



# Intelligence Report April - June 2021

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# COVID - 19 Update

**COVID-19 can be fatal.  
Do everything you can to keep  
yourself and others safe**



Sandwell and the whole of England remain under national lockdown. The Government's Road map out of lockdown has begun.

You should continue to work from home if you can and minimise the journeys you make where possible. You should get a test and follow the stay-at-home guidance if you have COVID-19 symptoms.

Below is an overview of the steps to be followed:

## **Step 1 - March 8**

- Schools and colleges are open for all students. Practical Higher Education Courses.
- Recreation or exercise outdoors with household or one other person. No household mixing indoors.
- Wraparound childcare.
- Stay at home.
- Funerals (30), wakes and weddings (6)

## **29 March**

- Rule of 6 or two households outdoors. No household mixing indoors.
- Outdoor sport and leisure facilities.
- Organised outdoor sport allowed (children and adults).
- Minimise travel. No holidays.
- Outdoor parent & child groups (up to 15 parents)

## **Step 2 - At least five weeks after Step 1, no earlier than 12 April**

- Indoor leisure (including gyms) open for use individually or within household groups
- Rule of 6 or two households outdoors. No household mixing indoors
- Outdoor attractions such as zoos, theme parks and drive-in cinemas
- Libraries and community centres
- Personal care premises
- All retail open
- Outdoor hospitality
- All children's activities, indoor parent & child groups (up to 15 parents)
- Domestic overnight stays (household only)
- Self-contained accommodation (household only)
- Funerals (30), wakes, weddings and receptions (15)
- Minimise travel. No international holiday.
- Event pilots begin

## **Step 3 - At least five weeks after Step 2, no earlier than 17 May**

- Indoor entertainment and attractions.
- 30-person limit outdoors. Rule of 6 or two households (subject to review)
- Domestic overnight stays.
- Organised indoor adult sport
- Most significant life events (30)
- Remaining outdoor entertainment (including performances)
- Remaining accommodation
- Some large events (expect for pilots) - capacity limits apply
  - Indoor events: 1,000 or 50%
  - Outdoor other events: 4,000 or 50%
  - Outdoor seated events: 10,000 or 25%
- International travel - subject to review

## Step 4 - At least five weeks after Step 3, no earlier than 21 June

- No legal limits on social contact
- Nightclubs
- Larger events
- No legal limit on life events

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/COVID-19-response-spring-2021/COVID-19-response-spring-2021>

## Introduction

Healthwatch Sandwell is your independent consumer champion for health and social care services in Sandwell. Our job is to champion the consumer interests of those using the services and give local people an opportunity to speak out about their concerns. We listen to views, concerns, and compliments about services to help shape and improve them so that people are accessing the most quality and appropriate care.

## Healthwatch Sandwell Update

Healthwatch Sandwell offices are located at Walker Grange, Central Avenue, Tipton, DY4 9RY. Telephone: 0121 569 7211, however since March 2020 staff have been operating from their home locations, therefore staff contact details have changed.

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## April to June at a glance

