



# On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch Havering Annual Report 2020-21

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Note: Except where noted otherwise, the quotations that appear in the report are taken from genuine communications we have received from patients, and from our own volunteers

*Cover picture: Cllr Jason Frost, Chairman, Havering Health and Wellbeing Board; Anne-Marie Dean, Chairman, Healthwatch Havering; and Ian Buckmaster, Director, Healthwatch Havering*

## Message from our Chair

During the pandemic our staff and volunteer members have ensured that the concerns of our local communities have been at the forefront of our thoughts and our weekly 'Keeping In Touch' Zoom meetings enabled our members to give regular and up-to-date community feedback, raising concerns and enabling early follow-up with health and social care commissioners and providers.

Although we have been working from home, every query - whether by phone or email - has been answered within 48 hours. Our Healthwatch Havering Friends Network has been providing information to residents, voluntary and statutory organisations, often twice a week.

One of our biggest achievements was leading the way, by raising awareness, with our dental services survey which we completed in October 2020. This highlighted the difficulty accessing dental care and finding dentists in the borough who would care for NHS patients.



**"Thank you so much for your email and taking the time to find out that information. Again, thank you for your kindness"**

It has been a privilege to work with carers whose dedication and commitment in very challenging situations has been amazing!

A big thank you to residents who have taken part in the many surveys that we have undertaken. Your views are important and have helped enormously in how we write reports to influence improvements in services.

Our reports highlights your views, and our new website holds all the reports and much more for you to access.



Anne-Marie Dean  
Chairman,  
Healthwatch Havering

# About us

## Here to make health and care better

We are the independent watchdog for people who use health and social care services in Havering. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support you need, 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 can 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 services to use your views to shape the health and care support you need today and in the future.



**“Local Healthwatch have done fantastic work throughout the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is more work ahead to ensure that everyone’s views are heard. COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities and to tackle these unfair health differences we will need those in power to listen, to hear the experiences of those facing inequality and understand the steps that could improve people’s lives.”**

**Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England**

# Highlights from our year

## Reaching out



We heard from

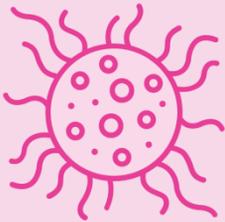
**255 people**

this year about their experiences of health and social care and we provided advice and information to

**75 people**

this year.

## Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

**45 people**

people during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

## Making a difference to care



Despite the suspension of our Enter & View programme, we published 5 reports about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services:

- Patient attendance audit at Queen's and King George Emergency Departments
- Patients' use of Interpreter Services at GP practices in Havering
- Covid-19 and Care Homes – the experiences of relatives and friends
- Dental Services in Havering
- Review of Havering GP practices' websites

## Health and care that works for you



**17 volunteers** helped us to carry out our work.

**We employ 4 staff:** All part time – 2.2 full time equivalent, which is a slight decrease from the previous year.

We received **£117,359 in funding** from Havering Council in 2020-21, the same as in the previous year.

## We launched our Friends Network in October 2019



### Friends Network

At the time, neither we nor anyone else had any idea about the pandemic that was about to hit the world. Almost no one had heard of Wuhan, in China, and few people knew the term "coronavirus". That soon changed!

Although we had not intended the Friends Network to be anything more than a means of communicating with our supporters about forthcoming events, reports and items of interest, we found in March that it was an ideal means of passing around information and advice about the pandemic itself and its consequences for local health and social care services.

At the peak, we were circulating two or three "Updates" from local NHS services about their service changes, how they were coping with the consequences of the pandemic and other vital information. We have also sent out warnings about scammers and invitations to participate in surveys. In all, we sent 134 emails to the Friends Network

Each of those emails reached not only the members of the network but many more people as members forwarded them to their friends and colleagues, many of whom, in turn, passed them on to others – and some of whom also joined the Network themselves.



**"Your newsletter is extremely useful and I have been forwarding on to my lay member colleagues. I know that getting the right content and amount of comms is harder than usual at present. So well done to you"**



# Theme one: Then and now NHS Dentistry



## Then: access to NHS dental services

**Thank you to our residents for sharing their experiences of dentistry and the co-operation of local dentists, which enabled us to raise the concerns locally and nationally. This included the CCG and MPs, Healthwatch England, who subsequently undertook a national survey, and the Chief Dental Officer NHS England. Our report has resulted in local and national awareness of the need to have greater focus on access for all individuals to NHS dental health services.**

Following the lockdown, only emergency treatments were available, mainly through calls via NHS111. Residents contacted us on behalf of themselves, family members and neighbours because access to dental care was so confusing. Many people were in pain and distressed. Only a handful of dentists in the borough were open to new NHS patients.



