

# The Internet and Older People



**healthwatch**  
Thurrock

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## About Healthwatch Thurrock

Healthwatch Thurrock is the independent Health and Social care services champion for the people of Thurrock. We gather and represent views of local residents in order to build up a picture of services that are doing well and where they can be improved.

Along with consultation work and gathering the voices of residents, Healthwatch Thurrock also provide an information, guidance and signposting service.

Residents are invited to “speak out” via an online forum as well as through targeted surveys, conversations and face to face engagement within the community.

Healthwatch Thurrock presents the voices of Thurrock to aid in identifying the need for change, considerations before commissioning and to support best practice across services.

## Learning from a user led approach

Through conversation and engagement with people actually using the services Healthwatch Thurrock highlight and promote improvements.

We know that services are better when people are treated as individuals and are actively involved with shaping support.

To do this, services need to learn from examples of real experiences, how they can be adapted and fit around local needs.

It is also important to understand where services are working well and that should be considered to be a blueprint of change when designing services and support.

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## Overview

Internet use nationally among older age groups has increased substantially over the last five years, but many are still non-users.

With more and more services provided digitally, Healthwatch Thurrock set out to establish the internet use and access amongst sheltered housing tenants within the borough.

Healthwatch Thurrock conducted a survey in October 2020 around support through the Coronavirus lockdown. Results revealed that many older people could not access online shopping, information and other services due to a lack of knowledge and/or access to the internet.

This led to increased vulnerability and isolation along with additional reliance on statutory or voluntary services for some people. It also culminated in reduced choice and independence for this community.

The indicators of the Coronavirus Survey led Healthwatch Thurrock to explore further the impact and disadvantages of not having online access.

The majority of respondents who undertook the survey were aged over 65 (87%) which is to be expected as the work was targeted at an older population.

A survey was designed to reflect the access/knowledge/usage of the Internet for Older residents living within the Sheltered housing complexes in Thurrock.

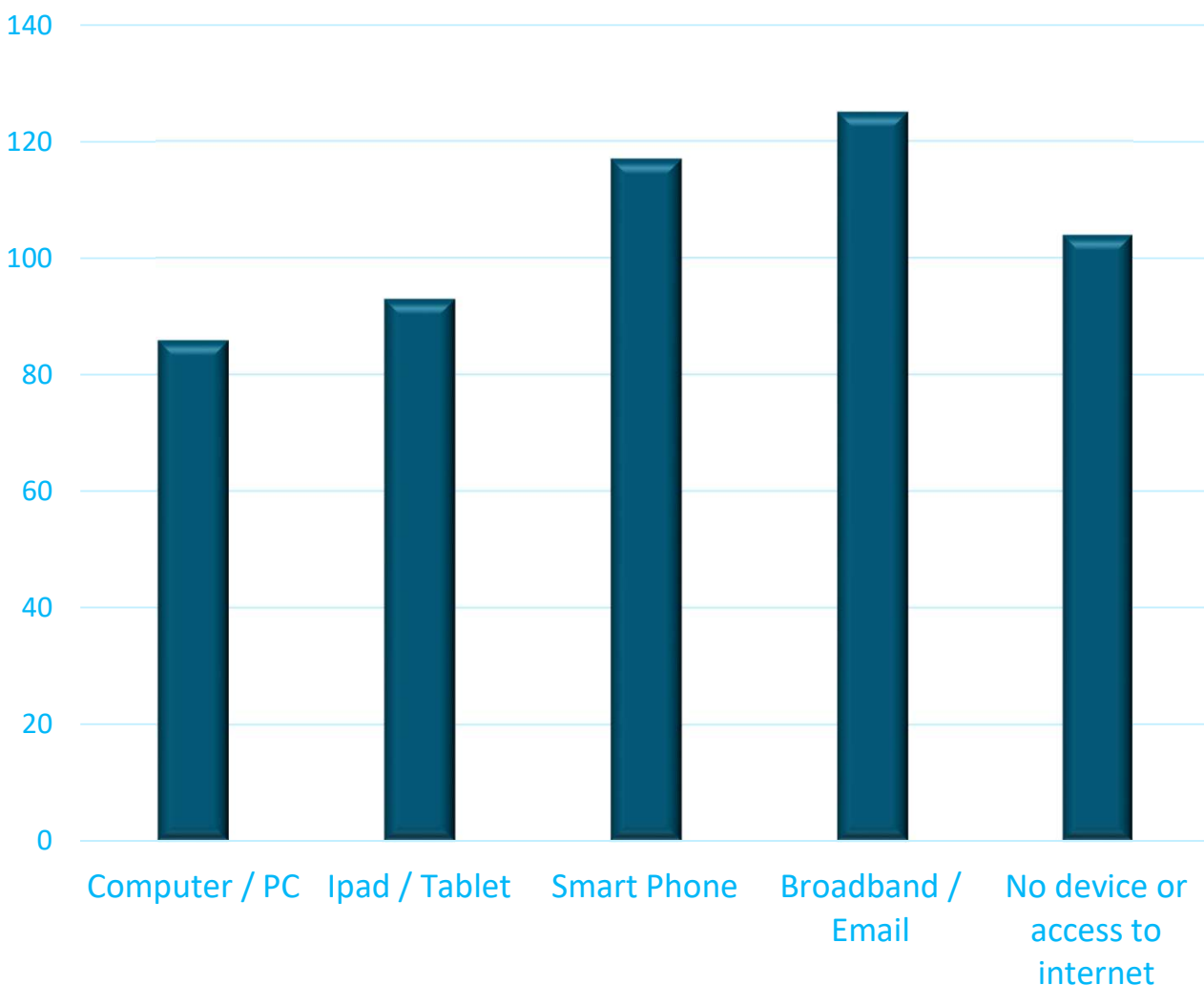
Survey packs were delivered by hand to all addresses within the complexes. The packs contained the survey, an introductory/explanation letter, Freepost return envelope and for ease of survey completion a complimentary pen.

