

Making your voice heard

Healthwatch Birmingham Annual Report 2020-21



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Message from our Chair

I am delighted to introduce Healthwatch Birmingham's annual report, my first since I became Chair in January 2021. I would like to thank former Chair Danielle Oum for her dedication and leadership. It has been a very difficult year for the city, yet despite this we continue to grow and fulfil our role to put patients and the public at the heart of care.

Our role became both more essential and more challenging during the Covid-19 lockdown. People's care has been disrupted as health and social care services responded to increased and unprecedented pressure, while social distancing restrictions made it impossible to gather feedback from the public face-to-face.

Throughout the crisis, we have endeavoured to help services provide the best possible support for those most in need, and reach more marginalised groups with essential information about social distancing, testing and vaccines. Never before has our Information & Signposting service been so important. We provided support to 3317 individuals; nearly seven times more than the previous year.

We developed innovative ways of working online, providing new routes for individuals to feedback about how the pandemic has affected them, and reaching out to the most vulnerable to highlight their needs. The feedback we received was used to help reassure the public that services are listening to and acting upon their concerns, whichever of Birmingham's many diverse communities they belong to.



"The pandemic has revealed deep weaknesses in our society, but also the strength of people coming together. It is this collective strength we draw upon and which enables Healthwatch Birmingham to make such a difference."

The pandemic has revealed deep weaknesses in our society, but also the strength of people coming together. It is this collective strength we draw upon and which enables Healthwatch Birmingham to make such a difference. We would like to thank everyone who has worked with us in the past year. This includes health and social care staff, commissioners and providers, third sector organisations and the many other stakeholders who share our dedication to eradicating health inequalities.

My thanks also go to the staff, volunteers and board members of Healthwatch Birmingham who have shown such resilience, flexibility and dedication during such difficult times.

Most importantly we would like to thank the thousands of people who shared their views on health and social care services in the past year. We aim to ensure everyone can have their voice heard, and believe this report demonstrates the positive impact people sharing their individual experiences has on health and social care services for all Birmingham's citizens.



Richard Burden, Chair

About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Birmingham. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support you need, by sharing your feedback with those who have the power to make change happen.

Helping you to find the information you need

We help people find the information they need about services in their area. This has been vital during the pandemic with the ever-changing environment and restrictions limiting people's access to health and social care services.

Our goals



1 Supporting you to have your say

We want more people to get the information they need to take control of their health and care, make informed decisions and shape the services that support them.



2 Providing a high quality service

We want everyone who shares an experience or seeks information from us to get a high quality service and to understand the difference that their views make.



3 Ensuring your views help improve health and care

We want more services to use your views to shape the health and care support people need today and in the future.



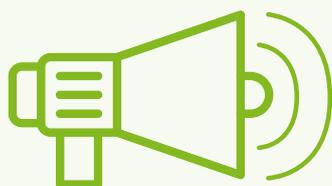
“Local Healthwatch have done fantastic work throughout the country during the Covid-19 pandemic, but there is more work ahead to ensure that everyone’s views are heard. Covid-19 has highlighted inequalities and to tackle these unfair health differences we will need those in power to listen, to hear the experiences of those facing inequality and understand the steps that could improve people’s lives.”

Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair, Healthwatch England

Highlights from our year

Find out about our resources and how we have engaged and supported people in 2020-21.

Reaching out

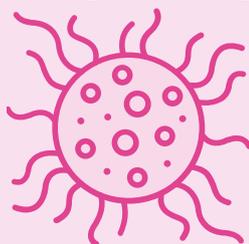


We heard from
3318 people
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We engaged with
13769 people
online this year.

We ran
17 online sessions
with partner organisations to provide information on care to marginalised groups and understand their health and social care needs.

Responding to the pandemic



We provided information and signposting to
3317 people
who had queries about the pandemic and other health and social care issues this year.

Making a difference to care



We published
4 reports
about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

104 recommendations
we made last year have been acted upon, at the point where we reviewed progress.

We submitted evidence to
20 consultations
about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.



