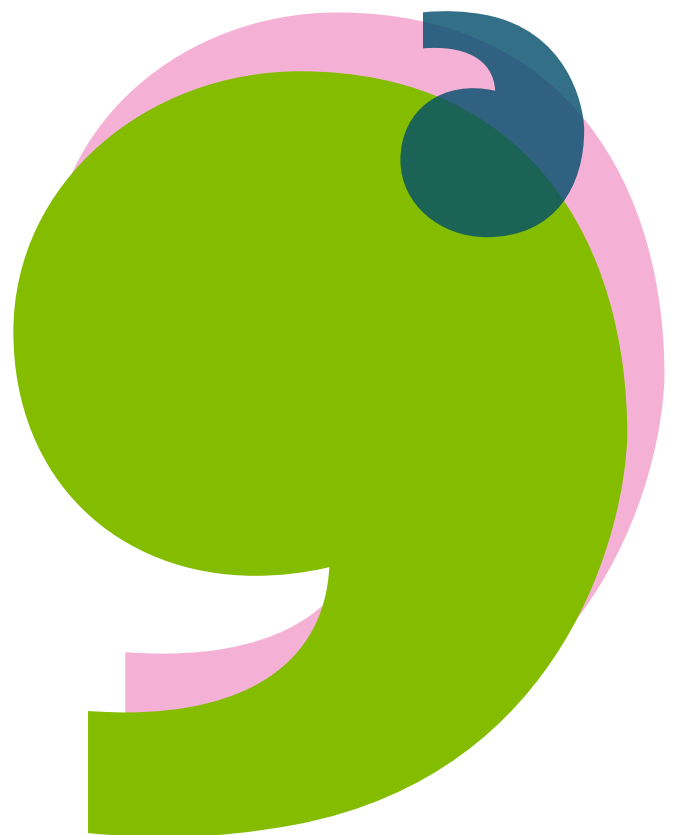




# Enter and View report

MIND- Abingdon - The Charter

November 2019



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Details of visit

Details of visit:	
Service Address	Mind Abingdon, The Charter, Broad St, Abingdon OX14 3LZ
Service Provider	Mind Oxfordshire
Date and Time	Wednesday 6 <sup>th</sup> November (evening) and Tuesday 12 <sup>th</sup> November (daytime) 2019
Authorised Representatives	Veronica Barry, Carol Ball, Jeanne Humber
Contact details	01865 520520

## 1.2 Acknowledgements

*Healthwatch Oxfordshire would like to thank the service provider, service users, members of staff and volunteers for their contribution to the Enter and View Programme.*

## 1.3 Disclaimer

Please note that this report relates to findings observed on the specific date set out above. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.



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## 2 What is Enter and View?

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Part of the Healthwatch Oxfordshire programme is to carry out Enter and View visits. Healthwatch Oxfordshire representatives carry out these visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being run and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement. The Health and Social Care Act allows local Healthwatch-authorized representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and carers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies. Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation - so that we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.

Healthwatch Enter and Views are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit, they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies.

### 2.1 Purpose of Visit

To engage with service users to understand their experience of attending Mind's Abingdon Charter Centre, including activities and support, as well as to hear about experiences of wider mental health support.

To get a staff and volunteer perspective on working at Mind, and support.

To observe how the project operates and provides its services.

### 2.2 Strategic drivers

During 2019, Healthwatch Oxfordshire looked at people's experiences of mental health services across the county. We wanted to hear what was working well as well as where things could be improved. We visited a range of providers and mental health settings provided under Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership (OMHP), including inpatient acute care, community-based care and voluntary sector provision.



## 2.3 Methodology

This report stems from a visit to MIND's Charter Centre, in Abingdon.

We undertook planning the visit to Mind by phone and emails, following initial meeting with Mind's Chief Executive.

We visited the Charter Centre twice, during a daytime and an evening session, in order to get a broader view of the work. We saw the project in action, as well as hearing from individual service users who were happy to speak with us and from staff and volunteers.

We collected information by talking with service users and staff by using prompt sheets to act as an aide memoire to promote free-flowing conversation. We heard from **seven service users** who were happy to speak with us on an individual basis on the day. We also spoke with one staff member, one volunteer and one student. We left copies of our mental health questionnaire for other service users to fill in in their own time and staff were able to fill in an online questionnaire.

## 2.4 Background

Oxfordshire Mind was established in 1967, as an independent charity to support people living in Oxfordshire (<https://www.oxfordshiremind.org.uk>). It is part of a network of local Minds, adhering to National Mind's standards.

