

Hospital Services – Report 1

22 November 2021 -
31 January 2022



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Background

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is the independent local champion for health and social care services in Stoke-on-Trent. A part of our role is to understand the experiences of people who are using the services and to give people an opportunity to speak up and have their voices heard.

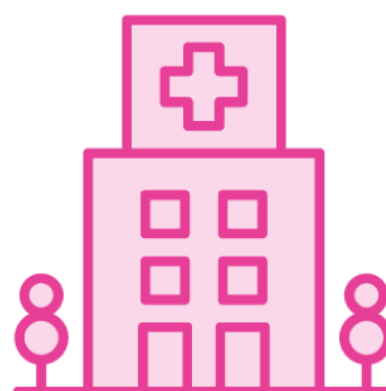
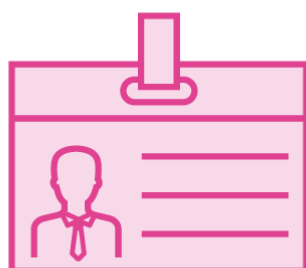
Between April 2021 and August 2021 residents of Stoke-on-Trent shared their three areas of focus; one of these areas was hospital services. In light of this, Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent formed a Hospital Services Project to find out to what extent cancelled or postponed hospital appointments had on patients during the Coronavirus Pandemic. The Coronavirus Pandemic has placed a huge strain upon healthcare services, which has resulted in hospital appointments and treatments being delayed and postponed right across the country.

Between 22 November 2021 and 31 January 2022 Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent formed a public survey for Stoke-on-Trent residents to have their say on how postponed or cancelled hospital appointments impacted their physical or psychological wellbeing. The survey was made up of 10 questions which targeted people who have, and who are, currently using hospital services in Stoke-on-Trent. The survey was shared widely across the city through social media, our website, eBulletins, real-time outreach events and engagement with local groups and organisations.

On close of the Hospital Services Survey Part 1, 37 residents of Stoke-on-Trent completed a survey to share their own or a family members' viewpoints on how postponed or cancelled hospital appointments made an impact on their lives.

This report details a background, methodology, what we found and a short discussion to conclude the feedback and findings identified.

For reader ease and understanding, the 'what we found' section mirrors the survey questions and provides a summary response per question with key figures and statistics to outline key themes.



Methodology

Participants

Data sources and inclusion criteria consisted of residents in Stoke-on-Trent who have, who are, or who may be awaiting confirmation of a hospital appointment. Feedback items from residents were required to be based on hospitals that exist to provide a service to Stoke-on-Trent residents.

Data Collection

A qualitative research design was formed to collect all survey responses through subjective opinions or rating scales. From 22 November 2021 to 31 January 2022 real-time outreach, social media channels press releases, our website, eBulletins and virtual communication were targeted methods used to promote and share the survey to receive a comprehensive return of completed surveys.

Data Analysis

All 37 survey responses were analysed through interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). This was because of the diversity within question styles and subjective output. However, the overriding tool implemented to establish the analysis was grounded through Snap Surveys.

