

# Championing what matters to **you**

Healthwatch Merton  
Annual Report 2021-22



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# Message from our chair

2021-22 was another challenging year for everyone, including Healthwatch Merton. The pandemic continued to limit our ways of engaging with people face to face and getting your voice heard across health and social care services and systems. However, despite the Covid-19 challenges staff and volunteers faced, the team continued to do excellent work on your behalf. I would like to personally thank all those involved with Healthwatch Merton over the last year for your continued support and dedication to helping others.

We have continued to strengthen partnerships with voluntary sector organisations and statutory services to work better together as part of a wide local integrated system to improve the care and support people receive locally.

In 2022/2023 we plan to listen to and engage with even more people, to support individuals and local communities with their health and social care challenges and keep partners in the new Integrated Care System accountable to the needs of local people.



Brian Dillon  
Healthwatch Merton Chair



“The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities.”

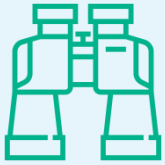
Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England



# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Merton is your local health and social care champion. 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

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



### Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



### Our values

- Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

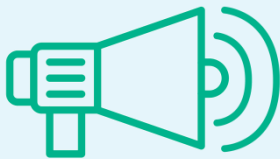
# Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

## Reaching out

**5,568 people**

people engaged with us this year through social media, E-bulletins, planned sessions, with us at online community events and through using our website to find the advice and information they need and to be involved in local discussions..



We heard directly from

**542 people**

about their health and social care experience which feeds into helping shape and improve local Health and Care services locally.

## Making a difference to care

We published

**3 reports**

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



**12 Ebulletins**

We directly influenced and supported the development of

**5**

different borough wide strategies seeking to improve local Health and Social Care services for residents, each with a clear focus on how it supports tackling local inequalities.

## Health and care that works for you

We're lucky to have

**13**

outstanding volunteers, who gave up over 79 days of their time to make care better for our community.

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

**£125,000**

Which is the same as the previous year.

We also currently employ

**3 staff**

2 fulltime equivalent, 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



Collaboratively with the local authority, volunteers and partner organisations supported the development and launch of the 'Merton Carers Strategy'.



From representation at meetings, sharing information, and listening to our community, our volunteers helped us begin to make our way out of COVID-19.

Summer



Looked into the accessible format standards and along with a local voluntary organisation ensured this was included in the local Health and Care plan.



We supported the #BecauseWeAllCare campaign which saw 54,000 people come forward nationally to tell Healthwatch England about issues they faced with services.

Autumn



Teamed up with our neighbouring Southwest London Healthwatch's and collectively engaged people with Long COVID to gather intelligence and learning to be shared with NHS to help improve available services.



As lockdown rules were lifted we re-started face-to-face community outreach and supported local events for people to be better informed on how to access the right services.

Winter



Began collaborative work on improving the procedure, experience and access when raising Adult Safeguarding concerns in the borough



Worked in partnership with others to understand communities hesitancy towards the vaccine and promote the local ongoing COVID-19 vaccination services.



# Listening to your experiences

Services cannot make improvements without hearing your views. That is why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and through our strong relationships feedback to services to help them improve.



## What is Working Well (during the Pandemic)

We invited Merton residents to share what had been working well remotely with health (e.g., 111 A&E Bookings and pharmacy delivery services), social care and community services (e.g., digital consultations and over the phone) during the pandemic. We had a section focused on connecting digital due to increase of online usage.

Alongside the online survey we also sought examples of what was working well through our virtual outreach programme that we carried out with the Patient and Public Engagement Manager (Merton) from NHS South West London CCG.

Here are a few examples of what we found:

- 'There is a box outside of the surgery for repeat prescriptions so you don't have to go into the surgery, this is great for people who cannot go online.'
- 'The NHS 111 (A&E Booking Service) have delivered a very effective service that my aunty is happy about when she had a stroke attack they provided a taxi service for her instead of waiting for hours for the ambulance to arrive because she needed very urgent care.'
- 'I was in the queue for the vaccine and a volunteer noticed I was having great difficulty standing, without me asking them to, they came and brought me near to the front of the queue so that I could sit down and wait.'

### Key findings:

39% said they had connected digitally since April 2020.

36% said they need more support with getting online and staying safe.

