

Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Rotherham
Annual Report 2021-22



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Message from our host organisation:

Healthwatch Rotherham has had a turbulent year, with the Covid pandemic still affecting how people use services and how services are able to communicate with members of the public. It has experienced challenges with members of staff leaving and volunteers moving on due to competing commitments. Despite these struggles the service continued to operate successfully, providing support via multiple channels.

These challenges have all now been overcome, the service is fully staffed with a new manager and engagement officer in post. We are grateful to Rotherham Council for increasing the funding, enabling us to recruit to both posts as full time. Health and social welfare services are returning to some normality, although it has been noted demand has increased in some areas, where delays due to the pandemic were evident as services are dealing with current and historic lists.

Healthwatch Rotherham has completed some excellent work, such as the virtual 'Let's Talk' events which work in partnership with other services, who have their own followers or patients. By reaching this audience, the team has been able to address issues immediately and also access parts of our community who would have otherwise not contacted them.

Just recently, Healthwatch Rotherham researched the difficulties local people have in accessing a dentist. The team undertook a detailed patient survey, collating their findings to produce a very informative report, with recommendations to address issues identified around accessing these services. They worked closely with professionals from this sector to offer recommendations for improvement.

As we move into the new year, I am looking forward to seeing the service continue to thrive and Citizens Advice is delighted to support Healthwatch Rotherham in providing a valuable service to the local community that is having an impact on the health and social care services that local people need to access.

Jamie Ashton: Projects & Services Director, Citizens Advice Rotherham District

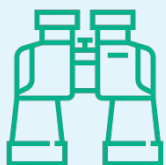
We at Citizens Advice Rotherham District, are very proud to be the host organisation of Healthwatch Rotherham and commend the hard work and dedication of the team.



About us:

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Rotherham is your local health and social care champion. From Brinsworth to Whiston and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision:

To understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.



Our mission:

We're here to make sure that those running services, put people at the heart of care.



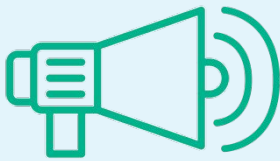
Our values:

- People's views come first - especially those who find it hardest to be heard.
- We focus on ensuring that people's worries and concerns about current services are addressed.
- We work to get services right for the future.
- We champion what matters to you and work with others to find ideas that work.

Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

Reaching out



292 people

read our reports online

246 people

viewed our online advice

362 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and COVID-19.

Making a difference to care:



We published

5 reports

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

Our most popular report was

'The positives and negatives of mental health services in Rotherham'

which highlighted the struggles people have accessing mental health services.

Health and care that works for you



We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received:

£90,000

Which is the same as the previous year.

We also currently employ

3 staff

who help us carry out this work.

How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring



We held 7 two hour myth-busting sessions on the Covid-19 vaccines via Zoom. The sessions were held in several different languages including Arabic, Spanish and Farsi and had 60 attendees.

90% of participants found these sessions very helpful. Positive opinions on the Covid-19 vaccine rose from 30% before the sessions to 91.7% after attending the session.

Summer



We looked into both adult and children/young people's mental health services in Rotherham. using a digital survey.

We called for improvements on waiting times, and an increased level of support and accessibility, particularly for young people. Our report attracted local media attention and assisted in 'Kooth', an online wellbeing community, being introduced in Rotherham.

Autumn



We were approached by Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group to look into how Rotherham residents accessed health and social care services in the Covid-19 pandemic, and how they found the multiple lockdowns.

We used digital polls as well as surveys and interviews to collect data. We found that residents were experiencing multiple accessibility issues, and we called for; More face to face appointments, less reliance on digital services to avoid digital exclusion and improvements to the Rotherham Health App.

Winter



We saw a large increase in people unable to get dental appointments. We found that out of the 18 dental practices we contacted in Rotherham, 16 were not taking on new patients. Only one dental practice's information was correctly listed on the NHS 'Find a Dentist' tool. We called for this to be updated and changed to assist patients. in making appointments.



In March 2022, we looked into how people access GP services in Rotherham. We called for GP's to offer a mixture of online and face to face appointments, appointment time flexibility, improvements to the Rotherham Health App and more Easy Read availability.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why we encourage people to let us know their experiences of health and social care services. This allows us to understand what people are experiencing and what they want from services, which allows us to feedback to services to help them improve.



Improving mental health services in Rotherham

After seeing an increase in mental health related enquiries to our service since the Covid-19 pandemic began, we decided to look at and evaluate mental health services in Rotherham through a public report.

Since the report was published, the local media picked up on the story and highlighted the long wait times and frustration felt by service users and family members. Rotherham council responded, particularly to our children and young people's findings, and commissioned the digital mental health service 'Kooth' into Rotherham.



