

# **COVID related Public Feedback**

## **Monthly Summary report**



**October 2020**

Throughout October, Healthwatch Medway have worked to gather direct feedback from people about their experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic and life under social distancing. We have combined this with anecdotal feedback from organisations who support a wide range of Medway residents.

Its purpose is to enable decision makers and planners to understand how people are coping during the COVID epidemic.

## **Methodology**

We have been running a series of social media adverts promoting an online survey. People were also encouraged to share feedback with our Helpline, either by phone, email or text.

To ensure more than one method of gathering data, Healthwatch staff and volunteers have established a regular phone interview with organisations. These calls enable us to capture the feedback that the organisations are hearing from their own clients and/or members. It is particularly important as it enables us to hear from communities who may find it harder to share their feedback such as people living with Dementia for example.

We have been sharing an insight report to provide a timely snapshot of how people are coping. These reports are shared directly with decision makers to help support their emergency and recovery planning.

This report aims to summarise and reflect the changing experiences of people living and working in Medway during the Covid 19 pandemic. If you require more detailed reporting on a particular theme, please contact us. Our previous monthly reports can be found on our website.

## **What are we going to do with the feedback?**

This is a monthly snapshot of feedback. Wherever possible we are raising issues and sharing feedback directly with relevant organisations.

You may read some worrying stories in this report. Some of these have come directly from the public and if they have given us contact details, we are following up with them and escalating if necessary. However, not everyone will give us contact details. Where organisations have shared concerns with us, they are following their own safeguarding and escalation protocols.

Comments in *italics* are direct quotes from feedback received from the public. Other comments are anecdotal pieces of feedback from organisations

## Access to GP

- *"I have been trying to get hold of the Doctors surgery on and off for at least 2 weeks now. Every time, I am around 26th in the call queue, obviously being at work I do not have the time to hang around on hold for 30 mins. I eventually got through to someone today to book flu spray vaccination for my son to be told the clinics are full and the rest of their clinics are also full. I was told that they don't know if any more clinics will be running as they may not have spare flu spray vaccinations to run the clinics!! When I asked what I should do, I was told the manager will look at it tomorrow but obviously if they don't have sprays left over they can't do any more clinics. I can't even pay for it at Boots or anywhere because I can't find any pharmacy that does the sprays, everything is for children over 12".*
- *"As a client of Balmoral Surgery, formerly run by DMC Healthcare, I have only received one letter informing me of the changes at the surgery. It took 10 weeks to get a phone consultation and the GP tried to dismiss me with a sick note rather than prescribe my regular medication. I also need an overdue smear test, I have waited for 9 months. When I got through to book, I was told there were no appointments left and needed to call back".*

## Virtual GP Appointments

- *"I like our GP's new system. It has meant I have actually spoken to someone and had tests organised very quickly in a way which was not happening before the Covid outbreak, unless I spent a long time re-dialling the surgery early each morning, only to be told try again tomorrow. This has worked."*
- *"I had a virtual call from my specialist nurse at the hospital that had to revert to a telephone call when she realised she could not see me as I had not been sent the instructions beforehand on how to make my mobile ready for their unique system. I have another one coming up next month and this time I am prepared now as I have the instructions."*

## Blood tests

- *"So, you get a text message from your surgery saying your annual blood test is due, ok so it must be important, but you cannot get an appointment".*
- *"Blood test are a fortnight wait in Medway unless you go to the Memorial hospital in Sittingbourne and then it is just a walk in , why can we not do it here?".*
- *"Trying to get through to the surgery is a joke, lines always engaged, or you get cut off".*

## Flu jab

- *"It took 50 mins to get an answer from my GP surgery, only to be told call back next week. I called back, only to wait another 50 mins then the same response. I could not get a flu jab at my local doctor and so I had it done at the chemist".*
- *"I had a flu jab and it was great, however a little like a conveyor belt with none of the usual checks and measures in place".*

