



On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch Swindon Annual Report 2020-21

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Message from our Team Manager

I don't think that any of us could have anticipated the impact that COVID-19 has had on all of our lives, or that we would be in lockdown for over a year. This has naturally had an impact on the work that we have been able to carry out, but I think we have risen to the challenge.

I look forward to the next 12 months and the opportunity to slowly start resuming some of our face-to-face work. I know that the pandemic has created new opportunities, but that new challenges have also come out of this as well. I have no doubt that the team will tackle these to continue to support the residents of Swindon.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Jo, Alex, Jim and Emma for all of their hard work, and of course our brilliant volunteers for staying with us and supporting our work remotely.



Thank you to all of the Swindon staff and volunteers for all of their hard work this year. It has been challenging but I am proud of what has been achieved.

Some highlights from the year have been:

- Our community pot projects: hearing views from [Parkinson's UK Swindon & District Branch](#), [The Harbour Project](#), [Swindon SEND Families Voice](#) and [Swindon Interactive Arts Service \(SWIAS\)](#) about their experiences of health and social care.
- COVID-19 was of course a big focus of our work, and informed most of the what we did. As the pandemic started we invited people to tell us about their experiences of accessing health and social care, as well as information about COVID-19 during the pandemic. This year we invited people across Swindon, with a particular focus on our ethnically diverse communities, to tell us their views on the COVID-19 vaccination
- We applied for funding from Healthwatch England to carry out a project on Digital Exclusion and were one of five Healthwatch from across the country to be awarded money to do this.
- Dentistry and the lack of NHS dental appointments available for patients was one of the dominant themes that arose this year. We have signposted people to access care, where this has been possible, and fed into the national picture of a national crisis.



Vanessa Scott- Healthwatch Swindon Manager

About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Swindon. 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 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 services to use your views to shape the health and care support you need today and in the future.



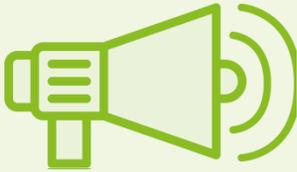
“Local Healthwatch have done fantastic work throughout the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is more work ahead to ensure that everyone’s views are heard. COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities and to tackle these unfair health differences we will need those in power to listen, to hear the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

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

Reaching out



We heard from

1,266 people

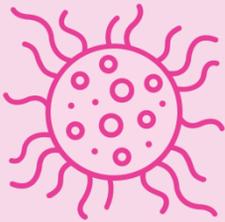
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

397 people

this year.

Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

1,020

people during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

Making a difference to care



We published

13 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Health and care that works for you



22 volunteers

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they contributed 30 number of days.

We employ 5 staff

Which equates to the equivalent of three full time members of staff.

We received

£137,424 in funding

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



Theme one: Then and now Dentistry



Then: access to NHS dental services

During 2020/2021 one of the biggest themes which has emerged from the feedback we have received from Swindon residents was the difficulty in accessing NHS dental appointments. This accounted for nearly 12% of the feedback we received.

Thanks to people sharing their experiences of dentistry we have been able to monitor what has been happening in Swindon and to use what we have been hearing to feed into the regional picture in the South West, as well as the [national picture](#), of a growing crisis in dental care.

The main issues included:

- Difficulties in booking routine and emergency care appointments.
- Priority being given to private patients.
- Insufficient information on dental surgery websites.



Now: Ongoing dentistry issues

Since the beginning of 2021 we, along with our volunteers, have been carrying out a piece of work, which involves checking what information is available on the websites and then ringing the practices each month asking them the following three questions:

1. Are you still an NHS dental practice?
2. Are you currently taking on new NHS patients?
3. Are you currently offering check-up appointments to existing patients?

We have been updating our website with this information, as well as helping individuals book an NHS dental appointment, on the rare occasion one has been available.

We have been attending the South West Dental Network group quarterly meetings and contributed to a presentation collating feedback from all Healthwatch across the South West.

