



# Annual Report

## 2020-2021

Healthwatch Bexley

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# Message from our Chair

**The last 18 months have been unprecedented. The impact of Covid-19 has been dramatic and terrible, and whilst things are now starting to improve, there is still a long way to go. Healthwatch Bexley have spent the year supporting local services, speaking to local people and representing the public at every opportunity.**

In particular, I have been immensely impressed at how the team has adapted to the changing circumstances, including moving to a completely remote working pattern. Despite this, they have managed to stay in touch with people, carrying out survey after survey on a range of issues, both Covid and non-Covid related. Despite almost all the work needing to be carried out online, they have never forgotten the need to be fully conscious of digital exclusion and have made great efforts to not only seek out the views of local people who are not online, but ensure that service providers and decision makers keep them at the forefront of their minds when necessarily shifting to online service provision.



**"The Healthwatch Bexley Team have worked tirelessly over the last year to make sure digital exclusion is at the forefront of decision makers minds."**

## Achievements

In addition to representing those that may not be online, the team have been instrumental throughout the year in providing detailed and qualitative information on a range of subjects that have been essential to the local Covid Recovery Programme.

They have conducted large surveys and produced a report looking at the impact of Covid on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, with recommendations taken up by local providers.

The team have carried out a huge amount of work looking at people's perception of the pandemic, and in particular, people's attitudes to vaccines and vaccine take up. This work has fed directly into Bexley Public Health and South East London Clinical Commissioning Group's vaccine programme, enabling services and communications to focus their attention on the most vulnerable, and those where extra information, positive role modelling and sometimes just a gentle nudge can have the greatest effect on vaccine take up, helping to protect everyone in the community. As the pandemic eases Healthwatch Bexley will continue to represent patients and the public as we undertake the huge recovery effort needed to maintain and improve health and social care services.

Rikki Garcia



# About us

## Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in the London Borough of Bexley. 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 reached out to local residents by delivering

**40,000**

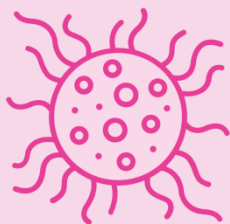
Healthwatch Bexley leaflets.

We provided advice and information to

**2,413**

residents this year.

## Responding to the pandemic



We regularly update our website with information about Covid-19.

**7,392**

people visited our website for information and advice.

**2,524**

people engaged with us through social media.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**10 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

**29 recommendations**

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

## Health and care that works for you



**18 volunteers**

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they helped distribute 40,000 Healthwatch Bexley leaflets throughout the borough.

**We employ 3 staff**

2.4% of whom are full time equivalent, which is a slight increase from the previous year.

We received

**£100,000 in funding**

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



# Covid-19 Vaccination



## Then: views on the Covid-19 vaccination

**Thanks to people sharing their views of the Covid-19 vaccination, we were able to voice any questions and concerns residents had to commissioners and Public Health Bexley, who ensured these were addressed and that Bexley residents had access to simple, clear, up to date information and messages about the Covid-19 vaccination.**

Our report found that out of the 700 people who engaged with us 83% wanted to be vaccinated. Their reasons were to protect themselves or others, get back to normality, out of a sense of duty, because of work or because they believe vaccines work in controlling the spread and effects of disease.

17% were unsure about the vaccine or did not want to be vaccinated. The main reasons included worries about side effects, long term effects, concerns about the speed of vaccine development and a lack of trust of both government and pharmaceutical companies. Others did not believe they were at risk of catching Covid-19 or being seriously ill if they contracted it.

We found that despite many residents wanting to be vaccinated they still had many questions or concerns that needed addressing to increase vaccine confidence. We also identified that certain groups of the population might feel less confident about having the Covid-19 vaccination.



## Now: Covid-19 vaccination

Thanks to residents sharing their views and concerns of the Covid-19 vaccination during the pandemic, frequently asked questions and concerns have been addressed through targeted communication. Engagement has been tailored to the local population and included webinars and virtual meetings to address local concerns and fears which Healthwatch Bexley, local GP's, commissioners and Public Health Bexley have attended.

