



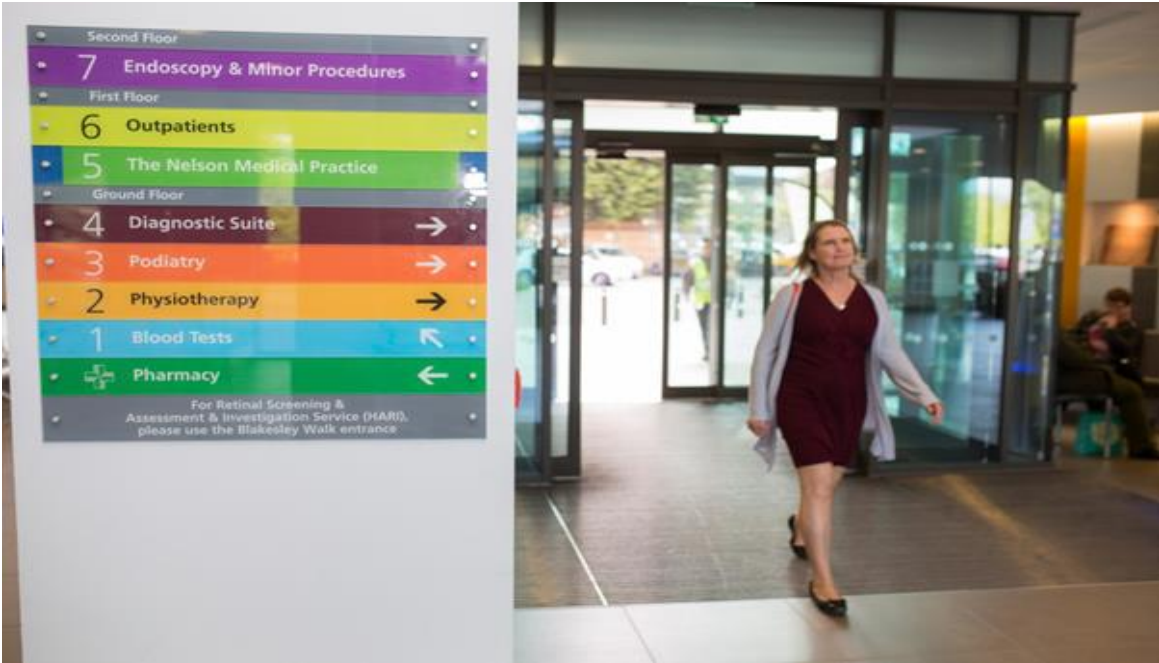
On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch Sandwell Annual Report 2020-21

Contents

Message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Highlights from our year	5
Theme one: Then and now	6
Theme two: Then and now	9
Theme three: Then and now	11
Responding to COVID-19	13
Volunteers	16
Youth Healthwatch volunteers	18
Finances	19
Next steps & thank you	20



Message from our Chair

The last year has probably been amongst the toughest that any of us can remember. That's certainly true across our health and care services, where **we've all been responding to the worst pandemic in one hundred years.**

Sadly, some of us will have lost family, friends or colleagues and whilst the vaccination is making incredible progress, a lot of people are understandably still feeling anxious or exhausted.

At the time of writing, we still have lockdown restrictions in place with concerns over new variants. This brings us all further challenges and worries. But that is not the whole story of the last year.

Sometimes the worst of challenges brings out the very best in people. We've certainly seen that in Sandwell from colleagues across our health and care services – from community volunteers to frontline NHS and emergency workers, from carers to social care workers and many more.

All of us at **Healthwatch** thank all those that helped keep Sandwell going and moving **forward.** It has truly been a team effort and shown the best of humanity, kindness and community.

We have all had to adjust to the challenges of the pandemic, working differently or from home, managing virtual engagement and volunteering in different ways. At Healthwatch we have continued to adapt and meet our work priorities through the flexibility and good will of our Board, volunteers and staff, as demonstrated over the coming pages.

To all of you, a sincere and heartfelt **Thank You.**



John Taylor, Chair
Healthwatch Sandwell
Advisory Board

About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Sandwell. 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.