**Our web site had  
3611 visitors &  
7397 page views**

**55 people were  
signposted to help  
or support services**

**We engaged with  
738 Sandwell  
residents**

**117 information  
and support posts  
on social media**

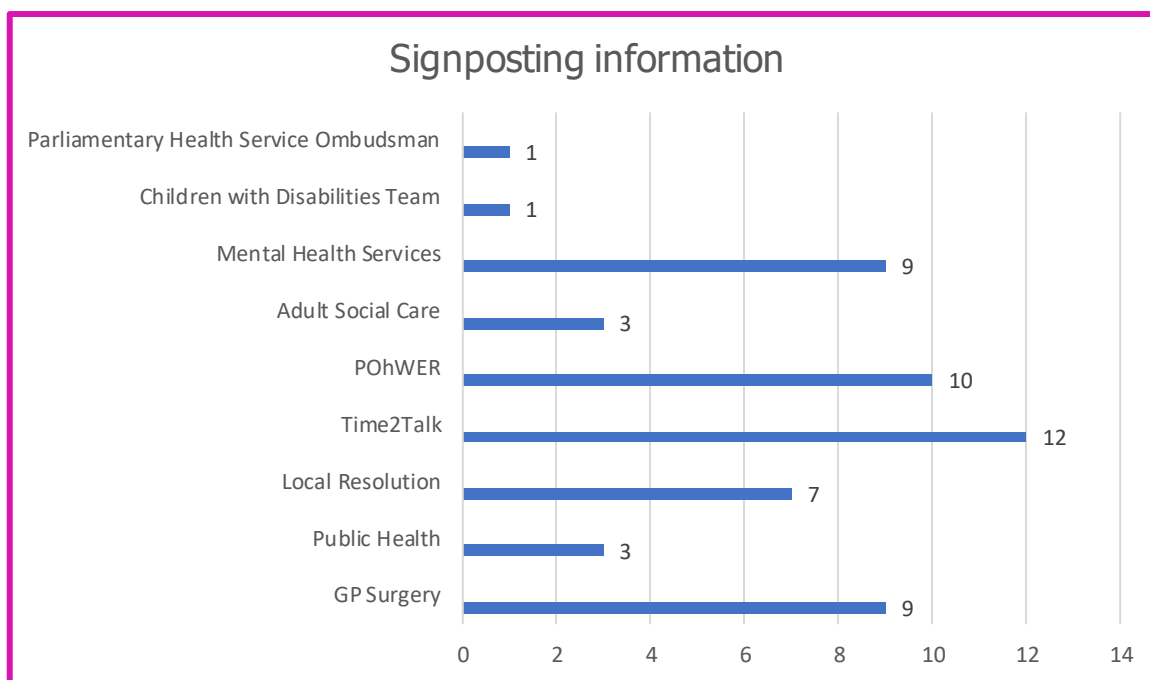
During the period April to June 2021, Healthwatch Sandwell has collated patient experiences. These are sourced from:

- phone contact with residents/patients, focus groups we facilitate
- focus groups we attend
- local online forums and service user groups
- service user experiences/feedback via our web-based 'Feedback Centre'

<https://www.healthwatchsandwell.co.uk/services/>

## Signposting Activities

Our Healthwatch activities involve signposting the public to relevant support agencies to assist them with their concerns. The following graph depicts which agencies have been referred to:



## What Healthwatch Sandwell have been hearing about



Pre COVID-19 we were hearing about the difficulties in people getting a Doctors appointment. COVID-19 has exacerbated this problem. Below is a snapshot of some of the issues we have heard about from the public:

- A person tried for 5 days to get an appointment with the GP. The GP then cancelled the appointment and informed the person to book again using the online booking system. The person did not have a device where this was possible.

- We heard from a person who tried to cancel an appointment but was unable to get through on the telephone. They waited for the appointment and told the GP that the appointment was not necessary. The GP was not empathetic and said that it was a waste of an appointment.
- We heard from a person that they had been told by GP to book a blood test at the end of June. At the end of May, they called the phlebotomy service on 26 occasions until they got through - only to be told that they were unable to book so far in advance and they would need to call back.
- A person tried to book an appointment with GP as they were concerned about their eyesight. They were told to make an appointment with the Optical services. This appointment took three weeks. The Optician advised that the person needed to see the GP in the first instance.
- We heard from a carer of a person with learning disabilities and Autism, that one of the GPs from the practice had refused to continue with the appointment as the dependant was not present and of consenting age. The parent advised the GP that consent had been given, it was recorded on case files and that there had not been any issues in the past. The GP refused. The carer had waited two weeks for the appointment.
- We heard from a person who was trying to register with a GP. They had tried multiple surgeries in the area but had been turned down.
- We have heard about an individual who felt they had no choice but to arrange a private consultation after being passed between the GP and A&E on a number of occasions.