A Community Champions network to disseminate Covid-19 information was set up. A frequently asked questions document Covid-19 information page was included on the commissioners and local authority websites.

Vaccination rates were found to be lower amongst some Bexley care home workers, we have worked with care homes, commissioners and adult social care to explore the reasons why.

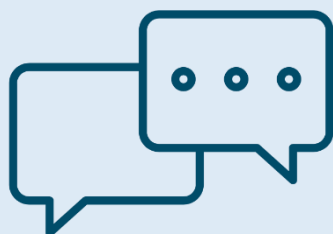
Between January – February 2021, 122 care home workers shared their views about vaccination with us and 63% were happy to be vaccinated. The main fears and concerns of those not wanting to be vaccinated included; fear that fertility may be affected, concerns about vaccine safety, side effects and long-term effects. There was a belief that they were not at risk or could manage the risk by following government guidelines, others wanted to wait and see before committing to be vaccinated.



**"I find it very concerning that several of my own work colleagues have expressed strongly their reluctance to get vaccinated. I find this very worrying as we are working with some of the most clinically vulnerable people in society and these people need protecting" *Care home worker***

We are currently continuing our work with Public Health Bexley and commissioners exploring the reasons why some groups of residents and certain local minority groups do not want to be vaccinated. This includes the homeless, asylum seekers, gypsies and travellers, certain ethnic minority groups and those aged 18-35 years. We regularly join the Bexley "Let's Talk" Covid-19 outreach bus to listen to resident's concerns. This commissioned piece of work will help us gain valuable understanding and insight into the concerns of those who are not confident enough to be vaccinated.

### 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.healthwatchbexley.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk)



0208 304 9344



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



# Digital GP Access



## Then: GP access

**Being able to get an appointment with a GP has been a priority for Healthwatch Bexley since it was first established.**

In 2018, Healthwatch Bexley conducted Enter and View visits to all GP practices in the London Borough of Bexley with the help of our specially trained MENCAP and 'Speaking Up' 'Look and Listen' volunteers. We looked at GP access from two perspectives, those residents with and without a learning disability. At the time, in the previous 6 months, only 15% of the people without a learning disability had used GP online services to book an appointment and only 13% had used online services to order repeat prescriptions.

We recommended that GP access could be improved by promoting online GP services and encouraging patients with digital access to book appointments online. This could help free up the phone lines for those without digital access.

Residents with a learning disability told us adjustments would be needed to help them access the GP such as information in an 'easy read' format, having access to longer appointments and practices making reasonable adjustments to help patients access their appointments.

It was suggested that GP practices should work with the local learning disability team to ensure those with a learning disability had access to a good health check.



## Now: accessing your GP during the pandemic

The arrival of the pandemic changed the way we access many services including GPs, placing even more pressure on phone lines and larger reliance on technology at home. Healthwatch Bexley looked at these issues after noticing increased levels of negative feedback through our online feedback form, residents calling us and through comments on social media.

We engaged with over 185 residents to find out how they were being affected by this rapid move to digital services. We found that 50% of residents with digital access had used eConsult to contact their GP and book appointments. However, many had experienced problems or did not feel confident online, preferring to call and speak to the practice.



**"Since working with Healthwatch Bexley we are really pleased to have received funding and training to help our members get online and join our virtual groups. "**

***-Seniors In Touch Group-***

Residents told us that they needed training and support to help them use digital services such as booking an online GP appointment. As a result of people sharing their experiences, a peer mentoring training programme has been introduced. The programme offers free training for representatives from local organisations, charities and community groups, who once trained, can offer digital support to others in the communities they work in.



**"All stakeholders involved in this event contributed to a fantastic outcome. It was wonderful to see that extended appointments allowed more time for resolving anxieties for patients and their carers"**

***-Sukh Singh Assistant Director of Primary Care Service Delivery-***

Mencap have offered digital support to their members to help them access services. This has included members being supplied with tablets and training on how to use these.

