



Eastbourne Listening Tour- Homelessness Engagement

March 2023

healthwatch
in Sussex

Introduction

Our rationale for a Listening Tour

Healthwatch gather people's views of health and social care services in Sussex and make sure they are heard by the people in charge.

Each year we focus on one area of East Sussex to engage with local people and understand their communities in more detail. For 2022 the Healthwatch East Sussex Listening Tour wanted to hear from residents in **Eastbourne**, from the **15th to the 30th October**.

We wanted to make sure that all voices are heard, especially the voices of those who have more barriers which make accessing health and care difficult. One group we may not normally hear from are individuals who are homeless. That is why we worked with homeless organisations including Warming Up The Homeless, Kingdom Way Trust and The Salvation Army to learn what changes need to be made to ensure that homeless individuals have equal access and usability of health and care services.

Alongside this we also engaged with residents at a temporary accommodation site, Jevington Gardens. Healthwatch East Sussex has written a report on this which looks at the needs of these residents.

Our aims were to:

- Raise the profile of Healthwatch amongst homeless individuals, in particular making them aware of our Information and Signposting Service.
- Use the feedback gained to understand which local services are working well and which could be improved.
- Discover what aspects of day-to-day life are having an impact on these individuals' health and wellbeing.
- Raise awareness of the health inequalities that exist for rough sleepers and people in temporary accommodation.
- Get the voices heard of a group who don't often get listened to.

Context

Why did we do this?

- According to [Homeless Link](#), homeless residents are at a greater risk of negative health outcomes and not being able to access health and care services. Common issues faced by the homeless include:
 - Experiencing a long-term illness, disability or infirmity
 - Suffering from poor mental health
 - Being dependent on drugs or alcohol
 - Poor nutrition due to a lack of food.
- Healthwatch East Sussex meets people where they are, so we worked with local homeless charities in Eastbourne such as Warming Up the Homeless, Kingdom Way Trust and The Salvation Army to enable us to have conversations with these individuals. These services are used by rough sleepers and people living in temporary and emergency accommodation, providing food, a warm setting for them to eat in as well as support and advice.



What we did

Our methodology

Where we went:

3 Healthwatch East Sussex staff members visited 3 weekly drop-in services:

18th September- Warming up the Homeless Sunday Suppers

25th September- Kingdom Way Trust Weekend Drop-in

25th September- Warming up the homeless Sunday Suppers

28th September- The Salvation Army Weekly drop-in

4th October- The Salvation Army Weekly drop-in

Our Engagement:

We produced a survey which would allow us to have one-to-one conversations with service users. This included questions about their day-to-day lives, if there was anything troubling them and their experiences of health and care.

Who we spoke to:


We spoke to **16 people** who were either rough sleeping or living in Temporary or Emergency Accommodation. These were a mix of men and women who were all within the age ranges of 25-49 years and 50-64 years. The majority suffered from mental health conditions and a large number suffered from long term conditions such as diabetes, asthma or epilepsy.

6 What we heard – Our key findings

- The drop-in services we visited are greatly appreciated by their users, offering food and warmth but also a space for social interaction. **“They’re a god send.”**
- Seven people we spoke to need to see a dentist. DentAid is a valuable service funded by The Salvation Army in Eastbourne, offering free dental treatments to service users. However there is a limit on how many people can be seen.
- Many people who are rough sleepers or living in temporary accommodation have mental health diagnoses or issues and are not receiving any support. Some of the reasons for not receiving this support included: **they don’t know how, they haven’t been offered, they don’t have credit on their phone to call mental health support, they need another recommendation from Homeworks, or they are waiting to have their appointment organised.**
- An issue which was raised several times was that they are moved on from place to place. This may result in them being far from family and unable to see them due to not having the financial means to get there. A lot of people want to move to a different area.



What we heard – Our key findings

- Communication with and between the local authorities and benefit services can be time consuming, confusing and it was mentioned that sometimes there was a lack of response.
 - It can be difficult to see a GP or get through to one on the phone.
 - Some people we spoke to did not have a phone or had a phone which was broken and so they have no means to call or email health services, Adult Social Care, the local authority or benefit services.
 - The walk-in clinic which used to be in Eastbourne Station was highly valued.
 - The overall rating of experiences of health and care services was **5.6 out of 10**. (15 of the 16 respondents answered):
 - *“Diabetic team have been fantastic.”*
 - *“Haven’t had issues getting help from GP ... has changed insulin so it works better.”*
 - *“Doctor is brilliant but lack of communication for what services are available.”*
 - *“Doctor called once but after that never heard from them again.”*
 - *“Doctors said they wouldn’t do anything to help. Doctor didn’t give medication.”*
 - *“Not getting mental health support.”*
 - *“Need a dentist”*
 - *“Haven’t been able to get appointment with GP or dentist.”*
 - *“GP quick, other times not.”*
- 



Key themes

Troubling issues in day- to-day life

Respondents commented that they have mental health conditions and we were told that they had never been offered mental health support, they did not know how to get support but there was clearly a desire for it:

“I would value more mental health support.”

“You have to keep going- there’s only so much others can support you.”

“GP said they are going to help with mental health. They haven’t organized appointment yet.”

Another troubling issue raised was that benefits don’t often cover essential costs, especially with the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis and rising costs of bills.

The individuals who live in temporary accommodation that we spoke to are housed in Eastbourne but may not want to be there or even feel safe there. Several people told us they had been moved around a lot from town to town or to different temporary accommodations.

