

Healthwatch Oxfordshire Report to Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee April 2023

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1 Healthwatch Oxfordshire reports to external bodies

During this period we published the following reports to:

- Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board (March 2023)
- Oxfordshire Health Improvement Board (February 2023)

We have also attended Oxfordshire Quality Committee, Children's Trust Board, and Oxfordshire Mental Health Prevention Concordat meetings during this time.

Reports are available online at: <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-reports/reports-to-other-bodies/>

Healthwatch Oxfordshire have attended the following meetings of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) in order to bring what we hear from Oxfordshire residents. This has included:

- Oxfordshire Place Based Partnership meetings (non-voting attendee)
- BOB ICB Board Meeting (public attendee)
- Continuing Healthcare Transformation Group and working sub group
- Joint representation with the other Healthwatch groups at place to BOB ICB committees including BOB System Quality Group meeting.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire's Chair also attends the BOB Integrated Care Partnership and took part in the BOB ICB Joint Forward Plan workshop.

2 Healthwatch Oxfordshire research

You can see our reports here: <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-work/research-reports/>

Reports can be viewed in summary, easy read, and text which can be viewed in large print or other formats as well as translated into different languages using the Enable ReciteMe button at the top of the web page.

Since the last meeting we have published the following reports:

Men in Carterton (March 2023)

Between November 2022 and January 2023 we focused on speaking to men in Carterton using 'rapid appraisal' techniques. We wanted to hear more from working

men who are often seldom heard. We spoke to 31 men in all, their voices give rich insight into some of attitudes and views men of working age held towards important issues of health and wellbeing, and some of the barriers faced to seeking care.

“Things are changing, blokes are talking to each other more now since the pandemic...”

“It’s harder for men to open up because it makes us look weak, and I don’t want to look weak”

“Men don’t go to the doctors. It’s really taking the time to go as you are either so busy or the time slot doesn’t work”

Our work linked with the Oxfordshire Men’s Health Forum #30Chats in 30 days initiative in November 2022. The report was shared with the Men’s Health Partnership and together with other partners, plans are developing to reach out to men in West Oxfordshire –catalysed by findings in this report.

3 Outcomes from our work

Healthwatch Oxfordshire Board held an online Open Forum on **Tuesday 28th February** to which members of the public could attend. A report on our activity and outcomes to date, including summary can be seen here:

<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/about-us/board-papers-and-minutes/>

Report: Healthwatch Oxfordshire outreach at Oxford University Hospitals 2022–23 (March 2023)

Over the four visits we spoke to **354 people** attending hospital as patients or relatives and friends, as well as staff working at the hospitals. The report summarises what we heard from members of the public during outreach visits to the four hospital sites (Horton, Nuffield Orthopedic Centre, John Radcliffe and Churchill). Themes emerging from these conversations included parking and travel, waiting times for appointments and coordination of care across departments, as well as some comments on need for interpreting and translation support. People were generally positive about the excellent care received from clinical staff. They also told us about challenges of access to primary care, GP appointments, and lack of NHS dentists. Visits continue on a rolling basis during 2023–24.

Report: Healthwatch Oxfordshire outreach activities during 2022–23

During this last year **we spoke to 663 people across Oxfordshire** directly during outreach to a variety of settings, including market and shopping centres, local fairs and events. A summary report of what we heard from people, including comments on GP access, digital exclusion, NHS dentistry, access to mental health support, and continuity of care can be found here:

<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/report/healthwatch-oxfordshire-community-outreach-visits-2022-23-april-2023/>

Hearing from young people: During the last few months, Healthwatch Oxfordshire have supported Oxfordshire Youth working with young people to create three podcasts on young people’s views on aspects of health and care. Young people worked to decide and develop the podcast themes, subject matter and to create them. The first podcast will be launched in April and can be found here <https://oxfordshireyouth.org/what-we-offer/youth-voice-network/the-podcast-crew/> The following two podcasts will be launched in May and June.

4 Enter and View visits 2022–2023

<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-work/enter-and-view/>

Enter and View visits are undertaken to healthcare settings to collect evidence of what works well and what could be improved to make people’s experiences better. Based on our observation and the feedback of patients and members of staff, we highlight areas of good practice and suggest improvements. To find out more about why and how we carry out these visits see here:

<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/20220922-Healthwatch-Oxfordshire-Enter-and-View.pdf>

All reports are published on our website once the service has had a chance to respond to the recommendations. They are also sent to the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Visits are conducted by both Healthwatch Oxfordshire staff and lay volunteers and most often recommendations are acted upon before the reports are published. This enables local residents to get involved in assessing services and changes are made that will improve the experience of service users.

