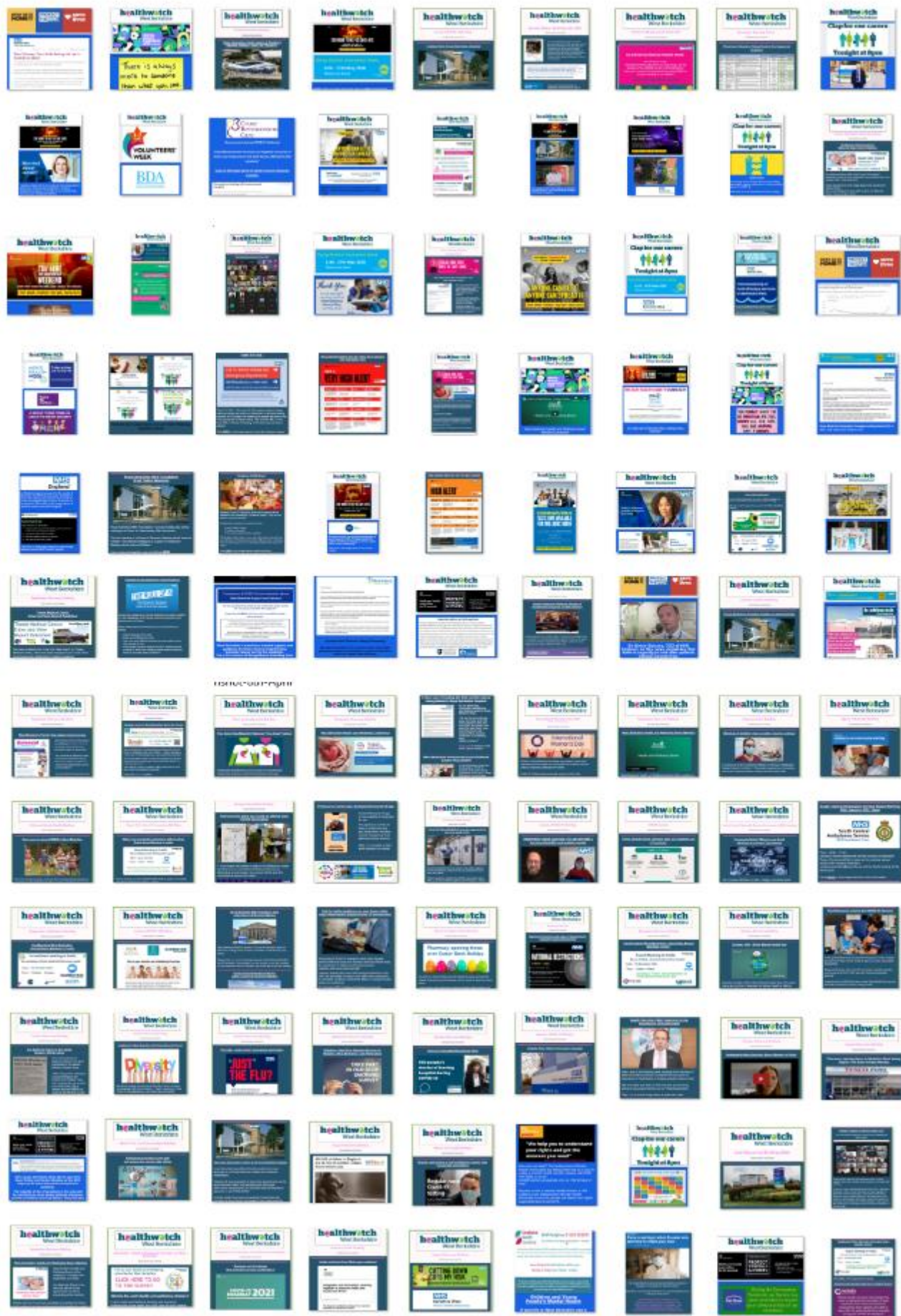




On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch West Berkshire Annual Report 2020-21



All Newsletter Covers produced during COVID-19

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West Berks Diversity Forum

“The Healthwatch West Berkshire team are always incredibly responsive and exemplar of active listening”

James Wilcox (Fair Close Centre)

Message from our Chair

Welcome to the Healthwatch West Berkshire (HWWB) Annual Report for 2020/21.

When I wrote my report this time last year it was difficult to look to the future and envisage the on-going havoc wreaked by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and resultant impact on the provision of health care to the community.

Despite the difficulties imposed by remote working in a virtual world, Healthwatch West Berkshire has continued to be the essential, and successful, conduit for patient feedback.



**Mike Fereday, Chair
Healthwatch West Berkshire**

“..it is my firm belief that we impact the provision of local health and care services provided to the local community for the better.”

While there have been many dark days, the light at the end of the tunnel is glowing ever brighter fuelled by the fantastic efforts of scientists around the world to produce effective vaccines in an unbelievably short period of time and the subsequent roll-out by local health professionals. For West Berkshire, the CCG, the Primary Care Networks, Practice Managers, Practice Staff and volunteers can feel justly proud of the smooth and efficient way that the local vaccination centre was set up and run. It follows that much of the work of HWWB this year has been Covid 19 related.