NHS England and NHS Improvement commissioned Ottaway Strategic Management to undertake an Oral Health Needs Assessment for the South West region. We helped to promote this and helped to recruit participants to their workshops. The report has now been published and the summary report can be read [here](#).

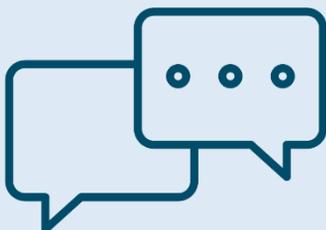


“I am on ESA and DLA and finding it hard to find a dentist can't afford to pay for dental plans can you help me”

There is general confusion about 'being registered' with a dentist and a misconception that the process is the same as being registered with a GP. If people have not been to see their dentist regularly they have found that they no longer have access to NHS dental appointments. Communication with patients therefore needs to be looked at and addressed so that they know what to expect. In 2017 [we also asked people about their views on dentistry and a request for more education on prevention emerged from this](#).

People have contacted us in distress about not being able to find an NHS dentist, with harrowing reports of ongoing pain, not being able to eat properly, weight loss and depression. Crucially, patients who have been unable to access treatment they desperately need, need to be able to do this as a matter of urgency and in such a way that they are not faced with crippling costs.

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 is here for you.

 www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk

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Theme two: Then and now Community Pot Projects



Then: Community Pot Project – Nepalese Association of Wiltshire (NAW)

In 2019 we awarded our Community Pot Fund of £2,000 to the Nepalese Association Wiltshire (NAW). We wanted to find out whether or not health and social care in Swindon was meeting their needs.

The key findings were from the [Nepalese Association Survey Report](#):

- Language was a barrier for over half of the respondents. There was also a request for prescription delivery and an alternative way to get prescriptions to help those experiencing language barriers.
- The majority of respondents cited a need to eat more healthily and take more exercise, with some requesting more information and support in order to do this.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of appointments and therefore long wait times to see a doctor and a call for more staff.

Since then, and with the arrival of COVID-19, there has been a big emphasis on having information in different languages. We have promoted Language Line to NAW and have raised the need for support and education with healthy eating with Swindon Borough Council. We have also worked with our Nepalese contacts again this year on our Digital Exclusion Project (refer to page 10).



Now: Community Pot Projects 2020/21

We, along with our Advisory Group, decided that continuing to offer small pots of money to local groups and organisations would be a really good way to hear from a wider range of individuals. This is particularly true of seldom heard groups, from whom we usually get limited feedback via our usual engagement methods.

We gave funding to:

- [Parkinson's UK Swindon & District Branch](#)
- [The Harbour Project](#)
- [Swindon SEND Families Voice](#)
- [Swindon Interactive Arts Service \(SWIAS\)](#)

Key findings from the 263 people we heard from were:

- There is concern about the post-COVID-19 backlog of waiting lists, referrals, and appointments.
- Navigation of health services is a challenge for people new to the country.
- Access to health and care services needs to be maintained for people who have limited or no personal use of online services.



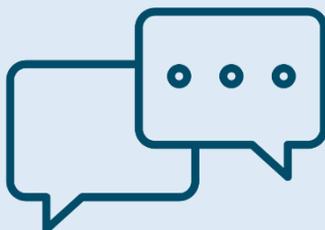
*Many thanks for the **final report**. It has been put together very well. I had passed it onto an old acquaintance of yours, Sally Wood, [Parkinsons] UK Area Development Manager West. She is phoning me today to discuss it. She thought "This is a really interesting but concerning report with a good number of participants".*

We know from feedback that we continue to get from people, that access to GP appointments, for example, continues to be an issue in Swindon. This will be one of our work priorities in 2021/22.

We also know from some of the feedback contained within the reports, as well as from other work we have carried out this year that people are digitally excluded. Whilst there have been huge benefits to the rapid implementation of digital appointments these are problematic for a significant minority of people. There are a myriad of reasons for this; some people are not confident using technology, some people's disabilities make it difficult for them to engage online, some people have no internet access or they are simply not interested in technology.

