

# The role and impact of Healthwatch Brighton and Hove during the Coronavirus pandemic:

## Activity report covering January to April 2020.

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## 1. Executive summary by David Liley, CEO

Welcome to this performance report, in which we describe the role Healthwatch Brighton and Hove played in supporting patients and local health and social care services during the COVID-19 crisis. We have focussed in this report on our activity from early January to 30 April (2020).

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in our city. Our job is to listen to what people like about services and what could be improved. We share what people tell us with those who have the power to make change happen. We encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area. During this current crisis it has been more important than ever for Healthwatch to understand the needs and concerns of our city's residents - and to respond to these.

In January, Healthwatch recognised that public concerns were mounting around a new virus that had already forced the closure of local GP practices. We investigated, and issued our first public facing advice in early February. We were one of the first community organisations to publish consolidated information and since then we have issued over 24 public-facing updates. By taking this approach we established ourselves early on as the 'go-to' organisation for accurate and up-to-date information and we have received praise for our role from city leaders, the media and public. We have subsequently produced five separate guides for patients on topics such as: how to access your GP or dentist, how to obtain prescriptions, support for physical and mental health and a comprehensive guide to local health and social care services. We also created a dedicated COVID-19 webpage containing up-to-date information together with a detailed set of answers to commonly asked questions.

We have continued to champion the needs of our city's residents, challenging leaders to deliver services that are accessible to all. We have raised concerns and achieved positive outcomes for patients on a variety of topics. These include ensuring access to GPs for the deaf community; clarity of advice for those in receipt of direct payments; provision of urgent dental centres; and we have helped to ensure that the needs of cancer patients were being met.

We have welcomed the collaborative and open approach of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) and the local NHS Trust in listening to our concerns, involving us, and keeping us informed. This has been an unprecedented time for all, and Healthwatch is proud of its role in helping to support patients and of the way in which local services have adapted so quickly to this crisis.

**David Liley, Chief Executive Officer**

## 2. Highlights from our work (January - April 2020)



### Patient feedback

We continued to receive questions, experiences and feedback on health and social care services. We provided advice, signposted, and shared information with city leaders to help them with their approach to this crisis.



### Raising issues

We escalated over 30 concerns and questions to health providers and decision makers covering 20 different topics. We also flagged our concerns to Healthwatch England.



### Relationships

We solidified our relationships with city leaders gaining privileged access to information. We also built new relationships with key health professionals.



### Some of the issues we raised

We pushed for GP appointments to be adapted for the deaf community; for the development of emergency dental hubs; and we highlighted where basic amenities could not be accessed.



### Mailshots

We issued 24 separate updates to our 1,400 strong community which includes the public, MPs, Councillors, the media, community groups and the NHS.



### Praise

Healthwatch received praise from city leaders, Healthwatch England, the press and the public for our work, guidance, and information sharing.



### Press and info releases

We issued four statements to the media; an update for Councillors and a compilation of positive comments and feedback received by Healthwatch about local services.



### Social media

Facebook: we made 114 posts achieving a reach of over 10,000 with 1,000 engagements.  
Twitter: we posted 96 Tweets that were shared or liked 81 times.



Young Healthwatch worked with Public Health colleagues and shared information and advice on COVID19 and relationships with young people.



Healthwatch established a project for our volunteers and staff to phone vulnerable people after discharge from hospital and provide sign-posting.

### 3. Background

In February 2020, Healthwatch suspended some of our regular activities and projects until further notice. At the same time many of the usual Council, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and NHS Trust meetings that we attended also stopped, with only some switching to being online. Where we could we continued our non-face to face activities such as conducting online surveys and signposting members of the public to sources of information on health and social care. We switched much of our focus to COVID-19 related activities as summarised by this report. In March, we identified an opportunity to adapt our existing Home Care Quality Reviews project ('Lay Assessors') to gather patient feedback on hospital discharge and follow-up care, enabling us to share these experiences with the Council from April onwards.



During this time, it was more important than ever to understand the needs and concerns of our city's residents - and to respond. Equally, it was critical to understand how local health and social care services were adapting and to share this information with the public. New, sometimes untried, approaches were implemented, and patients needed to know how this affected them. We remained a key contact point for people to raise their concerns, both on COVID-19 and non-COVID related issues. People continued to email and call us, as did other local organisations who wanted to share with us the work they were doing and ask for our support. Like the NHS, we adapted our role to provide information not just on health and social care but on a wider range of issues that still impacted on people's wellbeing such as job uncertainties and money worries. We shared this information frequently through our [fully accessible COVID-19 webpage](#).