Oxfordshire Mind is part of the Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership.

In addition, it receives funding from a range of other sources to enable it to provide wider wellbeing support, courses and information services for anyone experiencing mental health issues.

Oxfordshire Mind aims to raise awareness of mental health issues, making sure that support for mental health in Oxfordshire is easy to find. Mind runs a range of mental health support and wellbeing services, advice and information, including:

- Free courses and workshops held on weekdays, evenings and weekends. These aim to increase understanding of mental health- and focus on a wide range of themes such as assertiveness and communication, managing stress, managing strong emotions
- Workplace training to support mental health at work
- Support with welfare benefits
- Peer support groups across the county
- Supported housing and accommodation
- Information and advice on mental health support and services and provision of Mind's information line support
- Primary Care Wellbeing Project
- Benefits for Better Mental Health
- Children's and Young People Team
- Safe Haven, Crisis support in Oxford.

Oxfordshire Mind operates from sites across the county, including **Oxford city** (the Mill), **Cherwell and West**; Banbury, Bicester and Witney, **South and Vale**: Abingdon (Charter), as well as making use of local community and health facilities and meeting places. It runs a huge range of tailored courses and workshops, as well as activities such as arts and crafts, music, mindfulness, board games, healthy cooking and opportunities for physical activity such as health walks and yoga.

People can contact Oxfordshire Mind directly themselves, via the information line, or with referral from GP or mental health professionals. On contact, they will be offered a 30-minute 'Options Session' by phone or face to face, with a Wellbeing Worker, who will work together to identify and signpost to the type of support and interests relevant to them. The person will then be offered courses or activities within Mind or encouraged to access other support. Once an Option Session is complete, and Oxfordshire Mind can offer support, the person can then access any activities of relevance by using the activities information on the website. Once attending, service users are given support, can make use of the Recovery Star as a tool for setting goals, or more informal support, and can come and go as desired.

Oxfordshire Mind encourages involvement from people who use its services, and for them to bring their own expertise on mental health to the organisation. During 2019, it has taken a strategic review of processes and pathways for service users to be involved and feed into the wider organisation, as well as ensuring that appropriate support is offered to those that do become volunteers.

Its Involvement Strategy aims are that "Oxfordshire Mind will embed the involvement of service users and stakeholders at all levels within the organisation, aiming always for a co-productive approach. Oxfordshire Mind aims to ensure that all involvement is recovery and wellbeing-focused, is inclusive, is meaningful, and has a positive impact." Opportunities for this are through opportunities for becoming a 'lived experience' volunteer or interviewer, Expert by Experience, Involvement Champion, Peer Supporter, as well as enabling input and feedback at Mind's different venues.

## 2.4 Summary of findings

Oxfordshire Mind's Charter Centre is based in the middle of Abingdon on the first floor of the Charter Complex, above the Library, and adjacent to the GP surgery and multi-story car park. Local buses come past the centre, so it is accessible from around the town.

The Charter Centre offers wellbeing activities and peer group sessions through the week (Mon-Fri) along with evening session on a Wednesday for people who work or are in full time education. In addition, courses are offered on Saturdays.



The centre is accessed by stairs, and by a lift from the car park area. The stairs and entrance approach at night feel poorly lit and gloomy, and not easy to find in the dark for first timers.

However, on entering the Mind's Charter Centre, the atmosphere changes, with a light, warm and welcoming space opening out. The centre is deceptively large and roomy, with office space, main open plan area, large fully equipped kitchen, and dining area, toilets, tables for artwork and comfy seating areas. The centre feels homely and is decorated with service users' art works and posters, plants, and craft work.

There is a clear information board in the main area, with up-to-date information on events and local support services, and a display of activities and courses for the day and weeks ahead.

The kitchen is well-equipped, and freshly cooked lunch is provided each day, using produce delivered from an Oxford community food co-op delivery, aimed at using surplus supermarket food. Service users share mealtime together, with a chance to socialise. Service users can help themselves to hot drinks at any time.

There is an emphasis on service users making the space their own, taking pride and ownership, setting up shared self-run activities together, and making suggestions on the day. Service users are encouraged to make the centre their 'home' and to contribute to its development, as well as to the wider Oxfordshire Mind organisation.

The centre manager encourages innovative thinking and is open to new ideas, providing strong leadership. Strong working links have been established with local mental health professionals and support via a monthly networking meeting over lunch. Outreach and support to serving military personnel and families has also been established at the local RAF base at Benson.

