



In This Together

Then and now

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Annual Report 2020-21

About Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is the local consumer champion promoting choice and influencing the provision of high quality health, social care and wellbeing services for all across Central Bedfordshire.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) has significant statutory powers to ensure that the voice of the consumer is strengthened and heard by those who commission, deliver and regulate health and care services. HWCB engages and consults with all sections of the local population so that a wide crosssection of views are heard, understood and acted upon. Everything we say and do is informed by our connections to local people and our expertise is grounded in their experience.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is one of three local Healthwatch in the County of Bedfordshire which belong to a network of local Healthwatch. Healthwatch England leads, supports and guides the Healthwatch network which is made up of the national body and local Healthwatch across each of the 152 local authority areas in England.

Healthwatch is the only body looking solely at people's experience across all health and social care. As a statutory watchdog our role is to ensure that local health and social care services, and the local decision-makers put the experiences of people at the heart of their care.

healthwatch
Central Bedfordshire

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Message from our Chair

It has been a very challenging but rewarding year for Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire as staff, Directors and volunteers have worked tirelessly during the pandemic to ensure that the voice of local people continues to be heard, listened to and acted upon.

Despite limitations of engagement, we have continued to reach out to our community and offered help with signposting, advice and information. We held virtual events and distributed surveys to find out more about people's experience of health and care services during lockdowns, and produced various reports of our findings, with recommendations for actions to improve access and treatment.

We worked with mental health providers and support organisations to help resolve issues and concerns with many positive outcomes, and addressed national issues, for example, access to dentistry services which has resulted in a call for an urgent reform of the provision of dental care.

Our Young Healthwatch team continues to represent the voice of young people in Central Bedfordshire and produced reports of their activities including an online review of health and social care service websites, using the methodology of the 15 Steps programme, which allowed them to see how useful a website is and by doing so reaching out to a greater volume of young people, that need the care the organisations provide.

We were delighted to be shortlisted for two Healthwatch Network Awards; 'Celebrating our volunteer team' and 'The impact our team makes', in recognition of the projects and activities undertaken during 2020, and equally pleased that two of our volunteers received 'highly commended' in the local Cheering Volunteering Awards for 'Volunteer of the Year' and the 'Sir Captain Tom Award for Outstanding Contribution'.

Our team continue to respond positively to a rapidly changing environment and will ensure that the voice of local residents is used to influence change and to inform our work.



"We held virtual events and distributed surveys to find out more about people's experience of health and care services during lockdowns."

Dave Simpson
Chair
Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

About us

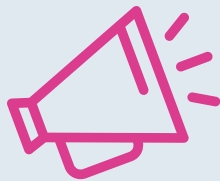
Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Central Bedfordshire. 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 their experience or seeks advice from us to get a high quality service and to understand the difference their views make.



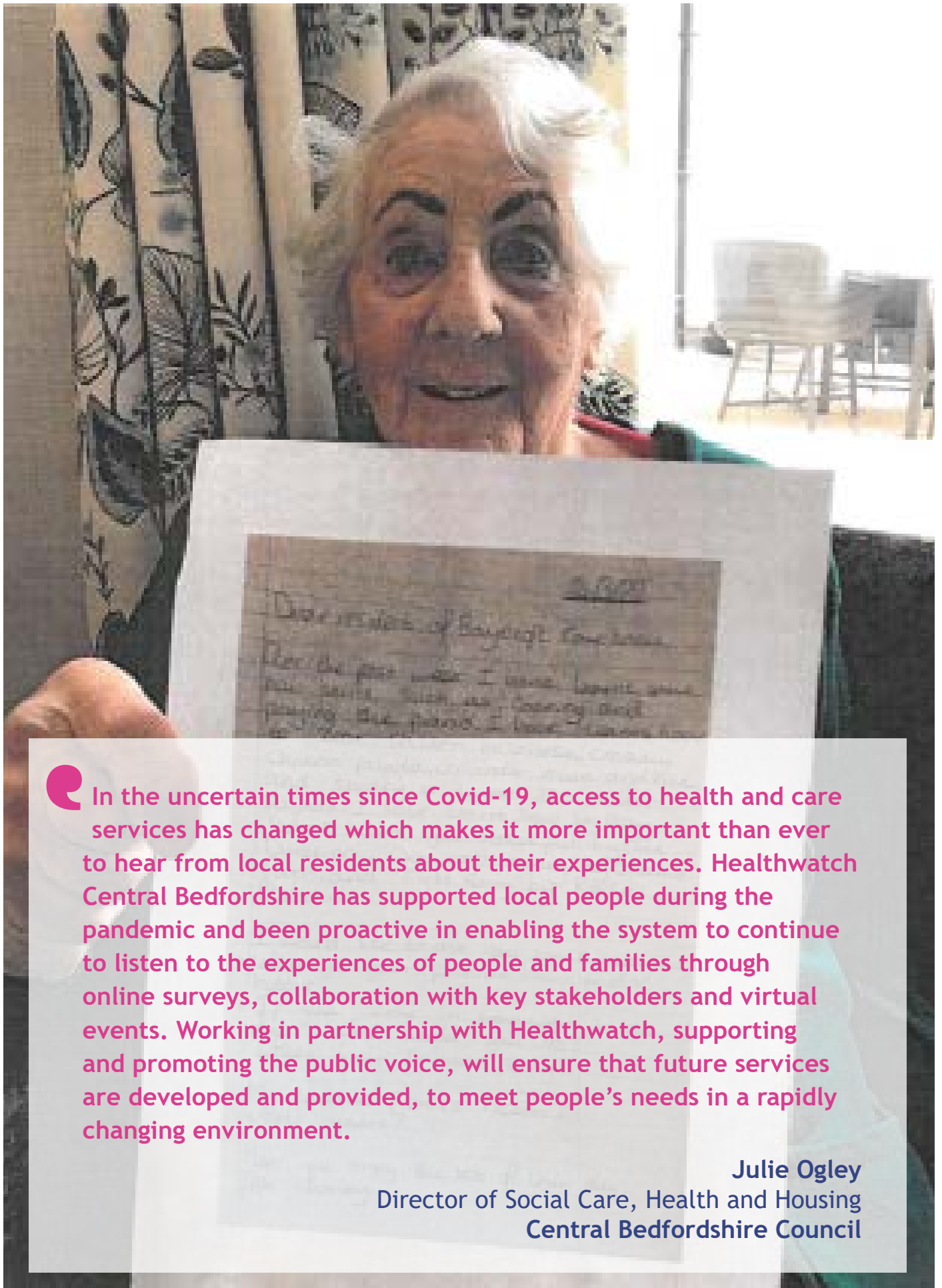
3 Ensuring your views help improve health and care

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



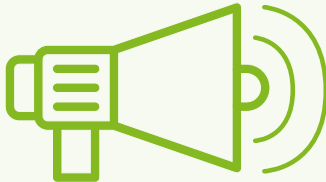
In the uncertain times since Covid-19, access to health and care services has changed which makes it more important than ever to hear from local residents about their experiences. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has supported local people during the pandemic and been proactive in enabling the system to continue to listen to the experiences of people and families through online surveys, collaboration with key stakeholders and virtual events. Working in partnership with Healthwatch, supporting and promoting the public voice, will ensure that future services are developed and provided, to meet people’s needs in a rapidly changing environment.

Julie Ogley
Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
Central Bedfordshire Council

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

4,635 people

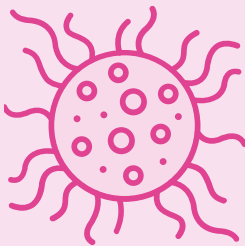
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We directly provided advice and information to

2,015 people

this year.

Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

2,973

people during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

Making a difference to care



We published

12 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made 72 recommendations for improvement.

26% of recommendations for improvement

we made last year have been acted upon, at the point where we reviewed progress.

Health and care that works for you



54 volunteers

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they contributed 164 days.

We employ 5 staff

80% of whom are full time equivalent, which is the same as the previous year.

We received

£151,410 in funding

from our local authority in 2020-21, 5% more than the previous year.



Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire have continued over the last year to provide support to improve health and social care services in Central Bedfordshire. They provide support to individuals when requested by signposting to services and in supporting to investigate complaints and comments on services. The reports provided by Healthwatch such as those on lockdown are insightful and give a true picture of the views of our residents, which is used in commissioning services. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire have supported the Council over the last year by leading on undertaking research and gaining feedback from residents on services in order that we can look at how we commission them in the future. The reports provided are helpful, professional and impartial, and allow residents to provide anonymised feedback in a way that they might not feel comfortable doing so with another agency. Thank you to all at Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire for all of the work they have done over the last year, and that they continue to do.

Lorna Corbin
Commissioning Officer
Central Bedfordshire Council



Then and now Dentistry



Then: Access to NHS dental services

Healthwatch England supported the British Dental Association to campaign for better access to dental care, and as Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire regularly receive feedback from local residents relating to accessing dental care in Central Bedfordshire, we wanted to explore this further.

Our report found that over the past year Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the availability of dental care. Prior to the pandemic, 75% of people who completed the survey, visited their dentist regularly and the results from our survey showed that a larger proportion of people (89%) had attempted to secure an appointment since the pandemic, in many cases, without success.

Many people were worried or felt unsure about when they would be able to see a dentist, or were having to travel long distances to get the care and treatment they needed, and a number of issues were raised regarding the affordability of non-urgent dental treatment that was being offered privately.

“I did need urgent treatment in early 2020 but was unable to get an appointment. Because of the pain I was in I travelled to Milton Keynes private dental care which cost several hundred pounds.”

Patient from Central Bedfordshire



Now: Ongoing dentistry issues 2021

To enable us to hear more about the challenges faced, particularly because of Covid-19 restrictions, we developed a dental survey posted on our website between January - February 2021. This included questions about accessing NHS dental care both before and during the pandemic to give us a snapshot view.

Concerns were previously raised with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire about the limited availability of NHS appointments; many people reported struggling to access NHS dentistry for routine care because practices are either not taking on new NHS patients or have no available NHS appointments, and the pandemic has made this even more difficult.

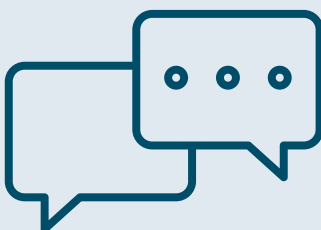
Although dental practices have now reopened, many people told us they were still unable to secure an NHS appointment for a check-up, hygienist appointment or routine fillings, as most practices continue to treat only urgent or emergency cases. Communication of information about which services (routine and emergency) are available has been confusing and more people have struggled to access a timely and effective service.

“Accessing dental care in the pandemic was impossible with dentist on the phone unwilling to refer to an emergency dentist. I ended up losing a tooth only because I lost a filling. Never had any dental problems before and am now facing expensive treatment to sort it out. I cannot stress enough how traumatic the whole experience was and to know that I lost a tooth for no good reason other than that I could not get proper care.”

Patient from Central Bedfordshire

From the responses given in the survey it is clear there are ongoing issues accessing dentistry services and clearer information is needed for new patients, with appointments being provided on a timely basis and dental surgery websites kept up to date to reflect this.

In our full report, published in March 2021, recommendations include asking the government to increase the resources for dental surgeries to recruit more dentists to support the backlog of patients which has risen exponentially as a result of the pandemic, and to support those who are unable to afford private treatment by the provision of short-term financial support for patients on a low income. Additionally, we would like to see an urgent review of the costs of both NHS and private dental treatment to prevent spiraling costs in treatment post pandemic. The full report can be viewed here: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/people-share-their-views-on-dentistry-services-in-central-bedfordshire>.



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.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk



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Then and now

Accessing information on GP websites



Then: Visiting a GP

From information given to Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire at a Patient Advisory Board, it was clear that there were heightened concerns about an accessible and available service for cancer patients, particularly for those patients who would normally directly consult their GP if they were worried about symptoms relating to cancer.

It has been widely reported in national media that the current pandemic is placing cancer patients at an enormous disadvantage with the possibility of delayed or inadequate treatment, which is likely to result in poor, short, and long term outcomes due to the redirection of hospital resources to the management of Covid-19 infected patients.

Patients were being advised not to attend GP surgeries due to social distancing and lockdown restrictions, and therefore it is highly likely that there would be an increase in the numbers of patients accessing surgery websites to gather the information they may need.



Now: accessing information on a GP website

To determine how up to date GP websites are in Central Bedfordshire we developed a survey to investigate the extent of current information and advice on Practice websites and asked our volunteers to review each website; a total of 34 across Central Bedfordshire.

Data relating to the question 'Is the website up to date?' indicated that in many instances there was, for example, the latest NHS Covid-19 information on the front page of the website. However, reviewers found that when delving deeper into the website, there was a significant amount of out of date information still being displayed, including more than one instance of referral to the 'Primary Care Trust' (PCT) which were replaced nationally by Clinical Commissioning Groups in April 2013

Less than half the websites reviewed (41%) had advice for cancer patients with only 47% providing a link to the Macmillan Covid-19 web pages. In addition, disappointingly, only 15% of GP Practice websites displayed links to cancer support groups, either locally or nationally.

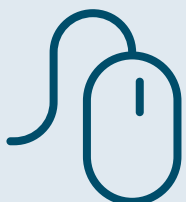
"I was really worried whether my cancer treatment would continue during lockdown but even more worried about visiting my GP so I had a look on their website to see if there was any information or support group number to call to discuss my concerns, but other than the practice number which I could not get through to, there was nothing."

Patient from Central Bedfordshire

It was clear from our research that many GP Practice websites in Central Bedfordshire are lacking vital up to date information and advice for their patients and visitors to the website, with many specifically lacking information relating to what to do about cancer treatment during the pandemic, and signposting to cancer support groups.

The Patient Advisory Board (PAB) was supportive of the results of our survey and agreed, as per our recommendations, that Primary Care Networks should play a role in improving the content and design of GP Practice websites. The PAB agreed that this would provide an opportunity to commission IT provider(s) to improve the frequency of updates and to provide better access to a range of advice to cancer patients from key partners. The Patient Advisory Board also made further recommendations to the Primary Care Group, based on our report, which included asking that individual practices focus on providing local information to cancer patients about consultations, referrals, and the availability of diagnostic tests.

At a subsequent virtual East of England Regional Healthwatch meeting in mid May, colleagues were advised of the survey and asked to join the project and progress the survey in their local areas. Several Healthwatch colleagues agreed to do so or to incorporate our survey questions in their current survey regarding access to GP services.



To review our full report > > >

<https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/gp-website-survey-report>

www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk



Then and now Enter and view visits



Then: Visiting health and care services

Prior to the first national lockdown, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire staff and volunteers undertook 'Enter & View' visits to many local health and social care services. Following our visits, full reports along with our recommendations for improvement, were shared with the Clinical Commissioning Group, Central Bedfordshire Council, the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England.

Due to the pandemic we have been unable to continue with the visits however, in March 2021, our Young Healthwatch team of volunteers reviewed a website, and a PowerPoint presentation (Storyboard), of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre called 'The Emerald Centre', using their '15 Steps Training' to see how useful the website is as a source of information and advice for young people.

The young people found that the website is well organised, simple to navigate, with easy to understand messages providing key information. However, they felt the website could be more engaging with the introduction of photos or pictures, and a Live Chat function, which may appeal more to young people. They also suggested including images of the Centre in the 'Our Services' section of their website plus a photo of the examining room. They also felt that the PowerPoint presentation is full of useful information and appears inviting. Suggestions for improvement included providing a section on what public transport is available near the location to the Centre, and photos of young people to be included in the presentation.

The young volunteers believe that, by making these changes, it would help to reassure those seeking help on what to expect; to establish a sense of familiarity when they visit the Centre, and will build trust between the person seeking help and staff at the Centre.



Now: Visiting virtually

Following their report of the virtual visit, and the easing of lockdown restrictions, the young volunteers were recently invited to visit The Emerald Centre, in a safe and structured way, in the absence of patients, to review accessibility for young people with the aim of creating the patient journey through the service, and for the final part of the assessment to be completed.



