



# **COVID related Public Feedback for Kent**

**Monthly Summary report  
November 2020**



## Background

Throughout November, Healthwatch Kent have worked with the Kent User Forums to gather direct feedback from 135 people about their experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic and life under social distancing. We have combined this with anecdotal feedback from 24 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 gathering feedback through a number of routes:

1. The number of calls to our Helpline has steadily increased since March
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, 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 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.
- The previous months reports are available on our website.

Thanks to everyone who contributed! Your story can make a huge difference to others.

## What are the headlines?

This is a long report with a wealth of information. We would encourage you to take the time to read all the feedback. However, there is a contents section to enable you to focus your attention.

### The headlines from this month are:

- We have continued to hear the struggles that people face trying to access an NHS dentist.
- We heard many stories about the need to have continuity of care from mental health services, with people telling us that there are staff changes, a lack of "check in" phone calls and being discharged from the service when they didn't feel that they are well enough.
- Parents told us about their concerns about increasing infection levels within schools. Many parents have been calling for schools to close ahead of Christmas.
- There has been some confusion about the latest guidance for the clinically extremely vulnerable, whereas some organisations state that "shielding is no longer a thing"

# CONTENTS PAGE

**SECTION 1.** (Page 4) **THE IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN;** issues such as finance, government guidance, isolation and access to food.

**SECTION 2.** (Page 10) **MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING;** issues such as the domestic environment, general mental health and wellbeing, secondary mental health services and the wellbeing of staff and parents

**SECTION 3.** (Page 16) **ACCESS TO MEDICATION & PHYSICAL HEALTH;** issues such as access to primary care, access to medication, ongoing healthcare, and dental treatment.

**SECTION 4.** (Page 24) **CARE & SUPPORT PACKAGES;** issues such as care homes, care packages.

**SECTION 5.** (Page 26) **EDUCATION, TRANSPORT & HOUSING;** issues such as education, transport, housing

**SECTION 6.** (Page 29) **TESTING;** issues such as access to tests, covid experiences, track and trace.

**Our Action Plan** (Page 30)



## **SECTION 1. The impact of lockdown**

**There were 12 themes within this topic area:**

- 1. Second Lockdown/Tier3**
- 2. Shielding**
- 3. Facemasks**
- 4. Social distance**
- 5. Access to food**
- 6. Finance**
- 7. Domestic issues**
- 8. Furlough and Jobs**
- 9. Cultural Differences**
- 10. Vulnerable groups**
- 11. Resilience**
- 12. Death & Bereavement**

### **SECOND LOCKDOWN & TIER 3**

- We heard comments on social media about the new lockdown rules and moving into Tier Three. People were questioning the type of shops that were allowed to remain open; had concerns about the amount of traffic on the roads and were disturbed by the amount of visitors that other people were having at home.
- A community hub in Kent told us that people have found this lockdown easier than the first. Staff and clients have continued to use the hub and local businesses.
- A voluntary organisation in Thanet told us that they were reverting their befriending service back to offering telephone calls only during the second lockdown. Volunteers and clients have been upset over the new regulations as they were enjoying distanced garden visits and walks.
- An organisation supporting rural residents told us that community spirit is varying within different locations. Although there is an underlying feeling of resilience, there was a definite lull once the second lockdown was announced.
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that in their locality, people were not sticking to the rules as much; more people are out on the streets, fewer people are observing social distancing or wearing masks.
- A foodbank organisation told us that people are generally panicking about being in Tier 3 and are very unsure of what they can or can't do at Christmas.

## SHIELDING

- An organisation supporting stroke survivors told us that some of their members are still shielding due their health conditions. One has continued shielding even after government regulations changed, due to how their health condition makes them feel.
- An organisation supporting people with dementia told us about one professional carer who was not able to access any shielding help from the Council or Government during the first lockdown. They did not fall easily into any of the vulnerable categories, despite having one kidney. The person they care for has multiple heart problems and diabetes. They are alone in the household and the carer struggled to look after both of them without the support of food parcels and volunteer help.
- Our social media insights told four stories of people who had issues with shielding;
  1. Someone who was not classed as vulnerable even though they had cancer and one kidney
  2. Someone who had received a letter to say they should stay at home, but they've been working throughout the pandemic.
  3. Another person was frustrated because their pharmacy won't deliver medication to them as "*shielding isn't a thing anymore*" but they've both received emails to tell them to stay at home.
  4. Another family have been forced to live apart as one parent must safe at home, but their spouse is a high school teacher and must go to work; they have huge concerns about bringing the virus home from school.

## FACEMASKS

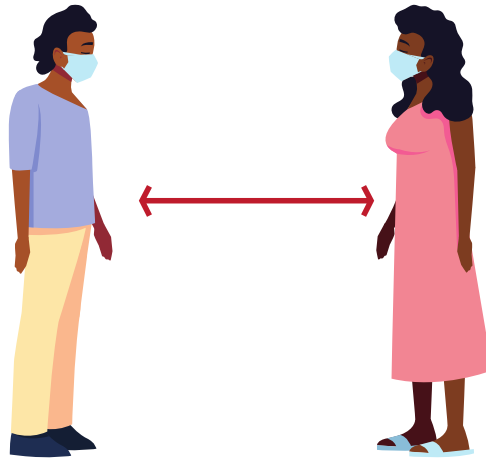
Through social media we heard about issues with face masks:

- people who are deaf and feeling more isolated than before because they can't lipread
- shop assistants & customers wearing the mask under their noses
- trying to get an appointment with the GP but being told that they must wear a mask when they are exempt



## SOCIAL DISTANCE

- We heard through social media about someone who is concerned with the close gatherings of parents standing together at school pickup and drop off times.
- A breastfeeding support organisation told us that they are a lot busier dealing with clients now. Prior to the second lockdown and social distancing restrictions, they were able to organise 3 hour drop-in sessions for clients to come in and seek advice. Now everything is taking a lot longer by phone or email. Breastfeeding classes are continuing following guidelines but people were starting to feel that they shouldn't come.