Our impact: Responding to Covid-19

The first full Covid-19 lockdown in Spring 2020 affected not only people's access to health and social care services, but also to everyday essentials such as food. During this period, we used our connections with third sector organisations in Birmingham to help people with issues such as obtaining supplies or mental health support.

We published a list of local services providing emergency support on our website and promoted this list on social media. We also put callers to our Information and Signposting service in contact with these services.

We implemented an online survey to learn how lockdown restrictions were affecting people's experiences of health and social care. We collected over 500 responses from Birmingham residents, and identified areas for improvement should there be a subsequent lockdown. These included:

- Access to supplies, including food.
- Provision of shielding letters to vulnerable people.
- Access to medication, treatment and appointments.
- Better communication from NHS and social care services.
- Improved hospital discharge.
- Support for people struggling emotionally with the effects of lockdown.

In many cases we took immediate action to contact the relevant organisations about issues. For example, Birmingham City Council provided us with contact details so carers could request PPE supplies, and obtained up-to-date advice from Birmingham and Solihull Local Pharmaceutical Committee (BSoL LPC) about collecting prescriptions.

We published a more detailed analysis of these issues - along with recommendations for improvement - in a report for commissioners, services and other stakeholders. [This report is available on our website.](#)

We ran a revised survey between December 2020 and February 2021, to see if services had improved and where issues may still exist. The survey was completed by 274 Birmingham residents. Whilst we heard many positive experiences, reflecting the dedication of NHS and Local Authority staff, the following areas still need to be addressed:

- Access to services such as GPs, hospitals, dentists, mental health services, social care assessments, day care centres and support for carers.
- Appropriateness of telephone consultations for certain medical issues.
- The ability of people, who find technology difficult to use, to book consultations online and then have them on the telephone.
- Experience of visiting the GP surgery in person.
- Communication about delayed consultations, assessments and referrals.

This insight into people’s access to the care they need and effective communication is especially valuable now that the NHS is moving into the restoration and recovery of services. There is a high level of concern about the number of people whose treatments have been delayed due to the pandemic, many with serious conditions such as cancer.



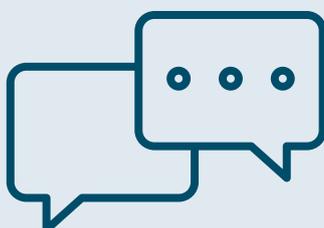
“My hospital appointment has been cancelled twice and my other appointments are only on the phone, which I’m worried about. QE hospital.”

Survey Respondent

This is particularly the case at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB), which has been the NHS Trust most severely impacted by the pandemic in the country. Following a Care Quality Commission (CQC) report highlighting serious concerns about patient safety at UHB, we pressed the Trust management to urgently address the issues raised. We have also sought answers around UHB’s performance on cancer waiting times before the pandemic, alongside its actions to tackle the current backlog of treatments.

We are actively supporting UHB in this task by working with the Trust to ensure communications with patients on waiting lists are clear, sensitive and appropriate for people’s needs.

We are continuing to monitor all the issues identified in the survey, and provide the most up-to-date information to people through our Information and Signposting service. Healthwatch Birmingham is also actively supporting the vaccine roll-out across the city. We are working with colleagues in the NHS and local authority to target areas with low take-up rates with suitable information encouraging people to have the vaccine, based on our knowledge of different communities in Birmingham.



Share your views with us

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don’t struggle alone. Healthwatch Birmingham is here for you.



www.healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk



0800 652 5278



info@healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk



Our impact: Health inequalities

Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority communities. There was an urgent need to hear the experiences of Birmingham's many diverse communities, to understand the causes of the health inequalities they face and work together to tackle them.

Working with Black Country and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group (BCWB CCG), we invited members of the African-Caribbean community to an online Q&A session. This gave participants the opportunity to ask questions about their health needs, and express their concerns.

This enabled Healthwatch Birmingham and BCWB CCG to identify issues around:

- Access to services for vulnerable and elderly African-Caribbean people.
- Health inequalities and structural racism.
- Co-morbidities.
- Mental health.

