



# **COVID Feedback from Kent**

## **August 2020**



# **Monthly Summary report**

## **August 2020**

### **Background**

Throughout August, Healthwatch Kent have worked with the Kent User Forums to gather direct feedback from 81 people about their experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic and life under social distancing. We have combined this with anecdotal feedback from 13 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.

Its purpose is to enable decision makers and planners to understand how people are coping during the COVID epidemic.

## Methodology

We have been running a series of social media adverts promoting an online survey. People were also encouraged to share feedback with our Helpline, either by phone, email or text.

To ensure more than one method of gathering data, Healthwatch staff and volunteers have established a regular phone interview with organisations. These calls enable us to capture the feedback that the organisations are hearing from their own clients and/or members. It is particularly important as it enables us to hear from communities who may find it harder to share their feedback such as people living with Dementia for example.

We have been sharing regular insight reports to provide a timely snapshot of how people are coping. These reports are shared directly with decision makers to help support their emergency and recovery planning.

This report aims to summarise and reflect the changing experiences of people living and working in Kent during the Covid 19 pandemic. If you require more detailed reporting on a particular theme, please contact us, this is the fifth monthly report that we have produced. Our April, May, June & July reports can be found on our website.

This is a monthly snapshot of feedback. Wherever possible we are raising issues and sharing feedback directly with relevant organisations.

You may read some worrying stories in this report. Some of these have come directly from the public and if 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.

**PLEASE NOTE: The comments in italics are direct quotes from the public about their experience. They are peoples' personal views, not the view of Healthwatch Kent. Other comments are anecdotal pieces of feedback from organisations**

Thanks to everyone who contributed!

## TESTING

- *"With such a crap track and trace system and the weird delay in making masks mandatory, it is no surprise that infections are rising again. More predictable chaos!"*
- *"Testing figures have risen therefore infection figures have risen, it's not rocket science"*
- *"We hear a lot about contact tracing but you need to be able to download the app! You can only download it if you have an iPhone 7 or more. Android can do it so why not iPhone 5 or 6? This is a mistake they made when they were devising this, did they not realise this was a problem?"*
- *"Testing more people will result in more positive tests. At least they're talking about covid cases now rather than the death toll"*

## CONTRACTING THE VIRUS

- *"I was very ill in March and had severe breathing difficulties so I'm almost certain that I had the COVID-19 virus but cannot say 100% without having had a test. I stopped vaping, which was a great thing because the truth is that I didn't have the willpower to do so prior to me getting sick. The downside to that is I'm now 12 kilos overweight as I ate for comfort. I'm exhausted all the time and just do not have the strength. I used to work out and was full of life and energy but now I need to sit down if I go up a flight of stairs because of tiredness and having to catch my breath"*

## GOVERNMENT ADVICE

- *"I would rather listen to Chris Whitty, whether he says the same as the Government or not. He has no hidden agenda, other than people's health, but the PM is only thinking of the economy"*
- *"The current advice is rubbish, we are told to stay at home and avoid crowds but go to the movies and eat out. Wear a mask in a cinema but don't wear a mask in a restaurant, but wear the mask if you're getting a takeaway from the same restaurant. Work from home if you can but we should go to work because the businesses are suffering."*
- An Age UK centre told us that they continued to receive calls from relatives of service users who wanted clarification regarding shielding advice and also clarification on the number of people/visits can be made to someone who is staying at home.



## **SECOND WAVE/LOCAL LOCKDOWNS**

- *"I went to Canterbury Primark yesterday after work, about 4.30pm. The centre was overcrowded, Primark must've had about a million customers in store (not all with masks). The second wave is coming people!"*
- *"There will be another lockdown soon, how many more cases is needed to prove that this is serious"*
- *"The second wave is coming. I wish people had more sense, we will never get rid of this virus if people don't listen"*
- *"Look at the beaches; Folkestone, Herne Bay, Whitstable. They're packed today, people are not listening to the Government. Local lockdown is looming"*
- *"Why are we considering local lockdowns but it's okay for the clinically vulnerable to come out of shielding? It doesn't make sense"*
- *"If we can't go abroad then we will all be flocking to our own beaches. Local authorities have to put measures in place now to stop the influx of people all coming to one area, sharing toilets, not using facemasks etc"*
- *"Many people aren't following the rules, they act as if covid has gone"*
- *"The government are doing the right thing, but they need to go one step further; pubs need to close again, or social distancing put back in place. It's that alone that has caused another spike in the 20 to 40 year old bracket"*
- An Age UK centre told us that they are preparing to revert back to their previous regime if there is a local lockdown. They told this will have a massive impact that this would have on their already limited resources.

