

# Giving you a voice

Healthwatch Birmingham  
Annual Report 2021–22



# Contents

Message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Highlights from our year	5
Listening to your experiences	7
Advice and information	11
Volunteers	13
Finances and future priorities	15
Statutory statements	16

# Message from our Chair

I am pleased to present Healthwatch Birmingham's annual report for 2021–2022. Given the very visible pressures and challenges health and social care services currently face, it is important that we shine a spotlight on our mission to ensure everyone in Birmingham, regardless of background, can access the best possible care.

At the core of this mission is our belief that the needs of patients and the public must be central to the design and delivery of health and social care services. No-one knows these better than the service users themselves. This report shows what can be achieved when services truly listen to what people want, and work closely with them to make the improvements they need. This is particularly important for people whose views aren't often heard. I am proud that, in the following pages, you can read about how Healthwatch Birmingham has given groups such as young people with mental health issues, people with visual impairments and the city's Somali community a voice to demand and secure changes to the services they rely on.

We will continue to support these groups by working with them, and with service providers, to ensure constant improvement. We will also be investigating and understanding the experiences of other vulnerable groups – such as users of local day services for people with disabilities or other needs – in our ambitious programme of activity in the coming year.

Alongside giving greater visibility to often forgotten communities, Healthwatch Birmingham itself has become a much stronger presence in the local health and social care system. Over 8,000 people – more than ever before – shared their experiences with us in 2021–22. We used what the public told us to speak out about the issues that most mattered to them – such as the backlog for treatments exacerbated by Covid-19, long waits for ambulances and difficulties getting appointments with dentists and GPs. In addition, we helped over 5,000 people find support for their own personal situation through our Information and Signposting service and website.



The needs of patients and the public must be central to the design and delivery of health and social care services. This report shows what can be achieved when services truly listen to what people want, and work closely with them to make the improvements they need.



The importance of our role, as the independent voice and champion for patients and the public, will be increased in the new Integrated Care System (ICS), which links NHS and local authority social care services more closely together. We look forward to collaborating with our partners in the ICS to tackle health inequalities and improve health and social care for everyone in Birmingham.

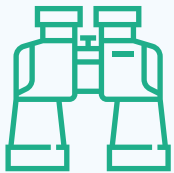
I would like to thank the incredible team of Healthwatch Birmingham staff and volunteers for the brilliant work they do on behalf of patients and the public. Thank you also to NHS and social care staff, alongside our many friends in the thriving voluntary sector, who work with Healthwatch Birmingham to make such a positive difference for the people of this great city. But the biggest credit for the impact we are proud to demonstrate in this report must go to everyone who shared their experiences with us. I appeal to you to keep telling us your thoughts – and encourage your friends and family to do the same – so that together we can create ever bigger benefits for you, your community and everyone in Birmingham.

– **Richard Burden, Chair, Healthwatch Birmingham**

# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Birmingham is your local health and social care champion. From Acocks Green to Sutton Coldfield and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



### Our vision

A world where everyone can get the best possible health and social care for them.



### Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and social care better for everyone.



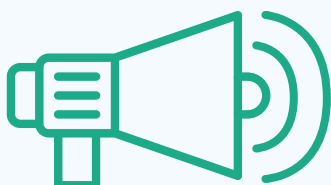
### Our values

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

# Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

## Reaching out



**8,008 people**

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

**5,430 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and Covid-19.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**4 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

**Access to mental health services for children and young people in Birmingham: what needs to change?**

## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**25**

outstanding volunteers, who help us to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received

**£407,956**

which is the same as the previous year.

We also employ

**10 staff**

who help us carry out this work.

## How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring



We chaired the West Birmingham Covid-19 Vaccination Hesitancy Group; working with the NHS and charities to increase vaccinations in deprived areas.



We ran an event, with the NHS and Birmingham City Council, to involve citizens in the developing Neighbourhood Integration programme.

Summer



We published our report into Birmingham and Solihull residents' experiences of health and social care during the second national lockdown.



Together with University Hospitals Birmingham, we ran workshops with Romanian and Urdu/Mirpuri speakers to improve health information in these languages.

Autumn



We published our report into young people's experiences of mental health services, calling for urgent changes to the support they receive.



Participants from our study into health inequalities helped to produce videos in Somali with Black Country and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group.

Winter



As part of our forthcoming investigation, We met with Local Dentist Committees to discuss how access to NHS dentistry can be improved.



We worked with Birmingham Women's and Children's Hospitals on a strategy to reach groups experiencing health inequalities.



# Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feedback to services to help them improve.



## Calling for important changes to mental health services for children and young people

When people seek help for mental health issues, speed and sensitivity of response is vital. However, when young people or their families ask for help, it not only takes far too long to be seen but the experience is often confusing and isolating too.

