

# Your Voice Improving Health and Care

Healthwatch Essex  
Annual Report 2021–22







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### Some of the many faces of Healthwatch Essex in 2021-2022

Clockwise from top left: Office Manager, Helen; (L-R) Communications Officer Beks with Trustee, Laurie and Engagement Officer, Larissa; One of our addiction project participants, Alex (left), with Renee, our Engagement Officer; (L-R) Trustee Lawrie Payne with CEO, Samantha, and Les Nicholl, from Essex Fire and Rescue Service; (L-R) Digital Marketing Apprentice, Sam, Engagement Manager, Dan and Senior Research Officer, Tom; Digital Marketing Apprentices, Libby and Sam.



# A note from us...

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As another challenging year draws to a close, I couldn't be happier or prouder of how the system has come together and endeavoured to keep spirits up during the pandemic as it continued to rumble on. Teams mobilised, and the community came together to deliver the vaccine rollout program and support those most in need.

A few highlights from the work that Healthwatch Essex has delivered this year include 'Living with Obesity': Men's experiences of losing and gaining weight. This report was well-received across the stakeholders it shared. The findings have fed into various strategies and policies across Essex, and the author Dr John Day was seconded on a short-term basis to Essex County Council to support them in writing the new Weight Management Strategy.

Our project focussed on addiction has resulted in an exciting campaign. The stories and experiences gathered have been powerful and provoked conversations concerning gambling, drug and alcohol addiction. The podcasts are a 'must listen', and the poster campaign is an opportunity to raise awareness about these fundamental issues.

Healthwatch Essex proudly won an award for COVID-19 response at the Healthwatch national network awards following our sensory awareness campaign earlier in the year. We have been able to work much closer with the national network this year and have delivered Research Methods training, Communications support and Engagement guides, supported by Healthwatch England, to a wide range of local Healthwatch.

We developed a new ambassador programme called the Trauma Ambassador Group (TAG) this year. These adults have come together to use their collective lived experience to feed into current service design, research at local and university levels and to capture and share the experience they have had.

I am proudest of this year how we have moved the information we have constantly been gathering to an entirely new audience through our TikTok and podcasting platforms. This has enabled us to share the stories we gather to a new audience, inform people, start conversations and impact change. I have been on a very steep learning curve with social media, but it has been fantastic to watch the number of people engaging with our content grow.



Sam Glover  
CEO



2021 was a year like no other as the world was in the grips of COVID-19 Pandemic. During this time, not only did Healthwatch Essex continue to deliver and represent the public across health and social care, we grew. We delivered more work, took on new staff and developed a completely new way of working without having to furlough anyone. Although staff were not able to come to the office, they have managed to stay in touch, continued to work closely, and supported each other during this time.

Despite the restrictions during the lockdowns, each team has continued to do their vital work in Information and Guidance, Research, Engagement and Communications and the Board is extremely proud of them all and the vital work they do. Thanks to our Chief Executive and all of the team at Healthwatch Essex for the exceptional work they have done during an extremely challenging time. Thanks also to our many volunteers who make a vital contribution to what we do as ambassadors and patient partners.

During the year we have seen the departure from the Board of Gary Hyams, Kerry Cole and Paul Hutton and thank them for their contribution. I would like to say a special thank you to Gary for all that he achieved as Chair; it is my pleasure to succeed him. To develop the Board we have welcomed Neil Jones and Steve Carey and look forward to working with them both. Our exceptional Board of Trustees give their time and share their knowledge and skills in support of our Chief Executive and the work of HWE and we are extremely grateful to them.

The way ahead in 2022 brings some uncertainties and challenges with the introduction of the new Health & Care Bill 2021-2022, the demise of Clinical Commissioning Groups and the establishment and implementation of Integrated Care Systems nationally. Healthwatch is key in all of this in capturing and sharing with key stakeholders the lived experiences of the local community in accessing and experiencing health and social care services, identifying gaps in provision and collaborating with the decision makers across all services to improve the care and support that is provided for everyone.

In 2022 the Chief Executive and Board of Directors will be considering our aspirations for Healthwatch Essex and creating a strategy to drive/achieve our aspirations for the organisation and the people of Essex and play our part in improving the health and wellbeing, access to and experiences of health and social care.



Amanda Cherry  
Chair of the Board of Trustees



# About Us

Who we are and what we do



# Our Vision

That people's voice and experiences influence all health, wellbeing, and care.

# Our Mission

Seeking and listening to people's experiences and voices to create opportunities to shape all wellbeing services and policy for Essex.



# About Us

We are an independent voice for the people of Essex, helping to shape and improve health and social care services in the county. We believe that people's views and lived experience of health and care matter, so we're here to make sure your voice is heard and responded to. We also provide an Information & Guidance service to help you access, understand and navigate the health and care system.

## What we do

Through innovative research and engagement activities - our reports, events, films and outreach work - we make evidence-based recommendations to the NHS and social care authorities and demonstrate how lived experience can have a positive impact on the redesign and improvement of local services. We have powers in law, as set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012, to encourage people to share their views and lived experience with us.

We also provide an information service to help people access, understand and navigate the health and social care system via a confidential phone call, text or email.

## Who we work with

We work closely with the health and social care authorities in Essex to help make sure they put patients and the public first. This includes the five NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups, one mental health trust, five acute hospitals, as well as Essex County Council which has responsibility for social care and public health.

We also work with regulators and other commissioners and providers of health, primary care and community care alongside various voluntary organisations to ensure the voices of Essex residents are heard and taken into consideration when improving local services.

As part of the wider Healthwatch network, we share information with Healthwatch England, which provides a formal link to the Department of Health and Social Care and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Our performance and impact is closely monitored by this network and Essex County Council, which receives our funding each year.





## What is 'lived experience'?

'Lived experience' describes people's first-hand accounts of their health and care. How people experience health and care services is affected by their own personal circumstances; for example, whether they have a family or whether they are in work. Their 'lived experience' (good or bad) can shape the trust and confidence they have in health and care services.

That's why it's important the system takes the time to find out about the people who use services - to empathise and recognise the impact their service has on the individual and to use this insight to better understand the health and care needs of the local population.

## Our governance

We want to make sure that as many people as possible can share their voice and stories with us and so we continue to take steps to involve the public and volunteers in our governance and decisions about our work.

Our Board of Trustees is responsible for the strategic oversight of Healthwatch Essex. They meet at least six times a year, of which two of these are public meetings.

We have also established a Strategic Advisory Group to advise the Board on matters of policy and strategy. This group includes representatives of patients, service users and carers, health and care organisations as well as people from the wider voluntary and community sector.



# Our Year at a Glance

Here are some of our highlights from the last 12 months.

## April

- We work with our Young Mental Health Ambassadors to share views in aid of Stress Awareness Month.
- The Information & Guidance team create a blog about MS.
- The Engagement Team takes a trip to Tendring to support out Asset Mapping project.
- Phase one of the addiction project begins, starting with gambling.
- The Collaborate Essex Disability and Carers Forum meet to discuss E-Scooters and the challenges they have brought.

## May

- We promote Deaf Awareness Week with our sensory impaired members of the Collaborate Essex Disability and Carers Forum.
- The Smiley Movement feature Healthwatch Essex film of Josh, which won a national charity film award.
- Volunteers and staff share images and quotes for Mental Health Awareness Week.

## June

- We launch our report looking at what matters to veterans on Armed Forces Day.
- We launch our Research Reflections blog, giving an insight into the work of our Research Team.
- A new Chair and Vice Chair of the board are elected.
- We release the 2020/2021 Annual Report.
- Phase two of the addiction project begins with a focus on alcohol.

