

# healthwatch

North Yorkshire

# Newsletter

Spring 2021



## **IMPROVING HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TOGETHER**

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2021, bringing you up to date with our work as the independent champion for people using health and social care services in North Yorkshire.

Over the last 12 months we have witnessed huge changes across the health and social care system in North Yorkshire as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has meant that we have had to adapt and change how we work with the public as well as with the health and care organisations across the county.

In terms of the work that we are focusing on, we are currently at the start of a research project with care homes: '*Care Homes & COVID-19: Lessons from an Unprecedented Time*'. This exciting project will bring together care home staff, residents, and residents' families and loved ones. Our aim is to identify the lessons we can learn from across the care sector in North Yorkshire, on how services adapted and changed as a result of the pandemic and how these positively supported care home residents, and how these changes can be taken forward when things begin to return to 'normal'.

Dentistry (see page 10) continues to be a major area of concern for people in North Yorkshire. We have been raising this issue with the NHS for the past six months, and we are about to step up our efforts on this. We will be holding a series of focus groups in Scarborough during June, with NHS dentistry commissioners, to hear the concerns of the public and find out the types of dental services that they would like.

In addition to new projects, we will continue to monitor and follow-up on our GP Website health-check [project](#) (discussed on page 6/7). The report has been warmly received by GP practices and we will continue to work with them and local Clinical Commissioning Groups to ensure GP websites are improved.

Lastly, we are seeking to improve the ways we gather [feedback](#) from patients and members of the public from across North Yorkshire. It has become evident during COVID-19 that we hear from some areas of North Yorkshire more than others. We will be developing a strategy to ensure we hear from all districts and do more to gather feedback from a greater variety of people.



## A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

It is an exciting and important time to be working for Healthwatch North Yorkshire, as the county begins to get back to normal following a difficult year. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a huge strain on all of us, and very sadly many people have lost loved ones. The NHS and social care providers have had to quickly adapt and change the delivery of services, to meet unprecedented demands - resulting in the added pressure on health and social care services across North Yorkshire.

I was delighted to join Healthwatch North Yorkshire as their CEO in September last year and was pleased to see the work that was already underway in listening to and gathering the public and patient's feedback around the COVID-19 pandemic and relaying this back to those people responsible for the delivery of care. This feedback, no matter how small, has helped shape and change many services across the county.

Since then, we have been working enormously hard to ensure we are talking to as many people, groups, networks etc., as possible to gather views and experiences. This has been a challenge - as this has mostly been achieved via a phone or online! So, a big thank you to everyone who has contacted us - as your views and experiences are really important to us and the work we do.

Over the coming year our priorities will remain on gathering the public's views on how we all recover from the pandemic (people and services), and we will be continuing to work with health and care organisations, the voluntary sector and the public to help improve the lives and wellbeing of communities who aren't always listened to or involved in discussions about their health or social care.

Access to dental services will continue to remain a priority for us, as this is something that we hear a lot about, and we know that a lack of NHS dental care is causing huge problems for the public.

We want to ensure that that we hear from all people in North Yorkshire, and a group that we don't always hear from is younger people. So we will be doubling our efforts in the coming months to work with young people to hear their experiences and stories of how the NHS and social care supports them, and what improvements young people would like.

Finally, I would like to say a big thank you to all our volunteers, as without your support and time, we wouldn't be able to undertake the work that we do. Thank you very much.



**Ashley Green,**  
**Chief Executive Officer.**





## COVID-19 IN NORTH YORKSHIRE

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on all of us. The challenges we have faced have been immense, and none more so than within our health and social care system, whose services have been stretched to accommodate the fluctuating rises in COVID-19 cases across the county.

We produced two COVID-19 reports last year and we will be publishing a new report in May. These reports have highlighted the difficulties that people have faced as a consequence of the pandemic, including accessing NHS services and appointments, living with a long-term condition, such as diabetes or a lung condition, challenges around seeing loved ones in care homes, accessing dental care, as well as being able to see their GP. These are just some of the many challenges people have faced.

It's vital that we hear from you so that we can share your experiences and views with those people and organisations that can change services for the better.

We are now starting to come out of the country's lock-down measures, but we would urge the public across North Yorkshire to remain vigilant and stay safe.

The vaccination programme across North Yorkshire has been a huge success, and much thanks should go to those people and organisations that have made this happen. Vaccines are the way out of this pandemic and health and social care providers are working exceptionally hard to make sure everyone in our county is protected as soon as they are eligible.

