



Annual Report

2020-21

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Message from our Chair



"The pandemic has revealed deep weaknesses in our society, but also the strength of people coming together"

Richard Burden – Chair of Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull



I am delighted to introduce Healthwatch Solihull'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 as Chair.

It has been a very difficult year for residents in Solihull, our purpose 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 line been so important. It enabled us to provide support to Solihull citizens.

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 Solihull'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 Solihull 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 Solihull who have shown such resilience, flexibility and dedication during such difficult times.

Most importantly we would like to thank the thousands of people who told us 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 of Solihull's citizens.

About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Solihull. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support they need, by sharing these views 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 their experience or seeks advice from us to get a high quality service and to understand the difference their views make.



3 Ensuring your views help improve health & care

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



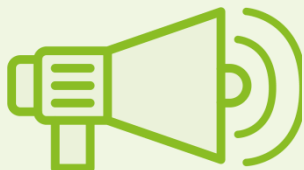
“Our team have adapted during the pandemic and strived to continue hearing peoples' views, but there is more work ahead to ensure that everyone's views are heard. COVID-19 has highlighted further the inequalities across Solihull, and the need for effective patient involvement in how services are ran. We will continue to listen and hear the experiences of residents and ensure they are heard by those running and regulating services.”

Natalie Travers – Healthwatch Solihull Manager

Highlights from our year

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

Reaching out



We heard from

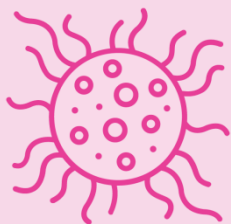
1507 people

this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

298 people

Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

Over 10,500

people during the COVID-19 pandemic 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. From this, we made several recommendations for improvement.

7 organisations

Have committed to making actions on issues we have identified through investigations.

Health and care that works for you



We spoke virtually to care homes

residents, their families and staff to find out their experience of care during covid-19.

We ensured safe visiting could continue whatever the weather.

We made trusted relationships with care homes so we can continue to engage safely with residents.



Blood tests at Solihull Hospital



Accessing blood services

Thanks to people sharing their experiences of blood testing in Solihull we were able to help service providers to adapt and make changes to ensure that all patients had access to phlebotomy services at Solihull Hospital.

Our original visit in 2019 found that signage was confusing and hard to see. We also identified that people may have found the set-up in the blood test lounge difficult to navigate and access safely, especially those with disabilities.

We observed that, as patients entered the blood test lounge, patients collected a ticket and sat down. Unfortunately, the ticket machine was placed too high to be accessed by people in wheelchairs. Staff then called people in groups of ten and these people had to stand in a line.

There was no display screen to call numbers, so users had to rely on hearing their number called. If a visitor was deaf or hard of hearing, they would not know when their number was called.

We also observed that standing in the corridor, without seating, brought challenges for some elderly people. One user told us it was like 'herding cattle'.



Improving blood services

We engaged with University Hospitals Birmingham to improve the service and make it accessible to all.

Staff listened to our concerns and quickly implemented an action plan. The following changes were made as a result of our visit.

- The ticket machine was moved to a more convenient location.
- Staff were advised not to call people in groups to then wait in the corridor. Rather, they should either call them through one at a time or ensure seating is available in the corridor. This was working well.
- The service moved to a new area of the hospital and this area made it easier to call one patient at a time.
- Issues regarding communication were discussed with staff.
- New signage was put up to better direct people.
- Waiting times were observed. We were assured that service users were being called through promptly and no queues were observed.
- With regards to paediatric bloods, UHB said “Children’s blood tests are currently only available at the Heartlands site. This information will be reiterated via a specific phlebotomy meeting with the CCG in the very near future with a request that this be communicated to GPs. We are looking into the feasibility of offering a limited Paediatric service at our Good Hope site again in the near future.”
- Booked appointments were introduced at various locations during the pandemic. UHB are looking to extend these bookings to Good Hope and Solihull imminently.

Our team will continue to work with UHB to follow up as restrictions ease to ensure the service is running smoothly and is accessible to all.





