

Improving community earwax removal service in south east London

January 2026

Background

NHS South East London is working to improve access to safe, timely, and effective earwax removal services across south east London. Many people experience problems with earwax build-up, which can cause discomfort, hearing difficulties, and sometimes impact balance.

At present, access to earwax removal can vary depending on where you live and which services are available locally. Some people may wait a long time for appointments, or travel further than they would like. We want to improve this by designing a consistent community earwax removal service that is fair and accessible for everyone across south east London.

We invited people who have used earwax removal services, those who have supported someone who has, or anyone who care about how services are delivered in their community to get involved and help us understand:

- What works well
- What challenges people face when trying to use the service
- Which improvements would make the service easier to use, be quicker to access and be more inclusive

Help shape community earwax removal service in south east London – gaining insights

Engagement methods:



Online survey – September – December 2025



Attending public events (face to face conversations and surveys – flyers and posters)
October – November 2025



Online focus groups – 3, 4 December 2025

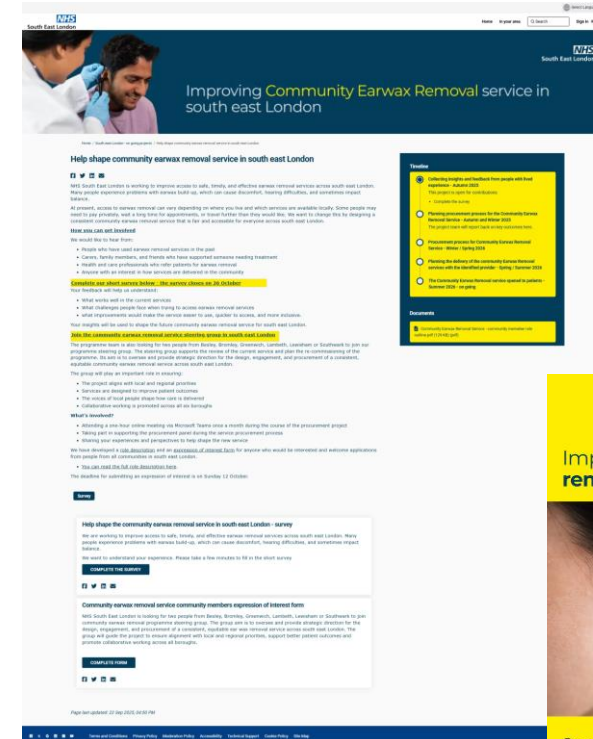


Recruiting people with lived experience to support the process as part of the steering group
and be involved in the procurement evaluation process – September – November 2025

Help shape community earwax removal service in south east London – engagement

All engagement opportunities were promoted with members of the public using both face to face and online

- Let's talk health and care online community
- #Get Involved newsletter (September, October, November 2025)
- South east London VCSE organisations
- Community champions groups across different boroughs in south east London
- Social media channels
- Integrated Care System newsletter
- ICS partners' organisations channels
- Current patients – via the current provider
- Greenwich community champions steering group



Help shape community earwax removal service in south east London

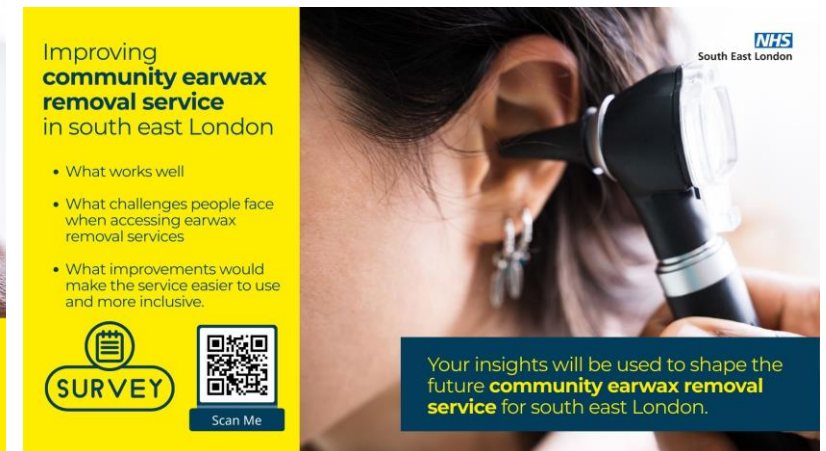
We developed a range of materials to promote and support the engagement opportunities:

