



# **East Sussex County Council, Adult Social Care and Health**

**Client experience during COVID-19 lockdown: What can we learn?**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**December 2020**

## Executive Summary

Activmob were commissioned by Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) at East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to speak to adult social care clients and carers about their experiences of services and support during and after the first the COVID-19 lockdown. Adult social care wanted to understand people's experiences of care and support during COVID-19, what had worked well and what could improve. The results and recommendations of the research will be used to inform adult social care's ongoing response to the pandemic and to help prepare for future waves.

### Participants and approach

40 clients of adult social care and carers, and five social care managers, were recruited to take part. Participants engaged in in depth conversations with researchers, informed by a topic guide to explore their experiences. An inductive approach was used to analyse the conversations. This means that themes emerged from people's insights and experiences. Following these themes, key conclusions have been presented, drawn from what people said and experienced.

### Key themes and conclusions

From the client and carer interviews, key themes included; expectations from adult social care, experiences during COVID-19, feelings at the time of lockdown, experiences of care and support during COVID-19, experiences of getting practical things in place, communications and information, and comparisons to previous experiences of care.

From the key themes, the following conclusions are presented:

- Most participants had low awareness of the support available from ASCH, they also had low expectations of what adult social care would provide.
- Over half the participants felt that there was a lack of clear, practical and reliable information on how they should respond given the announcement of the lockdown. Terms such as shielding and self-isolating were unclear. There was no single communication to all adult social care clients.
- Over half of clients who were not in receipt of regular services and support, such as home care, were anxious about how they would organise practical tasks such as obtaining prescriptions and food. For these participants they often experienced valuable support from neighbours and their local community.
- Clients who before lockdown received regular support such as home care services, generally reported that these continued well during lockdown with very few examples of any interruption in service.

- Hospital discharge experiences from the small number of participants in the study were mainly positive with pathways and services feeling joined up from their perspective. Experiences from Rehabilitation and Reablement were positive.
- Loneliness, isolation and missing social interaction was a key concern. Key groups affected were those who were more independent prior to lockdown and generally doing social activities, and individuals (especially younger) with learning disabilities who really struggled with the lack of social interaction.

From the operational staff interviews, key themes included; services during lockdown, decision making on practice, and working across the system.

- Managers felt that they and their teams had continued to deliver a core service to their clients during lockdown. Staff had worked tirelessly to achieve this.
- Managers felt that whilst a core service had continued, there were some groups who had been missed. This was a great cause for concern.
- Managers felt that enabling their teams to work safely was their main priority. They recognised that in these times they had to dedicate more time to understanding individual circumstances in order to fully ensure they were able to work.
- Staff were exhausted and anxious about another lockdown.
- Whilst local decision making worked well and swiftly within teams, quicker and practical guidance from across supporting departments to enable managers to focus on service delivery would have been welcome.
- Partnership with others such as NHS organisations and joint pathways had not worked well for all ASCH clients.

## Recommendations

The report includes five recommendations, with a focus on communications and information provision:

1. **Communicating the East Sussex COVID-19 plan - providing clear information and communication about how to respond and where to get help**
2. **Engaging with *all* clients**
3. **Informing clients about ASCH support**
4. **Checking in with all clients – ensuring no one is missed**
5. **Recommendations for the wider system – conducting a ‘deep dive’**

The full recommendations are set out in detail within the report.