



On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch Medway Annual Report 2020-21

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Message from our Chair

It's been a year that no-one could have predicted. Covid continues to have a huge impact on our health and care system and has affected every aspect of our work.

Despite working from our kitchen tables and spare rooms, we're proud of what we have achieved this year. We've continued to raise your voice and ensure decision makers hear what is important to you. They've been able to use your feedback to help them plan how to offer care and support during these difficult months.

Your story is powerful, so I wanted to take a moment to thank everyone who has got in touch this year and taken the time to share their experience of using Medway's health or social care services.

We've heard from more people than ever before, and I want you to know that each and every story is powerful and can make a difference. Keep telling those stories!

Other highlights this year include:

Hearing from the homeless community : Recently we spoke to five women and three men about their experience of being homeless in Medway. There is already a lot of hard work going on in Medway to support people who find themselves homeless, but we heard some stories that will help inform that work. For example, people talked to us about the challenge to visit traditional services in the daytime because they often sleep during the day so they can be awake and therefore safer during the night. We have suggested a pilot of a 'one stop shop' in the evenings offering a range of health and care services.

Giving community pharmacists a voice : We shared the stark stories of 101 pharmacists across Medway & Kent, in partnership with Healthwatch Kent. They told us what life had really been like for them. 72% of them told us that they didn't feel the system had learnt from the first wave to inform the second lockdown. Again, we'll be following up with pharmacists to understand what difference our recommendations have made.

Helping decision makers to hear from you : Every month we have been taking your stories directly to the people who make decisions. Our regular insight reports have been avidly read by commissioners, policy makers and social care leaders and helped them to plan what you need.

We hope you find this report useful. Do get in touch if you would like to know more about our work.

Graham Trice, Chair of the Healthwatch Medway Steering Group

About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Medway. 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 can 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.



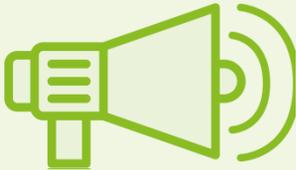
“Healthwatch Medway, along with the rest of the Healthwatch network, has done fantastic work throughout the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is more work ahead to ensure that everyone’s views are heard. COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities and to tackle these unfair health differences 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



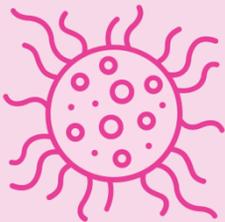
142 people

Contacted our Helpline this year. We listened to their experiences of health and social care and provided advice and information

458 people

used the advice and information on our website

Responding to the pandemic



During the pandemic, we worked with

31 Medway voluntary organisations

To get their voice, and that of their clients, heard by decision makers. We have been proactively gathering their feedback on a monthly basis.

Making a difference to care



We published

36 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

From this, we made **104 recommendations** for improvement.