## **SHIELDING**

### **PROPOSAL TO SHIELD OVER 50S**

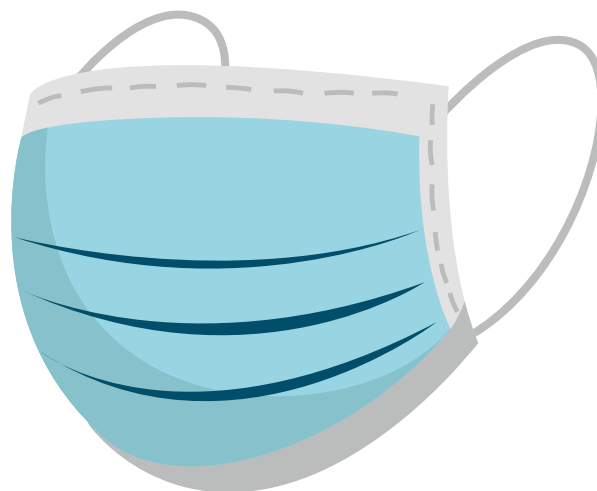
- *"I don't agree with the potential plan for over 50s to shield. I'm 59 but not an old 59. Since lockdown I have been out exactly 8 times, masked, sanitised, the works. Us "oldies" are the only ones who know how to abide by the rules"*
- *"Is 50 the new old? I'm 49 and have young boys. What a load of rubbish, I won't be staying in at my next birthday!"*
- *"I can't shield as I am my parents' carer, and my autistic son's carer. I have to do everything for them. I'm 54 by the way"*

### **AFRAID TO STOP SHIELDING**

- *"After shielding since March 12th, I remain extremely vulnerable, whereas the two metre rule has ceased to exist. The restrictions on customers and shops has gone, people won't wear masks, staff won't wear masks. The virus is still out there, it loves people being in close proximity. No way will I feel safe to shop for food or anything else for that matter, and I know I am not alone in this"*
- *"I am semi-shielding because I am still just as vulnerable as before, but I do go out. I rarely go in shops except for food and I avoid people, but they don't always avoid me. I can't wear a mask because I can't breathe in them. I do feel embarrassed about it"*
- A volunteer service in Thanet told us that some of their clients are continuing to shield, or have family members who are shielding.
- A community warden in the Canterbury & Dover area told us about a client who has been visited by a district nurse during lockdown to have their dressings changed. Hospital appointments are now back up and running however the client is refusing to attend the hospital for dressing changes as they prefer to have the nurse visit the house, believing that the hospital is full of germs.

## FACE MASKS

- *"I'm a hospital worker with asthma and I have been wearing a face mask up to 12 hours a day for the last five months. I hate them, especially with the heat in the hospital but I got used to them. I struggle to understand how Canterbury has become a city of chronic asthmatics. Some asthmatics genuinely can't wear face masks, but many people are pulling a fast one and have never had asthma in their lives"*
- *"Those who have genuine exemptions from wearing face masks should be wearing a Sunflower lanyard, however it still doesn't stop people from being challenged by others who don't recognise the significance of them"*
- *"50% of customers were not wearing a mask in my local Tesco last night. I complained to the security guard manning the entrance and he simply said it's a police issue. Supermarkets don't care"*
- *"We wore a Sunflower lanyard today as my exemption from wearing a mask. We had a really rough morning and the Sunflower lanyard was only honoured in Sainsbury's. So many customers gave us dirty looks even though my child was having a meltdown in the shop and it was obvious that he had autism. The Sainsbury's staff were brilliant and supported us well"*
- *"The Sunflower lanyards are excellent for people with genuine hidden disabilities; my daughter has used one. However recently I have become aware of people abusing these and attaching cards saying that because of their hidden disability they are unable to wear face masks. One lady bragged to me that she had got it for 50p in a charity shop and when I asked if she had a disability she said "no, I just don't believe in this covid nonsense".*
- *This is terrible as it makes people less sympathetic to the people with genuine needs"*
- *"They're uncomfortable but necessary. I would hate to give it to anyone else, especially someone vulnerable, and I hope others will treat me with the same respect"*
- A community warden has supported a client from the Ashford & Folkestone area who has refused to visit shops; they have claustrophobia and anxiety which has been exacerbated by the need to wear a mask.



