

healthwatch

Tower Hamlets



On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets Annual Report 2020-21

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Executive Summary

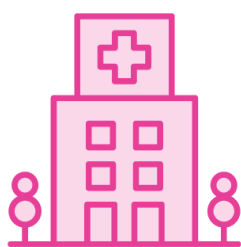
Community insights



Over 4,000 local people shared their experience of health and social care services. We used these to inform our 20 reports; making 128 recommendations for service improvement across public, primary, social and hospital care.

We led a Covid community insights project with our eight neighbouring Healthwatch for the North East London Integrated Care System. This has gathered nearly 60,000 issues and is seen as a national model of innovation.

Urgent Care Access



Covid made our work on improving access to care even more important. As GPs worked remotely and increased digital appointments, we looked at the impact on different groups within our communities.

Our insights helped GPs and hospitals adapt their systems quickly and helped them to train their staff to identify and address likely inequalities as they arose.

Health inequalities

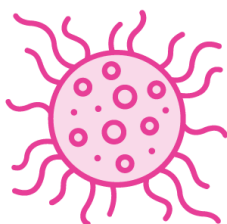


Our work into what makes a healthy community increased understanding of the factors impacting on inequalities locally.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot led our webinar on inequalities and Covid. We presented evidence to the Tower Hamlets local Inequalities Commission supporting their recommendations.

Our recommendations informed the new Borough Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

What next?



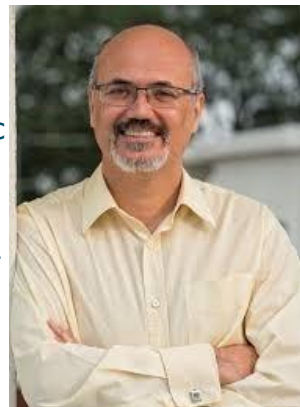
We will support the health and social care system to build back better by asking local people what changes, due to Covid, should be kept and which ones should be removed.

We want to put local residents at the heart of redesigning services and providing them with ongoing community insights to support them in that role.

Message from our Co-Chair Randal Smith

Changing what we do and how we do it in a time of crisis

The pandemic has been a challenge for all of us. Like others, we had to change the way we worked – from the office arrangements to public consultations. We decided the most useful role we could play was to feed residents' insights to the health and social care services to enable them to respond quickly. Our staff and volunteers moved from face-to-face working to engaging with people over the phone or online. Their work was turned into reports and regularly informed the Borough's pandemic response.



User voice and health inequalities

In the autumn, we hosted an online talk by Sir Prof Marmot who has made health inequalities central to public health thinking over the last decades. He emphasised the value of user voice in addressing the inequalities. Pointing out that the barriers to equality cannot be identified and removed without it.

Our reports described the unequal impact of lockdown on residents and made recommendations on how to respond now, and in the longer term, to address these inequalities.

Making a difference

I've been on the Board of Healthwatch Tower Hamlets for 5 years and would not have remained if we were not making a difference. That's what we're here to do. Drawing upon our report on home care, Tower Hamlets is redesigning its service. This process is just underway and we will engage further with the service providing further insights to improve it.

...and finally

The engine of Healthwatch Tower Hamlets is our volunteers – those conducting our surveys, coding and inputting the insights gathered, representing patients and users and sitting on the Board. They ensure we remain rooted in the community and reach the under-represented voices. I'm both delighted and proud that many of our volunteers draw on their experience with us to progress in employment for themselves.



I would urge you to consider joining us to help improve care in our Borough. Please contact us on 0800 145 5343, info@healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk

About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Tower Hamlets. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support you need, by sharing these views with those who have the power to make change happen.

Helping you to find the information you need

We help people find the information they need about services in their area. This has been vital during the pandemic with the ever-changing environment and restrictions limiting people's access to health and social care services.

Our goals



1 Supporting you to have your say

We want more people to get the information they need to take control of their health and care, make informed decisions and shape the services that support them.



2 Providing a high quality service

We want everyone who shares an experience or seeks advice from us to get a high quality service and to understand the difference their views make.



3 Ensuring your views help improve health & care

We want more services to use your views to shape the health and care support you need today and in the future.