Since the last HOSC meeting, we have published four Enter and View reports on different services:

- **Horton General Hospital Accident and Emergency Department** (February 2023)
- **Renal Dialysis Unit**, Churchill Hospital, (March 2023)
- **John Radcliffe Accident and Emergency Department** (April 2023)
- **Oxford Children's Hospital** (April 2023)

Enter and View reports with recommendations and service provider responses are found here <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-work/enter-and-view/>.

- **Patient Engagement.** Healthwatch Oxfordshire continues to support patient engagement, with regular contact with Patient Participation Groups (PPGs). This includes regular patient information webinars open to all, newsletters and communications to PPGs, attendance of PPG meetings, and liaison and support with PPG chairs, practice managers and clinical directors in the Primary Care Networks. Recent examples of this work included support to Luther Street Medical Centre to plan re-establishment of a PPG, and support to Botley PPG, as well as signposting and information to different services. Recent webinar on March 31st saw Dan Leveson, Oxfordshire Place Based Director for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board speaking on changes to health and care, and how it would affect residents. This was attended by 42 people. The next webinar on May 26th will hear from South Central Ambulance Service. A link to join this webinar and recording of all webinars can be seen here: <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/ppgs/patient-webinars/> With funding for this activity from Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board.

5 What are we hearing about?

We continue to hear from members of the public about issues of importance to them. Active communications via outreach social media, and online also supports engagement with the public. From Jan – March 2023 we have had:

- 17,397 reach via Facebook
- 9,784 Twitter impressions
- 14,055 web sessions

We have 3,103 followers across our four social media channels

- **GP patient registrations**

At the last Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in February, Healthwatch Oxfordshire formally asked the committee to assure itself that Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board as the responsible NHS body is keeping the pledge with regard to ensuring access to primary care to all residents of Oxfordshire.

We noted patients telling us they were facing particular challenges to access to GPs in Didcot area. Communication by the surgeries and BOB ICB about routes to registration have improved, now coordinated via BOB ICB Patient Advice and Liaison Service (BOB ICB PALS) via email to bobicb-ox.palscomplaints@nhs.net phone number is not consistently provided).

However, we have continued to hear from some patients about delays in gaining response from BOB ICB PALS with some citing over a week waiting to have any response to their request for support, with patients being unsure of the process to go through.

"I have first contacted them on x March, I also visited the Oak Tree GP in person and explained them 2 times, but no one is ready to talk and they just give me the same number and email to contact, which sadly doesn't help"

We have also been contacted by a number of health professionals trying to secure GP registration for vulnerable patients, and uncertain of routes to take.

- **Access to NHS Dentists**

Access to NHS dentists for both adults and children continues to be **one of the main issues raised by members of the public** who contact us for guidance and help. We continue to raise the issues of access to NHS dentistry at other committees including Oxfordshire Quality Committee and Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board Quality Committee – who plan a 'deep dive' on dentistry for their next meeting as a result. We have met with Local Dentistry Committee. We have also raised issues of access to dentistry faced by seldom heard groups including by asylum seekers living in hotel accommodation, and those with underlying health issues.

Below are some comments from the public we have received since January 2023. As a local Healthwatch we try to signpost people to the information and support they need, but this is frustrating due to lack of options for people to try.

The comments highlight:

- Lack of access to NHS dentistry for both adults and children
- Impact of pandemic people being 'removed from list' after break from seeing dentist
- Mixed and often conflicting information, unclear communication about options for NHS treatments and how to find
- Vulnerability of high risk groups including pregnant women, asylum seekers, those with underlying health conditions e.g. diabetes
- People unable to afford follow up care recommended following one off emergency treatment
- High cost prohibitive for many - people tell us they are unable to afford dentistry treatments- exacerbating inequalities in health
- Barriers to travel distances to find dental care

Dental Patient Stories

April 2023

"I recently used the out of hours emergency dental service and they were very good. They treated me and put in a temporary filling and told me to contact my dentist to complete the treatment. I don't have a regular dentist so I have called around (approximately 20 practices) and no one will treat me on the NHS. Some have said I can register as a private patient but I can't afford that. So likely I will end up back at the emergency dentist if the temporary filling fails and then begin the cycle all over again!!"