## GOVERNMENT OBESITY INITIATIVE

- *"It's really irresponsible for the government to be putting the focus on calories and nutrition and a balanced diet; real obesity is so much more than that"*
- *"The government are telling us to lose weight but are also currently promoting and offering incentives for eating out in McDonalds and Burger King!"*
- *"The government response to obesity is very poor to say the least. What have they promised? To provide more weight management services, to change labelling and advertising .....we already have weight management services that in my opinion aren't that helpful. I'm sure we all know what foods are healthy and which aren't. How does this help change the mindset of people who are so obese to the point they can't see a way out? How does this help improve the mental health of those with obesity? How do these measures help against the discrimination and name calling they receive? The government isn't doing enough, they need to consider that a one size fits all approach doesn't work. For many a lifestyle course focusing on mental health, self care, physical activity and eating habits would be more useful. They don't offer this! Mental health has to be considered much more than it is"*
- *"Not all of us earn the wage that ministers do, and not all of us can ride a bike due to disabilities. Being overweight is much more than food and exercise. They need to learn facts first before saying the obese need to eat healthily"*
- *"I ran an emergency Foodbank during lockdown, shopping for 12 families. I shopped at ALDI, the money had to go as far as possible. Frozen and tinned foods were top of the list so the food lasted for a whole week. It was so far away from being the healthiest foods, but what can you do on a tight budget. buying fresh meat, vegetables and fruits in the quantities needed would not go as far. This creates poverty obesity, which the government don't seem to acknowledge. The most recent campaign is so damaging"*

## ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

- *"I have a telephone appointment with my GP today; I want to discuss my mental health and go back onto tablets. I'm so scared that going back onto medication again will make me worse. I want to see a psychiatrist, but I don't think the GP will refer me. Sometimes I think the only way to get a psychiatry evaluation is to harm myself and take myself to A&E"*
- Our Helpline heard from a lady who was deaf and communicated through lip reading. She was unable to get a face to face appointment with the GP surgery and struggled to contact the surgery to tell them this.
- A community warden in the Sevenoaks area told us that one client was finding the virtual GP appointments much better for them and they are happier now that they don't have to sit in a crowded waiting room with other ill people, and it is much less stressful for them. The only issue is that they don't know when the GP will call so they have to sit beside their phone all day. If they miss the call, then they have to try to get an appointment again the next day.
- Our helpline heard from someone who was suffering with a swollen stomach; they were unable to have a face to face consultation and had a phone call instead. The GP was concerned enough to send the, to A&E with a letter, however A&E would not treat the client as it was deemed "non-urgent". A&E wrote a note and gave it to the client, and told him to return to his GP. The GP then called the client back and diagnosed the client without a physical examination. The client said "why can't the GP get PPE and see me like other services? At the end of the day all I want to do is see a doctor. I feel let down by the surgery"

- A breastfeeding support group told us that some of their clients are struggling to get in contact with their GP and then they end up messaging the support group and asking for medical advice.
- A community warden in the Canterbury/Dover area told us that a village Doctors surgery are still not open for consultations, and patients are directed to the larger "sister" surgery in another town.

## **CANCER TREATMENT**

- *"My Mum was diagnosed with cancer in 2019. She was having chemo treatment at Maidstone Hospital which seemed to have been working. We knew it was terminal but we were hopeful. I moved my wedding to Oct 2020 though. At the beginning of Covid, the hospital stopped her treatment with little discussion. It was shocking how quickly she went downhill. I moved in with her to care for her. No NHS staff came to the house to see her. I had to create a spreadsheet on the wall to keep up with all her medication. I am not medically trained – I am a hairdresser! – and it was really overwhelming. We thought she had a urine infection and in the end the hospice came to help us. She went into the hospice to treat the infection but it turned out the cancer had got to her brain and she passed away 3 weeks later. It was a lot to cope with on my own. Now I am grieving but I have so many questions about how much longer she could have stayed with us if her treatment had continued"*
- *"My dad is suffering from terminal lung cancer. Up until lockdown he was receiving immunotherapy and responding well. At the beginning of lockdown he was still well even though they postponed his treatment as a covid precaution. In May his brother was found dead in his flat and dad was not allowed to attend the funeral. Since then he has gone downhill rapidly, he has been in hospital several times unable to breathe properly and has lost so much weight he looks like a prisoner of war. My mum is very physically disabled so for the past five weeks I have been over every day cooking and cleaning for them. Watching my dad's laboured breathing has been so painful"*
- *In one person's opinion, "The amount of people that will have developed cancer and not had it diagnosed, amongst other illnesses, will outweigh all the deaths attributed to the coronavirus. It will become more apparent as time goes by. Most nurses I've spoken to have said they've been twiddling their thumbs for six months as people were too scared to enter hospitals and weren't getting referrals from GPs for potentially dangerous conditions as yet undiagnosed. This is a no way a criticism of nurses and doctors dealing with covid as they're just doing their jobs, to me this is poor management from the top"*

## **NHS 111**

- A mental health support group told us that a service user phoned 111 about getting an emergency prescription for an inhaler, but kept being passed between different doctors who wanted to take the service user into hospital. This whole ordeal made their physical and mental health worse. *"All I needed was a prescription, I didn't want to be incubated in hospital next to COVID patients."*