Health and care that works for you



7 volunteers

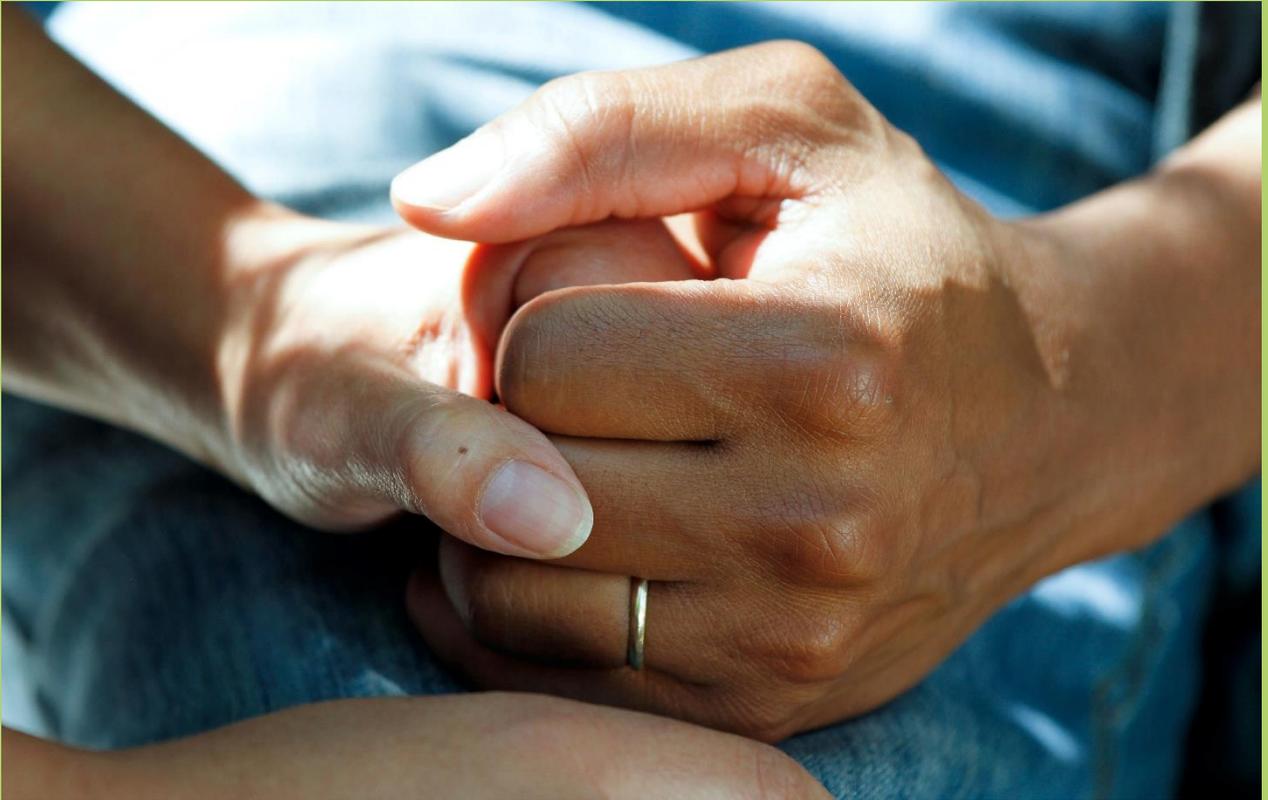
helped us to carry out our work offering hours of their time to help us make a difference.

We employ 2 staff

We received

£121,555 in funding

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



Care Homes : Then & Now



Then: support for Care Homes & Personal Assistants during Covid

Care Homes were hit very hard during the first wave of the Covid pandemic, but people who provide care in peoples' own homes were also struggling. We wanted to find out more.

We spoke in-depth to 53 organisations that provide care for people in Medway. That included Care Homes, Personal Assistants and Domiciliary Care providers. They told us what life had been like during Covid and what lessons had been learnt. The headlines were:

- Personal Assistants clearly told us that they felt left out and forgotten
- 45% of care homes told us they felt they got the help & support that they needed
- 69% of providers felt there were lessons to be learnt including discharge from hospital, timely testing & better information for Personal Assistants
- 38% of providers told us that they did not always get the support they needed from GPs

We shared all our findings directly with Medway Council, and presented our report to the Medway Health & Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee (HASC)



Now: making life a little bit easier for PAs

Thanks those that shared their stories, we've been able to make life a little bit easier for Personal Assistants in Medway.

Personal Assistants told us that they struggled to get PPE and had found it particularly hard to buy food for the person they care for during the first wave of the pandemic because they had no formal recognition of the role that they play.

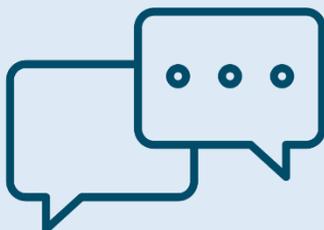
Medway Health & Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee HASC told us our report was "inciteful and informative" and have committed to working with us and other members of the Medway Better Together Consortium (which includes Medway Voluntary Action, Kent Association for the Blind, Carer's FIRST, & Medway Citizen Advice Bureau) to make improvements. Medway Council have also committed to make some changes which includes:

- Making PPE free for all Personal Assistants and those who provide care to others
- Medway Council have created an online portal where all care providers, including PAs, can order PPE & equipment
- Conversations have started to create a 'card' which PAs can use to clearly indicate that they look after someone. This will be particularly helpful to enable them to access supermarkets in the slots designated for Carers.



"We've been working with people and organisations who offer care to people throughout the pandemic and we've heard a huge amount of feedback. Our role is to make sure the right people hear those stories in the right way. Medway Council listened carefully, and have acted quickly to make changes which will make life a little bit easier for the many Personal Assistants who have been working so hard throughout the pandemic. We'll continue to give care homes and care providers a voice in the year ahead." Maggie Cane, Healthwatch Medway

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 Medway is here for you.



www.healthwatchmedway.com



0800 136 656



enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com



Looking for people who don't know they need to be found



Then: caring in a pandemic

More people than ever before found themselves looking after someone during the Covid pandemic.

