healthwatch Cheshire East

On equal terms

Healthwatch Cheshire East

Annual Report 2020-21

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Front Cover: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff delivering books donated by our volunteers to Eden Mansions Care Home, Styal

Message from our Chair and CEO

We are delighted to present to you our Annual Report for 2020/21. It has been a strange year but one in which we are very proud of our team of staff and volunteers.

Top: Lynne Turnbull, Chair, and; Bottom: Louise Barry, CEO – Healthwatch Cheshire CIC

We would like to both acknowledge and thank the staff and volunteers from all of our partners across health, care and the community for their incredible commitment and hard work during this period. Healthwatch staff and volunteers have seen and heard many of the challenges that have faced people as a result of Covid-19. We have also seen, or been a part of, the flexible and rapid approaches put in place to deliver support to those most in need, and to provide effective planning and communication.

Circumstances this year have of course forced us to work differently; remotely and unable in large parts to engage with our communities face-to-face. Despite these challenges, the team has stepped up and enabled us not just to be a part of the local effort in response to COVID-19, but also to continue having the continuous conversations with people in places that we always have. It is this that has made sure we have continued to put the views and experiences of the people of Cheshire at the heart of the decision-making of health and care providers and commissioners.

This year, we have received 2,430 responses from people across Cheshire to our COVID-19 survey, resulting in around 9,000 comments about access to health and care, and people's mental health and wellbeing. Having been presented at the Cheshire East Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the NHS Cheshire CCG Quality and Safeguarding Committee, the reports have been vital in assisting the pandemic response locally and strategically in informing future commissioning intentions to provide joined-up care for people as close to home as possible.

With the pandemic leaving us unable to conduct our regular Enter and View activity, we have conducted surveys for residents of care homes and their friends and relatives, with some heart-warming responses about some of the great care and effort staff are going to during the pandemic. It has been a pleasure this year to follow up our work from previous years with the Boating community, and help them to obtain GP Access Cards to register with GP Practices and access COVID-19 vaccines.

Members of our team have supported at vaccination centres during the rollout, including talking to people about their experience, taking temperatures, and directing people around the centres. We have helped to promote and provide information to people about the vaccination programme, and have been feeding people's experiences and our observations into Cheshire's Vaccination Steering Group and Communications Cell to enable the programme's continued development and to help in the messaging to encourage people to get their vaccines. Our work has included asking our Citizens Focus Panel about their views and experiences of the vaccine programme.

As well as making sure people's views are heard during this changed time, our team have also been involved in supporting people in our community during the pandemic. Staff and volunteer time has been offered to help with shopping and prescription collections for people shielding, whilst our amazing volunteers have donated books and twiddle muffs to care home residents.

We hope that you enjoy reading more about all of our work in this Annual Report, and that you will share in our pride at what our team has achieved this year. We would like to thank our team of staff and volunteers for their dedicated work, and everyone that has worked with us this year to make sure that people's voices continue to be heard.

Many thanks

Lynne Turnbull, Chair **Louise Barry, Chief Executive**

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

Cheshire East Council

Cheshire East Council is very pleased to be able to comment on this year's Healthwatch annual report. The local Healthwatch is designed to hear views of the people and their needs and experiences of local health and social care services. Their work in collaboration with our commissioning and operational teams has helped to scrutinise services in order that positive outcomes are delivered for our population.

Despite a very challenging year with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Healthwatch have been outstanding and ensured that individuals voices have been heard on a number of significant issues and developments such as access to services during COVID, impacts that COVID has had on communities and most importantly keeping the resident voice at the centre of health and social care integration.

Healthwatch provides excellent insight and knowledge to enable us to achieve better outcomes for the residents of Cheshire East."

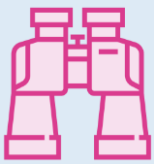
Nichola Thompson - Director of Commissioning/People Directorate, Cheshire East Council

Dr Matt Tyrer - Director of Public Health, Cheshire East Council

Healthwatch has continued to be a supportive but critical friend of the CCG and has proven to be an invaluable partner over the last year as the local and national system responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The insight and intelligence provided by Healthwatch around the public experience of health and social care services during this time and access to local COVID-19 services have helped shape and guide our response. The support provided to engage directly with our underserved communities has also been critical in the push to vaccinate these communities. As the local system progresses in implementing the changes resulting from the NHS white paper, and as local NHS services reset and recover, the continued support and involvement from Healthwatch will be crucial in communicating these changes to the public and other stakeholders."

Clare Watson - Accountable Officer, NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group

About us



Our vision at Healthwatch Cheshire is simple

To be an independent voice for the people of Cheshire, helping to shape and improve local health and care services.

Our principles

Healthwatch Cheshire:

- independently collects the voice of the people of Cheshire about their health and care experiences
- uses its networks and public engagement to gather meaningful and robust local evidence and intelligence, working in partnership across all sectors of health and care
- challenges and informs providers and commissioners to influence key decision making in health and care
- sets the standard for excellent public engagement, enabling diverse and seldom heard voices from across Cheshire to be heard
- ensures that all people have good quality, up to date information and advice
- provides a range of ways to gather the experience of people of Cheshire
- provides an NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) supporting people to raise their concerns and complaints.

Find out more about us and the work we do

Website: www.healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk

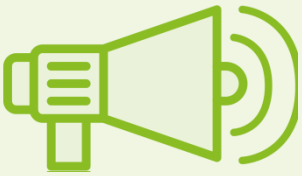
Twitter: @HealthwatchCE

Facebook: @HealthwatchCE

Highlights from our year

Find out about our resources and how we have engaged and supported people in 2020-21.

Reaching out

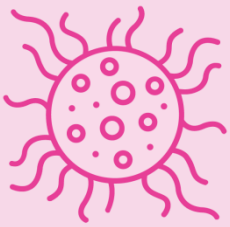


We heard from

1,913 people

this year about their experiences of health, social care and wellbeing.

Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with, supported, and provided advice and information to:

22,988 people

online, on social media, by email, over the telephone, and face-to-face during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

We supported the COVID-19 vaccination process at:

3 vaccination centres across 13 days

Making a difference to care

We published

28 reports

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

Health and care that works for you

43 volunteers

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they contributed 477 hours.

We employ 6 staff

who work a variety of full time and part time hours, which is a 15% decrease from the previous year.

We received

£167,997 in funding

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

Top four areas that people have contacted us about:

32% on GP services

15% on Hospital care

14% on Dentistry

5% on Vaccines

Clear and reliable information during COVID-19

Early in the pandemic, we heard from people about a lack of clear information, and so we focused on providing people with clear, consistent and concise advice and information to address concerns. We created a dedicated section on our website to provide all of the local and national information about Coronavirus, in one place, as a reliable source. Visits to our website have more than doubled this year.

To view the latest updates, visit:

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/coronavirus

We have been working in partnership with the communications teams at each Hospital and Community Trust, Cheshire CCG, and Local Authorities who provide us with the latest updates from their organisations. Our website is seen as a place where all partners can feed in information they wish to share, including the latest updates on the COVID-19 vaccination programme across Cheshire.

"I mentioned it on the last system call, but just wanted to say thanks to you and your team for pulling together the central coronavirus web page – it looks great, and we've been promoting it on our social media channels, as well as in staff briefings."

Jonathan Forrester – Communications Manager, Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health or 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.healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk

0300 323 0006

info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

Responding to COVID-19

Your Health, Care and Wellbeing During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

Since the beginning of May 2020 up until 23 March 2021, we have been asking Cheshire residents to tell us about their personal experiences during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. People shared their views and concerns on a wide range of topics, including health, care, mental health, wellbeing, and wider concerns both now and for the future.

Across Cheshire, **2,430 people responded** to our survey (1,077 from Cheshire East), which equates to **over 9,000 individual comments**. We have published several sets of reports based upon these findings, including the period of May to October 2020, and a follow-up set of reports from October 2020 to March 2021. Reports during each period included overarching summaries based upon findings across the whole of Cheshire East, as well as a further 8 separate reports for each of the Care Community areas in Cheshire East, allowing Care Communities to better understand the views and needs of their local population.

The findings of this survey have helped to provide up to date information to partners including Local Authorities, NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Hospital Trusts, voluntary sector organisations, the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England. Having been presented at the Cheshire East Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the NHS Cheshire CCG Quality and Safeguarding Committee, the reports have been widely used in assisting the pandemic response locally and in informing future commissioning intentions to provide joined-up care for people as close to home as possible.

You can read our reports on our website:

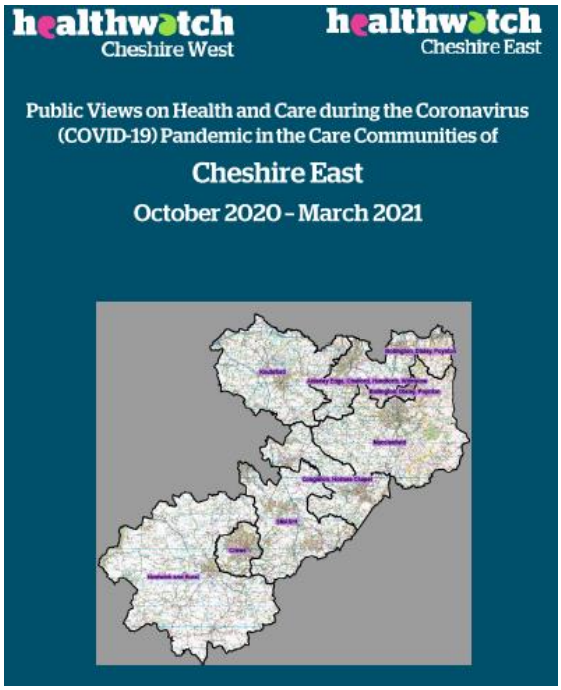
healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

> ***Absolutely amazing – coverage, impact … The value, richness, sheer breadth and depth of your and your team's remit – phenomenal."***
>
> **Claire Heaney – PMO Programme Director, Cheshire East Partnership**

Above: Healthwatch Cheshire supporting the COVID-19 vaccination rollout across Cheshire

Findings from our survey have included:

- Satisfaction with services, but not preferable to business as usual.
- People haven't felt comfortable making appointments, or with a perceived overburdening of the NHS. However, there were some signs that people are beginning to feel comfortable accessing healthcare again as time progressed.
- The majority of people reported being happy to have GP video/telephone appointments dependent on the concern, but there is still strong sentiment that face-to-face appointments are beneficial.
- Issues with prescriptions and medication, particularly with the repeat prescription process, occurred throughout the pandemic, but as time went on these became far less common.
- COVID-19 vaccinations – there has been positive sentiment regarding the process, and we initially received many queries about access.
- People's top future concerns include: the observance of social distancing, and the mental and physical health of themselves and others.



Left: Tweets from Dr Jonathan Griffiths, local GP and Primary Care Advisor at Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership

"What a great piece of work the Care Communities reports are... we want to make sure that the positives and lessons are learned far and wide, and particularly the positive messages about the vaccine rollout. The messages about hesitancy to use the NHS are also pertinent to us at the moment."

Anna Collins – SRO Communication and Engagement (COVID Vaccination Programme), NHS Cheshire CCG

Supporting our local communities during COVID-19

Signposting and handling telephone and email queries

Members of staff have been responding to telephone and online queries from members of the public requiring information or support. This has enabled us to obtain feedback from the public and also to signpost. Besides regular calls from ICAS clients we have received a number of queries from local residents. Notably, the majority stem from the pandemic, queries around the vaccination programme, access to dentistry, and social isolation. Over the Christmas period we also assisted in helping our local health and care partners to deal with any queries around the vaccination process.

