



# On equal terms

**Then and now**

Healthwatch St Helens Annual Report 2020-21



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# Message from our Chair

**Undoubtedly a year of considerable challenges for everyone, on many, many levels. The staff team have adapted their working practices to manage the huge challenge of making sure that the important work of Healthwatch was still carried out to the highest standard, while supporting the Halton & St Helens VCA team with their COVID-19 response.**

**Local people had a great need for information during the pandemic and staff and volunteers worked hard to make sure that our communities were kept up-to-date about a situation that was sometimes changing daily.**

**With VCA yet again being awarded the Healthwatch St Helens contract, we've been able to work alongside them to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our communities were supported and kept safe and informed. I'd like to congratulate VCA as well as our other partners across health and social care, for their response to the pandemic and all of the hard work that went on.**



**I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their tireless efforts and commitment to our organisation, especially the staff team.**

## Looking forward:

We know that the pandemic will impact on our local people and services for a long time to come. With mental health already being a concern for us, it's important that we capture the experiences of local people about the effect that COVID-19 has had on them and their families.

We'll continue to work in partnership with the Local Authority, CCG and providers, who regularly express their appreciation for the part we play in making sure that they all know what local people need and want from the services they use.

I'd like to end by once again thanking everyone who's been involved in the COVID-19 response and for working so hard for the people of St Helens.



Tom Hughes

# About us

## Here to make health and care better

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



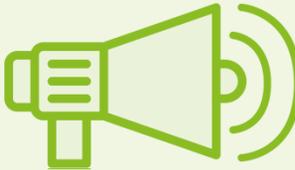
**"It has been so heartening over the last year to see the amount of work Healthwatch has accomplished whilst in 'lockdown' and the team working from home. They have steadfastly carried out their role of improving and shaping services, conducting surveys and getting information out to the public in what has been a most challenging year. We are fortunate to have a Healthwatch team in St Helens that is so proactive, and seen as a key partner for both our local Council and CCG."**

**Pam Meredith, Healthwatch St Helens Director**

# 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

**2637 people**

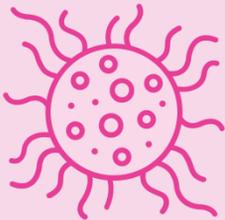
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

**29,998 people**

this year.

## Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with and supported

**more than 2600**

people during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**3 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made 9 recommendations for improvement.

**100% of recommendations**

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

## Health and care that works for you



### Volunteers

More than 6000 hours were given by volunteers, from both Healthwatch St Helens and Halton & St Helens VCA this year, to support people affected by COVID-19.

### We employ 5 staff

40% of whom are full time equivalent, which is the same as last year.

We received

**£159,427 in funding**

from our local authority in 2020-21, 5% less than the previous year.



# Then and now Maternity Services



## Then: Accessing Maternity services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Thanks to local women and their families sharing their experiences, we were able to identify the issues that were affecting women who were accessing maternity services during the pandemic.**

A number of themes emerged from our research into what local people experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic when trying to access treatment, and some of the feedback was around maternity services.

We ran a survey specifically about accessing Maternity Services and found that most women had the same issues, including not being able to take their birthing partners to appointments and scans, and lack of consistency in the staff who supported them through their pregnancy.

Overall the care that women received was good but some reported their mental health being affected by having to attend appointments alone, particularly when they were hearing bad news about their pregnancy.



## Now: Accessing Maternity Services

**Local women have helped to identify what needed to change in Maternity services, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.**

Our Maternity Voices Partnership was very interested in the findings of our report and requested that we did further work to find out what local mums and mums-to-be were experiencing.

One of the issues we identified was that women and their partners didn't always fully understand the information that was given to them during their pregnancy. St Helens MVP will review all written information given to women to check that it is clear, and the information can be easily understood.