The following 3 case studies provide a more detailed picture of people's experiences:

### **Case one**

We have heard about an individual who visited the GP on numerous occasions over a six-month period seeking support for persistent sickness. They were not offered diagnostic tests with COVID-19 being the reason given. The person eventually arranged a private CT scan



and was admitted into hospital the same day in a life-threatening situation. Following this the person was diagnosed with advanced stomach cancer and secondary bowel cancer.

### **Case two**

We had a person calling us who was experiencing depression and anxiety and expressed suicidal thoughts\* due to family breakdown and being turned down for a job. The person reported that they had no medication and had called the GP practice for over a week to be turned away as there are no appointments. They has been advised to go to the Walk-in centre by staff at the GP practice but they wanted to talk to a GP who knew their history.

Healthwatch Sandwell tried to refer them to Healthy Minds as the person informed Healthwatch Sandwell that the GP had made a referral in April 2021. The person had also called Healthy Minds themselves and was informed that they are waiting for the referral from the GP which they haven't received.

The person requested contact details for other GPs in the area as they were considering changing.

Healthwatch Sandwell contacted the Practice Manager and left voice mail and email requesting them to chase up the Healthy Minds referral and medication. The Practice manager responded and referred this to the deputy to deal with and get person sorted that day. Healthwatch Sandwell was later informed that the person was allocated a telephone consultation that day and they were chasing up the referral with Healthy Minds.

Healthwatch Sandwell also contacted the Healthy Minds Counselling Service who had been trying to call the person but was getting through to their voice mail.

Healthy Minds signposted Healthwatch Sandwell to the Crisis Team and Single point of referral (Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust).

Healthwatch Sandwell contacted The Crisis Team (as the patient is not known) they gave Healthwatch Sandwell the phone number for Single point of referral, but the latter only take referrals from medical professionals. Healthwatch Sandwell was then signposted to a 24/7 helpline (Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust) that take referrals from anyone. Healthwatch Sandwell made a referral.

Healthwatch Sandwell rang the person and explained what was happening. The person was very thankful.

\* Healthwatch Sandwell risk assessed the situation and believed the patient was not an immediate risk to themselves and a call to the police was not appropriate.

### **Case three**

We heard from a British National who had requested a COVID-19 vaccination for a relative. The relative is north-eastern European and is visiting UK to look after a grandchild. The family's GP has refused to take temporary patients and they advised that they go to their nearest Walk-in Centre, who also refused to accept a temporary patient. The relative was advised to call Healthwatch Sandwell by 119.

Healthwatch Sandwell contacted Healthy Sandwell (Public Health) for advice, who confirmed that anyone in England can register with a GP surgery and see a primary care doctor or nurse for free. They do not need proof of address or immigration status. Overseas visitors to England, including anyone living in the UK without permission, will not be charged for vaccination for COVID-19, and immigration checks are not needed to receive the vaccination.

The person was given this advice and Healthwatch Sandwell recommended that they go online to register with another GP in the local area who should not refuse them.

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## Effects of the Pandemic on accessing care

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to dramatic changes in the delivery of routine health care. Specialist care and surgery is delayed - the demand is far greater than the resources available.

- We heard from a person who had knee surgery cancelled on 5 occasions.
- A person told us that they had had surgery cancelled due to not responding to communication that they had been sent from the hospital. The person had not received any communication as it had not been sent.
- We heard from a person who had been told that there was a waiting list of in excess of 12 months for a referral to a consultant for chronic back pain
- We heard from a person who had been referred for a hip replacement. They were in pain, were unable to walk unaided, unable to drive and could not manage aspects of their personal care. The waiting list was in excess of 12 months.
- A person told us that the consultant had said that they needed to be referred to a different hospital department. The person would

have to be referred by their GP. The person was unable to get a GP appointment for 5 weeks.

