



# Establishing a Youth Healthwatch in Sandwell

2020 - 2021





# Introduction

Healthwatch Sandwell are the independent voice of the public in health and social care services. We collect feedback from the public of Sandwell about their experiences of using health and social care services and use that feedback to work with service providers and commissioners to look at ways to improve services. One of the ways that we collect feedback is to carry out focused projects each year that look at services, conditions, or groups.

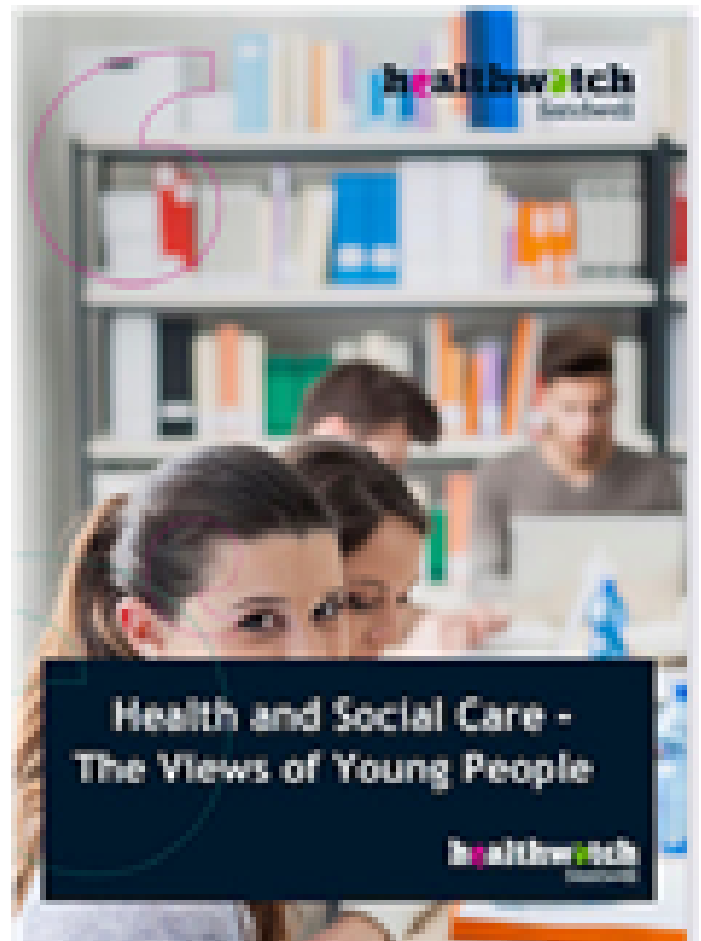
The Department of Health has made clear its expectation that Healthwatch will be

**"a strong voice for children and young people, as well as adults, in both health and social care".**

Healthwatch Sandwell identified the importance of including and listening to the voice of children and young people during the financial year 2019 / 2020. They carried out a project that engaged with children and young people in Sandwell about their knowledge and experiences of health and social care services. The final report "Health and Social Care - The views of young people" was published April 2020. The overarching recommendation of the report was that a Youth Healthwatch Sandwell was established to ensure the voice of young people continued to be heard and used to improve services across Sandwell.

# Background

To start any new project or group will always be faced with challenges, establishing a Youth Healthwatch coincided with the start of the Covid 19 pandemic and the first national lockdown. Plans were to build upon existing relationships made during the focus groups to hold face to face events to allow a Youth Healthwatch to be designed and developed in a coproduced way with the young people. The first challenge was to engage with young people remotely and start the process in the uncertain times at the start of the pandemic.



Healthwatch Sandwell was able to employ a Youth Engagement Worker for 7 hours a week from April 2020 to lead upon this work. In September 2020 a permanent position of 10 hours a week was secured ensuring the staff resource of an individual to lead and develop this work. Following is an outline of the different workstreams during the past year working towards a thriving Youth Healthwatch in Sandwell.

