



# On equal terms

**Then and now**

Healthwatch Bath & North East Somerset Annual Report 2020-21

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# Message from our Team Manager

I don't think that any of us could have anticipated the impact that COVID-19 has had on all of our lives, or that we would be in lockdown for over a year. This has naturally affected the work that we have been able to carry out, but I think we have risen to the challenge, migrating quickly to using Zoom and Teams for meetings and engagement. For the most part this has worked well, but we know that this will have excluded some of the people we have worked with, who may not have access to the internet.

I know that the pandemic has created new opportunities, but that new challenges have also come out of this as well. I have no doubt that the team will tackle these to continue to support the people of Bath and North East Somerset.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Pat and Emma for all of their hard work, and of course our brilliant volunteers for staying with us and supporting our work remotely. Sadly we have said goodbye to Diane Hall and Roger Tippings. Their knowledge, passion and commitment to our work has been invaluable and they will be greatly missed.

**Thank you to all of the Bath & North East Somerset staff and volunteers for all of their hard work this year. It has been challenging but I am proud of what has been achieved.**

## Some highlights from the year have been:

- Our community pot projects: supporting the COVID-19 relief effort with and hearing about people's experience of health and social care. We were delighted to have awarded funding to eight brilliant organisations: [3SG](#), [Action for M.E.](#), [Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases](#), [Bath Rugby Foundation](#), [B&NES Carers Centre](#), [Citizens Advice](#) and [The Diversity Trust](#).
- COVID-19 was of course a big focus of our work, and informed most of the what we did. As the pandemic started we invited people to tell us about their experiences of accessing health and social care, as well as information about COVID-19 during the pandemic.
- Dentistry and the lack of NHS dental appointments available for patients was one of the dominant themes that arose this year. We have signposted people to access care, where this has been possible, and fed into the national picture of a national crisis.
- Once again our volunteers have contributed to the Quality Accounts to enable us to provide a thorough response to service providers across B&NES



**Vanessa Scott – Team Manager**

# About us

## Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Bath & North East Somerset. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support you need, by sharing these views with those who have the power to make change happen.

## Helping you to find the information you need

We help people find the information they need about services in their area. This has been vital during the pandemic with the ever-changing environment and restrictions limiting people's access to health and social care services.

### Our goals



#### **1 Supporting you to have your say**

We want more people to get the information they need to take control of their health and care, make informed decisions and shape the services that support them.



#### **2 Providing a high quality service**

We want everyone who shares an experience or seeks advice from us to get a high quality service and to understand the difference their views make.



#### **3 Ensuring your views help improve health & care**

We want more services to use your views to shape the health and care support you need today and in the future.



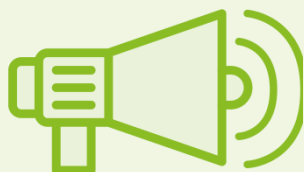
**"Local Healthwatch have done fantastic work throughout the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is more work ahead to ensure that everyone's views are heard. COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities and to tackle these unfair health differences we will need those in power to listen, to hear the experiences of those facing inequality and understand the steps that could improve people's lives."**

**Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England**

# Highlights from our year

Find out about our resources and how we have engaged and supported people in 2020-21.

## Reaching out



We heard from

**888 people**

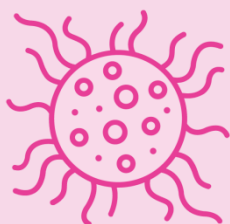
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

**57 people**

this year.

## Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

**210**

people during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**9 reports**

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

## Health and care that works for you



**17 volunteers**

helped us to carry out our work.

**We employ 3 staff**

1.2 of whom are full time equivalent, which is a 0.4% increase from the previous year.

We received

**£83,622 in funding**

from our local authority in 2020-21, which is the same as the previous year.





# Theme one: Then and now Dentistry



## Then: access to NHS dental services

**During 2020/2021 one of the biggest themes which has emerged from the feedback we have received from B&NES residents was the difficulty in accessing NHS dental appointments.**

Thanks to people sharing their experiences of dentistry we have been able to monitor what has been happening in B&NES and to the use what we have been hearing to feed into the regional picture in the South West, as well as the [national picture](#), of a growing crisis in healthcare..

The main issues included:

- Difficulties in booking routine and emergency care appointments.
- Priority being given to private patients.
- Inaccurate information.



## Now: Ongoing dentistry issues

Since the beginning of 2021 we, along with our volunteers, have been carrying out a piece of work, which involves checking what information is available on the websites and then ringing the practices each month asking them the following three questions:

1. Are you still commissioned to provide NHS dental services?
2. Are you currently taking on new NHS patients?
3. Are you currently offering check-up appointments to existing patients?

