



Our Year

2020

Foreword

“It gives me great pleasure to bring you this overview of the work we’ve done this year, to make a difference to the lives of people in St Helens.

2020 brought us unprecedented challenges, with the COVID-19 epidemic affecting how we were able to work, but also gave us an opportunity to support the people of St Helens in a different way.



Jayne, Support Team
Manager

Right at the beginning of the crisis the Healthwatch St Helens Support Team joined in with the amazing work our parent company, Halton & St Helens Voluntary & Community Action were doing, to mobilise a team of fabulous volunteers who provided shopping, dog-walking and telephone wellbeing calls, to local people who were shielding. It was a privilege to be involved with that work and to know, that by finding volunteers, we were making sure that the most vulnerable people in our community were able to stay indoors and stay safe.

During the first few months of the pandemic we asked local people about their experiences of accessing care and treatment during the pandemic. Over 2500 people responded, making it the best response we’ve ever had to a survey. The report from that survey was used to influence the development of locals services, by letting commissioners and providers know how local people had been affected and what care and support they would need going forward.

2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic made us look at new ways of working, and how harnessing the technology we have available to us makes it possible to engage with local people and bring them the usual Healthwatch St Helens service they have come to trust.

Despite to challenges, we believe that 2020 has been a year to be proud of and we look forward to what 2021 brings.”

Jayne Parkinson-Loftus

Healthwatch St Helens Manager

Our Research

COVID-19 - Your Experiences of Accessing Care & Support during the Pandemic.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cheshire & Mersey Healthwatch network felt it was important to understand what people in our local areas were experiencing when trying to access health care for long-term conditions and any other health concerns, not related to the COVID virus.

The Cheshire & Mersey local Healthwatch network includes Cheshire East & West, Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens, Warrington and Wirral. Over the years we've worked on quite a few joint pieces of work.

We would like to thank our colleagues at Healthwatch Liverpool who developed a survey which they shared with the rest of the network, so that what we were asking in the survey was fairly consistent but we could adapt the questions if we needed to.

2573 people completed our survey, making it the most successful piece of research we've carried out, at least as far as numbers are concerned. This told us how much the pandemic was affecting people and how much they wanted a way to express how they were feeling.

We were able to identify a number of themes from what people told us in the survey, ranging from concerns about finances to some people experiencing serious mental health issues. Everyone who gave us their details was contacted by a member of the team and signposted to services that could support them, where appropriate.

Our report was shared with colleagues across St Helens and was taken to the CCG's Governing Body so that the findings could influence the design and delivery of services so they meet local people's needs.

The report is available on our website and paper copies available on request.

Thank you to everyone who completed a survey and shared your experiences with us.

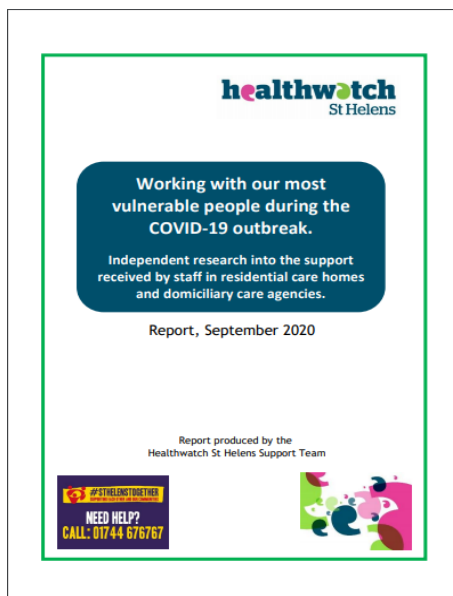


Supporting our most Vulnerable People during COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we felt it was important to understand what people living and working in nursing/care/residential homes and receiving domiciliary care were experiencing.

We knew that our Local Authority Social Care teams were offering a lot of support. In agreement with them, we started some independent research into what the managers and staff of nursing/care/residential homes and domiciliary care agencies felt about that support.

Over a 6 week period, staff from 26 care homes, 13 domiciliary care agencies and 1 Extra Care agency, shared their views and experiences with us.



We found out that the support being provided was good but staff had a few suggestions as to what would have made their jobs easier during the first weeks and months of the COVID situation.

We shared those comments and suggestions with our Social Care colleagues at St Helens Council.

The Local Authority's Quality Monitoring team were able to produce an action plan in response to the findings of our report and what care staff had told us.

We shared the final report with The Care Quality Commission, Healthwatch England, The Quality Monitoring Team, Health Scrutiny Committee, among others.

You can visit our website to view the report and we can provide paper copies on request.

We'd like to thank all of the staff who took time out from their work to share their experiences, views and ideas for improvement with us.

To view all of our reports visit: www.healthwatchsthelens.co.uk

Some figures...