## Access

Access to online services is offered within Libraries and Community Hubs, however, with these closed during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the need for home based equipment and services was essential for many reasons.

From the 290 residents that took part in the survey, 104 said they did not have any way of engaging online. This equates to over a third (36%) who do not and cannot access online services. Healthwatch Thurrock asked the following:

Do you have access to any of the following? Select all that apply.



## Access

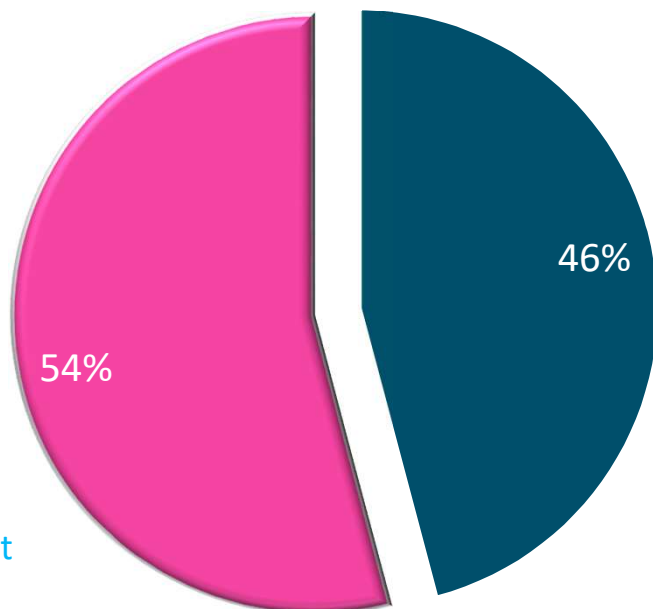
Although the majority of residents did have a device and/or internet access, more than half (54%) said they did not use the internet to search for information.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, face to face and paper format information was not readily available or being distributed. This meant for many, the internet was the only way of receiving information and updates locally.

Other services people used the internet for was shopping, banking and to find out hospital information.

■ Yes, I use the internet to search for information

■ No, I do not use the internet to search for information



## Booking Online Services

Booking services and appointments online has increased over the past few years, and exponentially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