“I was part of the team visiting The Emerald Centre where I was able to be shown around in order to put my ideas forward for improvements. Being involved in this project was rewarding as I was given the opportunity to be heard as a young person, which will, in turn, benefit and make a difference in my community.”

Young Healthwatch Volunteer

The Forensic Nurse Examiner and Safeguarding Trainer at The Emerald Centre explained that she approached the Young Healthwatch team of volunteers to inform them of the services available at the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) and asked them to review The Emerald Centre website and the storyboard (PowerPoint presentation) used for presenting to groups of all ages and gender.

The young people were very pleased to be asked to review the website and Storyboard and present their findings. Their subsequent visit to The Emerald Centre then gave them the opportunity to talk to the staff and experience the patient ‘journey’ themselves.

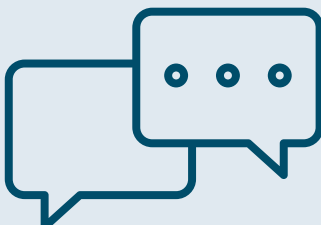
The nurse explained that as a result of the review by Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire:-



“We have modified our storyboard and created new ones for males, females and teenagers. We are also in discussion with our IT department about having a Live Chat Function on our website.”

The young Healthwatch volunteers are looking forward to continuing their reviews of service websites with the possibility of following up with a visit to the service itself.

To read a copy of the full report, ‘The Emerald Centre Review’ please visit the Young Healthwatch website at <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/young-healthwatch> or click on the link: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Emerald-Centre-Review.pdf>



Share your views with us

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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 thousands of people by:

- Providing up to date advice on the COVID-19 response locally
- Linking people to reliable up-to-date information
- Supporting the vaccine roll-out; managing issues and concerns
- Providing information and guidance to local support services
- Helping people to access the health and care services they need

Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



23% on GP services



31% on Dentistry



12% on Hospital care



44% on Vaccines

When can I get my vaccine?



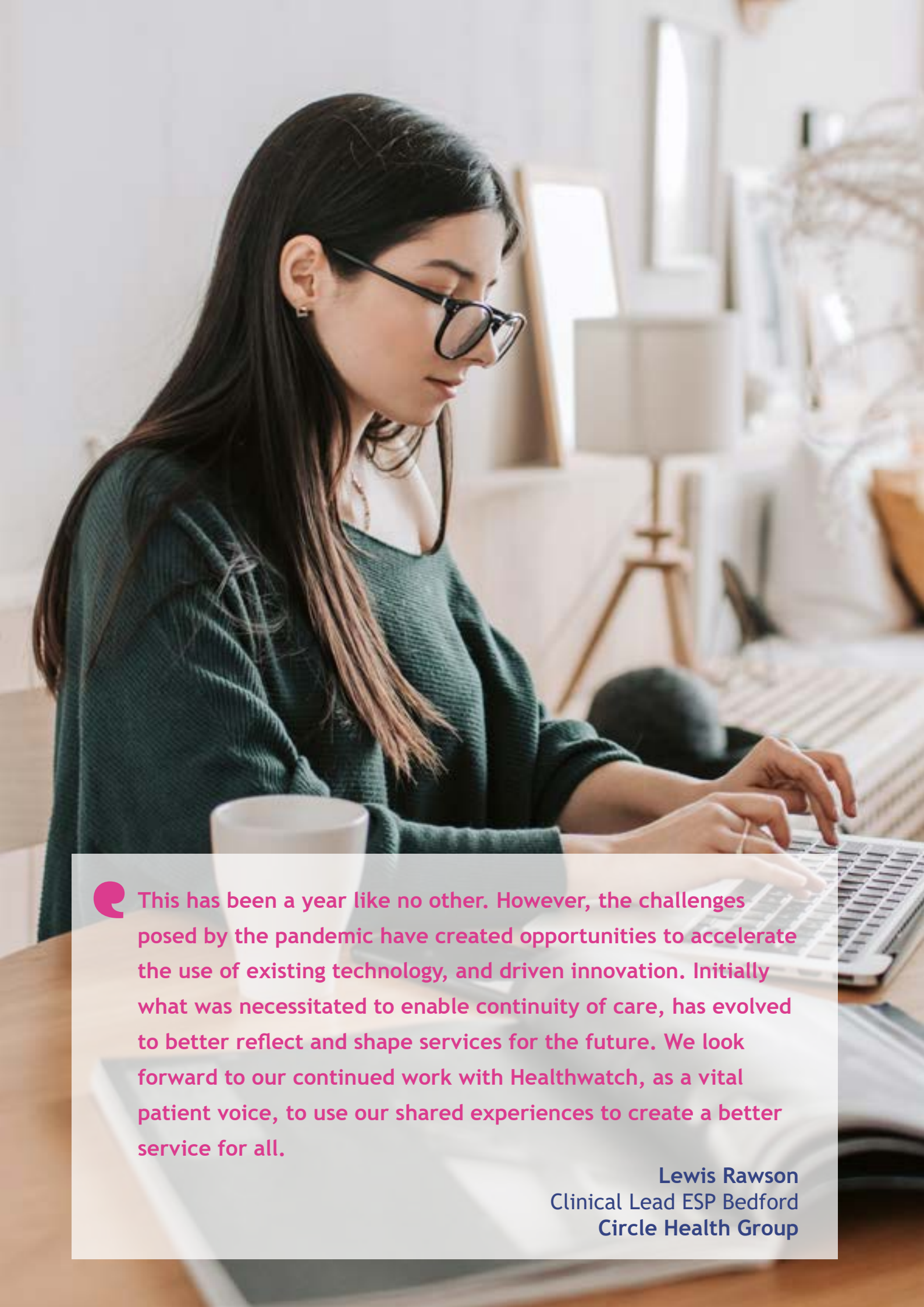
When the vaccination programme was rolled out across Central Bedfordshire we were regularly hearing from people with concerns and questions. To help support the programme, along with our Healthwatch colleagues in Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes, we would regularly feed back themed concerns to the Communications team at the Clinical Commissioning Group. This was designed to ensure they were aware of people's concerns and could add relevant information to the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of their website, to help address local people's concerns and queries.

Early in the pandemic, we heard from over 125 people about the lack of clear information and often inaccurate information relating to the vaccination programme in Central Bedfordshire.

Our role became much more focused on providing people with clear, consistent and concise advice and information including providing articles on our website to help address people's concerns. The key questions people were asking included:

- *'If I am the main carer of an older person, how do I get the vaccination?'*
- *'How do I get to a vaccination centre if I don't drive and have no access to transport?'*
- *'I am not registered at a GP Surgery, how will I be notified?'*
- *'If I have a long term condition, what category do I fall under?'*

More questions that people asked us about the vaccination programme can be found in our section **'You said, We did'** on pages 20 to 21.



👉 This has been a year like no other. However, the challenges posed by the pandemic have created opportunities to accelerate the use of existing technology, and driven innovation. Initially what was necessitated to enable continuity of care, has evolved to better reflect and shape services for the future. We look forward to our continued work with Healthwatch, as a vital patient voice, to use our shared experiences to create a better service for all.

Lewis Rawson
Clinical Lead ESP Bedford
Circle Health Group

You Said, We Did

Here are just some of the ways we have helped people in the community:



Support following a bereavement

A lady rang us to say she had recently lost her husband and was not coping very well. Her GP said that she needed bereavement counselling and referred her to the IAPT service (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies). She subsequently received a letter from the service to tell her they could not help her and had discharged her. She had tried to contact her GP again but could not get through. We provided her with email details of the surgery reception as an alternative to a phone call and gave her details for Cruse, The Silver Lining, Age UK and bereavement counselling. She was also given details of the Good Neighbourhood Schemes in her area. The lady said *"I didn't know there was so much out there to support me, thank you so much."*



Additional support in a care home

We were contacted by a lady who was concerned about her brother who had recently had a stroke and was living in a care home. She told us her brother was very depressed and lashing out at the nursing staff but had only been prescribed antidepressants without any other mental health support. She wanted him to receive counselling but felt the care home were not being supportive. We contacted Mind BLMK for advice who advised that his sister could complete a referral on behalf of her brother, and that Mind would liaise with the care home directly. She was also signposted to the Bedfordshire Wellbeing Service. Mind are now providing counselling for her brother and the lady said, *"I am so grateful for all your help and advice; my brother will finally get the help he needs."*

You Said, We Did



Access to mental health support

A gentleman that had recently moved to the area had previously suffered with mental health issues and had received treatment locally in the community. Visiting his GP after relocating he told us, *"I was fobbed off with drug counselling, it was useless, I need help with my mental health. I would like to know how to access services for my mental health; they have renewed my medication, but I feel that I need extra support."* We discussed with the gentleman whether he felt at risk as we understood he had self harmed recently and strongly advised him to contact NHS 111 should he feel in crisis again. We also gave him contact details for local mental health services and support groups. He agreed to contact us again if he needed anymore signposting and also gave us consent to pass his issues on to the local mental health provider, East London Foundation Trust, to investigate further.