- We were told by a visually impaired person that there was no hospital transport available to support them getting to their appointment so the appointment would have to be cancelled.
- A carer and person with autism was asked to leave a hospital waiting area as the person with autism was finding it difficult to cope with the environment. The appointment had been delayed by two hours. They were advised that they would have to telephone for another appointment and they would be put on the waiting list

### **Case one**

Delayed Surgery (referral from Community Cancer Support Facilitator)

We heard about a parent who was feeling really low, very emotional and was at breaking point. The parent has a big family, the youngest of her children are twins. One of which has cerebral palsy. The child should have had surgery and it has been delayed for over a year due to COVID-19. The parent said it is heart-breaking to see how much pain the child is in and to see their foot and leg starting to turn inwards. The child needs this surgery, but the family have been told that they will have to wait a while longer.

The family lives in a townhouse which is not suitable for a growing child in a wheelchair. This is having an impact on the parent as the child has to be carried.

Healthwatch Sandwell signposted them to a Paediatric consultant at Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, the Local Resolution team at Sandwell General Hospital, the complaint procedure to Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, POhWER Advocacy Service, Parliamentary Health Service Ombudsman and Children with Disabilities Team.

### **Case two**

Delayed consultation for liver damage (referral from Community Cancer Support Facilitator)

A patient in April 2021 had blood tests and found a dangerously high level of gamma-glutamyl transferase in their blood which can suggest liver damage.

The patient underwent an urgent CT scan on 27th May. The patient's GP made an urgent referral to Gastroenterologist's at the Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust.

The GP informed the patient of 5 signs to look out for in an emergency whilst waiting. The patient had 2 Symptoms from the list: no appetite and losing weight, but patient believes that no one seems to be bothered about this.

The patient still did not receive an appointment, so 2 weeks later contacted their GP again, who made another referral.

The patient went to the surgery in person to raise this and GP made another referral.

The patient contacted their GP again as they still did not have any contact from Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust - 4<sup>th</sup> referral made. Healthwatch Sandwell rang Gastroenterologist's at Sandwell who said that there are 2 routes into Gastroenterology:

1. 2-week pathway (Rapid Access)
2. routine referral pathway

It transpires that this patient is on the latter pathway.

The hospital advised Healthwatch Sandwell to request that the patient return to their GP and asks for the referral to be marked 2-week pathway.

The patient did this, and the GP who was unaware of this, actioned immediately. The patient now has an appointment with Gastroenterologist's at the Hospital on 21<sup>st</sup> July.

### **Case three**

We were told that a patient with gynaecological cancer was taken to Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital Trust with severe bleeding following a 999 call which resulted in the patient been admitted to hospital.

The patient was informed by the consultant that they were on 'the wrong route' and needed to be discharged and go to Gynaecology directly. The patient was advised to get dressed and get have someone to collect them. The patient was left on trolley in a side room with an emergency buzzer. The buzzer could not be reached as it was on the other side of room.

## Published Reports

### Access to mental health and well-being services in Sandwell during COVID-19 Pandemic



A survey conducted by Healthwatch Sandwell in February 2020 found that 60 % of respondents indicated that accessing mental health and wellbeing services, and the quality of those services was a priority area for them. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about sudden unplanned changes to health and care services across the UK and the virus affected people's physical and mental wellbeing. Healthwatch Sandwell staff had spoken to people during the subsequent national lockdowns, who described the effect on mental health and support services. This included service offers either stopped or changed to phone/virtual support.

The findings from this report concur with the Health Foundation. This report has identified how COVID-19 has impacted on people's mental health and wellbeing. It identified that isolation, bereavement, unemployment, and uncertainty about the future have all affected them. Access to mental health and wellbeing support organisations have either been postponed or altered to meet the restrictions of the pandemic.

Link to full report: [HW Sandwell Access to Mental Health and Well Being Services in Sandwell During the COVID 19 Pandemic2021](#)

**Establishing a Youth Healthwatch in Sandwell 2020 - 2021**



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.

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.