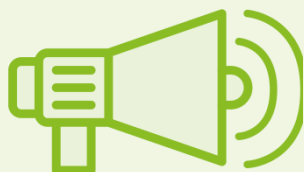
"Local Healthwatch have done fantastic work throughout the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is more work ahead to ensure that everyone's views are heard. COVID-19 has highlighted inequalities and to tackle these unfair health differences we will need those in power to listen, to hear the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

5704 people

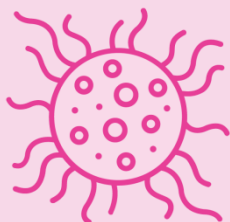
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

195 people

this year.

Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

534

people during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

Making a difference to care



We published

8 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made 31 recommendations for improvement.

16% of recommendations

we made last year have been acted upon, at the point where we reviewed progress.

Health and care that works for you



15 volunteers

helped us to carry out our work.

We employ 6 staff

74% of whom are full time equivalent

We received

£180,250 in funding

from our local authority in 2020-21 - the same as the previous year



Theme one: Then and now - Access to Primary Care Services



Then: Accessing your local GP

Healthwatch Sandwell often hear from patients saying that it is very difficult to get an appointment at a GP Surgery. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the majority of patients would choose to book appointments by queuing at a GP surgery, or on the telephone, with less people registered for on-line services.

The NHS Long Term Plan, published in January 2019, included the ambition that “all patients will have the right to online consultations by April 2020 and video consultation by April 2021”

In 2019 Sandwell ranked as the 12th most deprived local authority area nationally for indices of multiple deprivation. Digital skills levels and digital poverty are associated within these deprivation levels.

Set in this context Healthwatch Sandwell wanted to look at the patient experience of “using digital technology in primary care services”



Now: accessing your GP during the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic required sudden adjustments to primary care services delivery with face-to-face services becoming the last rather than first patient service option. Patients needed to adjust rapidly to using digital technology and remote services. Healthwatch Sandwell found that patients had been willing to try to adjust and many were happy or satisfied with the new services and some could see benefits. Supplementary services were also widely used such as NHS 111 on line, virtual Doctor services and the Sandwell and West Birmingham Health app which was developed during Covid-19.

“being able to book appointments without waiting in a phone queue for an hour”



“I can access the facilities in my own comfort zone”

However Healthwatch Sandwell identified that 44% of people surveyed found digital technology difficult to use. Some groups of people faced additional challenges with using or accessing digital technology, including older people, those with sensory or learning disabilities and those from minority ethnic communities with language barriers. Healthwatch Sandwell focused on the issues, barriers and challenges presenting for these groups of people and included the voices and insights from patients within the report.

“It’s not good for people with no English or sight problems - for people like us it is complicated”



“Feels like I’m treated as an outcast because I can’t access online. It’s unfair”

Digital poverty i.e. a lack of ownership or access to digital equipment or internet data was an issue for 30% of people surveyed. Healthwatch Sandwell found that these figures were much higher in groups of people over 65 years old and people from minority ethnicities who were unable to speak English.



Recommendations

Healthwatch Sandwell made 8 recommendations within the report including:

- A person-centred approach – recording communication preferences for individuals with support needs.
- Review accessible communication formats offered and translation services.
- Primary Care Networks to work with Healthwatch Sandwell to continue progressing the patient experience of services and the use of digital technology.

Going forwards

The findings of the report were well received by the Sandwell Local Commissioning Board and shared with all the Primary Care Networks - it is intended that the all the recommendations are implemented.

Dr Ian Sykes, local GP and Chair of the Sandwell Local Commissioning Board

“notes the recommendations and fairly high overall satisfaction of those who completed the survey, but accepts there is still work needed, especially for those in our community with limited internet and IT access”

Dr Sykes has undertaken to help ensure that the Clinical Commissioning Group works with Healthwatch Sandwell to improve primary care access and help reduce health inequalities.

The Primary Care Networks plan to continue to develop up the on-line and video consultation offer complemented by face-to-face services. Working in collaboration with the Primary Care Networks Healthwatch Sandwell will aim to promote and encourage the use and benefits of digital services to patients and continue to help ensure patients voices are heard within health care services development including through Patient Participation Groups.