## Now: Ongoing dentistry issues

We launched our survey in September 2020. Our approach was to identify and talk to dental practices to get a better understanding of how dental care in Havering was being affected

**We have led a campaign to ensure that the access and treatment concerns affecting local residents is recognised as a high priority by NHS England.**

For residents the main issues were, and in many cases still are, the inability to find practices that will take NHS patients, a lack of information, access to services and priority given to private patients. Many patients who spoke to us were distressed, anxious and in pain.

Many were also suffering financial hardship, and for them private dental care was not an option. A significant number had not used the dental care system for some time, were unfamiliar with the current charging structure and were unaware either that charges were payable or to what extent

Using the CQC register we surveyed 50 dental practices in Havering; 27 replied.

**Our survey found only 15% of practices were taking on new NHS patients; over 85% stated they were prioritising patients on the basis of clinical need; and 25% stated that they were charging for PPE. Worryingly, of those not taking new patients at present, 89% indicated that they would not be taking on NHS patients in the foreseeable future.**

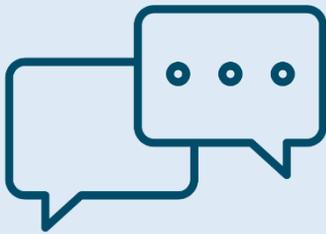


**"I am trying to find a NHS dentist that's taking on new patients for my husband and myself I have tried calling a few dentists in my area but they are only taking on private patients could you please send me a list of dentists that are taking on new patients please we live in Havering..."**

**This issue is bigger than just the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown, which created chaos for many residents. It is about health inequalities and the importance of health and wellbeing.**

**Oral health is very important as it affects what we can eat, how we communicate and socialise, and our self-confidence. Poor oral health can result in missing school or work and even lead to serious illness. Achieving good oral health is therefore a vital aspect of helping people live well. A good smile is a good start in life!**

**Our report was welcomed by the CCG, Healthwatch England, NHS England and the coverage in the Romford Recorder encouraged other residents to share their experiences.**



### **Share your views with us**

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

 [\*\*www.healthwatchhaverling.co.uk\*\*](http://www.healthwatchhaverling.co.uk)

 **01708 303 300**

 [\*\*enquiries@healthwatchhaverling.co.uk\*\*](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchhaverling.co.uk)



## Theme two: Then and now Access to GPs



### Then: accessing your local GP

The pandemic created a major overnight shift in the long-established method of face-to-face patient consultations, moving to remote consultations. Triage was put in place and, in many cases, patients were forced to share their personal clinical information via reception staff, practices nurses and managers, which did not always result in any GP intervention, but required the sharing of highly personal details, causing acute embarrassment to many patients and potentially putting them off from seeking medical advice when most needed.

Good communication is essential in times of national emergencies, and we explored 3 methods that GP practices have available to support their patients.

- Websites
- Telephone Reception Services
- Patient Participation Groups (PPG)



## Now: accessing your GP during the pandemic

Primary care is the first point of contact for patients with symptoms, worries, anxiety and questions. The opportunity to use the GPs' websites should have been a 'gamechanger' in helping patients access clinical advice: for many patients, however, that was not the case. Our report, published in November 2020, identifies some good practice and areas where improvements could be made.

Of the 45 practices in Havering, only 35 had their own website: 7 websites provided no advice for dealing with Covid-19 and only about half told patients how to access a GP during the pandemic; 40% offered no general information on health and wellbeing and only 3 practices made special provision for people who had loss of sight. 40% failed to mention their process for ordering repeat prescriptions (which is a requirement): many patients just had to ring in.



**"You have difficulty getting through to them. Longest I have spent on phone to try and get an appointment was 2hours 15minutes. When you do get through the appointments are normally gone and you are told to go through whole process again the next day"**

Many patients contacted us with concerns about the amount of time that they waited to get through to the surgery, and the long time many patients had to wait once through to reception staff. Many patients told us they rang off, for concerns about charges to their telephone bills. Patients commented that reception staff were often curt and unsympathetic, although we recognise that reception staff as the 'front of house' service for the practices were under enormous pressure. Equally, patients commented that reception staffs' kindness and understanding had meant a lot to them.



**“My daughter’s UCL consultant requested that as a family we should all be vaccinated for covid to protect her. This request was dismissed by practice as it didn’t meet their computer tick boxes”**

**“Have been to the Polyclinic because the practice doctor never phoned me back last week.”**

Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) are a formal part of all GP practices. During the pandemic, the PPGs have not had a high profile, and we have not been able to identify any PPG supporting patients.

We are currently running a survey to explore this issue further. It is a contractual requirement for GPs to have a PPG. As all organisations review past practice and plan new ways of working this would seem to be an ideal time to make patient participation in GP practices a high priority.