We also undertook a piece of work on Digital Exclusion this year, which we will cover in the next section.

Share your views with us



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Theme three: Then and now Digital Exclusion Project



Then: Digital Exclusion during the pandemic

From April to July 2020 we invited people across Swindon to take part in our COVID 19 survey to find out what impact this had on accessing health and social care. An area of focus within this report was on people's experience of telephone and video consultations.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digitalisation of services which in lots of ways was very positive for those who are able to access appointments in this way, and so for many respondents phone and video consultations worked well.

The [report](#) highlighted that there are clear efficiencies in using technology in carrying out some, if not all appointments.. It also said that consideration needed to be given to those who are digitally excluded. It should be noted that the survey was all carried out online, and so would not have gathered the views of those not able to access the internet. At the time discussions were being held about the issue of digital exclusion and what could be done across the borough to address this.

In September 2020 Healthwatch England invited Healthwatch across the country to apply for £5,000 of funding to carry out a project on digital exclusion. The funding was to be awarded to five Healthwatch, of which we were one of the successful applicants.



Now: How to support people who are digitally excluded better

Thanks to the strong relationships we have built up with surgeries over the years, we felt that we would be in a good position to be able to deliver the Digital Exclusion Project.

This project was to be a deep dive into the experiences of people from groups that previous research had identified as being at greater risk of digital exclusion – those from areas of social deprivation, especially:

- those over 65
- people with disabilities
- people with language barriers.

It aimed to find out if their interactions with primary care had changed during the pandemic and with the acceleration of moving to online appointments.

The project brief stipulated that we were to work with patients and staff from one practice, to make sure that everybody had the same baseline level of experience of care being provided.

We invited [Priory Road Medical Centre](#), which is part of the [Wyvern Health Partnership](#), to work with us on this.

“



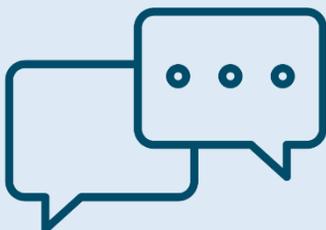
“I don’t feel confident to challenge the receptionists when they say it can’t be in person or they can’t give me a time. I found it hard to explain over the phone. It was really hard to hear what the doctor was saying. I told him once that I couldn’t hear, but when he was too quiet to hear again I didn’t feel confident enough to ask him to repeat what he said.”

Healthwatch England collated the findings from the five projects and we have published the [Locked out: Digitally excluded people’s experiences of remote GP appointments report](#) with the key findings.

These include, ensuring that face-to-face appointments are still available to patients, supporting people to learn how to access remote appointments, making sure people are not disadvantaged by remote care and their rights are maintained, ensuring practices record patients’ preferences about access to care and committing to digital inclusion by treating internet access as a universal right.

One of our work priorities for 2021/22 will be looking at GP access, including the different ways people are meant to be accessing these online. We propose to work with Primary Care Networks and the Clinical Commissioning Group to develop support for Swindon residents in understanding how this works.

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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 best as possible during the pandemic.

This year we helped people in Swindon by:

- Providing up to date advice on the COVID-19 response, by providing a range of local and national information on [our website](#)
- Linking people to reliable up-to-date information about everything from dentistry, to GPs, to advocacy
- Supporting the vaccine roll-out by helping local residents understand how the booking system works
- Helping stakeholders understand the needs of Swindon residents with feedback gathered in our reports on [COVID-19](#) during the first lockdown, [Hospital Discharge](#) during the pandemic, [good practice in Care Homes](#) in lockdown and people's attitudes to the [COVID-19 Vaccine](#).
- Helping people to access the services they need

Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



20% on GP services



12% on Dentistry



12% on Hospital Care



11% on Vaccines

Advice & information



Early in the pandemic, we heard from 175 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 articles on our website to help address people's concerns. In just three months, our national advice had been accessed by over 70,000 people by Healthwatch throughout England.