Healthwatch Sandwell also have a role to play in ensuring that health and care services remain accessible to all, with reasonable adjustments made where needed and an equitable service offer for those unable to use or access digital technology.

The Integrated Care Systems Digital Inclusion Sub Group have welcomed the findings of the report as useful insight to inform and develop services across the region.



Full report “using digital technology in Primary Care Services”
can be found here: [click here](#)



Theme two: Then and now - Homeless People Accessing Healthcare in Sandwell



Then: Accessing healthcare in Sandwell - Homeless Project

In 2019/20 Healthwatch Sandwell conducted a project entitled: Accessing Healthcare in Sandwell - Homeless Project, this report was published June 2020. Report link:

<https://www.healthwatchsandwell.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HW-Sandwell-Homelessness-Project-Report-2020.pdf>

This project aimed to identify health inequalities with regards to this target group. The project identified barriers to accessing health services and made recommendations to commissioners and providers of health and social care.



"As soon as you say you are homeless their next words are 'right okay' I know straight away that I am viewed differently to others."

Respondents made suggestions to on how to improve access:



"I would like a place to go where no one asks me loads of questions about where I live, they just give me care."

From the findings Healthwatch Sandwell made 7 recommendations, which included publicising homeless people's rights to healthcare services.

Sandwell Homeless Forum is a multi-disciplinary group facilitated by Sandwell Council, which was created to input into the Homeless strategy and improve communication and joint working in the homelessness field. Sandwell Homeless Forum endorsed the report in July 2020. As a result the Forum has incorporated the 7 recommendations into an action planning document and agreed that all the key stakeholders would identify what they will be doing to meet the recommendations by submitting a pledge.

Now: Ongoing work on Homeless people accessing healthcare services in Sandwell

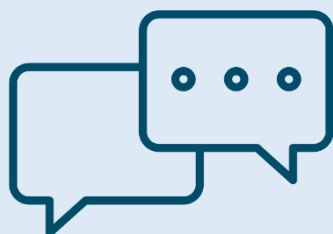
In response to Covid-19 in 2020 local street homeless people were housed in temporary accommodation which made provision of support services easier to deliver and brought more positive outcomes for some homeless people.

As a result of the project work and report Healthwatch Sandwell were invited to be a member of the Sandwell Homeless Forum.

Healthwatch Sandwell will be monitoring progress with implementation of the 7 recommendations.

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.healthwatchsandwell.co.uk

0121 569 7211

info@healthwatchsandwell.co.uk



Theme three: Community support



Then: Community support

The voluntary and community sector in Sandwell offers a wide variety of social connection and support opportunities to meet the needs of the local population. However Covid-19 meant the majority of face-to-face services were affected, many support offers were delivered remotely and some ceased, but the need for social connection and support increased.

Now: Increasing community support

As part of our engagement programme Healthwatch Sandwell set up a local Community Cash Fund Initiative, a small grants scheme that enabled local community and voluntary organisations to improve the health and wellbeing of local people. Four grants of up to £1500 were awarded to initiatives that could contribute to developing relationships with seldom heard from groups.

The 4 projects took place through Covid-19 lockdowns:

Community Projects delivered



A project to support young people to talk about how they felt after losing relatives to Covid-19. The young people created a video of their experiences and learnt video making skills and interview techniques.



Life in Community address issues surrounding health, poverty, worklessness, apathy, learning, and skills deficiencies. The project set up a self referral listening service and has established referral links with Sandwell wide services.

"I really didn't think listening would work but it has. Me and my listener have built up such a good relationship. I'm so happy I said yes, to getting involved. Male User, aged 61"



West Bromwich Dartmouth Cricket Club developed a small area of land for flowers and plants plus a new pathway and seating area for the local community who may wish to come and work/volunteer to prepare the area and then maintain it.