Continuing conversations with people in places

Working within social distancing guidelines, we have continued to engage with groups and organisations that we had previously, to maintain our conversations with people about their views and experiences of health and care, both online, via Zoom, and when possible, in person. These groups and organisations include: Cheshire College South and West, Reaseheath College, Space4Autism, YMCA Crewe, Motherwell, Stapeley Coffee Club, and Cheshire East Carers Hub, amongst others.

Above: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff at Motherwell CIC, Wistaston – 31 March 2021

Providing support to our local communities

Healthwatch Cheshire East have been supporting the local community by being a part of the NHS, Local Authority, Community and Voluntary Response Cells, feeding back intelligence regularly in online meetings. We have offered some of our staff and volunteer time to help the most vulnerable in Cheshire by taking part in Cheshire East's People Helping People scheme. 8 members of our staff and volunteer team gave 305 hours, completing 338 tasks such as shopping and prescription collections, support phone calls and door-step chats. Feedback from people we supported includes:

"The scheme has literally saved my life. I am at high risk of the coronavirus and had no one else who could help. I would have had to go out and risk my health to shop if I hadn't had this support."

"I am very grateful for the help. I was worried how I was going to manage but feel reassured that I will now have the food and essentials that I need to get by."

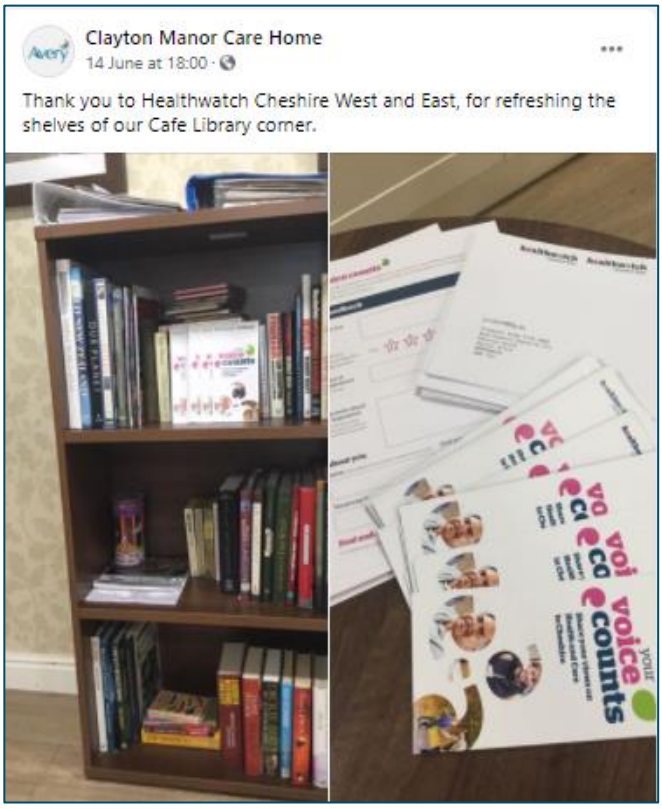
Above: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff helping with shopping deliveries for vulnerable people during COVID-19

You can read our full report on our Community Response in Cheshire East during the pandemic on our website: healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Above: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff delivering books to a Care Home

Donating books, twiddle muffs, and tablet devices to Care Homes

Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West volunteers donated over 500 books to Care Homes across Cheshire to re-stock their libraries following the COVID-19 pandemic, providing residents with a good book to read during a time when visiting and outside trips have been restricted. A volunteer also provided twiddle muffs - knitted activity muffs which provide tactile stimulation for people with dementia - for residents, and we let Care Home residents borrow our Healthwatch tablet devices for the course of lockdown, to enable them to remain connected with loved ones.



Above: Facebook posts from Care Homes that received books from Healthwatch Cheshire East

Just wanted to drop you an email and say 'thank you' for sourcing and letting us borrow the iPads for our residents to use at Telford Court. At this difficult time where sadly loved ones are unable to visit the home these iPads will be invaluable in enabling residents to maintain contact with their families which is so important for their wellbeing".

Manager – Telford Court Care Home, Crewe

Supporting Cheshire's COVID-19 vaccination programme

Supporting at vaccination centres

Healthwatch Cheshire East are proud to have been hearing the views and experiences of people and supporting staff and volunteers across Cheshire at a variety of COVID-19 vaccination clinics.

With 3 vaccination centres attended over 13 days in Crewe and Macclesfield, Healthwatch staff have seen first-hand just how much hard work, coordination, and teamwork it takes to set up the clinics at short notice and to provide vaccinations to thousands of local people in a professional, socially distanced, and efficient manner. During these sessions, Healthwatch staff chatted to people about their experience, helped to guide people at entrances and exits and around the centre, took people's temperatures, supported volunteers and staff with refreshments, undertook administration work, and assisted at observation areas. Our work was appreciated by staff and members of the public at the vaccination centres, and helped support a vital initiative as health and care resources were diverted towards the vaccination programme in Cheshire.

Alison, Healthwatch Community Engagement and Project Officer, recounted her experience of supporting the programme:

It was lovely to be able to chat to local people and to hear so much positivity about their experiences, including praise for staff and volunteers who were kind and helpful, and for the efficiency of the clinics. One gentleman explained that he had been nervous about attending because of a fear of needles but that he hadn't needed to worry as staff were reassuring and gentle and that it was so quick that he hardly felt a thing. Another resident said it was the first time they had been out for nearly a year and that they were really excited to be receiving the vaccination as it felt like a positive step forward and a light at the end of the tunnel."

Above: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff at Waters Green Medical Centre vaccination centre, Macclesfield – 29 January 2021

Providing people with the information they need

Healthwatch Cheshire East continue to be part of the Cheshire-wide Communications Cell including health and care partners in response to COVID-19. We have continued to provide the latest updates about the vaccination programme on our website and social media, as well as reporting back to our health and care partners on people's experiences and queries about the vaccination. We have supported many members of the public with their queries around access to the vaccination.