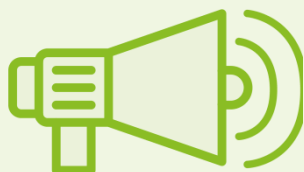
"Local Healthwatch have done fantastic work throughout the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is more work ahead to ensure that everyone's views are heard. COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities and to tackle these unfair health differences we will need those in power to listen, to hear the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

Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England

Highlights from our year

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

Access



We heard from

4,071 people

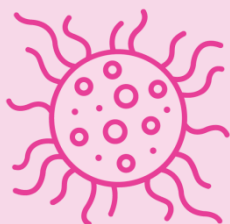
this year about their experiences of health and social care. They left 4,983 comments relating to 15,129 issues.

We provided advice and information to

146 people

this year.

Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with

857

People directly during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

We made **86** recommendations on how providers could respond to the pandemic based on our community insights.

Making a difference to care



We published

20 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made **128** recommendations for improvement.

75% of recommendations

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

Health and care that works for you



103 volunteers

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they contributed 483 hours.

We employ 4 staff

three of whom work full time and one 4 days a week, which is an 16% decrease from the previous year.

We received

£179,716 in funding

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

Healthy communities: then and now



What local people say?

We have been asking local people key questions about staying healthy since 2019.

what
would you do?

What would you do?

In **May 2019** we talked to 346 local people in street markets about staying healthy and improving neighbourhoods as healthier spaces.

Neighbourhood conversation

In **December 2019** we returned to the street markets to talk to 240 local people about what makes their neighbourhood good and how they could live healthier lives.



Staying well during covid

In **March and June 2020**, we undertook a survey online and over the phone with local people looking at how they stayed healthy and well during the pandemic.

Voices of disabled residents

Between **January and March 2021** we surveyed 182 residents who are disabled or living with a serious long-term condition to understand their information needs and their experience of services during Covid.

Asking the same questions prior to and during the pandemic allowed us to let local and regional services know what was important during Covid:



Clean, safe outdoor spaces are extremely important to people's health and wellbeing. Encouraging everyone to use these is important during the Covid-19 pandemic and as part of the recovery.



A move to digital engagement with health, social care and community services has had benefits for the majority of residents. However, a small minority are finding it more difficult to access the services they need. Projects to tackle this are essential to avoid inequalities of health outcomes for some of the most vulnerable; and it is crucial that those directly affected are involved in their design.



Disabled people have poorer experience across almost all areas of health and well-being. The redesign of services after the Covid crisis provides an opportunity to do things differently and move away from a one size fits all approach.



Stronger community connections and peer support were a positive outcome of the pandemic and continued support will help tackle loneliness and build community cohesion.



What does a healthy community look like?

As we build back from the pandemic the things that are important to residents are:



“Feeling alone and completely friendless. During my sickness I needed company of my relatives and friends but for this pandemic situation completely changed. Very depressive situation. It has impacted on my mental health.” **Local Resident**

What difference did we make?

Our community insights on the pandemic meant that services adapted quickly including prioritising keeping parks open and safe, linking to online community groups to get Covid messages out, linking up information and advice with GP services.

The new Borough health and wellbeing strategy has prioritised safe open spaces, children, young people and improving access and coordination of services based on our findings.



healthwatch
Tower Hamlets



Impact of Covid 19 on local communities 2019-2020

Click on the image to read the full report.

Health inequalities: then and now



Who struggled to stay healthy before the pandemic?

We found that:

-  Younger people, those on lower incomes or unstable housing had a harder time making healthy choices.
-  People living in housing association estates felt less safe in their area.
-  People living in the borough's most deprived areas reported poorer air quality.
-  Ethnic minority people and people with complex conditions gave less positive feedback on health and social care services.