We continued to collate patient feedback and passed our questions to the CCG's new 'Community Connector' and the multi-agency 'Community Response' teams who responded to our queries and supported our role in escalating these where needed. We shared patient experiences with Healthwatch England who thanked us for our work and committed to raising some of our concerns with NHS England.



Healthwatch volunteers continued to help us deliver services to vulnerable patients: they represented us on key groups such as the Local Dental Committee (which we asked to join following our well-received 2019 report examining [Oral care in care homes](#)). Volunteers also shared their personal stories which enabled us to flag concerns to city leaders e.g. on issues such as the lack of clear access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for unpaid carers and confusion around the advice being given to those who are in receipt of direct payments.

## 4. Advice we provided to the public

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove worked with colleagues in the Council, NHS Trust and CCG to deliver accurate and up-to-date information to our city's residents.

### Guidance

- ✓ We published a [public-facing guide](#) to health and social care services which responded to issues raised with, or identified by, Healthwatch. This information continues to help people understand how they can access vital services. We received praise for this work from the public and the Council's Public Health team.
- ✓ We produced dedicated guides for the public on accessing [dental](#) and [GP](#) services and how to arrange and collect their [prescriptions](#), as well as advice on [staying active and looking after your mental health](#). We received positive feedback on all of our guides.

The screenshot shows a guide titled "Seeing a dentist" from Healthwatch Brighton and Hove. At the top, there is a red banner that says "Please stay 2 metres apart" with "SAVE LIVES" in white text. Below this is a diagram showing two people standing 2 metres apart, with the text "2 metres (6ft or 2 steps)". To the right of the diagram, it says "Coronavirus - COVID-19 Stay at home. Protect the NHS. Save lives!". The Healthwatch Brighton and Hove logo is in the top right corner. Below the banner, the text reads "Coronavirus (Covid-19) Information about seeing a dentist". A green box contains the text: "Should you have any questions or require further information please contact us by email: [office@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk](mailto:office@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk)". The main heading is "Seeing a dentist" in a dark blue box. Below that, it says "This guide provides some information about seeing a dentist at this current time." Under "KEY POINTS", there is a checkmark icon and the text: "Patients can still contact a dentist if they require medical help. This does not have to be the dental practice you are registered with, and you can contact any practice which is near to your home."

### Information and signposting

- ✓ We created a dedicated page on our [website](#) on which we posted regularly updated [information](#) on COVID-19 and answers to [Frequently Asked Questions](#) which extended beyond just health and social care. We shared our resources with the Healthwatch network, and our Frequently Asked Questions template was adapted by several other Healthwatch teams.
- ✓ Our advice included links to information available in a range of formats including Easy-Read, British Sign Language (BSL) and translated materials. We also created a webpage which could be customised to suit an individual's needs e.g. with styling options, reading aids and a translate tool.
- ✓ <https://COVID.reciteme.com/healthwatchbrightonandhove/>

The screenshot shows a webpage with a ReciteMe overlay. The overlay is yellow and contains the text: "Source: <https://www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk/newsflash/coronavirus-update/>" and "Last updated: 30/04/2020 16:00:22". The ReciteMe logo is in the top right corner. Below the overlay, the Healthwatch Brighton and Hove logo is visible. The webpage has a navigation menu with items: Home, About us, Our Services, Find Services, Publications, Volunteer, News & Events, and Contact. A "Coronavirus update" banner is visible at the bottom of the page.

## Regular updates

- ✓ We issued regular updates to our mailing list comprising of 1,400 individuals, members of local organisations, the media, Council and CCG colleagues and MPs
  - We provided information on COVID-19 related topics such as testing for the virus, support for those who were ‘shielding’, how to avoid scams and the [NHS Volunteer Responder scheme](#).
  - We published a consolidated report which described some of the [positive feedback](#) Healthwatch had received on how well local services had adapted to the crisis and some of the praise Healthwatch had received about our work. We felt that this positive news story was particularly important in offering reassurance to the public.
  - We used our updates to promote the Council’s requests for support from the community for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and the return of rehabilitation equipment from people who no longer needed it.
  - We promoted the [NHS ‘Open for Business’ campaign](#) to encourage people to access NHS services if they needed urgent help. At the same time, we provided additional information around cancer referrals.