## July

- We launch our report looking at men's experiences of living with obesity.
- The Engagement and Communications Teams attend Harwich Holiday Fun.
- Our CEO hosts a livestream about accessing GP services.
- The Collaborate Essex Disability and Carers Forum meet to discuss their mental health experiences.

## August

- Our Hidden Voices Podcast launches with the first episode focussing on what it's like to live with a Stoma bag.
- Alongside the podcast we launch the Hidden Voices TikTok channel.
- Our CEO and Engagement Manager attend 'Meeting on the Move' conference.
- Our Engagement and Communications teams attend an outreach event in Clacton.

## September

- We release the second episode of the Hidden Voices podcast along with TikTok videos and reach 200,000 views.
- The Healthwatch Essex team take part in Sensory Awareness Training.
- The Young Mental Health Ambassadors share their experiences on Children's Mental Health Day.
- We begin gathering experiences of end of life care in North East Essex and our Information & Guidance team attend Farleigh Hospice to understand more about their bereavement Services.



## October

North East Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance works with Healthwatch Essex to produce the Community Asset Mapping Start Well report.

We visit Princess Alexandra with the Purple All Stars to discuss accessibility issues for those living with learning disabilities.

Our Collaborate Essex Disability and Carers Forum hosts training in Chelmsford.

Our TikTok channel reaches 500 followers in just three months.

## December

Our staff donate warm clothes to the North Essex Support Team for their Winter Warmers events and volunteer at the events themselves.

We film and release Nurse Jo's story about contracting COVID-19 as a healthcare professional.

Our podcast focusing on alcohol addiction is released.

Healthwatch Essex staff take part in the 'Free From Poverty for One Day' event.

## February

We begin work co-designing our addiction campaign with participants.

Our Digital Marketing Apprentices and our Engagement Officer attend Anglia Ruskin University for an outreach event.

The Communications Team run a Social Media Training Treasure Hunt for the entire team.

## November

Copies of our Annual Report are filed in the British Library.

We win the Healthwatch Award for Response to COVID-19 with our sensory awareness campaign.

We record and release our podcast of veteran's experiences for Remembrance Day.

The Research Team delivers training on co-design with healthcare professionals.

We support White Ribbon Day as a J9 Domestic Abuse Reporting Centre.

## January

We record the Hidden Voices episode focussing on the experiences of people living with drug addiction.

We release videos of lived experience of drug addiction on TikTok where we gain more than 1000 new followers in a week.

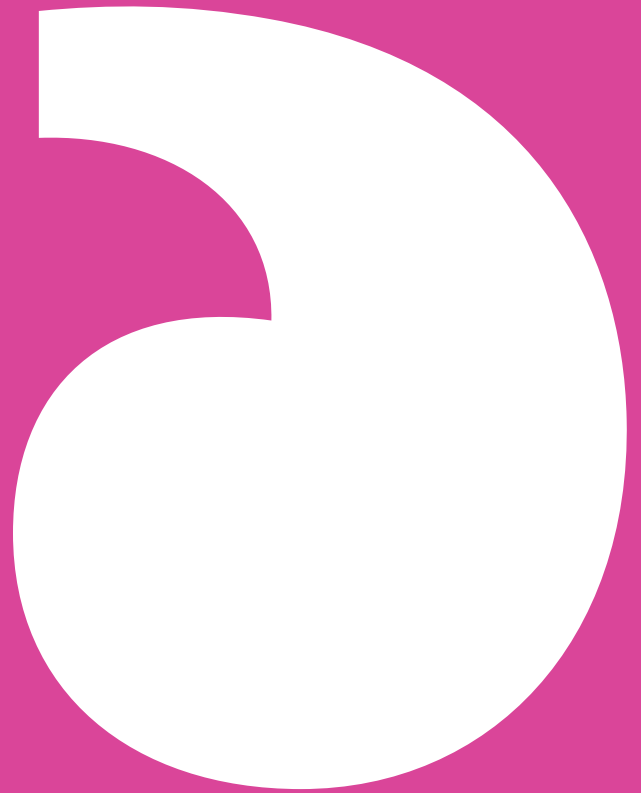
The Communications Team film with our new Trauma Ambassador Group.

## March:

'An Evening with Healthwatch Essex' takes place at Hylands House, Chelmsford.

We launch our addiction campaign, sharing the stories of people recovering from gambling, alcohol and drug addiction.

The Engagement Team run an event introducing some of our volunteers to the wider Healthwatch Essex team.



# Listening & Engaging

Capturing and sharing your  
experiences to help improve  
health and care services





# Your Voice Matters



## Health and care that works for you



**Over 75 volunteers & ambassadors**

help to carry out our work and put their lived experience at the heart of reshaping local services. We have recruited Healthwatch Essex Ambassadors with experience of maternity, mental health, disabilities and more.

## Supporting people



**1,096 people**

accessed support from Healthwatch Essex information & guidance team via our website, phone, text, Whatsapp, live chat or email.

## Connecting online



**30,768 interactions**

across our social media channels, 41,789 people visited our website and 80 people provided information to us via our online Feedback Centre.

# Our Projects

Read how we've captured your voice through our research & engagement, working with a wide range of people on various projects.

## What Matters to Veterans?



Healthwatch Essex engaged with 30 military veterans who had served in the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and British Army to capture the lived experience around their transition into civilian life. The project included participants who were either working, volunteering or associated with military charities and organisations including BLESMA, Help for Heroes, Blind Veterans UK, Transition Liaison Services (TILS), Investigating Countryside Angling and Research Projects (iCARP) and Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs.

The report highlighted themes such as transition and resettlement which raised issues such as employment, budgeting and finance, payment of bills and housing. These hurdles are all challenges to overcome once the military gates shut behind you, which can be daunting and overwhelming. The adaptation of change between civilian and military services was another huge difference which took time to adjust to also.

a need for more efficient signposting, and planning and preparation prior to leaving the military could be improved.

Dedicated Welfare Officers for every district were mentioned as a solution to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation. This would also enable proactive support where necessary. Veterans then have access to that point of contact at any time, who can help with any welfare issues or assist with support in relation to housing, health, wellbeing, or employment.

GP surgeries in Essex will be working in partnership with Healthwatch Essex to roll out veteran friendly training using lived experience of military veterans incorporating use of terminology and understanding the needs of the veteran.

Engagement Manager, Dan, speaking to veterans, Paul Findlay and Steve Branch



The identity and perception of a veteran was also raised, not just through public perception, but also identification as a veteran was not always accepted by some. Many believe a veteran to be a soldier who served in the world wars, however the participants we engaged with ranged from the ages of 28 - 98 years old.

Feelings of abandonment and isolation were raised as an issue, and many missed the camaraderie within the military and felt they have struggled to adapt to the lifestyle that they had left at a young age due to feelings that they didn't belong. Issues around 'feeling forgotten' once the gates shut were common amongst participants after not hearing from any support charities.

Armed forces and Veteran's breakfast clubs have been very highly valued by all veterans. The club is seen as a safe place to engage with other ex-service personnel who have shared similar experiences. A local breakfast club set up in each district of Essex would help towards the prevention of loneliness and isolation. This would also promote veteran's wellbeing by providing talk therapy as well as a venue in which veterans feel comfortable socialising.

This project "What Matters to Veterans?" launched on Armed Forces Day in June 2021. The project has since launched a podcast released on the week of Remembrance Sunday 2021 which highlights the key issues raised through this report. We have shared the report and its findings with the Cabinet Office who have taken forward the recommendations and incorporated them into their wellbeing strategy.

There was a consensus that there are too many military charities, and it becomes confusing where to turn for support. There is



# Living with Obesity

In July 2021, former Researcher Manager Dr John Day and Research Associate Sarah Haines published their in-depth report *Living with Obesity: Men's experiences of losing and gaining weight and the implications for policy and services*. The report was the culmination of a year-long research project that explored men's lived experiences of obesity. Using telephone and videocall interviews and a short demographic survey, the report foregrounded the experiences of 29 men living with obesity from across the East of England. John and Sarah aimed to understand men's everyday experiences of obesity, including their views on different weight management activities.