We investigated the Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB) mental health service for young people after numerous service users, families and carers contacted us to raise concerns about access to treatment and the quality of care.

Following our report, based on feedback from over 200 young people and their parents/carers, we are now working closely with FTB and service users to ensure that essential changes are being made for the benefit of young people in the city.



## 82% of young people

(or their parents/carers) who had used FTB said support did not match their needs

Among the issues identified were:

- Delayed responses from the mental health crisis support team putting young people at risk.
- Difficulties getting suitable support leading some young people and their parents to turn to A&E as their only option.
- Long waiting times after referral meaning opportunities for early intervention are missed, with young people's mental health deteriorating before their first assessment.
- Lack of care plans resulting in some young people receiving insufficient care and/or inappropriate treatment for their needs.
- Inadequate understanding and support for young people with mental health issues and other conditions such as autism.
- Poor communication and lack of integration across different services.

### What difference did this make

FTB is now working closely with service users on the recommendations in the report, with an initial focus on improving communication with patients and increasing staff awareness of neurodevelopmental needs, alongside a drive to recruit new staff to the FTB workforce.



“For Forward Thinking Birmingham it has been vital to listen and act on the findings of the report. It matters to us that local people get the mental health services they need. We feel a huge responsibility to get things right and we use our patients’ feedback to make sure that we are continuously improving our services.”

– Elaine Kirwan, Director of Nursing, FTB





## Improving vision impairment rehabilitation services

For people who have serious problems with their sight, the right support from visual impairment rehabilitation services is essential to help develop the necessary skills to live with sight loss and maintain independence.

Our initial investigation into visual impairment rehabilitation services provided by Birmingham City Council was prompted by comments from a focus group about their challenges accessing support. We spoke to 33 individuals who were either registered sight impaired or severely sight impaired and a small number who were not yet registered.

People told us about issues such as:

- Lack of access to specialist Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Officers.
- Confusion about who to contact for support, the registration process and referral routes.
- Assessments fail to take into account other issues and conditions.
- Impersonal support that does not consider individual needs.

We made recommendations for improvement based on what people told us they need. These were presented to the council's visual impairment rehabilitation team in our initial report, who have now confirmed important changes have been made. These include:

- Recruiting an additional Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Officer.
- Improving information, accessibility and navigation on the council's website.
- Maintaining regular contact with everyone on the sight loss register, including regular wellbeing checks for those receiving a care package during lockdown.
- Working with Focus Birmingham and Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) to develop additional information leaflets.



**“During the lockdown, I did get refresher long cane skills trainings that I had requested. I was grateful for this, the instructor was good, he took all steps to make me feel safe and secure, and also trained me on two different routes. I also had an assessment which matched my needs and this helped to make my house accessible for me.”**

**Service User**



### What difference did this make

By identifying the specific barriers and challenges for people with sight loss, we helped Birmingham City Council's visual impairment rehabilitation team to implement changes that will improve access, information, engagement and communication.

This will give people living with sight loss the reassurance that their needs are central to the planning and implementation of the care and support they receive.

## Three ways we have made a difference for the community

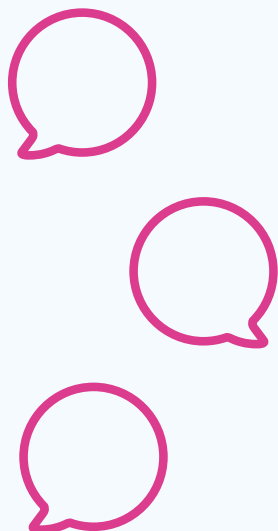
Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.



### Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

**It's important for the NHS and social care services to step back and see the bigger picture, through hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives, which provides a deeper understanding than using data alone.**

Some people who need the most sensitive care struggle to get health and social care services to listen to their needs. This is particularly true for survivors of past trauma such as modern slavery or domestic abuse. We have worked with organisations like Adavu Project and Anawim (Birmingham's Centre For Women) to give the people they support a way to share their personal experiences with services in ways in which they feel safe, secure and listened to.



### Getting services to involve the public

**Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people in the development of services in order to help improve care for everyone. We regularly respond to consultations put out by health and social care organisations to emphasise the importance of using public feedback in the design and delivery of services.**

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) updated its patient experience framework after we highlighted areas for improvement such as accessibility and demonstrating how feedback is used. The Department for Health and Social Care also upgraded its guidance around use of force in mental health settings to include greater consideration of public feedback following our response to its public consultation.



### Improving care over time

**Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and social care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.**

We are working with the NHS on long-term strategies to tackle some of the entrenched health inequalities in Birmingham. Following our report into health inequalities, Birmingham Women's and Children's Hospital Trust has made cultural awareness training a priority for staff and has recruited a Patient and Families Ambassador for Inclusion and Diversity to promote equalities and inclusion. West Midlands Ambulance Service has also recruited an Inequalities Officer to ensure the trust is listening to diverse communities.

# Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Birmingham is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home – you can count on us.

This year we provided information about a wide range of health and social care needs, such as:

- How to access NHS dental treatment
- How to get a GP appointment
- Eligibility for the Covid-19 booster vaccine
- Local support groups



## Helping people to get an NHS dentist

People struggled to access NHS dental treatment. We were in contact with the local NHS England team to ensure we were providing up-to-date information to help people access a dentist.

One caller told us his elderly father was desperate to see a dentist but could not find one taking on new patients. We signposted to NHS England who found him a dentist accepting new patients. He told us ‘without Healthwatch I would never have known about’ the NHS customer contact centre who were ultimately able to help.



## Supporting the Covid-19 booster vaccine programme

When booster Covid-19 vaccinations were announced, we had many calls enquiring about their eligibility and availability during the Christmas period.

We had a caller who was trying to get her 13-year-old son vaccinated but could not find out up-to-date information about where to have it. She had been to multiple centres who had turned them away. We found her the most current information and she told us after the appointment ‘I am grateful, it’s a weight off my shoulders.’





# Volunteers

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of Healthwatch.

Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in NHS and social care.

You'll see our volunteers out and about in health and social care settings and at community events, listening to people's experiences and directing them towards help and support.







**Fatemeh**

“Volunteering gives me satisfaction from going out and helping people. It also gives me confidence and lets me use my knowledge in a good way. There are different benefits for every volunteer because they are giving something back to the community. It also lets you meet people in a safe environment to gain experience and expand your communication skills.”



**Tim**

“I’ve been a volunteer for four years. I attend events in the community to talk to the public. Healthwatch Birmingham provides a voice for people to let the appropriate bodies know their experiences of accessing health and social care services in the city. I enjoy volunteering for an organization that is helping everyone live more independent lives with better access to health services.”



**Mark**

“I volunteer because I think NHS people are good but the NHS system could be improved. A lot of people have a lot of views on the NHS and government bodies. Healthwatch gives you an independent voice to have your say – and it doesn’t have to be that formal. I know a lot of people are put off by making their voices heard formally – Healthwatch allows you to do that but can also help you do it informally as well.”



**Do you feel inspired?**

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

 [www.healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk/volunteer-with-us/](http://www.healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk/volunteer-with-us/)

 **0800 652 5278**

 [volunteering@healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk](mailto:volunteering@healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk)

# Finance and future priorities

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

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£407,956	Staff costs	£317,988
Additional funding	£0	Operational costs	£53,595
		Support and administration	£17,938
Total income	£407,956	Total expenditure	£389,521

## Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. Use our position on the Birmingham and Solihull ICS to ensure the experiences of local citizens drive the changes needed for improvement
2. Improving access to primary care and mental health services
3. Ensuring support for those waiting for treatment

## Next steps

Tackling long-standing health inequalities in Birmingham will continue to be at the heart of everything we do. Only through listening to and involving those most likely to experience inequality in health and social care will we see change for our more deprived communities. Our role is to both ensure we are making local voices heard and that health and social care services have effective systems to involve patients and the public in decisions. The citizen voice needs to be threaded through every layer of the new ICS.

The fast-paced change in health and social care needs to ensure patients are on the journey too, understand the changes being made and how that affects them. We regularly see the impact of poor communication and the challenges this creates for citizens, this needs to improve so everyone can get access to the care they need at the right time and place.

– **Andy Cave, Chief Executive, Healthwatch Birmingham**

# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch Birmingham, Cobalt Square, 83 Hagley Road, Birmingham B16 8QG

Healthwatch Birmingham 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 nine 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 2021/22 the board met formally four times and made decisions on matters such as maximising our impact for the most vulnerable in Birmingham, tackling inequalities and ensuring we are well placed within the emerging Birmingham and Solihull ICS.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. People's experiences prompt and lead our activity and investigations, with our reports focusing on improving services for everyone. People's experiences collected through our feedback centre, community engagement and information and signposting are collated and themed. Key issues go through our Topic Identification and Prioritisation (TIPS) process where our volunteers and members of the public help us select issues for us to investigate.

## 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 social 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 social care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, working with community groups who have direct access to the people we need to reach.

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.

## Responses to recommendations and requests

We had no 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 Birmingham is represented on the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board by Andy Cave, Chief Executive. During 2021/22 he has effectively carried out this role by championing the involvement of local people in decisions and supporting the Board to understand citizens' experiences. Throughout this year we have also held a seat on the Covid Outbreak Engagement Board to support the city in its response to the pandemic.



**healthwatch**  
Birmingham

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