We have and continue to hear from members of the public who have received their vaccinations. And we would also invite you to share your experiences so that we can help to shape, influence, and inform this massive undertaking for our local health and care services.



**READ OUR REPORTS**

# VOLUNTEER WITH US

Volunteers are vital to the work that we do at Healthwatch North Yorkshire. We recruit, train and engage our volunteers in a wide variety of opportunities to make sure that the voice of those people living and working in North Yorkshire can be heard.

People's experiences are at the heart of what we do, and it is our volunteers that make such a difference and help us achieve our goals.

## Meet Our Volunteer Anuja:

I started volunteering for Healthwatch North Yorkshire last year. I was looking to help the NHS and contribute towards the health and social care system in England. Following a google search I found various volunteering roles that Healthwatch offered. I got in touch with Lada and started helping as a strategic volunteer.

Healthwatch provides me with the perfect opportunity to apply my research and consultancy skills for the various strategic needs of the organisation. Some key projects I have worked on have included a large 'public engagement mapping' project for West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health & Care Partnership. I have also helped review and provide comments on new strategic material for several NHS Trusts.

I enjoy working with the various volunteers who come from diverse backgrounds. I learn a lot from working with all the volunteers and look forward to working on future projects. It is a fulfilling opportunity and a great way to meet new people in your area.



Healthwatch North Yorkshire's volunteers are an important part of our organisation. Over the past year they have contributed to a significant amount of our work.

Most recently, a team of seven volunteers, working closely with Healthwatch Volunteer Officer Lada Rotshtein, and completed a three-month project: to produce an '[Engagement and Consultation Mapping Report](#)' for the West Yorkshire and Harrogate Health and Care Partnership.



## WE ARE LISTENING TO YOU!

### North Yorkshire GP Website Check-Up



As a result of COVID-19, it has become increasingly important for people to attain the information they need through the internet. We know that GP practices are most people's main point of contact with health services. GP practices have had to undertake significant changes to their working practices, and this has resulted in less face to face visits for members of the public. Further to this, staff shortages due to illness, and increased call volumes by phone have made it difficult for members of the public to see or talk to someone at their medical practice, adding to the importance of GP websites.

We therefore decided to undertake a simple GP website audit to see what information was being provided to the public, was it easily accessible, did it fulfil the needs of the public and particularly was it providing up to-date COVID-19 information.

We also wanted to address questions around types of appointments, translation/ interpreters, and information about support organisations.

A team of our volunteers undertook the fieldwork for the [project](#). They were tasked to look over every website of all 82 GP practices linked to Primary Care Networks (PCNs) that operated within North Yorkshire. For each GP practice website, the volunteers acted as 'mystery shoppers' and were given nine questions to answer, plus asked to note positive examples and areas where improvement was needed. The 'health checks' were conducted from the 30th November to 20th December 2020.

The nine questions asked were:

1. Is there a link to the NHS Covid-19 advice site?
2. Is there easily accessible, current, Covid-19 advice on the website?
3. Was it easy to find out how to make an appointment?
4. Are there options of in-person, phone, or video appointments?
5. Is there information about translator services and details how to arrange them?
6. Does the website have links to self-care & support organisations for health & wellbeing?
7. Was it easy to find out how to make a complaint?
8. Does the website contain current Patient Participation Group (PPG) information?
9. Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?





Our volunteers found many great examples of GP websites providing crucial information for members of the public in North Yorkshire, but also examples of areas in need of improvement.

For example, our volunteers liked a number of GP practice's new patient registration forms which included questions regarding the need for an interpreter or other communication issues plus learning disabilities.

However, some GP practice websites were not easy to navigate, or their information around appointment booking was unclear.

Over 90% of GP websites provided clear and helpful information about self-care and support organisations to help people take control of their own health. Slightly less (87%) had links to official NHS COVID-19 information, and 84% made it clear how to book an appointment.

However, it was not always clear what types of appointments were available. The appointment options were often situated in multiple locations, potentially creating confusion for patients.

### **'Adopt this standard'**

Our volunteers found that only around one third of GP practice websites provided sufficient information regarding interpreter service provision. There was also a lack of patient engagement demonstrated in some GP websites: less than half were found to have up-to-date information regarding their Patient Participation Group, and less than one fifth mentioned the local Healthwatch.

As a result of our report, Vale of York CCG have started to undertake their own audit to look at the clarity of information that is available on GP websites across York and North Yorkshire. They will use our feedback to find where there are gaps and create an expected 'website standard' across the Vale of York area, with the hope that GP practices will adopt this standard.

