



# On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch East Sussex: Annual Report 2020-21

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# Message from our Chair

**During the pandemic we captured more experiences and supported more people than ever before and used our insight to inform the short and long-term evolution of health and care services.**

Without doubt the Covid 19 pandemic changed the way in which Healthwatch East Sussex worked in 2020/21, and many of our adapted practices will continue in future years as they have enabled us to engage with far more people and learn about their experiences.

Like other organisations linked to health and care, we had to remain wholly flexible in order to meet the rapidly changing needs of both providers and residents, offering a key linkage between the two.

Our previous work with Care Homes and Carers gave us the ability and indeed confidence to virtually monitor what was happening in the care sector and enabled us to provide instant feedback to providers, service users and health and care commissioners. This was further enhanced by our "Staying Connected" webinar, the success of which led to our being asked to provide an additional three webinars focused on supporting the families and friends of those in care homes.



**"I would like to acknowledge the contribution that Healthwatch East Sussex has made during 2020/21. They have provided valued input into our outbreak control plan and collaborated with partners to address important issues such as housing and homelessness, and support for families and friends of care home residents during this period. Their survey findings have enriched our understanding of our citizens experiences of the pandemic which supports local decision making. We look forward to continued partnership working with them."**

**Darrell Gale, Director of Public Health, East Sussex County Council**

The pandemic led to the speedier discharge of patients from hospital. Working with the Clinical Commissioning Group and Hospital Trust we undertook 1,441 well-being checks which helped identify the urgent needs and support required by over 200 patients.

The Board appreciates that our success in what can only be described as an extraordinary year would not have been possible without our dedicated staff, all of whom willingly took on additional challenges, and of course the work of our volunteers who together contributed 2,200 hours (and I know that's just the hours they recorded).

Once again it is a big thank you to them all and to East Sussex County Council and all our health and social care providers for their continuing support, and we look forward to working alongside them in responding to the needs of patients and the public in 2021-22.



Keith Stevens

Chair of East Sussex Community Voice, delivering Healthwatch in East Sussex

# About us

## Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in East Sussex. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support you receive, 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 an 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 service providers to use your views to shape the health and care support you need today and in the future.



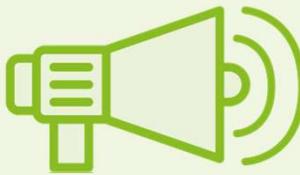
**“Healthwatch research into the local impact of COVID has been invaluable in helping the East Sussex Communications and Engagement Steering Group shape messages for key issues such as vaccination roll-out and access to medical services. John, as Healthwatch Director, was also instrumental in developing the Community Hub model and support offered to the shielding residents.”**

**Tom Hook**  
**Assistant Director, Adult Social Care & Health, East Sussex County Council**  
**Chair of the East Sussex Communications and Engagement Steering Group**

# Highlights from our year

Find out about our resources and how we have engaged and supported people in 2020-21.

## Reaching out



We heard from

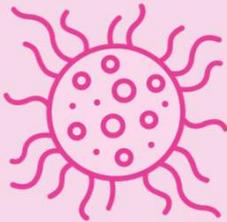
**7,638 people**

this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

**621 people directly** and **36,421 people virtually** this year.

## Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

**43,375**

people during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

We also reached **164,391** people through Facebook and generated **97,911** impressions via Twitter

## Making a difference to care



We published

**5 reports as Healthwatch East Sussex**

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made 20 recommendations.

**6 reports as Healthwatch in Sussex**

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made 37 recommendations.

## Health and care that works for you



**31 volunteers**

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they recorded 2,200 hours which equates to 275 days.

**We employed 9 staff**

5 of whom are full time, which is the same as in the previous year.

We received

**£376,000 in funding**

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



## Theme one: Then and now Dentistry



### Then: Access to NHS dental services

**Thanks to people sharing their experiences of dentistry we were able to draw attention to the need to ensure that patients had access to simple, clear information about their treatment.**

As part of our High Weald Listening Tour in 2019, we undertook a pilot project to engage with dental practices and their patients. Using our statutory powers to “Enter and View” providers of care regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), we visited 7 high street NHS dentists in the High Weald area and all three Emergency Dental Service clinics covering East Sussex.