During the pandemic a group of GP practices organised a targeted event for people with a learning disability and their carers. During the event at Queen Mary's Hospital people had the opportunity to asked questions about Covid-19, receive their Covid-19 vaccination and have an annual health check at the same time.



### To find out more



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



[0208 304 9344](tel:02083049344)



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



# Children and Young Peoples Emotional Wellbeing



## Then: children and young people's emotional wellbeing

**Children and young people's emotional wellbeing has been a priority for Healthwatch Bexley since 2017.**

In 2017, we listened to local children and young people about their emotional wellbeing. They told us that they commonly experienced stress, exam pressure and sleep problems, with over half reporting that they sometimes felt anxious or depressed. The report findings highlighted that a significant proportion did not know where to go to for help or who to speak to if they felt anxious or depressed. Only 8% had heard of HeadScape, a one stop source of self-help about a range of mental health issues, designed by young people for young people.

Healthwatch Bexley produced a signposting leaflet for children and young people that listed all services available to them. Over 1,800 children and young people received a copy of the directory, which was also available on our website.

Commissioners advertised HeadScape on bus stop advertising boards to increase awareness of the service. Kooth an online counselling and emotional wellbeing service was commissioned to offer anonymous help for those aged 11-25.



## Now: impact of Covid on young people

We asked young people aged 11-25 about the impact the pandemic has had on their emotional wellbeing, how they were managing and coping. We wanted to find out how they felt the pandemic had affected their education and plans for the future.

We found they were concerned about missing education and how it would affect future employment or university. Many experienced loneliness, fear, anxiety and depression during lockdown but were unsure where to go to get help.



**"For some, Covid-19 has only amplified mental health issues that have been prominent for a prolonged period of time, so the pandemic could be a wakeup call to everyone (schools, parents, young people) to show recognition to struggles related to wellbeing that people have suffered with long before Covid-19. A young person's struggles shouldn't instantly be dismissed due to a tough year."**

To increase awareness of local services, Healthwatch Bexley produced a signposting directory which young people can access via our website. Since our report, a list of resources for children and young people is now available on the commissioners website. Whilst both HeadScape and Kooth have been publicised via the local school's forum.

We are working with the local authority and commissioners who are conducting a review of services available to children and young people. In the summer we will be asking young people about their experiences of using local mental health and emotional wellbeing services so that their views can influence service provision .



**"I wouldn't really know what support I would need or where to find it"**

**"I believe emotional wellbeing services could be improved by actually educating young people on who offers the help and where to go to get it.."**

As a result of children and young people sharing their experiences, we have recognised the ongoing need for services such as Kooth and HeadScape to be promoted both in the community and within schools.



To find out more > > >

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



0208 304 9344



# 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
- We delivered 40,000 leaflets raising the awareness of Healthwatch Bexley
- We provided the answers to frequently asked questions

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



29% on GP services



18% on Blood Tests



12% on Dentistry



10% on Covid-19 information

## Information and signposting



We heard from people about the lack of clear information and often inaccurate information. Our role became much more focused on providing people with clear, consistent and concise advice and information articles on our website to help address people's concerns.

The key questions people were asking included:

- When will I be vaccinated?
- How can I get a GP appointment?
- How can I find an NHS dentist?



### Contact us to get the information you need

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 Bexley is here for you.



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# Volunteers

**At Healthwatch Bexley we are supported by 18 volunteers to help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services.**

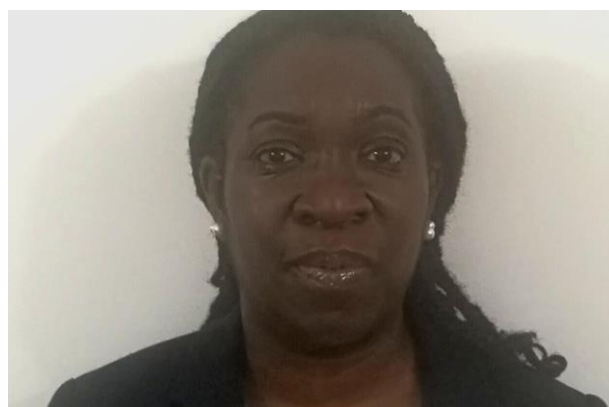
## **This year our volunteers:**

- Helped people have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online.
- Represented us at meetings such as the Patient Experience meetings.
- Delivered 40,000 Healthwatch Bexley leaflets.
- Two of our MENCAP volunteers took part in our 'Looking After Yourself' presentation during the Learning Disability Virtual Big Health Week.
- Promoted our surveys and social media posts.