Bradford & Craven PCCC (Primary Care Commissioning Committee) endorsed our recommendations and highlighted the inclusion of diversity. They are currently considering the use of easy read facilities on websites, and taking up a number of our recommendations in their current review of GP contract monitoring.

North Yorkshire CCG have told us that they found our GP Website Check-Up report very informative and particularly relevant in the current context. They will be working with their PCN's to support GP practices to make the necessary changes to their websites.

### **'Making improvements'**

Later this year we will conduct a follow-up review to evaluate the improvements to GP websites, as well as continuing to monitor feedback from the public regarding their experiences of GP practices more widely.



**SCAN TO  
READ THE  
REPORT**

**Have  
your  
say**

# WE ARE HERE TO LISTEN TO THE THINGS THAT MATTER MOST TO YOU!



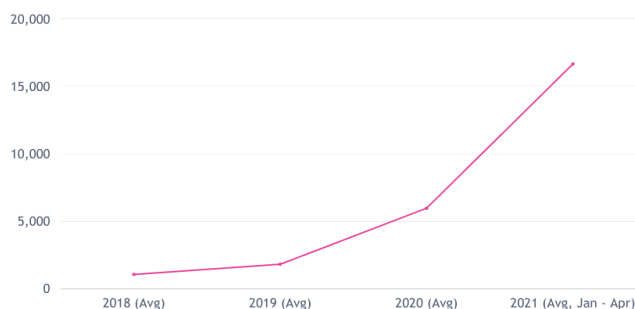
People speak to Healthwatch North Yorkshire about the issues that matter most to them. We share these experiences with local services so that they can be improved. We also share them with Healthwatch England, the national body, which identifies common issues affecting people across the country, and informs those with the power to make change happen.

It is important that people continue to get in touch with Healthwatch North Yorkshire, as the more feedback we receive, the more information we can provide to local health and social care providers - who have the power to change services across the county.

Over the last 6 months we have been working hard to make sure our website and social media content is tailored to the information that you want - with up-to-date relevant news and information. A lot of the information we share has related to COVID-19 and the vaccination programme in North Yorkshire.

We have continued to see an increase in our monthly figures for people visiting our website. This is important to us, as this helps to inform us that the information we provide is right and that we are reaching more and more people.

Monthly Average of Visits to Healthwatch North Yorkshire's Website by Year



In March we launched our report - *Rural Communities* - which highlights the challenges people have to accessing health and social care information and services in rural communities.



## Report's key findings:

- People feel more informed about health and social care services in the local area than services located further afield.
- Most information is accessed through local sources, such as local media or word-of mouth.
- Transport is vital for accessing health and social care services especially for older people.
- Lack of reliable bus services discourages use and prevents people from accessing services.
- Despite a strong sense of community spirit there are feelings of isolation that permeate in rural communities.
- COVID-19 has highlighted the key, evident barriers that exist for people in rural communities.



# Meet Our Trustees



**Agnes Crutchard,  
Board Member.**

I have been working for a Yorkshire healthcare organisation for the past 10 years, as a senior market intelligence manager, investigating new medical technologies which can benefit the NHS. I am also working closely with primary and secondary care organisations in Yorkshire, supporting healthcare professionals in developing innovative ideas destined to improve patient care. I have been involved in charitable activities over 9 years, supporting local children fundraising activities as pre-school, PTA, and a Play Park committee member.

I joined Healthwatch North Yorkshire as a trustee in October last year and it has allowed me to realise the importance of voluntary sector organisations in improving local care and the particular role of Healthwatch in capturing the voice of patients to improve service delivery. This was particularly demonstrated by the role that Healthwatch North Yorkshire played in assisting patients at a desperate time such as these past 12 months of pandemic, when most other health and care services were paralysed by their need to respond to emergency situations.

I became a trustee because as a mum of a child with a hearing impairment we have benefited for several years from the support and care of the NHS, and I wanted to give something back. In addition, through my professional life, I closely witness and support clinicians in making an impact in the Yorkshire region, and I was looking for an opportunity to support patients similarly contributing to the improvement of health and care services. I also wanted to share my expertise in managing healthcare data.

The support that the team at Healthwatch North Yorkshire has been providing to patients during the pandemic, has demonstrated that we are a true voice for patients and a valuable partner in helping to bring about service improvements. As a member of the Board of Trustees, we are assisting the Healthwatch team in navigating this period of high demand on our services, through advice, active participation but also in strengthening the team through recruitment. Our objective is to maintain the momentum for Healthwatch North Yorkshire to be recognised and to develop new relationships in our region which will allow us to influence the current restructuring of local health and care services.