- ✓ posters
- ✓ flyers
- ✓ digital screens for GP practices
Lewisham and Bromley

We also attended the following outreach events

attending outreach events:

- Ageing Well Bexley - 4 October 2025
- Inspire Lambeth – 25 October 2025



Member with lived experience role - the community earwax removal service steering group in south east London

We recruited people with lived experience to support the process as part of the steering group and be involved in the procurement evaluation.

The screenshot shows the NHS South East London website with a banner for 'Improving Community Earwax Removal service in south east London'. Below the banner is the 'Community earwax removal service community members expression of interest form'. The form includes sections for 'About you' with fields for name, organization, telephone number, email, and preferred method of contact. It also includes a section for 'Which south east London borough do you live in?' with radio button options for Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Southwark.

This document outlines the role of a lived experience member on the steering group. It includes a background section explaining the purpose of the group and the role of the lived experience member. It also includes a section for 'Steering Group lived experience member role' which lists the responsibilities of the member.

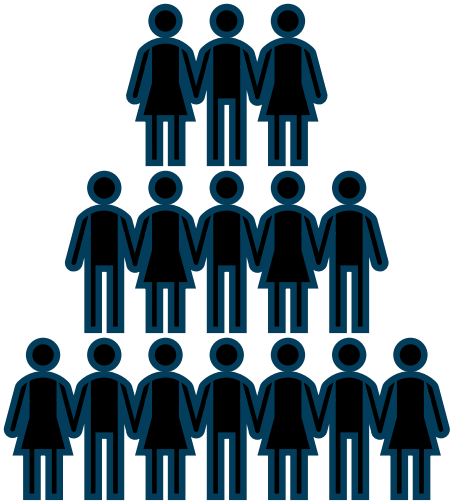
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- Four applications received from people with lived experience
- We held informal discussions with all applicants
- Three people are now members of the steering group and will support the procurement process

Gaining insight – responses and reach

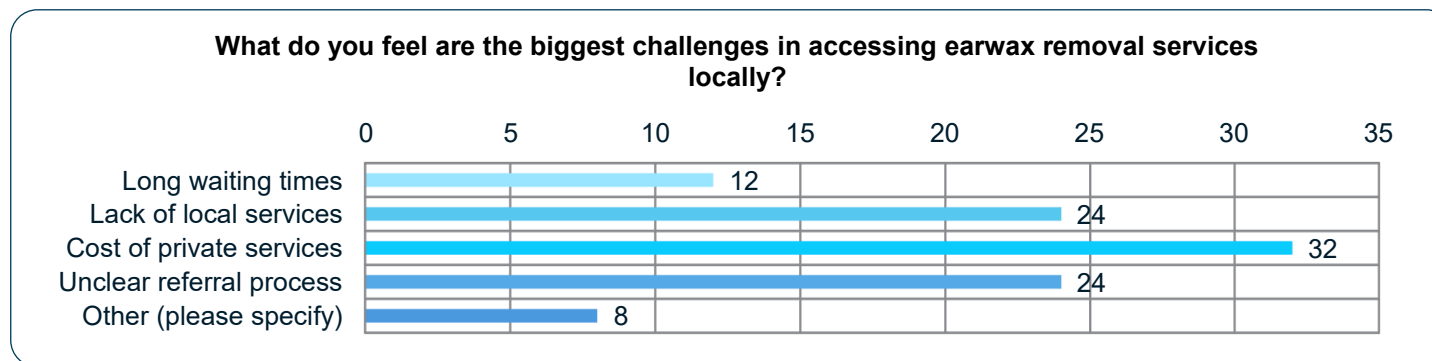
During the engagement we captured feedback and insight for a diverse people across south east London.