"My family and I moved to Oxford in 2019 and registered with an NHS dentist. My child and I had check-ups during 2019, perhaps early 2020. My child was seen again for a check-up in Oct 2022. I had to shield myself during the pandemic and am still at risk. I chose not to take the infection risk of a dental check-up until now, as I have a sore receding gum. The practice tells me that as I have not been seen by a dentist for three years, I am no longer eligible for NHS treatment and have to pay privately. They have said they have no spaces for NHS patients and have given conflicting advice as to whether I might be eligible to have NHS treatment after paying for an

initial check-up privately, or if I must pay private rates for all my dental treatment from now on. The receptionist told me that the practice has no choice but to follow NHS rules, removing patients from eligibility from NHS treatment if they do not attend for check-ups within two or three years."

"I am looking to find a dentist in my local area but am unable to find one that's talking on new patients."

March 2023

"I had emergency treatment at the out of hours dentist, I know I need a root canal but can't find an NHS dentist to complete my treatment. It's ridiculous"

"My dentist in Abingdon has just sent me a letter telling me they will no longer treat me on the NHS but they will treat me as a private patient".

"I am trying to find an NHS dentist as our practice Bath Street Abingdon is closing to NHS patients. I have tried so many. No-one is taking NHS. Can you help? We are OAPs with limited income and can't afford private care."

"I received a letter from my dental practice stating that from April they would no longer be providing NHS dental care. My sister was due to start treatment yesterday at the same practice but was turned away as the appointments needed would go beyond the cut off date. What's happening is absolutely appalling!"

"Our dentist in Abingdon is going private. I have tried to contact another NHS dentist. No one wants to take NHS patients. We are retired and on a fixed income can't afford private treatment. Can you help us find a NHS dentist we are desperate to secure treatment in the near future. We have paid our NHS contributions all our lives how do we find dentist who will take us?"

"We are an elderly couple who moved to Didcot after lockdown, where we expressed our frustration at negative answers received from various dental practices in our area rejecting us as new patients and only offering option for private care. We cannot go on private, we only are basic taxpayers. My wife has been needing an emergency intervention - just received via 111 call, but she would need a denture and we are struggled to find a dentist as explained above."

"I have been unable to find an NHS dentist since I moved to Oxfordshire three years now. During the pandemic, it was understandable, but I have been in contact with 10 different practices, some repeatedly over the last six months, and no one can take

on NHS patients (even though it says on the NHS "find a dentist" page that they are, and when you contact them they push their private services...)"

"My dentist will no longer treat me as an NHS patient, I have rung the NHS and to be honest they were no help. I don't need urgent treatment but what happens if I do?"

I'm looking for advice. My dentist has recently stopped being NHS, meaning we have to go on a plan or pay the private price when we visit neither which is affordable for me, we are a family of five with three being children. I keep phoning around local practices to be met with the same answer, surely there is something these practices can do especially for the children to be NHS. Even though I'm a little annoyed with myself as didn't think at the time (few years ago now as my children were small, but dental practice is still going), my children were registered at a dentist to be told they are not ones who are suffering with bad teeth so I have to leave and find another dentist, which stupidly I did! I really don't know what to do and the thought of paying private rates and if anything goes wrong with our teeth is really starting to stress me out and there's nowhere to go/turn to.

"I have tried to contact over thirty dentists and am unable to find one in Oxfordshire who will take me on as an NHS Patient" (March 2023)

February 2023

"Hello, moved to a new area OX13 and want to register with a dentist that is accepting NHS patients. Do you have a list of them, as few and far between".

"Just cannot find an NHS dentist that is accepting new adult patients. Most will only accept my children. Our local dentist does accept private work but at £120 just for the initial consultation that could be a very expensive treatment cost just to keep your teeth in check. I admit we live in a rural area so our choices are limited in the Cotswolds. However, we are prepared to travel but even travelling 30 miles or more won't get us a dentist that is accepting new adult patients. Some dentists are taking on new patients but only with a referral but how can you get one of these with no current dentist".

"Could you help me please. I cannot find any dentists that are taking on new NHS patients, I have used the GOV service and called all the practices and no one is taking on in or around the OX14 postcode. The closest I can find to Abingdon is nearly 30 miles away".

"Two years ago dentist wrote to patients to say they were moving to private care on a first come first served basis. I contacted Healthwatch at the time who looked into it and received a letter to say that the practice had agreed to continue offering NHS care. The practice refused to see any of my family however and has since gone entirely private, including for children. My children have not been seen since before the pandemic. We have been forced to take out a private dental plan for all four members of the family at a cost of approximately £700 a year. My children are 10 and 13 and now stuck with private dental care as are we. Literally no NHS dentists in my area"

"My pregnant partner needs an urgent dental check as she is suffering painful bleeding gums and we are just being fobbed off in trying to arrange an NHS appointment. We have called NHS 111 and been fobbed off as we need to try all of the dentists again....This is ridiculous that urgent care for someone in pain with bleeding gums cannot be treated via the NHS and we have to keep trying. I feel very frustrated and let down by this lack of support and empathy. I now feel that the only option will be to book private treatment when she is entitled to free NHS treatment due to her pregnancy. The only reason she was taken off the NHS list was due to Covid restrictions preventing her attending dental appointments and was removed for this."