The report recommended that service providers develop men's weight management programmes based on collective support and camaraderie. Football-based initiatives were deemed particularly effective. The report also urged public health policymakers to recognise that men's experiences of weight gain across the life course were influenced by changing social pressures in adulthood. Finally, the report recommended that commercial weight management programmes adopt an increasingly personalised approach. Participants often found that these initiatives failed to factor in the emotional impact of weight loss and weight gain.

Since its publication, *Living with Obesity* has significantly influenced policies and practices relating to men's obesity. On receiving an executive summary of the report, Essex County Council confirmed that it would inform future design of weight management services. John was invited to give a talk on lived experience research at the University of East Anglia's Parental & Childhood Obesity Early Prevention Research Group, therefore developing people's knowledge of men's experiences of obesity at an academic level. In May 2021, he was a guest speaker at the Suffolk and North Essex Integrated Care System's Thinking Differently Together event series, which brought together a range of stakeholders to share their ideas. At the event, John showcased the accounts of two men interviewed for the report, therefore ensuring that key service providers and local health policymakers directly engaged with the participants' lived experiences. John was subsequently invited by the Head of Wellbeing and Public Health Commissioning at Essex County Council to take up a



secondment opportunity, which involved developing the new commissioning plan for weight management services across Essex and the spending of £500,000 acquired from Public Health England. He later worked with the Transformation and Commissioning Manager at Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group to support the training of primary care professionals involved in referring patients to weight management programmes across Essex.

The report aimed to empower men to share their experiences of obesity by ensuring that their voices were heard. One participant wrote a blog about his experiences for the Healthwatch Essex website. John was also consulted by the Obesity Empowerment Network UK - a user-led advocacy organisation that gives people affected by obesity a public voice - to develop their engagement with men. This consultation work ensured the report's impact on men's lives beyond the East of England. Reflecting on the report and its influence, John stated: 'Arguably, the most meaningful impact of the report might be its potential to change the way readers think about obesity. The rich data included in the report illustrate how participants developed obesity, which was often through a complex set of social circumstances that directed and constrained the men's behavioural options, as opposed to the common, incorrect and harmful assumption that obesity is the outcome of unrestrained personal choice, irresponsibility and laziness.'

# Pathways to Meaningful Lives



Senior Research Officer, Tom, with Christopher McLeod

Approximately 1.5 million people in the UK have a Learning Disability (LD). Within this population, around 21,133 18 to 65-year-olds with LD reside in Essex. While reliable employment figures for this population are limited, a 2017 estimate asserts that only 7.5% of adults living with LD within Essex County Council's Adult Social Care services were employed. This figure fell from 9.4% in 2015/16 and 10% in 2014/15, suggesting that a significant majority of this population fail to attain employment. It is, therefore, argued that LD adults regularly miss out on benefits associated with employment such as improved wellbeing and quality of life.

To investigate employment barriers for members of this population, the research examined routes through which adults with LD attain work and explored experiences of workplaces. Thus, the research first examined interrelationships between the body and society, contending that biologically and socially situated experiences affect conceptions of employment. After this, the research explored the utility of support, particularly that provided by networks embedded in homes and the education system, in promoting capacity to participate in employment and conceptualise and pursue aspirations. Finally, the research investigated how people with LD experience workplaces by studying variables such as employment status and organisational culture.

To do this, 17 adults who live with LD and had been in employment, volunteering or work-experience in the 18 months preceding data collection were recruited and interviewed. Transcribed testimony was then analysed using Thematic Analysis: a method that enables researchers to assess patterns pertaining to experiences of phenomena. In doing this the researcher was able to create a narrative that reflected the lived experiences of the subjects being studied. Selected findings of the report are discussed:

individual's position within said network. This means that an individual with LD may struggle to harness the benefits of network access if their identity promotes diminished status.

- Access to cultural resources may be important in enabling individuals with LD to conceptualise and pursue aspirations. Resources such as sub-cultural knowledge, relevant experiences and qualifications often enable individuals to follow specialist and/or creative career paths.
- The desire for social and/or professional agency may inform how individuals with LD engage in roles. Some may take on flexible roles as a means of incorporating professional responsibilities with their social and familial worlds. Equally, others may take on full-time work as a means of feeling like they have control over their working practices.
- Organisational cultures defined by efficiency and productivity regularly diminish experiences of work. The perceived slower pace of workers with LD when engaging in professional tasks often means that they feel as if they are incompatible with workplaces, particularly when compared to colleagues.
- In-work networks of support may be preferred to external support provision. Networks of colleagues and employers who understand and empathise with worker accommodation requirements may enable individuals to learn more about, conform to or change the norms and practices that constitute their workplaces.

- Networks embedded in families and at schools may be important in enabling individuals with LD to develop an understanding of their potential, gain confidence in relevant tasks, activities and environments and pursue their aspirations.
- The quality of the support provided within a network is contingent on an



Senior Research Officer, Tom, with Donna Robinson & Jennifer Cornwall

# Addiction: Gambling, Drug



Renee with Alex Clark, who shared her experiences of living with a drug addiction.

Throughout this past year, Healthwatch Essex has engaged with participants who have lived experience of gambling, drug, and alcohol addiction to share their experiences of accessing services. The honest and open sharing of these experiences allowed clear findings and recommendations to be revealed, all of which were shared in the 'Addiction: Gambling, Drugs & Alcohol' report launched in April 2022. The report had several prominent key findings, prompted by the detailed conversations had with participants.

## Alcohol

Participants with lived experience of alcohol addiction disclosed that family was their main motivation and incentives to accessing support. Several participants stated that their families made the choice of having minimal contact with them which impacted feelings of hitting 'rock bottom'. Families felt that in order to help their loved ones see the effects of their addiction, this was the only way they could open their eyes to the impact it was having on everyone.

There were concerns raised about the accessibility of support for people living with an alcohol addiction as people of different backgrounds may not have the same fair routes to recovery as others. Some people living with an alcohol addiction may not have the disposable income to fund access to support however the routes that are available to them may not be sufficient.

## Drugs

Like the participants with lived experience of alcohol addiction, those who had lived with drug addiction shared the significance of being in the right mindset to accessing support. This was listed as one of the biggest barriers to accessing support, alongside their own denial and the stigma attached to drug addiction.

Participants were keen to share their views on how important residential rehabilitation programmes can be to someone's recovery. Residential rehabilitation centres take away the temptation of alcohol due to not being able to access it. Being in a facility that provides methods on how to recover and offers 24/7 care to the residents is important.

Participants shared how important it is for people to be aware that the road to recovery is not always a smooth journey. Many people living with addiction try a few different options before finding the best route that is most suitable for them and may also encounter relapses. Having this information beforehand negates the potential feelings of failure or disappointment should the individual struggle during the process of recovery.



Renee with John Wills, who shared his experiences with living with alcohol addiction.



# g & Alcohol

## Gambling

Participants living with a gambling addiction highlighted that they had encountered barriers when initially accessing support and emphasised the severe lack of support received when approaching their GPs. 40% of participants had been prescribed anti-depressants when seeking support from a GP for a gambling addiction and had felt like this was not sufficient for what they required help for.

Some female participants shared that in their experience, they tended to participate in gambling activities during the night when their children and partners may be asleep. This period was the time when the participants would hit 'rock bottom' and needed support the most. Emphasis was placed on the importance of 24-hour helplines who can assist gamblers at all hours of the day.