## ACCESS TO FOOD

### Supermarkets

Our social media insights captured stories from two people about supermarkets

1. One person was upset that they were now being charged for a delivery slot for their shopping, it was free when they were classed as “shielding”.
  2. The other person told us that supermarkets were very busy now that lockdown was imminent, and they would be using local delivery services.
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that they spoke to a caller who was unable to organise a food delivery because they didn't have a credit card and couldn't pay in the prescribed way.

### Whilst isolating

- We heard through social media of a parent who was concerned about one of their children having to self-isolate and missing out on their free school meal. The school told the parent that they would still provide a daily packed lunch, or a weekly bag of food, which reassured the parent who was concerned about finances.

## ACCESS TO FOOD

### Foodbanks

- A foodbank organisation told us that they see young people, aged 17, who are taken to the foodbank by their care workers to get help accessing food and to be shown how to cook the food. They are told that when they turn 18, they will leave the care system, but they have no knowledge of how to cook for themselves. The organisation told us that care managers are not ensuring that they have these skills before turning 18.
- A mental health support group told us that more of their service users are accessing the local foodbanks than ever before. The queues are longer outside the foodbanks and they require more volunteers to cope with the demand.

### School meals

- An organisation working with children who have emotional needs told us that the most vulnerable groups needing support are those that do not qualify for free school dinners. Many are just above the mean testing for free school meals but aren't in the high bracket; they sit just above the minimum line. They are not entitled to any support.
- An organisation who supports families through challenging times told us that half of the families that they work with are accessing foodbanks right now. This is due to either one or both parents losing their jobs or being on reduced hours or furloughed.





## FINANCE

- An organisation supporting carers told us about a case where DWP have been very slow in getting back to them about their benefits. They applied for Carers Allowance at the beginning of lockdown and still haven't had a response.
- An organisation supporting rural residents told us that many older residents in their areas are cancelling their TV and internet packages to enable them to buy food and pay their bills (such as the newly reinstated TV licence fee for over 75s).
- An organisation supporting vulnerable families told us that one school in their area was closing for a two week circuit breaker. A single mum had to take unpaid leave from work but can't claim any help from the government schemes as she was not told to isolate, just the child. Due to the need to prove income loss and being paid a month in arrears, no help from tax credit can be claimed for 8 weeks either. Another two families had a similar story. All families required food donations to get them through the month.
- The same organisation told us about another family; Mum has been struggling financially. She was feeding her children but her and her husband hadn't eaten for two days. They were not claiming everything they were entitled to but were prioritising bills over food. (Their water bill alone was £1400 which turns out was a mistake but the family were paying it, or trying to). They currently only have £4 until 15th December, in two weeks time.
- An organisation who supports veterans told us that they are aware of several cases of veterans finding themselves in debt and rent arrears as a result of job loss or loss of work. Many of their self-employed members have not been self-employed long enough to claim support from the government.



## DOMESTIC ISSUES

- An organisation supporting people with dementia told us that one client found themselves involved in a scam telephone call and lost £3000. Their family then disconnected the telephone line for their safety and provided them with a personal mobile. The client has memory problems and forgets to charge the mobile device.
- Community wardens in Swale & Thanet, and also in Folkestone & Hythe, told us that they are seeing neighbourhood disputes, many of which are fuelled by being confined to the home more.

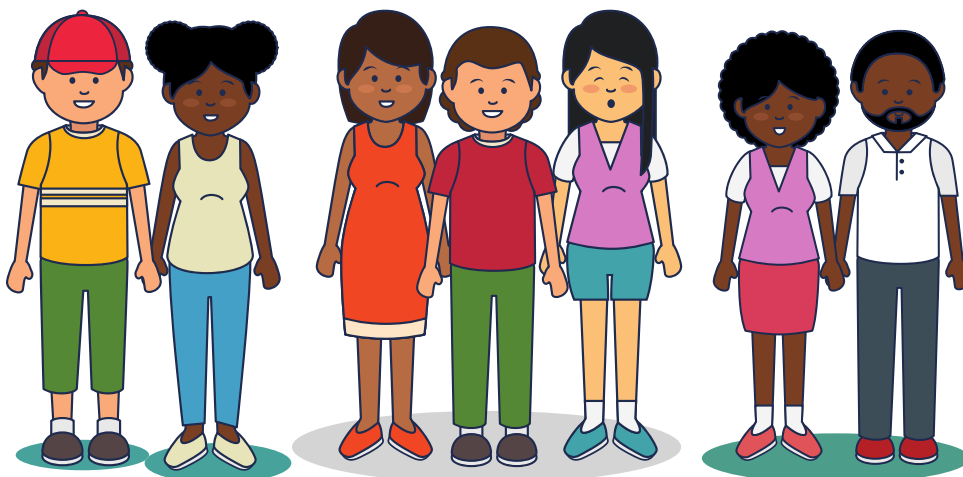
## FURLOUGH/JOBS

Our social media insights told us of two people who were concerned about furlough and jobs:

1. One person was concerned about their health and left their workplace permanently in order to keep safe.
  2. Another was concerned that the furlough scheme has been extended until the end of March, they were worried that many industries will still be closed at that time.
- *“I live with my OAP parents who have numerous health issues. I had to give my job up in March in the first lockdown. I haven’t worked for 7 months. I have no income and I don’t leave the house as I am shielding my parents. I haven’t socialised in 7 months and I have nowhere to go anyway. I need another job, but it’s pointless now that we’re in a second lockdown”*

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

- An organisation working with children who have emotional needs told us that the majority of the families that are contacting them are not from BAME backgrounds. The organisation is concerned and wondered if this is due to a cultural stigma attached to asking for help.
- A foodbank organisation told us that they have a number of women attending their service who don’t speak English. A class has been set up to teach their male partners English and improve language skills, and the organisers have said that the women will be allowed when covid restrictions have been lifted. No one knows why the ladies cannot attend with their partners, it may for cultural reasons, but no one is sure.



## **VULNERABLE GROUPS**

- A community & social hub in Kent told us that they have had to close the disabled centre that ran from the Hub. They have been doing more online services with this group instead.

## **RESILIENCE**

- An Age UK in the south of Kent told us that some of their clients are afraid to use the 111 service because “*the service will think they cannot cope*”

## **DEATH/BEREAVEMENT**

- We heard three stories from our social media insights. They all spoke about their loved ones died of cancer related illness or a heart attack but that Covid was listed on the death certificate

## **SECTION 2. Mental health & wellbeing**

### **There were 4 themes within this topic area:**

#### **1. Mental health**

#### **2. Impact of isolation**

#### **3. Impact on workforce**

#### **4. Impact on parents**

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

- Our social media insight gatherers told us about a first time mother who was worried about how she will cope when the baby is born and her family aren't allowed to visit and support her. She was worried that she will develop post-natal depression.
- An organisation supporting young refugees told us that there are long delays on cases with the Home Office, which are causing concern and anxiety and affecting the mental health for young people.
- An Age UK in Kent told us a survey with carers reported that 100% are concerned about the impact of a second lockdown on their loved one's emotional needs and mental health
- A drug and alcohol service told us that they have seen a large increase in the number of referrals for alcohol abuse during the pandemic. Family members have been referring their loved one to the service because they have been around to notice the daytime drinking and an increased dependency on alcohol. The organisation have been able to set up an online support group for family members.

## MENTAL HEALTH

- An addiction support service told us that the number of face to face meetings for absolutely essential interventions had increased just prior to the second lockdown.
- An organisation working with children who have emotional needs told us that the vast majority of the parents that they deal with have anxiety. The reasons range from their own job, being furloughed, their kids schooling and wellbeing. There is a huge impact on parent's mental health right now.
- A foodbank organisation told us about a client who is currently signed off from work due to mental health difficulties. However being signed off is exacerbating his problems. His partner is pregnant, and he is concerned about how to provide for them.
- An organisation who supports careers told us that the cared-for who have mental health issues appear to have improved during lockdown, due to the fact that *"the whole of society are doing the same thing so there are no expectations placed on those with mental health issues"*.
- A service user said that they contacted SHOUT 85258 for support recently. She said she absolutely loves this service as they saved her life.

## CMHT

- A mental health support group told us that one service user was supposed to be getting fortnightly phone calls from their care co-ordinator at XXXXX but has not heard from them since August.
- A different support group told us that a service user was discharged from XXXXX during lockdown. They were referred, by the CMHT, to a primary care team for further support. The team assessed the client and decided that their service was not appropriate and they should still be with the CMHT. They completed this referral, the client shortly received a letter from the CMHT to say that they did not meet the requirements for the CMHT and they would not be offered support. This situation has left the client without any support and they are now self-harming again.
- *"I've got to the point where I don't know what else I can do and no one has any advice about what I can do next. I have been discharged from the CMHT, I don't know how because I still need so much help. I was referred to a primary care provider but they didn't accept me, my psych nurse said it was because a month ago they had a massive gap in referrals so ended up accepting people to fill those numbers even though they didn't actually need the service. So now there isn't space for people like me. Someone needs to help me, and the GP has tried to refer me back to the CMHT but I haven't heard anything yet. And now because I've moved house my previous surgery has dropped me and now I don't even have a doctor"*
- A service user from a mental health support group has been trying to speak to their care coordinator at XXXXX, leaving messages for them to call them back for weeks and no response.
- Another service user reported: *"My nurse at XXXXX is really helpful. They call me every week to see how I'm doing, help me through things and listen. It's really got me through lockdown."*

## CMHT

- We heard from a service user who thinks that the consultant psychologist at XXXXX was really good and has been very supportive towards her. She now has a new care plan in place and feels like she is heading in the right direction.
- *“A social worker (not my normal one) rang me and told me we were about to have a meeting with lots of different people. I wasn't able to join in because I only heard just before it was due to start and that there would be so many people there. I thought it was going to be just me and my social worker, and I was too overwhelmed to join the call. She said they can send the minutes, but I would rather have been told at least a few days before, to have time to prepare”*