# Making Connections



It has been important that Healthwatch Sandwell works with existing organisations across Sandwell enhancing the positive work already taking place by other agencies and not duplicating, while remaining the independent champion for individuals. Existing youth engagement across the borough is extensive and includes school councils, Child Looked After Forum's, voluntary sector support for specific groups such as young carers, youth provision, NHS services engagement forums and the council's SHAPE Youth Forum. All these and others seek the views of children and young people in Sandwell. SHAPE is the umbrella for much of the engagement work in Sandwell currently and has been developed and is facilitated by Sandwell's Public Health department.

“The SHAPE Strategic Board aims for all its multi-agency partners to engage with children and young people in ways that enable them to be actively involved in shaping decisions, and leading and initiating action for change and development across our services on an ongoing basis.

- Staying Safe
- Being Healthy
- Enjoying & Achieving
- Making a Positive Contribution
- Economic Wellbeing”.

(Sandwell Children and Young People Engagement Strategy 2019-2022)

At the time of Healthwatch Sandwell's report "Health and Social Care - The views of young people" was published several other research projects gathering the views of young people had been carried out by other organisations including public health, police and inclusion services. Led by SHAPE a strategic multi-agency action plan was devised responding to all needs identified by the various reports.

It was also agreed that rather than repeating many different surveys SHAPE's bi yearly survey would become yearly and designed together to follow up from the body of research already undertaken with young people. Healthwatch was part of this process with questions around health being included in the survey. The survey was completed by over 300 young people and is in the process of being analysed and compiled into a report by SHAPE.

Relationships have been forged with various organisations across the Borough which will be used to engage with young people with different experiences. The following pages explain current activities that have been commenced in 2020/ 2021 with the intention for them to continue into the following year.



## Partnership work with Sandwell Autism Group and Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

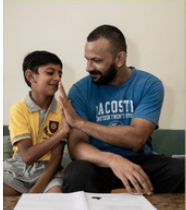


**Help us be better at hearing your child's voice!**

**Have your say**

Leanne (Healthwatch Sandwell) & Juliet (Sandwell & West Birmingham Hospital NHS Trust) would like to attend a Sandwell Autism Group Meeting  
18th January 2021  
10:30 am - 12 pm

To ask parents how we could talk to your child to hear their views of Health and Social Care Services in Sandwell.

For more information  
Please call Leanne  
07732683446

Work has been undertaken to learn from parents and carers as to how best to engage with the young person they support. To plan effective opportunities to engage the views of individuals with Autism in Sandwell. Engagement to date as offered the following suggestions;



Accept long term collection of views that come out of casual situations rather than a snap shot

Questionnaires rarely offered in easy read format

Capture views not just in words use photos, visuals, videos of likes and dislikes.

Wide use of different tools and guidance to schools / colleges / parents on what can be developed as meaningful responses at an appropriate level of understanding.



An easy read survey has been drafted and will be opened to parent / carers and individuals whom are autistic in the first quarter of the year to increase reach. The outcome of this research will be used to plan engagement throughout summer 2021.

## Partnership with Health Futures University Technical College



Health Futures University Technical College specialise in health care and health science courses. Health Futures is located in West Bromwich town centre and supports 14 - 19 years olds with career aspirations in the health and social care fields. We have worked with Health Futures to recruit Youth Healthwatch Volunteers. We hope to offer work experience placements in the forthcoming year, where a group of young people will design and carry out research during their work placement. The college is ideally suited to engage with young people who have an interest in health and social care.

## Partnership with The National Deaf Children's Society



Plans for Healthwatch Sandwell staff team to receive training to ensure a fully inclusive environment were postponed due to The National Deaf Children's Society tackling the challenges of Covid - 19. Plans will now commence May 2021 for training before the recruiting of Deaf Youth Healthwatch Volunteers.