Link to full report: [Establishing a Youth Healthwatch 2020 – 2021](#)

## Healthwatch Sandwell Annual report



Link to Full Report: [Healthwatch Sandwell Annual Report 2020 - 21](#)

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## Priority Projects 2021-22

### Young People's Mental Health



Throughout the Pandemic, Mental Health in young people has been exacerbated due to minimal socialising due to the lockdown, not attending education and having to support relatives.

As a Black Country the services are delivered by one provider, it has been decided that a collaborative Black Country Healthwatch project



would be both beneficial to the provider and Black Country Healthwatch and reduce duplication.

### **Aims and objectives.**

The aims and objectives of the project are to

- Identify the impact of COVID with Young People
- Identify gaps in services
- Identify alternative support whilst waiting for treatment
- Identify support that young people require when transitioning from young services to adult services

This information will be shared with the Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

### **Project output**

The output from the project will be in a written report that will detail key findings from the surveys and focus groups. The findings and recommendation of the report will be shared with the Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

## **COVID-19 The Hidden Impact on Carers**



Carers have faced huge challenges from the impact of COVID-19 including additional caring responsibilities and pressures on their day-to-day lives. This includes food shopping while also trying to protect the vulnerable people they are caring for who may be shielded. Respite and day care services have been closed during the pandemic, reviews and assessments have been paused while access to support has been affected by social distancing measures.

This has left many carers with less support and feelings of stress, isolation, depression and being forgotten about. Carers lives, family and friend networks, wellbeing and mental health have all been impacted upon. Young carers have additionally been affected by the pressure of greater responsibilities plus the closure of schools and colleges creating challenges in maintain their education.

### **Aims and objectives**

- Gather insight on the experiences of caring during COVID-19
- Understand the impacts of COVID-19 on individuals providing care during COVID-19
- Gain insight into the experiences and impacts on young carers during COVID-19
- Understand what information and support has been available for carers during COVID-19
- Gain a picture on the uptake and experiences of carers needs assessments as defined within the Care Act 2014
- Gather feedback and views on the impact of supporting services provision affected during COVID-19
- Seek the views of carers on what services are needed to support carers in the COVID-19 restoration and recovery stages

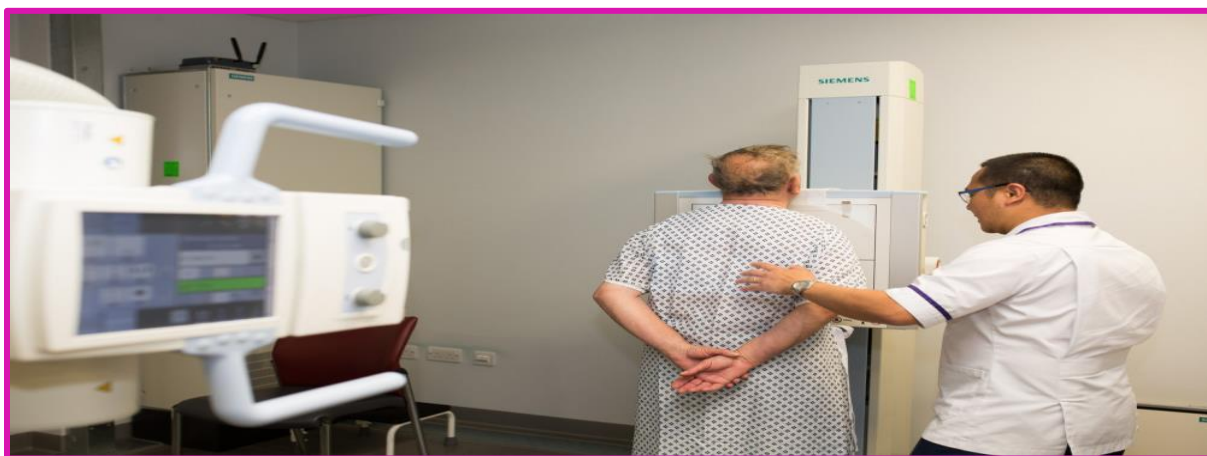
### **Project Output**

The output for this project will be a full-length report and a short Executive Summary report which will be shared with stakeholders and published on the Healthwatch Sandwell website.