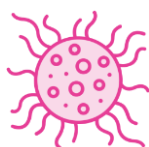
### Recommendations:

- Services should be adaptable enough to deliver via the most appropriate method in any individual circumstance, and proactive about ascertaining which method that is.
- The barriers blocking those who are excluded need to be addressed and could inform a Merton wide digital strategy/plan
- Hold a Merton Digital Summit

### Local impact:

We shared the recommendations at strategic local boards and fed them into relevant programmes and discussions within the networks locally. This has influenced a variety of pieces of work, in particular around 'digital inclusion' and 'access'.





## Long COVID

Between August and November 2021, Healthwatch Merton gathered the views of residents experiencing symptoms associated with Long Covid. Here are a few examples of what people said:

‘Long COVID has made my work life quite difficult. I am 32 years old, I am an administrator/ finance officer and trying to do a full day’s work can be very difficult as its mentally taxing, which makes my home life after work difficult. As I am so tired, this can put a strain on my relationships as I cannot do usual things like go for long walks or carry heavy shopping, this is affecting my mental health and in turn my well-being’

‘Feel I don’t have a life like I used to. I just exist. I can’t do the things I used to. My body and brain don’t work how they used to’

‘I contracted covid over 10 months ago and had mild symptoms except for fatigue. I still have fatigue i.e. I need to rest in bed after eating a meal and I need to rest much more throughout the day than before I had covid’

### The key findings from our Long COVID survey:

27% Had received a Long COVID diagnosis

80% Stated they had not received any support (or were unsure)

63% Stated that Long COVID has impacted on their mental health

32% Stated that living with Long COVID had impacted on their working life

70% Of the people who shared experiences were aged between 30-59

### Local and national impact: Long Covid

As well as influencing development of local services, our work has informed the Healthwatch England ‘What People Have Told us About Long Covid’ report

## 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

It's important for the NHS and social care services to step back and see the bigger picture, through hearing personal experiences, and the impact on people's lives. This provides a deeper understanding than using data alone, can challenge assumptions and motivate people to think and work more creatively.

It is important for us to enable direct access between decision makers and local people whenever we can. An example, we supported a Craftivism and Chat group for those Deaf and Disabled to give their views on health care and services in Merton directly to South West London Clinical Commissioning Group representative with our help and encourage those agencies asking us to help gather views to take an active roll in it.



### Getting services to involve the public

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

We are an active part of the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board (MSAB) and a sub group was directed to be setup to include looking at the process of raising an Adult Safeguarding Concern within Merton. We pushed for real life testing with local people, shared ideas and various ways this could be done which has formed part of the review.



### 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.

'The Accessible Information Standard' which is a law and aims to make sure people with a disability or sensory loss are given information they can understand, and the communication support they need. Though widely known, it is often left out of local strategies or not given the right focus. Locally we have helped along with Merton Vision to ensure this has been part of the thinking and it was recently added to the revised local Health and Care plan and a promise of a task group being setup to focus on this issue.

# Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch 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 or how to make a complaint – you can count on us.

**This year we helped people by:**

Signposting them to relevant health information online

Sharing portals for identifying dentists in the area

Signposting to advocacy services for help with complaints

Referring them to organisations who provide more knowledge and resources



## Giving People the information they need

We aim to give people the information they need to make their own choices or raise their own concerns about their health and care.

This can be anything from sharing where to locate relevant information or materials, information about Merton Social Prescribing or contact details for an organisation that could help them, to more complex queries from people who need more help from us and we will try to find them the place to go next.

## Signposting and Connecting people with local services

Through strong working relationships and networks we are able to support and direct people to right place for them.

Whether that is Independent Health Complaints Advocacy provided in Merton by Voiceability or one of the many local organisations we work with, from 'Off the Record' young peoples counselling service, MCIL (Merton Centre for Independent Living, Citizens Advice to Merton's Social Prescribing to name some, we are confident we will find people the right place to go and not be left being sent from one service to another until they hopefully end up in the right place.



## Providing advice and information

As demand for Social Care and NHS services increases, particularly when services are under considerable pressure, it is important that individuals are seen and supported by the appropriate service for their concern.

We support all our partners communication campaigns in providing advice and information to the public to help them decide which service was right for them.





