



# **COVID related Public Feedback for Kent**

**Monthly Summary report  
February 15th-28th  
2021**



## Background

Every day both Healthwatch Kent and the Kent User Forums are working together to hear feedback from people about how they are coping right now. In the last two weeks of February, **37** people shared with us their experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic and life under social distancing. We have combined this with anecdotal feedback from **11** organisations who support a wide range of Kent residents including people living with mental health, physical disability, sight loss and impairment, carers and those suffering domestic abuse.

This report details everything we've heard. Its purpose is to enable decision makers and planners to understand how people are coping during the COVID epidemic.

## Methodology

We have been gathering feedback through a number of routes:

1. The number of calls to our Helpline continue to increase
2. People also share their experiences with us via our website, email or text
3. We've been running a series of social media campaigns to capture feedback
4. The Kent Forums have been proactively gathering feedback from the communities they represent
5. Regularly talking to community groups and voluntary organisations to understand how their clients and members are coping

Since March 2020, Healthwatch staff and volunteers have been building relationships with voluntary organisations and community groups. This has enabled us to hear from communities who may find it harder to share their feedback such as people living with Dementia.

## What do we do with the feedback?

Every month, we bring together all the feedback from the multiple sources into one report. This is then shared with decision makers to provide a timely snapshot of how people are coping.

## What are we trying to achieve?

This report aims to summarise and reflect the changing experiences of people living and working in Kent during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Our aim is that the feedback is used to support emergency and recovery planning across the health and social care system in Kent.

## Things to remember when reading this report

- The comments in italics are direct quotes from people. They are people's personal views, not the view of Healthwatch Kent or the Forums. Other comments are anecdotal pieces of feedback from organisations.
- This is a snapshot of feedback over a month-it is not intended to replace an organisations own responsibility to gather feedback from the public.
- Wherever possible we are raising issues and sharing feedback directly with relevant organisations.
- You may read some worrying stories. Some of these have come directly from the public and they have given us contact details, we are following up with them and escalating if necessary. However, not everyone will give us contact details. Where organisations have shared concerns with us, they are following their own safeguarding and escalation protocols.
- The previous months reports are available on our website.

Thanks to everyone who contributed!



## ACCESS TO VACCINES

- An organisation supporting people with vision impairments reported a lot of feedback about the information leaflets that are given to people after their vaccine. They told us people are struggling to read them as the print is small. One person called AstraZeneca directly to get an electronic copy of the leaflet. No braille or Easy Read version of the leaflet have been produced and distributed to vaccination hubs. We offered to record an audio version of the leaflet but have not yet heard back from the Clinical Commissioning Group.
- A dementia support group told us that some clients had found it difficult to walk to the “post vaccine” waiting area as it was a 50-yard walk away from the surgery, which people had not been forewarned about, and found it difficult to manage.
- KCC Community Wardens in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells told us that residents have raised concerns about duplication of advice being sent about vaccinations. For example, an NHS letter advising them to go to one site then a telephone call from their own GP practise sending them to another site.
- KCC Community Wardens in Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling told us that residents have expressed concerns that people who are allergic to penicillin and are aged 70 and over have not got their vaccine and have been ‘forgotten about’.