We have been updating our website with this information, as well as helping individuals book an NHS dental appointment, on the rare occasion one has been available. You can read more in [our Dental Briefing](#).

We have been attending the South West Dental Network group quarterly meetings and contributed to a presentation collating feedback from all Healthwatch across the South West.

NHS England and NHS Improvement commissioned Ottaway Strategic Management to undertake an Oral Health Needs Assessment for the South West region. We helped to promote this and helped to recruit participants to their workshops. The report has now been published and the summary report can be read [here](#).



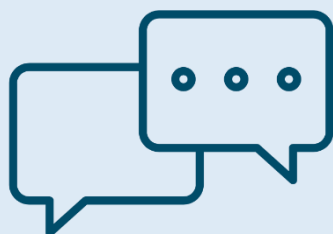
**"My daughter is due to move into BANES soon and is looking to register with a NHS dentist. She is 30 weeks pregnant, and needs some treatment for an infected tooth. We have tried a number of dentists but none are taking new patients. "**

There is general confusion about 'being registered' with a dentist and a misconception that the process is the same as being registered with a GP. If people have not been to see their dentist regularly they have found that they no longer have access to NHS dental appointments. Communication with patients therefore needs to be looked into and addressed so that they know what to expect.

People have contacted us in distress about not being able to find an NHS dentist. Crucially, patients who have been unable to access treatment they desperately need, need to be able to do this as a matter of urgency and in such a way that they are not faced with crippling costs.

We will continue to support the residents of B&NES to share their views.

### Share your views with us



If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.



[www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk)



01252 232 401



[info@healthwatchbathnes.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbathnes.co.uk)



## Theme two: Then and now Community Pot Projects



### Then: Community Pot Projects

**In 2018/19 we launched our very first Community Pot funding, inviting groups and organisations across B&NES to apply for a small grant to help support or to get a project about health and social care in B&NES off the ground.**

When our community pot projects first launched we received five applications and funded four, and in 2019/20 we received eight applications, which all received funding.

- [2018/19 Community Pot Projects](#)
- [2019/20 Community Pot Projects](#)

The arrival of COVID-19 meant that taking findings from the first community pot funded projects forward has been delayed – either at the request of the recipients or because of other delays.

The report from West of England Rural Network focused partly on Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT), which was one of our work priorities for this year. These findings, as well as work we had carried out independently on this topic, were used to feed into the national review of NEPT.

As the review has been consistently delayed we have had to pause planning further work around this. This will be picked up again once the review has been published.





## Now: B&NES Carers Centre Community Pot Project & West of England Rural Network

**We met with B&NES Carers Centre and their Carers' Voice group in January 2021 to discuss the findings of their final report.**

Key findings from the report were:

- Carers have identified the need to make changes in the appointment systems to ensure carers and their loved ones are taken into consideration when attending appointments.
- Carers Voice would like to work with partners (some yet to be identified), including Healthwatch, to try and make changes happen.
- They would also like to ensure that carers are identified on the future Integrated Care Records

***"Making appointments work for carers (and those they care for)"***

From this the group decided that they wanted to initially focus their attention on the issues around hospital appointments and the problems these create for people with caring responsibilities, if for example they get an early morning appointment



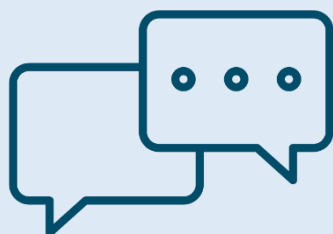
***"You've been a real pleasure to work with around our Carers' Voice project and the group are so refreshed to feel your commitment and support for their project"***

In quarter 4 of 2020/21 a project plan was developed, with the Carers' Voice Group leading on what they wanted to do. We also took the issue around hospital appointments, highlighted in the West of England Rural Network report, and included this in the plan.

Preliminary discussions have been held with Sharon Manhi, Lead for Patient & Carer Experience, Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust, about the findings from both reports. We will be presenting our findings to the Outpatient Steering group meeting at the RUH in quarter 2 of 2021/22.

We will be supporting the Carers Voice Group to set up a Task and Finish Group in 2021/22, to include the RUH and other stakeholders who have influence over hospital appointments, to ensure the needs and voices of carers and the people they care for are heard.

### Share your views with us



If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.