Hi Alan,

**Covid-19: Healthwatch publishes essential updates on health and social care services**

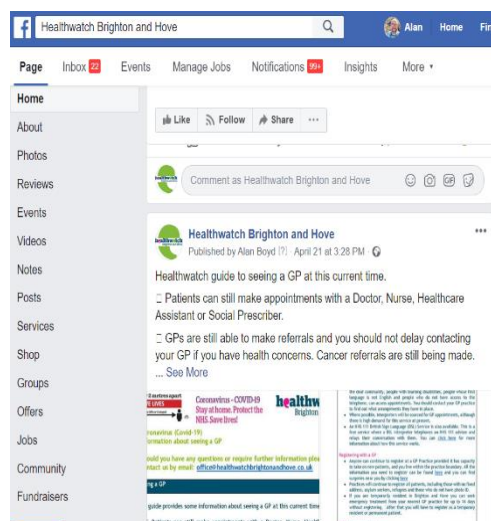
Today, Healthwatch Brighton and Hove is publishing essential updates on health and social care services in Brighton and Hove.

David Liley, Chief Officer of Healthwatch Brighton and Hove said today:

"Local people have been asking us for advice about Covid-19. Our updates have been prepared with the NHS, Brighton and Hove City Council, Clinical Commissioning Group, voluntary organisations and local charities.

## Social media

- ✓ Through our social media channels, we delivered daily updates to the public on health and social care. We provided further information on other matters such as schooling and support for businesses. During this time, we increased our number of followers and widened our social media reach.



**Facebook:** Between 7 February to 31 March, Healthwatch made 114 posts related to COVID-19. These were seen a total of 10,000 times and were engaged with 1,000 times by people liking, sharing, and commenting on these (an average engagement rate of 9% which is described by Facebook as being 'good').



- ✓ The top posts in terms of engagement related to the closure of Warmdene GP surgery, Council advice on COVID-19, the initial lockdown announcement, and Community Hubs. The posts seen the most times related to isolation notes for employers, how to look after your mental health, Community Transport, Council advice on COVID-19 and information for worried parents. An interesting and diverse mix.

- ✓ **Twitter:** Between 7 February to 31 March, Healthwatch issued 96 Tweets that were shared or liked 81 times.



- ✓ Our Twitter feed attracted interest in different topics to those shown on Facebook. The most retweeted or liked posts related to the NHS 'share your current experience of coronavirus' survey, sexual health services, job centre closures, refuse/recycling collections and observing a minute's silence for those NHS staff lost to the virus.

- ✓ We created an online flyer with key information about COVID-19. We shared this on Facebook and Twitter and added it to our email signatures to spread these messages far and wide.





## 5. Concerns raised with Healthwatch, and our actions

Healthwatch continued its work of listening and responding to patients' queries and escalating issues and concerns to city leaders and pressing for answers. We believe that through our work we have helped shape the overall approach taken by decision makers and those responsible for providing local services, as well as ensuring that the information people needed has been made available to them. Healthwatch has been able to ensure that the needs of patients have been made known to those in charge and in many cases the CCG, the Council and the Trust have published wider advice and guidance on topics that we have raised with them. Healthwatch has not achieved any changes in isolation, but through the open and collaborative approach displayed by health and social care leaders, our volunteers, the public and local services, and we express our thanks to them all.

### Issues and concerns raised by Healthwatch with the CCG and Council have included:

#### Accessibility of services

- ✓ In April, Healthwatch highlighted the poor availability of information about COVID-19 and related matters in accessible formats such as Easy-Read, translated materials and British Sign Language. We requested that these documents be produced and /or made available as soon as possible.