Remote working and virtual meetings have continued to be the norm which has impacted on activities such as “Enter and View”. Given the national disaster of coronavirus infected patients being discharged from hospitals to care homes, a member of the Healthwatch West Berkshire staff, with full PPE and taking effective infection control measures, was able to visit several care homes to gather the experiences of residents and staff as to how they were affected by the pandemic. I am humbled by the dedication of this individual in performing this activity.

Adapting to the new way of working was challenging but I am delighted to commend the staff of Healthwatch West Berkshire for the way that they have responded. Our monthly Newsletters became daily as we sought to provide the residents of West Berkshire with up-to-date information on the pandemic. Of particular note was our fifth “Thinking Together” event which was held as a virtual event. This enabled providers and recipients of mental health support to exchange views. Holding the event virtually had both *pros* and *cons* but it proved to be very successful. Concerns that we may have lost participants because of digital exclusion issues proved to be largely unfounded thanks to welcome support from the voluntary sector.

Joint Covid 19 Survey and Report for 'Berkshire West'

HWWB took part in a joint survey with Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham on how Covid 19 had affected individuals. We took the opportunity to target and engage particularly with the residents of West Berkshire. It was clear that there was a huge anxiety created in the public as everyday services moved online, changed location, were suspended, or just stopped operating. Major issues highlighted included Phlebotomy (which seems to have been largely resolved) and specifically Dental services, which effectively ceased to operate in any meaningful way for much of 2020.

Maternity Survey , Report and Forum to obtain people's views and experience.

Following our survey of women using maternity services which was updated to take account of Covid 19 issues, we published our report on the maternity experience. In West Berkshire, the levels of care are generally very good, though the maternity experience report highlighted some issues that may warrant further investigation and potential changes – a startling finding of the report being that 25% of women were dissatisfied with their maternity care. A significant number of women were found to have given birth in hospitals in adjoining counties (outside the Bucks, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care System (ICS) highlighting the cross-border issues we experience in West Berkshire.

West Berkshire Diversity Forum

HWWB hosted the second West Berkshire Diversity Forum – another virtual event – which focussed on how Covid 19 had affected individuals, their families and the community. This enabled the community (people of colour) to share their experience during the pandemic with the intention of learning from the feedback and how this should impact on health and social care service in West Berkshire.

CAMHS Survey & Focus group work

In February 2021 HWWB undertook an online survey exploring the views and perceptions of the parents/guardians of children who were currently using the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). I hope our report, when published, will be a springboard for the root and branch transformations that will improve the mental health and emotional wellbeing of our children and young people in West Berkshire.

In terms of healthcare provision, the pandemic has continued to change the way in which people interface with GP surgeries with much greater reliance on digital technology. HWWB will continue to have an important role in ensuring that the vulnerable and those unable to adapt are not left behind and overlooked by the NHS.

Finally...

In conclusion, it is my firm belief that we impact the provision of local health and care services provided to the local community for the better. That this has been achieved, once again largely devoid of any face-to-face contact, is entirely due to the enthusiasm and vigour shown by the Chief Officer, HWWB staff, volunteers and Board members. Of course, we could not have done this without the willingness of statutory and Health and Social care organisations to listen to us, to work with us and to respond positively to the issues raised on behalf of local people.



**Mike Fereday, Chair
Healthwatch West Berkshire**

About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in **West Berkshire**. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support you 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 an 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.



"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 of 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

1137 people

this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

1,115,638 people

this year via social media, newsletters & our website.

Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported via digital

387,909 people

during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

Making a difference to care



We published

2 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made 24 recommendations for improvement.

33 % of recommendations

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

Health and care that works for you



22 volunteers

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they contributed 800/100 hours/days.

We employ 4 p/t staff

2.6% of whom are full time equivalent, which is the same as the previous year.

We received

£98,000 in funding

from our local authority in 2020-21, the same as the previous year.

The logo for Healthwatch West Berkshire, featuring the word 'healthwatch' in a stylized font with a green dot over the 'a' in 'watch', and 'West Berkshire' in a smaller font below it.

Healthwatch West Berkshire Maternity Report

Theme one: Then and now Maternity



Then: access to NHS Maternity services

Thanks to people sharing their experiences of maternity we were able to highlight a message that all was not good for those giving birth in West Berkshire and for new mums also.

Our report found that one in five of those women answering the survey told us they were unhappy with their maternity care and almost one in ten found the experience traumatic.

HWWB also found that only half the women surveyed felt they were given all the information they needed. The most worrying figures relate to those women who said they received little or no information or advice during their pregnancy: 12% and in the 10 days post-partum: 21%. We found 3 out of 10 women felt they didn't get the emotional support they needed during pregnancy. Of more concern was that 4 in 10 women felt that they had little or none of their emotional support needs met. Given the dangers of postpartum depression, this is a concerning figure and one that needs to be addressed.