The project will aim for approved photographic images to be included within the report and published to promote the report and raise awareness of the needs of carers.

The project may seek to produce a video, with the approval of participants, to help inform care services on the needs of carers. This is dependent on the appropriate opportunity and resources being identified.

## Hospital Treatment Pathways



In response to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, non-urgent operations were postponed for 3 months, and those patients deemed medically ready were discharged from hospital, giving the NHS capacity for beds for urgent surgery or COVID-19 patients. As restoration and recovery unfolds, rescheduling of treatment and COVID adaptations are put in place. A review of the patient experience is necessary.

Widespread interruptions to healthcare services due to COVID-19 have affected patients with a wide range of potentially life-threatening conditions. Delay in treatment is having a significant impact on patient safety, suffering and wellbeing.

### Aims and Objectives

- Gather a picture of hospital treatment delays in Sandwell
- Gather a picture of alternative services and treatments provided while awaiting hospital treatment during COVID-19
- Seek to understand how the position differs to pre COVID-19 timelines, services & treatments
- Gain insight on the impact and experiences for “patients in waiting” of delayed hospital treatments
- Establish an overall picture of the position for patients experiencing delayed hospital treatment- rearranged dates or on going wait lists

### Project Output

Full-length report and a short Executive Summary report will be shared with stakeholders and published on the Healthwatch Sandwell website.

The project will aim for approved photographic images to be included within the report and published to promote the report and raise awareness of patient experiences of hospital treatment pathways.

## Reviews about your local services

The screenshot shows the Healthwatch Sandwell website interface. On the left, under 'Find a service', there is a search bar and a 'Sort by' dropdown menu set to 'Last Reviewed'. Below this are three service listings:

- Glebefields Surgery**: St Marks Road, Tipton, DY4 0SN, 0121 530 8040. Based on 5 reviews (4.5 stars).
- The Smethwick Medical Centre**: Regent Street, Smethwick, B66 3BQ, 0121 289 3418, www.modalitypartnership.nhs.uk. Based on 4 reviews (3.5 stars).
- Sandwell General Hospital**: Lyndon, West Bromwich, B71 4HJ, 0121 5531831, www.suh.nhs.uk. Based on 24 reviews (4.5 stars).

On the right, under 'Browse', there is a 'View All' link and a list of service categories with icons: Hospital, GPs, Dentist, Social Care, Pharmacy, Optician, Emergency Care, and Community.

If you would like to leave a review about your experience(s) when using health and social care services in Sandwell visit: <https://www.healthwatchsandwell.co.uk/services/>

## Volunteering Opportunities with Healthwatch Sandwell

**why not join us?**

**become a  
Healthwatch Sandwell  
volunteer**

We welcome people to join us and support us as volunteers. If you are interested in marketing & promotions, engagement, or research please get in touch with us. More information on how you can support us can be found on our website:

<https://www.healthwatchsandwell.co.uk/get-involved/>

or call Anita Andrews Engagement and Volunteer Lead 07885 214421

# Healthwatch Sandwell Advisory Board Recruitment

**why not join us?**

**become an  
Advisory Board Member**

We are looking to recruit Advisory Board Members who share our passion for developing Healthwatch Sandwell the ‘consumer champion’ for NHS, public health and adult and children’s social care services across the Borough. You will need drive, energy and enthusiasm and the ability to play a leading role in maintaining our vision.

You will need to have experience of organisational development, a knowledge of health and social care landscape, effective cross-sector partnership working with voluntary and community organisations and the ability to involve local people.

So, if you want to play a leading part in shaping the future of a vital organisation, then we would be delighted to hear from you. To receive a recruitment pack and application form please contact us [07885 214389](tel:07885214389)





To share your patient experiences contact us on Telephone: 07885 214398

Visit our Feedback review page:

<https://www.healthwatchesandwell.co.uk/services/>

Or Email: [info@healthwatchesandwell.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchesandwell.co.uk)



Draft