Some respondents told us that they had a lack of response from the local authority regarding housing issues, such as unanswered emails or difficulties getting through on the phone.

Being listened to

Healthwatch East Sussex wanted to know if the homeless community feels listened to and we found:

- Several people told us that their friends or family listen to them.
- An overwhelming majority told us that the homeless organisations we visited listen to their needs.
- Most respondents told us they don't feel listened to or only sometimes feel listened to by the council, and health and care services.
- Other comments we heard were that they didn't trust anyone, felt let down or were waiting for responses from the council, doctor, welfare officer etc. and that these processes are complicated or difficult to understand.

The participants gave these suggestions to be heard more easily:

- Further help and support is needed to better understand the processes for their accommodation decisions, receiving PIP and Universal Credit.
- It was clear that most communication happens either on the phone or via email, but participants told us that they would feel more confident to have a face-to-face conversation about these processes.
- Better communication such as the local authority responding to emails or being easily available for a phone call would help these individuals feel listened to and understand what the next steps are for them.



Do you feel listened to?

“No, if we did, we wouldn’t be in the situation we’re in.”



Experiences of health and care services

- The majority of people we spoke to told us that they had problems with their mental health or had a diagnosis for mental health and most of these people told us that they really need support.
- It can be difficult or impossible to get GP and dentist appointments and many people are in desperate need however, some people had not had any issues seeing their GP.
- Whilst we did not visit a service held by the homeless organisation, Matthew 25, some people told us that they had been able to see a doctor through this organisation.
- We were told by one individual about having a podiatrist appointment over the phone.
- Services are often out of walking distance and so it is too expensive for them to afford to travel there e.g. Conquest Hospital in Hastings for a specialist appointment or Sovereign Harbour for Covid vaccines.
- Positive comments were shared that they used to use the walk-in doctor at Eastbourne station when this service was in place. ***“They were fantastic.”***
- Two participants told us that access to pharmacies was good and that they had not had any problems getting their medication.
- We heard one recommendation about health services suggesting that there needs to be better communication about the services available to homeless individuals- “no one communicated that this service exists”.



Experiences of health and care services

“Diabetic team have been fantastic.”






Our Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- The homelessness organisations are an essential service in the community and should continue to be available. Without these organisations rough sleepers and those in emergency and temporary accommodation would lack food, warmth, support and advice.
- There is not sufficient support for the large number of people with mental health conditions. If support is not given, these individuals suffer and will struggle to overcome other challenges such as drug and alcohol dependency.
- The processes for financial support can be complex and sometimes this support does not cover essential monthly costs. This leaves individuals unable to buy food, toiletries etc. and when living in temporary accommodation unable to pay the bills.
- Many people are not happy living where they are living or being moved around or being far away from their families. This could have a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing, not having any family support or potentially feeling unsafe in a certain location.
- Communication is lacking from the local authority, doctors, welfare officers etc.- there is a need for responses to these individuals and it would be appreciated to have face-to-face communication. This would result in homeless residents feeling listened to and getting the financial, health and care support they require.
- Doctor and dentist services are limited which means that these residents are suffering from untreated health and dental conditions. This is causing them to suffer from painful conditions and it impacting on their wellbeing.
- Some health and care services are not in an accessible location for someone who is homeless and has limited funds to travel there. Specialist treatment at hospitals or covid vaccinations were fed back as being difficult to reach and result in residents' being prone to health risks if they cannot get to these locations.



Recommendations

- Whilst we are aware that there are some health professionals that already attend the homeless drop-ins, if needs are not being met then the frequency of these visits should be increased.
 - NHS providers should make mental health support a priority for homeless residents by offering a mental health support officer to attend each of the drop-in sessions held by The Salvation Army, Kingdom Way Trust and Warming Up The Homeless, to avoid conditions worsening.
 - Local authorities should reflect on their communication with service users by asking for feedback and learn how they can better undertake their duties. Evaluating if emails are answered and in a timely manner, if their services are accessible (especially those with protected characteristics), if there are opportunities to speak on the phone or face-to-face and if residents feel listened to.
 - Eastbourne Borough Council should make communication appropriate for people experiencing homelessness. They should engage with this group, hear how effective their services are and evaluate how their services can be more effective.
 - Eastbourne Borough Council and the Department of Work and Pensions should offer the opportunity for face-to-face appointments with homeless residents to discuss and offer help on benefits, accommodation, next steps and listen to any other needs. This could be established as one of the services offered at the weekly drop-ins that Healthwatch attended. If these discussions take place, an emphasis should be put on asking homeless residents what their preferences are when it comes to accommodation.
- 



Recommendations

- NHS service providers should make services available in town centres so that people without the financial means can access these services as they are within walking distance and do not need to pay for transport.
- The NHS should provide funding for DentAid to be available at further local services such as Warming Up The Homeless and Kingdom Way Trust rather than just at The Salvation Army.
- Healthwatch will highlight these findings at local forums and meetings and will share recommendations of what needs to be changed.
- Healthwatch should continue relationships with Warming Up The Homeless, Kingdom Way Trust and The Salvation Army to have an awareness of the health and care needs of people experiencing homelessness and whether these are being met, as well as staying up to date on the everyday impacts on their mental health and wellbeing.



For more information

Healthwatch East Sussex
Freepost RTTT-BYBX-KCEY
Healthwatch East Sussex
Greencoat House
32 St Leonards Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN21 3UT

www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

 @HealthwatchES

 Facebook.com/HealthwatchESussex

t: 0333 101 4007

e: enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

healthwatch