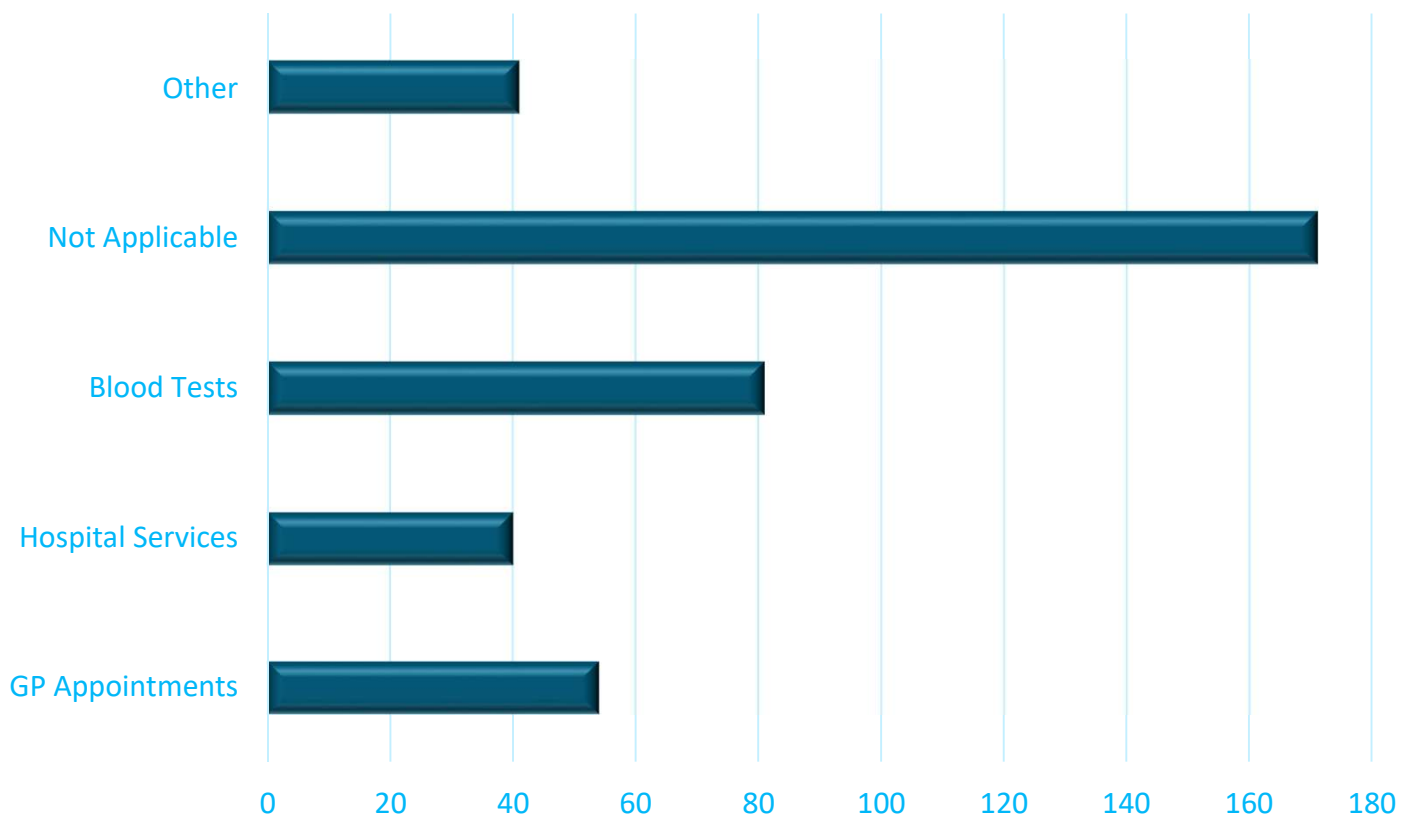
When asked whether residents did book services online, the largest response (59%) was marked as “Not Applicable”.

From freetext, residents said that they would book by telephone or by asking a family member to do this on their behalf.

*“My daughter does it as I do not know how to use it”*

*“I phone for all appointments on my mobile phone”*

Do you use the internet to book any of the following appointments?