59.6% of people

Preferred face to face mental health appointments

People told us about the long wait times for mental health appointments and assessments, with some parents reporting their children waiting four years to get an autism diagnosis with CAMHS. Adult service users reported that services do not work together and communicate effectively, which delays treatment.

We recommended services shorten wait times through an increase in staffing and resources. Where this isn't possible, provide more resources and support for children and adults whilst they are waiting for an assessment and/or diagnosis. We also recommended for services to be more accessible to users. One example of this being to utilise the school environment more to avoid taking children out of school.

What difference did this make?

Kooth allowed young people in Rotherham additional mental health services and support in an accessible way that they did not have previously.

Mind, Body and Soul project:

We were approached by Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group in July 2021 to undertake a report looking into how Rotherham residents found the Covid-19 lockdowns, how they are adjusting to the 'new normal' and how they accessed health and social care services during the pandemic. We focused on all age groups and backgrounds to gather a wide range of data. The main outcomes of this research were:

- Improving health and social care information accessibility
- Ensuring GP's are providing Easy Read materials
- Ensuring the Rotherham Health App is user friendly.

We ran a series of polls on Facebook and Twitter, as well as three digital surveys. We then followed this up with additional interviews from participants who had agreed to give extra information following the surveys.

We found that the findings were varied. Many found the lockdowns positive and allowed them to reconnect with family, whilst others found them incredibly isolating and struggled to access healthcare services, leading to poor physical and mental health. Residents found it difficult to access GP appointments, with patients wanting a return to face to face medical appointments, access to Easy Read documents, and improvements made to the Rotherham Health App to make it more user-friendly.

Recommendations and Impact:

The findings and recommendations were presented to multiple services (including Rotherham CCG and Rotherham Hospital) and it was agreed that the recommendations would be discussed at various sub-group committees and changes would be made to improve the patient experience. It was suggested by services that a 'secret shopper' type group of residents would provide feedback on the app to ensure it was user friendly.

“We believe it is so important that patients are able to access health and social care services with ease, and any accessibility barriers should be reviewed urgently and amended to ensure all patients can access services, and are not discriminated against”.

Three ways we have made a difference for the community

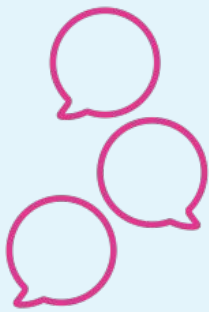
Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

In the summer of 2021, we examined mental health services in Rotherham for both young people and adults.

We found that children and young people had limited mental health services available to them in Rotherham, particularly digital ones. Due to this, Rotherham Council decided to improve the mental health service provision in the borough, and commissioned the digital mental health service 'Kooth' to provide its digital services to young people in the area. This has benefited lots of young Rotherham residents, allowing them to access anonymous support and resources digitally.



Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

We completed a Let's talk event on Dementia Awareness. This event gave members of the public the opportunity to gain information and a positive forum for questions and answers which were recorded on our website for others to make use of which provided a better communication pathway between services and users.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes. There has been difficulties accessing GP appointments for a number of years which was exaggerated throughout the Covid 19 pandemic. Our 'Accessing GP services' report was the first part of our work to highlight the need for change within this process. We have made links with other services to ensure patient opinions are taken into account. We will continue to share information and access the correct forums to provide continuous feedback to services on where problems arise.

Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Rotherham is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up to date information on COVID-19 on our website and via social media
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust by responding to our enquiries
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme by holding myth buster sessions
- Helping people to access the services they need by signposting them



Assisting residents with Covid-19 vaccines:

We have spoken to many residents who were extremely nervous about the Covid-19 pandemic, with many feeling isolated and scared.

One resident contacted us in Summer 2021 regarding the Covid-19 vaccines. They really wanted the vaccine, but felt incredibly anxious about leaving the house and being near other people, due to being clinically vulnerable. We managed to arrange for them to have their vaccine outside, by liaising with a local GP surgery in Rotherham. This allowed the resident to have their vaccine, leaving them more reassured, whilst preventing further stress and anxiety.

We were then contacted by the resident again in early 2022 regarding the booster vaccine. Again, we liaised with a local GP surgery who were able to fit the resident in the very same day for a booster vaccine appointment outdoors, in time for a hospital admission.

Working with local services allowed us to provide a fantastic level of care for a Rotherham resident, preventing unnecessary stress and worry.



Helping local residents find a dentist appointment:

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, we noticed a huge uptake in the amount of Rotherham residents contacting us regarding dental appointments. We noted that the bulk of people were not already registered at a dentist, and were struggling to get an appointment at all. Residents complained that they were spending hours ringing round various dentists unsuccessfully, using the 'Find a dentist' tool on the NHS England website.