#### *Local organisation concerned over lack of translated materials*

*Thanks very much for your e mail about the “shielding” letters. We have been very concerned about the lack of translated information that has been made available by the NHS and public health. We are particularly concerned about whether “shielding” letters have been translated for patients. This would be the only way to ensure that vulnerable people with language needs have equal access to information about keeping themselves safe. Are you able to offer any further information?*



- ✓ Healthwatch identified alternate sources of information from internet searches and with the assistance of both Healthwatch England and local community groups. We promoted these on our website, and we included this information in our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document.
- ✓ In early April, we were pleased to see more information in alternative formats being made available and that sources of information were publicised in the CCG's public update.
- ✓ In April, we raised concerns about levels of access to water and toilet facilities for local traveller and van dwellers populations, saying that basic amenities were a right for all. We worked with [Friends, Families, Traveller's](#) to issue a [press release](#) and were pleased to receive a full and comprehensive response from the leader of the Council which set out the work being done to support this community.

## Dentists



Healthwatch pushed for the rapid delivery of emergency dental services and helped make the case for these sites to operate in Brighton, Haywards Heath, Crawley, Hastings, and Eastbourne. We championed the voice of dentists who were unhappy with the delays in getting these new services operational. Healthwatch escalated our concerns to the regional hub of NHS England. The Community Connector and Community Response teams updated Healthwatch on what actions the CCG had taken as a result of the feedback we gave them.



### ***Patient with dental concerns***

*One of my fillings dropped out yesterday. Unable to speak to my dentist personally. Receptionist located him. Advised to get a temporary tooth repair filling kit on Amazon. No local pharmacy's in Brighton have them. Neither did Amazon! Finally found one on eBay for twice the normal price. Receptionist said the surgery is not likely to be open until at least June. They will contact me. She said the dental 'Hubs' being set up are only for very severe dental conditions, e.g. abscesses, or traumatic damage to the mouth, jaw, or teeth.*



- ✓ Healthwatch issued public advice about the closure of routine dental procedures on 25 March.
- ✓ A Healthwatch volunteer represents us at the Local Dental Committee which provided us with a direct route to key dental contacts, and a rich source of information that we were able to share with the public. Information on the creation of urgent dental centres was issued by NHSE on 22 April and on the same day Healthwatch published a [comprehensive guide](#) for patients explaining how they could access dental services.
- ✓ We continue to work with the Local Dental Committee (LDC), CCG and NHSE to understand the pressures facing dentists and for more clarity on how urgent dental centres are operating and whether this information is reaching dental practices i.e. the types of conditions which can be referred on.

## GPs



Healthwatch challenged the fact that people with hearing disabilities were unable to use GP telephone triage services or processes for repeat prescriptions. We highlighted that this was in contrast to NHS 111 that offers both a textphone service and a British Sign Language BSL interpreting service.

At the end of April we were pleased to see the launch of new services for deaf people in Brighton and Hove who can now benefit from a new Video Relay Service (VRS) which means deaf patients will be able to call their registered practice for free, using the standard telephone number, speak with receptionists and book a telephone appointment with a GP.

- ✓ We raised questions over how ‘hot and cold assessment’ GP sites were being set-up in Brighton and Hove, and on the timescales for the hubs to be open. We worked closely with the CCG and obtained privileged access to information regarding their development and launch, meaning that we could provide this information to patients as soon as it became publicly available.
- ✓ On 22 April, Healthwatch produced a [comprehensive guide](#) for patients explaining how they could continue to access GP services. Additional advice about obtaining prescriptions achieved some of the highest levels of engagement of any post that we made on Facebook during this period.
- ✓ As shown below we continued to receive patients’ queries regarding how to access their GP and/or usual services. Our Information Line, led by Healthwatch volunteers, was able to offer advice and signpost people to further sources of information to help them receive the care that they needed.



**Spouse of a vulnerable older person concerned about using GP services**

*I registered my husband, who at 89 has many disabilities and health problems and nursed in bed. I am 81 and his primary carer. I had a text from the government saying I must contact our GP. I do not want to trouble our Doctor at this busy time. Not sure what to do?*



**Access to a GP for migrants**

*Please can you advise me of GPs in Brighton/Hove that will see a migrant with some with no paperwork. I have heard there is something called Safe GPs, but I can't find anything for this area.*



**Patient concerned about how to get a repeat prescription**

*In two weeks, I will need a repeat prescription for the above. How do I go about getting this now in the current situation?*