## DENTISTRY

- *"I'm nearly 35 and haven't seen a dentist since I was last dragged to one as a teenager so I don't have a clue what to do. Tonight my worst fear, I finished dinner and felt something sharp in my mouth and I've somehow broken off a quarter of a molar tooth. It doesn't hurt but it is sharp so I'm guessing I need to see a dentist. But is this going to cost me an arm and a leg? I have no idea who to ask or who to call"*
- *Our helpline took a call from a client who told us that their dentist wanted £25 just to make an appointment. The client also said that they were unhappy with the delay of PPE provision being given to dentists to allow them to carry out their duties. The client said they were "outraged" that NHS dental practices were only just starting to take delivery of PPE whereas many private clinics already had the PPE and were charging a lot of money to carry out basic dentistry, which put people at a disadvantage if they did not have the finances to pay for this.*
- *"I'm registered at an NHS dentist and so is my son. I rung them as my son has been having toothache, he seems to have big holes in his back teeth, each side of his mouth. I was told by the receptionist they will get the dentist to call me back. That was back in May and I'm still waiting for the phone call. He now needs these teeth out and I also need to be seen as well"*
- Our helpline took 7 calls from clients this month, who have been unable to find a dental practice. One client told us that their son is a type 1 diabetic and is agony, they called the dentist that they were registered with, but they were told that they are no longer registered. Another client told us that they are with a private dentist and having spent almost £1000 in the past few weeks, they can no longer afford it; they cannot find an NHS dentist and require further treatment.
- A student told our helpline that they were unable to attend their usual dentist whilst they were away studying at university. Their usual dentist in Ashford told them that they have now lost their place. The client is shielding but is in significant pain and needs dental treatment but is unable to find a new dentist.



## ANTENATAL & POSTNATAL CARE

- A breastfeeding support group told us that one client was dropped off at the hospital doorstep and made her own way up to triage when she was in labour. Partners are only allowed in when active labour is at 4cm, and for some women they could have a quick labour so some partners might miss it. Some women have said that partners don't get to be present for the most stressful part.
- *"Hospitals are being so unfair, I've recently just given birth and had to stay in for a few days (in Pembury). My husband had to leave soon after the baby was born, he only saw his son for one hour when he was born and then not again for four days. Hospital was a very lonely place and I feel that my husband missed out on so much and babies change so fast in the first few days and they never got the chance to bond"*
- Our helpline took a call from a client who was concerned about the health visiting service. Their baby was underweight, which wasn't picked up, and also had a tongue-tie which wasn't discovered until 11 weeks old. This was a direct impact of the lack of weigh in clinics and face-to-face visits. The client said *"It has felt like all appointments have been stopped due to covid 19 for safety but as a new parent that babies are not being checked and because of this we have ended up with our child being underweight and a tongue tie not being resolved earlier. This is our first child and we feel let down as many healthcare teams seem to think another team is seeing babies and are shocked when it is shared that we haven't seen a healthcare professional or health visitor for weeks."*
- A breastfeeding support group told us that their breastfeeding clinics have reopened this week, and they only have 8 spaces a week. They have been booked up a week in advance. They said that it is interesting to see people coming to the clinic and finding that they haven't got many other options on places to go for advice. They saw someone at the Sevenoaks clinic who was from Ramsgate. People are feeling very isolated and keen to get to groups to socialise.
- We heard from a group supporting new parents that women and their partners have to start isolating two weeks before their due date so that their partners can come into the hospital with them. If they haven't started isolating early enough then they could go into early labour and then not be able to have their partner be a part of the birth.



## PHLEBOTOMY

- *“My mother is 81 years old and had to stand on her own in the queue for almost an hour to have a blood test. She has a walking stick and felt very ill afterwards. It's not fair to force people to wait in the rain for a medical appointment”*
- Our helpline heard from a client who required rapid blood tests as part of an ongoing medical concern. Their GP had no appointments available and their local hospital phlebotomy department is closed. They arrived at Gravesend Hospital on a first come first served basis, and found *“a massive queue stretching down the road about 50 people. Spoke to 1 lady who had been there since 9am. Extremely hot, no seating as on public road. Elderly and disabled in queue as well. I left and went home without waiting”*. They returned again a couple of days later at 8.15am: *“Already 20+ people in queue. Some people had brought garden chairs! Again, very hot and no shade, no seating etc. The queue did move before 9am and I was seen about 9.15. Four phlebotomists were working flat out. When I left at least 30 to 40 people waiting down the road”*. The next month was the same: *“Arrived 8.15 again. More people with garden chairs, I was seen at 9.30. Again, four phlebotomists. And another 30 people or so waiting down the road. Clearly this is an ongoing situation as notices are pinned to the building wall saying ‘if you are waiting here at 12 noon you will not be seen’. I am reporting this as it is very unsatisfactory and feel this should be investigated. Is it right that everyone, especially the elderly and disabled people have to queue for hours in heat with no seating? What about the winter?”*