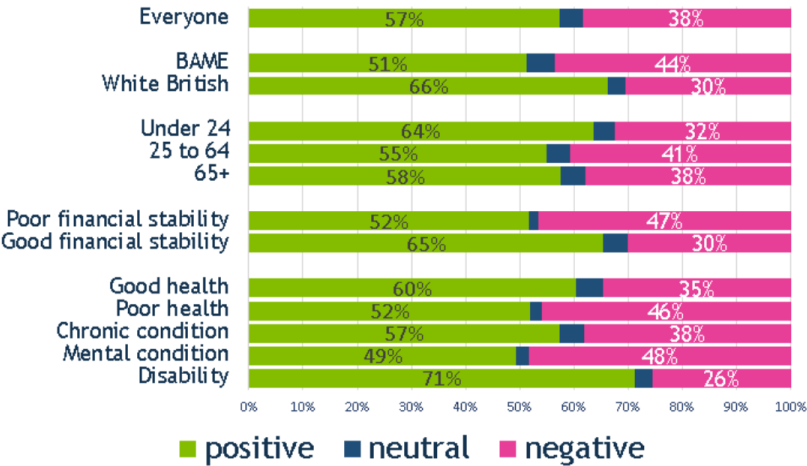
8% felt that there was very little they could do to maintain a good level of health and well-being.



When it came to health and care services we found:

- White British people gave more positive feedback than ethnic minority people.
- Younger people and those in good mental health gave more positive feedback than those in poor health, particularly those suffering from a mental health condition.
- Those with a good level of financial stability gave more positive feedback than those less financially stable.

Respondents experience of health and care services





How did Covid impact inequalities?



Women, people from our ethnic minority communities, younger people and parents of disabled children felt less able to support themselves and their families financially.



77% of our survey respondents who were in work worked from home. Those who found it more challenging were those with children or caring responsibilities, and those experiencing low moods

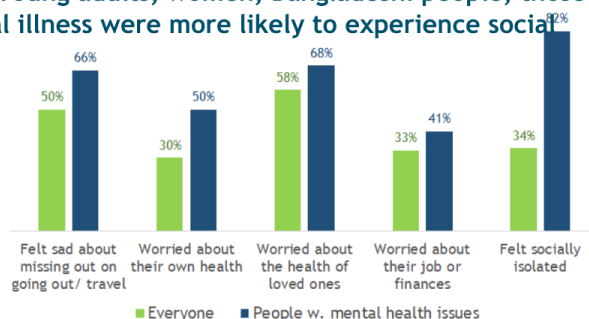
"I am still working from home, my working/leisure time has blurred so I am looking at work at all hrs even at weekends. Zoom meetings are exhausting. I've had to take days out already to try to centre myself. It's not been great for my mental/emotional health. I'm a very social person."



34% of people had been feeling socially isolated. Young adults, women, Bangladeshi people, those who needed to shield and those living with mental illness were more likely to experience social isolation.



16% of respondents suffered from a mental health condition. The pandemic impacted them significantly more severely.



14% of respondents sharing a house with other people said their relationships were tense or unpleasant.

What difference did it make?

Our Health Inequalities Webinar with Sir Professor Michael Marmot was attended by over 200 stakeholders from across the local health and care system. You can view it here. [Inequalities with Sir Prof Marmot](#). The outcome of discussions fed into the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

We provided key intelligence to the Tower Hamlets Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities Commission and both fed into; and responded to their recommendations. You can read the report here [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Commission Report and Recommendations](#)

We have provided crucial information on the intersection of factors that impact on inequalities including income, housing, employment, ethnicity, gender, language confidence and disability. Identifying the likely communication needs of these different groups has allowed the vaccine and test and trace response to be more customised and therefore more effective. We believe that this has helped to save lives in our community.



"Healthwatch supported the vaccine rollout by sharing with us people's understandable caution and concerns so that we could do whatever possible to encourage our population to be protected."

North East London Integrated Care System

Urgent care access: then and now



Our work on improving urgent access in 2019 meant that our local GPs and hospital providers had improved their access and had vital information about who might not be able to access services digitally .

In 2020 we engaged with nearly 400 patients in GP practices A&E and the Urgent Treatment Centre at the Royal London Hospital to understand how access could be improved. Their experience helped us to understand:

- how well the urgent care system was understood by patients and how they used it.
- that by improving urgent GP access with increased triage and online offers you could decrease demand in hospital emergency services and also improve patient satisfaction.
- who might use digital appointments and who might struggle

As Covid took hold we focused on building our knowledge of the impact of digital access.

In December 2019, we asked 240 local people if they would consider using online tools to access NHS services.