Our local acute Trust have formally launched their newly established Community Birthing Team, a service which focuses on providing end to end care for women who choose to have their babies at home, or at other nurse-led locations available in St Helens. This will help to ensure that women see the same group of midwives, to improve the continuity of their care.

For us, our place in the Maternity Voices Partnership means that we can raise any issues that come to us, in the long-term, and know that they will be looked into, with providers and commissioners working together to ensure continued improvement of maternity services.

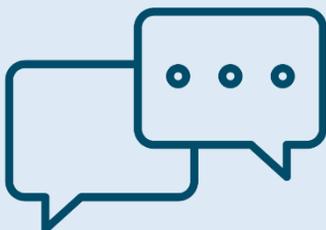


**"Healthwatch have helped the Maternity Voices Partnership to make sure the views of maternity service users are sought out, listened to and acted upon. Everything they do has the service user at the heart of it and they help their voices be heard loud and clear." Alison Finney, MVP Chair.**

Changes to restrictions around COVID-19 means that women can now safely take a support partner with them to the early pregnancy unit, all antenatal scans, other antenatal appointments where the woman considers it important to have support, and during labour and birth from the point of attendance at the hospital or midwifery unit.

The opening up of maternity services to partners again following the relaxing of restrictions will help to improve the experience of both women and their partners throughout a woman's pregnancy.

### 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 St Helens is here for you.



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



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



# Preventing Suicide in St Helens



## Then: Worrying suicide rates

**The high numbers of suicide in St Helens has been a concern for some time, with further concerns that they would get even higher during the pandemic.**

We identified this issue as a priority for us and set up a task and finish group to find out the experiences and views of people who have been bereaved by suicide and what they believe could have been done better, that might have stopped their loved one from taking their own life.

We joined forces with the Community-led Suicide Prevention Group, which was set up by Public Health St Helens, and St Helens Wellbeing Service, to reach the right people, who would be comfortable and willing to talk to us. We made sure that we were using the most sensitive approaches, by taking advice from our colleagues in the Wellbeing Service who offered training in how we could best carry out conversations with people who had been bereaved.

Sadly, our task and finish group work had to be postponed, due to COVID-19 restrictions, as it was something we needed to do face-to-face. This was not something we could do via a survey or over the phone. This could only be done by building relationships and earning trust, by letting the people we met get to know us and understand what we were trying to do.



## Now: Working together to prevent suicide.

In response to the high suicide rates in our area, North West Boroughs Healthcare Trust has re-examined their practices, as the main provider of mental health services in our borough.

A Suicide Prevention Reference Group has been set up, including people with lived-experience of being bereaved by suicide or attempting suicide, and Healthwatch St Helens representing the voice of the wider community. The aim of the group is to support and respond to local plans around suicide prevention.



**“Over the last year, in very difficult circumstances, Healthwatch has continued to help us ensure that the lived experience of service users and carers is used to help identify service improvements.” Dennis Dewar, North West Boroughs Healthcare Trust**

We’ve seen many developments in how our local Trust has worked to improve services. Over recent months we’ve seen an increase in training for all staff, particularly those on the end of a phone call to someone in crisis, better support for families who have been bereaved, safety planning on wards, and forming links with local community-based groups.

Families with lived experience of being bereaved by suicide are involved with helping to shape the suicide strategy and a Family Support Lead brought in to support families in the aftermath of such loss.



**“I would also like to thank Healthwatch for the role they play in our Suicide Prevention Reference Group. This has included supporting the development of our Family Support Lead training, delivered to staff working with families who have lost a loved one to suicide.”**

We’ll be picking up our task and finish group work again, working alongside the Community-led Suicide Prevention Group and St Helens Wellbeing Service, once all COVID-19 restrictions have been completely lifted.