Approximately 6 out of 10 women felt free to make their own decisions and believed that options and choices were well explained, leaving 4 out of 10 who did not. It is striking that although a third expressed the desire to give birth at home, however, only 5% of the sample achieved this. Leading to the question is shared decision making real in maternity?

Of particular note, was the communication 'gap', with many feeling they did not know what to do around important issues: including getting in touch with their midwife and what to do if they were not available; baby weighing and how important this was or even how to do it safely. There were inconsistencies from the four local hospital Trusts around partners visiting or accompanying pregnant women. It is important this feedback does not get lost.



Now: Ongoing maternity issues

Thanks to patients sharing their experience of maternity, HWWB has actively campaigned to ensure that the issue of maternity is right at the top of 'the worry list' for the local NHS leaders and West Berkshire's Health and Well Being Board. Asking for scrutiny and service improvements to be made is crucial to ensure national scandals are not brushed off as 'well its not like that here.'

We were delighted to take our Maternity report to the Health and Well Being Board for an in depth discussion of local services in September 2020. The report had 14 recommendations

Our initial survey captured the views of 190 women, following on from a joint survey in 2018 that heard from 1400 across the BOB ICS area. With recent national maternity scandals to the fore, Shrewsbury's leading to the *Ockendon Report**, which followed on from others including Morecombe Bay and the birth inequalities for Ethnically Diverse Communities scandal*, it's clear Maternity services are not in the place they need to be for scores of women and more importantly it's not being talked about! 1 in 5 women being unhappy with their experience points to systematic issues even in an area of relatively good health like West Berkshire.

In addition, HWWB received some post survey Covid maternity feedback:

- It has emerged from talking to new mums within the *West Berkshire Maternity Forum* that **Health Visitors (HV)** play a vital role, in supporting them postnatally. The HV service has been greatly affected by being unable to operate normally with limited mitigation being open to the service during the pandemic. This has inevitably had a huge impact on new mums.
- The communication 'gap', left many feeling they did not know what to do around important issues: such as how to get in touch with their midwife and what to do if the midwife was not available
- There were inconsistencies from the four local hospital Trusts around partners visiting or accompanying pregnant women.

"We had our 6-week check done at the same time as her jabs but no measurements. Don't even get me started on trying to get her weighed that's been an absolute nightmare back and forth with both doctors and Health Visitors"

As a result of our report Hampshire Hospitals have agreed to locate a Maternity service within West Berkshire, with Great Western Hospital happy to consider it if there is funding available.

We have also established a *West Berkshire Maternity Forum*, allied to the other three maternity voice groups in surrounding areas. It is hoped it will be supported to become a real voice for pregnant women/new mums in West Berkshire.

HWWB urges the BOB ICS, West Berkshire Health and Well Being Board & NHS England to keep a keener eye on patient feedback with regard to maternity in its transformation plans and hope overall services will begin to become equitable for all with satisfaction levels far higher in future.

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 is here for you.



www.healthwatchwestberks.org.uk

01635 886 210

contact@Healthwatchwestberks.org.uk



Theme two: Then and now

Accessing Covid Vaccinations



Then: access to Covid-19 Vaccinations

Being able to get an appointment with a GP has been a priority for Healthwatch since it was first established. For many, including those from vulnerable groups such as Rough Sleepers, the Ethnically Diverse Communities, Canal Boat dwellers and disabled groups this can often be far from straightforward.

A West Berkshire Resident whose mother had travelled over from India to visit found themselves 'stuck' in the UK as the pandemic caused another lockdown. They tried to register their mother with a local Newbury GP, only to be told they needed a letter from the Home Office, despite her having a valid visa.



"My Mum had struggled to register with the GP however with fantastic effort from Healthwatch team, we have managed to get her two doses of vaccine in Newbury - thanks Healthwatch team"

When vaccinations opened up to vulnerable groups the son tried again to register his mother and, despite her visa being valid until 2022, was told again by the surgery receptionist a Home office letter was required.

At this point he approached Healthwatch West Berkshire:

- We contacted the Berkshire West CCG who clarified the correct procedure under the GP Enhanced Service specification that she should be registered and entitled to a Covid-19 vaccination
- We then wrote to the Practice Manager and the lady was registered, received her jab (as did the son and his wife as carers) at the Newbury Racecourse site.



Then: access to Covid-19 Vaccination

An older couple who live on a narrow boat had cruised down from the Midlands and found themselves on the canal just outside Newbury when the second lockdown happened. Both were due to be vaccinated and had received NHS texts offering them vaccinations back in the Midlands. As they could not get there due to lockdown, having no transport other than the canal boat, they tried to register with a local GP practice

Their own surgery was only offering postal access to national sites and advised them to seek temporary registration in West Berkshire. They completed the online form for the nearest Surgery. The response from the surgery said because they were registered so far away they would not allow a temporary registration for Covid Vaccination. Additionally, they both received text messages from the NHS to book an appointment at national sites, but the link only offered places around the Midlands surgery where they were registered.

