

How organisations can make clearer, more accessible information for Slough citizens....

What we did



Healthwatch Slough regularly hears how confusing, complicated, complex and difficult it is to access information, particularly for people with communication needs, a long-term condition or those experiencing a health or social care crisis. Our investigation was prompted by the number of stories we hear from Slough Citizens about their difficulties. 1

Experiences shared with Healthwatch Slough...



I am hard of hearing so I cannot use the phone well enough. I am on benefits and can't afford the internet. I use various organisation to help sort out my problems but they keep losing funding and shut down.

I get leaflets or posters with no telephone number. Its hard nowadays to speak to a human being. People are not prepared to listen

Although I did find the information I was looking for ... the leaflets were squashed together, you can't find anything. In my experience, these tend to be more confusing, all over the place, with out of date information, causing confusion and frustration.

We wanted to better understand what people thought and **carried out a questionnaire and held a number of face to face interviews**. People told us they mainly go to friends or family for health or care information, then face to face via services or groups or use a telephone helpline.

Healthwatch Slough carried out **online searches** of 9 websites to identify and evaluate ease of access to health and care information. We selected websites from key services that may be the "go to" or the "known" organisation for people to find out health and social care information.

Healthwatch **surveyed professionals to assess the extent to which they were well informed**, particularly around the Accessible Information Standard.

Healthwatch **mystery shopped 14 organisations in Slough** in order to determine how easy or difficult it was to find relevant information. We were looking for information about the service. The staff, who can help, how to provide feedback, compliments or complain. We also looked for information about healthy living. Social care services, information for carers or young carers.

Executive Summary

Healthwatch Slough looked at how information was provided on key Slough organisation's websites, we visited premises, we carried out questionnaires with organisations & members of the public. We were able to collect information about how organisations communicate & provide accessible information to Slough Citizens, what worked, as well as identify gaps whereby services could get accessible information to Slough Citizens.

Patients, service users and their carers place a high value on information. Without reliable and accessible information, it is hard to make good life choices and the best use of available services.

Healthwatch Slough found no shortage of information but the Slough Citizen is often left to dig it out for themselves and may not know what it is they need to know. Clear signposting is not always happening.

With regard to quality of information, most health and social care websites contain useful information, but some are poorly designed and not always kept up to date.

Healthwatch Slough would like to see easily identified information contact points where all of the community can go to access health and care information. The information contact points should be staffed by people who are skilled in online searching, to act as a conduit to more specialised and personally relevant information services. Information centres should be publicised widely so local people know where to go to access information on health and social care services.

Finding relevant information on websites

It is possible to find a large amount of information relating to health and social care services using the internet alone, but the usefulness of the websites depends on how easy they are to navigate. Slough Borough Council has an aspiration that Slough is a leading digital city, where information is accessed and shared online. Healthwatch hears that some people are confident using social media, apps and websites, however we know that some are not. In Slough many people prefer the personal face to face communication, but due to funding cuts this type of offer is less available.

Healthwatch believes that having health and social care information available online is a benefit to the whole community. People can access online information at any time of the day whenever they need it. Online information should be:

-Accessible, -Provide Clear information, -Easy to navigate, -Friendly - Links to other information

Websites that did not score as highly were either missing information or cluttered with too much information.

Ensuring information is current and up to date adds validity to the website and encourages the user to return to the site again.

Addressing accessibility of websites is a step in tackling inequalities, this should be a high priority.

By highlighting good practice, we hope to encourage services to review and make changes their websites. We wouldn't want services to be adding pages & pages to websites but hope as part of your signposting that you can add good website links to your own websites for your customers to access

Walking in & browsing for leaflets

Healthwatch visited 14 organisations looking for information about the service, the staff, who can help, how to provide feedback, compliments or complain. We also looked for information about healthy living. Social care services, information for carers or young carers.

Some services that we visited offer face to face support, where people will come to the organisation and request information - as part of the service offered staff/volunteers will support and help the person to get the information needed often this will be supported with information available away from the public eye e.g in service files, online or via the telephone signposting.

Some services do not have the space to promote and share all the information that is sent to them so often information is available out of sight through requests.

Experiences shared with Healthwatch Slough

✚ Mrs Adams has a long term health condition she was attending her GP appointment with her daughter Sarah. Sarah was sitting in the waiting area and started to view the information that was around her. The Community Support notice board caught her attention and she began to read the information displayed on there. When Mrs Adams and Sarah left the GP surgery they brought home with them a leaflet on seated exercise.

✚ Jaspal had arranged for the next door neighbour to look after her mother whilst she came into My Council to pay her mother's council tax bill, whilst waiting in a lengthy queue she observed information on the Carers support service, after paying her bill she passed the leaflet stand and collected a leaflet on Slough Carers support.

By highlighting good practice we hope to encourage services to review and make changes to their practices. A major gap in information was social care information from statutory services. We found lots of information from supporting organisations such as Age Concern, Destiny Support, Family Information Service & Kingsway Church Carers Support Centre but only in one site did we find information on what social care is, what Slough Borough council provides and how to access it or where to get further information on it. We believe that adults and children should know and easily find the statutory services, be aware of their rights of what they are entitled to.