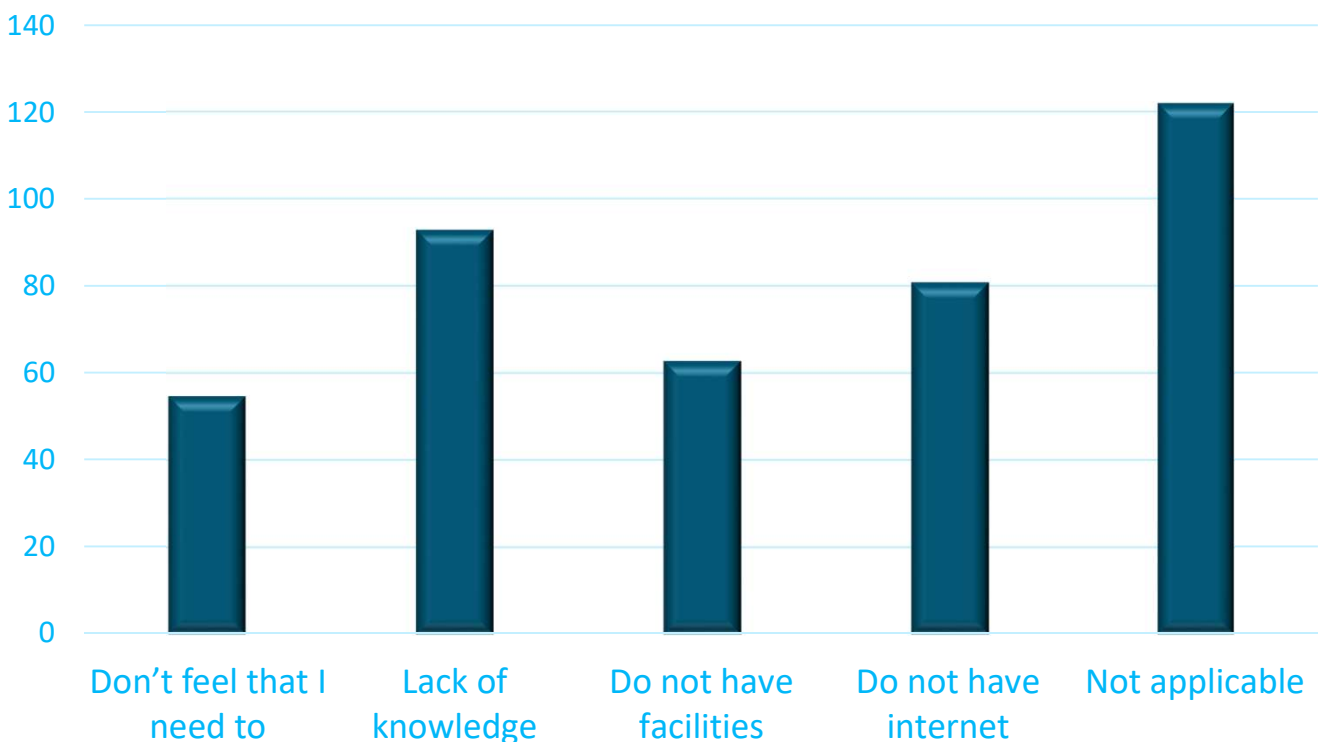


## Not using the internet

It was important to understand the reasons why people did not use the internet. Some as previously stated did not have the facilities or connection to go online, however 93 people (32%) said it was due to a lack of knowledge.

Another 122 (42%) also cited that it was “Not Applicable”.

Reasons not to use the internet



When asked whether respondents would be interested in training to learn how to use the internet a large majority (71%) said that they would not be interested.

*“Have TalkTalk, have a pad but never used it”*

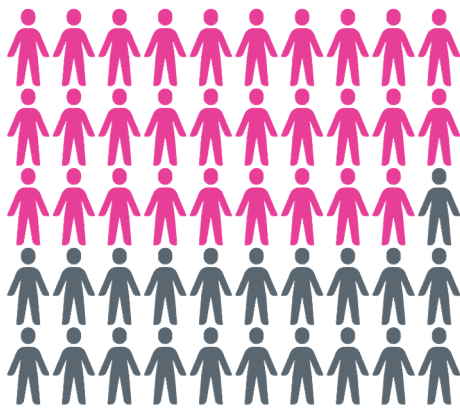
*“Could not afford to have internet”*



## Findings

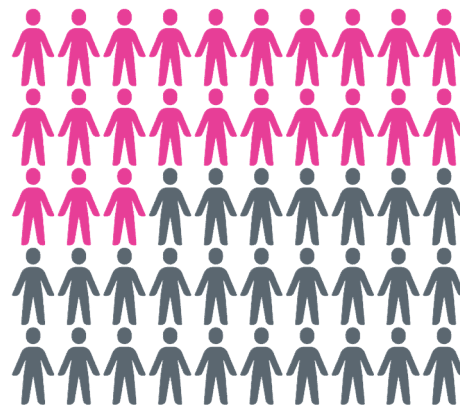
The results for the Thurrock survey revealed a lower Internet usage rate in adults over 65 when compared to the national picture.

### Residents 65+ accessing the internet



National (ONS) 2018

59%



Healthwatch Thurrock Survey 2021

46%

Although the usage is lower than the National figure in Thurrock, It is heartening to find that 29% of respondents are interested in training for Internet usage.

In Thurrock that would equate to approximately 6,000 older residents.

## Findings



29%

Residents said they would be interested in internet training

With so many wishing to gain more skills on internet usage there is clearly a gap in provision for this cohort of residents.

It is encouraging that Thurrock's Sheltered housing management team are working to upgrade to fast fibre coverage and to look at internet options for communal areas in the complexes.

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