Feedback from this session, and wider discussions around the ethnic dimension of health inequalities (both pre and during Covid), prompted our investigation into the experiences of Birmingham's Somali community. Through interviews with members of the Somali community, we found that the following factors have led to distrust and detachment from health and social care services:

- Lack of dignity and respect.
- Poor diagnosis and referral to specialist treatment.
- Cultural and language difficulties.
- Stigma and discrimination.

We detailed these issues and recommendations for addressing them in a report circulated to health and social care commissioners and providers. [The report is available on our website.](#)

As a direct result of our work on health inequalities, service users from the Somali community and other ethnic minority groups in Birmingham will benefit from improved engagement from health and social care services, greater involvement in decision-making and better quality of care.

We engaged with key stakeholders within health and social care around the findings of our work with the Somali community. This included Birmingham City Council, Birmingham and Solihull CCG, Black Country and West Birmingham CCG and Birmingham's seven NHS trusts. We asked our partners how they would use the report findings to:

- Improve their knowledge of the issues affecting the Somali community (and/or other ethnic minority groups)?
- Improve their engagement with the Somali community (and/or other ethnic minority groups) including the involvement in decision-making processes?
- Address the issues that have been raised in the report regarding diversity, stigma and discrimination, knowledge and rights, culture and language and trust?
- Design, commission and deliver improved services for the Somali community (and/or other ethnic minority groups)?

Health and social care services have made a number of changes in response, including:

- Using the report findings to inform practice.
- Making stronger links with the Somali community and other ethnic minority groups.
- Involving service users from the Somali community in decisions around their care.
- Improving health and social care services to accommodate the needs of ethnic minority groups.
- Improving staff knowledge of issues affecting ethnic minority groups in Birmingham through recruitment, training and better use of demographic data.



“Healthwatch Birmingham will continue to engage and hear the experience of those most likely to experience inequality and use this to drive improvement. We will use the findings of this report and other intelligence to influence wider discussions around inequalities. We will support the work in localities and neighbourhoods to support Health and Social care to understand their local communities and reduce inequality.”

Andy Cave, Chief Executive, Healthwatch Birmingham

Following our session with the African-Caribbean community, BCWB CCG has now outlined the next steps they intend to take, including:

- Establishing a community leaders' forum.
- Signposting people towards mental health support.
- Appointing a Transformation and Partnership Director with a lead role in reducing health inequalities.
- Reassuring patients that they can still access face-to-face appointments.



Finding the answers you need

Healthwatch Birmingham plays an important role in helping people to get the information they need, especially throughout the pandemic. The insight we collect is shared with both Healthwatch England and local partners to ensure services are operating as best as possible during the pandemic.

This year we helped 3317 people by:

- Providing up to date advice on the COVID-19 response locally.
- Linking people to reliable up-to-date information.
- Supporting the vaccine roll-out.
- Helping people to access the services they need.



Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch Birmingham is here for you.



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Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



GP services



Dentistry



Hospital care



Vaccines



“Healthwatch are very helpful. They gave me contact details which led to my ongoing case being resolved.”

Information & Signposting caller

Key questions we were asked:

What can I do if I cannot get through to my GP surgery to book an appointment?

We provided details on how to informally raise concerns with the practice, or formally complain to NHS England.

How can I book an appointment with an NHS dentist?

We explained how to find dentists accepting new patients on the NHS website. We also signposted to the NHS Customer Contact Centre and the Oral Health Foundation.

How can I complain about my hospital treatment?

We provided information on hospital complaints procedures, and signposted to PALS. We also recorded their experiences ourselves.

How can I get a Covid-19 vaccination?

We signposted people towards the relevant Clinical Commissioning Group website for their area, which contain details on who is eligible, how the vaccination works, and how to book an appointment.



Volunteers

At Healthwatch Birmingham we are supported by a number of dedicated volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to see made to services.