**Patient concerned about accessing hearing services**

*I am deaf in both ears and use hearing aids provided by Boots Hearing Care (BHC). I need regular micro-suction for wax removal provided by Sussex Audiology Centre (SAC) or the Royal Sussex Hospital ENT department. My left hearing aid failed two months ago and BHC are refusing to offer an appointment - they say that this is following government regulations. My right ear is now blocked, and I have lost all hearing in that ear - and SAC are closed indefinitely. GP surgeries used to offer wax removal but no longer do so. How do I - and other deaf persons or those with ear wax problems - get help please?*



## Hospital services



### Hospital Discharge

- ✓ Healthwatch is clear that vulnerable people who are discharged from hospital during the current crisis should be receiving the follow-up care they need once back at home. Working with the Council we adapted our existing Home Care Quality Reviews project ('Lay Assessors') into a Hospital Discharge Wellbeing check, and our volunteers are contacting those people who have been recently discharged from our local hospitals. We have learned that many people are happy with the support they are receiving, whilst for others we have been able to signpost them to vital services. We look forward to possibly expanding the remit of this successful project in the near future.

### Cancer patients

- ✓ Healthwatch wanted to understand how diagnostic procedures for cancer patients, and referral pathways for patients who had possible cancer symptoms, would be supported at this time. We raised this with the Council's Community Connector team who asked the CCGs' Commissioner for Cancer to provide a response, which was forwarded onto Healthwatch Brighton and Hove. This offered reassurance that people with cancer would remain under the care of their existing teams, and that new cancer patients would continue to be referred on for investigation. The Associate Director of Public Involvement also sought a Sussex-wide response on cancer referrals from the Associate Director of Planned Care. This information was included in the CCGs and Healthwatch's Frequently Asked Questions. Healthwatch was able to share this information widely through our communication channels.

### Outpatient services

- ✓ Healthwatch asked how outpatient appointments and services would be managed across our local hospitals during the crisis. Using our contacts at BSUH and the CCG we received immediate advice that we shared publicly. We included this information within our Frequently Asked Questions and guidance on local health and social care services. Subsequently, our local Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals Trust (BSUH), updated their website with more information.

### PALS services



We clarified with our contacts at BSUH how the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) team would continue to operate in light of advice from the Ombudsman, issued in March, that normal complaints systems would be temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 crisis. We received reassurance that a

feedback system would continue to operate, and that people would still be able to contact PALS. We incorporated this advice into our guidance on how local systems were adapting to the crisis.

## Patient Transport Services



We asked how South Coast Ambulance Service (SCAS), who provide Patient Transport Services, were enforcing social distancing advice for people using their vehicles - particularly those requiring life-saving dialysis and cancer treatments.

### “ Parent of child with a long-term condition concerned about PTS

*I am concerned because he has to go to [a clinic] most weeks. When he went last week there were 16 people ahead of him in the queue and others coming in. Is there any way that he can avoid this situation when he has his next test tomorrow? Also, he travels on public transport to his Renal Department appointments which worries me. He has used Patient Transport once, but he doesn't want to follow this route because there will inevitably be other people in the car.*



- ✓ We worked closely with the CCG to obtain internal advice issued by SCAS to their staff which gave details of hygiene requirements, PPE, and socially distancing measures. We would like to express our thanks to the CCG for their assistance in obtaining this.
- ✓ Healthwatch remain disappointed by the lack of any public-facing materials or Frequently Asked Questions having been produced by SCAS. On their website, SCAS last produced a public briefing on COVID-19 in February and Healthwatch does not consider this to be acceptable. We continue to question why SCAS appear to be the only local service provider who do not provide this level of guidance.

## Personal Protective Equipment

- ✓ We are continuing to work closely with the CCG's Community Connector Team to clarify the availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and eligibility for these items particularly for social care staff, and carers. We express our sincere thanks to the team for their help so far.

### “ Individual who is an unpaid carer uncertain how to obtain PPE

*I sent an email a week ago to the council to request PPE for use at home with my mother living with Alzheimer's but have had no reply. Should we need it I am not sure how I would access this.*



- ✓ A Healthwatch volunteer raised this issue with us and has shared with us the outcomes of their investigations which did not always match the advice coming from the CCG and the Carers Centre. There appeared to be some confusion about who was eligible to apply for PPE and whether this included unpaid carers and/or those in receipt of direct payments.
- ✓ At the end of April, we were pleased to see the CCG launch a [new online system](#) which provided carers (paid and unpaid) with an easy route to apply for PPE.
- ✓ Undoubtedly, national restrictions on obtaining PPE and the way that is interpreted in government advice, still means that PPE is not necessarily available for the unpaid carers of vulnerable adults who may not be shielding or displaying COVID-19 symptoms. Healthwatch believes this may place vulnerable adults at risk, and those in their household, who may not be able to obtain PPE for 5-7 days when they need it. We continue to ask questions of the CCG about this.