Find out more about the COVID-19 vaccination programme

If you have a query about the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Cheshire, you can find out more by contacting us:

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccinations

0300 323 0006

info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

Supporting Cheshire's COVID-19 vaccination programme

Focus group on fertility concerns around the COVID-19 vaccine

Anecdotally, Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West were hearing that there could be an issue amongst young women in regard to getting the COVID-19 vaccination due to concerns about how it may affect fertility. In partnership with NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), we hosted a focus group to have an informal conversation with young women about their views and the views of their wider social circle on the vaccine, potential concerns, and what they think about messaging and effective sources of information. This outline of the discussions was shared with communications colleagues in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils, NHS Cheshire CCG, and local hospital trusts, in order to influence communications messages around encouraging vaccine uptake amongst this cohort of people.

Our participants reported that any concerns or uncertainties that they had were allayed by the Cheshire GP who took part in the focus group with us, who was able to explain some of the myths that had been surfacing around the vaccine. As a result of the feedback of our participants, NHS Cheshire CCG produced a short video with the GP explaining myths, which has been used as part of the local communications to this cohort during the vaccine rollout.

Thank you so much for the information from the Focus Group. It is really interesting, fears about fertility are completely understandable and it is good to know that the women attending the group were reassured by accurate information particularly from the GP. It is difficult sometimes to compete with social media when so many negative messages and misinformation is out there."

Cllr Laura Jeuda – Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Cheshire East Council

You can read a summary of our focus group on fertility concerns around the COVID-19 vaccine on our website:

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Above left: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff preparing the delivery of care home questionnaires; and Above right: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff collecting care home questionnaires from a care home

Experiences of Care Homes during the pandemic

Due to the pandemic and guidance around social distancing, we have been unable to conduct our regular statutory Enter and View activity since March 2020, which serves to provide much of our intelligence around care homes and is a valuable resource both for commissioners and members of the public. Being unable to visit care homes and experience them first-hand during this period means that our ability to gain the views and experiences of those who use these services has been reduced. In response to this, we co-designed two questionnaires with input from care home staff, commissioners, and relatives of people living in care homes.

The first of these questionnaires was aimed at people who live in care homes, and the second aimed at friends and relatives of people living in care homes, in order to listen to what people think of the care they have received during the pandemic. In designing these questionnaires we received input from relatives of care home residents and family members, NHS Cheshire CCG and Local Authority commissioners and Care Home managers.

This is an approach that allowed us to hear what people have to say in a non-intrusive manner without having to physically visit care homes, therefore protecting residents during the pandemic. In November, with the appropriate PPE, we hand-delivered over 6,000 paper copies of surveys to 138 care homes across Cheshire, and completed versions were collected by Healthwatch Cheshire staff. These included links to online versions of the questionnaires, which Care Homes were asked to share with residents and their friends and relatives.

In total, we received 829 responses to our surveys relating to 102 care homes across Cheshire (457 responses relating to 57 Care Homes in Cheshire East), and would like to thank the care homes for their support in helping us to receive so many responses.

Each care home will receive their individual reports, and reports will also be grouped by Care Community and shared with the Integrated Care Partnership, Local Authority commissioners, Care Community leads, NHS CCG, voluntary and community organisations, and published on our website.

Findings from our questionnaires have included:

- Staff going above and beyond for residents, with praise for their dedication and adaptability.
- People kept informed of changes to guidance or visiting.
- People finding it difficult not having visits from friends and family.
- People have been able to have access to devices e.g. phones/tablets to maintain contact with family and friends.
- Challenges for staff, including visiting restrictions, staff testing, sickness, and COVID-19 outbreaks.

Above: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff collecting care home questionnaires from Telford Court Care Home, Crewe

Our reports on the experiences of residents and friends and relatives of care homes will be published on our website:

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Virtual Enter and View Visit

As part of our scrutiny function, we have the power to Enter and View services. This means that our Authorised Representatives have the right to enter certain types of health and social care premises to observe the nature and quality of services, and to comment on what is being done well and what could be done better. We then produce reports which we share with the people who have the power to make changes to services. Due to the pandemic and guidance around social distancing, we have been unable to conduct our regular statutory Enter and View activity since March 2020.

In November, we trialled our first ever virtual Enter and View visit. The visit was conducted via 'Zoom' using a handheld device belonging to the Care Home Manager. This allowed her to move around the home, and introduce residents and staff to the two Authorised Representatives who both asked questions of staff and residents and took notes. The purpose of this visit was to independently hear from the residents about the effects of the pandemic and to gain an understanding of how the home is currently operating during the pandemic.

We recognise there are limitations with this approach, so as soon as it is safe to do so, we will be continuing our regular Enter and View activity, physically visiting health and care services across Cheshire.

Find out more about our regular Enter and View activity:

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/enter-and-view

0300 323 0006

info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

Above: Healthwatch Cheshire East staff visiting boaters at Bollington Wharf

Helping Boaters register for GP services and get their COVID-19 vaccine

Healthwatch Cheshire have been working in partnership with the Waterways Chaplaincy to raise awareness of the new GP Access Cards and to discuss the COVID-19 vaccine with the Boating Community across Cheshire.

During March 2021, Healthwatch Cheshire visited 45 marinas, designated moorings, canals, towns and villages on foot across Cheshire and Warrington and Halton, talking to 89 members of the boating community and marina staff to offer support, advice and guidance on a variety of subjects. This has included talking to Boaters about how they can register with a GP Practice, how this can help people to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, and about the vaccination programme taking place throughout Cheshire. A report looking at our activity and feedback from Boaters has been published on our website.

GP Access Cards are a national initiative which allow people to register with a GP Practice without having to provide proof of address, something that Healthwatch Cheshire found during previous work with the community, can be an issue for boaters, who often travel from place to place on the canals. Healthwatch Cheshire are acting as a hosting organisation for the cards, and will ensure that Boaters who would like a card can access one.