Many of our volunteers were shielding throughout lockdown, and we kept in contact to offer support. Although restrictions meant our volunteers couldn't meet people face-to-face, they still played an invaluable role helping Birmingham's citizens throughout the pandemic.

This year our volunteers:

- Helped to design our online surveys to collect feedback about services during lockdown.
- Built relationships with the Somali community as part of our study into health inequalities.
- Attended online meetings to keep in touch with each other and share ideas around future work.



“As we move out of lockdown, opportunities to get involved with our work are increasing. These are exciting times and we are actively recruiting volunteers to help us continue our journey, give the public a voice and help improve health and social care services across the city.”

Mark McKinley, Volunteer & Community Officer, Healthwatch Birmingham

Become a Healthwatch Birmingham volunteer and you'll be assured of a warm welcome and the chance to get really involved in our work, as our Volunteer Representative Tim explains:

"I first came to know of Healthwatch Birmingham when I was looking to start volunteering in the community after retiring from Birmingham City Council.

Healthwatch Birmingham stuck out as something I could get involved with as it provided an opportunity to promote fairer access to health and social care services for everyone in Birmingham.

I joined in 2018 and since then I have enjoyed community engagement events at a range of venues such as hospitals and mental health support services organisations. I was voted by my volunteer peers to become volunteer representative in early 2019, meaning I support volunteers and take their questions and views to the Healthwatch Birmingham board.

I am proud to be part of an organisation that really values its volunteers and makes such a big difference to health and social care services in Birmingham. We would love you to join us!"



Volunteer with us

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch with us on:



www.healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk/volunteers/



0800 652 5278



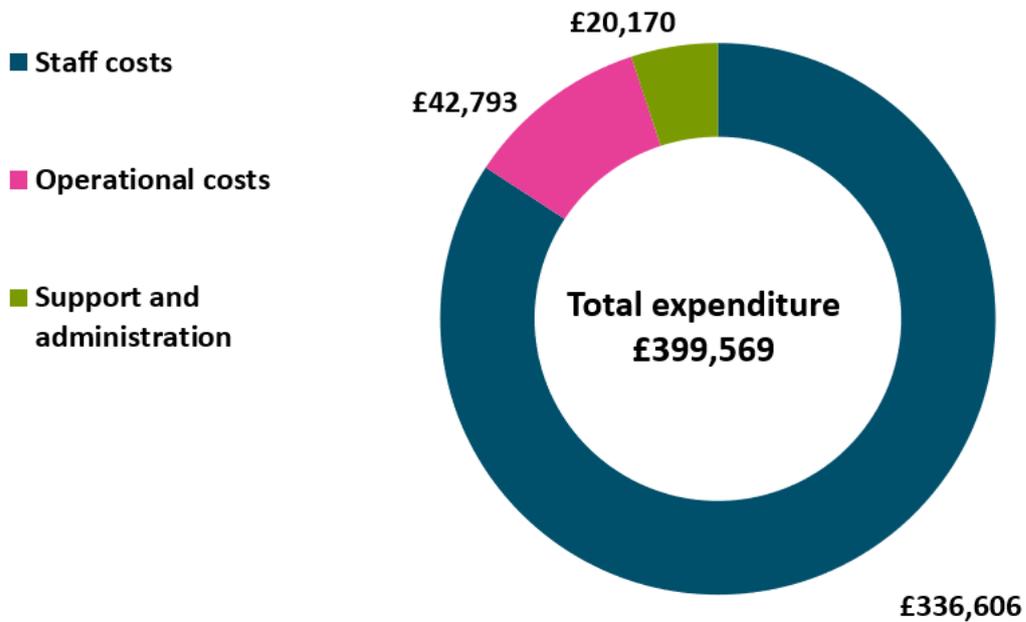
volunteering@healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk

Finances

Income

To help us carry out our work we received £407,207 funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Expenditure



Next steps

The past year has been extremely testing for Birmingham. Health and social care services have worked tirelessly under unprecedented pressure to care for citizens during the pandemic, and we at Healthwatch Birmingham have done our utmost to support the fight against Covid-19. Yet while the vaccine programme offers hope, the challenges that remain mean there is no time to rest.