Accessing your GP via technology

People being able to get an appointment with a GP has been a priority for Healthwatch Solihull since it was first established.

Over the last year, we have frequently been told about the difficulty of accessing GP services via technology (by telephone, website, app or video call).

The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically reduced the number of face-to-face appointments and interactions at general practice premises. It was therefore important for us to hear and report Solihull residents' experiences of accessing and having consultations via technology.

An online survey was completed in November 2020 by residents (16+ years old) who are registered to a general practice in Solihull. It included an invitation for people to share their experiences verbally with us. We advertised the survey with the help of local Solihull organisations, and by sharing it in meetings with health and social care providers.

Accessing your GP during the pandemic

Thanks to patients sharing their experience we were able to identify the key issues and engage with Primary Care Networks in Solihull to implement changes.

The main findings of our report identified that, whilst the public understands the necessity of the use of telephone and video call consultations in addition to face and face appointments, there are still concerns between patients and their general practice.

In response to the report the PCNs acknowledged the need for clearer explanations on access via technology, including:

- The need to improve website information and accessibility.
- The plurality of options to access surgeries to support people with constraints, such as; work, caring responsibilities, disabilities, language barriers, etc.
- How to access face-to-face consultations if technology is a barrier.
- Clarity about telephone call-back times (and whether it is acceptable for patients to use their phones whilst awaiting a call).
- Processes around missed calls and if practices will phone again and how many times.
- The confidentiality of digital tools.

Our report also shared the response of Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in Solihull and of the Birmingham and Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group and outlined the next steps we will take to help improve this aspect of Solihull GP services.

We heard through our survey that 57% of our respondents found accessing technology-based services 'very difficult' or 'difficult'.

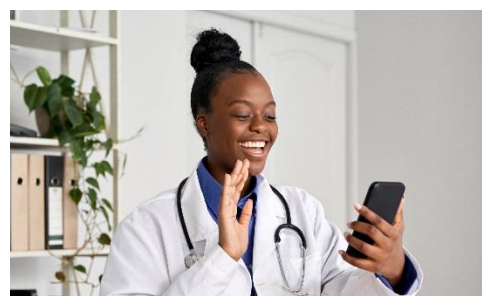
Respondents experienced problems during telephone and video consultations due to issues like the lack of visual cues that cannot conveyed via telephone consultations or issues with understanding healthcare professionals' tone of voice or accent on the telephone. 86% of respondents did not have an option to choose between having telephone appointments or video call appointments.

The issue surrounding insufficient GP telephone lines was a common for respondents. Patients emphasised that they are working, or have other tasks, that may not allow them to wait more than an hour on the telephone. It was therefore often problematic that general practices do not give specific times or periods for telephone consultations/appointment.

Respondents also had fears about confidentiality related to the use of technology.

Changes made by the NHS because of the initial report
will be published in a follow-up report

You can read the full report [here](#)



Visit our website for more www.healthwatchsolihull.org.uk



Responding to COVID-19

Healthwatch plays an important role in helping people to get the information they need, especially through the pandemic.

During the pandemic Healthwatch Solihull worked with stakeholders to ensure we were able to share timely and factual information to keep residents informed.

This year we helped 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.
- Supporting the community volunteer response.
- Helping people to access the services they need.

Top three areas people have contacted us about.



Dentistry



Vaccines



GP Access

Early in the pandemic, we heard from people about the lack of clear-and often inaccurate information. Because of this our role became much more focused on providing people with clear, consistent advice and information to help address people's concerns.

The key questions people asked included:

- When will I receive my vaccine invitation?
- When will GP's be offering face-to-face appointments?
- How can I find an NHS dentist who is offering appointments?
- When will my cancer treatment resume?

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.

Early in the pandemic one lady told us *"without his treatment plan he won't survive, why are people with cancer being ignored?"*

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's senior 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.