Healthwatch Havering’s aim is to help make PPGs more effective as one of our three top priorities for 2021/22.



**Get in touch with us and tell us what you think**

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## Responding to COVID-19

Part of our role has been linking people to reliable and up-to-date information, helping people to access the services they need and signposting to support the vaccine roll-out. We have developed new skills and honed our old ones. The insight we collect is shared with both Healthwatch England and local partners to ensure services are operating as best as possible during the pandemic.

Thanks Bev, the CCG got in touch with the practice and its all booked he can attend locally for his second jab. He was absolutely delighted with the outcome. It has taken a lot of pressure off his shoulders. He can have his next eye procedure without worry."



"This is excellent partnership working and I am grateful to be able to work alongside you and the CCG" (Havering Volunteer Centre)

"Good afternoon Carole (if you don't mind me calling you by your first name) I don't know how to thank you enough for all your help in getting this problem sorted for my wife myself and our son, apparently it was lack of communication so our son will now be added as our unpaid carer we are indeed in your debt THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS."

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



21% on GP services



10% on Dentistry



28% on Hospital Care



15% on Vaccines and blood tests

## Getting through the pandemic



Early in the pandemic, we heard from people about the lack of clear information and often inaccurate information. Our role became much more focused on providing people with clear, consistent and concise advice and information, and feeding back to the national Healthwatch network. In just three months, Healthwatch's national advice had been accessed by over 70,000 people.

The key questions people asked included:

- What does shielding mean?
- What is the difference between social distancing and self-isolation?
- How can I find an NHS dentist?



### Contact us to get the information you need

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



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# Volunteers

**At Healthwatch Havering, we are supported by volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services.**

**Despite many being required to shield from covid, this year our volunteers:**

- **Helped people have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online.**
- **Carried out website reviews for local services on the information they provide.**
- **Given us the views of local people by talking to friends and neighbours in their local communities.**



**Volunteer Member for 7 years**

A neighbour was very anxious that he could not find anywhere to get a blood test and that his condition would get out of control. As a Healthwatch volunteer, I was able to raise this issue and take part in a survey which identified a serious problem with blood testing in Havering. Healthwatch raised this with the CCG, which moved quickly to solve the problem.

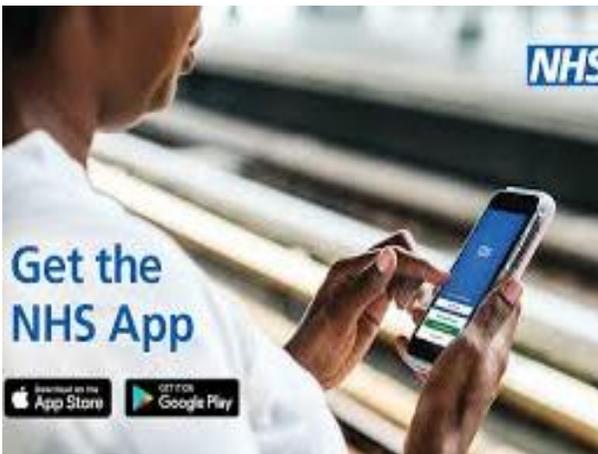
**Volunteer Member for 5 years**

As a member of the Asian community and a former NHS nurse I know it is vital to have good communication between patients and clinical teams. Patients often feel they have not been properly understood. The pandemic has taught us how important it is to be able to communicate within our growing local communities and we need good interpreting services in GP practices



**Volunteer Member for 7 years**

So many residents spoke to us about how difficult it was to contact their GP practice. We researched GP websites across the country and we found good sites dedicated to helping patients, we were concerned at how poorly many of the local GP websites compared. I am now working on how we can help to develop Patient Participation Groups in each practice so that we can improve things from the patients perspective.



**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 us at:



**[www.healthwatchhavering.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchhavering.co.uk)**

**01708 303300**

**[enquiries@healthwatchhavering.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchhavering.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.