## ONGOING MEDICAL CARE

- *“I had a hysterectomy at the end of June. We all had to shield for 14 days so it meant my husband, who is self employed, was not able to work for 2 weeks. Both my grown children had to shield too. Luckily my work paid me 70% of my wages. I worried the whole time that my op would be cancelled as they sometimes are, but I was so glad that it went ahead”*
- *“I'm having an eye operation on 13th August and I have to self isolate (as well as my family) for 14 days before the op. Do NHS workers have to isolate? I don't think so! They're still out going to supermarkets and shops like everyone else, but me and my family are told to stay indoors! Makes no sense!”*



## **POSTPONED CARE**

- *"I have severe osteoarthritis with a hip full of cysts that become infected regularly. The only thing that helps is keeping my weight as low as possible. I can't exercise but I can't lose weight without exercising. The only reason my hip was replaced was because I went private and the surgeon was horrified I'd been left like it. He actually treated me on the NHS. He also straightened my femur and is going to repair my knee; all damage caused by my hip that should have happened in March but it was cancelled because of covid"*
- An Age UK centre told us that one of their mental health volunteers took a call from an 81 year old lady who was very distressed. She had her operation cancelled by her consultant. She has been in a lot of pain and feels very negative.
- A community warden in the Sevenoaks/Tunbridge Wells area told us about a client who needs to attend hospital regularly. The client is concerned about using public transport in case they pick up an infection. The local taxi firm charge £25 each way to hospital, which isn't sustainable. The client has decided to postpone their treatment until "things settle down"
- Likewise, the community wardens in Maidstone/Tunbridge/Malling told us that approximately 50% of the people they see are waiting for medical treatment and are said to be very worried and frustrated at their appointment times being pushed back due to covid.

## **POOR HOSPITAL COMMUNICATION**

- Our helpline heard from a client about the poor communication they received from an inpatient ward in the hospital. Due to covid restrictions, the client was unable to visit their spouse in hospital but they were speaking on mobile phones daily. The client noted that her husband was particularly confused during one phone call and she notified ward staff who said that he was fine. A few days later her partner was rushed for emergency surgery without her knowing, and she only found out the after, when she couldn't get through to her husband on his mobile phone. He was in ICU; the staff said that they didn't have any contact details on record even though the client said that she had provided all details. The client said that communication with hospital staff is very poor considering loved ones cannot visit the hospital to see their relatives.
- *"I had a telephone consultation with the practice nurse on behalf of my son, who is six years old. A referral was made to ENT and I was told that I would receive a message directly from ENT. Within a few days I received a letter from EKHUFT and it said that ENT would contact me by 11th August (10 days time). I called them today (21/08/20) and they said that they had a very big backlog and it would be at least 4 weeks before they reached us on the waiting list. The communication was so poor"*

## **HOSPITAL DISCHARGE**

- An organisation supporting carers told us that carers are reporting their loved ones are being discharged with more complex needs, especially if they are recovering from Covid.

## PHARMACIES

- An Age UK centre told us that following the change in guidance to stop shielding, some chemists are no longer delivering prescriptions. Some of the Age UK clients are worried about going out to get their medications now.