"I really started coming up to West Bromwich Dartmouth to watch some cricket on the weekends but with lockdown the season was curtailed greatly. I soon found there was plenty to do in the weekdays by volunteering to do stuff around the ground. Being able to get outdoors was a lifeline for me as I live on my own but the camaraderie, banter and chats together with the fresh air helped me immensely. As lockdown proceeded, we decided to create our own garden at the ground which has given us all a load of satisfaction, self-worth and a real team spirit"



New Baby Network supports families on their journey from pregnancy to the first 2 years with their baby. A wellbeing coach with lived experience of perinatal mental health challenges ran a series of virtual Wellbeing Workshops for parents. Two volunteer "birth listeners" were also trained, providing a unique opportunity to get feedback around maternity services.

"I've never been to anything like this before, I feel so much better having had the chance to talk"



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 best as possible during the pandemic.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up to date advice on the COVID-19 response locally
- Linking people to reliable up-to-date information
- Supporting the vaccine roll-out
- Supporting the community volunteer response
- Helping people to access the services they need

Top areas that people have contacted us about:



Hospital care



Support services

Case studies



Support to patient in hospital during Covid-19

Healthwatch Sandwell were made aware of a patient with multiple disabilities, including visual impairment and support needs. The patient had been hospitalised with leg fractures so was bed ridden. Due to his immobility and visual impairment the patient was stressed about hospital procedures and unclear about hospital discharge processes. Healthwatch Sandwell were able to keep regular communications with the patient and help inform on all processes and guide his support within the hospital. The information and links provided helped reassure the patient and ensure that reablement and ongoing support services flowed smoothly on his return home from hospital.



Helping people navigate with blindness and visual impairment.

During Covid-19 restrictions Healthwatch Sandwell have ensured communications and working relationships with the visually impaired and blind community in Sandwell. This has included producing audio information through the "Talking News" which is circulated to members of Sandwell Visually Impaired, a local support organisation. Also helping address problems with navigating social distancing with blindness and difficulties with transport to health appointments, including signposting to local and NHS volunteer services.

Case studies



Support to residents in independent living

Healthwatch Sandwell were contacted by a resident of an independent living facility, raising concerns about not being able to access a Covid-19 test. Healthwatch Sandwell intervention enabled residents to have access to Covid testing when required. Health and safety concerns were also raised about Covid-19 risks due to the lack of PPE available to staff and residents, the number of visitors to the facility, and staff continuing to work after being in contact with Covid-19 positive residents. Healthwatch Sandwell worked with the Public Health team to ensure that staff were supported to understand the correct health and safety procedures to minimise the transmission of the virus and that PPE was available. The Healthwatch Sandwell intervention helped restore some confidence in the health and care services for the vulnerable residents.



Supporting an elderly patient in hospital

Healthwatch Sandwell were contacted by the relatives of an elderly patient staying in hospital. They were concerned that their relative had no access to a telephone to stay in contact with family members. The ward mobile phone was broken, and the patient did not have a mobile telephone of their own. The patient was advised that they could use the land line telephone at the nurse's station – however the patient was not mobile. As contact between relatives and patients during hospital stays was limited due to COVID -19, the patient was very isolated.

Healthwatch Sandwell raised the matter with the relevant senior staff, the issues were rectified enabling the patient and family to have contact and to have confidence in the healthcare system that vulnerable patients are listened to and their concerns taken seriously.



Volunteers

At Healthwatch Sandwell we are supported by 15 volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services.

Thankyou for all your continued hard work and commitment.

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online
- Shared website and social media content with people
- Posted out paper surveys to local community

The pandemic led to 2 new roles which made it easier for volunteers to continue being involved with Healthwatch Sandwell during the national lockdown or under restrictions

Community Rep - Sharing our posts on social media and/or handing out our leaflets, newsletters, and surveys to your neighbours in a socially distanced way.

Online Feedback Collector - collect feedback about people's experiences of health and social care services that has been left online.

Healthwatch Sandwell welcomes 3 new Advisory Board volunteers



Stephanie

"I am currently in full time studies, completing a Master of Science in Public Health. I am a disabled student that opted to become a member of Board because I wanted to be a part of a dynamic team to mitigate the issues pertaining to health and social care in the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough. The decision was based on experiential knowledge. My observations included inequalities in health and social care as well as culturally sensitive issues that impact the communities living in Sandwell. I believe I can add value using advocacy and representation."