## Sharing Experiences

We recorded three 'Hidden Voices' podcasts dedicated to addiction, hearing the voices of four people who had first-hand experience, which were listened to nearly 500 times. The participants also recorded multiple TikTok videos each which have received more than half a million views, with many people wanting to find out more, ask questions and share their own experiences.

Alongside the 'Addiction: Gambling, Drugs & Alcohol' report we launched a poster-led campaign. Most people spoken to for this project shared how valuable it had been for their recovery to see other people with lived experience now being in a better position with their lives and offering support to others. Some participants joined a working group and co-designed posters featuring staged 'before' photos next to 'authentic' after photos to highlight the significant difference that recovery has had on their lives. The posters have been distributed to GPs, hospitals, hostels and local council support services to offer messages of hope and signpost to lived experience addiction support services.



One of the posters from the campaign, featuring Chris Gilham, who spoke to us about his experiences of living with gambling addiction.

# Male Mental Health & Suicide

*"You kind of look back at your father or your grandfather and you think, 'they didn't struggle, they seem to have all the answers'. And I think because you're little and you're looking up at these figures...you're not going to know what they did or didn't go through".*

*"I think a lot of people are really struggling, and I do include me, a lot of things that keep them going is their children. And when they're grown up and left home, and can look after themselves, and aren't as dependent on you as they were, it can be a trigger for some".*

In June 2021, Research Associate Sarah Krauze began collecting data for a research study on middle-aged men's experiences of mental health and suicide. Suicide is a significant public health issue. In 2020, men made up 75% of the 4,912 suicides registered in England. The highest suicide rate in England is men aged 45-49. The markers that define middle age, such as age and generation, have become increasingly blurred in recent years. Traditionally, midlife was deemed the pinnacle of one's life. However, men aged 45-49 now report the lowest levels of life satisfaction. The project aimed to understand middle-aged men's lived experiences, exploring what contributed or led to their suicidal behaviour, and outlining how the prevention support that they had encountered could be further improved.

The research project used semi-structured focus group discussions and a one-to-one in-depth interview, to sensitively capture men's experiences of midlife and suicide. Participants were recruited via consultation with a variety of organisations tailored to support men's mental health, including charities, community groups, therapists and support workers. The youngest participant was 38, whilst the oldest was in their late sixties. This age range reflected the ever-expanding boundaries of middle age. Those recruited came from a range of educational and professional backgrounds. The focus groups were conducted from September-October 2021. An additional one-to-one interview was carried out in November. Data transcription and thematic analysis was completed in December, and the report findings were written up with the support of Research Officer Lorna Orriss-Dib in early 2022.

The men interviewed for the project provided rich accounts of the risk factors that influenced their mental health and contributed to their suicidal behaviour. These factors fell into three key themes: competing pressures, feelings of worthlessness, and an inability to comprehend the future. The findings from this project will be available in the report Middle-aged Men's Experiences of Mental Health and Suicide, due for publication in 2022. Given the UK government's recent announcement that it will be reviewing the 2012 Suicide Prevention Strategy for England over the coming year, this report could not be more timely.



# Asset Mapping



After the release of the refreshed Community Asset Mapping report in 2020, Healthwatch Essex has been working on phase 2 of this project, gathering the citizens voice of local residents across North East Essex. Working alongside Community 360 & Community Voluntary Services Tending, phase 2 aimed to gather a deeper understanding of community need, with a spotlight on citizens voice within certain areas.

Using the Essex-wide Livewell approach, which is constructed of 6 domains, two further reports have been released focusing on the Start Well and Feel Well domains. For the Start Well report, citizen voice was gathered in Stanway and Harwich, two areas which differ due to a number of factors. Engagement consisted of both a survey launched in the local schools within the area and listening to well established organisations within the community. Participants in Stanway raised concerns including the level of infrastructure and its

From these findings, some of the recommendations suggested included, dual mental health support for both child & parent, an evaluation of the current infrastructure available to Stanway and to understand the need to work with young adults in Harwich to understand their needs. This report was shared with key stakeholders and the Alliance board who have used the report to influence work dedicated to children & families in North East Essex.

With a number of concerns around mental health raised in the 'Start Well' report, it was decided that a focus on the 'Feel Well' domain was needed. Citizen voice for this report focused on Pier Ward in Tendring & Berechurch in Colchester. In a report on coastal towns, Clacton was said to have the second highest mental health need in the country, with Pier Ward in the top 10% of most deprived areas. Berechurch meanwhile, sits fairly central in level of deprivation for Colchester, but has a growing population with an ever-increasing mental health need. Similar to Start Well, a survey was produced to gather residents experience of using mental health services and several interviews took place with local organisations. When it came to Pier Ward, participants concerns included the level of street violence and its impact on their mental health, the high number of houses of multiple occupancy (HMO's) and the stigma attached to this, and the role of a GP in relation to mental health support. Berechurch participants meanwhile expressed a need for a community space that locals could easily access, more wrap around support for residents and, like Pier Ward, more safety on the streets. The report is due to be released in April and will be used to support mental health and well-being in the area.



Engagement Officer, Larissa, engages in a community setting as part of the asset mapping process.

possible impact on green space, the mental health of young people and families and the importance of the community in a rapidly expanding population. On the flipside, engagement in Harwich highlighted concerns around the suitability of assets for teenagers, financial concerns about the cost of assets and, once again, the higher levels of poor mental health in young people.

The last topic for Citizen voice will focus on the Die Well domain, looking into end of life services within North East Essex later in 2022.



# Criminal Justice & Healthcare

In August 2021, Healthwatch Essex started a piece of work engaging with individuals who have lived experienced of the criminal justice system. We worked with several local organisations and charities across the county to understand the current system and ways in which it can be improved.

We have spoke with people who had either served a sentence in prison or received a non-custodial sentence. Depending on an individual's circumstance, participants were asked to express their thoughts on the support available in prison, experience with probation services, support with mental health and the stigma attached to

the title of 'an offender' and finding suitable housing or employment. We hope that the information presented in the final report will help contribute to the work of probation services, charities and prison services.

## End of Life in North East Essex



Our Communications Team film Deputy Sister Nicola from St Helena Hospice, sharing details about her role.

Healthwatch Essex were commissioned by the North East Essex Health & Wellbeing Alliance End of Life Board to capture 12 lived experience stories (one per month) from residents in relation to end of life care. Every month, one of these stories is shared with the Board to help support their 10 priority outcomes. These stories help to paint a picture of the current end of life care services available in the area and highlight what is working and what can be improved. All 12 stories will be presented in a final report and our hope is that this report will contribute greatly to the work done by the end of life board.

# The Essex Neurology Network

The Essex Neurology Network brings together national organisations, people affected by neurological conditions and local organisations to make a difference. Hosted by Healthwatch Essex, the network is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

In the past year, the Network has focused on building a strong local network, comprised of over 30 people, including neurological professionals, charity members and local supporters from organisations such as the University of Essex.



Set up to raise awareness and promote understanding of neurological conditions, members of the Network meet quarterly and deliver projects with the aim of securing the highest standards of care from local services.

The Network is planning two projects at the moment. The first is carrying out a mapping exercise of all neurological services across the county, to identify gaps in service provision and raise awareness of this locally. The second is working with people affected by neurological conditions to listen to lived experience in a meaningful way and support local services and authorities to do so as well.

All of our work is service user led, with lived experience at the heart of everything we do. At our most recent meeting we welcomed two guest speakers to share their experiences, and this informed our project ideas and discussions.

The Network's e-learning course, 'Understanding Neurology', continues to provide insight into what it is like to live with a neurological condition including brain injury, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, Huntington's disease, Parkinson's, Progressive Supranuclear Palsy and stroke.

Developed and presented by both practitioners and patients, the e-learning course is designed to give people a better understanding of the symptoms and care pathways for each condition. So far, the e-learning course has been completed by over a thousand people and the Network has promoted it to over 250 GP surgeries and councils across the county and the UK.