- 359 visits – Let's talk engagement project page
- 111 visits to the survey page and 47 survey responses
- 2 outreach sessions (over 20 people involved in conversations)
- 2 focus groups
- 10 participants attended the focus group (including staff from a care home)
- 4 informal interviews were held with people with lived experience
- 3 people with lived experience recruited to be part of the steering group and procurement process

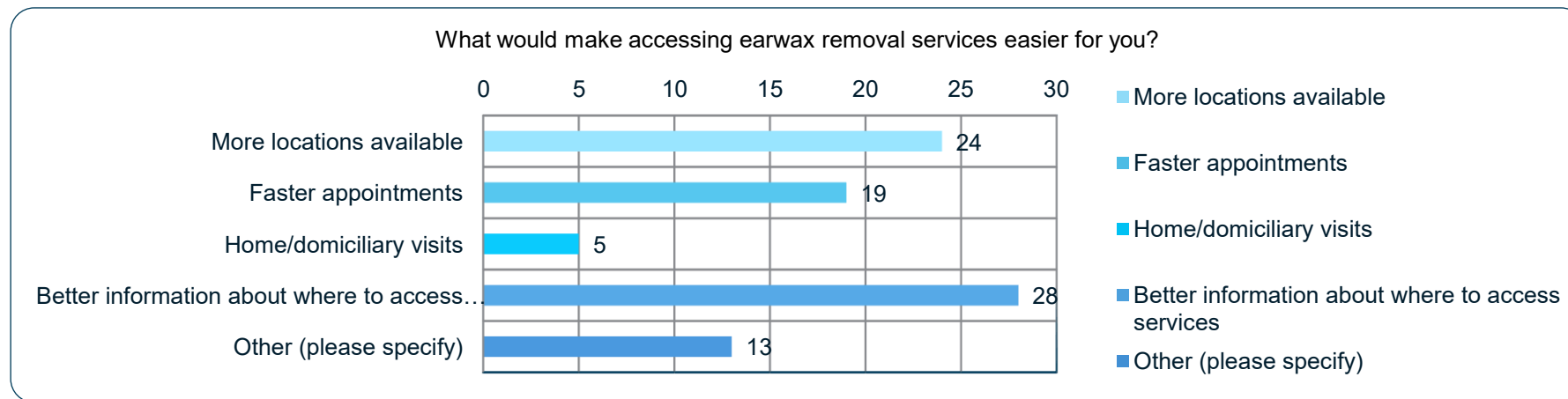
Survey insights (1 of 2)

- A key emerging theme from the survey responses was a limited awareness of the free NHS service and of the pathway available to patients to access it. This lack of information on referral and eligibility criteria resulted often in people assuming that they have to use private providers and therefore they need to pay.
- The overall satisfaction rate was high with respondents who have accessed the NHS community earwax removal service. Participants valued the clear information on the procedure, including self-care advice and practical instructions.
- The respondents identified several barriers to access the service. The most significant challenges were the cost of private services, lack of NHS provision. Another concern was unclear referral process which indicated a need of improved communications and guidance.



Survey insights (2 of 2)

- Looking at what would make accessing the CEWR services easier, respondents identified a few areas of improvement. The most suggested action was providing clearer information where services are available. This reflects the wider theme identified across our engagement process regarding lack of awareness of free NHS provided services and how to access them. More locations across south east London was also highlighted as important to help improving patients' experience.
- These insights reinforce the need to improve communication, increase awareness of the service and expand the number of access points to better meet the needs of our local population.



