



On equal terms

Then and now

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham Annual Report 2020-21

Contents

Message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Who we are	5
Highlights from our year	6
Then and now: Care home experiences of staff and residents during COVID-19	7
Then and now: Accessing dental care	9
Then and now: Access to GP services	11
World Mental Health Day 2020	14
Responding to COVID-19	16
Volunteers	18
Finances	20
Next steps & thank you	21

Message from our CEO

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham continues to be hosted by LifeLine. LifeLine Projects is based in the borough and was founded in 2000. LifeLine exists to impact individuals and influence systems. Characterised by renewed hope, developed confidence and improved skills, the programmes that we offer give people the chance to grow, expand their horizons, and become agents of change in their own community. We focus on empowering and enhancing the lives of those people most isolated and vulnerable, building their confidence and helping them to learn new skills, so that they may fully live their lives and become a part of their community.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have all had to adapt the way we work and deliver services for the safety of staff, volunteers, and the public. In the health and care world, new ways of working have provided opportunities to be innovative in the way services are delivered, yet these opportunities have also come hand-in-hand with various challenges and barriers, faced by both health professionals and those accessing services.

Therefore, our role has been even more pivotal, we continued to be a critical friend to service providers and commissioners ensuring they listened, adapted, and took into account the views of those accessing services in these challenging times.

Residents sharing their stories about access to health and care during COVID19 directly influenced all the projects worked on this year, including access to GP digital services, mental health and wellbeing services for carers and access to dental services. Providers and commissioners welcomed all our findings and recommendations.

This year the team have supported over 200 residents through our signposting and information service. A COVID19 website page was set up to provide up to date information in relation to the pandemic and the page has been visited over 2500 times throughout the year.

The team were also able to support the borough's response to COVID19 for the most vulnerable in our communities. Our team and volunteers helped 70 local people with practical support such as shopping, medication pickups, gas and electricity issues and befriending calls.

Not all this could have been achieved alone, so I would like to thank the team, all the residents who shared their experiences with us and our wonderful volunteers who have continued stay involved throughout the pandemic. Our volunteers have assisted with mystery shopping activities, telephone interviews, communications, reviewing websites for information and writing blogs.

Our plans for next year will be focused on our statutory duties and the evidence gathered over the last year. We will be continuing to look into GP services and dental services and looking at new projects including physical health of young people and challenges faced by people with disabilities during the pandemic.



Nathan Singleton

CEO, LifeLine Projects

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Singleton', written over a white background.

About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in **Barking and Dagenham**. 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 that their views make.



3 Ensuring your views help improve health and 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

Who we are

The team



Manisha Modhvia
Acting Manager



Richard Vann
Officer

The board

Our board consists of local residents, healthcare professionals and community leaders. Their unique and valued set of skills helps to inform Healthwatch about the reality and experiences that people face when accessing local health and care services.

They use their local knowledge and experience to focus on issues that the Healthwatch team should be working towards.

The Board meets quarterly with the Healthwatch team. These meetings are open to members of the public.

Between meetings, the Healthwatch team keeps in contact with each member; to listen to any health or care related feedback they have heard from members of the community. This intelligence forms the basis for discussions and items of work that the board want Healthwatch to pursue.



Daniel Singleton
Interim Chair



Elsbeth Paisley
Member



Kim Blyth
Member



David Sollis
Member



Barbara Sawyer
Member



Val Shaw
Member

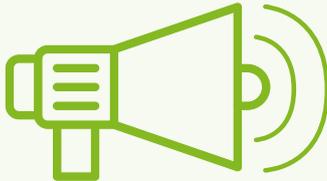


Zahra Ibrahim
Member

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

600 people

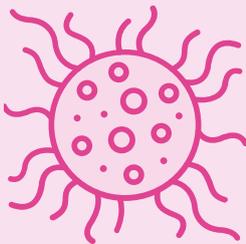
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to

185 people

this year.

Responding to the pandemic



We engaged with, supported and provided information on our website to

3000 people

during the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

Making a difference to care



We published

5 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services. From this, we made 15 recommendations for improvement.

All of recommendations

we made last year have been acted upon, were welcomed by commissioners and providers.

Health and care that works for you



19 volunteers

helped us to carry out our work. In total, they contributed 500 number of hours.

We employed 3 staff

We received

£115,920 in funding

from our local authority in 2020-21.