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 Solihull is here for you.



www.healthwatchsolihull.org.uk



0808 196 3912



Enquiries@healthwatchsolihull.org.uk

Engaging with residents during COVID-19

Engaging with care homes

During lockdown we set up a telephone focused community outreach activity to help engage with local nursing and residential care providers. We interviewed residents and their family members along with care home staff at The Prince of Wales Nursing Home to discuss experiences of care and how the home had adapted throughout the pandemic. The project provided a great opportunity to develop new ways of engaging and gathering feedback from a community that had been significantly impacted by Covid-19.



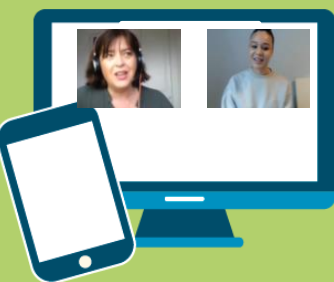
“I can watch TV and listen to different programmes and have a sing along”



“There is nothing staff won't do to help”

Virtual engagement

Throughout the pandemic our virtual and web-based platforms have been key in allowing us to engage with the local community. We have successfully hosted Zoom sessions, created online surveys and connected with residents via social media. One of our recent social media posts included a resident sharing her experience receiving the Covid-19 vaccine. To date, the post has reached over 7000 views online and generated feedback centre responses from other residents who had received their vaccine also. We plan to continue with our interactive online activities alongside face-to-face engagement to promote outreach to the many different communities living in Solihull.





(Photo taken in 2019 pre-pandemic at a training session)

Volunteers

At Healthwatch Solihull we are supported by seven volunteers who help us find out what people think is working and what improvements people would like to make to services.

This year our volunteers:

- Provided support on our GP access project by testing out surveys and providing input when deciding the research topic.
- Took part in mystery shopping and online feedback gathering.
- Represented the voices of Solihull residents and volunteers at virtual board meetings.
- Continued to support Healthwatch Solihull from home by attending virtual meetings and assisting with projects.



Volunteer Board Representative - James

"I have been with Healthwatch Solihull for a year and a half and prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, I was involved with report writing and attended awareness and outreach events. As a result of lockdown, volunteering activities understandably had to change however I have still been able to provide my input with research projects via virtual meetings. Although there have been many changes over the past 12 months, I have continued to support Healthwatch Solihull where possible and this year was successfully appointed as the Volunteer Board Representative for the organisation. I am looking forward to being able to further champion the voices of residents and volunteers living across Solihull and to also provide my expertise and knowledge whilst on the board."



Helping young people - Rhiannon

"Young people have been massively affected during the pandemic. From reception age to university age, young people have struggled mentally to cope with the pandemic and how it has changed their education experience and personal lives. I have regularly updated young people on the many ways they can access mental health support in Solihull, as well as gathering views from young people."



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 at Healthwatch Solihull.



www.healthwatchsolihull.org.uk



0808 196 3912



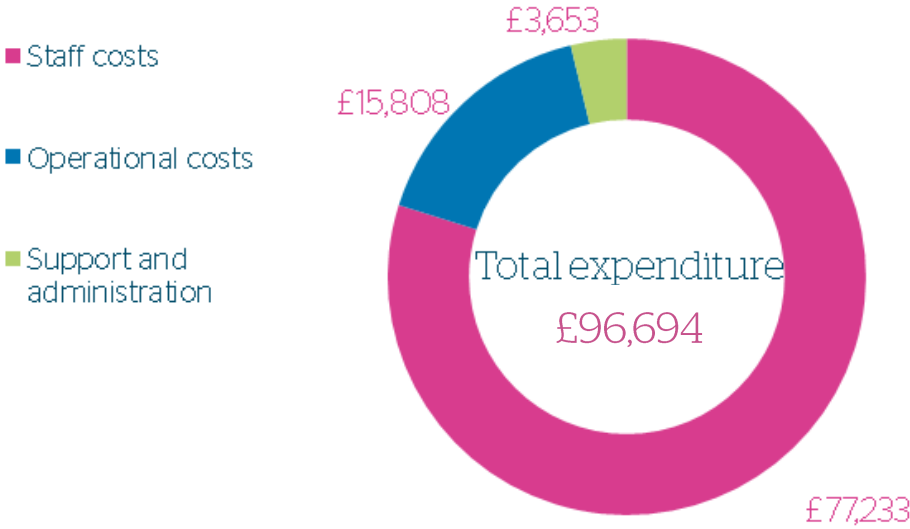
enquiries@healthwatchsolihull.org.uk

Finances

Income

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We received £116,491.73 from Solihull MBC in 2020-2021.