## **Received the vaccine**

- Through our social media insights, we heard about one person who took a taxi to a drive-through a Covid testing centre and was charged £35; they said that they wouldn't have taken a taxi if they knew the cost upfront.
- *"I had my Astra Zeneca injection on Saturday and I spent all of Sunday in bed unwell. I felt sick, headache, dizziness. I think it is all normal side effects. I feel ok this morning, 3 days later, just a sore arm"*
- *"My neighbour had their Covid Vaccine at XXXXX. A friend had told them what to expect so they felt prepared. They said all the staff were lovely, however afterwards instead of being asked to sit and wait for 15 minutes (as they were expecting) a staff member said 'the exit is this way'. My neighbour was a bit shocked but made their way home. Afterwards they reported that they felt unwell, it lasted for a few days"*
- *"My mother-in-law attended XXX for her Covid vaccination. She said everyone was friendly and made her feel relaxed. She was told that she was having the Pfizer vaccine and would have to wait for 15 minutes afterwards. Following the jab, she was shown to another room and a timer was put on, when the buzzer went off, she felt fine and was allowed to leave. She said that she felt 'off' for a couple of days and that her arm felt like someone had punched her. Other than that there were no serious side effects and she was pleased to have been called for the vaccine"*
- A mental health support group told us that a service user had their covid jab and on the third day they were still experiencing some symptoms. They called NHS 119 and were told to self-isolate for 7 days at home. They were told to isolate as symptoms should only last for 2 days following the jab. 119 were going to post a home covid test as they could not get to the testing centre which was 13 miles away.
- We heard from a lady who said that it was wonderful that the centres and vaccines had been mobilised so quickly and they were very grateful to have been called, however they said it would be nice if there was a private area. She explained that she has scars from self-harming and it was daunting being in a public area where these scars could be seen. She felt that there are maybe other people who would not wish to show their scars etc.
- A mental health support group told us about a service user who was happy to receive their vaccination in Dover. They have booked their 2nd vaccine, which will be in Folkestone which is a bit out of their "comfort zone", but hopefully it will be resolved when the time comes in May.
- A caller to our Helpline reported that their parents were invited to have their vaccine at a local centre however they declined because the appointment offered was late at night. Since then, they have received a call from their surgery to book a home visit to have their vaccine.
- *"Poor organisation at XXXXX vaccination hub. Waited outside in minus 5 temperatures with a big queue of others outside on 13 Feb. High vis man at the door keeping it firmly shut. No one checking the queue outside or letting people in when there was loads of chairs spaced apart. Organised inside stacks of volunteers but elderly clients left outside for ages without anyone looking after them. Much better organisation needed for such a large venue"*

## **Not had the vaccine**

- *"I have huge concerns about Kent's slow Covid vaccination process. I was advised last year that I am at higher risk should I catch Covid-19 as I had acute kidney injury in the past. However this does not fall into any designated Government category so despite having discussed this with my GP, I have to wait for category 7 (over 60's). Due to slow progress in my area together with adding a large number of people to the higher risk categories in Kent recently (learning difficulties and the Government's additions based on Q-Covid model) plus the decision by Kent CCG to work down the age within categories, it seems I will have to wait until April or May for my first vaccination. This means I will not be fully protected until say August or September. As I have been more or less shielding due to the medical advice and the economy is due to be opened up again soon, it seems harsh that there is this inequity."*
- *"I am a little confused as to where I come in the vaccine queue and I am not sure if I am classed as vulnerable or not. I moved house last year and I am concerned that I may have been missed between surgeries, as people keep suggesting I should be classed as vulnerable. I have fibromyalgia, hemochromatosis and a furring of an artery in my neck, which I take aspirin everyday for"*
- *"I am currently living with my elderly mother and she was offered the covid 19 vaccine but she turned it down. She is very worried that it might interact with her medication and cause harm to her. Also, she is concerned by turning down the offer, she thinks she might be removed from the doctors surgery list"*
- A caller to our helpline talked about the problems they were experiencing with their father's GP surgery.. Their father is 94 years old and is housebound; he has had letters asking him to book his covid vaccine but the surgery had told them to ignore the letters as they would be vaccinating him. The client called 119 who said to deal with the medical centre directly. The client was told by the surgery that home vaccinations only started in the past week and there had been delays due to the bad weather, they were not able to give a date for coming to the house to give him the vaccination. The client and their father are aware of other people in the same surgery who have already been vaccinated at home, but they are still waiting. The client is concerned because the medical centre told them on the phone that the vaccine has to be administered by a doctor. They have asked to speak to the practice manager, but haven't heard back from them to date.
- *"I was wondering why we have not yet prioritised care homes in East Kent for the Covid vaccinations. We are hearing about over 70's now being vaccinated in other areas, we see on the news Herne Bay, Canterbury, etc. all up and running and still our care homes are left behind. My father was taken to hospital only yesterday having tested positive - this could have been avoided and, although XXXXX now seems to be up and running, no mention has still been mentioned about vaccinating care home residents"*
- A mental health support group told us about a service user who arrived for their Covid vaccination; they went to the XXXXX hub and there was hardly anybody there. They were informed that they could not have the jab due to another health issue and were told to go back to their GP, who should arrange for the local hospital to give them the vaccine. The GP gave them the hospital phone number which they rang only to be told it was for NHS staff only and there were no phone numbers for the general public. They have emailed their surgery to inform GP of the problem but are still awaiting a reply to the email.