Access to dentistry services

A mother rang as she was desperately trying to find a local dentist to treat her daughter who had recently received emergency treatment but who now needed a referral to the hospital to have her wisdom teeth removed. Her daughter was not registered with a dentist, due to a temporary living situation. Upon contacting dentists in her local area, all said they would not give her an appointment for a routine referral as they were only treating emergency or urgent cases and her daughter was unable to travel further afield. Her daughter was in considerable pain and at the end of her tether. We directly contacted NHS England's Dental Manager to highlight the issue and request their help. The NHS England team managed to secure a dental appointment at a nearby practice for the following day for her daughter. The mother was delighted and said, *"I cannot thank you enough, you are amazing, and the practice has said she can register at that dentist too, so we are both incredibly grateful for your help."*

You Said, We Did

We received many enquiries about the vaccination programme in Central Bedfordshire:



Wife and carer to vulnerable gentleman

Early in the pandemic, a wife and carer for a vulnerable 84-year-old rang to ask when, where and how her husband would be able to access the Covid-19 vaccination. She was unable to drive long distance and understood that many local practices near to her may be unable to sign up to provide the vaccinations, which seems to leave her husband in limbo. She added there was nothing on their GP website page other than standard Covid-19 messages found on all websites. We explained that only six Primary Care Networks (PCN's) had so far gone live with the vaccine in the first wave across BLMK (at that time) and that the clinics were only running for two days a week as they could only get a certain number of vaccines. The Clinical Commissioning Group advised that more PCN's were due to come online, and they would be contacted direct by their surgery and be given an appointment within days - firstly for the over 80's age group. Key message given was not to phone the GP Surgery; they would call as soon as they had the vaccines and the equipment needed to store it. The lady was grateful for the information and said it had, *'put her mind at rest'*.



How safe are we?

We received a call from a couple who asked, *"If we only have one injection, how safe are we, if after having two, we are about 75% protected i.e., are we only about 40% protected currently with one, after the three weeks? Should we really wait until we have had the 2nd vaccination before meeting up with anyone?"* We advised the couple that we would raise their concerns with our partners, and they may have to wait for national guidance on this issue, further down the line.

You Said, We Did



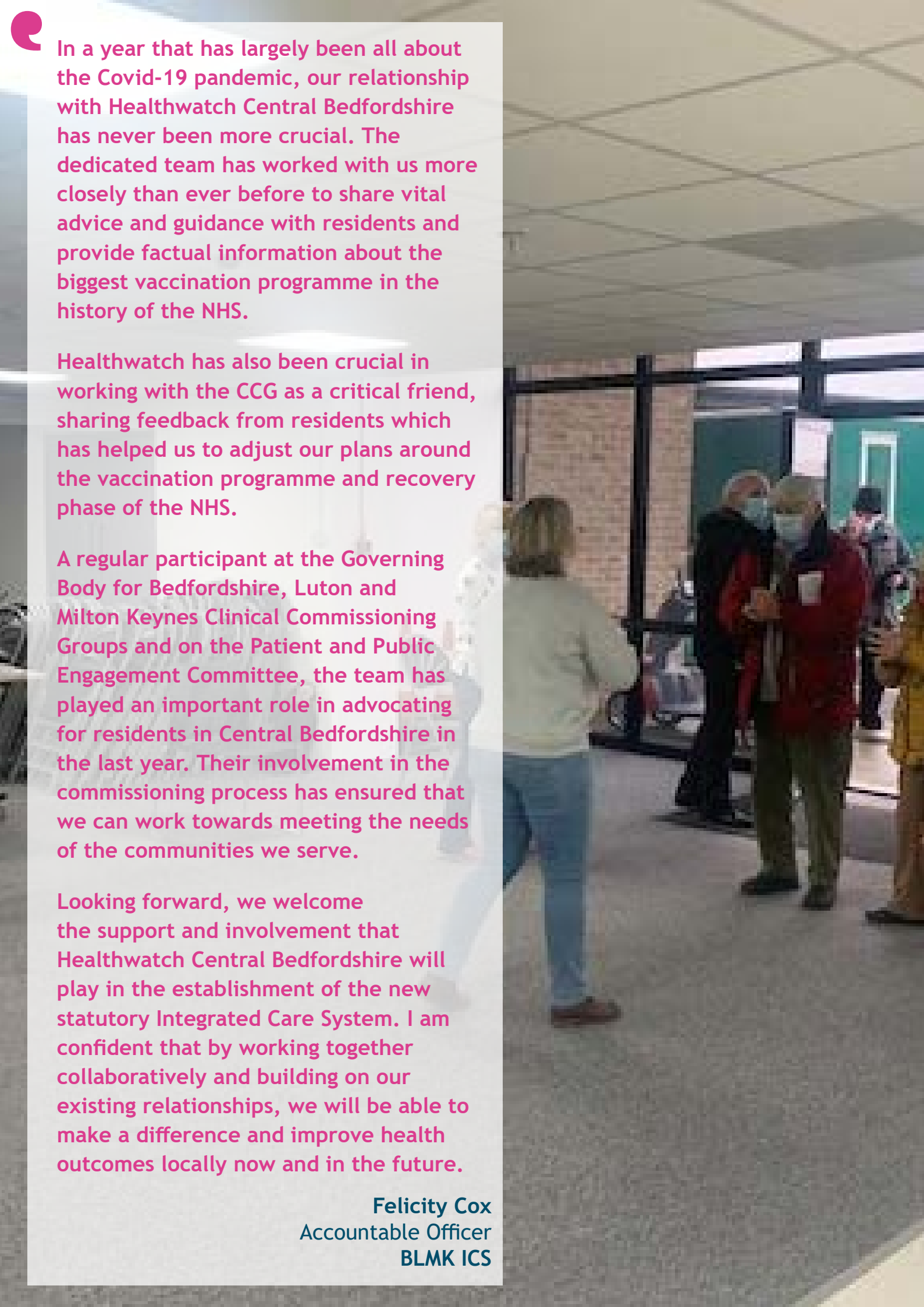
Parents caring for a disabled daughter

A parent called and told us *"My wife and I are carers for our disabled daughter who recently received the vaccine. We are in our 50's, could you advise us if we are eligible to register for the vaccine now or should we wait for our age group under the priority list?"* We provided the couple with the BLMK CCG vaccination helpline number and after researching, advised that the JCVI had revised its recommendations on 30.12.20 to include unpaid carers. The government guidance on priority access to the vaccine stated that unpaid carers would be offered the vaccine in priority group six alongside people aged under 65 with long term conditions. It recommended that unpaid carers who receive the carers allowance, or who were the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer fell ill, should be prioritised. They were also directed to further information and support for carers locally and nationally.



Confusing on-line information

A Good Neighbour Group called to ask for a link to the Rufus Vaccination Hub as they had received an enquiry from someone who had searched for 'Rufus Centre vaccinations' on the internet and were directed to GP Surgeries in the local area and the Rufus Centre. However, upon checking the Rufus Centre website they could not locate anything relating to vaccinations. Eventually they found it by googling 'hub' - they asked, *"could this be made simpler for the general public when searching, and a redirect link be added to the Rufus Centre website, as unless they know to use the word 'hub' its hard to find."* We confirmed we would raise the issue with the Clinical Commissioning Group and suggest a link be placed on the Rufus Centre website to redirect people to the 'Hub' but, as this is managed by an independent company, it would be reliant on goodwill.