## CARE HOMES

- *"I haven't been able to see my Mum in her care home since March, she is in the final stages of dementia. Thankfully the visiting rules have been lifted but I have to "book" to see her for 30 minutes every two weeks as they only allow two visits from resident's family a day. I sit two metres from her and can't touch her. I watch the carer sit next to her and hold her hand and give her a cuddle yet I'm not allowed. It just breaks my heart but I guess I'm lucky I can see her at all"*
- *"My Mum moved into a care home in January and then we couldn't visit from the end of March. She contracted covid in May and we could only see her through the window until the last few days when they allowed my Dad in. On the very last day they let me and my siblings in. It felt awful to have lost her last few months of life"*
- *"My wonderful Mum passed away in a nursing home in April. She was receiving palliative care but the two weeks we couldn't see her broke her heart and I know accelerated her passing. I'd been seeing her every day and being forced to stop was brutal. We always helped get her to drink, reassuring her, and giving her our love and time. The excellent caring staff and home know how much an engaged loved one can contribute. Yes, we all understand the reasons but there has to be a better way. I work in retail and things are allowed and encouraged here to get the economy going. Poor lost souls with Alzheimer's and their families are more important than money. Every day hurts. This suffering is torture and covid and lack of dementia family friendly treatment will cause so many additional deaths"*
- *"Care homes should have been given priority help and implementing the distancing and care of those diagnosed with coronavirus among the staff and those in their care from the outset. Every other sector was offered some form of help. They did a marvellous job through difficult times. Not once did I see queues of people volunteering to help out at any care home while they were struggling with lack of PPE, bad advice or being ignored by the government. Without these wonderful people working through the pandemic it would have been much worse. Placing loved ones in a care home is a last resort. Who else would have cared for the elderly and vulnerable had these care homes not been there?"*
- *"I watched the Panorama programme last night, it was so upsetting. releasing patients from hospital back to care homes without testing was crazy. I hope there isn't a second wave of this dreadful virus but if there is, I hope lessons have been learned"*
- *"Care homes have been used as covid wards: hospitals are just discharging people back to their deaths. The poor staff are not paid anything close to the HCAs in hospitals, yet staff in care homes have to give medication (HCAs don't). The training need is just as intense...it needs a massive overhaul. Private companies should be ashamed, but so should Councils and government for pipping contracts out to the lowest bidders"*
- An organisation supporting carers told us that their clients are continuing to talk about taking their relatives out of care homes.

## **ISOLATION**

- An advocacy service for older people told us that they are going to continue to offer a befriending service for their clients as are they are seeing a real demand for the service.
- A breastfeeding counsellor told us that she has restarted home visits. Some Mums have said she is the first person they have seen outside of their family since the baby was born.
- An organisation supporting independent living talked about the impact of covid on their clients, many of whom said that they are feeling less safe right now. They talked about the impact on their mental health, and that the withdrawal of shopping deliveries has made life more difficult as they try to access supermarkets themselves.
- An Age UK centre told us that they are seeing an increase in the number of befriending calls that they are doing each week.

## **DOMESTIC ISSUES**

- Community wardens told us that they are aware of the increase in tension between neighbours; annoyances have been accentuated by prolonged exposure within the home and garden environment, having bonfires, increase in noise, parties, breaching social distance guidelines etc.

## **FINANCE**

- An advocacy service for older people told us that their clients are continuing to ask for help with filling in forms to enable them to claim welfare benefits such as universal credit, attendance allowance, pension credit and appeals. They received 87 referrals for this service, and many of the clients are unable to leave their home, which is why the advocacy service are keen to restart their home visiting service.
- An organisation supporting disadvantaged families told us that six of the families that are known to them are struggling financially as they are on zero hours contracts and had their hours reduced. Two of these families work for leisure centres and they have had their hours cut by 60% and now they cannot afford their outgoing bills.
- An Age UK set up a "basement larder" and have been gathering donations of food in preparation for a possible second wave and for families in dire financial need, who are struggling to cope on the furlough scheme.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable families told us that they saw four families in one month lose their businesses (beauty & mobile hairdressing). The families need support and help to claim universal credit, but they are going to struggle for the next six weeks until their claim is processed. They were given details of local foodbanks that might be able to help during the next few weeks.

## ACCESS TO FOOD

- *“During the lockdown I had my shopping done by Age UK as I am shielding, and there was a surcharge cost of £6 per shop. Now I have been told the cost has gone up to £15 plus mileage for the shopping. This is a big hike in charges. It is now costing me more money to have my shopping done and I cannot do it by myself, I cannot afford this anymore”*
- An Age UK centre told us that they are still delivering around 300 hot meals per week.
- Another Age UK centre has been making and delivering hot food parcels to their service users who have specific dietary needs, as they found it difficult to source the food elsewhere.
- Community wardens in the Thanet area have supported 33 people this month, who have struggled since the Government food parcels stopped at the end of July.
- Community wardens in Maidstone/Tonbridge & Malling told us a similar story in their area, they spoke to five people who are relying on foodbanks as they can't make ends meet. Four of these people were elderly and vulnerable.

## TRAVEL & IMMIGRATION

- *“It's no wonder that Kent remains high on the COVID-19 list; we have the ports flooding the infection back in, the Eurostar, and also all the illegal immigrants that keep washing up on our shores”*
- *“Why are KCC the only County responsible for immigrant children and young people? They are the government's responsibility so their care and education should be spread fairly across the UK counties. Kent has some of the most deprived areas, it's under enough strain as it is. Something needs to change”*
- *“They must stop all flights right now in and out of our country, before it's too late. Don't make the same mistake as before, some of us value our lives”*

## MENTAL HEALTH

- A breastfeeding support group told us that they believe that postnatal depression rates are increasing. They are receiving lots of messages asking for help and advice because Mums can't get any face to face support.
- An organisation supporting carers, told us that carers continue to report that mental health services are not supporting them enough.
- A community warden from the Maidstone/Tonbridge & Malling district was fortunate to be on hand to counsel and convince a resident in their area not to complete suicide, and was able to contact emergency services for support.
- Community wardens told us that they had concerns over young people's mental health and parents are reported to have been struggling to support young people. Many vulnerable young people have lost the positive influence of other adult role models outside the home, such as teachers, youth workers and extended family.

