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**Intelligence Report
October – December
2021**

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COVID - 19 Update



Over autumn and winter, the Government will aim to sustain the progress made and prepare the country for future challenges, while ensuring the National Health Service (NHS) does not come under unsustainable pressure.

The Government plans to achieve this by:

- a. Building our defences through pharmaceutical interventions: vaccines, antivirals and disease modifying therapeutics.
- b. Identifying and isolating positive cases to limit transmission: Test, Trace and Isolate.
- c. Supporting the NHS and social care: managing pressures and recovering services.
- d. Advising people on how to protect themselves and others: clear guidance and communications.
- e. Pursuing an international approach: helping to vaccinate the world and managing risks at the border.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-autumn-and-winter-plan-2021/covid-19-response-autumn-and-winter-plan-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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October - December at a glance

**Our web site
had 3310
visitors & 6245
page views**

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

**We engaged
with 945
Sandwell
residents**

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

Point to note people signposted for support has increased by almost **50%** this quarter

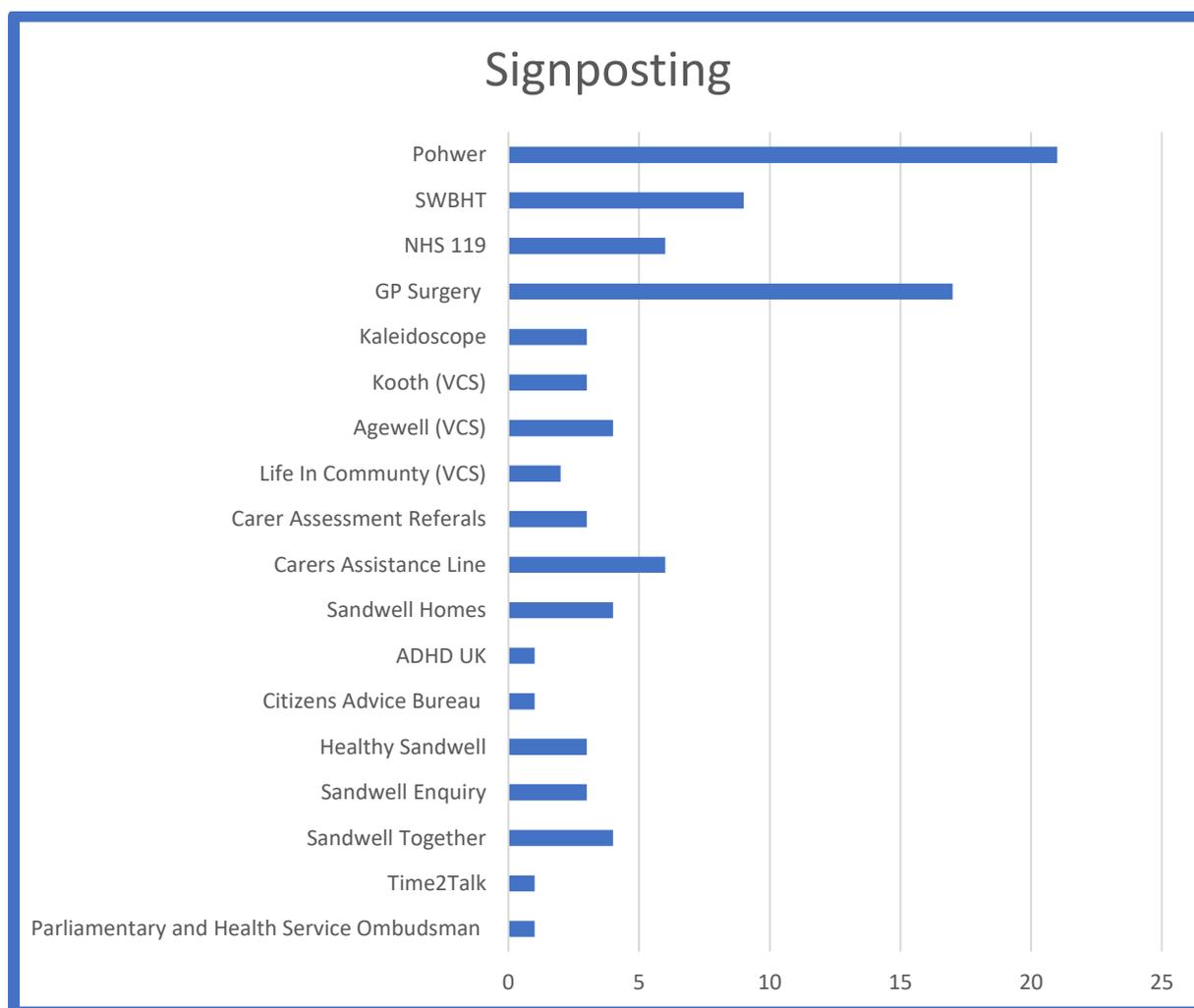
During the period October - December 2021, Healthwatch Sandwell has collated patient experiences. These are sourced from:

- face to face community engagement
- phone contact with residents/patients, focus groups we facilitated
- focus groups we attended
- local online forums and service user groups
- service user experiences/feedback via our web-based 'Feedback Centre'

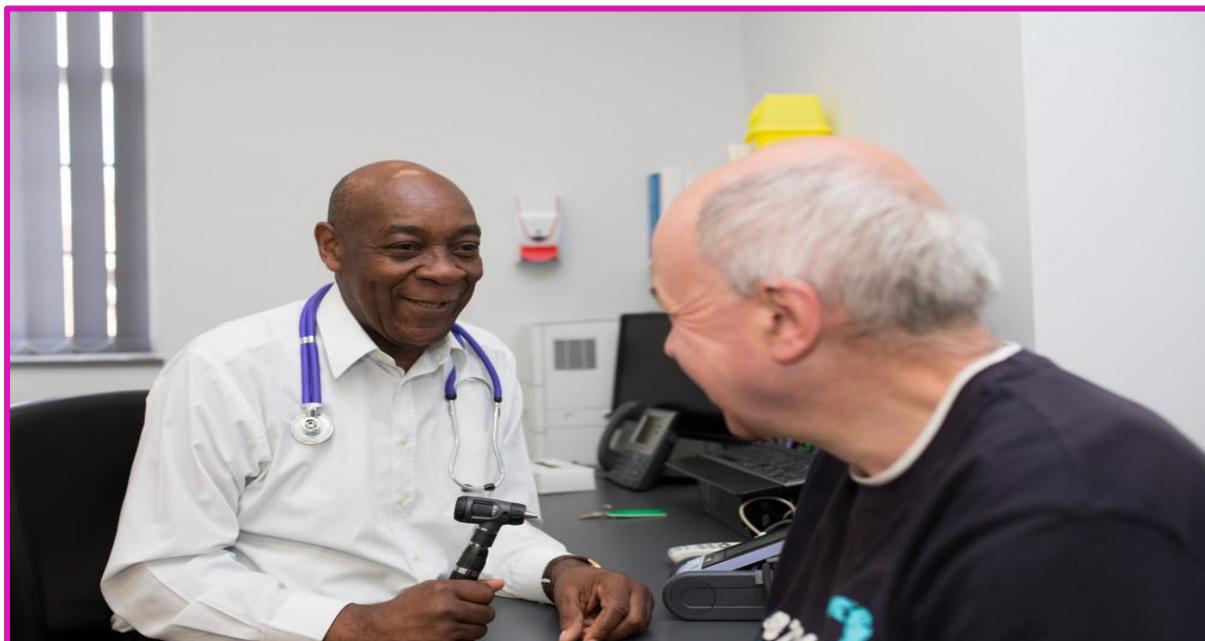
<https://www.healthwatchsandwell.co.uk/services/>

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:



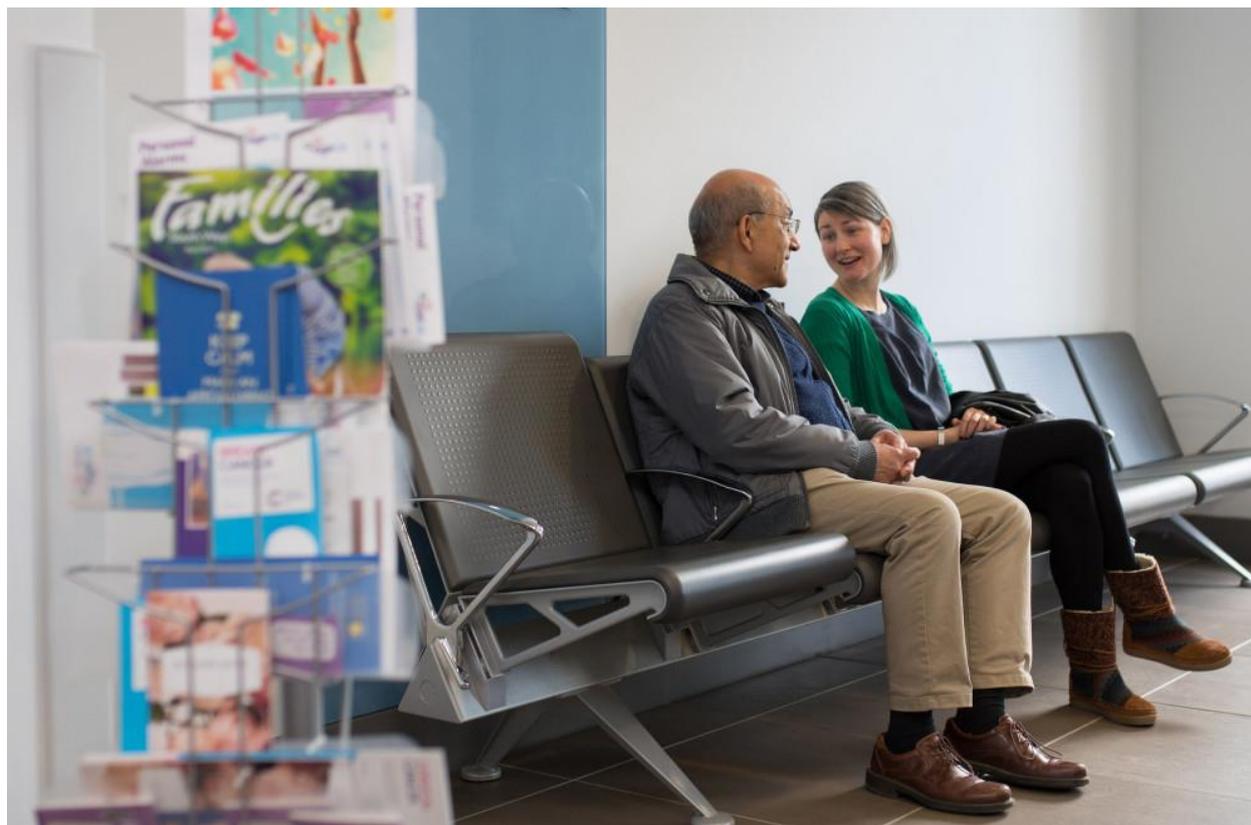
What Healthwatch Sandwell have been hearing about



We have heard from people about issues to do with GP access. We listen, support and if necessary signpost to external organisations with expertise.

- We heard from a person who received a letter about booking their Covid -19 booster vaccination – they required the booster as soon as possible. They had called the GP surgery as stated in the letter and after eventually getting through the receptionist was not very helpful – the person said “rude”. The patient was concerned as they could not book a booster with GP.
- A person contacted us about as they were concerned that their thyroid check was over due. They had tried on many occasions to get through to the GP surgery to discuss their concerns but had been unsuccessful. The person was also concerned that they had received no information about receiving their Covid -19 booster vaccination.
- We heard from a person who had been discharged from hospital after receiving treatment. The person was advised to contact their GP for a follow up appointment to check if all was going well. The person tried to get through to the GP surgery on many occasions and were unable to do so, which caused worry and frustration.

- A person contacted us about concerns regarding their diabetes review – this was long overdue and the person had not received any communication from the GP about this. The person had tried on many occasions to book an appointment and was unable to get through to talk to anyone about the situation.
- We heard from a person who was having trouble getting enough medication for osteoarthritis. The GP said that the person required a blood test before medication could be prescribed. The person had a blood test and results reviewed by GP. It was agreed by the GP that the medication could continue. However when the person went to pick up the medication they were told that there was a limit on medication as they required a blood test. The person explained the history to the pharmacist, they were advised to contact the GP to have the suspension removed so that the full prescription could be given. The person has called the GP practice on 57 occasions and has been unable get through. The person is now in a lot of pain and can only walk short distances
- A person called us about getting a fit for work letter from the GP. This person had been out of work due to illness for a considerable length of time. Their new employer had requested that the person get confirmation from the GP that they were fit for the duties required. The person has tried to contact the surgery numerous times over 9 days to speak to someone about getting the letter. They have been unsuccessful and are getting anxious that the offer of employment will be withdrawn.
- A person told us that they had been able to get a telephone GP appointment on line within a short timesclae. The appointment was at 10.30 am. The person waited until 11.00 am but the GP had not called. The person phoned the surgery and was told that they should allow a two hour slot for the appointment. This was not stated on the booking system – the appointment time stated 10.30am. The person had to cancel the appointment as they were unable to take a call due to caring responsibilities. They have tried to book another appointment through the on line booking system but there are no appointments available.