They found that the local Vaccination Centre was the Newbury Racecourse. Having found a number for the Racecourse they were told the vaccination centre did not have a phone number, but it was suggested that they try another local Newbury Surgery, as they are 'nice people'. The couple contacted this surgery in Newbury, to be told the surgery didn't want to register them.



As the BMA states: "Anyone, regardless of their country of residence, is entitled to receive NHS primary medical services at a GP practice. This means tourists, or those from abroad visiting friends or family in England, should be treated in the same way as a UK resident."

The couple then rang the national 119 number to book an appointment at the Newbury Racecourse, and were told that the Newbury site is not registered with the NHS booking service, it was only for people registered at a local surgery! They could not understand that they had done what had been requested of them, but were still no closer to organising Covid-19 vaccinations.

Finally the couple contacted HWWB. We contacted the CCG and subsequently the surgery the couple had initially applied to in order to determine why it was unable to register this couple to get vaccinated. On receiving the call from us, the surgery registered the couple as temporary patients so they could receive the vaccination.

The couple were registered, and brilliantly offered the vaccine at the Newbury Racecourse, as they didn't have transport to get to the Mass Vaccination sites in Reading or Basingstoke, (which was policy for temporary patients,) but they could get the train to Newbury Racecourse and got their jabs there.



Now: accessing your GP during the pandemic

As a result of people sharing their experiences, we contacted the Berkshire West CCG and their Covid Vaccination Board who reminded all the local GP surgeries that under the National Guidance all people were to be registered to ensure they received their vaccination when due.

HWWB also raised this issue of Rough Sleeper Covid-19 'jabs' with the local Covid Vaccination Board. We were delighted when the Board and Dr James Kennedy set up a virtual clinic working with the Newbury Soup Kitchen/ West Berkshire Homeless Team to get our local Rough Sleepers vaccinated early in the New Year.

Despite the excellent 'Right to Care' card produced by Healthwatch England and NHS England, national initiatives around 'GP Registration', *it's still not working!* We still have too many vulnerable people approaching surgeries and being told they can't register without ID.

HWWB is calling on NHS Improvement and the BOB ICS to conduct a formal review into how people should be registered either temporarily or on a full-time basis. HWWB are asking whether difficulties with securely accessing patient records can be worked around to avoid 'flat refusals' to register someone visiting a surgery by GP receptionists, who are simply following a local surgery process!





Responding to COVID-19

Healthwatch plays an important role in helping people to get the information they need, especially through 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 1137 people by:

- Providing up to date advice on the COVID-19 response locally
- Feeding back to the NHS and West Berkshire Council what the public were telling us
- Linking people to reliable up-to-date information
- Running the personal stories of residents & key workers in our *Covid Diaries* page
- Supporting the vaccine roll-out and helping with community engagement
- Supporting the community volunteer response
- Helping people to access the services they need

Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



Phlebotomy



Early in the pandemic, we heard from many people about the inability to get an emergency blood test. Many were concerned that having consulted a GP, who said their case was urgent, they then found there was a three/four week delay to get a test done at the major centres as their GP didn't do blood tests. We even had our local MP 's office asking if we could help signpost or assist and one case where they were seen by a consultant before the blood test were done

Following this:

- We raised it at the CCG Planned Care Board?
- A recovery plan was put in place
- More staff were recruited and new booking systems were put in place



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 is here for you.

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- 01635 886 210
- contact@healthwatchwestberks.org.uk



Volunteers

At Healthwatch West Berkshire we are supported by 22 volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services.

This year our volunteers:

- Helped us get in touch with Ethnically Diverse Communities who were struggling in the pandemic producing our online surveys.
- Held focus groups for new mums feelings isolated to capture their feedback during Covid
- Helped us analyse key feedback and write reports for CAMHS, Covid-19, Maternity
- Managed online Zoom meetings around the new Joint Health and Well Being Strategy to capture the thoughts of key groups
- Helped us write online surveys that were 'public friendly' avoiding jargon

"When I don't know what to do...I phone Healthwatch...so helpful."

Mark Landreth Smith



Board Member – Lesley

When I retired in March 2017 I wanted to carry on contributing to the health and well-being of local residents. So, alongside my part-time consultancy roles within Public Health, I have been proud to be a member of the Healthwatch West Berkshire Board for the last 2 years.

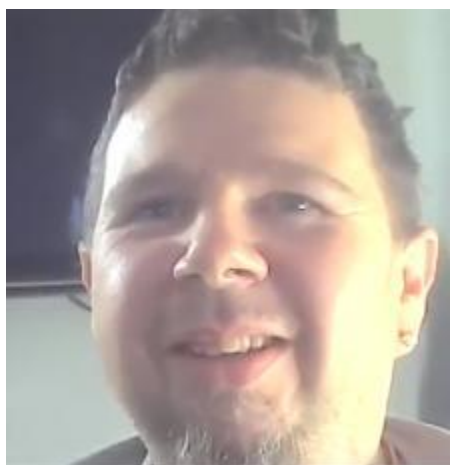
I have been involved with the HWWB team in looking at a variety of care services including maternity services, CAMHS, primary care and services for ethnically diverse communities. I have been able to use the skills and knowledge, from working in the NHS, to help contribute to the valuable work that Healthwatch does to improve local NHS services. I feel privileged to be a member of such a professional, able and dedicated Board.