The key questions people were asking 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

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Volunteers

At Healthwatch Swindon we are supported by 22 volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services.

This year our volunteers:

- Have attended meetings on our behalf, such as the Primary Care Commissioning Committee meetings, the Citizens Assembly, Patient and Public Engagement meetings, Patient Participation Groups and more.
- Carried out website reviews of dentists and the information they provide.
- Came runner up in the Pride of Swindon awards. We celebrated with them by having a cream tea together at the Olive Tree Cafe



Moya Pinson– Volunteer with the Pride of Swindon Certificate



Supporting our volunteers

We set up virtual volunteer team meetings via Zoom, which were well attended. At these meetings, we organised speakers which included Bath & North East Somerset, Swindon & Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Bowel Cancer UK and from Great Western Hospitals NHS Trust. We also celebrated the Pride of Swindon runner up certificate with a cream tea, where we also did a Safeguarding refresher.

Advisory Board member - Harry

"I joined the Healthwatch Advisory Board three years ago. The difference at Healthwatch for me is that that it focuses directly on patient concerns, is not affiliated to any of the health providers and it truly represents the views of the patient. I believe that Healthwatch does really good work taking the voice of patients forward and allowing them to express both positive and negative views on services in a more open way. By using Healthwatch, patients can help to improve and challenge services that they receive, where necessary."



Helping online - Harry & Steve

In an effort to be as inclusive as possible, we created, a 'Volunteer Technology' survey. This was done with the help of two of our tech-savvy volunteers Harry and Steve. We sent this out via Survey Monkey and spoke to the other volunteers over the phone. This was done to make sure that every volunteer has the opportunity to attend our Zoom meetings.



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 at **Healthwatch Swindon**.



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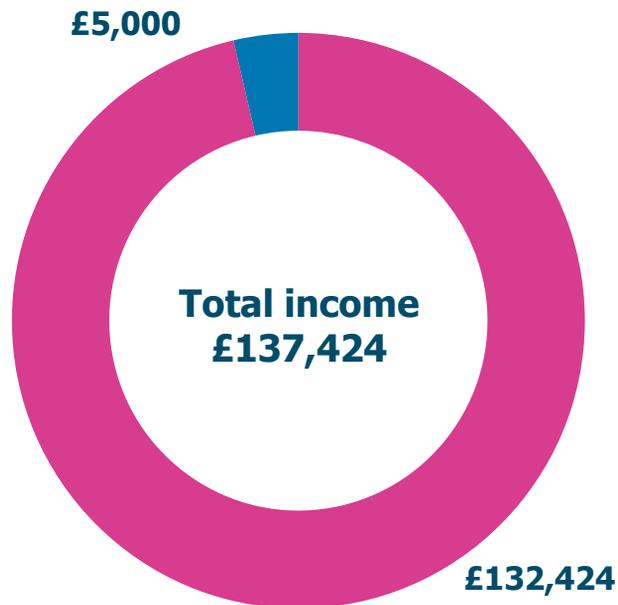
info@healthwatchswindon.org.uk