## Autism

- Our social media insights told us about two people who were frustrated at the wait for an SEN assessment. One parent said that their child's mental health has been made worse by the pandemic, and the other parent said that they were chasing an assessment date but it was difficult because of Covid. They said that were told to take their child to A&E if he couldn't be kept safe.
- A member of staff from a mental health support group told us that they are 'fed up with GP's referring clients to the mental health team rather than using the correct procedure for an ASD assessment. *'It happens across the board with multiple GP's and is a waste of time for all involved, especially the mental health team and the client.'*

## CAMHS

- An organisation supporting families with special needs told us that they are hearing issues from parents regarding CAMHS; parents are calling the service but are not getting through to talk about prescriptions. They go to the centre but are told to email. When they email they are then told to call! Parents have been resorting to facebook groups and talking to other parents in the same situation to find contact emails for clinicians and then trying to find a route to get help.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable families told us about a family; the young person has mental health needs and the GP sent a referral to the school nursing team. The school nurse said it was not their remit and sent the referral back advising to refer to CAMHS. CAMHS said it was definitely the school nurses remit, and that the young person should have “in-school counselling” before accessing Tier-2 services with CAMHS. Due to the time lapsed with referrals going back and forth and the decline in the young person's mental health, they are now accessing Tier-3 services at CAMHS and are having suicidal thoughts and self-harming. Mum's mental health has also suffered as a result of this and is self-harming and having panic attacks.

## CAMHS

- A mental health support group told us about the difficulties one client had when accessing CAMHS; they had a telephone assessment for their daughter in October. The assessor was described as lovely and seemed to know what they were talking about. It was a very detailed assessment. The assessor said that they needed to speak with their team but would get back to the family regarding the outcome. The family thought that the assessor was going to get back to them sooner rather than later by the way they spoke, but after 3 weeks they still haven't heard anything. It turns out that the notes have still not been written up and that the young person would be discharged from the service and referred to Early Help. They said that if they were to intervene at this stage then they would still be working with the child until they are old enough to move into Adult CMHT. They had not informed the family about the discharge and have not referred the child to Early Help.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable families told us that one Mum was in a distressed state as her daughter is writing in her diary how she plans to end her life; thinks she has no friends or family who like her and hates her body and appearance; locks herself in her room; cries all day and can't be consoled. A few days later she is happy drawing rainbows and unicorns and chatty. This has been going on for about 8 weeks but Mum can't cope with the mood swings, up and down. She refuses to go to school on a "bad" day, so the school don't see how her mood changes so much. It took 4 days to get hold of someone at CAMHS who said it's a question of "is this behaviour reality or attention seeking" and they could adjust her medication but they have no appointments for face to face currently. Mum was signposted by the support organisation to Young Minds, who put her in contact with a bipolar organisation, which Mum believes might be a likely diagnosis.

## Crisis Team

- A service user at a mental health support group said "I had to call the crisis team last night, I was hearing voices, wanting to self-harm and couldn't sleep. They were really helpful and got me through it."
- *"The crisis team have actually gone above and beyond to help ease my anxiety about coming out of hospital and taken me on walks and come in twice a day"*
- *"The crisis team have been so helpful. Just having someone to talk to and give me tips"*
- *"I tried contacting the crisis team and they put me in a queue. That sort of service is terrible when you feel like committing suicide"*



## Memory clinics

- A dementia support group told us that clients have found it difficult to get hold of the local memory service. One client was waiting for a prescription for over 3 weeks and was repeatedly told that it had been sent to the pharmacy, but it hadn't. The support group were able to facilitate a conversation and get the prescription filled. The same group told us that numerous service users have been waiting months for their initial memory assessment & that they have had very little communication from the local memory clinic. The group were informed that there is a back log of over 200 assessments needed to be completed.
- A mental health support group told us that many of their service users feel that once the diagnosis is given, they are just "tossed" aside and forgotten, discharged back to their GP. There is very little support emotionally and practically from the memory service.

## IMPACT OF ISOLATION

- We heard through social media about an elderly & vulnerable person who hasn't socialised since March. Even when restrictions eased in the Autumn, they made plans to see friends and then cancelled; they are struggling with the isolation now.
- An Age UK in Kent told us that 90 clients last month told them that they were worried about their increased confusion and low mood due to the ongoing limitations of what they can do and staying at home.
- An organisation who supports veterans told us that veterans who are living alone are feeling increasingly isolated as they can't meet up with anyone. Many of their service users have a "carry on regardless" mindset and that there is a feeling of "being in it for the long term" before there is a way out.
- An organisation who supports families through challenging times told us that many of their clients were struggling with isolation and anxiety. Pre-covid all of their centres were free to access. At the moment, the only available facilities (pre-2nd lockdown) are soft play and music therapy classes, which have to be paid for and many people cannot afford this. There are no free-to-access places for vulnerable families to meet up and have contact.
- An organisation supporting people with dementia told us about a client who had not been out of their home for a long time. They had a serious fall at home and were admitted to hospital. They have now been moved into a nursing home and are not able to have the home comforts and pets that they loved so much.

## **IMPACT ON THE WORKFORCE**

We heard three stories through social media of the impact that was felt within workers.

