

**Support for our most vulnerable  
people during the COVID-19  
situation.**

**Independent research onto the support  
received by residential care homes and  
domiciliary care agencies.**

Interim Report, July 2020

Report produced by the  
Healthwatch St Helens  
Support Team





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## Background

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Healthwatch St Helens felt it was important to understand what people living and working in nursing/care/residential homes and receiving domiciliary care were experiencing.

We were aware that our Local Authority Social Care teams were offering a lot of support. In collaboration it was agreed that Healthwatch St Helens could be effective in conducting independent research into what the managers and staff of nursing/care/residential homes and domiciliary care agencies felt about that support.

## What did we ask?

- What support has been useful from health and social care colleagues since the outbreak of COVID-19?
- What health and social care involvement has been unhelpful?
- What improvements in support/offer from health and social care colleagues would you like to see?
- Any other comments

## What did they tell us?

Staff from the Homes/agencies had the option of remaining anonymous, however they were encouraged to identify which Home/agency they were from, in order for any follow up work to be done, should any concerns arise around the quality of the support being given. We spoke to Company Directors, Managers and Senior Staff who gave their time to speak candidly about their experiences and how they adapted working practices in unprecedented times. Communication was by telephone and email, with telephone calls ranging from five minutes to almost an hour.

Around forty care homes and agencies were contacted over a six week period. In many cases it became apparent that senior staff felt that care workers were undervalued and not given the same recognition as other health care professionals. One Manager was quoted as saying *'My staff have worked like warriors through this pandemic, and should have been given the same recognition as NHS staff.'*

Another Manager we spoke to said *'Social Care is just as important as NHS, we do feel overlooked.'*

Many of the individuals we spoke to told us that communication needed to be clearer and more informative. We were told that *'communication is*

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*often overlapped*’ and *’repetitive*’. It was noted that communication from hospital was also poor at times, mainly regarding test results. Many care homes and agencies reported that the weekly phone calls from St Helens Council were good as requests for PPE or information would be discussed.

Contact Cares was mentioned several times by different individuals. The issue was always the difficulty in getting through. One senior staff member informed us *’I had a fifteen minute wait to get through, and I only needed some information.’*

The involvement of GPs also came under criticism, with some GPs refusing to visit, or indeed, take calls. One senior member of staff told us that, *’it’s nigh on impossible to get a visit or call from a GP’* or they *’got fobbed off’*. However, it is fair to say that some GPs responded quickly and effectively to requests of appointments and this made difficult times a little easier, using *’Face time’* to chat to staff and residents in care settings.

The Frailty Team, Infection Control Team and St Helens Council received high praise in terms of their willingness to help and their quick response times. Managers also mentioned how their staff were willing to take on extra shifts and even change or swap job roles to help.

Finally, it is important to mention the community itself. Throughout this piece of work, the kindness of people in this borough were mentioned. Help came in the form of local businesses donating food, schools making face masks and supermarkets donating *’goodies’* to staff. It is pleasing to know that in these unprecedented times, good will and generosity of St Helens people remains.

## Recommendations

After all the questionnaires were completed, we compiled a list of recommendations that came from Social Care staff, that they feel they would benefit from. The recommendations to come from this piece of work include:-

- A mobile unit to test staff would be welcome. Many do not drive and the nearest testing station is St Helens Hospital.
  - Re-introduction of the *’tele-meds’* system. A Manager explained that although she knew this could cause its own problems it would make life much easier during the pandemic with regards to medication changes and implementation.
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- Introduction of a regional ‘care bank’ to offer help in staffing wherever needed locally.
  - A direct contact to the organisation/individual, instead of using Contact Cares for all queries and enquiries.
  - Support into the mental health of staff needs to be examined and suitable access to services provided.

#### **Disclaimer**

Please note that the information contained in this report does not reflect the opinions of staff or volunteers from Healthwatch St Helens. It relates entirely to the views and experiences provided by staff members we spoke to.

#### **Appendix 1.**

Survey

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Please advise the person who is completing these questions that they and/or the home can remain anonymous, although providing a name will allow someone to follow up issues raised with them.

<b>Name and role of person completing questions (optional)</b>	
<b>Name of home (optional)</b>	
<b>What support has been useful from health and social care colleagues since the outbreak of Covid -19</b>	
<b>What health and social care involvement has been unhelpful?</b>	
<b>What improvements in support / offer from health and social care colleagues would you like to see?</b>	
<b>Any other comments:</b>	

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