Theme one: Then and now

Care home experiences of staff and residents during COVID-19



Then

During the first lockdown, the council asked the Healthwatch team to undertake a piece of research to look at the experiences of residents and staff. In total we spoke with 35 residents and relatives and 57 staff members.

We found that overall, residents and their families felt that care home staff provided excellent care for both the health and well-being of their residents during the COVID-19 crisis. However, feedback received from care home staff showed that they were dealing with the unknown factors of the virus, lack of PPE and training, positive cases, death and the strain of additional communication requirements caused them fear. As a result, staff were tired and anxious after dealing with a high-stress situation for several months. This meant there was a risk that the work force could suffer PTSD or 'burn-out' from being on high alert for so long. Within the findings, it became evident that support was needed for the mental health of staff working in these areas.

The recommendations were based on the findings and included sharing best practice, recognising care home staff for their work and communicating with family members about visiting arrangements. The findings and recommendations were including as part of the council's winter plan. The findings and recommendations formed phase two of the project.



Now

The initial project highlighted there was a risk to the mental health and wellbeing of care staff, therefore we undertook a piece of research which focused on the experiences of care staff in regards to their mental health and wellbeing. A survey and case studies were used to collect evidence. We spoke 10 individuals in total.

The findings highlighted the impact on the health and wellbeing of those working in care homes and providing care to residents in their own homes. Personal and work lives were and continue to be affected. There are a number of services available to support staff with their mental health and wellbeing however, it was evident from speaking with staff that this is not communicated to everyone in the same way and therefore leading to a difference in not only knowledge but also support that is provided. The pandemic has also affected the financial situation of some staff adding extra worry to them.

Impact

Healthwatch put forward proposals for recommendations that looked specifically at disparity between the social care services; the opportunities for staff to share concerns; support for BAME staff and community resources to support social care staff.

The commissioners from London Borough of Barking and Dagenham welcomed the report. Some of their comments from their response included:

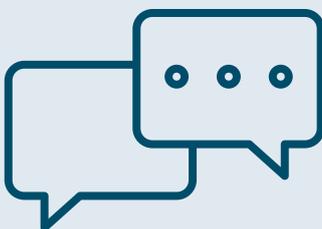


Thank you for this valuable report which helps us as a commissioning body hear the human voices behind the services.

This provides us with fantastic insight into the experience of care staff.

The report also raises issues that staff had and the transcripts particularly highlight some of the more personal stories and struggles of working throughout COVID-19.

We have shared the Healthwatch report and this recommendation with our Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health who acknowledged the need to ensure staff are appreciated and thanked.



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.