Pat

"I have been a Volunteer for Healthwatch Sandwell Advisory Board since December 2020. During the prior 12 months I noticed a positive change in the way Healthwatch Sandwell work with community organisations and when asked to become more involved it was an easy yes for me. The opportunity to work with the team at Healthwatch Sandwell who are hugely talented has enabled me to see, first hand, how their work and strategic alignments impact Sandwell citizens to create meaningful change."



Valisha

"I have lived and worked in Sandwell and Birmingham for 6 years and I am passionate in improving services and therefore recovery outcomes for those facing any difficulties within the community. I completed my undergraduate in Psychology and I am currently undertaking my MSc in the Clinical Applications of Psychology alongside full time employment with The Children's Society as Practitioner in Emotional Health and Well-being. I have joined the board to help make positive changes for the community in health and social care by ensuring their voices are heard, especially the voices that can often be disregarded, like young people and minority ethnic communities."

Youth Healthwatch Volunteers



Throughout the year 9 Youth Healthwatch volunteers have been recruited and attend regular meetings. The young people have been involved in the following:

- Designing a Youth Healthwatch Logo
- Producing a Youth Healthwatch promotional video
- Establishing Twitter and Instagram accounts
- Attending internal and external focus groups to share their views and experiences
- 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 soon.

I want to help improve health and social care in Sandwell

- Hayden

It helped me build upon my confidence and personal skills

- Karina

It has helped my communication skills by communicating with different age groups regularly - ***Maryam***

