2020-2021

Our Annual Impact Report

healthwatch Oxfordshire
Your voice on health and care services

Message from the Chair

The Healthwatch Oxfordshire team rose to the challenge of working under lockdown. They focused on what our local communities needed, constantly adapting and developing new ways to ensure your voices were heard during the pandemic.

The pandemic highlighted many issues that were already impacting on local people and communities. We heard about a lack of reliable, accessible, and up-to-date information on COVID-19 in community languages. We also became aware of issues of digital exclusion as health care consultations shifted online. We reported what we heard about the impact of COVID-19 and your experiences of accessing services to providers and commissioners.

We did manage to grow our team, by welcoming a new community outreach worker, and we also grew our board. At the end of a strange year, I step down as Chair and hand over to Sylvia Buckingham. I wish Sylvia, the team, and trustees all the best for the coming year.

Tracey Rees, Healthwatch Oxfordshire Chair 2019-2021

About us

We are the independent champion for people who use health and care services in Oxfordshire. We are here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the services you need, by sharing these views with those who have the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about health and social care services.

We aim to:

Support you to have your say

Ensure all voices are heard

Work together to help improve health and care services for all

We have a team of **7** members of staff, and are supported by **6** volunteers and **6** trustees. We received **£247,908 in** funding from Oxfordshire County Council to help us carry out our work.

Our year in numbers

→ We heard from **7,697** people about their experiences of health and social care

→ **161** people left a review of using a local health and care service via the Feedback Centre on our website

→ We had **33,408** hits on our website and reached **130,726** people through social media

→ We provided in-depth advice and information to **147** people

→ We published **28** reports based on our research, setting out what we heard and what improvements people would like to see to local services

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Our work

A focus on social care

One of the areas that we concentrated on this year was social care – the care and support people receive in their home or in residential homes. As part of this work we:

→ Carried out two surveys of care home managers to ask how they were coping during the COVID pandemic. We passed on what we heard to social care decision-makers locally and nationally.

→ Heard from 160 unpaid adult carers and published a report highlighting the challenges they faced accessing support services. We held an event bringing together carers and support agencies to talk about how support for carers could be improved, and we will closely monitor a new carers service launched in April 2021.

→ We reached out to people who are paid to care for someone in their home. Following our report on this, Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers agreed to work with us to conduct an annual survey of employed carers, as we suggested.

→ We published a report on people's experiences of changes in Oxfordshire County Council's policy on adult social care contributions. The council has pledged to involve service users in ensuring information about social care contributions is more accessible and concise.

"The Healthwatch Oxfordshire survey of care homes that we report on today is an absolutely excellent piece of work and demonstrates exactly why this organisation exists." Oxford Mail

Working together on wellbeing

We have worked closely with Oxford Community Action (OCA) over the last 18 months to find out what Oxford's new and emerging communities think about wellbeing. **152** people completed our survey, describing what supports their wellbeing, where they turn for support and what makes it difficult to get support.

Members of the communities involved also helped to produce a short film about their views on wellbeing called *'A Problem Shared'*. Two community volunteers representing OCA presented the film, along with a report about this work, to key health and care decision-makers on the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board in March.

We also:

→ Made three outreach visits as part of a project to find out what it is like living in the Didcot area. Following concerns raised about the impact of housing growth, we will hold a meeting for organisations involved in delivering services in this area to ask that they work with local people to ensure population growth is sustainable and supported with adequate infrastructure.

→ Worked with other local Healthwatch organisations to produce reports about the experiences of people in Buckingamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West in accessing care during COVID and of care inequalities.

→ Produced a report about the emotional wellbeing of 0-5 year-olds which we sent to the commissioners of early years support services as a snapshot of parents' and carers' understanding about this issue.
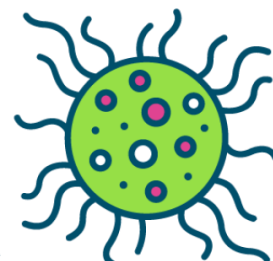
All our reports can be read at www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/reports

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Our response to COVID

Hearing about the impact of COVID

An important part of our response to the pandemic was to hear about the impact that COVID was having on health and care services, and people's access to these services.

370 people shared their experiences of using pharmacies in Oxfordshire. People told us they valued the role, service, and presence of community pharmacies but had experienced delays in getting medicines and queues at pharmacies, and that social distancing was not always adhered to.

221 people shared their experiences of finding and accessing NHS and private dentists for routine and urgent treatment during the pandemic. We heard that restricted access had meant that some people were left in pain or with worsening oral health, and how wealthier people were able to access treatment by paying privately. Following this work, NHS England announced additional dental appointments in Oxfordshire.

We also heard from people who were struggling to access GP and acute care services, with some reporting problems getting appointments, long delays for hospital treatment, and concerns about when services would return to normal. Given that patients were increasingly being directed to online services, we carried out a review of how easy it was to use GP practice websites.

Enter and View visit to the Kassam vaccination centre

COVID restrictions meant we were only able to carry out one Enter and View visit this year, which was to Oxford's NHS COVID-19 vaccination centre at the Kassam Stadium.

Our visit followed strict COVID protocols, which included not talking directly to patients, but instead distributing a paper questionnaire, and a link to an online survey for them to complete.

Feedback from **87** people who completed our survey was overwhelmingly positive and praised the organisation, safe environment, and efficiency of the centre as well as the attitude of staff and volunteers.

An Enter & View Project

We also:

→ **Provided reliable and trusted information on COVID** - and helped people to access the services they needed and answered their queries on a range of COVID-related issues.

→ **Ensured translated information was available** – we worked with Oxford Community Action to translate and deliver a COVID information sheet in five languages to 700 homes in Oxford.

→ **Highlighted the digital divide** - we worked to raise awareness that not everyone is digitally connected or keen to receive services or support online.

→ **Reached out in new ways** - we used social media to engage with communities, held virtual meetings and online drop-in events on topics such as accessing GPs during COVID.

→ **Supported the vaccine roll-out** – **460** people completed our survey sharing their views on the COVID vaccine, which we shared with those managing the vaccine roll-out in Oxfordshire.

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Next steps

Our priorities for next year

→ **Increase the voice of seldom heard communities** – through our ongoing involvement with and reaching out to community groups and voluntary organisations, and working with community researchers.

→ **Increase the influence of Healthwatch Oxfordshire in ensuring that the voices of patients and public are heard by the health and social care system** – by attending Committees and Boards, and through our support to service user groups, Patient Participation Groups, Primary Care Networks and the Oxfordshire Wellbeing Network.

In 2021-22 we will continue to focus on making sure that the voices of people from communities that do not generally engage with surveys, or who are digitally excluded, are heard. It often takes time to build connections and earn trust within these communities, but we are committed to working in this way. We have recently appointed an outreach worker in Oxford, and we are supporting five community researchers to expand our reach and listen to people from different communities.

We will continue to monitor actions taken against recommendations in our reports, and we commit to keeping the public informed of the impact their participation in our research has had on services.

Rosalind Pearce, Healthwatch Oxfordshire Executive Director

Thank you to everyone who has helped us this year, including:

→ Members of the public who shared their views and experiences with us.

→ Our brilliant team of staff, trustees and volunteers for their hard work.

→ The voluntary organisations we worked with for helping to ensure more people's voices are heard.

→ The providers and commissioners of health and social care who have listened and responded to the voices of Oxfordshire residents.

Contact us

Please get in touch if you would like to share your experience of using a local health service, if you have a question about a local service, if you would like to contribute to one of our research projects or to sign up to receive our news briefing.

You can also follow us on social media to get regular news and information updates.

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