> *This work enables comprehensive coverage of the network that will give boaters the confidence to register at any surgery, despite being miles from home or without the luxury of having a home surgery."*
>
> **Martin Buck, North West Waterways Chaplaincy**

Acting upon Boaters' feedback

Healthwatch Cheshire has previously worked with the Boating Community to produce reports on the issues affecting Boaters when accessing health and care, published in March 2018 and March 2019. Findings included mixed experiences; some Boaters receiving good support from GPs with no issues registering at Practices, whilst others experienced difficulties in registering at certain GP Practices due to postcode issues. The Boaters we spoke to recommended that signage at key points along the canals indicating local services and how to access them, leaflets and online information regarding emergency numbers, local GP Practices that will accept Boaters as patients, and other support information, would be useful to them.

The work with the Boating Community in March 2021 represents us acting upon these issues raised previously by helping Boaters to access primary care and signposting information.

This engagement took place as part of work with NHS Cheshire CCG, Cheshire East Council and Cheshire West and Chester Council, Healthwatch Halton and Healthwatch Warrington, and voluntary and community organisations to ensure that people know how they can access their vaccine.

We displayed posters explaining the GP Access Cards and Boaters' rights to GP access on Canal and River Trust noticeboards along the canal system and in marinas and canal-side shops. With permission from the group administrator, we also posted information about the GP Access Cards in the Cheshire Boaters' Facebook Group, reaching 662 members. An article on our work with the Boating Community was also published in the news publication 'Towpath Talk':

www.towpathtalk.co.uk/raising-awareness-of-boaters-rights-to-doctors-surgeries-and-covid-jabs

Find out more about obtaining a GP Access Card:

www.healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk
0300 323 0006
info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

Case Study: Supporting a Boater to access a COVID-19 vaccination

Our work with the Boating Community in Cheshire led Healthwatch Cheshire to be approached by NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to assist a Boater based in Cheshire with no permanent address to access a COVID-19 vaccination.

The CCG had originally been approached by a relative of the Boater. The Boater, who has mental health issues, had received a text message from his GP Practice 100 miles away to say that he was eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine due to his medical issues. Healthwatch Cheshire telephoned the relative, who was really grateful to finally hear from someone. The relative told us that he had spoken to the receptionist at a local GP Practice who said they would call him back. As it had initially appeared that the issue had been resolved, Healthwatch Cheshire asked him to call us back if the GP Practice didn't get in touch.

The following day he called us back to say his call had yet to be returned. Healthwatch Cheshire called the GP Practice and asked to speak to the Practice Manager, and were told by the receptionist that she would call us back. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Healthwatch Cheshire therefore contacted another GP Practice in the area, where a receptionist arranged a date and a time for the Boater to receive his vaccination.

Healthwatch Cheshire informed the individual's relative and they were very happy and grateful. A few days later he called us again to let us know that the Boater had been given his vaccine.

We documented our journey around Cheshire's canals on Twitter:

twitter.com/HealthwatchCE

Our report on our work with the Boating community is available to read on our website:

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Access to Dentistry

Since June 2020, Healthwatch Cheshire East has received increasing numbers of calls asking for details of local dental practices taking on new NHS patients, as well as other issues being encountered. This year, we compiled the feedback received into a report, outlining the issues being raised, including:

- Details of dental practices taking on new NHS patients on the NHS website is often out of date, meaning that people needing treatment are forced to phone around individual practices to enquire about registering.
- People who have been put in touch with an emergency dentist, perhaps via the Cheshire and Merseyside Emergency Dental Helpline, and the issue has been patched up rather than resolved, unless they pay for private treatment.
- People finding accessing a dentist difficult; including people registering with dentists in other counties, some are offered appointments in several months' time, some are told there is no waiting list and to keep calling back.
- Occurrences where the Cheshire & Merseyside Emergency Dental Helpline is unable to provide assistance for people.
- Confusion around registration and people being unable to get an appointment due to a recent lack of attendance.

Using people's feedback to make changes

We share all comments and feedback with the individual dental providers, and also NHS E&I who commission dentistry services. We have started to hold regular meetings with the NHS E&I Dentistry team in the North West, to raise the concerns shared with us by the public, including this report. NHS E&I are fully aware of the concerns, and have explained the circumstances as to why some of them occur, helping us to better understand the system. They are currently working towards resolving these issues and we will continue to work together using regular meetings to raise concerns and provide feedback.

You can read our report on the issues raised by people in regard to dentistry on our website:
healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Integration Index – Measuring Joined-up Care

Healthwatch Cheshire East were one of five local Healthwatch asked by Healthwatch England and NHS England to undertake a project to establish a methodology for measuring how well health and care services work together. Building on our work on the NHS Long Term Plan in 2019, this methodology will inform the Integration Index, which will enable health and care systems to assess how well they are doing at providing joined up care. Work around the Integration Index will form part of the development of accountability and performance frameworks as we move towards Integrated Care Systems (ICS), including in Cheshire and Merseyside.

To undertake this work, we were asked by Healthwatch England to talk to a small number of people with learning disabilities and their families and carers with a recent experience of hospital discharge, to find out their experience of how well services are working alongside each other.

We gathered data and policies held locally by health and care services such as the local authority, NHS Cheshire CCG, hospital trusts, and Cheshire and Wirral Partnership. Alongside this, we held conversations with individuals within each organisation who are involved in the hospital experience of a person with learning disabilities and their subsequent discharge. This enabled us to start to build a picture of the experience and standard of care that somebody should expect upon being discharged from hospital.

Following this, we held one-to-one interviews, which due to social distancing restrictions had to take place over telephone and video call, with five people from Cheshire East who have a learning disability and an experience of hospital admission within the last three years and/or their carers. Each individual and/or their carer was able to tell us about their own particular story and experience, which we were then able to compare to the experience and standard of care that should be expected based on our reading of the policies and conversations with health and care professionals.

Our approach has provided key information from people to inform the Integration Index, and will combine alongside work undertaken by The King's Fund and NHSE&I. The information that individuals who took part in our interviews shared with us, and our conclusions, will also be shared with consent with local health and care services and commissioners in the coming year. This is so that the experiences of people with learning disabilities can help to improve services and processes in the future.