Our report ‘Knowing the Drill’ highlighted that whilst most patients had positive experiences in the care they received from both mainstream and emergency dentists, there was scope to improve the quality and accessibility of the information provided on websites and out-of-hours phone messages.

We found that information on dentists’ websites was regularly out-of-date, often failing to provide clear details of NHS charges for treatment, especially in relation to any exemptions. Similarly, both websites and out-of-hours messages often did not provide accurate information on the location and contact details for emergency dental services. The NHS ‘find a dentist’ website was also found to be inaccurate and challenging to navigate.

These findings were shared with the Local Dental Committee and Healthwatch England with the goal of encouraging dental practices to have shared minimum standards in the information provided to patients.



## Now: Ongoing dentistry issues

**Thanks to patients sharing their experience of dentistry during the pandemic, we have proactively sought to engage with commissioners and providers, both locally and nationally, to ensure that issues are addressed, and people's needs are met.**

Access to NHS dental treatment is the third most common reason why people have contacted us for advice and support in the last year. Our COVID-19 survey also found that a quarter of people found it difficult to get clear information or advice about accessing dental services.

The main issues raised with us included:

- Difficulties and delays in booking routine and emergency NHS dental appointments
- Priority being given to private patients
- Inaccurate information on websites and out-of-hours messages

People told us that when they were unable to access a dentist, they experienced anxiety, pain, and worsening problems which required further treatment. Some people told us that lack of access to dental care pushed them to "DIY" dental solutions which put their own health and wellbeing at risk and led to pressure being placed on other services such as NHS 111, GPs and Hospital Emergency Departments.

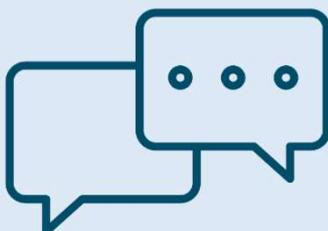


**"I emailed every dentist on the 'find a dentist' link some 20 times or more and yet I never get a reply and those that do are only willing to treat me privately"**

**"I have had to register for private treatment that I can't afford in desperation."**

Our 2020 review of East Sussex dental websites and out-of-hours phone messages showed that many practices were failing to provide up to date information about which services were available, or how and where to access NHS dental care in an emergency. In response, we shared guidance and information on dentistry publicly and with Community Hubs to ensure that those in most need were able to access support.

In collaboration with the other Healthwatch in Sussex we have combined our feedback and shared key concerns with the Local Dental Committee, NHS Commissioners, NHS England and the public. We have also escalated these issues to Healthwatch England. Both we and our network continue to call for clear information and treatment pathways, including clarity over what NHS patients have a right to expect, and detailed consideration of future NHS dentistry commissioning.



### Share your views with us

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.

 [www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk](http://www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk)

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## Theme two: Then and now Care Homes and Carers



### Then: Care Homes and Carers

Healthwatch East Sussex has consistently monitored the experiences of care home residents as part of our annual work programme. Prior to 2020, four rounds of 'Enter and View' visits had been undertaken to assess the quality and nature of care homes in the county.

These assessments provided useful feedback for their operators, their residents (including their family and friends), as well as health and care commissioners, and reports were positively received.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to monitor these experiences 'virtually' through dedicated online forums and surveys, especially the impact of the lockdown and the restrictions on visiting care home residents, both on the residents themselves, but also the effects on their family and friends, as well as staff.

We have heard that:

- Access to residents varied from care home to care home, as did communications between care homes and family members
- Separation due to visiting restrictions had a significant impact on carers' and residents' wellbeing
- Official visiting guidance for care homes, carers and the public lacked clarity, consistency and timeliness



## Now: Care Homes and Carers

In response, Healthwatch organised a 'Staying Connected with loved ones in Care Homes during the pandemic' webinar in November 2020, which brought together over 100 attendees, including carers' representative bodies, care homes, commissioners and front-line staff from health and care services.

Feedback about the event from all parties was extremely positive. It was recognised as providing a unique forum in which conversations between different parties could take place, experiences be shared, and connections could be established.