- An Age UK told us that when they arrived at a client's house (prearranged) to take them to the vaccination hub they refused to leave the house. The daughter called to rebook an appointment for the vaccine, but was told that the admin records showed that the client had received the vaccine and they were not able to book an appointment.
- A rehabilitation service told us that no priority has been given to prisoners or to prison staff in the vaccination programme. This has left prison staff feeling "extremely vulnerable".
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people in East Kent told us that carers in their area are concerned that they have not heard about covid vaccines for their housebound cared-for.
- KCC Community Wardens in Dover & Canterbury told us that people who are housebound are saying that their GP clinic have not contacted them with regards to having a vaccination at home, and it is so difficult to get hold of someone at the GP surgery.

## COVID TESTING

- A caller to our Helpline told us that their GP had recommended doing a home Covid test. They have had symptoms since the end of last year and the 119 team will not send them a test.
- An organisation supporting people with vision impairments told us that they had been tested in the Maidstone area for the new strains of Covid; one person said that the team member doing the testing "couldn't have been more helpful". The other person said that they wouldn't have been able to do the test if they didn't have a better-sighted person within their bubble who had to come over to assist.

## TRACK & TRACE

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard of one frustrated family who continues to receive calls from the Track & Trace team every day, despite their family member being admitted to hospital (and continuing to test positive for covid after one month)

## COVID EXPERIENCES

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard one household tested positive after displaying symptoms similar to a migraine, at the start of January. They only feel able now (6 weeks later) to consider returning to work even though they are still exhausted.



## SHIELDING

- Through our social media insights, we heard of one person who questioned why they had to continue shielding until the end of March if it was deemed safe enough to open the schools in Mid-March.
- *"I've just received another shielding email. I now have to stay shielded until 31st March. I assume this is when the government will be announcing how the country is going to restart and open things up? I was really keen to get back to the day centre on the 22nd February, which is when I was told that they would be open again. I've only just had my vaccine last week, so I was going to shield for 3 weeks after the vaccine and then get out to the supermarket, it's been a long time since I was able to leave the house. It looks like I'm stuck indoors for another 6 weeks now. It feels like forever"*
- *"I had a bit of a shock today as I received both a shielding letter and an invite to have the covid jab. I didn't know that I fell into this CEV category. I've not been diagnosed with anything except for arthritis, and I'm only 39. I've now booked my vaccine for next week. As for shielding, I don't really go anywhere but I feel like I've had my freedom taken away. I know I can get out for a walk and attend medical appointments etc, and I'm fortunate enough to be a stay at home mum and not work, but it hasn't stopped me from feeling a bit overwhelmed with it. I wasn't told to shield at all in the first or second lockdown, so it's a bit of a shock to be told to shield for the next 5 weeks. How am I supposed to take my kids to school if they have to go back in 2 weeks?"*

## IMPACT OF ISOLATION

- As part of our insight gathering on social media, we heard about one person who was desperate to get back to normal, after a struggling for the past year and putting on weight.
- A dementia support group told us that one participant has noticeably deteriorated since face-to-face sessions were put on hold; they are not connected to the internet and they struggle to converse on the telephone, so they have become very isolated.
- KCC Community Wardens in Swale and Thanet told us that many social gatherings for elderly and isolated people have not been able to take place, such as Age UK events. Many people have been finding this lack of interaction difficult, and it has also been difficult for family members to visit too. Many families have contacted the Wardens to request a check on their loved ones.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people in East Kent told us that many people have not been able to get outside for a long time, and carers are concerned about the decrease in people's mobility.

## LOCKDOWN

- An organisation supporting people to live independently, told us that their clients have concerns around life "going back to normal", and they are worried that they might not have the confidence, physical and mental ability to do this. They want to know what kind of support will be available to help them re-integrate?
- A rehabilitation service told us that some former prisoners have been released back into the community and are put into temporary accommodation, such as B&Bs, hotels. Some of the accommodation providers are setting their own regulations to adhere to covid rules, which the rehabilitated are struggling to accept. Some people are not following lockdown rules or staying indoors as they want their freedom back.

## ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

- A family contacted our helpline; they have been living abroad for a few years and have returned to the UK and are living in temporary accommodation. They have been unable to register with a local GP as the surgeries told them that they must provide a utility bill, something that the family do not have as their housing is only temporary. One member of the family has type 1 diabetes and wants to ensure that they are on the list for a vaccine.
- A caller to our helpline told us about trouble accessing a covid test: their brother needed to return to their home in Eastern Europe however he had tested positive for Covid in January and so was not able to get a PCR test as it will show a positive result. Their embassy said that they will accept a Dr's fit note to allow him back into the country; they contacted 111 who said that they need to register with a local GP, however the receptionist at their local clinic said that they don't provide these kind of fit notes. This means that he is unable to return to his country.
- Our helpline spoke to a caller who was having difficulty registering their parents with a GP clinic; their parents are from Turkey and have been in the country for many months already, and are staying for a while longer. The mother needs medication for a stroke, and also needs her covid vaccine. The GP said that they do not have the capacity to take anyone new on at the moment. They said that they could take their mother on but only as a temporary patient and provide her with the medication that she needs, but they would have to return to their own country to have their vaccination. They've called the CCG and the GP registration helpline, who said that their GP clinic did have space to take on their parents. They called the practice and explained to the practice manager that they had spoken to the CCG; the manager then allowed them to register their parents.

## ACCESS TO MEDICATION

- *"We went to the out of hours pharmacy at Boots in XXXXX on a Sunday, 14th February. The NHS website says it opens on Sundays till 11.59pm but the shop was closed and a notice on the door said that since 1st February it closes on Sundays at 4pm. I needed to get access to medication! Is the NHS website wrong, or should the pharmacy have been open? Is this a covid regulation that it closes early? I rang the bell for the pharmacy and waited for 20 minutes but there was definitely no one there"*
- *"I had a bad infection and was unable to get my medication from the pharmacy myself. I tried to use the NHS line to make use of their volunteer service. I rang the line but no-one called back and I tried to reregister myself twice more but no-one got back to me. In the end I had to pay £20 to a taxi driver to take my identification and pick up my prescription for me as I was too unwell to do it myself"*
- A rehabilitation service told us that former prisoners who are newly released are finding delays in being allocated a GP, which leads to delays in issuing medications



## DENTISTS

- Our helpline took 14 calls in two weeks from people who are trying to access NHS dentists. One caller had to borrow money to pay for the dental care that was needed. Another caller has been unable to find a dentist for themselves and their 8 year old son, who has a problematic tooth at the moment.
- KCC Community Wardens in Dover & Canterbury told us that people have been concerned about the lack of dental appointments available for children's check-ups; some people have been without an appointment for almost 2 years now.

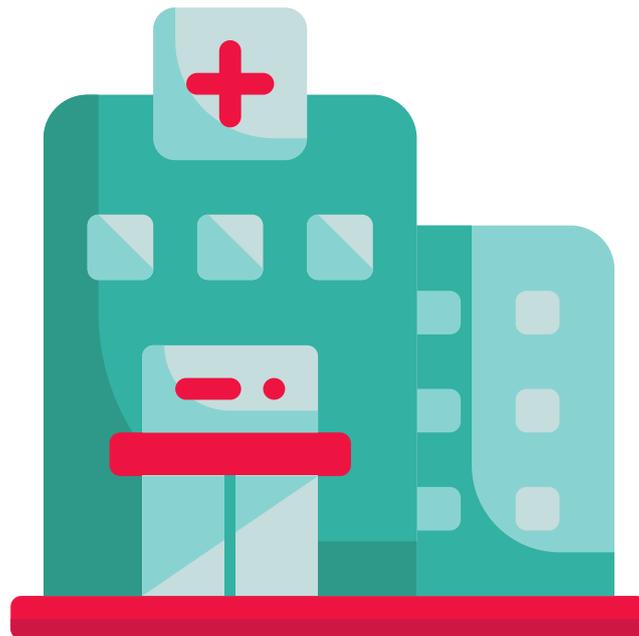
## HOSPITAL TREATMENT

### Postponed treatment

- A caller to our helpline told us that their surgery was postponed due to Covid; they had been referred for spinal surgery and in October 2020 they were given a date for surgery (to take place in November). Then the hospital, date and surgeon were all changed and then it was cancelled two days before the surgery was due. They have chased this by email and phone but have heard nothing back, their GP has also sent a letter to the hospital but there has been no response.
- KCC Community Wardens in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells told us that residents have had their routine operations postponed due to the pressures in hospitals. This has meant people have had to endure longer health and wellbeing issues.