Survey Overview

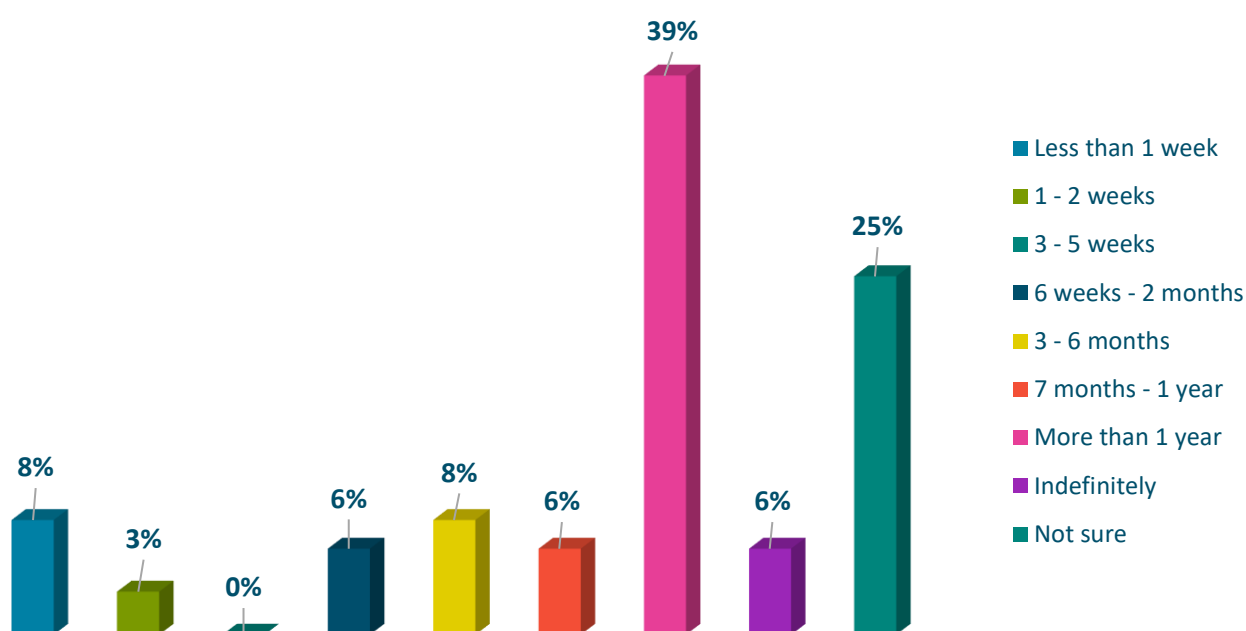
The Hospital Services Survey part 1 consisted of 10 core questions. There was a mixture between multiple choice questions and open text for subjective comments and opinions. The structure of the survey is mirrored within the report discussion through a breakdown of headlines that each relate to respective survey questions.



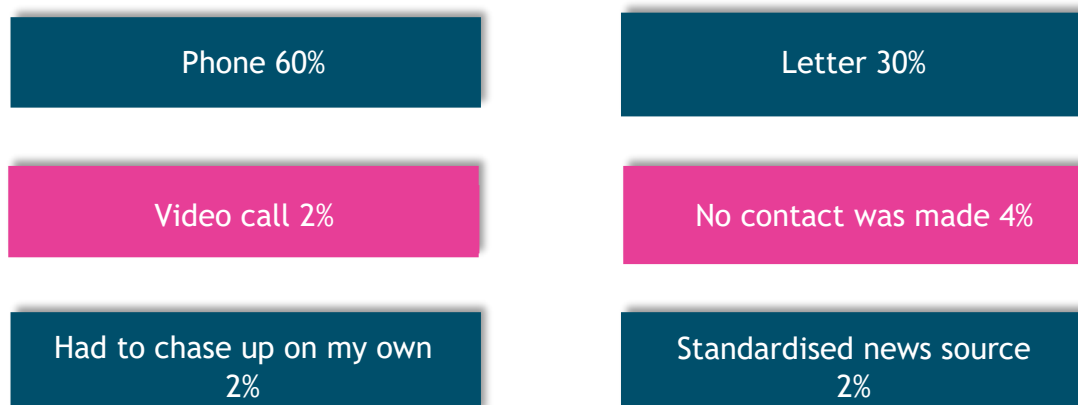
What we found

Length of postponed or cancelled hospital appointments

The Coronavirus Pandemic has placed a huge strain upon healthcare services, which has resulted in hospital appointments and treatments being delayed and postponed right across the country. Considering this, we asked the public how long their appointment or treatment has been delayed for. The results are as follows:

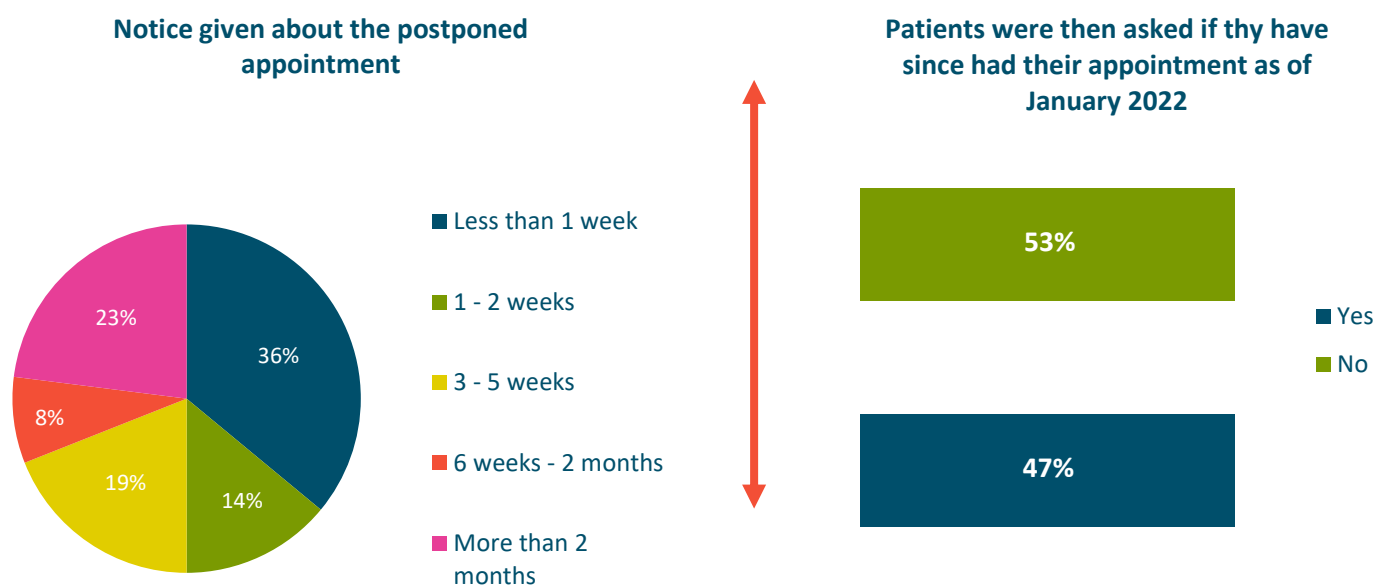


For those patients who had experienced a delay or postponement, we identified common themes as to how patients had been informed by the respective hospital. The top 6 themes were:



How much notice were you given of the postponement before your appointment or treatment?

In response to some hospital appointments being postponed we explored how much notice patients were given, and consequently, the impact this had on the patients' physical and psychological welfare. The patients' feedback is outlined below:



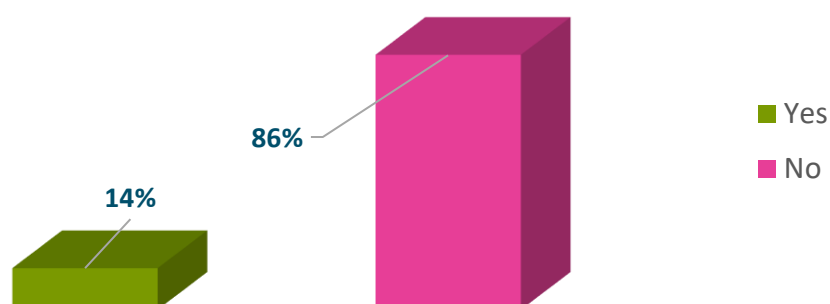
Patients shared their feelings on how the postponed hospital appointment impacted their physical and psychological welfare. The top 9 themes are outlined below:



Was anything offered to you in the meantime in lieu of your appointment or treatment?

Whilst patients experienced postponements or cancellations for their hospital appointment, we were keen to identify if patients were offered alternative support in the interim period of not having an appointment within the near future. Responders told us the following:

Was alternative support offered whilst waiting for your appointment or treatment?



It is clear that the majority of responders were not offered additional support after receiving a postponed appointment or treatment. In light of this, responders shared their ideas around what they believed could've been offered to help prior to the rescheduled appointment:

A number of patients thought that an approximate timeframe should be provided for when the rescheduled appointment may take place.

Some patients agreed that an informal telephone call with a staff member would've been useful and reassuring.

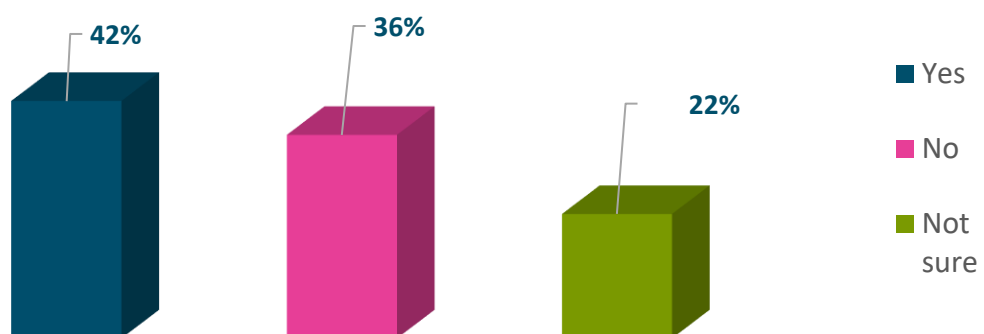
Patients noted that medical advice to support ongoing health conditions would've helped manage better.