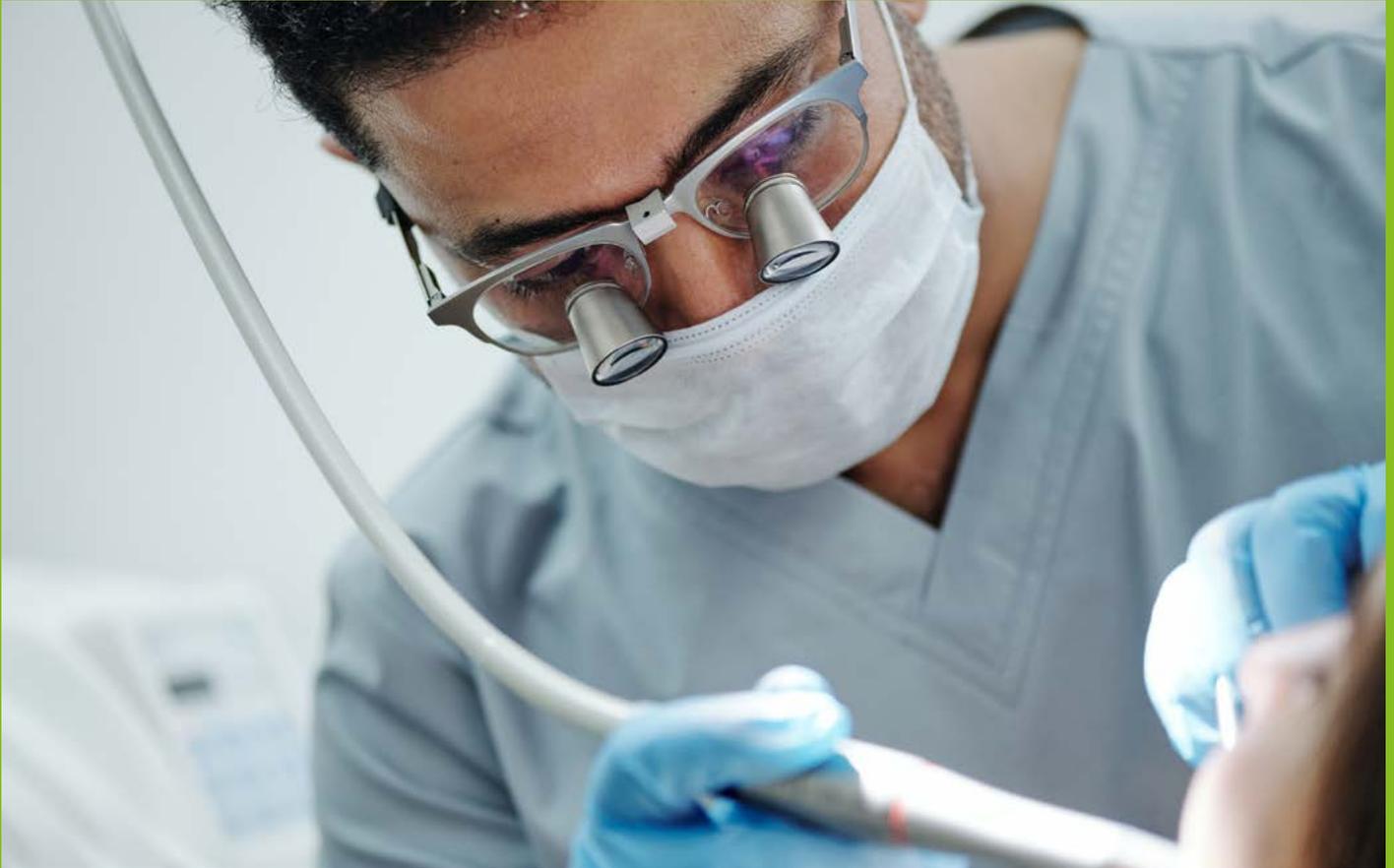
www.healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk



0800 298 5331



info@healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk



Theme two: Then and now Accessing dental care



Then

At the beginning of the pandemic a number of individuals contacted the Healthwatch team about general advice regarding dental services. We signposted individuals to relevant services and informed them of the current situation. Local people thanked us. At the time, there were no reports of any issues with dental services being seen.



As COVID-19 restrictions were eased, a number of local residents who were struggling to access both urgent and routine dental care contacted us through our signposting and information service.

Two main issues residents told us about included:

- Not being able to register with a dental practice as they were told that the practice were not accepting new registrations.
- Not being able to access dental treatment in a timely manner.

Healthwatch created an online survey seeking the views of local people who had experienced, accessed or tried to access dental services. We engaged on Facebook in the local community group, asking about peoples' experiences with local services.

By contacting all the local dental service providers, Healthwatch carried out a mystery shopper exercise to find out what issues the residents were experiencing when trying to access dental services.

Key findings

Dental practices offering both NHS and private services declined to offer appointments to NHS patients, however appointments were available for those willing to pay for a private service.

Residents expressed concerns to Healthwatch as for many the cost of private dental care is not an affordable option. This highlights the inequality in getting access to good quality dental care in Barking and Dagenham.

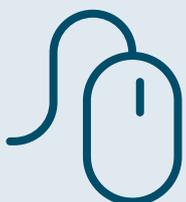
Residents found themselves being referred from one dental practice to another to be told there were no appointments available. In some cases, individuals were unable to access emergency appointments due to delays and demand.

People shared their stories with Healthwatch and said they have experienced pain and discomfort as a result.

Although patients are directed to NHS 111, this service is for urgent appointments. By local access being so limited there is a risk we will see a greater economic impact on local NHS services and a lack of a preventative approach to dental care.

Impact

We wrote to NHS England but did not receive a response. The findings were also presented at the Health and WellBeing Board. Access to dental care is also a national issue, which Healthwatch England continues to look into.



To find out more > > >

Please visit our website to read the full report.

www.healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk



Theme three: Then and now Access to GP services



Then

GPs are a universal service that most of us have accessed. They play a pivotal role in the community, through the provision of advice, referrals and free healthcare. It is a vital service and usually the first point of contact for many when something 'isn't quite right' with their health. Yet for the last few years, in common with patients across the country, patients have increasingly contacted Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham about access to GP services.