## 2.5 Results of visit

### Available Information

The project has well displayed and up to date information available for service users to make use of including;

- Large notice boards, with up to date information on mental health support, social support and voluntary sector initiatives;
- Information on local support and activities;
- Information on Mind, how to get involved in the organisation and ways to give feedback;
- Health and Safety information as appropriate, in kitchen and on board;
- Healthwatch Oxfordshire poster.



## Service user Feedback

We were available to speak to service users at both the daytime and evening sessions. In total we heard from seven people who were happy to speak with us.

Service users we spoke to told us that they really valued being able to come to the Charter Centre in Abingdon. Charter was seen as a safe, warm and welcoming space, where people could come, 'be themselves' and feel able to meet others with shared experiences.

A number of people commented that coming to the Charter was the highlight of their week and helped to get them out and meet others. It was a place where people felt able to build relationships, both with staff and those with similar experience. The space provided a place of understanding about mental health, which was not always forthcoming within family or work settings.

People found staff approachable and compassionate, and valued the support given to them. Service users felt able to tell staff how they were feeling and be accepted for that and not feel judged. Some service users commented on the need for consistency of approach from all staff.

People valued the wide range of opportunities and activities available at the Charter, accessing it for one or two sessions a week, and some also using wider services in Oxford at the Mill. Comments on the practical value of courses, such as the healthy lifestyle and cooking courses, yoga and managing anxiety. Art and craft and peer led music sessions were valued, enabling people to join together in a shared activity. Service users had been given tools and information to help them manage their own condition, and to improve their overall physical and mental health through lifestyle changes. The women's group and peer support sessions were also valued.

There was a sense of ownership of the space. People spoke of feeling 'comfortable'. Service users felt able and encouraged to give input into the





activities programme, suggest ideas, or to set up shared activities themselves such as craft and games sessions.

Service users commented that they felt able to contribute to the organisation, to speak out and be heard and give suggestions, as well as taking an active role if they wanted to. For example, we heard from service users who were taking part in Experts by Experience, help with events and fundraising, peer support roles and also taking part in interview panels when new staff were recruited. We also heard from service users who had been involved in organising 'My Life' Wellbeing event in the summer.

Support and training was given to enable people to take part, and be involved, but without the pressure and expectation of experiencing poor mental health at the time. Involvement of this kind was seen giving skills both supportive to future job prospects and getting back confidence for other areas of life following a period of poor health. It was also a way of reaching out to the wider community and supporting openness and education about mental wellbeing.

A number of people commented on the value of the Charter as a place to go when waiting for access to more specialised services such as Talking Space, and Complex Needs service. The Charter was seen as a place that 'helped them get through' this sometimes-stressful waiting period. However, there was also the view that more focused specialised support was needed for some, and that voluntary sector groups such as the Charter were not able to provide this.

Staff at the Charter were seen as helpful in giving support to help access and follow up wider mental health support as well as communicating with other services, at the same time as respecting confidentiality.

### **What suggestions did people make?**

When asked what they would like to change we heard the following suggestions:

- More weekend and evening options for those who work. Weekends and evenings were seen as a 'struggle' and a 'difficult gap' for some, especially if feeling bad, and with lack of other places to go in the locality, and lack of people to see face to face;
- More 'drop in' sessions;
- Service users voiced concerns that there could be more resourcing financially to support staffing, and activities;
- Travel to the Charter from surrounding areas was not easy if using public transport and could be costly and time-consuming if not eligible for a bus pass;
- Some comments were received on the peer support sessions. Whilst it was seen as helpful to be able to raise issues freely, some felt that the sessions could be facilitated more effectively. This would enable equal opportunity



to speak and be heard and ensure all service users felt safe with issues raised. Some felt that staff could benefit from more support in skills to run and manage groups dynamics and sense of safety. Larger groups often seemed more challenging and feeling of how useful the group was might vary. Consistency of staff approach was seen as important.

- Some service users commented on the entrance to the Charter - sometimes, and especially if visiting for the first time, the dark stairs, often with young people gathering, could be perceived as intimidating. Service users would welcome some way of brightening up the main entrance and stairs and making access more obvious and welcoming outside.