In March-June 2020, we asked 354 local people whether they had accessed NHS services online

Who is excluded?

Some of the most vulnerable Tower Hamlets residents may be at higher risk of digital exclusion.

38%

of 2019 conversation participants

14%

of 2020 Covid-19 survey respondents

were digitally excluded

(had no internet access, no devices to access the internet on or no IT literacy)



More likely to be of Black ethnicities.



More likely to be older.



More likely to be in poor health or disabled.



Less likely to be working or financially secure.



Appointments in person understandably cancelled however these were replaced with phone consultations. These were more effective, time saving and easier. Less stress about having to travel to appointments and rely on support to be available- this gave more time to prepare for the appointment and list all the things needing to discuss – which is often hard when anxious about travelling/getting home before rush hour/not wasting support time” **Local resident receiving home care**



Accessing GP services remotely- Covid19 surveys respondents



Patient with a positive experience

- May have a previously diagnosed, well managed long term condition
- Has used the NHS app before
- Perceives telephone and online consult as efficient
- Needs information on managing symptoms, repeat prescriptions or minor changes to their medication



Patient with a negative experience

- Distrusts telephone and online consultations.
- Has a low level of IT literacy
- Is experiencing new, unfamiliar symptoms
- Needs blood tests, physical examination or significant changes to their medication

Patients who used e-consult or other forms of online consultations in their GP surgeries found it easy and efficient.

Medicine reviews and other less complex appointments can often be done by telephone or online with the same results as in person.

Online or telephone appointments are less likely to be suitable for patients with complex needs or those with new, unexplained symptoms.



People most likely to use online GP services

- In work
- Middle class
- Aged under 50
- Parents



"Highlighting the strengths and downfalls of the Total Triage programme enabled us to make improvements before rolling it out at scale. This allowed GPs to respond more rapidly to a virtual appointment offer during Covid." **GP Care Group Quality Improvement Team**



What has been most helpful is the work that Tower Hamlets Healthwatch have done to inform an adaptation of the 'virtual by default' patient offer to ensure that existing health inequalities were not worsened even further as a result of this approach. Practices are now identifying and coding this cohort of patients so that their service offer is adapted accordingly." **Clinical Care Group**



The project was highly commended in the Healthwatch England Awards 2020 for Improving Health and Social Care. It was highly commended in the HSJ Awards as a partner to our GP Care Group for Primary Care Innovation of the Year using our patient experience data to improve GP access to reduce waiting times.

Young people: then and now



The experience of young people during the pandemic.

We wanted to understand what the impact of periods of lockdown were having on local young people and what they were doing to cope.

Eleven young influencers (13-18 year olds) collected data from a total of 95 young residents, 56 identified as female and 39 identified as male, ranging from 11 - 21 years of age from a range of different ethnic backgrounds.

Findings	Impact
Mental health education should be introduced across schools to ensure young people learn about how to maintain their health and wellbeing.	Local Council are working with young people to develop an offer that teaches young people how to maintain their health and wellbeing. The Mental Health in Schools project is working to support pupils in several Tower Hamlets schools so they can get support for their mental health early on.
Resources for low income families	There has also been some success for the local campaign to address this issue. A £70,000 donation was made to buy books as well as a donation from the National Grid of 70 laptops that are being distributed to some schools. A high-profile communications push is being planned to attract more donations.
Criminal activity and youth violence continues to operated during Covid	The Young influencers have been informed that this work is being delivered by group of professionals with a specific focus on vulnerable children and exploitation, including, youth services, youth justice, social care, and the police. The group is continuing to meet regardless of the pandemic, so they can continue their important work.



Click on the image to read the full report.

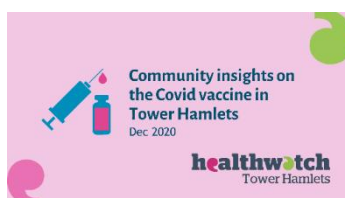
Our community insights reports



As well as the reports already highlighted we have provided insights on a wide range of topics important to our local residents and partners.