To understand the issues further, Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham undertook a project to understand the problems and barriers local people face with the aim of being solution focused. We held a number of focus groups undertook pop up engagement sessions and gained feedback through a survey.

During the course of this project, Healthwatch have gained feedback from 250 residents and spoken to all of the GPs in Barking & Dagenham. Both GPs and local people have referred to the importance of notifying the GP if appointments are no longer required, recognising that no shows (or DNAs - did not attend) cost the practice time and money. Furthermore, both GPs and local people also shared concerns about patients taking urgent appointments to have letters written by their GP.

Some of our findings included:

- A lack of privacy within waiting rooms in the practices
- A discrepancy in understanding: some patients were aware that they could book a double appointment to discuss more than one issue, others were not.
- Some GPs had noticed some patients 'block-booked' appointments to give themselves more time
- Variations in waiting times for a routine appointment: 38% of the respondents said they waited between 1 to 2 weeks, 33% said they waited over 2 weeks, 12% waited for one week and 16% waited for less than a week.
- Inconsistency in quantity and quality of information displayed on boards
- The need for information about other services the patients could access to support their nonmedical needs.
- Difficulties in getting through on the phone
- Majority (77%) of the people we spoke with described their GP as either good or excellent. 81% of patients we spoke to described their nurse as excellent or good.
- Challenges in booking online appointments
- Language barriers made it difficult for some people to have telephone appointments and book appointments online.

Impact

We received positive responses from the commissioners and service providers. A follow up discussion with GPs and practice staff showed that they gained a far better understanding of the role of Healthwatch and were more than willing to discuss solutions to the problems universally experienced at and by their practices, which affect negatively on patient experience. Individual practices also took action on some of the recommendations we made through nine Enter and Views undertaken as part of the project.

Recommendations for practices included:

- Improvements to patient access to privacy in waiting areas
- Giving patients the option to talk about more than one issue per appointment by booking a double appointment
- Communication on urgent care services
- Solving the issue of busy phone lines for urgent or routine appointments.

The majority of the practices welcomed the reports and took on board a number of the recommendations and were implementing changes to improve patient experience.

Full reports can be found on our website—www.healthwatchbarkingandagenham.co.uk



The arrival of the pandemic has changed the way we access GPs, placing even more pressure on phone lines and larger reliance on technology at home. We decided to look into these issues after noticing increased levels of negative feedback through our information and signposting service.

Our latest report looked into the experiences of 70 people and their experiences with their local GP. We received information through, telephone interviews, social media, focus groups, and an online survey.

Evidence from the report helped us to identify the success of digital appointments for some patients. People reported the ease of accessing their GP appointments more quickly, and in the comfort of their own home. However similar to the groups identified as having difficulty back in 2018, we identified that disabled people, people with long-term health conditions and people whose first language wasn't English were struggling to get the care they needed after the sudden shift to online appointments.

We have shared our report with the Clinical Commissioning Group and Primary Care Network Leads. At the time of writing this report, we are waiting for a response from the both.

On a national level Healthwatch England are calling on the NHS England and NHS Improvement to conduct a formal review into how people are accessing their GP so that access can be made easier for all.



World Mental Health Day 2020

Working in partnership with the Citizen's Alliance Network (CAN) and LBBD, Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham designed an online campaign, using the hashtag #EachOneReachOne.

We ran an online campaign in recognition that 2020 has been a difficult year for everyone. COVID-19 has had an impact on us all, and for many has caused temporary anxiety or depression. For some the impact has been far more serious. This year, WMHD celebrated the increase in neighbourliness and community spirit that arose from lockdown. We also signposted and provided information about local services residents can access as part of the campaign.

Activities on the day included:

- Residents, organisations, and statutory partners being invited to share photos about what helped them with their mental health during lockdown.
- A short film, specially created in support of the campaign by Cllr Maureen Worby, Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health Integration and Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board
- Signposting to professional and community support
- Local residents were invited to submit photos of themselves along with their own personal message saying what had helped during lockdown
- A landing page over our own webpage (a standalone web page, created specifically for the purposes of a marketing or advertising campaign: where a visitor “lands” when they have clicked through from Google or similar)
- Our team and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham provided an online drop-in entitled ‘Mental Health - What works?’

The results

Impact and outputs resulted in:

- 109 tweets between the 8th-12th October
- 10,458 views of our tweets
- 358 engagements with our tweets



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 3,000 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

Top four areas that people have contacted us about:



23% on GP services



10% on Dentistry



7% on urgent care



21% on COVID-19

Case study



A local resident contacted Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham to raise an issue about ear wax removal services for older people.