During the pandemic, we wanted to reach people in Medway who were looking after someone but weren't yet getting support from the Carer agencies. These people are known as Hidden Carers.

We launched a campaign, in partnership with Carer's FIRST and the Medway Better Together Consortium, to reach Hidden Carers and ensure they knew what support was available.

Although we reached over 50,000 people in Medway at the height of the pandemic, very few people actually came forward and asked for help. This worried us and we wanted to understand what was stopping them and what we (and others) could do to reach them in the future.



Now: sharing our learning

We wanted to know what are the barriers that stop people from asking for help and what can we do to remove them. We brought together a number of women who were looking after their Mums to find out more about how they coped, what they needed and what was stopping them from reaching out for help.



“I’m still the daughter going round doing little bits. I don’t class myself as a carer. I’m just a daughter.”

This is what we learnt :

- People have low expectations of what care is available
- Carers feel a sense of duty, resignation and endurance
- People do not identify themselves as Carers
- People don’t know where to go to get help or information
- The person who is cared for, and sometimes the carer, often wish to stay independent and maintain control of the situation
- The single most effective way to overcome the barriers is a trusting relationship with a professional, who can reflect back to them that they are a carer. This person can then give information, signpost them to the most appropriate support and offer an invitation to talk about their experience of being a carer.

We have shared everything we learnt with all the members of the Medway Better Together Consortium to help them in their own plans to reach carers, as well as with wide stakeholders such as Medway Council and the NHS.

“I don’t consider myself to be a carer. I still separate it and think of a carer as a professional carer. I wouldn’t know how to define what I do.”



You can read this report, plus all our others, on our website

We’d love to hear what you think

www.healthwatchmedway.com



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 Medway residents by:

- Providing up to date advice on the COVID-19 response locally
- Providing up-to-date, accurate, trustworthy information
- Supporting the vaccine roll-out
- Creating a weekly newsletter for all NHS volunteers across Medway & Kent to ensure they could keep connected with their NHS Trust and free up NHS staff to focus on front line delivery
- Helping people to know what services were open and how to access them
- Shared regular insights about how people were coping that week to inform decision makers and help them plan emergency and then recovery services
- Held focused conversations with people who were still coping with the long term affects of Covid. Their feedback informed the NHS how best to support them.

Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



48% on GP services



10.5% on Dentistry



11% on Hospital Care



11% on Vaccines

Getting your vaccine questions answered



Unsurprisingly we've heard from lots of people about the vaccine programme. Our role has been to provide people with clear, consistent and concise advice and information articles on our website to help address people's concerns.

We also put people's vaccine questions directly to the lead for the Vaccine role out in Medway and published the answers on our website.

The key questions people were asking included:

- What are the plans for vaccine centres on the Hoo Peninsula?
- How will people who are housebound be vaccinated?



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 Medway is here for you.



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Volunteers

At Healthwatch Medway we are supported by seven 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 people have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online.
- Carried out website reviews of GP surgeries looking at the information they provide.
- Benefited from our training to help them gain digital skills which they could use at home as well as for their volunteering.
- Continued to attend meetings on our behalf and ensure peoples' voices are being heard.
- Scrutinised public engagement and consultations ; acting as a critical friend.
- Built relationships with the voluntary sector to ensure they, and their clients, had a voice and were heard by decision makers.
- Made decisions about our immediate and long term priorities.



Volunteering from home - Louise

"During lockdown I've been volunteering from home. I've been reviewing all the GP websites in Medway to see what information and support they have available for their patients. It was incredible to see how few had any information about where to get support for mental health, especially given the situation we are living through. My findings were included in a national report too which was very rewarding."



Giving communities a voice - Graham

"I've been a Healthwatch volunteer since its inception in 2013. Previously I would attend meetings & events to gather people's views. However, now I gather peoples' views over the phone. I've been reaching out to various groups and individuals. I've been gathering feedback about the challenges facing clients and patients, giving them a platform to share their own concerns. The feedback has been avidly read by decision makers to help them understand what people need."



Hearing from care homes - Marion

"Just before the pandemic, back when we could talk to people face to face, I was involved in visiting care homes and talking to residents and staff. We wanted to understand how a new GP service, which should see GPs visiting a care home every week, was working and if people were feeling the benefits of a regular GP visit. Then the pandemic hit, but we kept busy working on our reports. We had 24 to do so it was quite a task but it gave a true picture across Medway."



Volunteer with us

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, we'd love to hear from you.