Insights summary – key themes

Easy access to services and flexible services

- NHS free service
- Evening and weekends hours
- Wheelchair accessible venues
- The service to be available in each borough
- Home visits for housebound people and group clinics in care homes
- Easy travel and accessible locations / venues

Clinical model of care

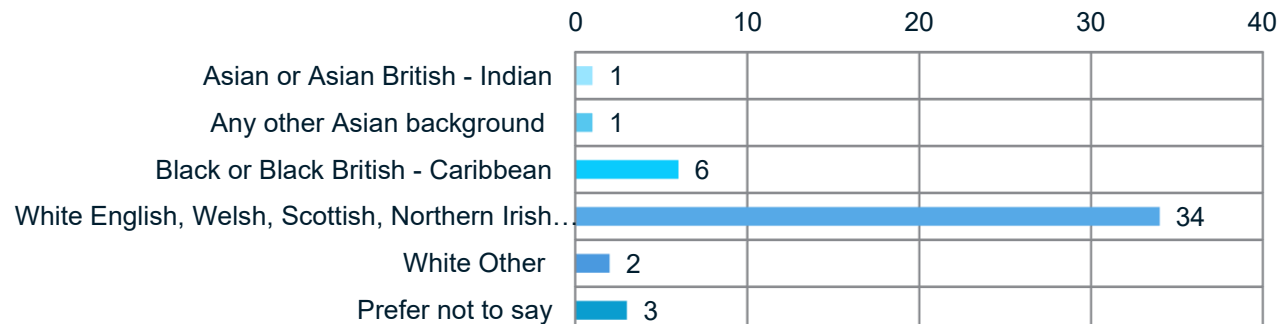
- Better joined up care between (GPs/ Earwax removal service audiology and other secondary care services)
- Clear follow up process
- Comprehensive access and referral process

Information and communications about services

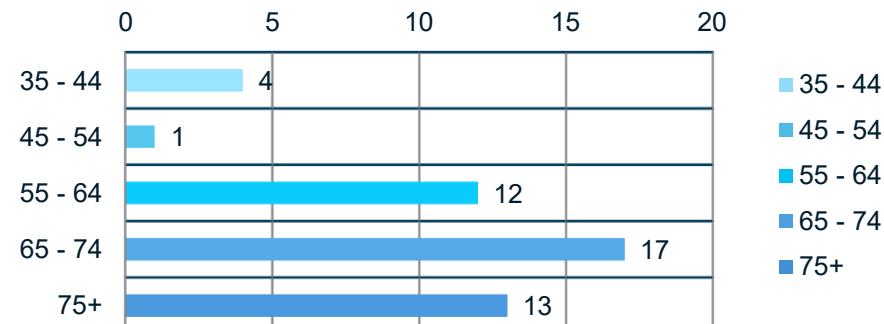
- Improved self-care support and advice
- Clear patient pathways
- Better online information
- Wider publicity and awareness about the NHS service (access/referral and eligibility)
- Information about local sites providing the service in each borough

Survey insight – demographics (1 of 2)