## **SAFE HAVEN**

- *"I phoned the Safe Haven in the evening having been to A&E that day for self-harm. I felt that I would harm again. The Safe Haven was just a 15 minute call putting my details on the system but signposting me to the Samaritans or Release the Pressure. I wish I hadn't given over my personal details for just another signpost. The Safe Haven is meant to be a new crisis service but just signposts to the Samaritans. There is no GP support as they are not seeing patients only doing phone or video consultations. Mental health services in Kent amount to signposting to the Samaritans"*
- Community wardens in Dartford and Gravesham told us that they had supported residents and made referrals to the local Safe Haven

## **CAMHS**

- *"When lockdown started my 14 year old daughter locked herself away within three weeks. I've always supported my daughter and always had great success, but I've contacted doctors, CAMHS, NHS, KCC but no actual help has been given. She has autism, severe anxiety and I believe depression. The school were fantastic but obviously it's now the summer holidays. We can no longer go out, she hates my son, she won't interact with us; I'm scared. I've tried so many little things just to get her to go in the garden but she shakes, shrivels up and goes full on anxiety attack"*

## **COMMUNITY TEAMS**

- *"I am a carer for my daughter. My daughter went to A&E and she was told by someone there that she needed to get referred to the CMHT. My daughter has been trying to get an appointment with the CMHT, but the GP won't refer her, and she can't get an answer from the Single Point of Access telephone number. So, my daughter has not been able to get the help she has been told she needs"*
- *"I phoned the Single Point of Access and they referred me to the community mental health team and the crisis team. The Crisis team said that there was not much that they could do - I felt like ending my life, I said I needed someone to talk to, but they said that they couldn't help me. I won't be calling them again; I've reached out for help with people who were supposed to help me, and they shrugged their shoulders and turned their back"*
- A mental health support group told us that one service user is upset because the one-to-one phone calls are being stopped and changing over to Zoom. Although she is able to use Zoom she feels as though she has Zoom overload as most of her support is now through Zoom and the phone calls made a difference.

## **AUTISM/ADHD**

- *"I am still waiting for help from the ADHD clinic. I have been referred to the ADHD clinic, but I don't know where it is or when I will get help. I was diagnosed privately, and my insurance lasted for a few sessions but once the insurance ran out, the doctor refused to send a list of specialist medications. I have been waiting over 6 months now for an appointment"*



## COMMUNITY SERVICES

- An organisation supporting carers told us that carers are reporting that there are not enough services available in the community to support people.
- A community warden told us that they are aware of two village halls in an area that have voted to keep the hall closed. This has stopped socially distanced exercise classes, weight loss groups, farmers markets etc. from meeting.

## HOUSING

- An organisation supporting independent living told us that they have seen seven clients this month who are looking for suitable social housing to fit their needs. Accessible accommodation is of limited availability at the moment, and there is also a shortage of supported living/warden assisted housing.

## TECHNOLOGY

- An Age UK Centre told us that they have seen an increase in the number of requests from their clients (from 41 per week), asking for assistance with transport to hospital appointments. Their clients do not feel safe using public transport.

## IMPACT ON CARERS

- We spoke to an elderly client on our helpline who was the sole carer for their spouse. The client was struggling and has been finding it more difficult to cope as her husband has dementia, a stoma bag and other medical conditions. She has to change the stoma bag every two days, and also has to clean her husband and the various bedsheets, when her husband pulls the stoma bag off, often during the night. As a consequence of his dementia, her husband also tends to wander around the house, moving furniture, and empties cupboards throughout the day and night. Her husband's medication was changed recently, which has helped with his agitation and sleeping patterns, however the community navigation service in her area were scheduled to carry out an assessment but have not been able to do this because of the current pandemic. The client receives a welfare call every 2 weeks from the navigators and said that whilst it is nice to speak to someone, she has not received any offers of practical help.



## EDUCATION

- An organisation supporting families with special needs told us that many parents have been concerned at the end of the school year; parents were calling to say that they had received end of year school reports and no progress was detailed. It was felt that this is likely to be because teachers have been unable to carry out face to face assessments, but due to the children being on SEN support they have to provide reports of progress etc.