- One person who works in a care home tested positive for the virus and had concerns about negative reactions that they received, and was nervous about going back to work.
- Another was asked by their employer to provide details of any medical condition that made them more susceptible to Covid, but they didn't want to disclose this.
- A third person was considered vulnerable in the first lockdown and was shielded, but in the second lockdown they are not considered vulnerable and have to go to work. Their employer is not giving them any shifts because he doesn't feel that it's safe enough and should be shielding again.
- *"I work in a care home and my manager spoke to me about the way that I dress. She said that I need to stop wearing a long-sleeved top under my carers tunic for infection control reasons. She always accepted it before now because she knows that I have self-harm scars on both my arms and I prefer to keep them covered. Apparently, some of my colleagues have complained that I shouldn't be allowed to wear my sleeves. If I have to expose my arms and scars then it will make my mental health worse and I don't want people talking about me. I don't want to lose my job if I refuse to get rid of the sleeves. I need to put my mental health first but I'm a good carer".*

## **IMPACT ON PARENTS**

- *"It's been tough few years, and now this pandemic, for me and my kids. I left an alcoholic five years ago, and I got made homeless from my lovely privately rented accommodation, to move here and be bullied constantly by my neighbours. Now with the pandemic I'm having to move because I can't cope here anymore. I am unwell myself and looking after an autistic child, and my two other kids. My girl is having to do most of the caring for me and my son. I don't have any friends or family so it's just us four. But at least the kids have school"*
- A breastfeeding support organisation told us that they are able to organise a face to face appointment with a mother, father and baby. Fathers are very grateful for the opportunity to attend as they say they had been excluded from many other aspects of pregnancy. Many haven't been allowed to attend the scan, or been able to attend when the heartbeat was first located. One father was kept out of the hospital and only allowed to attend the birth when the mother had been at advance stages of labour and was then removed from the ward immediately after the birth. He had slept in the hospital car park. There is a worry this will lead to a worrying rise of post-natal depression in men as they will have a greater detachment from the child having been removed from the involvement up to birth and from shortly after.



## SECTION 3. Access to medication & physical health

There were 8 themes within this topic area:

1. Access to primary care
2. Access to medication
3. 111 service
4. Hospital treatment/care
5. Dentists
6. Maternity and health visiting services
7. Flu vaccine
8. End of life care

### ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

- Two people told us about the difficulties they had experienced when trying to access their GP clinic, but found that it had closed due to an outbreak of Covid. They expressed frustrations at the lack of advice posted on the clinic's website about where to go for prescriptions and emergency care.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable adults told us that clients are concerned about the long waiting times to get through to GP surgeries. Many people are trying to get test results and rebook cancelled tests & scans. Some satellite branches of surgeries have made it difficult for clients to access them.
- Two people told us about the "e-consult" facility on their surgery's website. One person said that it was much easier to get hold of a GP this way instead of a phone call. The other person said that they requested a text or email as they were deaf, but they were only offered a phone call which was not suitable for them.
- *"I had a medication review with a new locum, and I felt really safe at the surgery in spite of the risk of Covid19. The GP also came into my medication review and gave me a prescription and they were REALLY friendly, and they REALLY listened."*
- Our helpline spoke to a lady who told us how difficult it was to get through to her GP practice. They rang the practice over 200 times to get an x-ray result. On another occasion, her neighbour tried to get through to the surgery as they were concerned about their baby. When they did get through, they were told that a doctor would call back the next day. The client, who is a nurse, looked at the baby and advised that they call 111 immediately. The baby was taken to hospital and was put on IV antibiotics. The client doesn't believe that the baby would still be alive if they had waited for the GP to call back the next day.

- A mental health support group told us about a service user who had tried contacting the GP surgery. They said they called constantly, the message said that their call cannot be connected and then the call would end. The client desperately needed to speak with the GP regarding medication for their mental health but could not get through. The client said they had tried the other options on the phone, but they refused to speak with them and said they needed to call back the next morning. The reason for not being able to connect the call is due to too many people being in the phone queue. The client said they tried 77 times on one day and 100 times on the next and still had no answer.
- A lady told us that their GP surgery has been very good. They've been helpful and supportive with the her mental health, especially as she doesn't feel supported by the CMHT.
- *"My GP surgery is closed, they mysteriously closed on Monday and put a notice on the website to say that due to staff sickness then the practice is closed. Surely ALL the staff can't be sick at the same time... unless a member of staff has Covid and everyone now has to isolate. In the meantime, I have been unable to get my repeat prescription approved and I'm running low on tablets. I asked the chemist across the road and they can only give me an extra 3 days. The GP clinic has a notice to direct people to 111 for help"*
- An organisation supporting stroke survivors said that the feedback from their users is that they have been struggling to get face to face calls with their GP. Many of them use Zoom to talk to their friends and they have asked *"Why can't GPs do calls on Zoom so that they can see us rather than do calls by phone?"*
- A community hub in Kent told us that there have been issues with elderly residents in the local area who are afraid to make the journey to see their GP. The Hub have been sending their minibus out to collect local residents with a driver and separate chaperone aboard to help people feel confident about going out.
- KCC Community wardens in North Kent told us that they are hearing that people are frustrated with untrained temporary staff on GP surgery phones.
- A mental health support group told us about a story: *"I've had COVID taken on and off my medical records numerous times over the last few months, they thought I had it then they didn't, when they thought I had it I was getting a lot of support for my other needs, now that it's come off and I don't have it they're not offering anything. It feels like if it's not COVID related they don't care."*

## **DELIVERY CHARGES/MEDICATION**

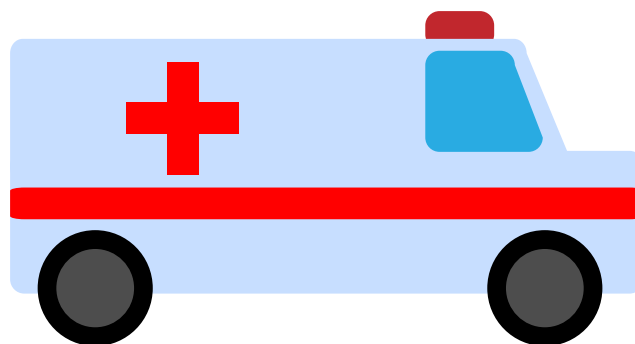
- We heard a story through social media about someone who was concerned about the increased delivery charges for medication - charges that they cannot afford to pay. They are shielding so they cannot leave the house for their medication themselves.