## Pharmacies & prescriptions



### Pharmacy

Healthwatch raised the issue of independent pharmacies facing financial crisis through the new 'economic cell' at Brighton and Hove City Council. We are particularly concerned that the city may lose some of its pharmacy services because of the current crisis.

- ✓ We also raised concerns over the possibility of fraudulent activity and scams from people volunteering to collect another person's prescriptions. The CCG Community Connector team raised our concerns to the Communications and Engagement Lead for the Sussex and Surrey Local Pharmaceutical Committee, who provided a briefing note on the use of volunteers to get medicines to vulnerable and shielding citizens. The briefing note was sent to the new Community Hubs, Community Pharmacies, and councils in Sussex. The information was also added into the Frequently Asked Questions for the Community.
- ✓ Healthwatch raised concerns over how pharmacies will ensure that patients still get access to their prescriptions, even if they do not have access to the Prescriptions on Demand Service. This was addressed in the briefing note subsequently issued by the CCG.
- ✓ On 22 April, Healthwatch published a [comprehensive guide](#) for patients explaining how they could continue to obtain prescriptions.

## Public Health

- ✓ In mid-April, we asked the Public Health team what the CCG's planned response would be to nationally reported concerns of an increase in measles seen amongst young children. This appeared to be linked to parents not wanting to take their children to GP surgeries to receive their immunisations during the current crisis.
- ✓ We received an immediate response advising us that the CCG was fully aware and were awaiting national guidance to be issued. In early May, the NHS launched a [campaign](#) urging people to attend all regular vaccination appointments to prevent outbreaks of serious diseases and reduce pressure on the health service. The NHS is urging parents to bring children

forward for lifesaving jabs to stop killer diseases such as measles and mumps. Healthwatch promoted this campaign.

## Social care

- ✓ Healthwatch raised concerns over the content of End of Life care advice provided to GP's and other doctors regarding the dignity of people in care homes and nursing homes. In April, we issued a [press release](#) and subsequently worked with city leaders to understand more about this issue.
- ✓ Separately, we raised concerns about social care staff safety, particularly in care homes and nursing homes and how quality is maintained when Care Quality Commission inspections are not going ahead, and friends/family unable to visit.
- ✓ We also sought clarification over the advice issued by the Council to people in receipt of direct payments. We received a response which explained the true intent behind the letter, and we were able to provide reassurance to those individuals who had contacted us. Healthwatch will continue to seek feedback from people receiving direct payments on the services they are receiving during the current lockdown and after this has ended.

## 6. Feedback received on health and social care services

Healthwatch received, collated, and shared positive feedback from the public and city officials. Despite the present difficulties, these comments acknowledged the success of local services in adapting to the situation. Some examples are shown below:

### How local services are successfully adapting

- (1) **Haematology** at the Royal County. A patient told us that instead of a face to face appointment, the haematologist rang them with the results of their blood test and subsequently sent them a follow-up appointment for September, and a form for a blood test in advance of that appointment. The patient told us that they were very happy with the service.
- (2) **Counselling** sessions. A patient told us that their appointment was held virtually through the medium of Zoom (an online meeting format). The patient advised that they experienced no delay to their treatment as a result and were happy with the service.
- (3) **Neurotherapy** being carried out online. The patient described how the physiotherapist demonstrated the exercises they needed to do, in turn watching what they were doing and providing feedback. The patient told us that this initially felt a little strange, but that they quickly adapted to this new approach. They told us that this was certainly better than having no treatment at all.

(4) **Physiotherapy.** Following a hip replaced 6 weeks ago, a patient's follow-up was changed from a face to face appointment to a telephone call. The patient told us that they were happy with the result. They also received two online physiotherapy sessions where the physiotherapist demonstrated some exercises and answered their questions. The patient told us they were offered Skype (an online call service) and other online options for these consultations. They reported that there were plenty of exercises that they could access and complete remotely.