## RETURNING TO SCHOOL

- An organisation supporting families with special needs told us that they are helping a new family who are waiting to receive their ASD diagnosis. The new high school said that the first term will be focusing on transition and wellbeing however they have none of the provision that was in place in primary school and no application for higher needs funding. The child's mum is worried that her daughter will revert back to being a school refuser and will start self harming again.
- *"I'm seriously considering deregistering my children at school, I have the choice as their parent. I want to see if the government are still following the science closer to September and will let the schools reopen"*
- *"I'll be deciding nearer the time if it's safe to go back to school or not. If the government said to go back and I don't believe it's safe I will take my kids out of school and I will home school. I won't be pressured into making them go back if I don't think it's safe"*
- *"My children will be going back to school in September. They need to have a structured routine and the longer off, the more damaging it is for their education and mental well being. The virus is here to stay, we have to function outside our four walls in one way or another and children have to as well"*
- *"I think blended learning to start and then go back to school full time if it all goes well, not only due to the virus, but for mental health reasons. Five months without school is a long time and children really need to be blended back in"*
- An organisation supporting families with disabilities told us that anxiety has been a major issue with families this month, coming from both parents and children. A lot of the children are in mainstream primary schools with learning needs and they are concerned about the change in routine over the summer, returning to school after they have been away for so long, wearing facemasks, and mixing with friends who they have been kept away from.
- Community wardens across Kent told us that they had spoken to multiple residents who expressed their fear and discomfort in sending their children back to school next month. Four families in the Canterbury/Dover area told their warden that they would not be sending their children back until the safety measures are adequate.
- *"Parents have been letting their kids go to packed beaches and parks during lockdown. Now that they can return to school, the same parents are complaining about the lack of distancing in schools! Did they not realise that the packed beaches and parks were just as busy as schools?"*

## **SAFETY MEASURES IN SCHOOLS**

- *“If my kids are to be subjected to temperature taking or mask wearing at school then they won't be going. I've kept them sheltered from the hysteria and I'm not jeopardising their mental health by forcing them to go to school and where most other children will be paranoid and anxious”*
- *“I am a deputy head teacher and we've been told that children can't transmit the virus. What about the 122 adults in my school? Why do adults need to wear masks in shops but not in schools? Why are GPs being encouraged to do video or telephone appointments but adult school staff are encouraged to work full time?”*
- *“Are they going to start swabbing children in school? I'm not sure my daughter will want a swab up her nose or her throat once a week, she'll start refusing to go to school if this happens. My daughter has mild autism and is also deaf, there's no way SEN kids can tolerate this”*

## **RETAIL SECTOR**

- *“With schools going back I need to get school uniform for my daughter who has autism. I was dreading school shoe shopping. I phoned Clarks to see about current access; without prompting, the staff member asked if we needed a separate space away from crowds, lights and noise. She offered a one to one appointment at the quietest time. Without asking, she made a note of her needs and clearly had been provided training with provision of access arrangements all in place. She had received better training than some of the teaching staff in school”*
- Community wardens in Dartford & Gravesham told us that they have spoken to 11 residents who were anxious because they didn't understand the guidelines when visiting shops and they were concerned about the long queues.
- Community wardens in Maidstone, Tonbridge & Malling told us that almost half of shopkeepers have received some form of abuse or criminality when asking customers to put a facemask on and many of the shopkeepers reported that they don't feel safe.

## **HOSPITALITY SECTOR**

- *“My wife, daughter and granddaughter booked a meal at XXXXX. No table was allocated and on arrival we were told that we would be outside. Firstly no one inside, or out, was wearing a mask (staff were using plastic shields). The tables outside were close enough to one another or to walls/fences to ensure that people walking past effectively brushed the table. This is not the only time that meals out have been in premises where people were coming in and not wearing masks and this seems to be largely the younger element of society. Such places are not getting my future business”*

## TECHNOLOGY

- A mental health support group told us that one service user cannot access Zoom as her phone is a basic one and there aren't any devices she could use. She has no broadband

## IMPACT ON THE WORKFORCE

- *"I am excited to get back to work after being shielded, I work for the NHS and have missed being part of the team. I am also nervous and anxious, all we can do is protect ourselves and stick to the advice and ensure we don't do anything where we don't feel comfortable. This is our new way of life sadly until we are vaccinated at least. I do anticipate to be shielded again before the year is over sadly"*
- A volunteer service in Thanet told us that they have completed risk assessments for their volunteers. Some of the volunteers feel that the guidelines presented are over the top and are causing them concern. There is a feeling that some of the volunteers will leave the service because of this.

**Healthwatch Kent**  
**Church Road, Seabrooke House**  
**Ashford TN23 1RD**

 **info@healthwatchkent.co.uk**

 **@hwkent**

 **@HealthwatchKent**

 **@healthwatch\_kent**

 **0808 801 0102**