# Volunteers

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

This year our volunteers:

- Represented us at stakeholder and service provider meetings
- Kept us up to date with local information
- Supported us with the development of our Work Programme
- Helped us with direct outreach as the community begin to gain confidence and attend outdoor events
- Supported us to develop improved ways of gathering local intelligence and using it more effectively







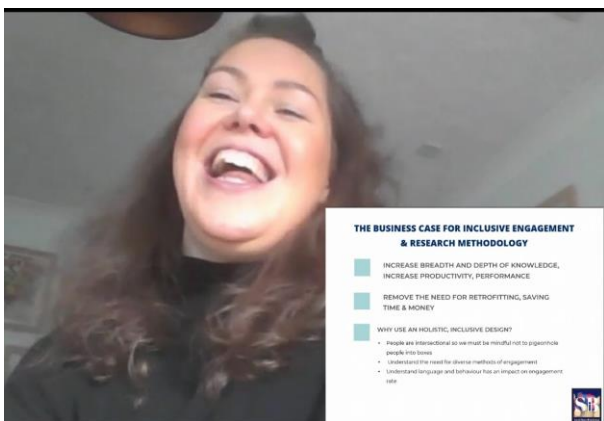
## Operational Committee

### Alfredo

"I volunteer for Healthwatch Merton as a member of Healthwatch Merton Operation Committee (HWMOC) . I got involved so I could help by using my experience to support HWMOC being kept informed, updated and linked in with St Georges Hospital. I have managed to do things like secure the Chief Operating Officer of St George's Hospital to join us at one of our recent meetings to discuss their plans for patient and community engagement in the coming year – As a HWMOC member I actively communicate with other members in identifying and sharing intelligence about potential gaps that we might want to look into and explore. For instance, 2 years ago a review of Blue Badge (BB) eligibility indicated that persons with certain learning disability qualify for a BB. This has led to an increase to the number of BB in circulation, the issue is the number of BB bays has not increased accordingly."

### Sarah


"I have found volunteering for Healthwatch Merton both welcoming and enjoyable. As a volunteer you want the opportunity to share what you have to offer. I was able to offer a session on 'Diversification in Methodological Approaches' which helped Healthwatch Merton and other volunteers to review and self reflect on how we approach and work with different people."



### Do you feel inspired?

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 Merton.

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

 020 8685 2282

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

# 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	
Funding received from local authority	£125,000
Additional funding	£0,000
Total income	£125,000

Income	
Staff costs	£95,684
Operational costs	£23,316
Support and administration	£6,000
Total expenditure	£125,000

## Top three focus areas for 2022-23

1. Develop a HWM 'Voice for Young People' to influence and direct areas of our work
2. Support digital inclusion work
3. A focus on two particular communities to strengthen their Voice within service design and improvement locally: Veterans and LGBT+

## 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.

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.

As the nation recovers from the pandemic and the devastating impact it has had on services and society, we will continue to champion the voices of local residents in an ever-changing agile environment, particular those who are seldom heard.

# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch Merton, Vestry Hall, London Road, Merton CR4 3UD. Host organisation MVSC, trading under the name of Merton Connected manage the Healthwatch Merton contract.

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Healthwatch Merton 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 Operational Committee consists of 9 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Operational Committee ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2021/22 the Operational Committee met 6 times and made decisions on matters of resource and time to focus on working with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to develop a sustainable role when the CCG transition into the new Integrated Care System (ICS) model.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work focus areas through public meetings, other outreach and engagement projects. We also review any intelligence we gather and receive from direct contacts and feedback to assess what key themes may be emerging.

### **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 2021/22 we have been available by email, provided a webform on our website, 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 reviewing which communities have been able to have an effective voice and try to identify those who have not. This has identified particular communities requiring our particular attention and we have started work with Veterans and LGBT+ communities to improve the strength of their voice with decision makers. We have identified other communities and will decide which ones to focus on next year.

We will ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. It will be available on our website, and we will also share it with Healthwatch England, Care Quality Commission (CQC), NHS England and the London Borough of Merton.

## **Responses to recommendations and requests**

There were no providers who failed to respond to our requests for information or our 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 the Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

## **Health and Wellbeing Board**

Healthwatch Merton is represented on the Merton Health and Wellbeing Board by Brian Dillon, Chair of Healthwatch Merton and Dave Curtis, Head of Healthwatch Merton.





# healthwatch

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