A photograph of a hospital corridor. In the foreground, a woman in a light green sweater and blue jeans is walking away from the camera. In the background, several people are standing and talking, all wearing face masks. The corridor has a grey carpet and a white ceiling with recessed lighting. Large windows are visible on the right side of the corridor.

In a year that has largely been all about the Covid-19 pandemic, our relationship with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has never been more crucial. The dedicated team has worked with us more closely than ever before to share vital advice and guidance with residents and provide factual information about the biggest vaccination programme in the history of the NHS.

Healthwatch has also been crucial in working with the CCG as a critical friend, sharing feedback from residents which has helped us to adjust our plans around the vaccination programme and recovery phase of the NHS.

A regular participant at the Governing Body for Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Groups and on the Patient and Public Engagement Committee, the team has played an important role in advocating for residents in Central Bedfordshire in the last year. Their involvement in the commissioning process has ensured that we can work towards meeting the needs of the communities we serve.

Looking forward, we welcome the support and involvement that Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire will play in the establishment of the new statutory Integrated Care System. I am confident that by working together collaboratively and building on our existing relationships, we will be able to make a difference and improve health outcomes locally now and in the future.

Felicity Cox
Accountable Officer
BLMK ICS



Then and now Festival for Older People



Then: Large scale event

Our annual event, the Festival for Older People, is usually planned well in advance of delivery, with work beginning in early August. In 2019 the event was a huge success, with over 300 people attending to talk directly to service providers and exhibitors, to hear more about the support services they offer to older people, and are available to them in the local community, which they may have been unaware of.

As lockdown eased the government continued to revise guidance, which had a wide ranging impact on the work of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire including activities such as large scale engagement and events. The venue we had booked for the Festival 2020 was not confirming bookings and national guidance was still limiting the number of people gathering indoors.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire had to take the difficult decision to cancel the Festival for Older People 2020, however, we felt strongly that the date should not pass without some activity to support older people, given that it is part of our annual programme and always keenly anticipated by the public and support organisations. However, the key question was what could be done in the timeframe, within government restrictions and resources available?

Staff, volunteers and stakeholders met online to consider alternative ideas for delivering the Festival in October 2020, and the unanimous decision was taken to host the Festival virtually, utilising all of our resources and help from our volunteers. The theme for the Festival 2020, linked with International Older Peoples Day, was *'Pandemics: do they change how we address age and ageing?'*



Now: Virtual Festival for Older People

This year has presented significant challenges to everyone, not least the most vulnerable in our society and those in the older age range, who have had their activities curtailed significantly by lockdown and the continuing restrictions on daily life.

To provide an event that encompassed information, advice, entertainment and activities, it was decided to expand the Festival across a full week. The idea being to encourage more people to attend and prevent cramming content into a limited timeframe.



“I particularly enjoyed yesterdays session; the movement and balance class, as I have now reached the age of 70, I found this very helpful indeed. Also, Dr Sarah’s reminder that I need to book my flu jab.”

The organisation of the programme was deliberately arranged to allow people to dip in and out, which would help to reduce screen time fatigue. We invited many key stakeholders and support organisations to join us and developed a weekly planner that was heavily promoted across our network.

Her Majesty’s Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis, introduced the Festival and joined again at the end of the week. Helen said:



“People who are slightly older are full of wisdom and full of experience and we need to hear that voice. I just wanted to thank you all so much. I am delighted that there are so many organisations participating this week to make the lives of our older citizens better in so many ways.”

The Festivals main aim was to ensure that a wide range of organisations who provide information, advice and support for older people can come together. Each day of the week had a theme with a question for all those participating, linked to general and emotional wellbeing, active living and healthy lifestyles. The programme also included guided exercise classes, poetry, gardening tips and lively entertainment.

Some residents would ordinarily be unable to join a physical event, due to frailness or staffing ratio’s, however the virtual offer was open to all, and participants included six care homes from across Central Bedfordshire.

The videos shown during Festival week received over 150 views a day, with total views across the week totalling 874. Attendees gave valuable feedback about their experience of health and care services during lockdown and beyond. Many people told us about some positive experiences with services and people embracing helpful technology. Strong feelings were also expressed that, in the future, wherever possible, patient choice should be at the forefront of all service delivery and design. Concerns were raised that the pandemic had put some lives on hold, summed up as, *“The issue of storing up problems for the future is a massive concern right now.”*

Click here to read the full report ‘Virtual Festival for Older People 2020’: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/VFOP-2020.pdf>



The pandemic has brought about significant change and challenges across the system. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has continued to effectively ensure that concerns and feedback raised by patients and their families/carers are escalated to our services. This has made a great contribution in bringing the health and wellbeing interests of residents to the fore.

Tasha Newman
Assistant Director, Central Bedfordshire
Adult Community Mental Health
Pan Bedfordshire ADHD
Early Intervention and Community
Rehab Services



Volunteers

At Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire we are supported by 54 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:

- Helped people have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online.
- Helped out at the growing number of vaccination centres across Central Bedfordshire and wrote blogs about their experience. Go to <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/leighton-buzzard-covid-vaccination-centre> to read the blogs.
- Carried out website reviews for local services on the information they provide.
- Helped with the local volunteering efforts of shopping and collecting prescriptions, providing befriending services, and even walking their neighbours' dog, for those self-isolating or shielding.



Young volunteer - Molly, 16

“Young Healthwatch has helped me gain confidence within the setting as well as outside. They are really supportive when you cannot make meetings because of having to do revision for upcoming exams. It is also a good break during the week after doing a lot of work at school or college.

I am currently working on a project called 'On the Buses'. This is about when people who don't look like they have a disability sit in the seats reserved for people who have one and the reaction they get from others. This is quite personal to me as I am disabled and am constantly stared at when I sit in these seats. I hope that we can raise more awareness that not every disability is visible.”



Board member - Paul, 63

“I came to hear about HWCB in my role as a Central Bedfordshire Ward Councillor. Having stepped away from 'politics' I became a Director of HWCB and take an active role in Governance and Strategy. I annually examine the local hospitals Quality Accounts and feed back to those institutions, and I have been engaged in analysing other health organisations reports and working as a HWCB representative on recent BLMK Working Groups. Most recently I have driven work through looking at our own internal governance arrangements. HWCB are a great organisation to be part of.”



Young volunteer - Keira, 16

“Being a volunteer for Young Healthwatch has given me something I could contribute to while helping me in lockdown. Attending the meetings also allowed me to socialise with a variety of people in the absence of school.

Healthwatch has taught me skills that will help me throughout my life, even aiding job applications. I have found comfort in the fact that I can make a difference for my community, even as a young person. I have done this by joining projects focused on how effective resources aimed towards teenagers are, while also connecting with others over problems facing young people.”



Volunteer - Joyce, 67

“I heard about HWCB through a local volunteer organisation and, having retired from working within senior administration roles just prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, thought my experience might be of use as a volunteer and would also help to keep the brain ‘active’ and hopefully help people.

It seems to me that HWCB is a focal point for people unsure about how to ‘find the right person/department’ to go to with any issues, with the website being extremely informative.”



Young volunteer - Serena, 14

“I joined Young Healthwatch this year to help me get my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award. Not only has it enabled me to achieve my award but also I have felt like I have accomplished so much more. I have made new friends, felt like I have helped my community and I have had the best experience!

I have taken part in the R.E.A.D.Y trial that helps young people that are suffering depression. I also took part in the ‘Back to school’ project that was about how pupils found online school, and also the return to school after lockdown. Everyone at Healthwatch is so friendly and makes you feel extremely welcomed when you join. I would definitely recommend Healthwatch to everyone as it is such a good way to contribute to our community and makes you feel like a better person.”



Board member - Carol, 74




“Healthwatch is a great organisation to be associated with and having volunteered for a few years, when a vacancy came up for a position on the Board (also a volunteer role) I applied and was delighted to be accepted.

Being a Director comes with additional responsibilities, and I have been given two portfolios: Enter & View and Marketing. We want to ensure more people know about Healthwatch to access our services, so I am working on a Marketing Plan. I am excited at the prospect of my skills being useful and helping others.”



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 Central Bedfordshire](https://www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk).