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## Responding to COVID-19

**Healthwatch plays an important role in helping people to get the information they need, especially through the pandemic. The insight we collect is shared with both Healthwatch England and local partners to ensure services are operating as well as possible during the pandemic.**

### **This year we helped over 200 people by:**

- Providing up to date advice on the COVID-19 response, by providing a range of local and national information on [our website](#)
- Linking people to reliable up-to-date information about everything from dentistry, to GPs, to advocacy
- Supporting the vaccine roll-out by helping local residents understand how the booking system works
- Helping stakeholders understand the needs of Bath & North East Somerset residents with feedback gathered in our reports on [COVID-19](#) during the first lockdown, [Hospital Discharge](#) during the pandemic, [good practice in Care Homes](#) in lockdown and people's attitudes to the [COVID-19 Vaccine](#).
- Helping people to access the services they need

## Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



9% on GP services



46% on Dentistry



5% on Adult Social Care



12% on COVID-19 queries

## Advice and Information



Early in the pandemic, people wanted up-to-date information about services and COVID-19. Our role became much more focused on providing people with clear, consistent and concise advice and information articles on our website to help address people's concerns.

The key information we provided people with included:

- What does shielding mean?
- What is the difference between social distancing and self-isolation?
- Where to find mental health support



### Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.



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# Volunteers

**At Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset we are supported by 19 volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services.**

## **This year our volunteers:**

- Have attended meetings on our behalf, such as the Primary Care Commissioning Committee meetings, the Citizens Assembly, Patient and Public Engagement meetings, Patient Participation Groups and more.
- Carried out website reviews of dentists and the information they provide.
- Spoke to residents in a care home to find how they coped during the pandemic and what measures the care home has taken to support them. This was done via a one-to-one call over Zoom and in a group session with four residents, also over Zoom. The report for this can be read [here](#).
- Supported us once again in providing robust responses to the Quality Accounts for Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership, Royal United Hospitals Trust, South West Ambulance Service and Virgin Care. An overview of the Quality Accounts can be read [here](#).





## Supporting our volunteers

We set up virtual volunteer support meeting via Zoom and Teams. Our Executive Board meetings which well attended by our members, who once again did a brilliant job of steering the course of our work.

## South West Clinical Senate Citizen's Assembly – Joanna & Ann

Ann Harding and Joanna Parker are our two volunteers who participate in the South West Clinical Senate Citizen's Assembly. The Citizens' Assembly is unique among Clinical Senates across England as it brings together the 13 Healthwatch from across the South West to give a strong and independent patient and public voice to the Senate Council's deliberations and subsequent advice to commissioners of services.

The Citizens' Assembly - through its Healthwatch representatives - puts the views and experiences of patients, carers and communities at the centre of the deliberations and recommendations of the Senate. Taking a broad view on the totality of health and social care, the Senate then develops professional consensus to help local health communities make effective decisions about quality, equity, safety and efficiency. By involving the Healthwatch network at all levels of its engagement and decision-making process, the South West Clinical Senate has proved its commitment to ensuring that patients, carers and family members, of all ages and backgrounds, are an integral part of its vision and active partners in its programme of work.



## Volunteer with us

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch at



[www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbathnes.co.uk)

**01252 232 401**

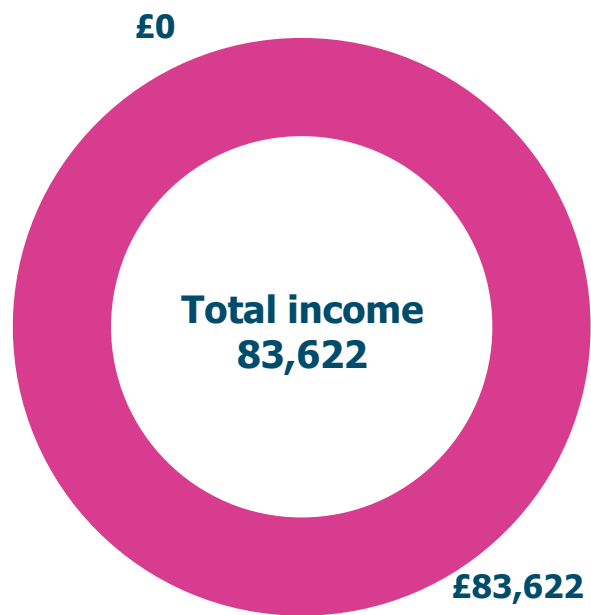
[info@healthwatchbathnes.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbathnes.co.uk)