# An Evening with Healthwatch Essex

In March 2022, we held an event showcasing the work of Healthwatch Essex, in the beautiful surroundings of Hylands House in Chelmsford. We were delighted to be joined by many of our volunteers, trustees and participants of recent projects, as well as one hundred attendees drawn from organisations across health and social care in Essex.

We shared the findings of our work exploring what matters to veterans, obesity in men, the experiences of people with learning disabilities accessing health and social care and our project focussing on addiction. We also heard from our Information and Guidance Team who shared an overview of their work and the fantastic Trauma Ambassador Group which was set up earlier this year.

Throughout the evening we heard a number of powerful stories, both in person and via film. Sam Fox (seen below with Engagement Manager, Dan) joined us on stage to share her experience of co-producing a sensory awareness campaign with Healthwatch Essex, highlighting the challenges she, and others, faced during the pandemic.



We were also pleased to be joined at the event by Chris Gilham, a participant of our addiction project (pictured right), who candidly shared his experiences of living with gambling addiction.

We were so pleased to finally welcome Joshua Newman back to receive a recognition of his work with Healthwatch Essex prior to the pandemic, when a short film of his

story won a national charity film award. Dr Babu, who co-starred in the film joined Josh and his mum Suzy on stage to receive a gift from Nick Archer, matron at



Broomfield Hospital, who presented him with his very own mini scrubs and hospital badge - recognising him as a 'surgical assistant' (pictured above). Healthwatch Essex also thanked Josh by gifting him a Colchester Zoo experience.

We'd like to thank everyone who was involved in what was a special evening with such rich insight into the lived experience of people accessing health and care services across Essex.





# COVID-19

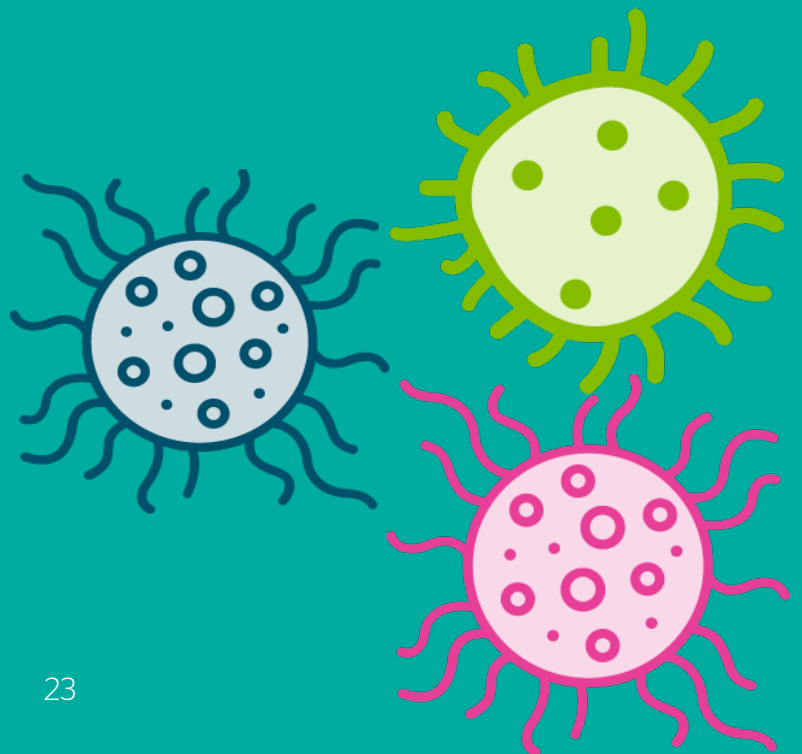
This year, COVID-19 has continued to feature in our work, both in the way we engaged with the community and in our work to help spread national and local government public health messaging.



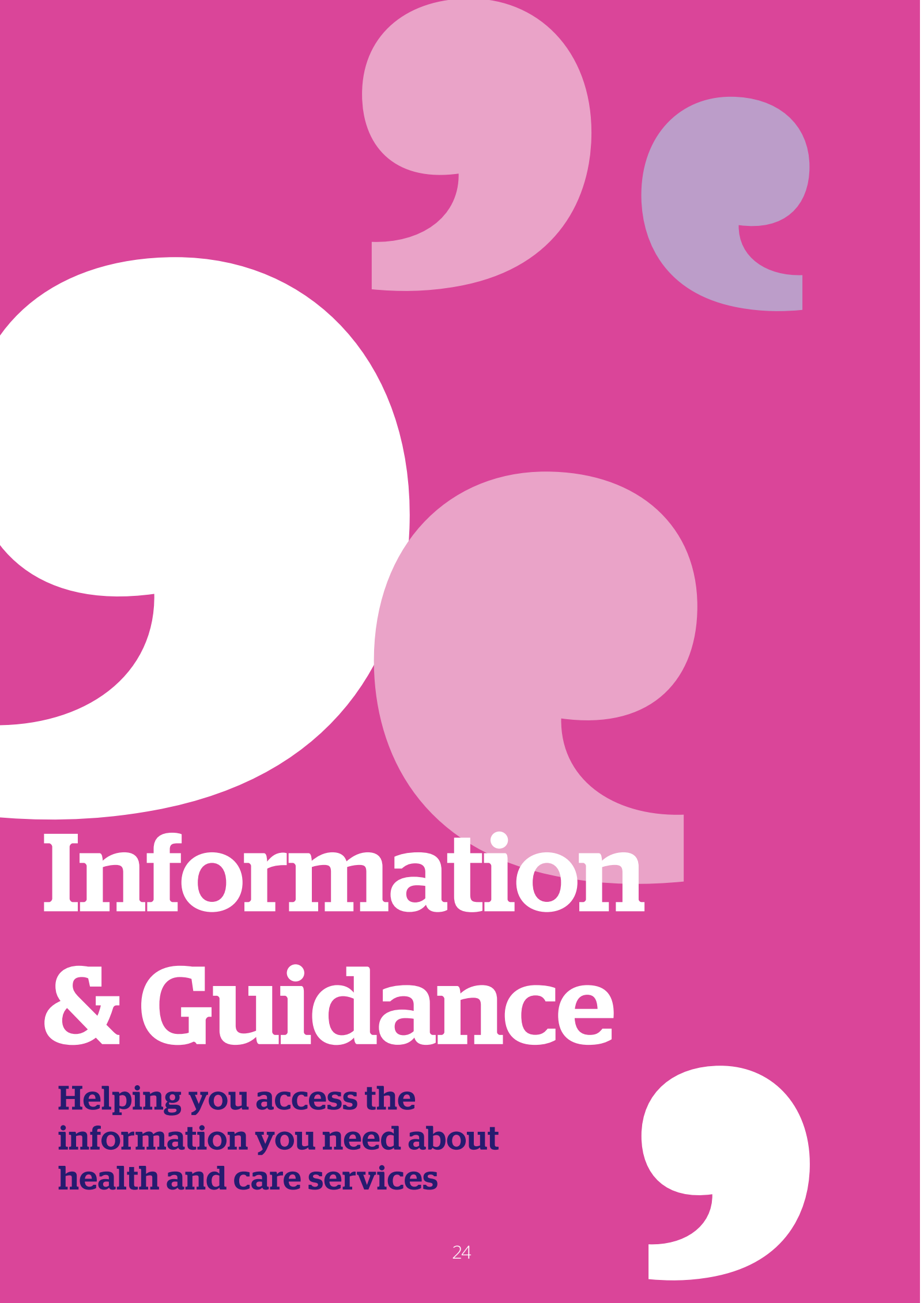
Jo Smith, matron of the respiratory ward at Broomfield Hospital, shares her story on camera with our Communications Manager, Rachel.