You can find all of our reports on our website [here](#). We provide regular dashboards on residents experience of GP Practices, the Royal London Hospital and on health and care services as a whole. This year we will be producing these quarterly with a clear summary of where things are working well and where further improvement may be needed. We are also working with our neighbouring Healthwatch to produce these across the North East London area. You can see an example [here](#)

We produced a number of rapid reports in 2020-2021 to help inform the test and trace and vaccine roll out and to respond to difficulties accessing dental services. Click on the images below to find out more.



You can see our response to the Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority Inequalities Commission below.



These are the first in a series of reports from our Voices of Disabled residents projects.





Volunteers

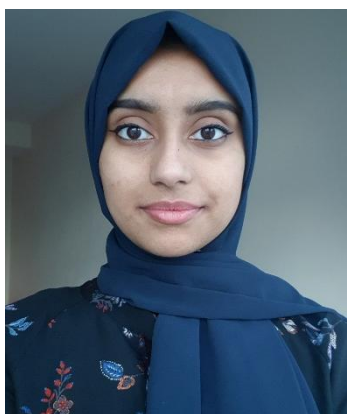
At Healthwatch Tower Hamlets we are supported by over a hundred volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services.

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online.
- Created digital content on our websites and social media.
- Helped gather community insights from across social media and online to build a stronger picture of the impact of Covid on local residents.
- Supported the submission of our Trusted Charity Mark Application by co-ordinating all of our governance policies and procedures.
- Our young volunteers developed and ran their own project to understand the impact of Covid on young peoples mental health.

Thank you

We want to say a massive thank you to all of our volunteers who have helped us across all of the functions that we need to deliver. We also want to say a huge thank you to all of our residents that volunteered to fill in, what probably feels like, an endless number of surveys and feedback forms. We hope that this report reassures you that what you tell us does make a difference.



Community Insights Researcher- Flora

Working as a Community Insights Researcher has allowed me to learn about my community and understand people's varying circumstances, particularly during the challenging times the pandemic has brought. Participating in the research projects made me feel I was positively contributing to my community and making a difference in their lives. I have also been able to build new transferrable skills that will likely benefit me in my professional career.



Helping run the office - Maria

I am studying organisational psychology and was looking for volunteering experience that could include administrative skills related to my studies and potential future career. At Healthwatch I have improved my smart-working and team skills and developed an understanding of governance policies and procedures. I feel these skills will be useful for my future career.

Board member - Kate

I have been involved with patient and public involvement for many years. In part as a researcher exploring its evolution but more importantly as a contributor to Healthwatch Tower Hamlets. Healthwatch has a difficult remit in treading the delicate balance between a passion for supporting residents, meeting the demands of the CCG and local authority as well as ensuring that the most useful information reaches the right people at the right time. Health and social care is at yet another turning point and I hope as member of Healthwatch it will be possible to contribute to its future.



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 Tower Hamlets.



www.healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk



0800 145 5343



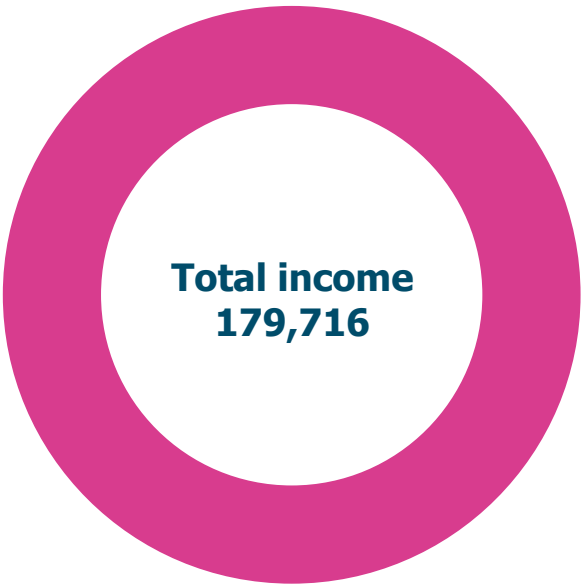
info@healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk

Finances

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

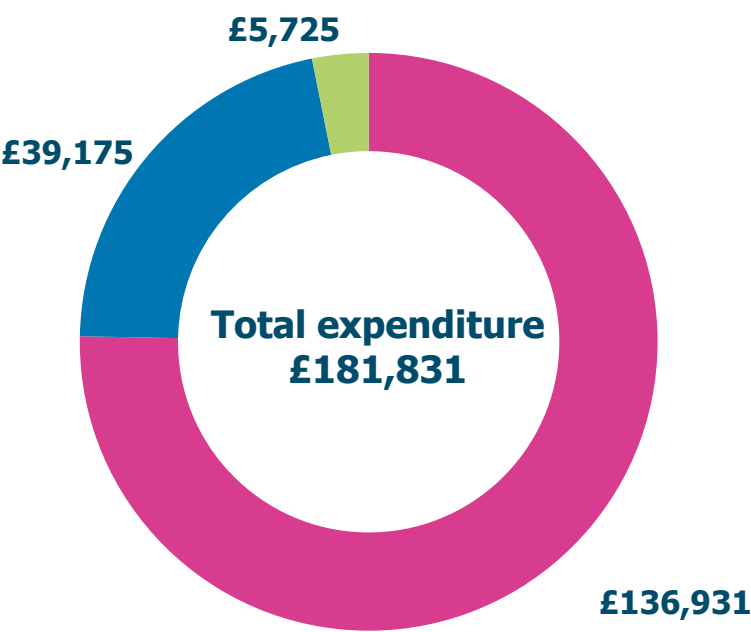
Income

- Funding received from local authority



Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Support and administration



Next steps & thank you

Top three priorities for 2021-22

1. Voices of disabled residents. Understanding how changes to services, due to Covid, are impacting disabled residents and involving them in service redesign.
2. What's changed. Make community views on what health and care services should look like post-Covid central to Borough decision making.
3. Delays in care. How can patients manage their care while they wait for treatment and how can administrative processes be improved, including online and phone, to support trust in the waiting process.

Two threads will run through all of our work this year – mental health and understanding and tackling health inequalities.



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

Dianne Barham, Chief Executive. Healthwatch Tower Hamlets.

Building on the themes identified in our report on Home Care services (undertaken for us by local community organisation, Almost Any How) we will begin our first large scale co-production partnership with Tower Hamlets Together to re-procure the service. Click on the image to read this very thought provoking report.



We will continue to work with our neighbouring Healthwatch to expand and develop the Community Insights System as the primary tool for our statutory and voluntary sector partners to collect and share the insights from our local residents.

Thank you to our community partners

We would especially like to thank the voluntary and community organisations who have worked with us this year and made it possible for us to gather insights from residents that we may have found more difficult to reach.





Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets, Wheel Chair Centre, Mile End Hospital, Bancroft Road, London E1 3AG.

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets 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 12 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 nine times and made decisions on matters such as to add gathering insights from care home residents and their friends and family to our work programme to replace enter and view visits and to look at increasing our resources by working collaboratively with the eight Borough NEL community insights project.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by reviewing themes from all of the community insights gathered throughout the year including identifying groups we haven't heard from. We draft a long list of priorities that we review with our stakeholders to see where we can best make a difference. We then ask our members to vote on the top three priorities through a member survey through our eBulletin.

Methods and systems used across the year’s work to obtain people’s views and experience.

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2020/21 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, provided a feedback centre/rate and review system, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done, for example, this by working with user groups who work with people with learning, visual and hearing impairments and by training local residents from within harder to reach communities such as our Somali and Eastern European residents to undertake phone interviews with people in their networks.

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.

2020-21 priorities	
Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Covid's impact on healthy communities.	The Borough health and wellbeing strategy has prioritised safe open spaces, children and young people and improving access and coordination of services.
Impact of increased digital access	Our profiling of likely excluded groups were used to train hospital and GP staff to help reach everybody in the community.
Disabled residents information and communication needs	Our report informed communication plans for vaccine uptake leading to improved messaging and likely better uptake.
Covid's impact on young people	The Council are working with young people to develop tools to help maintain their health and wellbeing.
Integrated Home Care	We are working with the NHS and the Council to design a new home care service.

Responses to recommendations and requests

We did not have any 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.

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

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets is represented on the Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Board by our Co Chair Randal Smith. During 2020/21 our he has effectively carried our this role by: presenting the findings of our Community Insights on Covid; highlighting the voice of the digitally excluded and participating in the Local Engagement Board to provide community input into the Covid response.

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