We have been listening to people concerns about hospital waiting times, communication, and the care they have received. We listen, support and if necessary signpost to external organisations with expertise.

- A person told us that they had been waiting for a hip placement for eighteen months. They told us that their health and mobility had decreased to such an extent that they were virtually housebound and in terrible pain. They fear that without treatment they will be wheelchair bound and require support with household jobs and personal care in the near future. The person said that they “just feel like giving up”
- We heard from the partner of a person who had been admitted to hospital for cancer treatment. While they were waiting for surgery, they contracted covid, so the operation was cancelled, and the person sent home. They have not received any communication from the hospital about rescheduling the operation.
- A person told us that the referral waiting times to see a consultant about chronic back pain was really lengthy. Their condition got worse so they decided to pay privately to see a neuro consultant – they could choose time slots for the appointment, and they were seen within three days.

The consultant advised that they required surgery to alleviate the pain. The person was told that they could have surgery privately within a month. The person was unable to afford the cost of private surgery so was referred back into the NHS system. After a month they received an appointment to see a consultant, it was for ten months later.

- We have heard from three people who have been turned away for their hospital appointment because they were late to arrive. This was due to parking being unavailable on the hospital site.
- Two people told us that they were turned away for their hospital appointment as they were late to arrive because of the queuing system outside of the hospital due to covid restrictions

A person has shared their hospital treatment journey with us in detail. Please click on the link below to read about their experience and find out how this could have been made better for them.

Click here:

https://engagingcommunities.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/HWSandwell/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7BED84A5A3-581C-469A-99E8-0674F8CA859C%7D&file=A%20Patients%20Journey.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true&cid=7ecf273b-ebff-45ce-a39e-736ef1ac9b3a



We have been hearing from people who are concerned about dental treatment.

- Not being able to find a dentist to register with
- No appointments available for routine dental care
- Long waiting times for dental treatments
- Parents concerned about children's oral health
- Dentist not taking on NHS patients only private
- Long waiting times for emergency dental treatment

Mobility affected by Covid restrictions

HWS spoke with an elderly person and their family carer about declining health and mobility which had been made worse by the impacts of Covid-19 restrictions as the elderly person was in vulnerable categories and had been housebound. The elderly person was keen to access support to increase their mobility. HWS made a referral to "Fallsfree4life" who responded promptly with a home visit. The family carer fed back to HWS:

"Thanks so much. Mum was assessed at home, which was really promising. The assessor is writing a report for more equipment and aids, to be seen by a G.P. straight away as required, plus physiotherapy home visit input etc"

The Right to Choose

We heard from a person who received a referral from their GP for assessment for ADHD, the patient requested their 'right to choose' and specified a provider who is out of area but who is eligible under 'right to choose' as they are commissioned by the NHS to deliver this service.

However, the GP refused, the person escalated this to Time2talk (NHS Sandwell and West Birmingham Clinical Commissioning Group) who agreed with GP and informed the person that they can choose, but only from the providers they work directly with.

The person believes that their legal rights within the NHS Patient Choice document is being denied.

Time2talk agreed to investigate this but did not get back to patient or give a timescale for their response.

Action by Healthwatch Sandwell

We advised the person that they had followed correct process by complaining to GP and then complaining to Time2talk (Customer Care Service of the Clinical Commissioning Group).

However, as Time2talk had not responded to person, so the complaints process for them was given to them.

The person was given the details of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to request an independent review into the decision of the CCG and also how to complain about the CCG's decision not to let person see their chosen provider.

HWS also provided the person with information from Citizens Advice Bureau (How to complain about the CCG), a PDF : A Guide to the Law on Patient Choice and relevant information from ADHD UK.

Who is responsible for Care?

We heard from a person who fallen and injured their nose and neck. The nose was treated successfully by Sandwell General Hospital. The person was fitted a neck brace and made a referral to Queen Elizabeth Hospital for further treatment on neck. However, they will not monitor the neck brace as it was not fitted by them. Sandwell General Hospital will not monitor the neck brace as they said it was now the responsibility of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The person needed to know to was responsible to monitor the neck brace

Action by Healthwatch Sandwell

We signposted to Sandwell General Hospital Complaints department

Priority Projects 2021-22

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.

Update

Carers, providing care and support to a family member or friend in their own home or elsewhere, are vital to reducing the pressure on statutory health and care services and even more so during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the support carers receive themselves to enable and maintain such a caring role is often insufficient.