-  www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk
-  **0300 303 8554**
-  info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk



In this exceptional year, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has played an important role in our response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The team has worked collaboratively with Bedfordshire CCG, as we have transitioned to the new single NHS Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Group and has been crucial in supporting the effort to provide help and guidance around the Pandemic and the roll out of the largest vaccination programme in the history of the NHS.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is an important system partner, ideally placed to ensure that the voice of our communities is at the heart of our work, and helping us strive to achieve the best outcomes for residents. We look forward to continuing working with them as we move towards the transition to Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care System.

Bedfordshire, Luton & Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Group

At Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire we involve younger people in our projects and activities to help improve local services for children and young people

Young Healthwatch volunteers have made a difference by amplifying the voices of young people

Despite the limitations of lockdown restrictions and the pressures placed on young people, our Young Healthwatch team have continued with their projects and activities over the past year with some very positive outcomes - some of which are listed below:

- **Home Becomes School Survey** - results from the survey provided a useful insight into the successes and failures of the education systems response to the pandemic in Central Bedfordshire. Undertaken in March 2020, the survey explored the thoughts and feelings of how young people felt their school had reacted to the pandemic, with many missing the social interaction and break from schoolwork. The final report highlighted that the amount of work being set by teachers could seriously affect their mental and physical health - *'I feel they set too much, they don't seem to realise that other teachers are setting lots of work as well, I feel it piles up and I spend my weekends trying to catch up'*. The full report was shared with local schools and educational leads. The young volunteers are currently working on a follow up report to compare results and review the past year of schooling during the pandemic. Read the full report at: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/home-becomes-school>
- **Five Minutes with Milly** - One of our Young Healthwatch volunteers interviewed a School Nurse; Teacher and a Midwife in September 2020 to find out about their experience of continuing to work during the pandemic.



School staff explained that children needed more support during lockdowns, and they were nervous about transitioning to a new school. The health worker found her role very challenging - *'I had to get used to wearing masks all the time'* and explained how difficult this makes it to bond with her patients. Read all the interviews in full at: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/five-minutes-with-milly-report>

- **Music for the Mind** - this study showed that, overall, listening to music whilst revising decreases the effectiveness of revision for young people. In October 2020, two Young Healthwatch volunteers conducted a study to have a wider understanding of what is the best and most effective way to revise, and to compare with other student's methods of revision which may indicate why exam results are so variable between students.
154 students, ranging in age from 13 to 18+ took part in the survey which also showed that listening to music can reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, increases motivation, and helps students feel more relaxed. However, some students found music itself distracting which implied that students know listening to music is detrimental to their revision, but



they do it anyway - *'It helps the time go by, it allows people to work in the library and study areas, music helps prevent anxiety, it stimulates my brain in creative subjects; it stops distractions'*. Read the full report at: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/music-for-the-mind-report>

- **15 Steps Online Review** - Young Healthwatch volunteers found that, overall, the health and social care websites they reviewed in March 2021 are well suited for young people, although they felt the GP websites needed improvement - *'Although it is easy to navigate, from what I can see, it doesn't have a dedicated area, option or website for young people, which may be something they need to consider, as it may hinder young people from seeking medical help, or make the process seem more daunting'*. Young Healthwatch volunteers had previously completed the '15 Steps Challenge' which focuses on seeing care through a patient or carer's eyes and exploring their first impressions. It has not been possible to physically visit services during the last 12 months, so Young Healthwatch volunteers undertook a review of 12 health / social care service websites, using the methodology of the 15 Steps programme.

The aim was to offer practical advice for each organisation to ensure their website was user friendly, and to offer suggestions for improvement to make them easier for young people to navigate. Making websites 'young people-friendly' means younger generations will be more comfortable doing things which can be seen as 'scary' and should be a vital consideration when creating a website. Their final report was shared with the organisation of the websites they reviewed which proved to be something that brought a great response, and their recommendations will be used in planning going forward. Read the full reports at: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/15-steps-online-review-yhw>

- **Podcast Training** - A Young Healthwatch volunteer's suggestion created an opportunity for other young people to plan, develop, record, edit and release their own Podcast, while increasing their own skillset, with the help of Hear2Listen, a non-profit organisation providing a range of professional services designed to increase the emotional wellbeing of young people, supporting them in overcoming barriers that prevent living healthy and fulfilling lives. Five Young Healthwatch volunteers took part in the virtual training over a four-week period between February and April 2021, which acted as an important forum for young people to express their views and opinions. In this case, COVID-19 was the chosen subject for their podcast episode - *'We did lots of things, like go into breakout rooms and discuss our interests and how that correlated with our podcast, whilst also doing work for the podcast episode we planned on recording. I think the recorded episode was a huge success and we all had a lot of fun doing it'*. The final podcast produced is available on YouTube and Spotify: <https://www.youtube.com/h?v=HwLAsGPrtNg>

- Pen Pal Scheme** - Young Healthwatch volunteers have continued to write to care home residents with positive results and during 2020 we expanded the scheme to include Good Neighbour Scheme contacts in Ampthill and Flitwick, and Dom Care agencies. Feedback received from a Manager of Respite at Home - *'My client is almost housebound in normal times however, this last year of shielding and lockdown has been difficult. The HWCB Pen Pal Scheme has helped relieve the loneliness. It is nice to have contact in the 'traditional way'. My client had pen pals when she was young, so it brings back nice memories of her youth and the people that she corresponded with. Writing to pen pals were something that many did as a hobby. My client looks forward to receiving the letters and replying. She enjoys answering the questions and explaining her likes and how things were in comparison when she was younger. The price of new cars and houses were responded to with amazement! The young lady who writes to my client is lovely. She has a very pleasant manner and freely shares things that are going on in her life. It is lovely that she is committed to the correspondence which is greatly appreciated. It makes my client smile'*. Read what our young volunteers think about having a pen pal, on our website at: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/what-it-is-like-having-a-penpal>
- Recruitment Video** - As a result of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's latest recruitment video, to encourage more young people to become involved in our projects, we have had a wealth of interest in joining the Young Healthwatch team from schools across Central Bedfordshire. To view the video and learn more about the activities of Young Healthwatch visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGdClZCbu9k>



Throughout the pandemic Young Healthwatch volunteers have continued to write 'Blogs' detailing how this affects them both emotionally, mentally and physically which have been shared on our website to support other young people who may have similar anxieties. This has helped them to manage their own situations and also raised awareness of particular issues and concerns for young people in Central Bedfordshire. These include 'losing a friend' whilst working on the Pen Pal project and managing a long term medical condition. To see their 'Blogs' visit: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/blog>

The young volunteers have been very active on social media; creating awareness through their posts which has seen an increase in followers throughout the year.

In recognition of the projects and activities undertaken during 2020, one of our young volunteers received 'highly commended' in the local Cheering Volunteering Awards for 'Young Volunteer of the Year 2020' and an older volunteer, who works exclusively with the young people, received 'highly commended' in the award category for the 'Sir Captain Tom Moore Award for Outstanding Contribution 2020' in March 2021.

YOUNG healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

Young Healthwatch volunteers continue to support work on the READY trial; a research study that aims to find out whether exercise is an effective treatment for young people with low mood or depression. The young people have so far supported an educational video and offered guidance on the promotional materials. This project will continue throughout 2021.

Future activities will include completing a project focusing on priority seating for disabled young people on public transport, which was delayed due to coronavirus restrictions, and working with students from Central Bedfordshire College to undertake a research project, asking the question, **'How has domestic violence among young people changed as a result of Covid-19?'**, with the aim of providing advice and information to young people in Central Bedfordshire. Posters will be displayed in the College to help educate and offer guidance to students.

Training in CPR will be a part of their future activities, with the intention to pass on their learning and train other young people in Central Bedfordshire. The aim is to enable young people to feel more confident, improve their resilience and be educated in key lifesaving skills.

Young Healthwatch volunteers, through their work, have continued to amplify the voices of young people and look forward to encouraging more young people to have a voice and make a difference.

Joining Young Healthwatch has given me many opportunities and opened my eyes to new things. Being part of the social media team has been great fun and they really trust you with what you are going to post. Other projects have been interesting to hear about, it really feels we are all making a difference and going in the right direction.