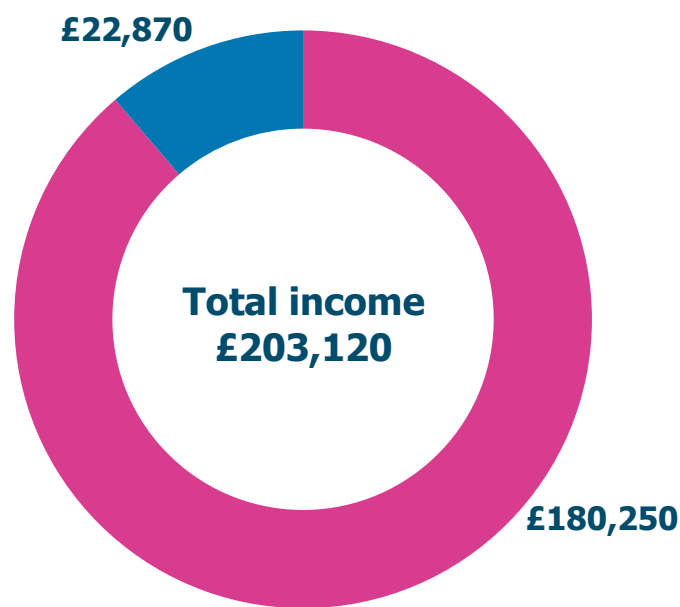


Finances

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

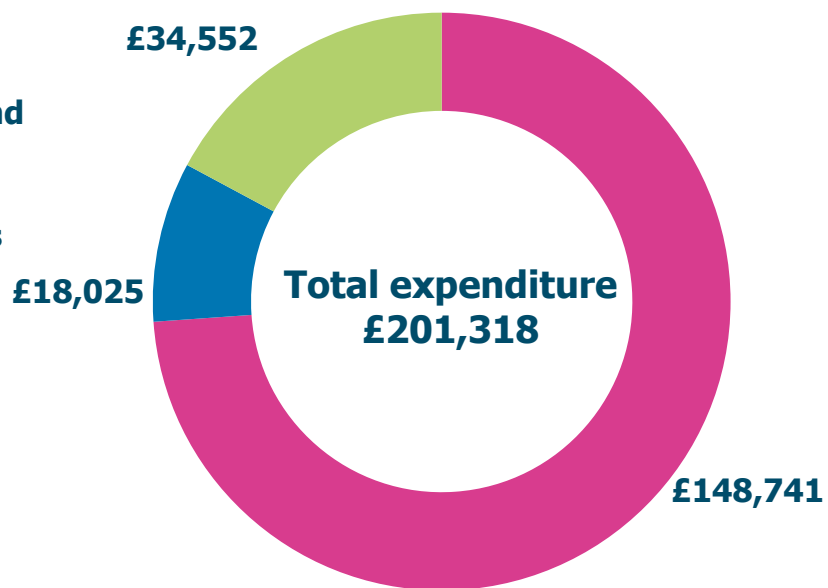
Income

- Funding received from local authority
- Balance brought forward from 2019/20



Expenditure

- Staffing costs
- Management and Governance
- Operating Costs



Next steps & thank you

Top three priorities for 2021-22:

The Hidden Impact on Carers

Hospital Treatment Pathways

Young People's Mental health

Next steps

- Ensuring members of the public can access services when required and face to face appointments are available alongside digital appointments, making sure all members of the community have equal access
- Supporting the development of a strong integrated health and care system ensuring the patients voice is heard
- To support and be involved in the Right Care Right Now Programme as the new Midland Metropolitan University Hospital comes to completion



Tackling unfair health differences will need those in power to listen. We will move towards creative and participative engagement methods that generate information for decision makers whilst developing confidences and skills from seldom heard from groups. We will implement a collaborative approach with joint planning and facilitation of public engagement events with representatives from Voluntary and community organisations and look to evaluate the nature of public engagement for commissioning purposes, developing recommendations to include the views from seldom heard from groups.

Thank you to everyone that is helping us put people at the heart of health and social care, including:

- Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us.
- All our amazing staff and volunteers.
- The voluntary organisations that have contributed to our work.
- Commissioners and providers in Sandwell who have taken the views of the public on board.

Alexia Farmer Healthwatch Sandwell Manager





Statutory statements

About us

Engaging Communities Solutions
Unit 42, Staffordshire University Business Village,
Dyson Way, Staffordshire Technology Park,
Stafford, Staffordshire, ST18 0TW.

Healthwatch Sandwell 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 6 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 7 times and made decisions on matters such as, escalation of concerning incidents to Sandwell Public Health and Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust and agreeing recommendations made within our reports.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by public consultation through survey and listening events. Through our engagement work during 2020/21 that included focus groups, one to one interaction and through the feedback centre for health and care services on our web site. We also engaged with senior stakeholders to align priorities with local areas of focus or service transformation.

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, provided a feedback centre/rate and review system, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities 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, working with people with Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia to improve their experiences within health and care services.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our web site, send directly to key stakeholders and voluntary and community organisations. We will present the report at our Annual Public Meeting and at Health and Wellbeing Board as required. Hard copies will be available and circulated as requested.

2020-21 priorities

Project / activity area
The Implications of COVID - 19 in accessing mental health and wellbeing services
The Implications of COVID-19 in accessing Primary Care - Using technology
Develop a Youth Healthwatch that will complement the work that we already do.

Responses to recommendations and requests

We had 2 providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations.

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 Sandwell is represented on the Sandwell Health and Wellbeing Board by John Taylor Advisory Board Chair. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried this role by promoting the work of Healthwatch Sandwell, bringing to the attention of the board patient experiences, challenged and contributed to the overall plan of how best to meet the needs of the local population and tackle local inequalities in health.



Healthwatch Sandwell
Walker Grange
Central Avenue
Tipton
DY4 9RY
Telephone: 0121 569 7211

www.healthwatchsandwell.co.uk

t: 0121 569 7211

e: info@healthwatchsandwell.co.uk

 [@HWSandwell](https://twitter.com/HWSandwell)

 [Facebook.com/Healthwatch.Sandwell](https://www.facebook.com/Healthwatch.Sandwell)

 <https://www.instagram.com/healthwatchsandwell/>

The contract to provide the Healthwatch Sandwell service is held by Engaging Communities Solutions C.I.C.
www.weareecs.co.uk
t: 01785 887809
e: contactus@weareecs.co.uk

healthwatch
Sandwell