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Finances

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

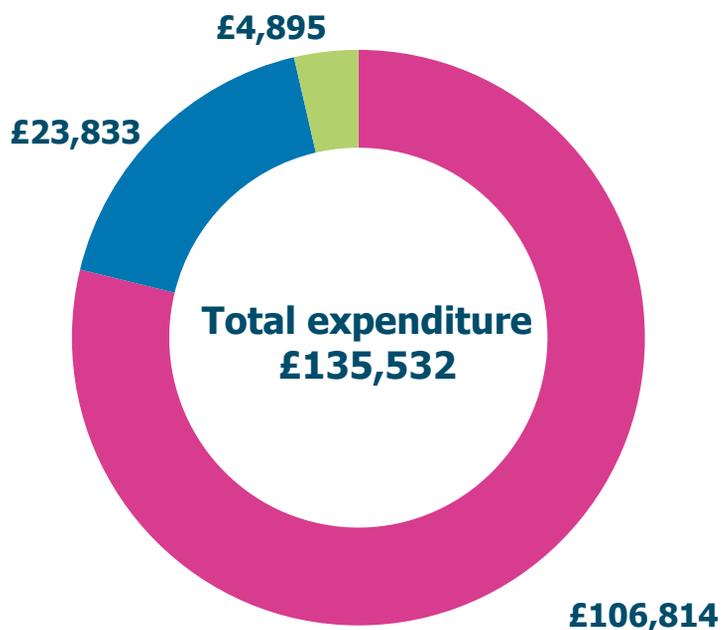
Income

- Funding received from local authority



Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Office costs



Next steps & thank you

Top three priorities for 2021-22

We're already working on our key priorities for the year ahead. We've deliberately left some space so that we can react and respond as the pandemic, and its impact, continues to unfold. Right now we are focusing on:

- Mental Health
- Access to GPs, particularly for people who have no technology
- Oral Hygiene

Next steps

As well as the new priorities, we will continue to work with Care Homes, Domiciliary Care providers and Personal Assistants to give them a voice as well as following up on our work with the homeless community and hidden carers.

As well as our focus on improving services, we continue to try and make ourselves better. A big priority for us this year is to secure accreditation for our Helpline which offers information & signposting to 142 people every year. Similarly we want to retain our Investors in Volunteers award when we are re-assessed later this year. We will keep you updated on our progress through our website and monthly newsletters.



"Tackling unfair health differences is a big issue in Medway. We will be working in partnership with others to ensure the experiences of those facing inequality are heard by the right people so that they can understand what needs to be done to improve people's lives." **Maggie Cane, Healthwatch Medway Manager**



Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Medway, 5A New Road Avenue, Chatham, ME4 6BB

The Healthwatch Medway contract is held and is managed by EK360. You can find out more information about us and the difference we make at www.ek360.co.uk

Healthwatch Medway 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 Steering Group consists of four volunteers who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. They ensure that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2020/21 the Steering Group met every month and made decisions on matters such as what our priorities will be for the year ahead and what projects to stop to enable us to respond to the Covid pandemic.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. Every month, our Information Gathering Group which is made up of staff and volunteers meets to review the feedback we have heard from the public. This feedback along with data from our volunteers who attend meetings on our behalf, are used as key pieces of evidence when we are setting our priorities for the year.

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, text, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities, engaged with the public through social media and proactively contacted voluntary groups to gather feedback each month.

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, working closely with forums and voluntary groups who represent harder to reach communities such as older people, people with hearing or sight difficulties and those affected by mental health and their carers

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 and send it directly to organisations and stakeholders as well as sharing copies via our newsletters and social media.

Responses to recommendations and requests

All providers who we contacted for information or recommendations responded to us.

We have noticed an increase in safeguarding concerns during the pandemic. We've reported three safeguarding concerns this year. All have been dealt with quickly.



“Healthwatch Medway brings an independent & person focused viewpoint to our Board, helping us to understand & approach issues confidently. I am determined to bring the voice of persons with lived experience to the heart of the Board & Healthwatch Medway will play an important part in making that a reality.” Andrew Rabey, Independent Chair of the Kent & Medway Safeguarding Adults Board

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 Medway is represented on the Medway Health and Wellbeing Board by Pat Gulvin who is a volunteer on our Steering Group. Pat shares information on our behalf and shares the meeting details with us and our fellow volunteers. As with all the meetings that we and our volunteers attend, Pat uses the feedback from the public to inform and influence the discussions.



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