- We heard through social media about someone who had to call 111 as they couldn't get hold of their GP, they were then told to get a Covid test even though they didn't have any of the Covid symptoms.
- An organisation who supports families told us that one of their clients tried to call her GP with what she thought was an asthmatic cough and wanted to be sure. She was told that no GP was available and to contact 111. She waited hours for a response from 111, to then confirm her initial thoughts of asthma rather than Covid.

## **HOSPITAL TREATMENT**

We saw two stories from our social media insights;

1. One person said that they were allowed to visit their GP to have a lump checked. They were invited to the breast clinic within days and had the lump checked and confirmed that it was nothing suspicious, the client was very reassured.
  2. Another person said that their father was ill and visited hospital, they were told that it was coronavirus and were discharged home. Their father has had many tests done and does not have coronavirus, but was diagnosed with prostate cancer.
- A resident told us that they had to be admitted to hospital recently. They told us that the staff were kind, considerate and caring, and that the hospital kept their worried spouse in the loop.
  - A dementia support group told us about someone with Dementia who had been admitted into hospital after a fall a head injury. Their partner told the hospital that they had dementia. They were moved to a ward and the information of their dementia was not passed onto the ward staff. When the Dr wanted to discharge them, the partner said that they would be unable to cope because of the dementia. The Doctor was surprised as they weren't aware of the dementia diagnosis which upset and concerned the family. The Physio and OT teams have since been supporting them for the transition to move back home.
  - *"I have had a wonderful service from the hospital throughout the crisis. They have kept my eye appointments going and I felt very safe with the measures they brought*



## Discharge

- A mental health support group told us about a service user who had routine surgery during lockdown and a short stay in hospital. They had a good experience with thoughtful staff up until discharge. They were discharged without their medication and tried to go back into the hospital to get back to the ward but got lost. They had not been seen by a doctor before discharge and did not have the opportunity to discuss ongoing medication. They were told that a courier would deliver the medication, which included painkillers. When the medication was couriered over only one of the three medications was included. This happened over the weekend and they had to wait over the weekend, in pain, until they contacted their GP.
- Our helpline heard from someone whose family member had a video consultation with their GP and it was advised that they needed to get to A&E immediately. They spent a few hours in A&E before being sent home at 11.30pm, making their own way home. They did not have a discharge note or any medication. Within three days they were in ICU with Covid. The family feel that the hospital should not have allowed their loved one to be discharged from A&E given their high-risk medical history.

## Cancer services

- An organisation supporting people living with cancer told us that they are aware of patients having to travel to various parts of Kent & Medway for their appointments. Patients are receiving a date, time and location of appointment but no other information. They then have to consider public transport access, parking charges, accessibility, distance from car park to the entrance, contact details etc. They reported that going to a new venue for appointments comes with more concerns and anxieties for patients.
- We heard through social media about someone who was going to the oncology department and had a letter to say that they could bring one person with them, but the signs in the oncology department told a different story.
- *“My father was diagnosed with cancer during the first Covid-19 lockdown. Understandably his care has been severely impacted due to the pandemic and I am very sympathetic to the difficulties facing the NHS at this time. My father’s health has steadily deteriorated over the last six months. Following one round of unsuccessful chemotherapy, my Dad was placed on a different chemotherapy drug. Unfortunately, my father reacted very badly to this new drug and the treatment was stopped. This was approximately two weeks ago, and they are now proposing to restart the treatment, despite him being clearly too weak to continue. Throughout this process my Dad's care has solely been directed through telephone appointments with his oncologist and his GP. He has not been seen in person by a doctor since June, when he was rushed to XXXXX in an ambulance. If not for that emergency, he would not have ever been seen by a doctor. This has led to a huge dichotomy in his care as his doctors advising him and making decisions about his treatments clearly have no idea about his physical state. Whilst I understand that the Covid-19 pandemic has severely impacted NHS services the failure of any doctor to assess my father in the past six months despite his stage 4 cancer diagnosis represents a clear failure of NHS services”*

## **DENTISTS**

- We heard two stories through social media of people who had dental issues; one person had treatment in March before lockdown and need to have the treatment completed but have been told that they are no longer registered. The second person contacted 111 who gave them a dentist helpline and they were able to see a dentist for treatment.
- A foodbank organisation told us about the difficulties that one family were experiencing; one member of the family has no top or bottom front teeth. They cannot get free dental treatment as it is not classed as an emergency.
- Our helpline had 13 enquiries from members of the public in November asking how to locate an NHS dentist, as they couldn't find anyone in their local area. Callers included people with disabilities, one person who was pregnant, people who have young children, and people who were in extreme pain.
- Community wardens in Dover & Canterbury told us that residents have raised issues over the lack of available dentists, especially for children, and they have concerns about the long term consequences for young people

## **MATERNITY**

We heard two stories through social media about maternity services;

1. One woman delivered her baby in hospital without her husband as he was extremely vulnerable and the hospital advised that he should stay shielded at home. She said that the midwives were very supportive and she asked to be discharged from the hospital the same day so that she could get back home to her husband.
  2. Another lady said that she was 36 weeks pregnant and meant to be having a c-section, although the last conversation she had with the consultant was at 28 weeks via a telephone call, and they seemed 'disinterested'. The paperwork that the midwife had contradicted the details discussed on the phone call with the consultant.
- An organisation who supports families told us that many of the antenatal classes running at the moment are on Zoom, but not everyone has access to that.