To find out more > > >

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



## Responding to COVID-19

**Healthwatch plays an important role in helping people to get the information they need, especially through the pandemic. We share what we learn from local people with Healthwatch England and local partners to ensure services are operating as well as possible.**

**During the pandemic, we were lucky enough to be involved in the amazing work done by our parent company, Halton & St Helens Voluntary & Community Action, to support local people during the pandemic.**

**This year, working with VCA, we helped hundreds of people in St Helens by:**

- Supporting Halton & St Helens VCA in the award-winning programme of work, 'Street Champions', that mobilised volunteers to go shopping for people who were isolating, walk their dogs, or make wellbeing calls to check on people who were feeling particularly isolated.
- Providing up-to-date advice on protecting yourself and others from COVID-19.
- Linking people to reliable up-to-date information about Tier systems and what they could and couldn't do.
- Supporting the vaccine roll-out.
- Helping people to access the services they need.

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



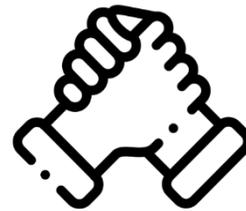
43% on GP services



7% on Dentistry



35% on Hospital Care



15% on Mental Health

## Case Study



The vaccination programme in St Helens was delivered mostly at the Saints RLFC ground and staff and volunteers there did an incredible job of keeping things running and keeping people safe.

We soon found out it wasn't for everyone, though, particularly some people with learning disabilities and sensory issues, who could find the environment too stressful and disorientating.

Through working with our partners at St Helens CCG we were able to tell people there was now another option. Anyone with additional needs, who couldn't access the vaccination centre, could have their vaccination done in the car park, as long as it was arranged beforehand, when the appointment was booked.



### Contact us to get the information you need

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# Volunteers

**At Healthwatch St Helens we are supported by our own team of volunteers, but this year we also worked with a group of volunteers from the St Helens Volunteer Centre, who wanted to make a difference, during these difficult times.**

## **This year our volunteers:**

- Helped local partners to improve their communications with the public, such as offering input into the redesign of our local Hospital Trust's website.
- Joined forces with the 'Street Champions' to shop for local people who were shielding, walk their dogs, or just be someone for them to talk to.
- Spread the word among our communities about us and the work we are doing.
- Helped us to decide on the priorities we would focus on.

The award-winning collaboration between Halton & St Helens VCA and Team Kinetic, gave local people the opportunity to volunteer as a 'Street Champion' and make a massive difference to others in St Helens.



### COVID-19 response volunteers

During the first lockdown, many of the people who found themselves with time on their hands, due to being furloughed from their jobs, wanted to help local people, by shopping for them, running errands, and making wellbeing calls to anyone feeling especially lonely and isolated.

The St Helens Together Volunteering Portal, made possible by the brilliant partnership-working between Halton & St Helens VCA, Team Kinetic and St Helens Council, meant that people could register their interest in volunteering and be matched to a person who needed support while they were shielding or self-isolating.

One volunteer told us how he felt so fulfilled by helping others, that he is now rethinking his career and is looking into training to become a carer.

Another told us that she will continue to offer her support, long after things get back to normal, as she sees so much value in helping vulnerable people in her community.

The Healthwatch St Helens team were proud to be involved in the mammoth task that was the coordination of those volunteers. 175 people registered with the St Helens Volunteer Centre, via the Team Kinetic Volunteering Portal. This meant that more than 650 local residents were supported to stay home and stay safe.