Younger Volunteer – Abbie

Working with Healthwatch has been very insightful. Being part of the team gave me an opportunity to gain some understanding of people's experiences using local health services, and how important they are in making sure those who need it are provided with the proper support.

It's great to think I may have contributed, albeit in a small way, to making a difference for those who are in need of the most help.



Board member Paul

Having recently found out about Healthwatch in 2020, then asked to be an active volunteer, has given me a big insight into the varied but important work they undertake bearing in mind this is only a small team but with a large outreach within all care and health sectors.

It has enabled me to share my knowledge and understanding with those who would not have direct experience within the world of Disability thus helping to bring disability to the forefront of Healthwatch and all its workstreams.

We should all aspire to give as much support as we can to those in need, they deserve our endeavours.



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 West Berkshire](mailto:volunteer@healthwatchwestberks.org.uk).



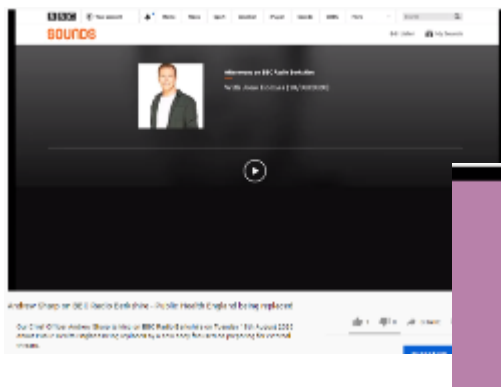
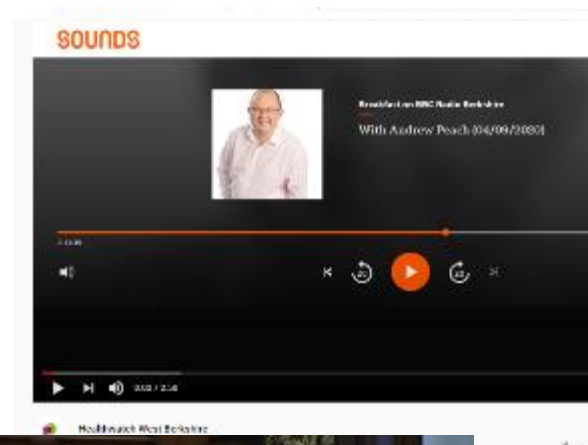
www.healthwatchwestberks.org.uk



01635 886210

volunteer@healthwatchwestberks.org.uk

Some of our media coverage



Laura Farris, MP for Newbury, mentioning our Maternity Report in House of Commons



What our partners say about Healthwatch West Berkshire....

"All at Berkshire West CCG would like to take the opportunity to thank the team at Healthwatch West Berkshire for your approach throughout the 2020/21 coronavirus pandemic. You have provided support where merited and challenge where necessary to ensure the best possible patient outcomes.

In particular, we would like to thank you for the helpful and comprehensive report entitled "Covid 19 First Wave Survey and Post First Wave findings in West Berkshire". It is clear, that a lot of effort was made to capture and reflect the public view and we were pleased to have had the opportunity to comment on the recommendations within the report ahead of its publication."

Dr Abid Irfan, Chair, Berkshire West CCG



"Community United West Berkshire has been working with Healthwatch West Berkshire throughout the pandemic, signposting cases involving the ethnically diverse communities and being involved with the West Berkshire Diversity Forum as well as the Community Link Conversation.

Together we have been advocating that the word 'BAME' no longer be used with reference to the ethnically diverse communities in West Berkshire since our Belonging West Berkshire event in September, which UK government has also supported the abolishing of the use of this word.

We value the spirit of collaboration and look forward to more especially as a partner in the West Berkshire Diversity Forum and the Long Covid Project."

Community United West Berkshire



"Healthwatch are a valued key stakeholder in Dementia Friendly West Berkshire. They are consistently involved in meetings, projects and feedback and are committed to making things better for people living with dementia and their carers in West Berkshire. Representatives from Healthwatch are always keen to share ideas and expertise and are first to step up and share tasks and events. All in all a very valued partner"

Dementia Friends West Berkshire
Victoria Rowland (Dementia Co-ordinator)



What our partners say(cont)....

"In all of the work we do with Healthwatch West Berkshire, they constantly demonstrate a tireless commitment to ensuring that the people of West Berkshire are represented and have their voice heard. This has included acting as an essential bridge to local government, the health and wellbeing board and other decision makers/ representative bodies in the area. Further they are a critical friend – helping to ensure our plans, proposals and processes are developed in full consideration of the needs of the people they represent and advocate for.

The support of Healthwatch West Berkshire has been critical to the success of our engagement to date and is essential for our plans for the future. The whole team provide a fantastic service to the community and we are proud to call them our partners."

Hampshire Hospital NHS Trust



"I would hope that after being closed for the whole of 2020 and part of 2021 that the Patient Information Point and Healthwatch will be able to resume its close working relationship and start working together again to help patients in the local community get the best treatment and help they can.