Taylor, Young Healthwatch Volunteer

For the short time I have been a part of the Young Healthwatch team I have experienced a sense of community and a collective passion for wanting to help others. It has made me feel more committed to my goals and I feel comfortable knowing I have friends who share them and a supportive team to go to.

Karen, Young Healthwatch Volunteer



It's been an incredibly difficult period during this pandemic for everyone of all ages and has impacted significantly on health services and our wellbeing. However challenging, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) have continued to take prompt action to resolve concerns as well as providing clarity and help to interpret national guidance for the public. I would like to thank Diana and the team and have really valued the role of HWCB on the Central Bedfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board. They are a key partner providing feedback on health services from the community. There are challenges and uncertainties ahead, but Healthwatch continues to bring the voice of patients, users and carers into our services, supporting us to continually improve the public's experience of health and care services. I would also like to thank Young Healthwatch and the work they do for young people. They have been writing their blogs and continuing with the Pen Pal scheme, despite dealing with their own challenges during lockdown. A real support and inspiration for their peers.



I was fortunate to meet a member of Young Healthwatch during half term where they were photographed next to the Young Healthwatch Mental Health graffiti board, which is sited in a local school. Thank you once again for all that you do and the difference you make.

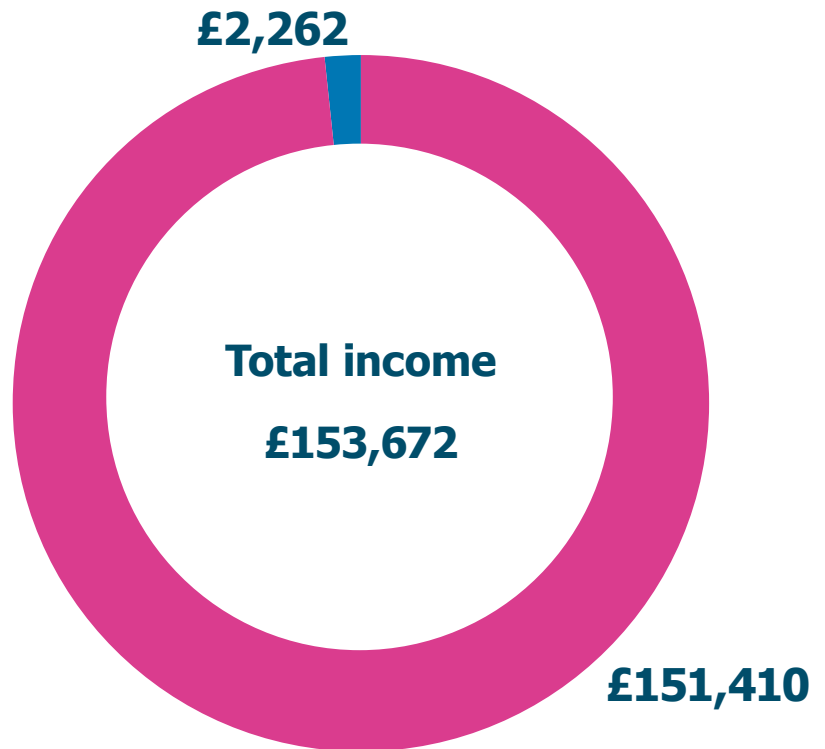
CLlr Tracey Stock
Chair, Health & Wellbeing Board
Central Bedfordshire Council

Finances

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

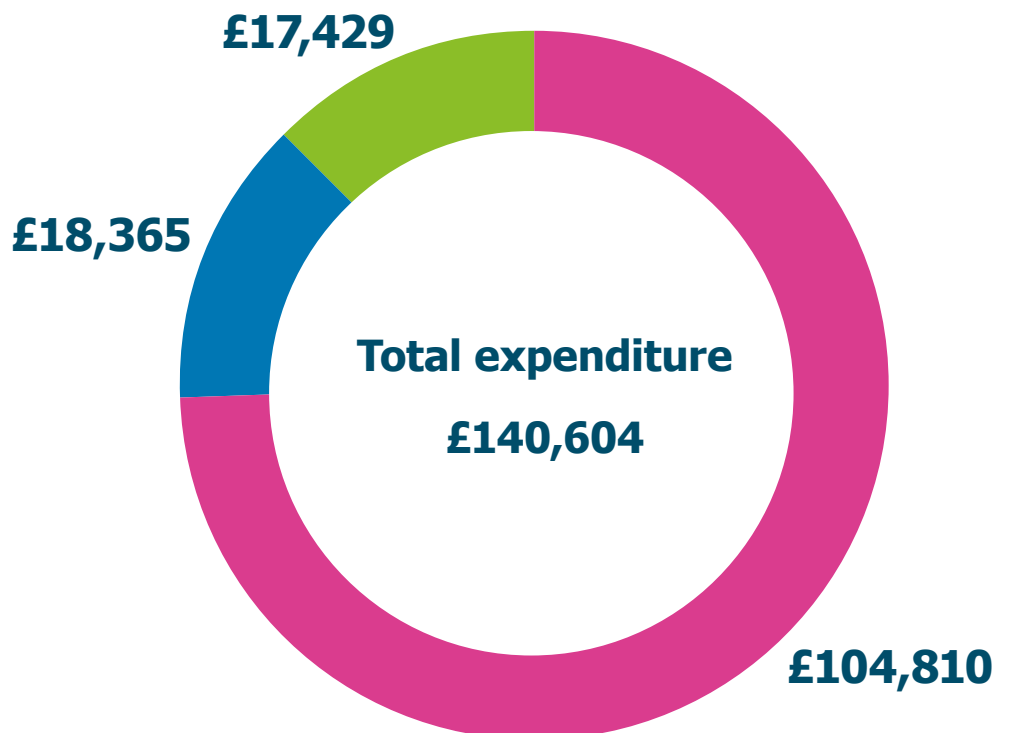
Income

- Funding received from local authority
- Additional funding



Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Other



Next steps

Top three priorities for 2021-22

1. Joint project with BLMK Healthwatch working with the D/deaf and Homeless communities to help improve systematic behaviours by highlighting health and social care challenges, issues and concerns, specifically raised by local residents who are seldom heard.
2. Reporting on feedback from our recent survey sent to patients and the public living in Central Bedfordshire who were discharged from hospital under the 'discharge to assess' (D2A) arrangements, which focused on getting people out of hospital quickly to cope with a surge in demand from Covid-19 patients. We will report on how the D2A arrangements are working for residents living in Central Bedfordshire who were recently discharged from hospitals across Bedfordshire and surrounding counties.
3. Researching local residents experience of accessing health and care services now and in the future, who may have had treatments postponed, delayed or cancelled due to the pandemic, e.g., cancer treatment and after care. We will look at trends and themes and consider how well the pandemic was managed and it's affect on other services, which will provide vital sources of evidence for the decision makers, as new and existing services are developed and commissioned to reflect the rise in demand.

Next steps

- As restrictions ease we will be looking to engage face to face with local residents, in a socially distanced way, in particular with regard to our 'Just Ask' programme of events, and focus groups researching people's experience of health and care services. Internally we will be looking at an effective mix of virtual and physical engagement events, and meetings, to maximise productivity and work/life balance.
- We will be following up on projects that were postponed as a result of the pandemic, such as the Young Healthwatch volunteers 'On the buses' project, and reviewing the recommendations previously made to commissioners and providers in our recent reports to determine actions implemented to improve service pathways and delivery.
- Our work will include helping to address and highlight inequalities across health and care services to ensure the most vulnerable people in our local community, and seldom heard communities, are able to access the services and support they need.
- With the help and support of our Board of Trustees we will continue with a review of our governance arrangements to ensure they are robust and fit for the future of the organisation; this will include changes to our Articles of Association.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone that is helping us put people at the heart of health and social care, including:

- Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us.
- All of our amazing staff and volunteers.
- Our Young Healthwatch team for all their outstanding work and projects to highlight the experiences of young people in their community.
- The voluntary organisations that have contributed to our work.
- Key stakeholders and partners who have responded to our recommendations for improvements to local services.
- Central Bedfordshire Council.
- Central Bedfordshire College.
- The Emerald Centre.
- Hear 2 Listen.
- University of Hertfordshire.
- Respite at Home Volunteers.
- East London Foundation Trust.
- Bedfordshire, Luton & Milton Keynes (BLMK) ICS.
- Our regional Healthwatch colleagues, particularly local Healthwatch across BLMK; Bedford Borough, Luton and Milton Keynes.
- Healthwatch England.