## NHS Health Checks 40-74 year olds

- *"So, I can't get a doctor's appointment, but I can get a health check?"*
- *"What about 75 and over?"*
- *"No free TV licence, no health check-up. We don't matter after 75 it seems!"*

## Pharmacies

- *We heard about a Rainham resident who is housebound and requires their medication to be delivered by Lloyds Pharmacy. The medication is a liquid and so they need a dosset box. It's also potentially breakable so delivery by Royal Mail is tricky. Prior to Covid, the medication was delivered by the pharmacy at no charge. Now they have been informed there will be a £60 a year charge. However, they are on benefits and cannot afford this as a one-off payment. The pharmacy offered the option to pay in two instalments. They told us they felt the pharmacy was "preying" on the vulnerable. The only other option for Rainham residents is the Boots pharmacy but they also charge £55 for home delivery.*



## Covid Testing

- *"My Mum tried to book a test all day, finally got one for the evening at the University at Medway. She got there before the end of the slot time but was told they had closed".*
- *"I booked a test at 7am this morning and managed to get one for 8am, they had over 400 slots still available. This was at the Rochester drive through".*
- *"I booked at the one by Rochester Airport for my little man at 11:55am and got a test at 12:30 - there were 700 slots available when I booked - I did it online and had no problems booking at all".*

## Hospital Care

- *"I can't praise the neonatal team enough, they saved my little boy's life."*
- *"I am still an outpatient at Medway Maritime Hospital and am unable to get appointments due to this pandemic. While I accept that my regular health monitoring issues have to be put on hold, I am worried about reports of Covid outbreaks within an increasing number of hospital wards at Medway Maritime Hospital. Such news is forcing me to consider carefully whether or not even to call an ambulance or ask for a referral to a hospital consultant".*
- *"I have just come out of Medway hospital after spending 5 days in the CCU. I was taken in by ambulance and the care I received was excellent. I felt very safe and well cared for".*

## Access to dentist

- *"I moved to Medway in July and have not been able to register with an NHS dentist".*
- *"I'm struggling to find an NHS Dentist in Medway".*
- *"I am on Universal Credit and due to Covid am having difficulty finding an NHS dentist. The Kent Dental Helpline gave 2 numbers but neither practice had a vacancy. Finally got registered with Luton Arches Dental surgery"*



## Lockdown

Further to the announcement on 12th October 2020 of a new three tier system aimed at simplifying and standardising restrictions of lockdown, the public shared their thoughts and experiences:

- *"Maybe if the government wasn't so quick in opening up after the last lockdown, together with the forced back to work/school, plus the eating out campaign, we wouldn't be in this situation again".*
- *"I don't think these lockdowns are working. We need to get the economy going again for a virus with a 99.97% survival rate."*
- *"The daily figures for deaths are for anyone that has tested positive in the last 28 days so it maybe they actually have died from something else other than covid".*
- *"I get that children need to go to school, but why is it you see groups of 10/15 all walking together to and from school, no social distancing and no masks then they go into school where teachers are wearing masks. They then go home to Mums and Dads and grandparents again, not wearing masks".*
- *"Well done all those thinking they were above the rules. Well done all those thinking this was a conspiracy to control us. It is directly because of people like you that others will now lose their jobs, or worse, far worse. You lose the right to complain about an authoritarian government, when your own actions and preaching have caused there to be no other option. This isn't down to the government, this is down to the public not being able to be sensible. Parties and bars full to overflowing the night before local lockdowns".*
- *"I really hope that the Government can get the mass testing up and running - test everyone and then those who test positive can immediately isolate - in the absence of a vaccine this appears the only way we will be able to limit the effects of the virus in the short term. I really wish the government and media would let people know the reality of some of the effects of the virus the clotting element causes, long term organ damage including brain damage - this virus is not just flu, it is far worse. Perhaps with keeping education open we need to educate the younger generation of these impacts."*
- *"I'm just feeling confused, the infection rate went up when schools, colleges and universities returned but these establishments are being kept open. Hospitals are becoming overwhelmed because of winter pressures, this is every single year; covid positive patients are a very small percentage of this pressure".*
- *"The problem is that there is no exit strategy. We know that a vaccine will not kill off the virus, and the very last thing we should be doing is continually running away into lockdowns that also do not kill the virus. The second wave is endemic across Europe, and yet the one country that is not experiencing a second wave, is the main one that did not lockdown in the first place."*
- *"People are still going into offices and schools are open. I wish we could close everything for two weeks, have limited police, nurses etc, even shut supermarkets, allow people to go get enough food for two weeks to stop the spread of the disease. I sadly think that number will rise again when we open up again in December. We need to have a testing system where everyone can get tested immediately, so only negative results would be allowed into buildings, then everywhere could be open, no more masks needed. I understand that Slovakia are going to be testing everyone".*