**"The training will ensure Healthwatch Sandwell are equipped to offer an inclusive experience for deaf young people. Ensuring everyone feels included".**

**(Leanne, Youth Engagement Lead, Healthwatch Sandwell)**



## Partnership work with Sandwell Children's Trust

Healthwatch Sandwell are in the process of producing a report following focus groups being held with children cared for by the trust and care leavers. It has been agreed that Healthwatch Sandwell will attend regular forum meetings for these groups. It is hoped that Youth Healthwatch volunteers are recruited from this group of young people to ensure their voice is included in our work. Some thoughts from the groups include;



**Affordability of Prescription charges for care leavers**

**We need to understand the fact verses fiction of vaccination (Covid -19)**

**Need mental health support that's just for us, that understands experiencing trauma**

**Like face to face doctors support, to be able to judge genuineness of professional.**

**Mental Health support should be offered as soon as you are in care**

**Don't wait!**





# Youth Healthwatch Volunteers

Throughout the year a total of 9 Youth Healthwatch volunteers have been recruited and attending regular meetings. Throughout this time the young people have been involved in the following;

- Designing a Youth Healthwatch Logo
- Producing a Youth Healthwatch promotional video
- Establishing a Twitter and Instagram Account
- Attending internal and external focus groups to share their views and experiences
- Being trained as ambassadors to signpost to the Kooth service
- Attending The National Youth Agency Leadership Training
- Becoming Youth Mental Health First Aiders

The group looks forward to meeting face to face in the near future.



Hayden joined because ...

"I want to help improve health and social care services in Sandwell".

Karina believes joining ...

"helped me build upon my confidence and personal skills"

Maryam is pleased ...

"it as helped my communication skills by communicating with different aged groups regularly"



# Youth Mental Health First Aider Training

A two-day Mental Health Foundation training course was commissioned to support recommendations from the young people's research project previously highlighted. The opportunity to participate in the training was offered to young people aged 16 and above who can support other young people. Young People attended from the following organisations;

Youth Healthwatch Sandwell

SHAPE Forum

Leaving Care Forum

Ideal for All

Health Futures College

Following on from the training regular peer support sessions will be held to ensure the young people feel supported in their role and have opportunities to revisit and develop their skills. Discussions with the above organisations will be held to ensure the role is promoted and young people are aware of the support available. The impact of the training will be evaluated at the end of 2021/ 2022 financial year.



"I found that the course provided a wide range of insight and further developed my knowledge on the importance of talking about mental health. As well as this about removing the taboo of openly speaking about this." (Sharan)

"Massively impacted on my practice, brilliant course" (Paula)

"I found this course very eye opening and I learnt many new things that I can implement into my youth parliament campaign in order to spread more awareness" (Suhana)

"I am very proud to have completed the course and want to support people who are finding things hard" (Hayden)

# Moving Forward

There has been a positive start to the establishing of a Youth Healthwatch Sandwell this year. More young people have been engaged and partnerships formed. However, Covid - 19 has significantly changed the development of this work and appears will do so into the next year. Consideration will need to be given on how we ensure as many voices of young people are heard as possible particularly of those that have more contact with health and social care services than the average young person. Ensuring these voices, that may not always be heard, are heard and influencing the strongest. These individuals include;

- Young people at risk of abuse and neglect.
- Young people with a Disability or long-term medical condition.
- Young People with care and support needs.
- Young people looked after by or have recently left the care system.
- Young Carers.
- Young People of ethnic minority



**"We're looking forward to meeting in person!"**

# Recommendations

1. Review of how 'Youth Healthwatch Sandwell' will function in the future with the aim of more young people from the above groups being heard.
2. For the survey and engagement work with autistic young people to continue to be developed.
3. To work with Health Futures College to develop work experience / volunteer opportunities at Healthwatch Sandwell.
4. Youth Mental Health First Aider's peer support group to be established and the impact of training to be recorded and evaluated with the aim of establishing a cycle of training.
5. Regular focus group sessions with children looked after and care leavers to be held.
6. To continue to develop online Youth Healthwatch forum. For SHAPE survey analysis to influence priority projects for the group for the forthcoming year.
7. For Healthwatch Sandwell staff and volunteers to receive training from The National Deaf Childrens Society.
8. To continue to have staff resource of Youth Healthwatch Lead to ensure the progress made will continue.

To access the Young people's research project:

<https://www.healthwatchsandwell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/YOUNG-PEROPLES-PROJECT-REPORT-FINAL.pdf>

If you are 14 - 24 years and would like to get become part of the team, please contact Leanne Abbott by email -

[Leanne.Abbott@healthwatchsandwell.co.uk](mailto:Leanne.Abbott@healthwatchsandwell.co.uk)



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