This Healthwatch Sandwell report looks at the experiences of being a carer in Sandwell during the Covid-19 pandemic and highlights the hidden impacts on carers health and wellbeing. The report also looks at the impacts of Covid-19 restrictions on the support service offers available to carers. Based on the report findings and carers voices the report includes recommendations to improve and develop a comprehensive support service offer for carers in Sandwell. Some immediate adjustments are needed to improve upon the support offer carers have experienced since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. Other recommendations may inform and influence the draft Joint Carers Strategy for Sandwell, which is currently in development.

Healthwatch Sandwell found that Carers have generally focused on protecting the vulnerable person they care for from Covid risk, this has had knock on effects on whole families and on carers individual lives.

Covid safety measures and restrictions, including lockdowns, have limited family connections and the sharing of care. Many carers and cared for have become isolated and unsupported with consequential negative impacts including on their physical and mental health, financial security and relationships.

Support services provided through Sandwell Council and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations have also been impacted by Covid lockdowns and safety restrictions. This has included closure of day services for cared for people with specific need. This has reduced options for carers and presented great challenges for many with lack of alternative public facilities available in Sandwell to support special needs. Direct support ordinarily available to carers has predominantly been on offer via telephone or virtual services and some services closed for extended periods. Face-to-face support and contact, including peer support has been greatly reduced.

Healthwatch Sandwell worked with Voluntary and Community sector organisations providing support to carers to engage, hear and ensure representation of carers voices within this report.

Healthwatch Sandwell found that 60% of carers had not accessed or received information or advice about support available to carers during Covid-19 and that over 60% of carers had not been connected to any form of support available. Digital exclusion is high within Sandwell which is likely to be further excluding some carers.

Sandwell Council support offer to carers focuses on information and signposting and carers assessment for carers with support needs of their own. There are specific support services available for young carers. Older carers can access general support for the older population of Sandwell. However otherwise the Voluntary and Community Sector carer offer is generally linked in with the support services for people with specific needs, such as cared for people with mental ill health or dementia. There appears to be less direct or clear generic support routes available to carers locally, though some new services have developed during Covid-19.

The report provides more detailed information helping highlight some of the gaps in support services to carers and reflects carers voices which are critical to informing improvement and development of services going forwards.

The report will be published in January 2022

Hospital Treatment Pathways



Healthwatch Sandwell are planning a new project launching in January 2022 looking at:

The pathway experiences of “patients in waiting” for hospital treatment

We would like to engage and listen to patients in Sandwell who have been referred by their GP but are still waiting for hospital treatment. We would also like to hear from people with hip conditions with or without a referral. To maximise patient voices to inform and improve health and care services Healthwatch Sandwell would like to work in collaboration with the Voluntary and Community Sector and other interested parties who engage with and support residents of Sandwell.

The project will seek to understand the impact of the longer delays for hospital treatment (due to Covid-19) on patients’ health and well-being, and their experience of services while waiting for treatment. We would like to hear what is good, what is poor and what is needed to improve the experience of being a “patient in waiting”. We would like to identify what adjustments to services would help make the patient in waiting experience more positive and enable patients to be fully informed and prepared for their treatment journey.

HWS will be arranging to hold conversations with individuals and groups by phone, email, face-to-face or virtually to suit participants. Conversation events include:

Waiting for hospital treatment – “What health, care & support services are needed?”

First event: 19th January 2022 1 pm – 2.30 pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84242092192>

Planning for hospital treatment – “What does good preparation look like?”

First event: 2nd February 2022 1pm - 2.30 pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87258377579>

Patient experiences of hip condition treatment in Sandwell – event dates t.b.c.

If you would like to share your experience or be involved in the project, please contact:

Sophie Shuttlewood – Projects and Partnerships Lead

Healthwatch Sandwell, Walker Grange, Central Avenue, Tipton, DY4 9RY

Mobile: 07732 683483

Email: Sophie.Shuttlewood@healthwatchsandwell.co.uk

Reviews about your local services

The screenshot shows the 'Find a service' section of the Healthwatch Sandwell website. It features a 'Sort by' dropdown menu set to 'Last Reviewed'. Three service cards are displayed, each with a star rating and the number of reviews:

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

The 'Browse' sidebar on the right lists various service categories: 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.healthwatchesandwell.co.uk/get-involved/>
or call Anita Andrews Engagement and Volunteer Lead
07885 214421



healthwatch Sandwell

To share your patient experiences contact us on Telephone: 07885
214389

Visit our Feedback review page:

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

Or Email: info@healthwatchesandwell.co.uk