### Discharge

- KCC Community Wardens in Folkestone & Ashford told us that they have seen residents being discharged from hospital early, and arrive home to find they have no food, gas and electricity.



## MENTAL HEALTH

- *“During lockdown I was diagnosed with EUPD, but it was not explained to me what it is and how to cope or find help for this. The mental health team diagnosed me over the phone in a 15 minute phone call and all they did was send me a leaflet which I couldn't read due to being dyslexic. This led me to look it up on google and self-diagnose”*
- A mental health support group told us about a person who has been waiting for help with their mental health condition. The waiting list is very long, and Covid is making things more difficult, but they need help now.
- KCC Community Wardens in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells told us that residents are living with continued fear of catching the virus. Some exhibit anxiety especially if leaving their homes. Some would rather go without visiting local shops for essential items due to extreme anxiety.
- KCC Community Wardens in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells told us that residents appear to be in a better place mentally since receiving the vaccine. The vaccine has given them hope and positivity.

## Community Mental Health Teams

- A mental health support group told us about someone who was accessing XXXXX for psychotherapy at the beginning of 2020. They said that their therapist was taken ill at the beginning of the first lockdown and their therapy was put on hold. Therapy was then resumed for 2 sessions and then told that was the end of their therapy. They reported that it was a waste of time as they didn't get anything from it due to the break between therapy sessions.
- *“During this lockdown the CMHT have been fantastic. They send a support worker to my house because I'm agoraphobic and they're helping me get a laptop and will teach me to use zoom so I can talk to people more as I'm lonely and they said they will organise therapy that I can do from home too”*
- A mental health support group told us about a person who has been waiting a year for their medication review and they report really struggling with the medication that they are on. They have noticed a decline in their mental health during the pandemic; they have contacted the CMHT to push for a diagnosis as they recognise traits of a specific mental illness, however the CMHT say that they need to wait for an appointment. They said they feel as though they are screaming out for help and the CMHT do not listen to them.

## CARE AT HOME

- KCC Community Wardens in Folkestone & Ashford told us that they received a referral from a GP surgery regarding a patient; the resident had contracted Covid last year, which had exacerbated underlying health conditions, and led to a deterioration in their health. The Warden instigated multi-agency working using the Esther model, and the district nurse increased their weekly visits, their care package increased, and the GP became more involved in medicine management.

## **CARERS**

- A caller to our helpline wanted to find out how to get their 2 adult children registered as her carers; she is housebound and both adult children live at home with her. She contacted the GP surgery who said that they needed proof, as they had recently received many calls from people saying that they were caring for a relative. She called KCC who said that this hadn't been heard of before. Eventually she was able to get her occupational therapist and her MS nurse to write to the GP and confirm that she is housebound, CEV, and requires care to do most tasks due to her condition, which is provided by her children. She reported that a GP came to her house the next weekend to administer her vaccine.
- An Age UK in the east of Kent told us that they receive many calls from carers of people with dementia; many are "desperate for help". The centre was unsure about the local guidelines for arranging help for people who are in need.
- An organisation supporting people to live independently told us that they are facing questions regarding vaccines, will staff be able to ask clients if they have been vaccinated and can they ask for proof?
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people in East Kent told us that carers have concerns that not all domiciliary carers coming into their home and mixing with the family have been vaccinated.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

- An organisation supporting people to live independently told us that some clients are concerned about the length of time it is taking for social services to reply to letters; in some cases it has taken 2 months to get a reply.
- KCC Community Wardens in Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling told us that residents are wanting to see more help & doorstep conversations from social services and also housing association officers. This issue is mentioned weekly and the Wardens reported that there is increased frustration and anxiety building up from residents.