Matron Jo Smith, who works on the respiratory ward at Broomfield Hospital told us her story of being hospitalised with COVID-19 twice and becoming severely ill. Her emotional and brave account was captured on film to support work promoting vaccine take-up in the community.

Working with Healthwatch Suffolk, our Information and Guidance Team also gathered stories and data in North East Essex about the impact of the pandemic on people's physical health and their experiences of Long Covid and post-viral illness. This was shared with Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System to help guide and inform their provision of services in the area.







# Information & Guidance

**Helping you access the  
information you need about  
health and care services**





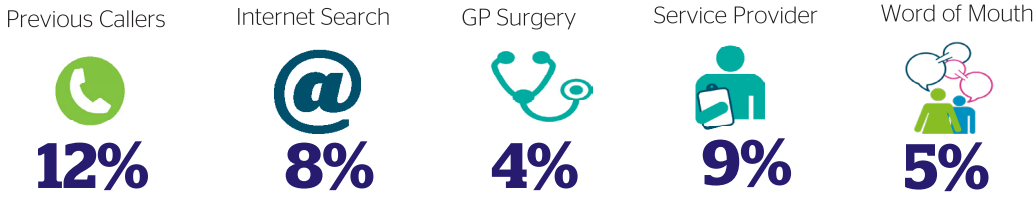
# In the Know

## How many people contacted us?

**1096** People sought support and information from our Information & Guidance team online, by text, phone or email in the last year.

## How did people find out about our Information Service

The most popular sources are:

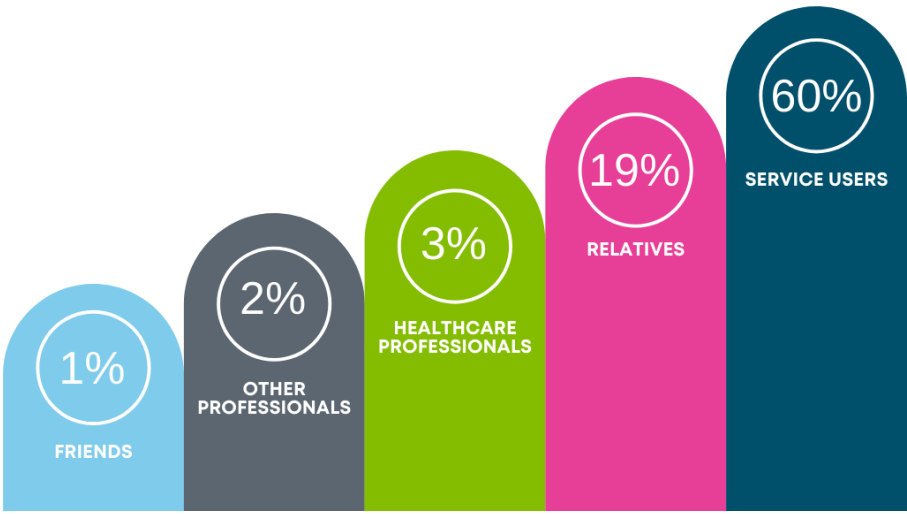


## What are people calling about?

Frequent lines of enquiry include



## Who's using the service



# Keeping Essex Informed

April 2021 saw us still in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the months following bringing fluctuating guidelines around slowing the spread of the virus. Having adapted quickly and efficiently to working from home since the pandemic began, our Information & Guidance Team have continued to provide our helpline service without disruption to the nearly 1100 people who chose to contact us for support. With the gradual relaxation of the health guidelines, we have transitioned to the hybrid way of working which is increasingly becoming the norm.

We have regularly attended the Essex County Council People & Families Scrutiny Committee and Health Overview Policy & Scrutiny Committee, as well as the SNEE ICS Suicide Prevention Group, LeDeR Steering Group, NEE Alliance Leadership Board, Essex Traveller Health & Wellbeing Group, One Colchester Delivery Board, West Essex Mental Health & Wellbeing Group, System Quality Groups for MSE NEE & HWE, NEE Homelessness Alliance, East Of England Cardiac Network Board, Care Nav+ Partners Network, Tendring SHELLS Homeless Partnership, Whipps Cross Hospital Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee, Essex Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment Group, ESAB Covid19 In Care Homes Review, Essex Care Homes Hub Oversight Board, Basildon Homelessness Partnership, NEE Primary Care Commissioning Committee, Essex Strategic Hate Crime Prevention Partnership, West Essex Time To Change Steering Group, End Of Life Complaints Board, NEE Winter Resilience Steering Group, Mid & South Essex Adult Self Harm Toolkit Development Group, Essex Women's Safety Partnership Event, Essex Anchor Network, SNEE Health & Wellbeing Alliance

End of Life Programme Board, South Essex Mental Health & Wellbeing Forum, Southend Essex & Thurrock Suicide Prevention Group, Discharge Outcomes Group and Essex Working Families Stakeholder Forum. Our presence at these meetings ensures that we are able to share the voices of the people of Essex through their lived experiences at the heart of where services are being formed and shaped.

We have worked collaboratively with Healthwatch Suffolk in collecting lived experiences relating to topics including asthma, emotional and mental wellbeing effects of the pandemic, Long Covid, post viral illness, patient transport, physical effects of the pandemic and screening.

We have continued to produce the quarterly Spotlight On Services data, featuring the nature of the calls we receive across the county, both on our website and via direct communication to partners.

We have participated in the evaluation panel for the Bereavement By Suicide support service for Suffolk & North East Essex, which was awarded to Victim Support and sat on the Essex Community Initiative Fund grant evaluation panel.

We also delivered a helpline service training session to the newly formed Farleigh Hospice support volunteers, and a session on the role of Healthwatch and the importance of the service user voice to the District Nursing Students at Anglia Ruskin University.

We were commissioned by St Clare Hospice in west Essex to provide a report on perceptions of end-of-life care and hospice services to inform their new five year strategy, and by St Helena Hospice in north Essex to support with the engagement of their new end of life care feedback programme.

Towards the end of the year, we were also commissioned to undertake the Digital Phase 3 project by SNEE ICS, looking at the experiences of males in the North East Essex area of digitalisation of healthcare services.

We attended the Dying Matters Virtual Fair, the Helplines Partnership Virtual AGM, and a Walk & Talk session in Clacton. We also participated in the NEE Winter Warmers event in conjunction with NEST. We were delighted to attend the Links Active Retired Group meeting in Leigh on Sea to talk about Healthwatch Essex and its services.

The team have undertaken training in Working with Trauma, Mental Health First Aid, Sexual Health, Personal Independence Payments, Dementia Friends, Vaccine Hesitancy & Myth Busting, Inequalities in Accessing Palliative Care Services, Compassionate Conversations, LGBTQ+ Awareness, Death & Dying In The Homelessness Sector, Women & Gambling, DWP Access To Work, Outcomes Based Approaches, Suicide Prevention, Long Covid, Safeguarding Adults & Children, Sensory Awareness, Emotional Resilience, Cuckooing, Tackling Inequalities, Safeguarding In A Digital World, Supporting Women Who Sell Sex, Fuel Poverty, Understanding Learning Disabilities, Self Care, Alcohol Addiction, Using Social Media, Criminal Exploitation and Qualitative Analysis.



Top | Information & Guidance Officer, Fergus, helps sort through clothing for the a 'Winter Warmers' event. Middle | Information & Guidance Manager, Sharon, with Information & Guidance Officer, Sara. Bottom | Fergus and Sara provide information about Healthwatch Essex at a Winter Warmers' event.