Expenditure



Next steps & thank you

Top three priorities for 2021-22

- Supporting the restoration and recovery of services.
- Gathering feedback from across Solihull, including all communities.
- Engage with and influence the ICS in Solihull giving Solihull residents a strong voice.

Next steps

- Following national guidelines we will look at the next steps and how we can recommence face to face community engagement.
- Following up on each of our reports, looking at the actions and recommendations to ensure changes are made as a result of what residents tell us.
- Working with local organisations and partners to reach more seldom heard groups.

“As a team, we would like to thank everyone who shared their stories with us this year. Every single piece of information is vital and helps us to identify key issues that need further investigation. I would like to thank our brilliant volunteers who have shown real dedication over the last year, as well as the staff team who have continually adapted throughout what has been a difficult time for everyone. Each resident who shares their views is helping towards better services for all. We look forward to the year ahead, continuing to hear from people across Solihull.”

Natalie Travers – Healthwatch Solihull Manager



Message from our CEO



Andy Cave

CEO Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull

The past year has been extremely testing for Solihull. Health and social care services have worked tirelessly under unprecedented pressure to care for citizens during the pandemic, and we at Healthwatch Solihull 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 health inequalities that meant Covid-19 had such a disproportionate impact on Solihull's most vulnerable communities.



“There will be no ‘quick fix’ for these longstanding issues, but we believe the resilience and resourcefulness the borough displayed during the pandemic means solutions will be found. For our part, Healthwatch Solihull 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 aim to 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.

The restoration and recovery of services offers opportunities as well as challenges. The new Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System, 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 Solihull will champion Solihull to have an equal footing and voice as part of the Birmingham and Solihull system.

Integrated Care Systems are designed to accommodate the specific needs of different communities, something particularly important somewhere as diverse as Solihull. Solihull is rightly proud of this diversity, yet many communities have suffered worse than others, both before and during the pandemic. Care Home residents, bereaved men and multi faith communities were just some of the communities we engaged with during lockdown, and we will continue to reach out across the borough 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, and that everyone can access the best possible care for them.



Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Solihull, Enterprise Centre, B37 7TP

Contract held by: Healthwatch Birmingham, Cobalt Square, 83 Hagley Rd, Birmingham B16 8QG

Healthwatch Solihull 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 eight 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 vulnerability throughout the pandemic and our focus on inequalities.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We use a range of tools to identify key themes and make decisions, we include our group of volunteers who help us to engage with local community groups, as well as being part of large public forums, and listening to what people tell us on our Information and Signposting line.

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 a webform on our website, provided a feedback centre/rate and review system, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities 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. This year we have done this by, for example, we engaged with local care homes to speak to residents virtually, we engaged with local faith groups to increase feedback from their members, and we ran sessions for men to speak about mental health and baby loss.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website, www.healthwatchsolihull.org.uk

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
GP Access Report	GP’s collectively responded and agreed to an action plan to improve communication with patients. They committed to working with us to improve patient experience of local health services.
Blood Tests in Solihull	UHB changed the layout of the service as per our recommendations, making the service accessible to all. They also changed the system of calling people through as per our comments.
Care Homes in Solihull	Following feedback shared by us from residents families, Solihull Council assured us that care homes would all provide equipment so that safe outdoor visits could continue.
Solihull Citizens and Covid-19 Lockdown	Birmingham and Solihull Local Pharmaceutical Committee (BSoL LPC) up-to-date advice about collecting prescriptions during lockdown. University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust is consulting Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull about communications with patients.

Responses to recommendations and requests

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 our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Solihull is represented on the Solihull Health and Wellbeing Board by Andy Cave, CEO Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by representing the views and experiences of Solihull residents and highlighting key issues.

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