## **COMMUNITY SERVICES**

- A voluntary service in Thanet told us about a couple who are finding it difficult to cope with the lack of respite; their spouse has dementia and they are both shielding so there is no respite from caring duties.
- A community hub told us that 35% of disabled adults who use their centre have now had their covid vaccine. This means they can start planning when to re-open some services to their vulnerable cohort.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable elderly people in East Kent told us that carers are expressing concerns that their cared-for's dementia is deteriorating as they have no activities to look forward to, and very little stimulation at home.

## IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

- Through our insight gathering on social media, we heard about 2 parents who were struggling; one parent is sending their child back to nursery but the child is refusing to go. The other is having difficulties with their 2 children with one child struggling with sleep regression, nightmares and toileting issues, and the other child struggling to cope with anxiety.
- A mental health support group shared a comment from a service user; “Early Help have been really helpful and they came to visit me at school when I was able to go to school, and face to face support is what I prefer”
- An organisation supporting families with special needs, told us that they had 6 new families referred into their service, all struggling with behaviour, sleep deprivation and parents are struggling to take back control of their children. All of the children from the 6 new family referrals have autism and the families are struggling to get support put in place at the moment.
- KCC Community Wardens in Swale and Thanet told us that they have seen an increase in antisocial behaviour calls, this is mostly due to children & young adults not attending school due to lockdown. This has caused members of the community some discomfort when they see large gatherings of young people.

## EDUCATION

- An organisation supporting families with special needs told us that a lot of families have had enough; they want their children back in full time education as they are struggling to manage the demands of home learning on the internet, and the time that it requires (especially when more than 1 child needs support).



## **ABUSE**

- An organisation supporting families with special needs, told us that they are helping families who are living in abusive situations in lockdown. In one circumstance, they provided a listening ear, food donations and activities to engage the children, as the police welfare service were supporting also.
- KCC Community Wardens in Swale and Thanet told us that with the new vaccine being introduced, there is a lot of apprehension, especially among older residents, that people will try to pretend they are from the NHS to sign people up to the vaccine for money.
- KCC Community Wardens in Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling told us that they provided support to one school after a parent became aggressive as they believed that the pandemic was not real.

## **FINANCE**

- An organisation supporting families with special needs told us that the families they work with are struggling with finances; the main earners have had hours reduced, or are on zero hours contract and no money is coming in. Some workers have been furloughed but at a reduced rate, because their employer can't afford to offer a top up.
- KCC Community Wardens in Swale and Thanet told us that many members of the community are struggling with financial issues due to either being furloughed, or their business has closed. There are concerns around people's property financial management and access to food.

## **SUPERMARKETS/GENERAL HYGIENE/ PRECAUTIONS**

- *"Whilst at the tills of my local supermarket, I was surprised to see that when the cashier was replaced by a colleague, there was no cleaning of the till area before the replacement cashier commenced working. Supermarkets have put a lot of measures in place to provide sanitation for customers, but I did not feel that the members of staff were properly protected, or perhaps not properly trained in how to sanitise their work station before and after working in it. It's all very well making customers clean their hands etc before entering the supermarket, but the spread of Covid will never be prevented if staff are not trained as well. I have also noticed on many occasions that self service tills are not wiped down at regular intervals, which I feel they should be"*

## **TRANSPORT**

- A voluntary service in Thanet told us that their clients are asking for transport to their vaccine appointments because they don't want to use taxi firms.
- KCC Community Wardens in Folkestone & Ashford told us that residents have missed appointments because they don't want to use public transport.

## TECHNOLOGY

- A dementia support group told us that their group has moved online for the time being and whilst it has proved challenging for some, it has presented new learning skills for others, which has increased their confidence.
- KCC Community Wardens in Dover & Canterbury told us that people who do not have the internet are finding it hard to book appointments for the vaccination. They have tried calling the number given but it can take up to an hour before it is answered.
- The same Wardens told us that people in their areas who do not have internet access have been unable to book a symptom free covid test.

## DEATH/BEREAVEMENT

- A dementia support group told us that people are struggling with bereavement, as they are unable to reach out to family and adhere to lockdown rules; it becomes a more distressing experience.

## Our Action Plan

**Throughout our report we have identified areas where we can act and follow up on some of the problems people have faced. This is to ensure that the feedback we receive reaches the right people and can continue to be used to drive change and improvement to health and social care services within our community. Check our monthly You Said We Did reports [here](#), to see what impact has been made as a result of the feedback you have shared with us.**



# Thank You



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