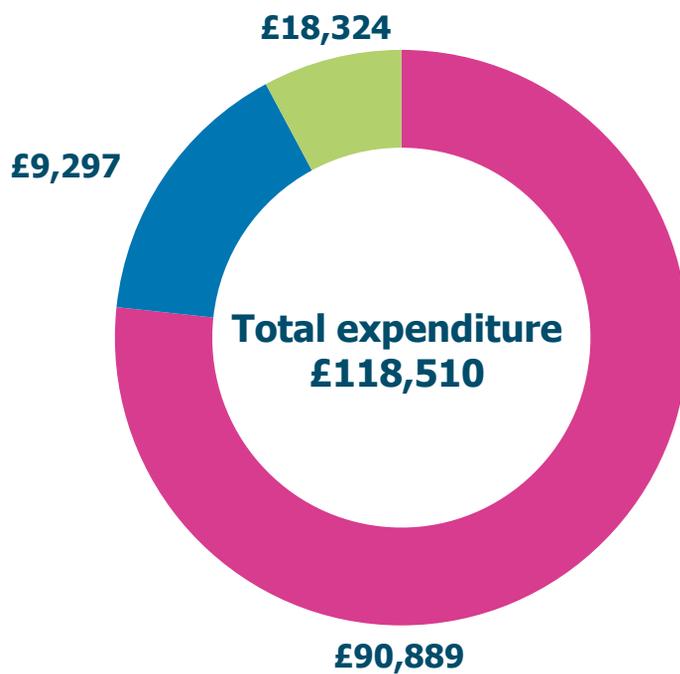
## Income

- Funding received from local authority
- Additional funding



## Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Support and administration



# Next steps & thank you

## Our top three priorities for 2021-22

- **To enable the development of Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) across the Borough**
- **Re-create our positive working relationship with Nursing and Care Homes**
- **Supporting community initiatives for residents across the Borough of Havering**

## Next steps

- Re-opening the office, provide a safe environment to meet, and plan how we continue to support our residents/patients
- We will build on the experiences shared with us and follow-up on recommendations in our reports
- We will continue to support equality and diversity and seek to support seldom heard communities



**"Tackling unfair health differences will need those in power to listen. To hear the experiences of those facing inequality and understand the steps that could improve people's lives, and then to act on what has been learned."**

We want to thank everyone who has contributed to our work during the difficult year that 2020/21 turned out to be – our volunteers, the Members and officers of the London Borough of Havering, the officials of the National Health Service commissioner and provider organisations with which we deal, our Healthwatch colleagues in North East London, the organisers and volunteers of other local voluntary organisations, the management, staff and residents of local care and nursing homes, the patients of Queen's Hospital and local GP practices...

# Statutory statements



## About us

Havering Healthwatch C.I.C., a company limited by guarantee, operating as Healthwatch Havering – registered office: Queens Court, 9-17 Eastern Road, Romford RM1 3NH

Healthwatch Havering uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

## The way we work

All our volunteers are members of the company. The general management of the company is undertaken by the directors and five volunteer members elected by the general membership (subject to certain criteria). The Committee meets 10 times a year.

Our Management Board generally meets a maximum of four times a year and all company members are entitled to attend and participate in its decision making, mostly in relation to statutory business.

Our Engagement Programme Panel, again open to all members, meets 10 times a year and manages our Engagement programmes, including Enter and View visits and Surveys.

The Annual General Meeting, held in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Acts, is held in June.

## 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 by email; we have sent out regular Updates to the participants in our Friends Network; and have engaged the public through online surveys. We have also joined online events with various bodies including Havering Council's Health and Individuals (Social Care) Overview & Scrutiny Committees and Health & Wellbeing Board, Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust and the Havering CCG.

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. This year we achieved this by working with Havering Volunteer Centre, and using our members' links with charities and faith groups.

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, our network and post out on request.

### 2020-21 priorities

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Survey of GP websites to assess how easy they were to navigate and obtain useful information	Published Jan 2021 – CCG committed to helping practice to provide useful and relevant information
Patient use of Interpreting services at GP services Survey	Recognition that there will be a greater need for this service as population expands. CCG will assess service including B&D and Redbridge
Undertake the annual independent survey for Safeguarding Adults Board	SAB received and accepted the views of residents expressed in the survey
Phlebotomy Level 2 Inquiry – members of the formal inquiry panel into shortcomings of the service due to the impact of Covid19	Report has 11 recommendations and the CCG will undertake a 1 year phlebotomy pilot working with patients to design the appropriate service model
Dental survey – undertaken because of the high number of residents concerns.	Report published 2020, contributed to the survey undertaken by Healthwatch England and contributed to their national report.

## Responses to recommendations and requests

No commissioner or provider failed to respond 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.

In common with many other local Healthwatch, we drew the attention of Healthwatch England to a number of issues arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown, including problems accessing GPs and NHS dental services. Healthwatch England produced several national reports as a result.

## Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Havering is represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board by Anne-Marie Dean, our Chair. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing the experience of residents, contributing to the health and wellbeing strategy, setting priority areas to improve people's health, and reduce health inequalities that exist in the borough.

## Overview and Scrutiny

Ian Buckmaster, our Director, attends Havering Council's Health and Individuals (Social Care) Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSC), and the Outer North East London Joint Health OSC (bringing together the Health OSCs from the Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Redbridge and Waltham Forest Councils) on our behalf. He regularly presents reports of our activities and findings to those Committees.



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