(5) **Renal outpatients.** Two patients told us that they were very happy with the telephone updates they received: the nurse specialist advised them that only complex clients were being invited to physically attend the clinic at present.

(6) **Hospital discharge.** Our new Healthwatch Wellbeing project is providing support to those who have recently been discharged from hospital to ensure they are receiving the support and follow-up care they need. One patient told us that they were hugely impressed with the amount of contact they had received from various sources. They told us they felt cared for and that their needs were being met.

## 7. Praise received for our work

In response to our work, Healthwatch received positive feedback from the public and lead officials acknowledging our impact. Some examples are shown below:

*Healthwatch guide to health and social care*

*“Dear Healthwatch B&H  
I just want to express my grateful thanks for the information on local services document you have prepared and distributed. This is very helpful and answers various questions I had.  
Much appreciated.  
With good wishes and do keep well.”*

*Member of the public -7.4.20*

*Healthwatch COVID-19 update*

*“Hi, I will include this advice in upcoming articles, many thanks for sending it over.  
Kind regards,”*

*Newspaper reporter 13.2.20*



*Healthwatch guide to health and social care*

*“Hi, Thank you for this very helpful document. Best wishes”*

*Member of the public - 7.4.20*

*Healthwatch social media post*

*“Thanks for the update. Will adhere to recommendations and watch this site for further instructions / developments. Have shared the information.”*

*Member of the public - 6.3.20*

*Healthwatch guide to health and social care*

*“I always enjoy and find your information very helpful and often I circulate it to our services users across the city.”*

*Manager, Local care agency - 21.4.20*

*Healthwatch positive feedback press release*

*“On behalf of the CCG I would like to extend my thanks to Healthwatch for the COVID-19 bulletins. I personally found the patient stories very inspiring. Kind Regards”*

*Senior Manager, Brighton, and Hove Clinical Commissioning Group - 22.4.20*

*Healthwatch COVID-19 guide to prescriptions*

*“Hi - I’ve just been alerted to your fab briefing note. Thanks so much for helping get the message across.”*

*Community Pharmacy Surrey & Sussex - 21.4.20*

## 8. An update on Healthwatch projects

### (A) New and potential projects

#### 1. 'Hospital Discharge Wellbeing project'.

Despite restrictions on face-to-face engagement, Healthwatch continued with our patient-focussed project work by adapting our existing Home Care Quality Reviews ('Lay Assessor') project into a 'Hospital Discharge Wellbeing project'.

Based on our local intelligence of people being discharged from hospital earlier than normal, Healthwatch established a system for our volunteers and staff to phone vulnerable people after their discharge from the Royal Sussex County Hospital (RSCH). We are working closely with our NHS Trust, City Council, St John's Ambulance, and other local organisations such as Possability People to deliver this project.

10 of our volunteers are currently calling recently discharged patients to check on how they are since being discharged, as well as asking how they are coping during this lockdown and if we can signpost or refer them for any extra support.

About a third of those we spoke to needed some help, and for the most part the discharge plans have been going very well and we have been able to help pick up on the few instances where things have not gone as they should.

As the NHS returns to normal, we expect 50-70 local people a week to benefit from Healthwatch Wellbeing checks on discharge from hospital."

Number of discharged patients we spoke to	Number who said they were OK and did not require support	Number signposted or referred to the Hospital Discharge Team	Number signposted or referred to other services
91	54	10	34

\* As at the end April 2020

One patient we contacted told us they were:

“... hugely impressed with the amount of contact I had received from various sources. I felt cared for and that my needs were being met.”

## 2. Young Healthwatch



Many of our **Young Healthwatch** activities also stopped because of the crisis. During this period, the team and their volunteers worked with colleagues in the Council's Public Health team to publish COVID-19 related posts targeting young people in the city. They also issued wellbeing posts offering support and advice to young people about how to manage relationship during the crisis, for example:

“However difficult it is personally, do not meet up with intimate partners who are not living in the same household”

“How to access contraceptives and sexual advice services”.

**We are working collaboratively with Young Healthwatch to develop a Youth Survey** which will focus on the impact that COVID-19 has had on young people's mental health and wellbeing.