2573

people completed our survey
about accessing treatment and
support during the COVID-19
pandemic

43

people have
had support
from our Independent
Complaints
Advocacy Services

58

people told us about
their experience of
using A&E at
Whiston Hospital

2721

people told us about their
experiences of using health
and social care service in St
Helens

40

providers of residential
and domiciliary care spoke
to us about how the Local
Authority supported them
through the COVID-19
pandemic.

What we had to put on hold

Our work around helping to reduce the rates of suicide in St Helens.

In 2019 we formed a task and finish group to look at the high rates of suicide in St Helens. With the support of Public Health St Helens and St Helens Wellbeing Service, we agreed a piece of work around people who had been bereaved by suicide. We were planning to gather their views on why they think their loved ones took their own lives and what they think might have made a difference.

Our Healthwatch Lead on this piece of work was invited to attend the Community Suicide Prevention Task Group at our local Momo's Café, which offers a safe space for lots of people. The group was set up and chaired by Public Health's Suicide Prevention Lead and is attended by a representative from St Helens Wellbeing Service, whose focus is on suicide prevention and mental health, as well as local support groups for people who might be having suicidal thoughts and feelings.

As this piece of work was highly sensitive, it was arranged that the Healthwatch task and finish group were to receive training on how to handle and carry out conversations around such a sensitive area. This would then be followed by being introduced to some people who were willing to talk to us about their experiences of being bereaved by suicide.

It was at this stage that the situation with COVID-19 happened, and events had to be cancelled. Of course we could not meet face to face, so this piece of work was put on hold. 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.

As soon as it's safe to do so, we'll be picking up this work again and looking for people who will share their experiences with us. Thanks to everyone who has supported us so far and we look forward to working with you again as soon as we are able.

The situation with COVID-19 has had a massive impact on people's mental health, not just in St Helens but everywhere. If you're one of those people, please seek the support you need.

There is lots of help out there. You can visit our website and also Halton & St Helens VCA's website: www.haltonsthelensvca.org.uk.

Enter & View visits.

Part of our remit is to carry out Enter & View visits to residential homes, GP practices and clinics across St Helens. The visits are carried out by a small team of authorised Enter & View representatives, (who have all been trained and had a DBS check), accompanied by a member of our Support Team.

Enter and View visits involve observation and using our senses to gather information and get a 'feel' for the place we're visiting. It also involves talking to residents/patients, family members and friends, as well as staff, and about how they find the service being delivered.

Our Enter & View schedule was one of the first things put on hold when the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic became clear. Due to the face-to-face aspect of the visits we could not carry them out while making sure that we kept patients, residents and our staff and volunteers safe.

Putting the visits on hold was part of the reason we approached our Local Authority about how we could still contribute to assuring the quality of care being delivered in care homes. This is what led to the research into the support being received by care home staff that we told you about a few pages ago.

We decided it wasn't a good idea to try and reach people who live in residential care through Zoom or another digital platform. It would put too much pressure on staff, who are already incredibly busy and might not be appealing to residents who aren't used to this kind of communication or don't feel comfortable with it. Instead, we will be sending out some surveys to residents and their family and friends to tell us what they think of the service being delivered.

Listening events

In the past we held a series of listening events that focused on helping people to understand what services were available to them and when they should use each service. The events went well and we received good feedback.

When the pandemic hit we knew it wasn't possible to continue with the listening events as they had been, so in December 2020 we held our first virtual listening event. It focused on the Urgent Treatment Centre and NHS 111 First. We had some really good presentations, some great conversations, some valuable questions and points made.

Looking forward

Like everyone else, we've had to adapt how we work and we'll be making more changes going forward. Our commitment to you is the same though, that we will listen to your views, signpost you to other organisations that can help you and work with providers and commissioners in our area to help improve health and social care services for everyone who uses them.

Listening events.

We'll be holding more virtual listening events, so look out for them in our newsletter, on Facebook and Twitter and on our website. It's easy to register to join in and we'll even take you through how to use Zoom if you've never used it before.

Volunteering with us.

We'll be looking for more volunteers in the coming months, as we redesign our volunteering opportunities. Volunteering with us doesn't have to take up a lot of your time - you can give as much or as little as you want to.

If you would like to help us to make a difference to services in St Helens, look out for volunteering opportunities in the coming months.

Sharing your experiences with us.

Sharing your views and experiences of using health and social care services in St Helens is really easy. You can email us, call us on the phone or visit our website.

What you tell us can help service providers to understand the needs of local people so they can adapt their service to make them better.

We look forward to hearing from you and continuing to helping to improve health and social care service in St Helens.

Contact us

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Healthwatch St Helens Independent Complaints Advocacy Service.

While we're working from home you can call us on the usual Healthwatch St Helens number or email us at:

advocacy@healthwatchsthelens.co.uk.