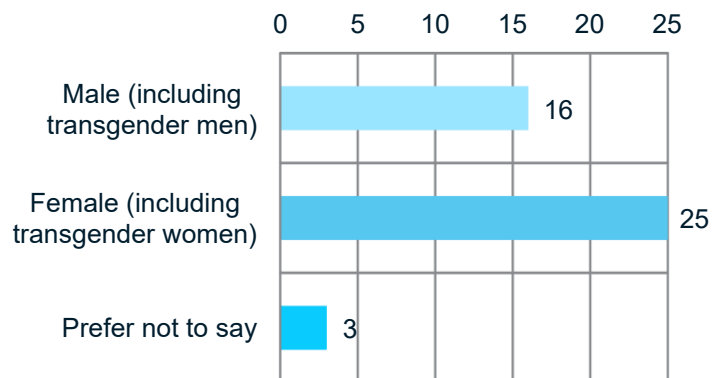
Ethnicity



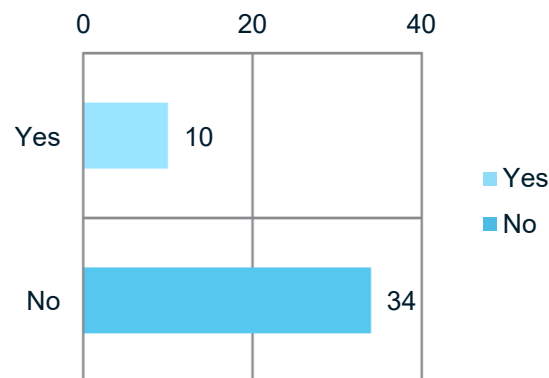
Age



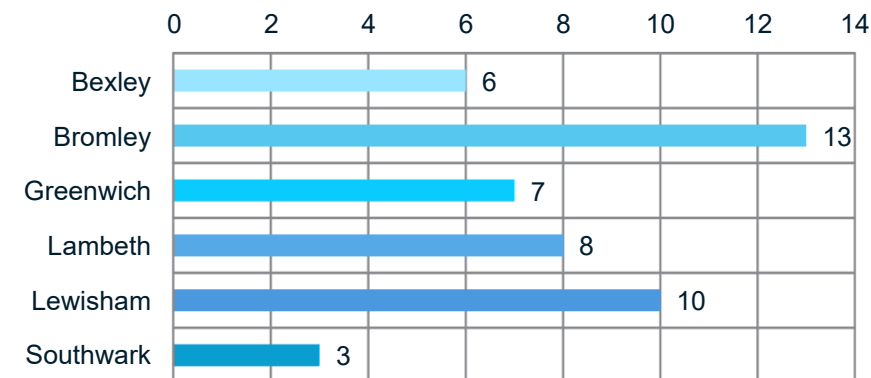
Gender



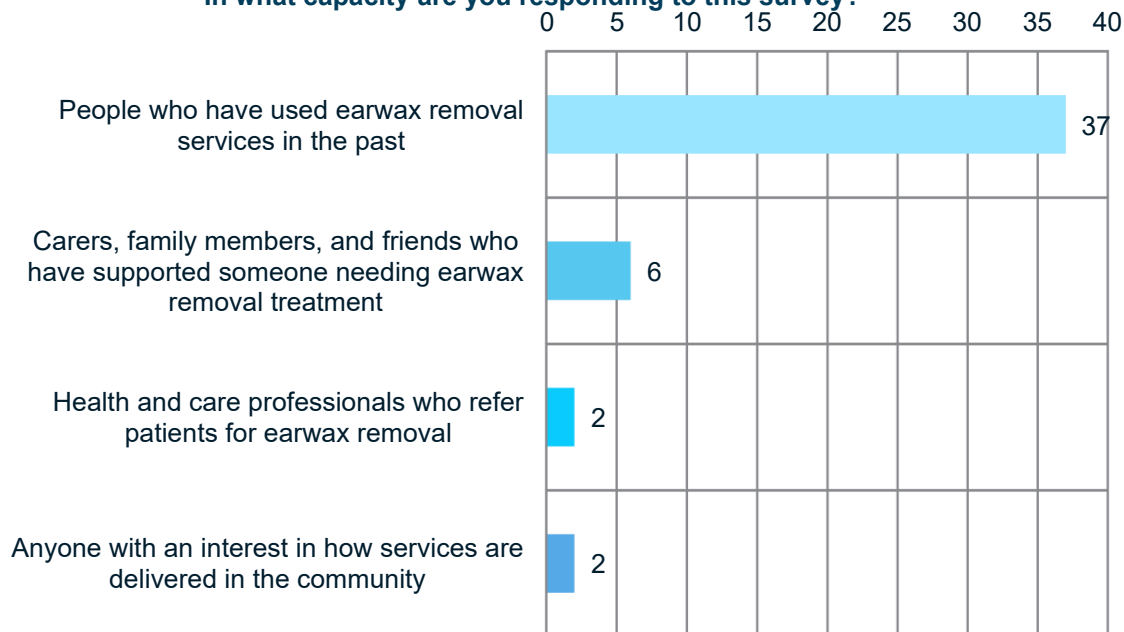
Are you a carer? ...