## 3. Contract tracing and dental

- ✓ Prior to the government announcing its public recruitment campaign Healthwatch offered its services to the CCG to support the government's goal to have 18,000 people involved in its contact tracing initiative.
- ✓ We continue to determine what further work we can do around dental services which are facing challenges at this time. We are working with the South East Local Dental Committee on this.

## (B) An update on existing Healthwatch projects

Healthwatch suspended some of its existing project work due to the COVID-19 crisis but continued to deliver online work and our patient helpline. We also worked to finalise some projects from 2019 such as our GP Review. We would like to thank our hard-working volunteers for their involvement in previous projects; and those which we are still able to run.

### 1. GP review 2020

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove completed their most recent review of GP Practices in the city in January 2020. We have provided the main report and individual practice reports to the NHS Brighton and Hove CCG. We have jointly agreed to remove these from our website until after the current virus response period. An update will be provided to the Brighton and Hove Health and Wellbeing Board. In March, before the lockdown, we held a successful media event with members of the press, local councillors, and the city's Mayor in attendance.

Our survey of patients' views about the service offered by their GP was conducted during the summer of 2019. The objectives of the survey were to assess patient experience of using their GP practice in terms of their satisfaction, perceptions over the quality of care, patient accessibility, preventative services, and surgery environment. In total, 998 patients from all 40 locations across the city were consulted. Healthwatch volunteers conducted visits to 34 locations to speak with patients and assess aspects of the environment such as signage and the presentation of supporting materials. Overall, patient satisfaction with GP services and patient perceptions over the quality of care they have received were good.

There were several issues raised by patients that we will be taking up with the NHS and GP practices, but those relevant to the current virus response are already resolved or in hand. Other Healthwatch recommendations will be resolved when the virus threat has passed. The report also picked up an increase in remote (online and telephone) access to services both for booking an appointment and for consultations. As a result of COVID-19, these remote services have become a necessity and our GP review demonstrated that most GP practices were at least in part ready to increase this method of service.

## **2. Outpatients booking services**

Our project investigating patients' experiences of using the outpatients' booking system has been put on hold with the agreement of the CCG who we were working closely with. We had successfully collected the views of 120 patients, but our draft report will not be completed at this time. We will return to the project outcomes once the NHS and our local hospital are able to return to business as usual.

## **3. Home Care Quality Reviews ('Lay Assessors')**

Our joint project with Brighton and Hove City Council has been temporarily transformed into the Hospital Wellbeing Project (as described above).

## **4. Environmental hospital audits and PLACE**

Throughout 2019-2020 Healthwatch completed its annual 'Enter and View' project which saw a team of volunteers visiting different wards across the BSUH estate and providing the Trust with patient insights on those environments. We also played a significant role in supporting our Trusts to complete their annual [Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment](#) work. Healthwatch would usually produce two reports summarising the outcomes of these two projects but at the present time we do not consider it appropriate to issue them. We will determine appropriate next steps in due course.

## **5. Review of patient literature**

We are pleased to say that Healthwatch volunteers continue to review draft patient literature produced by BSUH. Their input and comments continue to improve these documents which can be viewed on the Trust's [website](#).

## 6. Meeting representatives

The majority of meetings that Healthwatch attends have been cancelled. Some groups have switched to hosting meetings online and our volunteers continue to 'virtually attend' and represent us where they can. They share with us vital information and intelligence that we are using to inform patients and city leaders. One of our volunteers 'virtually attends' weekly Local Dental Committee meetings. Another volunteer attends the Brighton and Hove Maternity Voices Partnership, and they have put us in touch with the chair of that group who we are now working with to determine what useful information on maternity and pregnancy Healthwatch can help promote.

## 7. Healthwatch annual report

Every Healthwatch is required to issue an annual report. This year, given the current climate, we will be publishing a shorter update in the early summer.

## 8. Young Healthwatch



During this period Young Healthwatch has continued with their **Sexual Health** services project analysis and report.

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove continues to develop potential projects working closely with providers and suppliers of health and care services. We are focussing our attention on areas which can support services during the current crisis, but we are also looking towards a future post-COVID world, and how we can restore services as they recover.

**Report author: Alan Boyd**

## 9. How to contact Healthwatch

### Healthwatch Brighton and Hove:

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Share your experiences of health and social care services with us:



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