## Lockdown

- *"All these people knocking the government should come up with better ideas if they are so knowledgeable, so easy to knock when you don't have to make the decisions".*
- *"Just take a look at Bluewater at half term, rammed packed by parents and kids, you would never believe we are in a middle of a pandemic!"*
- *"This government is clueless, they tell us not to mix with more than 6 people when this is going on, they are clearly not enforcing the rules or turning a blind eye to things like Pontins holiday park".*
- *"Anybody with half a brain cell would of gone for a national lockdown on half term week, two weeks of no going out would be a small sacrifice to save lives, who would of opposed that?"*
- *"It's down to every individual person to make sure that they protect themselves, their families and friends. Please take care and keep safe".*
- *"As we move inside for the winter, obviously cases are going to rise. I believe that universities should go to on-line learning".*
- *"More people are now dying from cancer and suicide due to lockdown".*
- *"As an ICU nurse, I beg everyone to follow the restrictions. The first wave was horrendous for those of us "at the coal face" and I'm not sure I can do it again. It took a huge mental toll on myself and my colleagues at DVH."*

## Community

In October it was announced that Medway Council had received an additional £6.2 million from central government in the fourth tranche of Covid-19 emergency funding support. The public shared their thoughts:

- *"Charity starts at home. Let's put it into looking after our vulnerable low income families, charities that care for the community. Let's make sure the people of Medway are ok. We don't want any child to have a Bah Humbug Christmas.... Dickens would have supported the poor and needy. Please don't spend it on frippery!!! Please don't waste it on trivia. I think the council should provide us residents with a say and a full financial report on the expenditure!"*
- *"Will the Council be using the money to fund the extension of free school meals over Xmas and Easter? As a Medway taxpayer, I would welcome that."*

## Mental Health Issues

- *"It's hard, people are not doing what they should in shops and places leading to a rise in Covid which directly affects my access to the services I need. I only see the crisis teams eyes so half the time I'm unable to know whether I have seen the person before. It's hard doing all contact through phones and video links, I just want some human contact without this zombie apocalyptic nightmare world anymore".*
- *"Coronavirus, lockdown and social distancing has had a devastating effect on children and young people's mental health. It's been unbelievably hard, but together, we can make a difference and show young people they are not alone."*

## Teaching Staff

- *"Myself and my colleagues have all gone above and beyond! Everyone in schools- including teachers, TAs, cleaners, caretakers, office staff, canteen staff- have put their heart and soul into creating a 'new normal' and trying to create a safe learning environment for all".*
- *"Thanks to all staff in schools in what has been a very difficult term. It would help if Covid tests could be more accessible to teachers and have a quicker turnaround time. Schools are battling with a staff shortage".*