Thank you to all the staff of Healthwatch for your help and support with information and at times the urgent assistance you have given the PIP's Volunteers. We have seen how your staff's quick response to a bad experience can help a patient and how fast it can calm the situation down. Look forward to working with you all again in 2021."

**Patient information Point
West Berkshire Community Hospital**

Patient Information Point



"During this difficult year, Healthwatch has been supportive and encouraging of older people's views to ensure that they feel listened to. Through Healthwatch we have enabled older people to feed into the new Health and Wellbeing strategy for the Berkshire West CCG area, which will have a long-term impact on the services and support for older people in the local area."

Fiona Price, CEO Age UK Berkshire

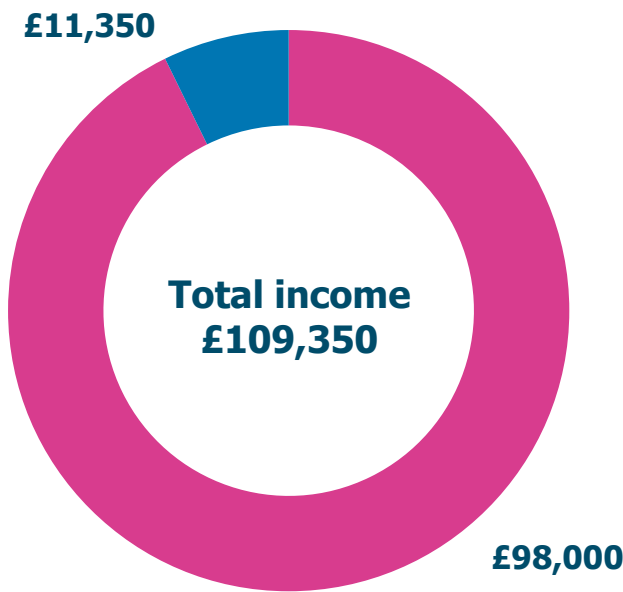


Finances

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

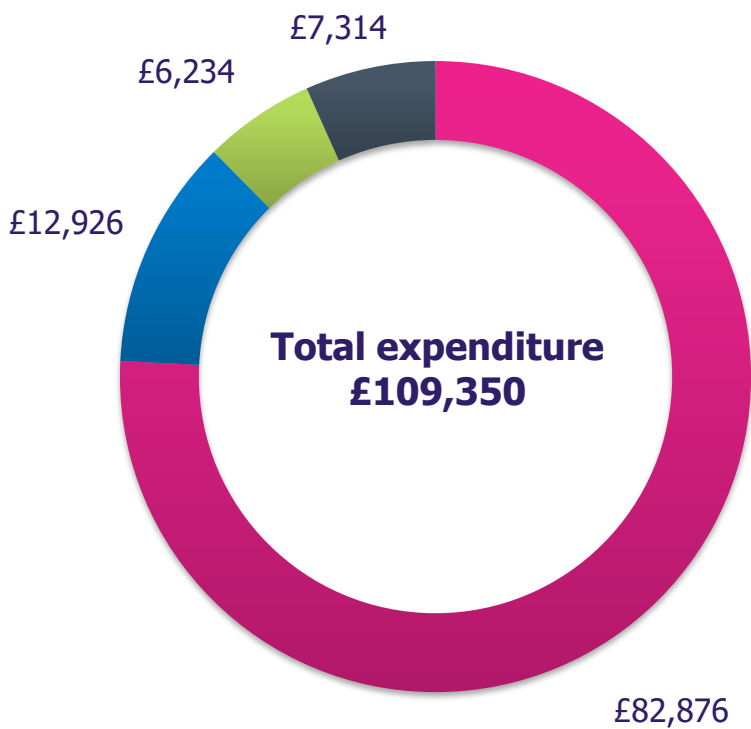
Income

- Funding received from West Berkshire Council
- Additional Project Funding



Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Support and administration
- Project Funding carried forward



Next steps

Top three priorities for 2021-22

1. Ensuring equitable recovery of all services from Covid including Dentistry, Primary Care, Secondary Care and Community services, with no group left behind due to lack of a 'loud voice to fight their corner
2. Maternity services in West Berkshire need to improve and be the same for women who use other hospitals and with Commissioners not only focussing on the Royal Berkshire Hospital. We will champion the West Berkshire Maternity Forum to ensure women and their families are listened to
3. Children and Young people's mental health services are still not responding quickly enough and Covid-19 may have created even more demand. We will work with partners and Commissioners to ensure this improves and doesn't lead to years on waiting lists

Next steps

- Ensure recovery of services is fair for all. By capturing real life experiences via all our feedback mechanisms our champions network of Voluntary Organisations and including in person again, once allowed, as well as digitally. We can then present providers and commissioners with accurate feedback to how services are recovering. Additionally, we can suggest amendments and ensure meaningful patient engagement is taking place
- We will champion the creation of a functioning and meaningful Maternity Forum locally for mums, which represents all the woman and families giving birth in West Berkshire. It will cover all the maternity units, not just the Royal Berkshire Hospital. We aim to engage all the relevant Maternity Voices groups and also the Commissioners at Berkshire West CCG

Following up on last year's recommendations?