The effectiveness of webinars as a means of expanding engagement led to Healthwatch being approached by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SPFT) to extend the reach of their 'Care Home Communities' project by co-ordinating three further webinars delivered between January and March 2021 focusing on:

1. The vaccination programme and visiting
2. The impact on families of long-term restricted visiting & separation from loved ones
3. What could and should health and care partners be doing to support relatives and family carers?

The events attracted nearly 200 participants and provided an open forum where health and care partners could provide up to date information and respond to any questions or concerns from carers. They also provided a safe space for carers to access emotional and wellbeing support, both from each other and specialist carers' support organisations.



**"As a family carer myself (and as Vice-President of Carers UK and a Patron of Carers Support West Sussex), I have warmly welcomed this series of webinars, co-produced by Healthwatch East, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove and offering a 'safe place' in which to explore the challenges in both protecting residents in care homes and enabling them to enjoy a good life."**

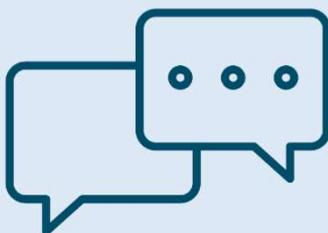
Dame Philippa Russell, DE

The webinars delivered multiple beneficial outcomes:

Carers identified the value of a forum in which to share personal experiences, provide mutual support and obtain information and guidance from support organisations and health and care professionals.

Care homes shared innovation on providing 'virtual' communications between their residents and others.

The Public Health team in East Sussex pledged to support family carers, to continue to support care homes, and ensure every effort is made to maximise vaccine uptake by carers as well as in care home communities.



### Share your views with us

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## Theme three: Then and now Hospital Discharge



### Then: Hospital Discharge

**Being discharged from hospital doesn't represent the end of the patient journey. It is one step in the process, with patients continuing to recover, either in their home or another community setting.**

Healthwatch East Sussex recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic may not only affect people's experience of being discharged, but also the type of support they could expect to receive once they left hospital.

In response to the pressures of the pandemic, the "discharge to assess" model was put in place. This focused on speeding up discharge in order to minimise opportunities for infection, but also on enabling hospitals to maximise the care available to people with illness related to COVID-19.

There were also changes to the wider follow-up support available from GPs, the voluntary sector and family and friends due to the lockdown, social distancing, shielding and changing demands. This impacted on people's awareness of what was available and how to access it, but also what information hospitals could give patients when they were discharged.

In response, we developed a programme of hospital wellbeing checks to offer reassurance, assess needs and provide information and signposting to patients discharged on the zero pathway in East Sussex. People on this pathway should have no additional support requirements.



## Now: Hospital Discharge

Working in partnership with our Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Hospital Trust, our staff and volunteers undertook 1,441 wellbeing checks by telephone with East Sussex residents after their discharge: assessing their needs, gathering feedback and providing information on the support available.

Our work identified high levels of satisfaction with their discharge overall. However, one-in-six discharged patients had additional needs or required support, and some struggled to identify how, where and when to access it. We supported them by sharing contact information and making referrals on their behalf to GPs, Adult Social Care, Community Hubs, community organisations and local initiatives.



**"I've had every support. The nurse came yesterday took my blood pressure and left numbers for me to call."**

**"Discharged yesterday and hospital has already been in touch today. Feel very well supported."**

We discovered some inconsistencies in the information people received when discharged, unmet patient expectations (often stemming from mixed messages), and issues in obtaining timely access to support. This left some without the medication, equipment or the help they needed to recover at home.

A cross-cutting theme was communication, especially how and when discharge information was shared.

The pilot recognised that most patients identified a positive discharge experience and had limited support needs, but we identified several recommendations for the CCG, Hospital Trust and ourselves.



**"Hospital staff were caring but I was asleep when the Heart Failure Nurse came to see me just before discharge and I did not really remember what she said."**

**"Felt she was rushed through the hospital procedures to discharge and things were not well explained."**

We are collaborating with the Multi-Disciplinary Discharge Improvement Group (MDDIG) at the Hospital Trust to enhance the content, format and means through which information is shared with patients, placing an emphasis on consistency, use of clear language and multiple formats to ensure patients have an appropriate understanding and record of the discharge process.

In partnership with our Healthwatch in Sussex colleagues we have planned qualitative engagement into hospital discharge in 2021-2 and are exploring options with commissioners and providers for ongoing work to monitor and enhance the discharge process, especially the pathways for post-discharge support.



