted to encourage natural and comfortable conversations for festival attendees. We designed an interactive and highly visual way of engaging with attendees to make giving feedback in the setting as accessible as possible. Laying out paper tablecloths with questions illustrated by photo symbols we asked attendees to respond by writing comments and adding emotive stickers illustrating sad and happy faces (figure 1). In some cases, attendees gave their feedback to staff and volunteers verbally who added comments to the display.

Figure 1

Photo of the engagement activity



Due to the highly public nature of the comments (figure 2), all feedback – except where signposting was escalated privately – was given in complete anonymity, as such we did not collect any personal data from attendees including demographic data. Further investigation would be needed to understand if the themes identified vary among demographic groups.

Figure 2

Photo of the Healthwatch Redbridge stall at the Disability Festival.



What we heard

The tablecloths were laid out one at a time meaning not all attendees answered all questions. The first tablecloth had the question, 'What type of health and social care services do you use?' with photo symbols and captions illustrating GPs, dentists, opticians, supported housing and hospitals (Appendix 1).

Figure 3

Written responses to the first engagement asset

What type of health and social care services do you use?
<i>Doctors or GPs</i>
• Practice nurse is excellent but doctors vary • Good saw me on time • Very good • They're ok • Essential! They care • Friendly GPs! Long assessment waitlists • Pretty efficient
<i>Dentist for your teeth</i>
• Very good • Some services are bad • Not happy service – overcharged following error • Very expensive • Painless
<i>Supported housing where you get help with activities</i>
• No bad experience at any service • Good but we need more
<i>Opticians for your eyes</i>
• Brilliant • Brilliant! • Very good • Excellent • Helped me a lot • Great!
<i>Hospitals</i>
• NHS help me a lot • Audiology – first rate • Good experience – hospital passport works great • Lots of problems – appointment cancelled 5 times! IBD nurse amazing • Nice maternity staff • Very good (no problems with any service) • Faultless – no complaints • No comment • Staff were excellent – all the services were so good

We heard a variety of comments. Opticians were highly regarded by those we spoke to while people had more mixed experiences with dentists and GPs. The comments received illustrate that people find administrative faults and delays frustrating even when they are satisfied with the care they received, with one attendee telling us that they had a hospital appointment cancelled 5 times (figure 3), and another outlining the importance of feeling heard but sharing the difficulties they had securing an ADHD assessment.

Feedback to the second set of questions (Appendix 2) demonstrated greater variety. The increase in detail would suggest that when asked about their feelings more people were willing to share their concerns than when they were asked about specific services. Administration problems were again raised with long wait times and poor communication highlighted (figure 4).

Figure 4

Written responses to the second engagement asset

How do you feel when you go to appointments?
• Staff are friendly • They can work more with holistic services to help tailor services to peoples needs e.g. sickle cell • They don't listen • Long wait times • Transport problems: not accessible • Tired and bored, I always have to wait for a really long time since they're always short • Sometimes I feel let down • Im worried about a blood test. I do over 3 weeks they say 3 days. I haven't got a call ask yet I'm stressed • Newham: I don't feel unhappy going to GP or Hospital. I am a carer for my LD daughter
How could health services improve?
• Talk to people about what they need • No improvements • More appointments • They need training from patience and understanding • We need support in a timely way for those with learning disabilities. Please do not ignore us. • More time per appointment. No rush by GPs Makes you nervous • More staff, being less desmisse and paying professionals more

Both positive and negative comments focused on staff attitudes, with staff being praised for being friendly while concerns were raised about dismissive attitudes, with comments stating, “they don’t listen” and suggestions that training in “patience and understanding” could improve services (figure 4). That both praises and criticisms focus on staff attitude highlights the importance of being listened to by professionals. For patients, having their concerns taken seriously and their experiences validated by the professional they see is key to the quality of their care.

Next steps

Joint research by Healthwatch England, The King’s Fund and National Voices highlights the scale of poor NHS administration and communication, with the burden felt most acutely by patients with complex needs and those who are struggling financially¹. That research recommends that on a local level Integrated Care Systems and commissioners do more to understand people’s experiences of administration². Healthwatch Redbridge could work with partners to encourage the collection of feedback through existing mechanisms and inquire as to what degree local partners understand the experience of administration by patients.

To better understand the comments made about staff attitude Healthwatch Redbridge could further investigate whether disabled patients in Redbridge are experiencing stigmatisation that impacts the quality of their care. Our work around the Accessible Information Standard³ has shown that patients in Redbridge with communication support needs often feel dismissed. This work could be built upon to further examine the role of stigmatisation in the barriers faced.