### Mencap volunteer – Sam

"I have been a volunteer with Healthwatch Bexley for four years. I helped the team this year by talking about my experiences of being a Healthwatch Bexley volunteer at the November 2020 virtual Learning Disability Big Health Week event. The event was aimed at South East London residents with a learning disability providing them with information and advice about physical and mental health and wellbeing. I am looking forward to getting more involved again with the team once Covid-19 restrictions allow.



### Board members - Tope

"I have had the privilege of being part of the advisory board for over 4 years. As an advisory board member, some of the things I do include supporting Healthwatch Bexley with identifying local issues and come up with strategies to deal with the issues. I support with reviewing consultation papers and reports and ensuring that best practice is achieved at all times. I share information from the local residents and get information from Healthwatch Bexley to the local residents allowing for Healthwatch Bexley services to be spread to a wider audience.



### Meetings - Saby

"I started with Healthwatch Bexley about a year ago. My main volunteer role so far has been attending virtual Patient Experience Committee meetings with Lewisham & Greenwich and Dartford & Gravesham NHS trusts, and to share and learn from their experiences. I also represent Healthwatch Bexley at the Healthwatch South East London Patient Experience Group which I find very useful, learning about different approaches to patient engagement. I hope to engage with the patients face to face in future.



### 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 at Healthwatch Bexley.



[www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk/volunteer](http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk/volunteer)



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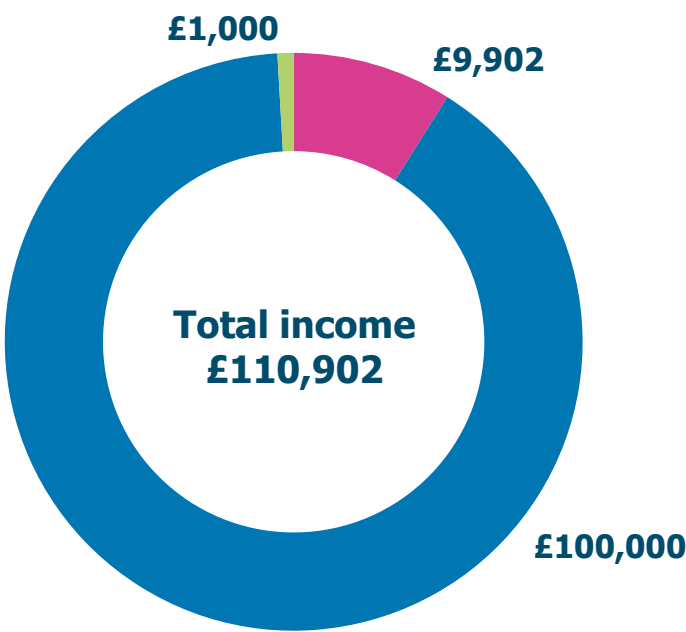
[info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk)