### Service users' comments on mental health support in Oxfordshire

- People had varied experiences of mental health support, often accessing a number of services over time;
- All commented on the lack of places to go for mental health support both in Abingdon and the South and Vale wider area, with a perception that support was 'Oxford centric';
- We heard about what service users felt was long waiting times for both Complex Needs Service (one mentioned four years) and Talking Space and how challenging it was during this time. Others felt time restricted sessions offered by therapy services within Adult Mental Health Team were not enough to support full recovery;
- Some felt that not getting help when sought it meant that things can escalate and get worse - 'needs to be more help out there so people can get help quicker';
- We heard a range of feedback about the Complex Needs service including comments on the long waiting times and perceived lack of alternative support- there was a need for 'something in the middle' like a 'drop in' service. Once the service was accessed, we heard praise for the support given at Complex Needs Service, and that Oxfordshire was seen as 'ahead' in having this service compared to many other regions. Some however, felt the support was extremely challenging- along with a recognition that you had to be 'ready' to make full use of it, and this was not always the case.
- However, Complex Needs was seen as a difficult service to benefit from if you were working, as it took a huge commitment. We heard comments that as all the in-depth sessions were delivered on weekdays, those working felt it was difficult to gain permission from or even tell some workplaces that they needed to do the course. Workplace support and understanding was not always forthcoming. STARS (Support Training and Recovery System) bringing in people with lived experience to support the programme was seen as valuable.



- We heard how some felt there was a ‘gap’ between Complex Needs and Talking Space, where people would feel uncertain of where to turn and would welcome more therapeutic support;
- People commented on feeling they had to constantly ‘re-tell their story’ when moving through referrals across the system and that this was often difficult.

### Activities

There is a wide range of creative activities available at the Charter Centre, and the programme is constantly developing.

The Charter Centre is open Monday to Friday, at varying times, offering daytime activities and courses, as well as a ‘late shift’ peer support session on evenings for people working and in full time education (Wednesdays) and Saturday courses. Current activities include: healthy living, yoga, relaxation, peer support and cooking meals, music, craft and women only group.

Courses offered include Assertiveness and Wellbeing, Practical Ways to Wellbeing, Managing Strong Emotions, Managing Stress and Exploring Self Esteem. There is a practical focus on developing skills to support people to manage their own wellbeing, share experience and learning with others. Service users are supported to develop ideas, suggest and set up activities of interest. All courses were evaluated through feedback at the end.

### Staff and volunteer Feedback

Staff and volunteers commented that they love their work and being alongside service users in their journey. Empathy and understanding was seen as an essential quality for staff, and maintaining and supporting quality of staff was key.

The ethos, values and focus of the Charter was seen as important in that it embraced service user’s involvement, and encouraged them to ‘own’ the project, as a ‘home from home’ supporting the running of activities and organisation at all levels.

Resources were seen as stretched, impacting both on staffing levels, and activities.

The manager works innovatively, and has established Health Partners Liaison meetings, bringing in wider health and mental health related partners to share information, and encourage joined up working. This includes contributions from the police, local mental health teams, GPs, health navigators, and sometimes focuses on themes, for example Modern Slavery, or Autism. This group is key for supporting an understanding of the local area, and how support for service users can be improved.

Staff were supported as a team with morning and after session feedback, 1:1 support, and felt able to contribute and be heard both here and by wider



Oxfordshire Mind organisation. Suggestions made were taken seriously, and it was felt they could bring about change. The manager encouraged staff to take time out and go for a quick walk at lunch breaks where possible.

Wellbeing workers sometimes felt ‘out of their depth’ and would welcome more training particularly in managing groups dynamics, managing challenges, and CBT for example in order to ensure that these are safe spaces, and people’s voices are heard.

There was understanding of the whistleblowing policy, and the organisation was seen as fair and ethical.

**Staff comments on wider mental health system**

## 2.6 Additional findings

- Opportunity is given for carers or family members to be involved where appropriate and are actively welcomed.

## 2.7 Recommendations

**Oxfordshire Mind**

- The Health Partners Liaison Meeting is an example of good practice, and could be shared as an example for other areas
- Investigate the feasibility of making the entrance area more inviting, and feeling safer, including improved lighting. For example, whilst this is out of Oxfordshire Mind’s jurisdiction, would there be ways of doing something like a mural project with additionally sourced funds?
- Review support to wellbeing workers and role in peer groups in terms of skills to facilitate and manage groups dynamics to ensure they are safe and supported spaces

**Wider observations for the attention of Oxfordshire Mental Health Partnership**

- Long waits for Complex Needs Service can pressurise voluntary sector settings, and we heard that there is space for ‘something in-between’ as people face long waiting times

## 2.8 Service provider response

‘Thank you for your report - a very good reflection of your visits’

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