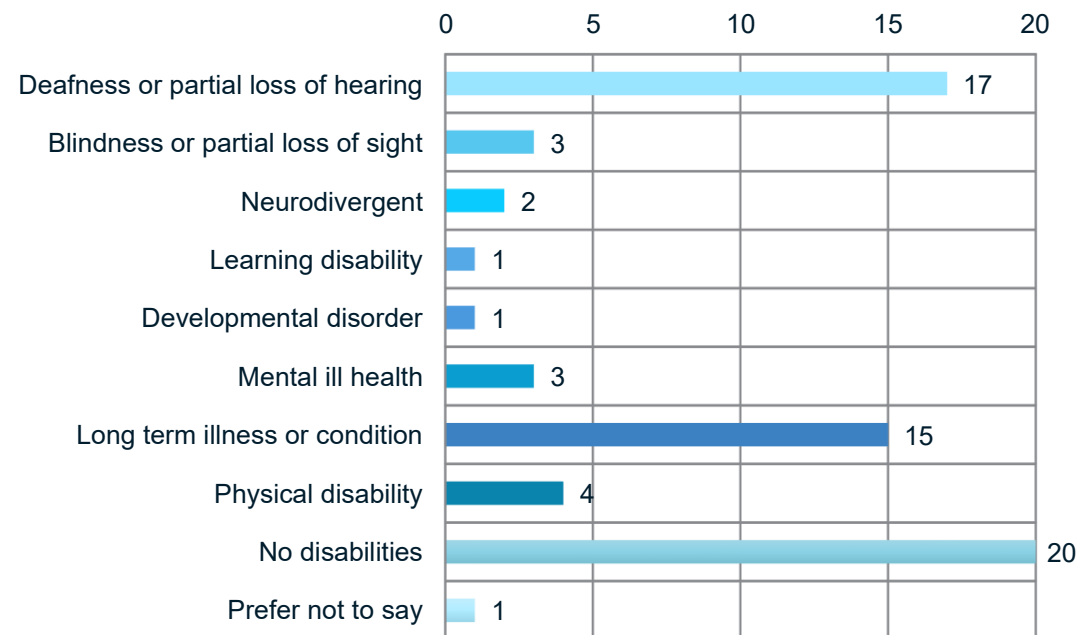
Borough



In what capacity are you responding to this survey?



Disability - Do y...



Focus group and community engagement key insights (1 of 2)

What people told us:

Service awareness and communication

- Many participants were unclear about how to access the Community Ear Wax Removal service and what support was available
- Confusion about referral routes, eligibility and next steps were common themes, particularly for new users and carers
- Participants felt that information was not always easy to find or clearly explained, especially for older people

Access, waiting time, booking appointments

- Waiting times for appointments were a key concern, with some participants reporting long delays
- Delays in access to service were felt to have a direct impact on hearing, communication, safety and overall wellbeing
- Participants highlighted the importance of reliable appointment systems, clear communication about waiting times and timely follow-up

Focus group and community engagement key insights (2 of 2)

What people told us:

Person-centred care and involvement

- Service users valued being listened to and treated with dignity, particularly during procedures that can feel uncomfortable
- Participants highlighted the need for appointments to be flexible and responsive to individual needs, including anxiety, mobility issues, and sensory sensitivities
- Families and carers emphasised the importance of clear points of contact and being kept informed, especially when supporting older or vulnerable people

Equity and inclusion

- Barriers were identified for housebound residents, people with mobility issues and those unable to travel to clinic-based services
- Participants raised concerns about access for people on low incomes, particularly where private provision was the only alternative
- The accessibility of venues, appointment times and communication formats (e.g. large print, plain language) were seen as essential to fair and equitable access

Next steps

Turning insight into action

- Insights collected during our engagement phase will directly inform priorities for service improvement, particularly around communication, access and responsiveness
- Themes will be used to strengthen expectations around timeliness, patient experience and overcome barriers to access services
- Insights will be considered alongside national guidance and operational data to ensure the service model remains safe, equitable and sustainable
- Feedback will help shape monitoring requirements, including patient experience and service responsiveness
- Engagement findings will be shared with stakeholders to demonstrate how feedback has been heard and used
- These insights and recommendations will guide the process of procuring a new service across south east London – [see on our project page the timeline](#)
- We recruited three local people with lived experience to support the development of this work and commissioning process
- Where appropriate service users and carers will continue to be involved in shaping and reviewing the service
- This summary engagement report will be made available to show how lived experience has influenced decision-making and service design