# Finances

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

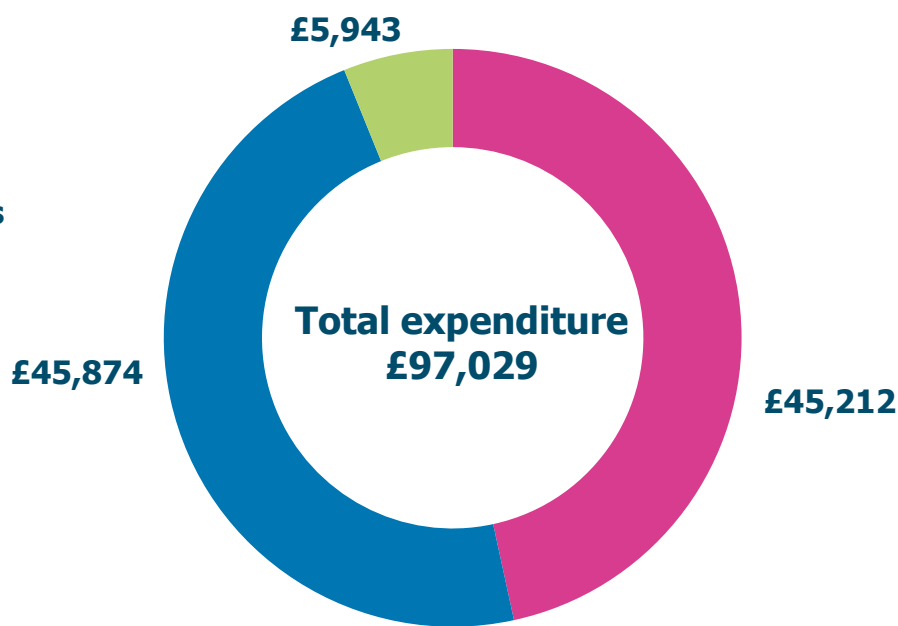
## Income

- Funding received from local authority
- Additional funding



## Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Office costs





# Next steps & thank you

## Top three priorities for 2021-22

- Community Pot Projects 2019/20
- Hospital Appointments for carers
- Non-Emergency Patient Transport

## Next steps

- Taking the findings forward from the Community Pot Projects 2019/20
- Hospital appointments for carers and progressing the project plan
- Reading the findings from the national review on Non-Emergency Patient Transport and shaping our future work in Bath & North East Somerset around this.
- Continuing to provide robust responses to the Quality Accounts



**"Tackling unfair health differences will need those in power to listen. To hear the experiences of those facing inequality and understand the steps that could improve people's lives, and then to act on what has been learned."**

## A message from our CEO

The past year has been remarkable for so many reasons, of which the commitment that our volunteers and staff have continued to show in adapting their approach, offering their insights and giving their time over this challenging period will be forever remembered- thank you!

The pandemic has reminded us, if we had been tempted to forget, that health inequalities exist and that our efforts to remove them from all systems and approaches must be placed at the heart of decision making. We must place even more emphasis on the importance of the voices of those individuals who face these inequalities and we should take time to understand what impact the use of new approaches, such as digital interventions, may have on our population.



Health care systems are changing at pace and I cannot wait to see how people in our communities help shape and drive positive change – here's to the coming year!

**Kevin Peltonen-Messenger – CEO of The Care Forum**



# Statutory statements

## About us

The Care Forum, Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue, Bristol, BS16 2QQ

Healthwatch Bath & North East Somerset 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 lay 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 2020/21 the board met three times and made decisions on matters such as how and when to carry out the virtual visit with care homes, so as not to put them under more pressure. We discussed the future community pot projects and the types of organisations it would be appropriate to fund. Where possible the money should be allocated to smaller, grass-roots organisations, who would not have access to reserves in the way that larger charities would.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. By the biggest theme to have emerged this year was dentistry and the lack of access to NHS dental appointments. This helped shaped the work we carried out to review local dentists, to enable us to provide up-to-date information to the residents of Bath and North East Somerset.

**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 care services. During 2020/21 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums 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 care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, funding local groups and organisations to gather the views of their service users via our community pot projects. We gave a presentation prior to inviting organisations to apply for funding at Bath & North East Somerset Council Independent Equalities Advisory Group. We also promoted our COVID -19 vaccination survey, with an aim of promoting this amongst B&NES ethnically diverse communities.

**2020-21 priorities**

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Dentistry	We have contributed to the quarterly South West Dental Network meetings, ensuring the patient experience of access to dental care has been shared.
Adult Social Care	We have chaired meetings between Bath and North East Somerset Council and a local grassroots organisation of disabled residents to help bring issues to the fore for discussion. An example of this is inaccessible language being used in correspondence. This is still a work-in-progress.

**Responses to recommendations and requests**

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 Bath & North East Somerset is represented on the Bath and North East Somerset Health and Wellbeing Board by Vanessa Scott, Manager, Healthwatch Bath & North East Somerset.



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