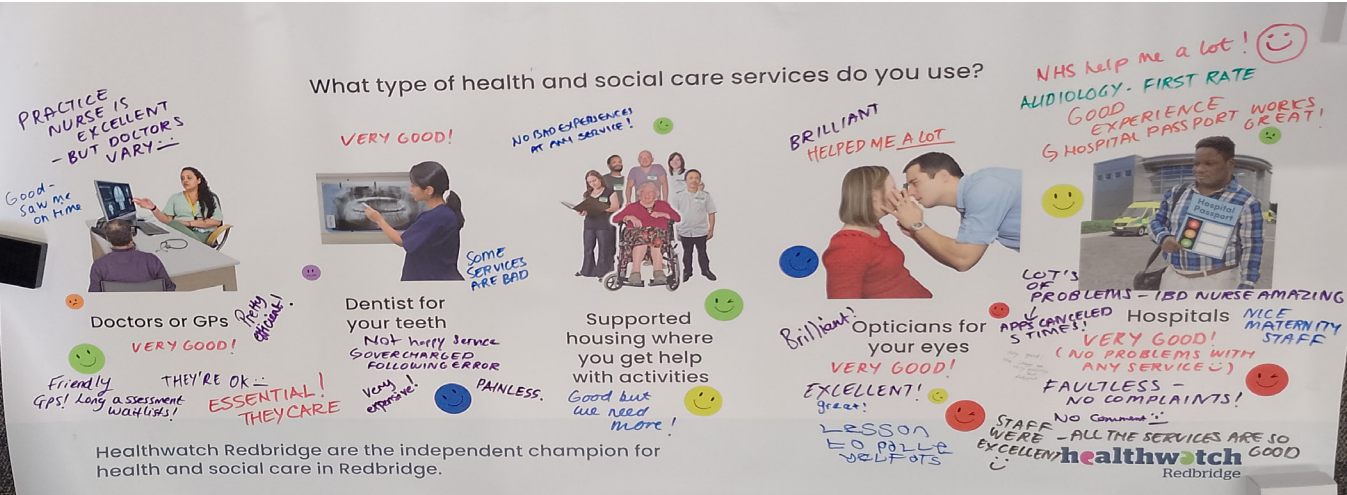
1 Healthwatch England. (2025). Patients put off seeking care due to ‘dysfunctional’ NHS admin warn patient groups and healthcare experts <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/news/2025-02-17/patients-put-seeking-care-due-dysfunctional-nhs-admin-warn-patient-groups-and>

2 Cream, J. Wellings, D. Wenzel, L. Lant, J. Pett, W. (2025). The King’s Fund. Lost in the system: the need for better admin. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/lost-in-system-need-for-better-admin#where-next?--->

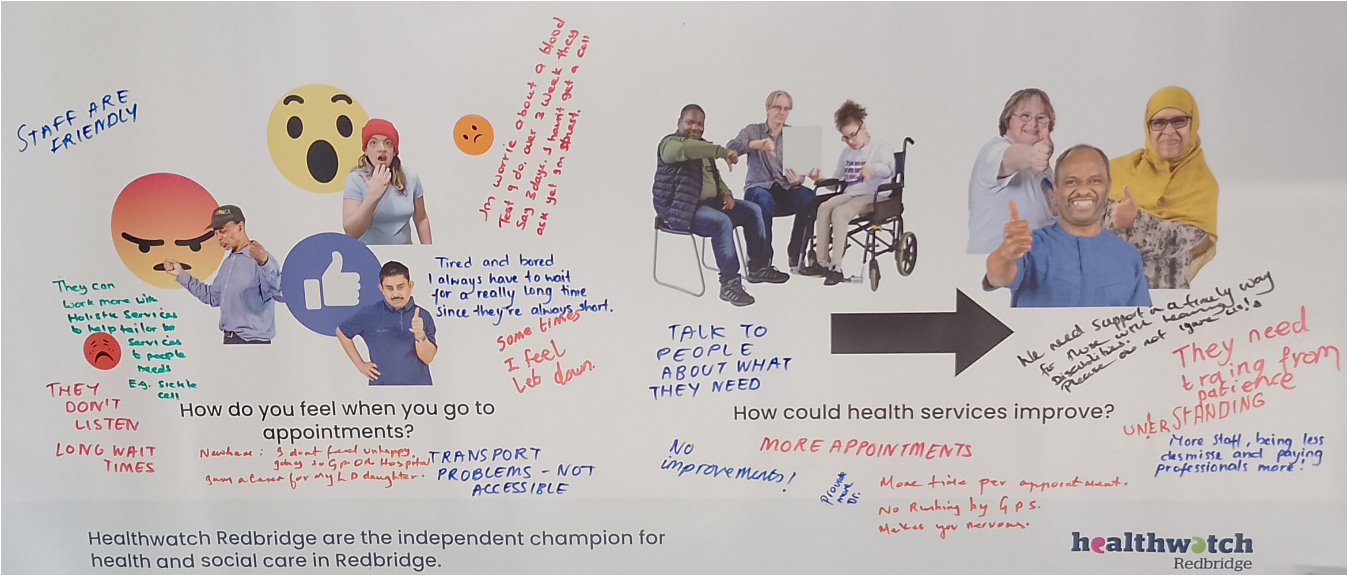
3 Healthwatch Redbridge. Accessible Information Standard. [Webpage] <https://www.healthwatchredbridge.co.uk/accessible-information-standard>

Appendices

Appendix 1 First engagement asset



Appendix 2 Second engagement asset





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