She had initially contacted her GP to be told that the service and procedure was no longer available at the practice and that she would need to find the service elsewhere. No guidance or alternative solution was offered by the surgery to the patient.

Through research, she discovered the nearest service was private and based in Upminster, at a cost of £80.00. She told Healthwatch “it was far too expensive and out of financial reach for most people”

She was concerned for elderly people who would require the service.

Healthwatch raised the issue at a Local Quality Surveillance Group (LQSG) meeting and a subsequent request was put forward that Healthwatch should escalate it by email through the Chair.

A response was received and shared with the resident and uploaded on the Healthwatch website to inform others.



Volunteers

At Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham, we are supported by **19** 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.
- Created digital content on our websites and social media.
- Carried out website reviews for local services on the information they provide.
- Helped with the local volunteering efforts of shopping and collecting prescriptions for those self-isolating or shielding.

Thank You

To all our amazing volunteers who help make a difference to health and care

Enter and View representative

"I do not have access to technology and pre-COVID, I used to undertake Enter and View visits and outreach. Throughout the pandemic, I have continued to volunteer in new ways, including- telephone interviews, phone calls and mystery shopping, as well as talking to pharmacists over the phone."

Office and outreach volunteer

"I have assisted with searching websites, writing blogs, and undertaking research. I am looking forward to the next year where I will be able to take part in new projects. COVID-19 has meant having to limit face to face engagement and I am looking forward to going out and about again."



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 Barking and Dagenham](#).

 www.healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk

 **0800 298 5331**

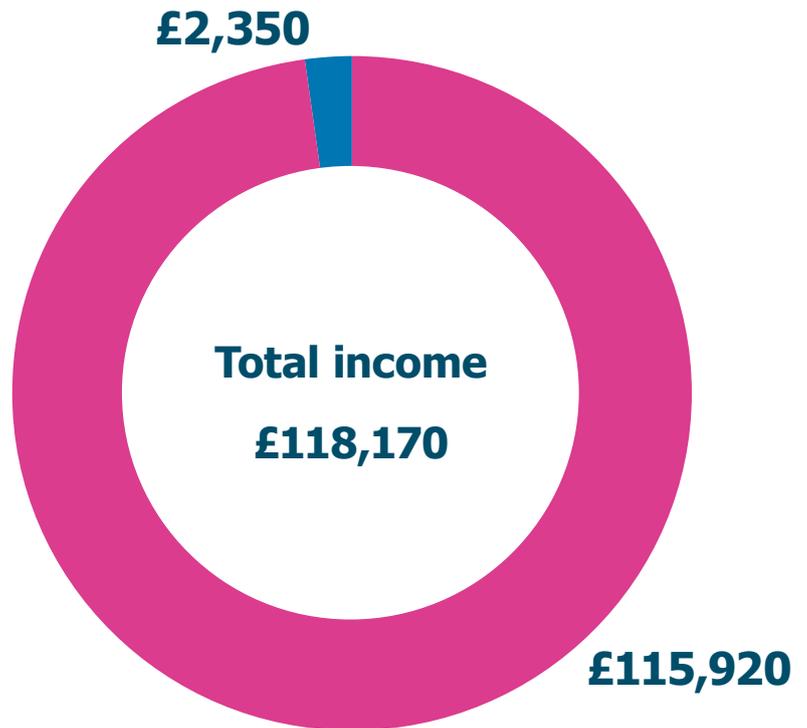
 info@healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk

Finances

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

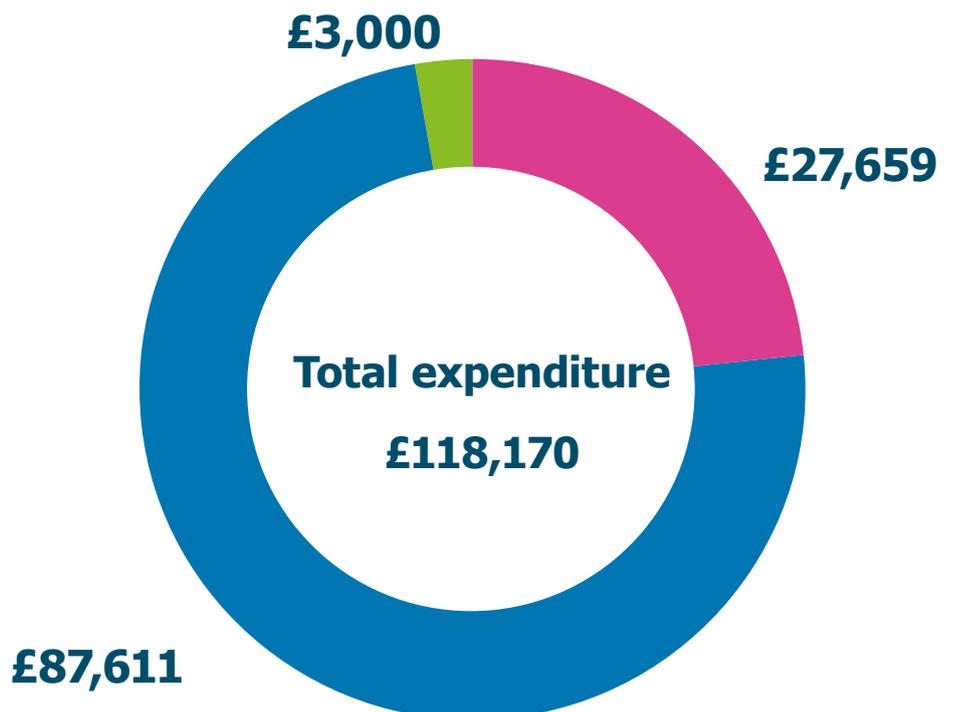
Income

- Funding received from local authority
- Additional funding



Expenditure

- How much it costs to run our Healthwatch (inc. operational costs)
- Staff costs
- Contribution to employee equipment



Next steps & thank you

Priorities for 2021-22

Our plans for the forthcoming year are determined by feedback we have received from the local community and based on our statutory duties. Plans for next year include:

1. Continue engaging with the public
2. Continue to represent the views of local people on relevant boards
3. Young people's physical health project
4. Follow up project on sexual health services
5. Continue to gather experiences of the local community accessing health and care during the Covid-19
6. Respond to COVID-related issues
7. Continue to provide an information and signposting service

Thank you

A big thank you to everyone who took the time to share their views and volunteer. We would also like to thank partners, commissioners, service providers and voluntary sector groups who took on board our findings and have taken steps to make a difference.



Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham, LifeLine House, 25 Neville Road, Dagenham, Essex, RM8 3QS

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham is held by LifeLine Community Projects, LifeLine House, 25 Neville Road, Dagenham, Essex, RM8 3QS

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham 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 [number] members who 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 four times and made decisions on matters such as Health and care issues we need to take forward, how to adapt the Healthwatch service taking into consideration government guidance.

We ensure the wider public are involved in deciding our work priorities. Some of the ways information or opinions of the public shape our priorities include:

Healthwatch Workplan: We believe that the work we choose to undertake should come from local people. Every year Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham look into the feedback we have received from the local community in order to plan projects that the team will take forward.

Healthwatch Members. Residents and stakeholders who have registered their interest with Healthwatch, give their opinions on the work-plan, consultations, receive e-bulletins and feedback to Healthwatch on health and social care services they have accessed. They also share Healthwatch information to groups and family members.

Signposting service: Evidence from our information and signposting service is analysed on a quarterly basis. When a theme emerges, the concerns from residents either form the basis of a project, or is used to challenge service providers and commissioners.

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 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 telephoning individuals with disabilities or long term conditions and speaking to them THEIR experiences about accessing health and care services during pandemic.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website www.healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk. People can also request a hard copy by telephone or email. The team send the report out by email to all registered members and via social media. Hard copies are made available at outreach sessions for the public to take.

Responses to recommendations and requests

We had one provider 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 Barking and Dagenham to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham is represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board by Nathan Singleton, Lifeline Community Projects, CEO. During 2020/21 our representative has effectively carried out this role by:

- Attending the health and wellbeing board and any subgroups workshops in relation to this
- Giving feedback on different areas or proposals
- Sharing any feedback from residents and challenging service providers

healthwatch

Barking and
Dagenham

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham
LifeLine House
25 Neville Road
Dagenham RM8 3QS

www.healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk

t: 0800 298 5331

e: info@healthwatchbarkinganddagenham.co.uk

 [@HealthwatchBD](https://twitter.com/HealthwatchBD)

 facebook.com/healthwatch.bd