### 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 with us at Healthwatch St Helens.



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# Finances

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

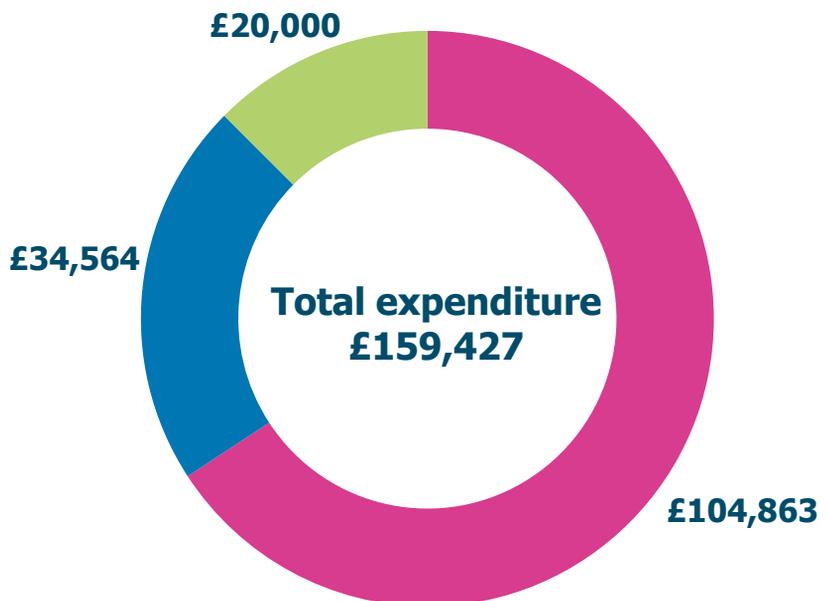
## Income

- Funding received from local authority



## Expenditure

- Staff costs
- Operational costs
- Support and administration



# Next steps & thank you

## Top three priorities for 2021-22

- Health inequalities
- The long-term impact of COVID-19
- Continued improvement of Maternity Services

## Next steps

- As restrictions lift, we look forward to being able to carry out Enter & View visits in the near future.
- The groundwork we did to find out about access to maternity services during the pandemic will lead on to more work about service improvement in the long-term.
- We will continue to work with our partners who support local people with learning disabilities, the LGBTQ community, children and young people, and people whose first language is not English.



**“The COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on all of our communities, in increasing health inequalities and putting barriers in the way of accessing services. We need to help local people to voice what’s happening to them so that their experiences can make a difference to service design in the future.**

**Thank you to our Chair, Board of Directors, our volunteers and our colleagues at Halton & St Helens VCA, for working with us and supporting us this year. Long may it continue”**  
Jayne Parkinson-Loftus, Manager.



# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch St Helens, Halton & St Helens VCA, The Beacon, College Street, St Helens, WA10 1TF.

Healthwatch St Helens 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 of Directors consists of 4 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities.

Our Advisory Forum are volunteers who ensure our decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our local community. They participate in whichever way is most accessible to them, according to their abilities and preferences, meaning not only those who are comfortable attending meetings can contribute to our work. Through 2020/21 our communications with the Advisory Forum was ad hoc and responsive to local need, and decisions were made on things such as which areas of work we should postpone until the COVID crisis is behind us and which areas of work we should focus on.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by always being responsive to what we learn through requests for signposting and for advocacy support. Our close working relationships with St Helens CCG, the Local Authority and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partners mean we are always aware of issues arising locally.

## 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 web form on our website, 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 local groups to ensure that people whose first language is not English had the chance to share their experiences during the pandemic.

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 website and our partners across the health and care sector help us to distribute it to as many people as possible, via a range of communication links and social media.

## 2020-21 priorities

Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Bereavement by Suicide	Our local mental health Trust has taken a number of steps to improve services and involve people with lived experience, in the design of services.
Access to services during the COVID-19 pandemic	Our survey highlighted many areas of concern. Our local CCG Assurance Committee took our findings as a guide for future commissioning decisions.
Supporting our most vulnerable people during the pandemic	Our research into what was happening in care homes and how much support staff were receiving from our Local Authority led to an action plan that addressed our findings and recommendations as well as a review of what support was available to care home staff.

## Responses to recommendations and requests

We had no 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.

## St Helens' People's Board

Healthwatch St Helens is represented on the St Helens People's Board, by our Chair, Tom Hughes. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by attending meetings virtually and making sure that the views and experiences of local people are acknowledged and considered, in decision-making.



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