All of our reports can be viewed on our website:

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Healthwatch Cheshire Citizens Focus Panel

Throughout the past year, we have been developing our Citizens Focus Panel, which enables us to get feedback on a range of topics from Cheshire residents on a regular basis.

To complement our regular engagement activities, we send out short online surveys, which volunteers can complete on their computer, tablet or phone to have their say on local NHS and care services. We report back on what our panel has told us and how this is being fed in to those who provide and commission services to help improve the future experiences of people. The timely nature of these reports on topical issues ensures that the feedback of our Citizens Focus Panel is relevant to local health and care decision makers.

We currently have 108 members of our Citizens Focus Panel across Cheshire, and are always on the lookout for new recruits. For more information on how you can get involved, please visit: healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/get-involved/citizens-focus-panel

Over the page are summaries of the surveys and reports conducted during the past year. You can read all of these reports in full on our website: healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Thanks so much for this [COVID-19 vaccinations Citizens Focus Panel report]. There is some really useful insight which we will share internally and for communications activity."

Jodie D'Enrico – Head of Communications, Marketing and Public Engagement, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Flu vaccinations

Flu jabs are an important way to keep well and reduce pressure on the NHS. It was our aim to understand more about our panel members' experiences of getting a Flu jab in their local area. Although arrangements for receiving a Flu vaccination were a little different due to the ongoing pandemic, people reported feeling safe throughout the process. Many preferred to receive jabs at their local GP, but were open to accessing their vaccination through a local pharmacy or community venue. There was a general consensus that people felt positive about their experience of receiving a Flu jab.

GP and Pharmacy access

During the COVID-19 pandemic it's been more vital than ever that people have local primary care services that work for them, their friends and family. That's why we listened to experiences of using local pharmacies and GP Practices during this time.

Most people didn't feel any differently about accessing services. However, a considerable number told us they didn't want to overburden them. Despite concerns, many contacted their GP, albeit with some increased difficulty. Some people attended in person, but most took advantage of video and telephone appointments. Queues outside pharmacies, often in adverse weather conditions, were common. People accepted the need for such measures, and felt safe accessing services, despite difficult circumstances. Having current and timely information from residents of Cheshire helped to give greater understanding of people's experiences to those planning the delivery of services during the pandemic.

Views on COVID-19 vaccinations

COVID-19 vaccinations in Cheshire began in late December 2020 and early January 2021. By the time of our survey, many people had received their first vaccine, or knew someone who had. There was still a large number of people that needed to receive theirs – so we collected people's experiences so far.

All respondents who had received a vaccine commented on how well organised and efficient the process was, especially the helpful and considerate nature of staff at vaccination sites. Most people told us they felt they had received enough information to make an informed decision about receiving a vaccine. We were told that communication could be improved, particularly with regard to logistical arrangements and what to expect when receiving a vaccine. In most cases, respondents felt prepared to receive the vaccine, with the right information to hand, or would recommend the vaccine to family and friends.

This feedback was used by NHS Cheshire CCG, Hospital Trusts, and Local Authorities to help ensure that the vaccine was rolled out smoothly as the programme continued. This was particularly crucial coming in the early stages of the vaccine programme, so that health and care partners could find out what was going well and what could be improved.

Join our Citizens Focus Panel

Do you have 5-10 minutes at home, on a coffee break or even on your commute, to have your say on your local NHS and care services? Share your views and experiences is by being a member of our Citizens Focus Panel.

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/get-involved/citizens-focus-panel

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info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS)

Supporting people in Cheshire East through the NHS complaints process

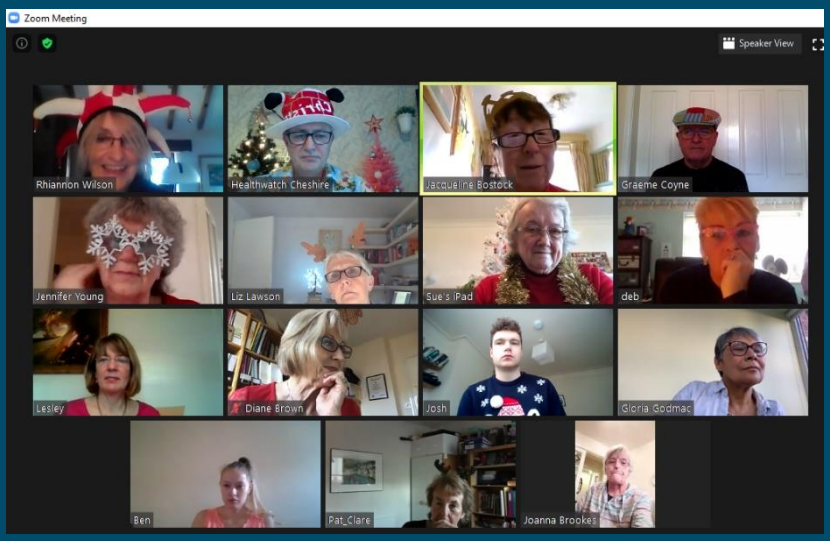
Healthwatch Cheshire provides an NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS). ICAS helps people to understand how the NHS complaints process works, and to support them where needed.

ICAS offers telephone, online, and face-to-face support to help the people of Cheshire to progress complaints in relation to any NHS service provision provided at hospitals, GP Practices, dentists, pharmacies, opticians, and nursing homes.

- 117 people from Cheshire East contacted ICAS for support during the year; an 11% increase on the previous year.
- ICAS had a direct impact on 104 residents with NHS complaints, including providing information to progress their complaint themselves, and signposting to other organisations.
- 14 of these people required further in-depth support from our ICAS Advocate to help them navigate the full complex complaints process.
- This year saw a decrease in complaints relating to hospitals and mental health services compared to the previous year.
- There has been a 50% increase in complaints relating to GP Practices in Cheshire East this year. Physically seeing a GP was an area for concern for some people contacting ICAS due to them feeling that their issue required a physical examination, rather than a telephone or video appointment.
- We have seen a large increase in complaints relating to dentistry this year. Many were concerned with finding an NHS dentist to complete their treatment after only being offered this on a private basis.