- We will continue to support the work of the joint West Berkshire Diversity forum with Community United who have been instrumental in allowing us to reach some seldom heard from communities, which have suffered disproportionality through the pandemic
- We continue to play an active role for the Homeless in West Berkshire. We remain committed to our target of zero involuntary Rough Sleeping in West Berkshire and ensuring that the homeless are recognised as a vulnerable group by the NHS
- We will use our voice at key Committees and Boards to deliver feedback from the public to those who commission services with the aim of an improvement in services to all, delivered without exception fairly



"Healthwatch have helped us considerably by sharing the feedback from people who use our services and communicating updates about access to our services with residents and other health, social care and community organisations across West Berkshire at a time when we recognise the importance of people being able to access the information, services and support they need."

Alex Whitfield, CEO, Hampshire Hospitals

Message from our Chief Officer

This was the toughest of years for us all, but especially those working in and around Health & Social Care, where it was clear that the best of responses, though heroic, hard fought & selfless, were failing and that the many unknowns of Covid-19 were reaping the most terrible of tolls. We reorganised completely to become a useful transmitter of up to date information and a conduit to feedback vital patient stories to the decision makers. While many were supportive, sadly much of the health and care system closed inwards and decided not to listen to the public's views. Others will decide how serious that was as a decision. In the period of this report 253 residents of West Berkshire died with Covid-19



**Andrew Sharp, Chief Officer
Healthwatch West Berkshire**

We worked flat out repurposing our work and concentrating on getting as much information out as we could as things changed daily with the first Covid-19 pandemic wave. Our newsletters changed from monthly to daily, introducing new sections on our website for easy access to groups and conditions affected (eg: LD, Carers, Mental Health, Pregnancy, the isolated, etc.)

HWWB ensured key meetings continued to take place and set up new online meetings with Adult Social Care and the voluntary sector. In addition, we attended weekly briefings with the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group and Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH). We discussed the patient feedback we received on the challenges faced, from where to reach a service, to how to get a prescription.

Our community's response throughout was marvellous, often stepping in where services wouldn't or couldn't. The *Community Response Hub* was set-up, instantly offering help by joining up with both voluntary sector and impromptu groups. It was the very best of us. Our front-line medics and key workers were too.



"As Sir Michael Marmot said 'there can be no more important task for those concerned with the health of the population than to reduce health inequalities. Review what can be done to reduce health inequalities and then do it', our key aim is to make sure this happens in West Berkshire"

Andrew Sharp, Chief Officer, Healthwatch West Berkshire

HWWB did however find gaps that really worried and unnerved our residents, who fed back to us. Issues from three week waiting lists for emergency blood tests, to the entire Memory Clinic service for dementia diagnosis being suspended, and only re-opening in September 2020. This created even longer waiting times for those in need of answers, with those carers hoping for relief now even more isolated with their loved ones.

Dentistry also stood out as a key failing service, and largely still does. Oral health is seen largely as 'external' to the Health system – and was treated as an afterthought in pandemic service planning. Consequently, many went months in severe pain, while others struggled to access services, they thought they were entitled to. It became almost impossible to find an NHS dentist with a short wait, but waiting times disappeared for those paying privately.

As the first wave abated recovery of services became buzz words. We actively sought the view of the public around many issues and fed this back. Secondary care locally responded well. Even Phlebotomy returned to a near normal service in the New Year, although with major inequalities built in dependent on the continuing issue of surgery on-site testing.

GP's struggled to cope with a backlog of patients, with odd national edicts around access from NHS England, and more access points for patients to deal with (eg: text, email and social media). Face-to-face GP meetings were harder to get, wait times on phone systems increased and public levels of dissatisfaction started to grow. Ultimately, in many cases, GPs were harder to reach. New triage protocols also caused issues, especially for those who are digitally excluded or vulnerable. This highlights the fact that those already marginalised found it ever harder to get help and services struggled to find a way to get to them and be of help. This was all made worse by the sheer exhaustion of key staff, over not one, but three waves of Covid.

It's clear *Health Inequalities*, better termed *Health Inequities* (an inherent unfairness in how two residents are treated for similar conditions) needs far reaching and urgent action. It's good to see the BOB ICS, Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) and the West Berkshire Health and Well Being Board looking at this seriously, with inequalities a key priority and a Joint Health and Well Being Strategy for all to get behind.

As Sir Michael Marmot said: *"there can be no more important task for those concerned with the health of the population than to reduce health inequalities. Review what can be done to reduce health inequalities and then do it."* Our key aim is to make sure this happens in West Berkshire.