## **Scans**

We heard three stories of people who were struggling to get confirmation of their scan.

1. One person received a scan appointment with 3 days notice, only because they had asked their midwife to find out for them.
  2. Another person was waiting for a 20 week scan (and was already at 21 weeks)
  3. A lady needed a 28 week growth scan and called the hospital, who never got back to her.
- One person said that they had faced issues with their 8 week, 13 week and 20 week scans. They have decided to use a private facility to avoid the difficulties they experience with the hospital.

## **Infant Feeding**

- A breastfeeding support organisation told us that there is still no service for tongue-tie in West Kent and the procedure is set to be referred to London. Local midwives are getting in touch with the organisation to organise these referrals. Referrals for this service are also coming in also from Ashford and Ramsgate

## HEALTH VISITING SERVICE

- We heard about a person who said that their baby became unwell and they were unable to get an appointment with the GP. The surgery suggested that she called the health visitor. The number for the health visitor rang out multiple times and after a while she got hold of someone who took a message and said the health visitor would call but she never got a call.

## FLU VACCINE

We heard multiple stories through social media of people who tried to get access to a flu jab and were unsuccessful.

1. Some people reported confusion between GPs and district nurses with regards to the responsibility of vaccinating housebound patients.
  2. Others told us that they had appointments booked at their GP clinic or pharmacy but when they arrived on the day they were told that there were no more vaccines available.
  3. We also heard from people who were told that they were eligible for the vaccine, having conditions such as type 1 diabetes, only to be refused the vaccination when they tried to get an appointment.
  4. Other people were confused why they were eligible for the vaccine when their only medical history was of ADHD.
- *“My mum is 87 with underlying health conditions, so is shielding. She was due to have her flu jab at home. When we spoke to the District nurse we were told that we needed to speak with the GP. The GP said the District Nurses were given the vaccines four weeks ago, you need to speak to them - we are just going round in circles and my Mum has still not had her flu jab. Last winter she didn't get it until February 2020! As her carer and because I was able to go to the surgery, I had my flu jab back in October”*
  - *“Despite being on the vulnerable list and being told I would be notified of flu jab appointments, nothing was received. I phoned the surgery and they revealed that there were no appointments for the over 65s. The local chemists have all run out of vaccines too.”*
  - Community wardens in Dover & Canterbury told us that residents had difficulties getting their flu jabs, with their surgery and chemist running out of vaccines. It has fuelled concerns about how they will get a Covid vaccine.
  - *“I'm meant to be on the flu jab list but they have run out of the flu jab at my GP. The nurse rang me to say they will be having more stock in and that I am on the list and she rang me to reassure me. I really appreciated this.”*



## **END OF LIFE**

- An organisation supporting young carers told us that many of the young people are telling them that they feel their relatives were discharged from hospital too early, before they were well enough. One lady was discharged from the hospital before a physio had done a walking assessment. Another young carer said that their mother was at end of life but discharged home. The daughter slept on the sofa for a week as her mother couldn't be left alone.
- Our helpline spoke to a family who had a relative in hospital. The prognosis was poor and the hospital allowed eight family members to visit. The security person at the hospital refused to let the family in but eventually the family were allowed to visit for 20 minutes each, individually.

## **SECTION 4. Care & support packages**

**There were 5 themes within this topic area:**

### **1. Care homes**

### **2. Community services**

### **3. Care at home**

### **4. Equipment**

### **5. Impact on Carers**

## **CARE HOMES**

- We heard stories from our social gathering insights of people who haven't seen their parent or loved one in many months, but they are appreciative of the support and care given by care home staff. Some people had concerns that their loved one was "going downhill" due to the lack of interaction with family members.
- An Age UK in East Kent told us about an elderly man who had suffered a heart attack and stroke. He had to use a hoist and was completely dependent on his daughter. He was moved to a care home with the help of a care manager and a care plan. The management in the care home changed and the relationship between the daughter and the management became strained. Eventually the father was given an eviction notice from the care home.

## **COMUNNITY SERVICES**

- A voluntary organisation in Thanet told us that there has been an increase in requests for cleaning & gardening services. Other support has also been sought for care and mental services.
- An Age UK centre told us that 98 clients reported being worried about the Day Centre not being able to reopen due to the new restrictions.
- A foodbank organisation told us about a family that they helped; the father is a foreign national who speaks English and is out working. His partner is pregnant and doesn't speak English, she is struggling because there is a lack of services that she can communicate with, and many of the services that she was able to use have temporarily closed down due to Covid.

## CARE AT HOME

- An organisation supporting independent living told us that they have a client who is terminally ill and requires night-time care; they have made multiple complaints as they were told that “*there are more vulnerable people with greater needs*”. The client said that the absence of multidisciplinary professional face to face meetings during lockdown when planning care packages has a huge impact on people living alone and with a terminal illness.
- An Age UK in South Kent told us that carers who are looking after people with dementia are struggling without respite care

## EQUIPMENT

- An organisation supporting vulnerable adults told us that one of their clients has been waiting for three months for OT equipment to be installed to enable her to access and exit her property. She feels like a ‘prisoner’ in her flat.