## Free school meals

- *"The vote was to extend Free School Meals into the school holidays. This would have helped low income families who rely on them who, due to furlough, are only getting 2/3rds of the salary that they were struggling on".*
- *"If you want families to be free of state help, then increase the minimum wage to a real living wage. End gig contracts, and regulate rents so they are affordable. You don't encourage people to be free from help by refusing to give it".*
- *"Hungry children are not a political pawn - how devoid of all human compassion are you if you're in a position to make a difference, you can vote to feed hungry children, and don't. I'm genuinely asking this question as I cannot comprehend voting for anything other than feeding a hungry child?"*
- *"So for the families experiencing delays in welfare support, with little to no work to sustain them - what is the government doing to support them in the interim? Empowering them to budget?"*
- *"Families are having to rely on food banks more than ever. Can local government guarantee children will get a meal to rely on during the Christmas holidays?"*
- *"No work and a long wait for Universal Credit will render the most vulnerable people at risk of homelessness. I suppose we should tell them not to worry, since they'll have lovely high streets to live on with all these boosts to heritage funds."*
- *"If children are going hungry and being denied food as they are living in poverty, doesn't local government think paying for their meals is a great thing to do? I don't care if it means I pay an extra tax".*
- *"Could you explain how local government is going to help the children of Medway? Many have had a two week half term and will have 2 weeks at Christmas. These times when their parents are out of work because of Covid, or on reduced hours at best, how will you make sure they don't go hungry whilst they are not at school?"*



## School

### Social distancing

- *"If you are not happy with the situation, fine, home school your children. Don't start calling for everyone else's children to do the same. I am far more worried about mine being socially isolated than I am about them catching covid."*
- *"I completely understand that children are going to mix at schools and it is unavoidable. I have no concerns that the school is not doing everything they can to protect the children attending and have complete faith in the school. Covid is here to stay so I feel we should not be rushing to get thing back to 'normal' taking to time to deal with the pandemic to reduce the amount of loss as best we can."*
- *"Government are living in a dream world if they think they can get the younger generation not to mix."*

## Supported Accommodation

In October local government announced that they were able to allocate £673,584 of funding to Medway Council to support their long-term accommodation programme for Rough Sleepers. The public shared their thoughts:

- *"Just house the ex Servicemen and possibly women veterans who are unfortunately rough sleepers. They fought for their country and then have been left on the scrapheap".*
- *"Let's see this unfold and actually get in motion, there are more rough sleepers in Medway than people know, many have serious mental health problems due to an array of past circumstances, some are ex-military service personnel, some have addiction problems, some are homeless because of the benefits system and the severe lack of mental health services. Turning Point need a serious review as they are useless globally, mental health services won't help unless you have been discharged from Turning Point (those poor souls with addictions) some people can't cope with group sessions that you have to do with them, and there are many that will not budge, you can take the horse to the water but you can't make it drink, We, as a charity for the homeless do our upmost best to get the help and support for our homeless community but unfortunately some efforts rewind back to square one, we work closely with police, probation, Citizens Advice Bureau, housing, benefits agencies, we provide a service that enables homeless to get free food, fresh clothing, bottled water etc, it's a very tough ride and a difficult cookie to crack. We also support families and vulnerable people in need with meals..."*

## Sexual Orientation

In October, Gravesham and Medway Pride posted that more young people are feeling compelled to come out during lockdown. The public shared their thoughts:

- *"I identify as bisexual, but for the life of me, I cannot see what lockdown has to do with 'coming out?' I have been to Pride marches and the one thing that annoys me, is gay men seem to think it's ok to have their backsides and genitals on show for all to see. There are often children at these gatherings. I visit gay pubs and clubs, no problems with them. A person's sexuality is no-one's business but their own".*
- *"Coming out is a massive issue and really hard for a lot of people. There is still plenty of homophobia in society".*

Thanks to everyone who shared their story with us this month. Get in touch and tell us how you are coping. Have you been to the dentist or tried to get an appointment with your GP? Do you have relatives in a care home or maybe you are trying to get support for your mental health?

Whatever your situation, we want to hear from you on **0800 136 656** or email **[enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com)**



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