**To find out more > > >**



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## 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 well as possible during the pandemic.**

**This year we helped 43,375 people by:**

- Expanding the breadth and reach of our information and signposting, by re-introducing a monthly newsletter, increasing the frequency of our bulletins, setting up COVID-19 Information and Vaccination Hubs on our website and introducing a 'Live Chat' function to provide real time answers to enquiries.
- Undertaking surveys into the experience and impacts of the lockdown and vaccination process, and sharing the insight gathered with service commissioners and providers to help guide their response.
- Collaborating with our Healthwatch in Sussex colleagues to inform the 'Restoration and Recovery' of health and care services after the pandemic through targeted engagement on digital services, care home provision and hospital discharge, and the sharing of feedback on primary and planned care.
- Sharing patient experiences and feedback with the Sussex Health and Care Partnership Board, Sussex Vaccination Programme Board and East Sussex Vaccination Equality Oversight Group.
- Championing the need for clear and consistent messaging for patients and the public from all service providers, and the importance of providing and sharing information in a non-digital form.

## Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



52.5% on GP services



13.9% on Dentistry



13.0% on Hospital care



20.6% on Vaccines

## Expanding our reach



We have focused on providing more people with clear, consistent and concise advice and information to help them make decisions and access support.

During 2020-21, more than 35,000 people accessed our website, compared to 16,500 the previous year.

Our Information and Signposting service received and responded to 381 enquiries, more than twice the number in 2019-20.

288 pieces of feedback were left on health and care services, a significant increase.

We have 400 more subscribers on our mailing list.

Our Facebook 'reach' and Twitter 'impressions' more than doubled.



### Contact us to get the information you need

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## Volunteers

**At Healthwatch East Sussex we are supported by 31 volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements they would welcome from their health and care services.**

### **This year our volunteers:**

- Helped people have their say from home, carrying out interviews over the telephone to find out people's views about digital and virtual appointments in health and care services.
- Reviewed the content of Dental websites and out-of-hours messages to assess the accuracy and suitability of the information provided.
- Undertook more than 1,400 Hospital Discharge Wellbeing Checks offering reassurance, support and information to patients discharged during the pandemic.
- Volunteered at Vaccination sites and staffed the Sussex Vaccination Enquiry Line to help people have a positive vaccination experience and make informed vaccination decisions.
- Undertook research and gathered evidence on COVID-19 cases, Long Covid and impacts on Care Homes.
- Supported delivery of webinars exploring the experiences of Care Home residents and their families.
- Contributed to the East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust Cardiology Transformation and Patient Experience Steering Groups.



**COVID-19 response - Cecile**

"I joined HWES as a volunteer at the end of last year and the first job I was offered was that of vaccination steward. Quite a few people needed reassuring that the vaccine was safe. Others hated needles. If I had a pound for every time I heard people say "Follow the yellow brick road" I would be a wealthy woman.

I have really enjoyed doing this work and I like to imagine that I have been a tiny cog helping to turn the wheel of the vaccination program."



**Hospital Discharge - Janet**

"I started volunteering in September 2020 and was asked to support with the Hospital Wellbeing Discharge wellbeing checks by phone. I found it most satisfying to not only capture people's experiences but also felt competent enough to give clear directions for additional support they may have required. This not only supported people but has built my confidence and also allowed me to use what I feel is part of my skill set showing a caring ,empathetic approach with everyone I spoke to and continue to speak to."



**Support during service change - Alan**

"This year I have had three main roles with Healthwatch. Two focused on ensuring patient experiences and views were considered when planning the rollout of the NHS 111 Clinical Assessment Service and in the ongoing review of Cardiac and Ophthalmology care at East Sussex Healthcare Trust. I have also assisted with the Sussex CCG Vaccination helpline, helping to resolve a great variety of queries and problems to ensure people receive their vaccinations quickly with a minimum of fuss."



**Volunteer with us**

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch with our Volunteer and Community Liaison Manager.



[healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk/get-involved/](https://healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk/get-involved/)



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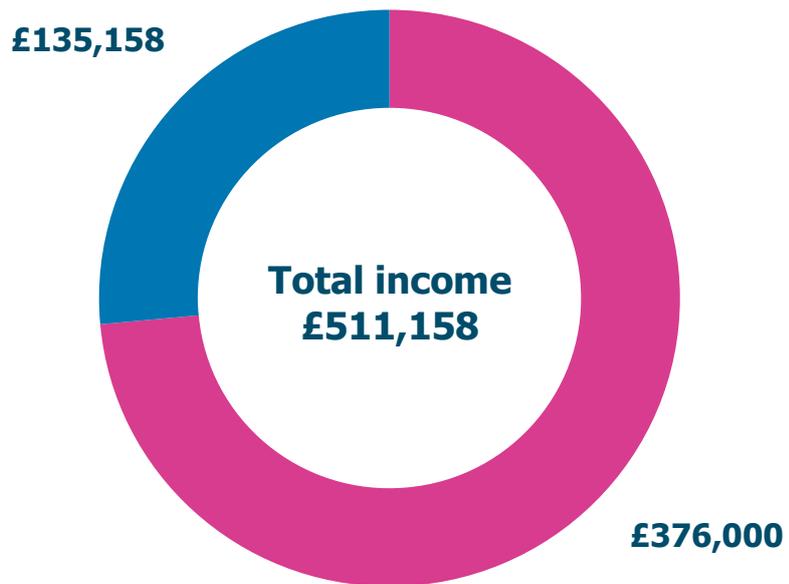
[enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk)

# Finances

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

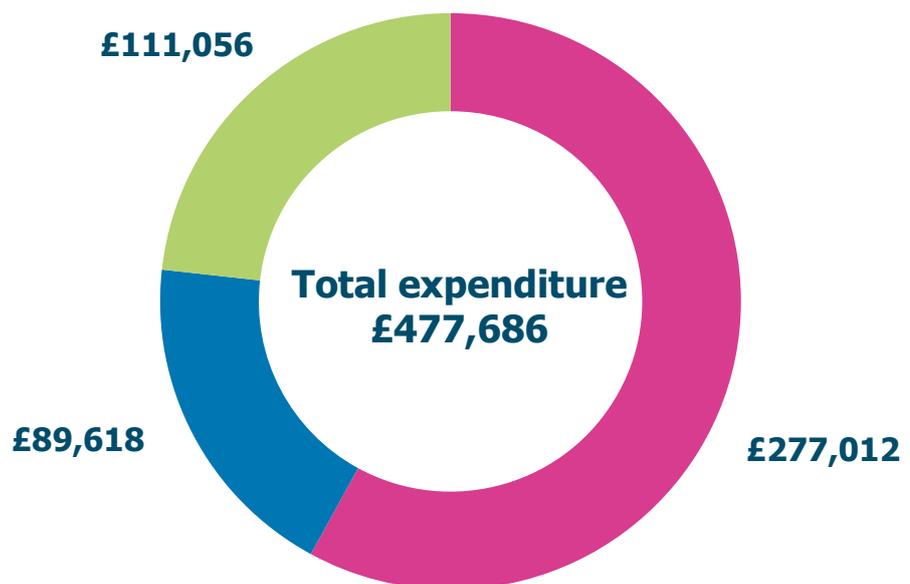
## Income

- Funding received from local authority for Healthwatch
- Additional funding (including Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service [IHCAS])



## Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Commissioned services



# Next steps & thank you

## Top five priorities for 2021-22

- 1. Acute Care** – return to 'normal' planned services and the hospital discharge process
- 2. Access to Primary Care** – GPs, dentists, opticians, pharmacists and links to emergency services
- 3. Adult Social Care** – carers, care homes and residents
- 4. Prevention and Social determinants of health** – social, economic and environmental factors
- 5. Children and Young People** – wellbeing, especially mental health

## Next steps

As we emerge from the national pandemic restrictions, Healthwatch East Sussex will monitor the impacts brought about by COVID-19, assess the return to 'normal' services and contribute to the ongoing evolution of the health and care sector, especially the development of the Integrated Care System (ICS) in Sussex.

Planned care needs have increased in the pandemic. As restrictions ease we will support people to access treatment and gather more insight into patient experiences such as hospital discharge.

Access to GP and dentist appointments dominated our feedback last year. We will continue to monitor public experiences and support the public to access these services, including capturing preferences around remote consultations and alternative forms of delivery.