# Finances

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

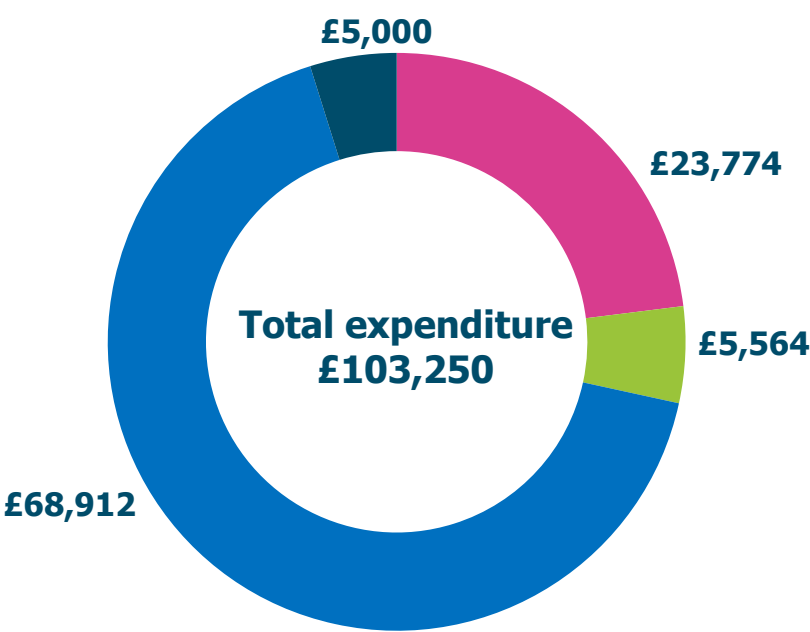
## Income

- Brought Forward from 2019/2020
- Funding received from local authority
- Additional funding



## Expenditure

- Operational costs
- Support and administration
- Staff costs
- Healthwatch Facilitator




# Next steps & thank you

## Top three priorities for 2021-22

1. Increasing awareness of Healthwatch Bexley
2. The impact of Covid-19 on the wider determinants of health/inequalities
3. Mental health

## Next steps

- In the coming year we will continue to work closely with residents, community groups, the local authority and commissioners as we move away from national restrictions and return to the 'new normal.'
- Many of the recommendations we made last year have been actioned. We will continue to ensure that residents voices are heard and continue to shape local Covid-19 recovery plans by working with those who make decisions and commission services locally.
- We are committed to equality and diversity and will continue to work with less heard residents and local minority groups whilst actively seeking to identify new groups to engage with. Exploring the wider determinants of health and inequalities, and how these may have been impacted by Covid-19 is one of our priorities for the year.

 **"Tackling unfair health differences 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, and then to act on what has been learned."**



# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch Bexley, 2A Devonshire Road, Bexleyheath, Kent DA6 8DS is managed by Mind in Bexley, 2A Devonshire Road, Bexleyheath, Kent DA6 8DS, telephone 020 8303 8932, email address [info@mindinbexley.org.uk](mailto:info@mindinbexley.org.uk), Registered Charity No. 1110130, company no. 05393807

Healthwatch Bexley 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 9 members who work 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 2 times and made decisions on matters such as our priorities for 2021/22.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. For example, feedback from residents via social media lead to us working with commissioners and primary care to raise awareness of residents concerns and improve local phlebotomy services.

Following on from our report 'Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing during Covid-19. As part of the commissioners needs assessment and review of children's wellbeing services, we will be asking young people about their experience of using services. The aim of this is to increase awareness of what's available and identify service gaps. Ensuring local young people influence the services that are available to them.

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, 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, delivering 40,000 Healthwatch Bexley leaflets to local residents. We also regularly visited local foodbanks and worked with a Winter Shelter for the homeless.

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, social media and will provide a printed copy for those without digital access. The report is sent to all the partners we work with for distribution amongst their contacts

2020-21 priorities	
Project / activity area	Changes made to services
Mental Health	A review of children and young people's services is being carried out and action plan expected in September2021. Children and young people's services have been promoted via the local school's forum. The Mind in Bexley Wellbeing Line received funding to continue provision of the service.
Impact of Covid-19	Resident's feedback helped shape local communication and engagement, addressing frequently asked questions and concerns particularly around vaccination. We have been commissioned by Public Health Bexley to conduct deep dives into the views of residents who are less confident in the Covid-19 vaccination.
Digital inclusion	Based on resident's comments, a digital champions scheme was commissioned to train peer mentors to support residents get online or build confidence in using digital platforms

Responses to recommendations and requests

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 Bexley is represented on the London Borough of Bexley Health and Wellbeing Board by Rikki Garcia our Advisory Board Chair. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by virtually attending meetings to represent the local voice .



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