Remaining key issues tied heavily into dissatisfaction with communication and the unknown which created apprehension.

Were you given a reason for the hospital delay or postponement?

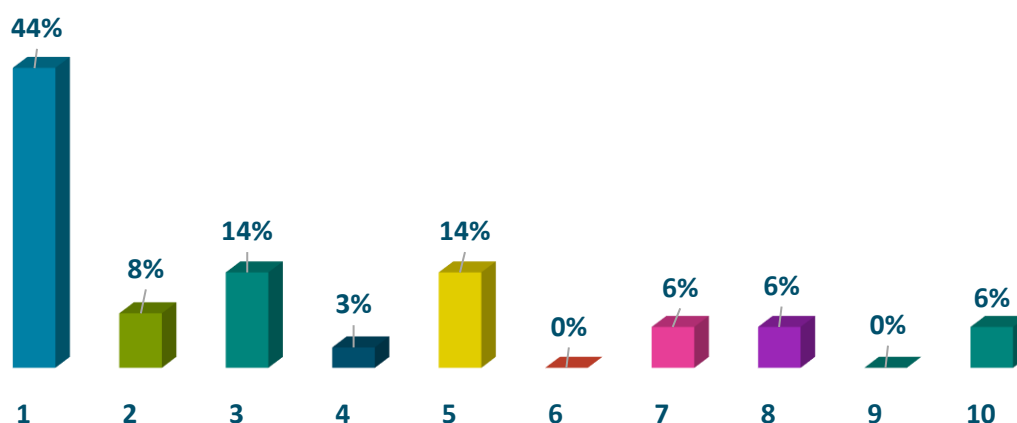
For those patients who experienced a hospital postponement, we questioned if patients received a reason for their appointment delay. The results were relatively split as some patients were provided a reason, some had no reason and others weren't sure if a reason was offered. For those patients who did receive a reason there was an expected common theme centred on COVID-19 implications. No other explanations were shared.

Did you receive a reason for the delay?



On a scale of 1-10, 1 being extremely disappointed and 10 being extremely satisfied, how happy were you with how your delay or postponement on your appointment or treatment was handled by the hospital?

In summary, patients were asked to summarise and share their feelings on a satisfaction scale to grade how they felt about the hospital appointment postponement. Unfortunately, it is clear that a significant number of patients were highly dissatisfied. The results breakdown and reflect responder opinions:



Summary of findings: discussion

Firstly, it should be acknowledged that COVID-19 has placed a huge strain upon healthcare services, which has resulted in hospital appointments and treatments being delayed and postponed right across the country. There was a consistent number of patients who shared empathy towards the challenges that hospitals have, and continue to face to offer its normalised services.

It is clear that responders have experienced lengthy delays which amount to over a year to have an appointment or treatment. Responders were informed largely by traditional methods of telephone or by letter which appeared to meet responders' needs. Although, it should be noted that some responders were dissatisfied with the limited updates which caused psychological distress.

In regards to communication, it is noticeable that responders did not receive much notice about their appointment postponement or cancellation, largely responders shared that they were given less than a one week notice period. However, while there were other notice periods provided these were in lesser quantity in responder answers. Moreover, it appears that there are still a large number of patients waiting for a rescheduled appointment, as just over half of responders are yet to receive a follow up appointment.

When exploring in greater detail what impact the cancelled or postponed appointment had on the responder, there was a range of answers that expressed negative feelings. For example, responders noted financial hardship, anxiety and depression, deterioration of physical health and uncertainty of how to best manage their own condition due to limited medical knowledge. Furthermore, responders commonly shared that limited alternative support was offered in the interim of awaiting for a new appointment date. This may be an opportunity for hospitals to consider how they liaise with patients to offer timely updates or relieve some anxieties.

A sizeable number of responders shared that they were provided a reason for the hospital delay which was positive, and these reasons were due to COVID-19 measures. That said, there were some responders who appeared to be unsure about the reason for the appointment delay, which may further tie into opportunities to liaise better with patients in the near future.

Overall, responders concluded by utilising our rating scale of one to ten to clarify how satisfied they were with the handling of the appointment postponement or cancellation, responders aligned with the lower end of the scale. Therefore, it is clear that responders felt that more could've been done to support patient transition whilst waiting for a new appointment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The contract to provide the Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent service is held by Engaging Communities Solutions C.I.C.

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