Finances

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

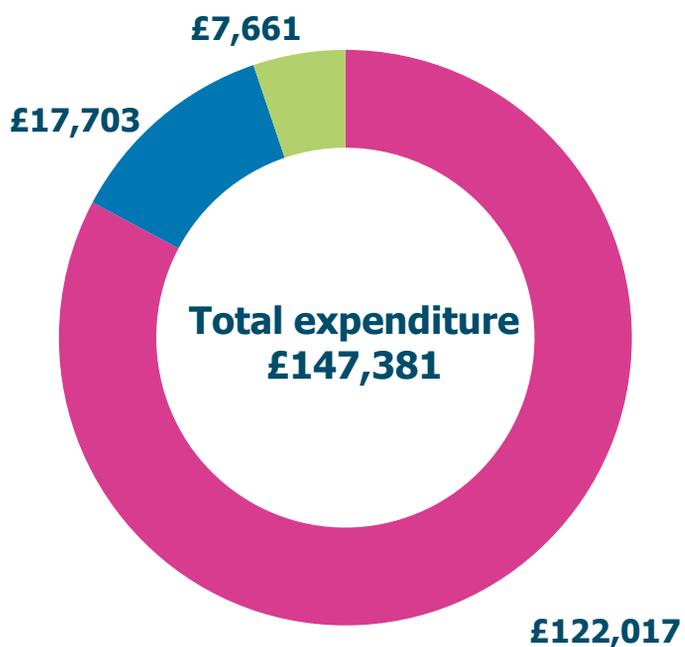
Income

- Funding received from local authority
- Additional funding



Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Office costs



Next steps & thank you

Top three priorities for 2021-22

- Dentistry
- GP Access & Digital Health
- Community Pot Projects

Next steps

- During 2020 and 2021 we have been working in partnership with [Healthwatch West Berkshire](#) and [Healthwatch Wiltshire](#) to plan a visit to Great Western Hospitals Trust, following on from the CQC inspection in early 2020. Due to COVID, the planned virtual visit was postponed twice, but this will take place in July 2021, and will be a combination of a virtual visit and an Enter and View visit.
- Digital Exclusion and working with Primary Care Networks and the Clinical Commissioning Group to support people to understand how to use the various digital platforms in accessing GP appointments.



"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."

A message from our CEO

The past year has been remarkable for so many reasons, of which the commitment that our volunteers and staff have continued to show in adapting their approach, offering their insights and giving their time over this challenging period will be forever remembered- thank you!

The pandemic has reminded us, if we had been tempted to forget, that health inequalities exist and that our efforts to remove them from all systems and approaches must be placed at the heart of decision making. We must place even more emphasis on the importance of the voices of those individuals who face these inequalities and we should take time to understand what impact the use of new approaches, such as digital interventions, may have on our population.



Health care systems are changing at pace and I cannot wait to see how people in our communities help shape and drive positive change – here's to the coming year!

Kevin Peltonen-Messenger – CEO of The Care Forum



Statutory statements

About us

The Care Forum, Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue, Bristol, BS16 2QQ

Healthwatch Swindon 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 Healthwatch board consists of five members, two of whom are volunteers, to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2020/21 the board met four times and made decisions on matters such as funding for the community pots and looking at GP access and the myriad of different ways people are expected to book their medical appointments.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. By far the biggest theme to have emerged this year was dentistry and the lack of access to NHS dental appointments. This helped shape the work we carried out to review local dentists, to enable us to provide up-to-date information to the residents of Swindon.

Another theme, which has been the case prior to COVID, is GP access. This, as well as the work we have carried out on the Digital Exclusion Project, has helped us to decide to look at this as a work priority for 2021/22.

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, by email, provided a webform on our website, provided a 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.

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 have done this by, for example, funding local groups and organisations to gather the views of their service users (see pages 9 and 10), working in partnership with representatives of Swindon's ethnically diverse communities to share their view on the COVID-19 vaccinations and having 20% representation of Swindon's ethnically diverse communities in our team of volunteers. We know that we need to do more to support diversity and are looking at our Advisory Board to ensure that in the future it will be as diverse as possible.

2020-21 priorities

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
COVID-19	We have helped people get the right information or access to the vaccine through a variety of methods, including our close links with BSW CCG
Dentistry	We have contributed to the quarterly South West Dental Network meetings, ensuring the patient experience of access to dental care has been shared.
Prescription Ordering Direct (POD)	A theme in quarter 1 to emerge was issues in getting through to POD on the phone. We suggested that BSW CCG creates an online form for people to complete regarding their prescriptions. This was added to their website soon after the suggestion was made.

Responses to recommendations and requests

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.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Swindon is represented on the Swindon Health and Wellbeing Board by Vanessa Scott, Manager, Healthwatch Swindon.



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