Adult Social Care services have been hit hard by the pandemic. We will help the public access the care they need and engage them in the re-design of services as government plans evolve.

Prevention and social determinants of health massively impact upon public health, and we will continue to support people facing health inequalities, such as those stemming from disability, ethnicity or income.

Children, young people and their carers need our support to access mental health and wellbeing help.

We will continue to work in collaboration with other Healthwatch in Sussex to gain insight into health and care issues at a Sussex-wide level, such as Long Covid.

We are developing activities to support children and young people access help with mental health and examining how health inequalities for homeless people can be reduced. We are also initiating a 'Young Healthwatch' to further explore the needs and views of young people.

We will work to reduce health inequalities and support seldom heard groups such as homeless people and those living in temporary accommodation. We will also continue to highlight the 'digital divide' and encourage health and care services to consider the needs of those without access to technology.



**"Healthwatch East Sussex provides vital insight from local people about their experiences of health and care; this feedback helps us continue to improve services for our communities. Their work regarding access to services in Eastbourne town centre and working with us on the design of a new service to support homeless people and rough sleepers, has been invaluable."**

**Jessica Britton, Executive Managing Director, East Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group**



# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch East Sussex is delivered by [East Sussex Community Voice CIC](#), Greencoat House, 32 St Leonards Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN21 3UT.

Healthwatch East Sussex 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 East Sussex Community Voice board consists of five members who provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions on priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2020/21 the board met six times and made decisions on matters such as:

- Setting and monitoring our work plan priorities during the pandemic
- Ensuring that staff and volunteer wellbeing and safety were supported at all times.

We ensure wider public involvement in setting our work priorities. The enquiries and feedback we receive through our Information & Advice Service, Feedback Centre and surveys mean that that we are reliably informed of what issues matter the most to our public.

We also seek involvement through our multi-agency Advisory Group, collaboration with many voluntary sector partners and our involvement in a diverse range of partnerships and Boards.

## 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 and email, a webform on our website, our feedback centre/rate and review system, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media and local radio.

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. One example is working with our Clinical Commissioning Group to develop a tender specification for the provision of primary care services to homeless people and rough sleepers in Eastbourne.

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, promote widely with our partners and our mailing list, and share it across East Sussex County Council as our commissioner, the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board and Healthwatch England as our national body. Hard copies are available on request.

### 2020-21 priorities

<i>Project / activity area</i>	<i>Changes made to services/commissioning</i>
<b>Children and Young People</b> expressed a range of views on using remote appointments to access health and care services in Healthwatch surveys.	Commissioners and providers have been encouraged <u>not</u> to assume that all CYP prefer remote or digital appointments or tools.
<b>COVID-19 Vaccinations</b> dominated our activity in the last quarter of the year. We gathered experiences via surveys and grassroots feedback.	Our evidence fed insight on the nature and distribution of vaccine hesitancy to those planning and delivering the vaccination programme.
<b>Primary Care</b> practice mergers were identified by Healthwatch East Sussex as a key catalyst for changes in patient experience.	The CCG is considering pre-merger guidance for practices to ensure infrastructure is fit-for-purpose and communication impacts are built-in to the process.
<b>Patient Transport Service</b> users identified issues and preferences during Sussex-wide engagement with Healthwatch.	Healthwatch in Sussex has encouraged commissioners to build-in more patient-focused KPIs into future contracting, provide trackable transport and share clearer guidance on eligibility.

## Responses to recommendations and requests

All the providers we contacted have responded to requests for information or recommendations.

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.

Two issues were escalated by our Healthwatch to the Healthwatch England Committee and these related to concerns around GP provision in one area and countywide access to NHS dentistry. Both are ongoing and the themes have subsequently becoming the focus of national reviews and further research activity.

## Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch East Sussex is represented on the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board by our Executive Director. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by calling for the public and patients to be at the heart of the key health and social care issues that have come before the Board:

- Highlighting the need for prevention, patient experience and engagement to be a core component of the East Sussex Integrated Health and Care Plan.
- Contributing to the East Sussex COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan, ensuring public messaging, engagement and delivery initiatives are appropriate and accessible for all residents

# healthwatch

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