

# Making it easier for people with learning difficulties to attend hospital appointments in East Kent

**healthwatch**  
Kent

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**#YourCareYourWay**



**February 2022**

## The story so far

In 2017, we partnered with East Kent Mencap to visit all three hospitals in East Kent to see for ourselves what support is available for people with learning difficulties.

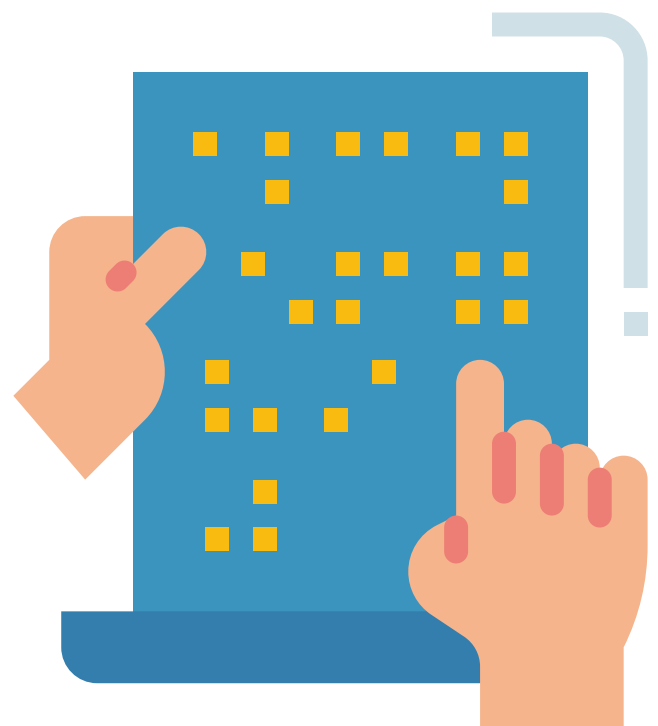
Together with a volunteer who has learning difficulties, we went to the main reception and to Outpatients to see what support was available to help them attend their appointment.

We found some great examples of how they had done things well, but also identified several areas where services could be improved.

Based on our feedback, we've been working with East Kent Hospitals to help them make a number of improvements including:



- A new audio & Braille transcript service
- A new British Sign Language interpreting service via video
- Pictorial books to help reduce communication barriers
- Mandatory training about AIS for all staff
- A new card which Deaf people can use to indicate that they need a BSL interpreter. This was designed in partnership with Healthwatch Kent and the Deaf community
- New posters explaining the AIS standard designed in partnership with people who have learning difficulties



## **Your feedback has made a difference**

**"It is reassuring to know that the Trust has a video BSL interpreting service available and that we can carry communication cards to inform staff on what we need and how to access this"**

**"The video relay service gives me independence and confidence, now that I contact hospitals without needing to ask a hearing person to help"**

**"A communication card informing staff that we require a BSL interpreter by video in an emergency would help us feel reassured that our communication needs would be met. The Deaf Forum has been given a voice and has been involved in the design of the card for feedback and ideas. This has made us feel more confident in asking for help, so that we can communicate more easily."**

**Danni from East Kent Mencap has a learning difficulty. Danni was involved in the producing of the AIS communication poster. When Danni saw the news poster in the hospital she said 'this is the one I helped to work on. They really listened to me and changed it... wow I cannot believe it!'"**

## **What's next?**

**We continue to hear from people all over Kent who are struggling to attend hospital appointments because they struggle to communicate. There is clearly more to be done to ensure all NHS services are meeting the Accessible Information Standard and to ensure that people feel confident that when they come to hospital the support will be in place to help them communicate.**

**In 2022, we will be returning to East Kent Hospitals and other Kent Trusts to see for ourselves what has changed to make it easier for people who may be D/deaf, blind or have other needs to attend a hospital appointment.**

**In East Kent, the hospital Trust has committed to the following:**

- Agree how patient surveys can be adapted to ensure everyone can give feedback regardless of their communication need**
- Implement quality assurance process to review whether peoples' communication and support needs are being met**
- Use mystery shoppers to check how the Trust is meeting the AIS standard**
- Ensure that the complaints policy is available and accessible to all patients/carers**
- Make the Trust's website more accessible to everyone**

**Our involvement has been recognised by the Chief Executive of East Kent Hospitals.**

**“The project would not have been so successful without the input of ‘experts by experience’ who could guide and challenge the work being done. Patient representatives, East Kent Mencap, Kent Association for the Blind, Kent County Council Sensory and Autism Services’ Deaf Forum and Healthwatch Kent were among the people working on the project to make sure what we set up in the Trust would work for patients first time.”**

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## What did we recommend?

**Mandatory staff training especially for reception staff. This should include front line staff from other organisations including G4S and Serco**

**Communication aids must be provided for those with a range of communication difficulties.**

**An audit of posters and banners should be completed to ensure they are accessible to a range of groups. Our volunteer found the posters to be inaccessible to them.**

## What's changed as a result?

**PALS & Complaints staff now have a process where they can record peoples' communication needs. Communication needs have also been added to the Customer Care online training which is mandatory for all staff.**

**Training programmes are available that covers deaf awareness, sight awareness and neurodiversity. These courses will initially be a pilot for reception and key staff identified.**

**New covers on patient Health Records, record and flag any communication needs**

**New hearing loops and equipment will be provided. There has already been an audit of the current hearing loops in preparation.**

**There has been a revision of PAS (Allscripts) that includes specific coded responses and alerts to communication needs**

**There is now a new audio and braille transcription service**

**There are electronic screens in the outpatient's reception informing patients that any information they need is available in different formats.**

**New communication booklets have been funded and distributed across wards and specific areas at all sites.**

**Pictorial books have helped to reduce communication barriers for inpatients and supports staff.**

## **What did we recommend?**

**Involve members of the relevant groups in testing out the new Video Interpreting Service.**

**Work with external groups of people who have communication difficulties to test other information to access whether it is accessible.**

**Leaflets in alternative formats must be made available.**

## **What's changed as a result?**

**A new Video Interpreting Service has been created and rolled out which supports all patients who are clinically vulnerable. Feedback from the D/deaf community is that it is easy to use and very helpful**

**External organisations and people with lived experience have been involved alongside Healthwatch throughout this work. There has already been an audit of the current hearing loops in preparation.**

**There has been a revision of PAS (Allscripts) that includes specific coded responses and alerts to communication needs**

**There is now a new audio and braille transcription service**

**A new Easy Read Patient Information Leaflet service has been implemented within the Trust.**

**People who have a learning disability and/or sensory impairment are involved in developing the leaflets. This has also led to the creation of pictorial communities.**

**The Trust has worked with patient groups to reassure them that they are creating materials that will work for people with a range of communication needs.**

**If you would like to chat with us about the report you can reach us through the following routes:**



**Online:**

**[www.healthwatchkent.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchkent.co.uk)**



**By Telephone:**

**Healthwatch Kent Freephone  
0808 801 01 02**



**By Email:**

**[Info@healthwatchkent.co.uk](mailto:Info@healthwatchkent.co.uk)**



**By Text:**

**Text us on 07525 861 639. By  
texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's  
British Sign Language interpreter  
will make contact and arrange a  
time to meet face to face**



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