**Andrew Sharp, Chief Officer
Healthwatch West Berkshire**



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

Website: www.healthwatchwestberks.org.uk

Telephone: 01635 886 210

Email: contact@healthwatchwestberks.org.uk



Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch England, 2 Redman Place, Stratford, E20 1JQ. Healthwatch West Berkshire is run by The Advocacy People **who are the contract holders**. Healthwatch **West Berkshire** 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 **8** lay members who live locally, and 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 **4** times and made decisions on matters such as **safely visiting care homes, holding our Thinking Together Event virtually** and **postponing our End of Life conference until it can be held in a face to face environment risk free**.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. **We capture all the feedback we receive and signposting requests to look to see if any themes emerge for future work or investigation. With its estimated only 1 in 100 people complaining about poor service in health and social care just a few reported cases with a similar story alerts our attention. We then check with partners, CQC & discuss at Board meetings held in public.**

We also use our public focus group events, such as the Maternity Forum to delve deeper into particular areas and our Champions group of voluntary organisations help provide key background intelligence that feeds into our priorities and work plan. We also work with our colleagues The Advocacy people running Health complaints to identify emerging issues. This combined with our active digital activity via web and social media gives the public many opportunities to influence our work priorities.

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, freepost response cards, by email, provided a webform on our website, 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, running jointly Three West Berkshire Diversity Forum conversations around Covid 19 and the vaccination programme. We are key members of the West Berkshire Learning Disability Partnership Board, Carers Strategy Partnership and the West Berkshire Dementia Alliance.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it via all our digital media, send copies to West Berkshire’s Public Libraries, all key stakeholders . Parish Councils, Patient Panels, voluntary groups, schools and colleges. Larger print and easy read versions are available on

2020-21 priorities

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Covid 19 Recovery of services	Phlebotomy services enhanced with more staff recruited & better digital access. Memory Clinics reopened. Equalities vaccination Board established. Digital Exclusion work targeted by CCG .
BAMER (Black, Asian, Ethnic Minorities, Refugee) health inequalities	Ethnically Diverse Communities (EDC)replaces BAMER term in Health & Well Being Board. West Berkshire Diversity Forum established
Maternity Services	Agreement for Hampshire Hospitals to offer services in West Berkshire in conjunction with Berks West CCG. West Berks Maternity Forum created
Children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)	Survey run, focus groups help and significant attention raised to areas of concern. Report to follow in June 2021

Responses to recommendations and requests

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations, however neither The Secretary of State for Health or The Department of Health and Social Care have responded to our Covid-19 report, when all other bodies have.

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.

We reported three key issues to Healthwatch England this year that were: 1. Discriminatory nature of the term BAME & use of EDC instead. 2. Free access to Dental for new mums unable to find an NHS dentist in 12 month period of free dental care during the pandemic 3. NHS Dental Issues around lack of access and failures to provide adequate service for residents during and after the pandemic

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch West Berkshire is represented on the West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board by Andrew Sharp, Chief Officer. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried our this role by attending every meeting, many sub groups (Integration Steering Board, Engagement ,Joint Health and Well Being Strategy, Mental Health Action Group, Ageing Well, Substance Abuse, Homeless Strategy Group) and delivering two key reports, Maternity and Covid 19.

thank you

I would again like to take this opportunity to thank our amazing Volunteer Board Members, (Mike Fereday, Lesley Wyman, Martha Vickers, Adrian Barker, Karen Swaffield, Judy McCulloch & Amanda Cunnington, and 'newby' Paul Wilson, our volunteers, our hard working small team (Alice, Michelle & Nathan), the support from our partners on the WB Health and Wellbeing Board Thanks also to our Health & Social Care partners, who are open and transparent & welcome our findings as key in helping improve services. I want to thank Catherine Williams, our Joint Healthwatch BOB ICS Officer who has managed to cope with a challenging year and provided five local Healthwatch with excellent information and representation but who made such a positive impression with everyone she met. To our remarkable voluntary sector, who daily perform miracles, local NHS and Social Care teams, Care Home staff, Domiciliary Carers and the thousands of 'unpaid' carers who were especially challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic. Big thanks to The Advocacy People team for unflinching support.

Finally, thanks also to the retiring Chair of The West Berkshire Health and Well Being Board, Dr Bal Bahia, who has been involved since the start and remains a working GP in West Berks and one of the most inspiring medics we have met!



Online Board meeting



Matthew Hilton
CEO, The Advocacy People



The Advocacy People are delighted that we are continuing our work to facilitate the delivery of Healthwatch services in West Berkshire. We see HWWB as a key piece of our overall mission to deliver excellent services to clients across our patch. The roles of advocacy organisations and Healthwatch have much in common - we believe we can deliver more effective and efficient services in addressing many of our challenges from a consistent perspective.

We have worked with local providers and with HWWB with the aim of getting rough sleepers into more settled lives, with GP registration, benefits and dental support. This was successful with HWWB supporting the advocacy work we undertook locally. We also work closely around emerging Health Complaint themes.

As we - hopefully - start to emerge from the challenges of the COVID pandemic, we can look back on a year of maintaining service delivery through what have been trying circumstances for all; and look forward to a constructive and productive future supporting the people of West Berkshire.



Covid-19 First Wave Survey & Post First Wave findings in West Berkshire

Feedback & Recommendations



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