I would particularly like to thank the team at Healthwatch North Yorkshire who have worked above and beyond what was expected of them, during these particularly testing times. I would also like to thank the patients and the public who have shared their stories with us, and to let them know that these are the stories that we need to hear about, and which, through communication with service providers, will hopefully help to improve local services.



# DENTISTRY ISSUES ACROSS THE COUNTY

In October we undertook a 12-month review of all the dentistry feedback in preparation for a meeting with NHS dental commissioners in Yorkshire and the Humber.

At that time we found that some dental practices had waiting lists of around two years, with some people having to travel significant distances to receive treatment. Since October this situation has only got worse.

In December, Healthwatch England published a report highlighting the dire situation across England - the story of a father asking his young son to help pull out his own teeth due to the pain – featured prominently and indicated the situation many people across the nation find themselves in with regards to poor access to NHS dentistry.

We undertook a second 12-month review in February, and found that the volume of people contacting us about NHS dentistry had increased to 1 in 9 contacts received.

At this time we highlighted the increasing concern around the oral health of children, and the growing frustration we were hearing from people about being offered private treatment after being told there was no NHS places available.

Worryingly, in our February review, we were getting indications that people were no longer being offered places on waiting lists. Since then, we have become aware of three dental practices in North Yorkshire intending to no longer deliver NHS dental treatment - one in Scarborough and two in the Selby district.

The reasons for this vary among the practices. This follows the closure of a dental practice in Helmsley in the latter half of last year.

When combined with the increased waiting times for routine appointments for those fortunate to be NHS dental patients, this is a very troubling direction of travel in terms of dentistry provision across the county.

Part of the problem is funding. The funding contract run by NHS England has not been revisited for over a decade, and simply there is not enough funding available to meet the requirements of the population.

We have been in frequent conversation with NHS dental commissioners for Yorkshire and the Humber, and similar to alternative provision being made available in Ryedale previously, we have been given reassurances the same will occur in Scarborough, and we hope for the same in the Selby district.

Further to this, we will be working in Scarborough in collaboration with NHS England and NHS Improvement to hear the views of the public to help understand what services people would like across Scarborough district this year and in the future.

We want to encourage members of the public in North Yorkshire to keep contacting us about dentistry to enable us to keep making the argument for greater provision and improvements in services.

Our voices give us the power to make representations to those with the power to make change happen. It may be difficult, but as we hear from more of you, the more the case becomes stronger.

## UPDATE FROM HEALTHWATCH ENGLAND:

Healthwatch England have launched their [strategy](#) for 2021-2026.

The strategy:

1. To build a sustainable and high-performing network of local Healthwatch services.
2. To find out the experiences of people needing or using health, public health and social care services.
3. To seek the views of those who are seldom heard and reduce the barriers they face.
4. To act on what we hear to improve health and care policy and practice.
5. To build on and share our expertise in engagement.
6. To be strong, well-governed and use our resources for the greatest impact.



## TOP LOCAL NEWS STORIES:

- Humber NHS Foundation Trust have set a goal to raise £200,000 for Whitby Hospital and Gardens.
- A multi-million pound [investment](#) at York Hospital will help develop a brand new two-storey extension and eight bedded resuscitation area.
- North Yorkshire County Council's '[Unlock Summer](#)' campaign is underway and encourages North Yorkshire residents to keep up their good work so that everyone can enjoy the freedoms of summer.
- Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys Trust have [partnered](#) with NHS North Yorkshire Clinical Commissioning Group to improve access to services for people with mental health conditions by embedding mental health professionals into multi-disciplinary GP meetings in Harrogate.



## HOW DO I BENEFIT FROM WHAT HEALTHWATCH DOES?

- You can speak to us about what you think of local services - good or bad.
- We are interested in everybody's views, from all parts of the community.
- Where possible, we will let you know when changes are planned to services in your area and help you have a say.
- You can speak to us to find information about health and social care services in your area locally.





# healthwatch

## North Yorkshire

Healthwatch North Yorkshire is an independent charity commissioned by North Yorkshire County Council to carry out statutory duties.

The Healthwatch Network was established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.

## SHARE YOUR VIEWS WITH US

As the independent champion for people using local health and social care services, we exist to make sure that people are at the heart of care—and we couldn't do that without your feedback.

Every comment matters, and your views really can help to make a difference.



We are currently transferring onto a new website and the new site will be launching soon.

Keep an eye on our social media channels or subscribe to our monthly newsletter to keep up to date with the latest news and information.

## GET IN TOUCH!

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