In the immediate term, there is the task of keeping Covid-19 in retreat while simultaneously getting people whose care has been disrupted treated as quickly as possible. But these urgent priorities must not divert attention away from the long-term effort to combat the stark health inequalities apparent in Birmingham both before and during the pandemic.

There will be no 'quick fix' for these longstanding issues, but we believe the resilience and resourcefulness the city displayed during the pandemic means solutions will be found. For our part, Healthwatch Birmingham will put the interests of patients and the public at the heart of decisions about health and social care in the wake of Covid-19. We will make the effective use of patient and public experience, insight and involvement central to the restoration and recovery of services. There are already profound changes underway in how care is accessed and provided, and it is essential that no-one's needs are overlooked in the design and delivery of services.



"The feedback we hear will provide support and challenge to health and social care services so the needs of individuals from every background are considered in plans to reduce inequality. Only by making sure everyone's voice is heard can we ensure everyone can access the best possible care for them."

The restoration and recovery of services offers opportunities as well as challenges. The new Integrated Care Systems, with NHS, local authority and other services working more closely together in the community, have the potential to significantly improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities. Healthwatch Birmingham will be playing a leading role in these new structures, ensuring that the patient voice is heard at every level, from the staff on the frontline to executives in the boardroom.

Integrated Care Systems are designed to accommodate the specific needs of different communities, something particularly important somewhere as diverse as Birmingham. The city is rightly proud of this diversity, yet many communities have suffered worse than others, both before and during the pandemic. We engaged with Birmingham's African-Caribbean communities during lockdown, and will continue to reach out across the city to understand and evidence where inequality exists. The feedback we hear will provide support and challenge to health and social care services so the needs of individuals from every background are considered in plans to reduce inequality. Only by making sure everyone's voice is heard can we ensure everyone has access the best possible care for them.



Andy Cave, Chief Executive



Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Birmingham, Cobalt Square, 83 Hagley Road, Birmingham B16 8QG

Healthwatch Birmingham uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making.

Our Healthwatch board consists of nine members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2020/21 the board met four times and made decisions on matters such as maximising our support for vulnerable people throughout the pandemic and our focus on inequalities.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. People's experiences prompt and lead our activity and investigations, with our reports focusing on improving services for everyone. People's experiences collected through our feedback centre, community engagement and information and signposting are collated and themed. Key issues go through our Topic Identification and Prioritisation (TIPS) process where our volunteers and members of the public help us select issues for us to investigate.

Methods and systems used across the year’s work to obtain people’s views and experience

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2020/21 we have been available by phone, by email, provided an online feedback centre on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. We heard from people with a sensory impairment through our study into vision rehabilitation services. We also heard from people from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic groups through our study into Health Inequalities. Through our various studies this year, we have heard from people living in communities with high deprivation.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible on our website.

2020-21 priorities

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
PALS Impact report	NHS Trusts have introduced targets for responding to enquiries and introduced a culturally sensitive PALS group.
Sight Loss Study	Birmingham City Council Vision Rehabilitation Team has developed a new referral pathway to improve access to the service and recruited an additional Visual Impairment Officer.
Health Inequalities and the Somali Community	Black Country and West Birmingham CCG has co-produced a cancer information video with the Somali community in order to improve health literacy and health outcomes.
Birmingham Citizens and Covid-19 Lockdown	University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust is consulting Healthwatch Birmingham about communications with patients.

Responses to recommendations and requests

Eleven providers and commissioners responded to recommendations or requests for information.

This year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by Healthwatch Birmingham to Healthwatch England and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Birmingham is represented on the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board by Andy Cave, Chief Executive. During 2020/21 he has effectively carried out this role by championing the involvement of local people in decisions and supporting the Board to understand citizens’ experiences. Throughout this year we have also held a seat on the Covid Outbreak Engagement Board to support the city in its response to the pandemic.

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