The comment below is from a Cheshire East resident who was assisted by ICAS in writing a letter of complaint regarding concerns over hospital treatment, resulting in positive meetings with specialists to discuss ongoing treatment:

"We made a lot of progress with your help, thank you. We feel that they took more notice of our complaint because of Healthwatch."



Left: Healthwatch Cheshire East volunteers on a Christmas celebration on Zoom

Volunteers

At Healthwatch Cheshire East we are supported by 43 volunteers who help us find out what people think is working, and what improvements people would like to make to services. During the Covid-19 pandemic, volunteer recruitment remained healthy. Undeniably, volunteers were a crucial source of feedback early on in lockdown and proved to be vital to our understanding of pharmacy and dental issues amongst others; this increased the development of our Citizens' Focus Panel.

This year our volunteers contributed 477 hours by:

- Helping with the local volunteering efforts of shopping and collecting prescriptions for those self-isolating or shielding.
- Assisting with Equality and Diversity Assessments at Cheshire & Wirral Partnership and Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.
- Compiling responses to over 100 Care Home Survey reports.
- Contributing to Cheshire Chat meetings, a Cheshire East Falls Project and Covid-19 Vaccination feedback sessions for NHS Cheshire CCG.
- Donating books, twiddle muffs and tablet devices to local care homes.

Whilst training was limited during much of the year, many of our volunteers updated their knowledge via e-learning on subjects such as: Mental Health awareness, Equality and Diversity, Suicide awareness, Psychological First Aid during COVID-19, Human Rights, Safeguarding, Disability awareness, Domestic Violence and Mental Health in Adolescence.

Our Volunteer Co-ordinator engaged with the volunteers on a daily 'keep in touch' basis using emails, phone calls, socially distanced visits, zoom quizzes, joke of the day and by sharing inspiring photographs to assist wellbeing.

"It would be very remiss of me not to mention Dave straight away as he is doing a fantastic job communicating with the volunteers. His daily email is a light hearted ray of sunshine in these very strange times *and widely enjoyed."*

Erica – Healthwatch Cheshire East volunteer and Board member

Bringing Lived Experience to NHS and Local Authority Working Groups to Improve Services

Volunteers contributed to a Task and Finish Group looking at the environmental impact of inhalers in Cheshire and Merseyside; looking at improving the carbon footprint and disposal costs of these devices.

In an ongoing Lived Experience Expert Advisors programme, our volunteers assisted NHS England & Improvement by sharing their mental health experiences to influence and shape services in line with the NHS Long Term Plan.

Our volunteers were invited to assist local NHS Trusts Cheshire & Wirral Partnership and Mid Cheshire NHS Trusts in their Equality Delivery System (EDS) decision making processes, helping to evaluate equality and progress in the services these Trusts provide to local communities and in creating workplaces free from discrimination.

Supporting our Care Homes

Realising early on during the pandemic that residents of Care homes would be severely affected by the lockdown, the Healthwatch team volunteered to lend tablet devices to homes to ensure that residents could keep in touch with their loved ones. One of our volunteers provided twiddle muffs - knitted activity muffs which provide tactile stimulation for people with dementia – which we distributed to homes across Cheshire. Recognising that care home libraries were depleted, our volunteers also donated over 500 books which were delivered to various care homes for the enjoyment of residents and staff.

Thank you so much for the kind delivery and thoughtful gesture. The books have provided great entertainment for our Service Users and has been a very welcome new boost to our library. Thank you so much for the kind gift and for thinking of our lovely people here at Clumber House."

Manager, Clumber House Care Home, Poynton

Celebrating Volunteer Week

Healthwatch Cheshire celebrated Volunteer Week from 1st to 7th June. As well as using social media to highlight the key work our volunteers have been involved in, we also published the findings of our Volunteer Satisfaction Survey. A number of our volunteers also took the time to create videos of themselves explaining why they volunteer for Healthwatch Cheshire and what they enjoy most about the experience. Their videos can be found on our website here.

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:

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering

0300 323 0006

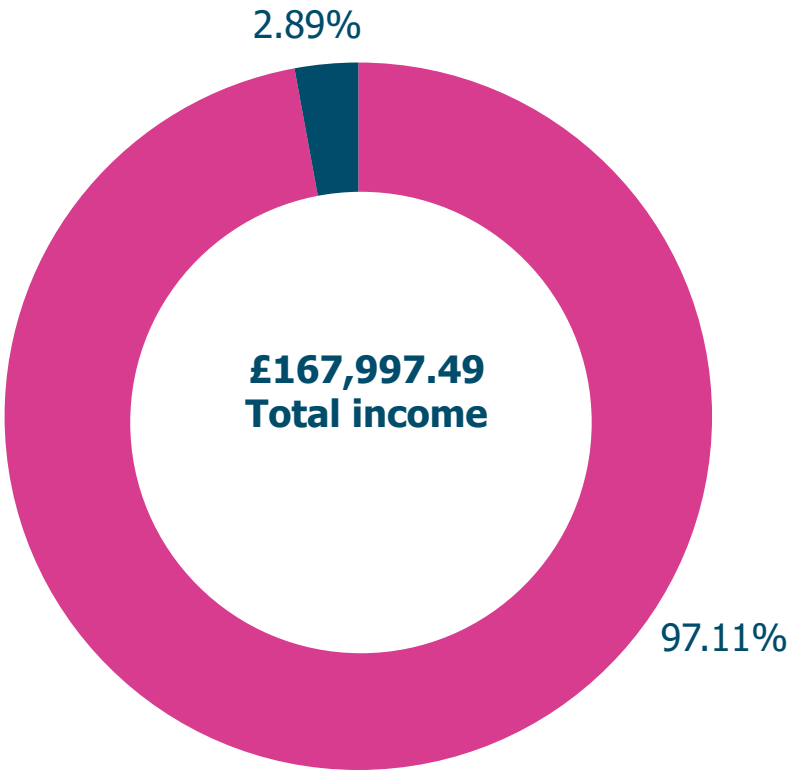
info@healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