We found a gap in information for carers and especially young carers. We know that there are many initiatives and support for carers in Slough unfortunately the information relating to carers was very "hit and miss" depending on the service visited. Some organisation had over 5 piece of information on adult carers whilst others had none.

Many services had information screens although very few were available. We suggest that services have their information screens on and that local services come together to plan and create the service message available for the slough community.

Carrying out this exercise showed some good examples of information that is available and has highlighted some gaps in information. Healthwatch has made recommendations that all Slough services can look at and implement to help people to access and navigate their way through the health and social care information for Slough.

Slough has a committed and dedicate team of volunteers offering their time at various agencies. The town has many schools who take part in projects such as the Duke of Edinburgh, we encourage organisations to do regular calls for help to support the upkeep of information available.

We understand that checking displays, organising leaflets racks is a timely exercise and we would encourage all settings to make time, invest in a volunteer to make sure that the information provided is up to date and where gaps are to request information to support.

We commend those organisations whose staff welcomed our fresh eyes and willingness to do things slightly differently in order to make it easier for the customer. We liked organisations that themed information or grouped leaflets by topic or area making it easier for people to navigate. Information that was bright and eye catching was much more appealing. We liked when photos of staff were displayed. One organisation had a notice board for all their newspaper articles. We liked the “*you said, we did*” style display showing people that their feedback really makes a difference in improving things.

Accessible Information Standard in practice

Healthwatch contacted 17 key organisations in Slough and asked them to complete a questionnaire on the access to health and social care information. Just 5 organisations responded. This in itself shows just how difficult it is to get organisations to respond to individual requests.

People with a disability or sensory loss have rights in relation to how information is provided by services. From the August 2016 the NHS and adult social care services are legally obliged to must the Accessible Information Standard. As part of the Accessible Information Standard, organisations that provide NHS or adult social care must do five things.



Ask people if they have any information or communication needs, and find out how to meet their needs



Record those needs in a set way



Highlight a person's file, so it is clear that they have information or communication needs, and clearly explain how those needs should be met



Share information about a person's needs with other NHS and adult social care providers, when they have consent or permission to do so



Make sure that people get information in an accessible way and communication support if they need it

Recommendations

Service responsibility

All services to have a policy or procedure for displaying information

Staff should receive training to enable them to understand customers information needs; how to access relevant information; and when to provide it

Use volunteers to help keep your information displays up to date and to regularly request feedback from Slough Citizens on the information available

Information needs and preferences – provision of alternative formats

All services to be aware of their responsibilities under the Accessible Information Standard

Services to be aware of formats that information can be provided in. e.g If someone asks you to provide information in a format method will you know the process to obtain these?

For services to take place in a joint piece of work to look at how information can be available in audio, easy read, British Sign Language (BSL) and translation material.

To collect information on how many paper resources are collected/used in different languages; can this be developed with the IT technology available.

Display information

To theme or group information by topic or area

To include photos of the staff team

To ensure information on carers and young carers is displayed

To place pens and paper next to the suggestion boxes and feedback forms.

“You said We did display” to evidence change and impact of customer feedback

To regularly check leaflets as they easily become damaged or out of date.

Visit other organisations to get ideas about how they display information

Services that have information screens use them. Local services come together to plan and coordinate messages.

Websites should wherever possible be accessible to all.

Websites should provide useful links onward to other relevant sites, especially those of voluntary sector groups.

Share good practice

Share good practice with colleagues and be able to evidence impact it makes in individual's life.

Slough Clinical Commissioning Group to share their information with providers for display so people can access a clear pathway to access health care provision and information.

Slough Borough Council to share their information with providers (in various formats) for display so people can access information on social care.

Slough Children's Trust Services to share their information with providers for display so people can access information on social care for children

Slough Carers Support (SPACE) to design and share a poster with all Slough services to identify where carers can go as a first point of call

Slough Children's Trust & Slough Borough Council to revise/update the young Carers leaflet & electronic information on website, to share information on what young carers rights are.

Use of community places

To have health and care signposting information in community places including Places of worship

To deliver more presentations and talks to local groups on how to access information services.

Single point of contact

Each local area should have a central, easily identified information contact point. This would be staffed by people who are skilled in online searching, to act as a conduit to more specialised and personally relevant information services. All services to be able to jointly promote and signpost.

Standards to improve signposting

To agree a clear pathway to inform the Slough community of how to request information to ensure that Slough people get quality information irrespective of where they go.

To collect experiences of receiving information and use of the signposting service; this information can then be used to shape the delivery of the information and signposting service.

Top Tips

- Ensure that there is a person responsible for keeping information areas up to date
- Making sure that information provided has a clear contact number if people would like to follow up for example we know that many people view online after services close, so would be great to highlight the number to call if they would like further information
- Have a range of communication methods open to receive feedback and complaints for displaying information, website content and booklets.
- To include large posters that included a clear message, short text, eye catching photographs.
- Keep the information simple and relevant.
- Use a clear font and use size 14 or bigger and have accessibility tools on each website
- To be aware of the requirements under the Accessible Information Standard

Further information?

If you would like more information about our work, please get in touch with Healthwatch Slough



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