Acronym Answers

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
BLMK CCG	Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Group
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
BLMK Healthwatch	Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Healthwatch
BLMK ICS	Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Services
CPR	Cardiopulmonary resuscitation
D2A	Discharge to Assess
D/deaf	Deaf (sign language users) and deaf (who are hard of hearing but who have English as their first language and may lipread and/or use hearing aids)
HWCB	Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
IAPT service	Improving Access to Psychological Therapies
ICS	Integrated Care System
JCVI	Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation
PAB	Patient Advisory Board
PCN	Primary Care Network
PPG	Patient Participation Group
READY	Randomised trial of energetic activity for depression in young people
SARC	Sexual Assault Referral Centre



Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, Capability House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire, MK45 4HR

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire 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 six Directors/Trustees and two Youth Parliament members who work on a voluntary basis 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 five times and made decisions on matters such as ensuring the public had all relevant information concerning remaining Covid safe, and addressing all concerns relating to the vaccination programme with up to date communication via all social media platforms.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. For example, we regularly hear from local residents sharing their experiences of health and social care services. Recently this included issues and concerns about accessing dental services in Central Bedfordshire. People told us that it can be difficult to get an appointment to see a dentist and/or access to the correct treatment on the NHS. Another example was young people with hidden disabilities who told us that they felt discriminated against whilst using public transport. We have prioritised work in these areas and researched further to gather additional views.

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, via our website by providing 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 and postal surveys.

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, inviting care home residents to join our virtual events with support from the care home managers, and hearing from our volunteers who are part of local faith groups, a cancer support group and a D/deaf community group.

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 and in our Newsletter and send via direct email to Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission, the local authority, the Clinical Commissioning Group and key stakeholders.

2020-21 priorities included:

Project	Changes made to services
Review of GP websites	The Patient Advisory Board made recommendations to the Primary Care Group, based on our report, which included asking that individual practices focus on providing local information to cancer patients about consultations, referrals, and the availability of diagnostic tests.
Review and visit to Sexual Assault Referral Centre	Provider has modified their storyboard and created new ones for males, females and teenagers. They are also in discussion with their IT department about having a Live Chat Function on their website.
Dentistry Services	Our report and feedback has contributed to a wider campaign and helped to trigger a national review of dentistry services.
Pen Pal Scheme	Positive feedback from healthcare staff; helps to relieve the loneliness, brings back positive memories and helps residents to connect with the younger generation.

Responses to recommendations and requests

We had six providers who did not 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.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is represented on the Central Bedfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board by Diana Blackmun, CEO. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by attending each virtual meeting, feeding back public views on various issues and concerns and disseminating current information as detailed by attending providers.

What they say

This is some of the feedback we have received from stakeholders about the work we do and how they have been using the feedback we provide.

"At yesterday's PAB meeting we were jointly charged with *taking forward the conclusions and recommendations arising from your survey on GP websites.* I have drafted a short paper for discussion at the next PPG meeting."

Ray Anderson, Patient Rep on the East of England Cancer Alliance (EoECA)

"Central Bedfordshire College have had the privilege of working with Healthwatch for another year, *providing further opportunities for our students to make an impact in the local community. This has given a brilliant opportunity for our students voices to be heard and to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of other local organisations. Our students have been fortunate to complete their research report virtually with Eleanor (HWCB Youth Engagement Officer), whilst having fun and developing their skills.*"

Hannah Piatkiewicz, Student Engagement & Experience Lead, Central Bedfordshire College

"*The video is excellent! I will send it to all our registration tutors to show to students this week and hopefully we will get a good response and start the ball rolling.*"

Shani Hawkins, Careers Advisor, Manshead CE Academy

"*It is great to see the kind of queries that Healthwatch were responding to during the first lockdown, and the ways in which these were resolved; particularly where they couldn't be fully resolved (e.g. where elective surgeries were cancelled) the work that the volunteers have been doing is clearly invaluable, and it was great to see examples of this in the report The work with care homes was great, and shows that HWCB are continuing with their work supporting services in the community, as well as highlighting good practice.*"

Lorna Corbin, Commissioning Officer, Central Bedfordshire Council

"Thank you for the report, it is always helpful to gain feedback and have opportunities to discuss any queries as they arise. I wondered if it might be helpful if we could provide some detail around the different service we provide in Central Bedfordshire and the number of people accessing those services for the next report?"

Tasha Newman, Assistant Director, Central Bedfordshire Adult Community Mental Health

"This is superb and more than evidences the standard of feedback that these young volunteers are providing. I personally can't wait to welcome them into the Trust when we are able."

Karen Bush, Community Engagement and Voluntary Services Manager, Luton & Dunstable Hospital

"Wow! The work you have done to bring services together to support the local community during COVID is amazing! Well done to all of you."

Caroline Mayles, Lead Diabetes Educator and the Diabetes Education Team, Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

"Thank you for an excellent Just Ask event which was most informative and excellently delivered by your team."

Ray Smith, Chair of Leighton Buzzard PPG Network and Member of Leighton Road Surgery PPG

"We just had a project team meeting and the whole team have been saying how fantastic the Advocacy Services report was. They wanted me to pass on their thanks to you and the team for your work on this, and to let you know how appreciated it was. Thank you again!"

Lorna Corbin, Commissioning Officer, Central Bedfordshire Council

"This is a great report by Young Healthwatch - well worth a read! Please do share with colleagues. Hopefully, we will be able to welcome Young Healthwatch back to the Bedford site soon to update them on progress within paediatric services following on from their 15 Steps report, and to look at other areas of the hospital."

Deborah Allman, Voluntary Services Manager, Bedford Hospital

Message from our CEO

I am very proud of our achievements over the past twelve months which would not have been possible without the continued support of our enthusiastic, skilled and knowledgeable staff, volunteers, the public and our partners. I would like to thank everyone that has been involved in our work this year, including our Chair and Board who bring insightful governance to the organisation and who have been very supportive during these unprecedented times.

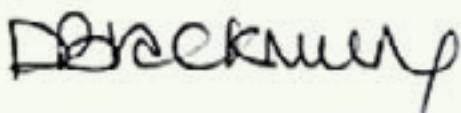
In the past year, support services changed how they delivered services, and priorities were reassessed to help form an NHS, and social care service, that could respond to the COVID-19 emergency. We heard from many people about their experiences of accessing health and care services during the pandemic, stories which were highlighted in our first lockdown report - 'Listening in Action During Lockdown', published in June 2020 <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/lockdown-report>. As a follow-up, the 'Living through Lockdown 3.0' report - <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/lockdown-3-0-report>, published in March 2021, was developed to include additional feedback from the public, and a further expansion of stories and experiences shared with us, including the support, advice and guidance provided.

The comments and stories shared are vitally important to us which are used to influence service improvement, to collaborate with key decision makers, and to report on the changes people would like to see.

The commitment and work of the NHS, social care and the voluntary sector in dealing with the pandemic has been amazing as we have all adapted to a rapidly changing environment. However, we will be facing new challenges as lockdown restrictions are eased and all services will be faced with a large backlog of non-Covid-19 care, storing up greater problems for the future, which will mean added pressure on front line services as well as support services.

Patient views can enhance learning from the pandemic and therefore our focus for the future will be, in addition to our planned activities and projects, to continue to gather valuable public feedback to help inform future commissioning decisions, as well as communicating system changes to the public and providing clarity to interpret future guidance.

I look forward to continuing to work with all our partners in the coming year, in these most challenging of times, to ensure public, patient and carer voices are heard and acted upon.



Diana Blackmun
Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire CEO



Contact us

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Instagram: hw_centralbeds
Website: www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk
Registered in England:
Company No: 08399922
Registered Charity: 1154627




Address and contact details of the organisation holding the local Healthwatch contract as of 31/03/2021:

Address: Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House, Monks Walk, Chicksands, Bedfordshire, SG17 5TQ
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