"I've been trying to find an NHS dentist local to me and there are no surgeries taking NHS patients within a 15 mins radius of our area. I live in Thame, Oxfordshire and I'm not the only one with the same problem. Posts about NHS dentists pop up in local community groups on Facebook at least once a month, and I have only ever seen frustrated comments and horror stories of individuals who've had to either go private and get into debt or deny themselves much needed treatment. This is incredibly unacceptable."

"I was registered in 2019 and I visited a couple of times. I have not visited since as I moved to [another Oxfordshire town]. Last week I had a very severe pain as a filling went off. They informed me that I am not an NHS patient anymore because I have not visited for more than 2 years. No one has called, no one has informed me of this. I have not registered with another dentist since I moved because no one in my area is accepting NHS patients. They told they do not take NHS patients anymore and they cannot accept me back". (February 2023)

January 2023

"I want to avoid calling the NHS as I know they are swamped at the moment and figured this was the next best option! I am looking for a dental practice in South Oxfordshire (Wantage, Abingdon, Didcot). I mean even a little further afield would work as I do need to be registered somewhere. I am pregnant now so realise I do need to be registered and come for some routine check-ups."

"Do you have any advice on what I can do as I cannot find any practices accepting new patients, I have emailed and called around seven practices, and had an email back from one practice telling me I can start a payment plan and pay for private appointments rather than NHS (which is not feasible considering the cost of living situation at the moment)."

"I lost my dentures and can't get an NHS dentist in Banbury I'm finding it difficult eating and embarrassed in my appearance please can you help me."

"The root infection has likely been there for quite some time. (Has autoimmune illness) I am worried how having had an infection there for years could have affected me and really need it treated - I shouldn't have an infection in the root of a front tooth for this long. I am registered with an NHS dentist. Having been told I had to pay £1300+ for something which might just fail and end up needing the more expensive treatment subsequently anyway, I asked about other options with higher success rates ... I've just paid £150 to see someone for five minutes and tell me that one dental implant will cost me £4150. The root canal + crown or a bridge wouldn't be for cosmetic reasons - it's due to an infection I've had for probably years which really needs treating. I don't really understand why I'm being sent down the private route for a root infection. Surely I should be able to get this done by NHS?"

"I am diabetic, and need regular treatment and cleaning for my health...I was told last time I went that my treatment would cost £2000. I can't afford this, I don't know what I will do"

Note: Public Health Oxfordshire are currently holding a survey to hear from people about oral health services in support the oral health needs assessment
<https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshire-oral-health-needs-assessment>

6 Healthwatch Oxfordshire Priorities for 2023-24

Healthwatch Oxfordshire priorities for the year ahead are set following analysis of information from a number of sources, including:

- What we hear from the public via contacts, outreach, signposting, social media, outreach and via our feedback centre.
- What we heard from 253 people via an online survey in December 2022 to January 2023, with issues raised including: access to primary care services (82 people told us GP access, and 38 access to NHS dentist, 53 noted access to mental health services, including for children and young people). 33 people felt joined up local social care should be a priority. We also heard about support for families with children with special educational needs. A summary of what we heard can be seen here:
<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Priorities-survey-summary.pdf>
- Review of planned policy and operational changes in health and social care services – both nationally and locally.
- Taking note of recent research projects that have raised the need / opportunity for additional work by Healthwatch Oxfordshire in the future including communities and sections of our population that Healthwatch Oxfordshire are not reaching or are seldom heard by the health and care system. Healthwatch Oxfordshire **goals and priorities for the coming year 2023-4** are now published here: <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/about-us/our-priorities/> and are as follows:
 - We continue to raise with commissioners and individual providers issues regarding access to all services.
 - Challenge commissioners to involve patients and communities in the review, development and delivery of all services with a focus on NHS dentistry, GP services, Adult and Children’s Continuing Care services, adult and child mental health services.
 - Design and deliver a project on rural isolation focusing on digitally excluded individuals/communities alongside a third sector organisation/s.
 - Explore with seldom heard communities how Healthwatch Oxfordshire can increase its profile within these communities and identify main concerns about accessing and experiences of health and care services.