Finances

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

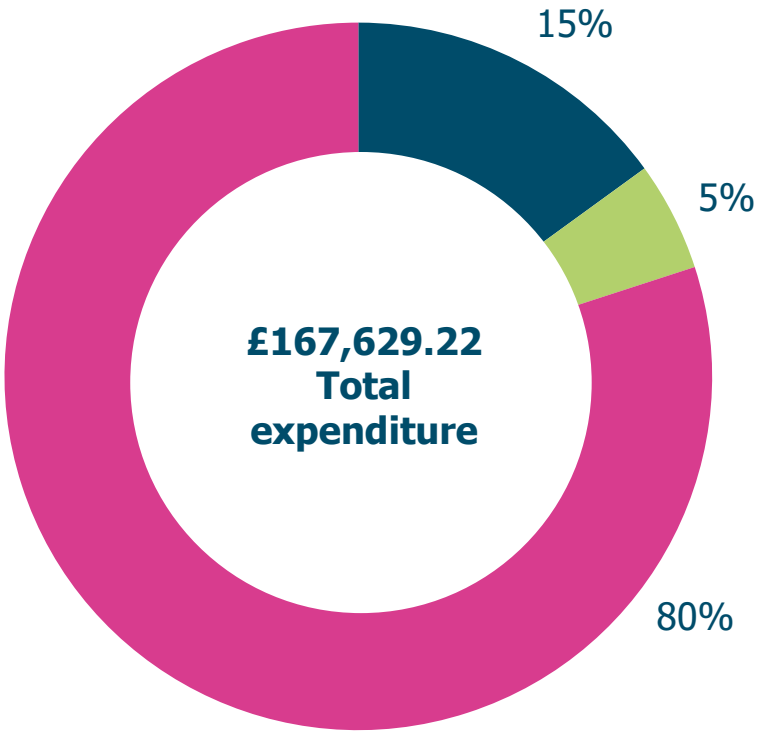
Income

- 97.11% funding received from local authority
- 2.89% additional income



Expenditure

- Running costs
- Operation costs
- Staff costs



Next steps & thank you

The last year has taught us many things about how we can continue to have conversations with people in places through a variety of methods. It also reinforced what we knew - that the more different ways we engage with, and listen to, a wide range of people, the richer the information we can provide to commissioners and providers of services in health and care, and the more influence people have on the design and delivery of future services.

Whilst we adapted our methods it is fair to say that we did not lessen our activity, nor our commitment to capturing people's experiences and views.

Going in to 2021-2022, we are of course still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, with communities across the country experiencing different levels of outbreaks, including those of new COVID-19 variants. The vaccine roll-out continues, as does testing, and track and trace. We will continue to support all the efforts around timely and key communications, and around gathering local views to help inform planning.

We will maintain a focus on working with a diverse range of people from our communities, and key areas/topics where we will deliver further work include:

- Primary Care Access
- Young People
- Citizens Focus Panel
- Care Home Engagement
- Continuing our Conversations with People at Care Community level
- Enter and View.

This year saw us working in 'business as unusual' circumstances. We now need to turn this into a more planned mixed approach to our work, that can continue to be effective during still changing times. Our team are naturally keen to return to more face-to-face activity, and to working closely with our partners to act on the learning from our reports.

We would like to give particular thanks to:

- Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us.
- Our tremendously engaged staff and volunteer team, and Board.
- Our partners in the Local Authority; NHSE&I; Health and Community Trusts; Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group; local Integrated Care Partnership; Voluntary and Community Sector colleagues; and Health and Wellbeing Board members.
- Our colleagues at Healthwatch England.
- Our partners at the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

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, website, our online Feedback Centre, social media, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, and provided our own virtual activities.

Due to the pandemic, we have adapted our usual way of working to online methods, in particular through our wider Health, Care, Mental Health and Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic survey, which received 2,430 responses from people to our survey (1,077 from Cheshire East), equating to over 9,000 individual comments. We also conducted specific surveys, such as experiences of Care Homes during the pandemic, and our Citizens Focus Panel which included surveys on Flu vaccinations, GP and pharmacy access, and COVID-19 vaccinations. This has been complemented by doorstep face-to-face conversations with people when dropping off shopping and prescription collections as part of the pandemic response, when dropping off our Care Home questionnaires, when talking to the Boating community along Cheshire's waterways, and in conversations with people whilst supporting at COVID-19 vaccination centres. We have a seat at local authority, NHS, and community pandemic response, communication and planning cells, where we have presented the views and experiences reported by the public during the year.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. It is shared with health and care services and commissioners, voluntary and community organisations, and is also available for people in Cheshire to read on our website.

2020-21 priorities

Project/activity area	Impact
Public Views on Health, Care, Mental Health and Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Findings have been fed into providers and commissioners and presented at various Boards, Committees, and Steering Groups. Reports have been used as part of the local pandemic response and communications.
Residents and Friends and Relatives Experiences of Care Homes During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Reports will be presented to individual Care Homes and commissioners, in order to look at what has gone well and what could be improved.
Supporting Boaters to Access Primary Care and COVID-19 Vaccinations	We have raised awareness of, and arranged for Boaters to obtain GP Access Cards, helping Boaters to register with GP Practices and access COVID-19 vaccinations. We have also ensured better information and signage alongside canals regarding GP access.
Access to Dentistry	People's issues have been raised in meetings with NHS England, who have explained to us why issues are occurring. Findings have also formed part of the Healthwatch England dentistry report.
Integration Index – Measuring Joined-up Care	Currently awaiting feedback from Healthwatch England and NHS England, and then the report will be shared locally with recommendations to improve experiences of joined-up care for people. This work has helped to form a methodology for measuring integrated care.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Cheshire East is represented on the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board by Louise Barry, our Chief Executive. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by presenting findings from our reports and challenging decisions and planning, including our Public Views on Health, Care, Mental Health and Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Pandemic surveys.

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