# Online & In The Media

**Connecting with our community  
through digital story-telling**



## Spotlight on Healthwatch Essex

We have worked to become as inclusive as possible, sharing our work in lots of different ways and attempting to reach new audiences regularly. This has included sharing lived experience, data and information from our reports and supporting national awareness days on topics of particular relevance to our work plan.



### Media Coverage

This year we had **28** news articles promoted by the media. They reached a combined audience of **2.5 million**. Some topics covered mental health in the emergency services and winning an award for our COVID-19 response.



### Instagram

Over the past 12 months we have seen a **23%** increase in followers and our **298** posts were viewed **24,000** times, receiving **1,400** likes.



### Twitter

We tweeted **648** times and were mentioned by other accounts **1,089** times. This resulted in:

- **135** new followers
- **24,200** profile views
- Our tweets being seen **240,500** times overall.



### E-Newsletter

Each month we distribute a newsletter informing our subscribers of project updates, research and more. In the past 12 months our subscribers have increased by **7%**.



### Facebook

**1425** people follow Healthwatch Essex on Facebook. This year, we posted **468** times and those posts were seen **125,000** times.



### LinkedIn

This year we gained **154** new followers on LinkedIn, bringing the total to **601**. We received **781** reactions to our content.



### TikTok

We launched Tik Tok in August 2021. Since then, we've shared **56** videos and those posts were viewed **573,930** times. We now have **2446** followers.

## Feedback

*"A massive shout out to Healthwatch Essex who have engaged with lived experience to create this campaign."*

- Chris Gilham, participant in our addiction campaign.

*"Healthwatch Essex, thank you for your kindness when we did this, you made something difficult, much easier."*

- Jo Smith, matron sharing her story of COVID-19.

*"I just wanted to say a massive thank you to the girls at Healthwatch because if it wasn't for them I don't think I would ever have spoken out and I wouldn't have been able to help people."*

- Alex Clark, participant in our addiction campaign.

# Top campaigns

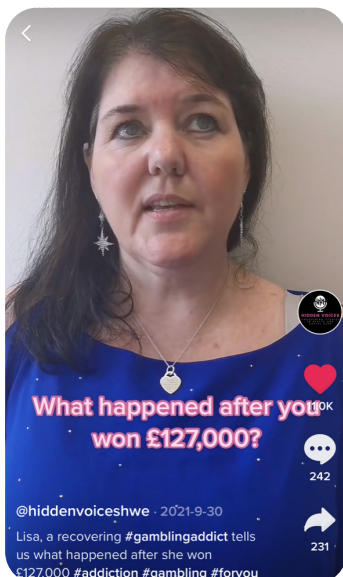
Here's a closer look at some of Healthwatch Essex's digital campaigns from the last year. We are focused on reaching different and diverse audiences online, via social media, print and more. We work system-wide and co-produce content with our volunteers and partners to help their stories come to life.

## Hidden Voices

This year, we launched our podcast, Hidden Voices, designed to capture the less heard voices across health and social care in Essex. Throughout the series we focussed on a series of different topics ranging from addiction to stomacare and what matters to veterans. The five available episodes have been listened to 750 times and the channel continues to grow.



## TikTok



This year, we also launched a new TikTok channel, designed to support our podcast. We share short videos to promote the podcast and to share experiences more widely. This has been hugely popular with one of our videos about addiction being viewed 210,000 times (pictured left).

## Jo's Story

In January Jo Smith, a matron in the respiratory ward at Broomfield Hospital shared her story with us. She explained how she was hospitalised twice with COVID-19 and had been admitted to her own ward for treatment. Jo was critically ill and was lucky to survive the virus. Her emotional account was used to support vaccine uptake in Essex.

## National Award

In November we were delighted to be awarded the award for COVID-19 response at a national awards ceremony hosted by Healthwatch England. We won the award for our sensory awareness campaign which was co-produced with members of our Collaborate Essex Disability and Carers Forum, who helped us shape a campaign to help people become more aware, tolerant and kind when supporting people with sensory impairment to follow to COVID-19 restrictions.





A large, stylized graphic of a quote mark, composed of overlapping shapes in dark blue, light green, and white, set against a vibrant green background.

# Our Volunteers

**Helping more people have their say  
through co-production**

A smaller, light green stylized quote mark graphic located in the bottom right corner of the page.

## How do volunteers help us?

At Healthwatch Essex, we could not influence positive change without the support of our large volunteer network. We have a variety of different types of volunteers who work with Healthwatch Essex to support our efforts to ensure health and care services better meet the needs of the people of Essex. Volunteers have donated many hours of their time this year and have been involved in numerous projects. We now have volunteers working with us as:

- Maternity Patient Partners
- Healthwatch Essex Ambassadors
- Trauma Ambassadors
- Learning Disability Ambassadors
- Young Mental Health Ambassadors
- Collaborate Essex Disability & Carers Forum members
- Research Ambassadors



### Our Volunteers

The Healthwatch Essex Ambassador Programme was developed to ensure that lived experience is used effectively to influence and shape service design and delivery. The model involves recruiting, training and supporting volunteers with direct experience of specific health and care services and facilitating their involvement in the decision-making process.

# Collaborate Essex Disability & Carers Forum

The Collaborate Essex Disability & Carers Forum was established in 2019 in collaboration with Essex County Council to ensure that the voices of those living with experience of disability or who are in a carer role are heard. The forum has 14 members, with a wide range of experience of disability including learning disability, sensory impairment, physical impairment and long term conditions.

This year, the forum has discussed a variety of topics which they have found directly affect them including mental health, GPs, and benefits. Forum members also engaged with their networks to gather the views and concerns from other people living with disabilities and shared these during the bi-quarterly forums.

Throughout this past year, forum members have been involved in a variety of different projects. They have:

- Participated in bus driver training package videos that provide guidance to drivers on how they can make a journey easier for those living with a disability.
- Undertook co-production training and learnt how to work with organisations to help improve services, which was later used during a co-production event with partner organisations.
- Provided feedback on accessibility for both new community buildings and restoration development plans.
- Attended focus groups and provided feedback on topics including E-scooters, community dentistry, mental health in relation to autism and how to engage with people living with sensory impairments.



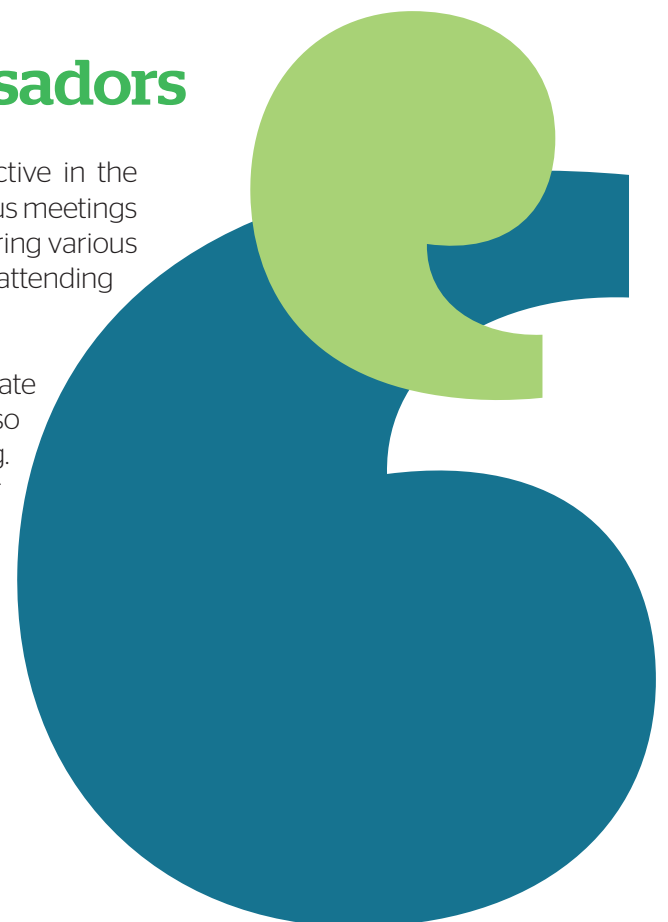
Members of the Collaborate Essex Disability & Carers Forum

## Healthwatch Essex Ambassadors

Our Healthwatch Essex Ambassadors have been extremely active in the community, acting as key representation for Healthwatch at various meetings and events. We are proud to have a group of individuals who all bring various interests and skills which they have been able to utilise when attending meetings.