We listened to this, and decided to do our own investigations into dental appointments in Rotherham. We found that the majority of the dental practices on the 'Find a dentist' tool were displaying outdated, incorrect appointment information, and recommended in our subsequent report on dentists, to amend this to save patients time and ease frustration. We were able to display in our report which Rotherham dentists were taking on new patients, which had waiting lists and which were not taking on patients at all. We were able to communicate this to clients who had previously contacted us about this issue to save them time and keep them updated.

We also held a 'Let's Talk' online Zoom event in January 2022, where we invited the chair of the Rotherham dental committee to discuss the current situation, as well as a stakeholder update on the situation. This was a really useful event and allowed us to communicate up-to-date information to services and the public on dentistry.



Volunteers

We're supported by amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch Rotherham. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in the NHS and social care.

This year our volunteers have:

- Promoted Healthwatch Rotherham at voluntary groups and across other organisations
- Attended Advisory board group meetings to direct the work plan for 2022/2023
- Responded to surveys and supported distribution of these to other individuals
- Promoted Rotherham Healthwatch across social media platforms and more.



Alison North: Strategic Advisory Board Member

My name is Alison North, and I have been a nurse for 35 years. I work part time within Mental Health Services, specialising in Dementia Care in Rotherham. I also volunteer for the Alzheimer's Society. I enjoy volunteering at Healthwatch Rotherham, meeting new people and learning new skills. I know how important good health and social care services are on the well-being of an individual and their family. My role supports Healthwatch Rotherham to speak to users of services, gather their experiences, good or bad, and provide feedback to those services to support improvement and developments.

Volunteering on the Strategic Board, allows me the opportunity to find out more about local services and be involved in decisions about engagement opportunities and recruitment. I hear about all of the contact made to Healthwatch for advice and support. I feel that I am playing a small part in supporting a Rotherham service that meets the needs of the local people, of which I am one. I am looking forward to what the future holds volunteering at Healthwatch Rotherham, and becoming more involved in engagement with the public and the service.



Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.



<https://healthwatchrotherham.org.uk/contact-us>



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Finance and future priorities

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

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£90,000	Staff costs	£67,591
Additional funding	£1,200	Operational costs	£14,030
		Support and administration	£16,259
Total income	£91,200	Total expenditure	£97,880

These figures are yet to be audited and therefore are in draft only, and could be subject to change

Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. Mental Health (as a result of Covid)
2. Changes to services brought about by the pandemic
3. Adult Social Care

Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that’s because of where you live, income or race.

There has been much talk around the impact Covid 19 has had on services including additional pressures and increasing waiting lists as part of our work we are focusing on changes to these services brought about by the pandemic, in a hope to highlight success and aid improvements to services which the Rotherham people have a negative experiences using.

Adult social care has reportedly had some difficult times within the pandemic, we hope to be able to complete Enter and View to support care homes in making positive changes

Statutory statements

About us

Citizens Advice Rotherham and District are the host organisation for Rotherham Healthwatch.

Healthwatch Rotherham 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 one member at present, as we are in the process of recruiting more members and a chair. We are lucky to have been granted £1,200 from a Healthwatch England pilot to support us in this endeavour. Our current board work on a voluntary basis 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 twelve times and made decisions on matters such as the work plan for 2022-2023, where we should direct our focus for our reports and suggest people we approach for collaboration. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. For example, we use insight from our information and signposting enquiries to shape targeted work examples include our GP and Dentistry reports. We also use our engagement opportunities through our Let's talk events to target discussions on subjects members of the public are interested in.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience:

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2020/21 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a web form on our website, provided a feedback centre/rate and review system, 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 highlighting people's experiences from a variety of situations and backgrounds. We have hosted multiple events in the past year, open to both the public and professionals, giving people the opportunity to talk about issues that affect them the most, such as dementia, strokes and COPD. We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website and mail this to all on our mailing list

Responses to recommendations and requests:

We had zero providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board:

Healthwatch Rotherham is represented on the Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Board by Natalie Palmer, Healthwatch Rotherham Manager, since March 22. Prior to this, Healthwatch Rotherham has been represented by her predecessors.

During 2020/21 our representatives have effectively carried out this role by providing an update around the work completed by Healthwatch Rotherham, directing focus to what matters to the people of Rotherham and supporting information reaching the correct level and people who are able to inform change.

Our Accessing GP services in Rotherham report was first discussed within the Health and Wellbeing Board and the outcome is currently being distributed amongst colleagues where further discussions will ignite.

Healthwatch Rotherham has also been heavily involved in the Pharmaceutical needs assessment steering group at the request of the Health and Wellbeing Board ,where Healthwatch`s knowledge around access to services issues and concerns of the public has been taken on board in decision making.

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment	Draft Pharmaceutical needs assessment completed ongoing process for HWBB to sign off
Accessing GP Services Report	The report was published and ongoing communications are taking place on how this information can inform change.
Maternity services	Building links to ensure the whispers of people living in the community can share views



healthwatch

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