Our ambassadors have ensured we are always kept up to date with the various work happening across the county and have also shared the work with stakeholders that we have been producing. They have also had the opportunity to get involved with other areas of work within the organisation, using their professional background to help on projects.

We are keen to expand the ambassador programmes and would welcome anyone who is interested in applying to get in touch with us.





# Maternity Partners

Since 2018, Healthwatch Essex and the Mid and South Essex Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership have been in partnership working to facilitate the Maternity Patient Partners. The Maternity Patient Partners are all parents who have accessed local maternity services within the last 5 years and who are using their experiences to improve these services for other families.

The Maternity Patient Partners have attended Broomfield, Southend and Basildon Hospital to conduct the '15 Steps' observational activity and provide feedback on any environmental changes that could be made and shared positive features of the maternity departments too.

They have been involved with the development of a Perinatal Mental Health Digital Toolkit, helped coproduced NHS maternity leaflets and provided feedback on a variety of new implementations including Maternity Passports and pregnancy referral 'automatic reply' emails.



Maternity Patient Partners, Kirstie and Laura, undertake a '15 Steps' observational activity at Broomfield Hospital.

# Trauma Ambassador Group



Trauma Ambassador, Karen, with Information & Guidance Officer, Fergus.

This year we have formed a Trauma Ambassador Group. This is a group of individuals who have come together to use their skills and experiences to help inform, shape and develop health, care and wellbeing services. Causes of trauma include domestic abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to crime and bereavement; however, it is very much an individual reaction and there is no exhaustive list of causes.

Trauma is by nature unpredictable and affects so many areas of life for those who live with it. It can manifest in the most mundane and unexpected of situations; for example, at a dental appointment, chatting with another carer at a support group or taking your child for a health check. It can result in the individual withdrawing and disengaging from these services, which leaves them in a position where they may not receive the level of care and support that they need and are entitled to. It is these inequalities that we aim to address through the Trauma Ambassador Group, with each individual member's lived experience of trauma.

The group have already produced two blogs which can be viewed on the Healthwatch Essex website, and have a robust plan of activities for the year ahead.

# Young Mental Health Ambassadors

Healthwatch Essex has been working collaboratively with the Emotional and Wellbeing Mental Health Service (EWMHS) since 2018 to ensure that services are designed and delivered with service users. The Young Mental Health Ambassador (YMHA) programme was created to recruit, train and support young people with an experience of these services and enable them to become involved by sharing their views and experiences. This year our 25 ambassadors, aged between 11 and 23, have:



Young Mental Health Ambassador, Naomi.

- Participated in Q&A sessions with NHS 111 and the East of England Ambulance Service and provided feedback on the Ambulance Service's young people's patient mental health survey.
- Supported the Princess Alexandra Hospitals Children's and Young People's Board Meeting and attended a PAH tour.
- Provided social media content for national campaigns including Children's Mental Health Week and Mental Health Awareness Week including sharing what they wish people knew about mental health, blogs of their experiences and their methods of coping with stress.
- Helped design the re-wrapping of the local NHS Community Vaccination Bus.
- Supported CAMHS with the re-procurement programme across Essex, Southend and Thurrock by developing questions for the Invitation to Tender process and evaluating and scoring bids.
- Supported an independent researcher with the design of their survey into pain management and shared their ideas on how to engage with the young demographic.

## Learning Disabilities Ambassadors

The last year, we have been working with The Princess Alexandra hospital in Harlow, establishing a group of learning disability ambassadors who have been sharing their experience of using hospital services. We have had various online meetings, discussing topics such as wayfinding and the suitability of hospital signage. Points raised by the ambassadors included suggestions around the use of bright colours, footprints to help with navigation and using images to help identify different departments.

We were also able to organise a walk around of the hospital in 2021, visiting the Emergency Department and meeting with doctors. The ambassadors highlighted how, for someone with a learning disability, the waiting times for the emergency department can be hard to read and signage on where to go to speak to someone was not clear. They also explained that it can be overwhelming with the amount of noise and how busy the department is. Because of these points shared by the LD Ambassadors, the hospital is investing more money into wayfinding and making sure this can be read clearly by everyone.



Learning Disability Ambassadors from Purple All Stars are shown around Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow.



# Looking Ahead





# In the Pipeline



There is a great deal to look forward to next year. As outlined below, we have a new and expanded team who will be building on the learning from 2021 and developing new projects. We will also be expanding some of our existing work programmes, including the Trauma Ambassador Group and Young Mental Health Ambassador programmes.

In 2022 we will be starting a new ambassador programme under the banner of 'Hidden Voices', run by the engagement team. This will be an opportunity to hear from some community members whose voices may have been hidden or seldom heard in the system.

The Young Mental Health Ambassadors will be focusing on the theme of body image - a topic which has cropped up in other work they have done. We intend to drill down into the topic more and understand the lived experience of this group and how we use this learning to share with our partners and the public.

The Essex Fella's forum started this year in Colchester as a small group of men talking about issues that impact them. This has grown in number and interest. We hope to expand this program this year across other areas of Essex.

Another important topic we will be looking at this year is infertility. Although work in this area has been carried out previously, we will be looking at the lived experience of both men and women who have been through this.

It has also been wonderful to share all of the insightful work the team has been delivering over the past year at our annual event held at Hylands House in March 2022. It was fantastic to have so many of our volunteers, trustees, and project participants join us.



The Healthwatch Essex team





# Finance

To help us carry out our work, we receive our funding from the Department of Health and Social Care via Essex County Council. Here's how we've spent our money.

## Information and Guidance



**£188k**

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## Outreach and Engagement



**£200k**

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## Commissioning and Research



**£51k**

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## Communications



**£118k**

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## Governance



**£11k**

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Our total expenditure from April 2021 - March 2022 was £569K.

All income received but not spent has been carried forward.

Each of the figures above includes an appropriate share of company overheads and office running costs.

# Thank You

**We work with a huge range of different people and groups, making it impossible to list everyone that has made such an incredible difference to our work.**

My favourite part of the job and often the hardest is thanking everyone we work with. It's hard because there are so many people; I couldn't possibly name you all.

This year we have worked with hundreds of people who have been participants in our research, engagement, and outreach work. Without your consent and you sharing your information and views so willingly, we would not be able to carry out any of our work. Every story gathered is appreciated and used to impact positive change in our community.

We have more volunteers and ambassadors than ever. Their roles are everything from the strategic and research volunteers who support the operational work we do, to the ambassadors who use their lived experience to sense check services and literature for a wider community.

Our stakeholders and partner organisations have worked closely with us this year to help get the lived experience and user voice we gather to the policymakers and commissioners of services. Thank you for working so closely with us and being open to our feedback.

This year, we have engaged with the public a lot more through our social media channels. Thank you to everyone who has listened to our podcasts, liked, shared, or commented on our posts and interacted or engaged with us. We love getting your feedback, so please keep it coming.

Finally and possibly most importantly, I would like to thank my staff and trustees. Staff, you have worked so hard and achieved so much. This is only possible by our trustees supporting and believing in us, allowing us creative freedom and safeguarding us with their overview and scrutiny.

Samantha Glover, Chief Executive, Healthwatch Essex





# healthwatch Essex

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