## IMPACT ON CARERS

- An organisation supporting young carers have noted an increase in referrals to Adult Social Care Teams, School Health teams and Children’s Social Care Teams to ensure that the cared for needs are met. 53% of young carers commented that their levels of caring had increased since the start of the pandemic.
- A Carers agency told us that carers generally found it tough in the beginning, but they managed. Some reported find things easier as more services are now online and so they don’t have to take their cared for out or get to 9am appointments which would have caused anxiety and stress for both the carer and cared for.
- An organisation supporting people with dementia told us that some families have moved in with older relatives to give care and reassurance. This has worked well for two families that they are aware of.





## SECTION 5. Education, Transport & Housing

There were 3 themes within this topic area:

1. Education

2. Housing

3. Technology

### EDUCATION

- An organisation supporting vulnerable families told us that XXXXX school in Kent are not supporting families and are penalising those who are choosing to keep their children home (not due to isolating, positive tests or clinically vulnerable, but for families who feel unsafe or whom their child's mental wellbeing is suffering). One Mum received a threatening letter saying they would be fined.
- An organisation supporting families with special needs told us that they have seen an increase in the number of school-refusing children, or part-time attendance. Many of the children with special needs do not understand the changes to bubbles, they are unable to be with their friends and the changing layout of schools as the schools attempt to make the buildings Covid-safe. Behaviours have increased in children having to isolate because of bubble positive cases and these children don't understand why they can't go outside or be at school for two weeks.
- The same organisation told us that two pupils from XXXXX High School had issues with penalties being given regarding behaviour, which was related to their disabilities and anxieties, which are very heightened due to Covid changes to the school day and the layout.
- Community wardens in Dover told us that they are aware of concerns about children catching Covid at school, as there are different approaches to isolation at different schools.

### School Precautions

- Through social media insights, we heard two stories from parents who had concerns about the precautions that schools were taking. One parent was concerned that schools have not been given additional funding to make classrooms and communal spaces safe. The other parent said that soap dispensers had run out by midday, so personal hygiene was being compromised.
- *“My daughters’ school are keeping all windows open in the classrooms and making the kids stand outside at lunchtimes. The kids are freezing but they’re not allowed to wear coats indoors. I bought my daughter football skins to wear under her uniform. They’re thin enough to allow a good fit of uniform but at least they keep her a bit warmer. Kids are going to come down with illnesses related to the cold temperatures and hypothermia.”*

## Removing children from school

- An organisation supporting families with special needs told us that one family have removed their child from school as they do not believe the new proposal from school is acceptable (moving from class bubbles, to whole school bubble). One parent has ADHD and struggles to understand social situations and also has a lung condition. They do not feel that the school environment is safe for their child and for them as a family. The head teacher was fully supportive of this and authorised the absence for the winter months or while numbers are rising.

## Closing educational settings

Our social media insights heard five stories of people concerned about educational settings closing;

1. There were three parents who want the schools to close in order to help control the rising infection rate.
2. Another person called for universities to close due to the number of students still living in close quarters.
3. One person felt that schools should not be closing in order to safeguard vulnerable children.

## Year groups isolating

- Through our social media insights, we heard five people tell us about year groups isolating and the impacts of staying at home. One parent was frustrated that their child's year group was not told to isolate despite one student and a teacher testing positive. Another parent told us that teachers in one high school are not even aware when bubbles are sent home, they just notice large groups of students missing from the classroom.

## Vulnerable young people

- An organisation supporting young refugees told us that after the reopening of services in mid-July, classes and education programmes were getting back, albeit in bubbles. In the new lockdown they will continue in bubble classes. A church in Canterbury gave them space to hold socially distanced classes for up to 10 students giving them extra ability to run education programmes. There is a huge need for education classes for young refugees.



## **HOUSING**

- A foodbank organisation told us about a family; one parent has mental health issues and the other parent worked full time and recently lost their job due to Covid. They have three children under the age of six. Their landlord has a family member who also lost their job and is now evicting the family in order to house their family member. The local council said that the only thing they can do to support the family is store their belongings.

### **Homelessness**

- One story from social media spoke about the need to shelter homeless people in hotels, like the last lockdown, especially now that the weather has changed.
- A foodbank organisation told us that one of their clients is a British citizen who moved to France with their family. Following a cancer diagnosis, he came back to the UK for a course of treatment and surgery. The first surgery took place but the second surgery was delayed due to Covid. Because of the lockdown and the state of his health he was no longer able to work and so whilst waiting for second operation to be rescheduled, he is now homeless.

## **DIGITAL INCLUSION/TECHNOLOGY**

- An organisation supporting young refugees told us that their Youth Forum is working well but they have not had new arrivals join in the last month, as the latest refugees to arrive do not have access to means to virtually connect
- An organisation supporting rural residents told us that they were working with the Kent Police Commissioners Office to set up virtual community meetings. They found that many people didn't have access to virtual meetings and internet facilities. Some of the residents did have access, but didn't want to take part in virtual meetings. Those who do use them tend to need help from a family member.
- An addiction support service told us that they are carrying out as many one to ones as possible by telephone. They have handed out phone handsets to some people to enable them to join Zoom support groups. The feedback has been very positive because they don't have to risk leaving the house to attend a meeting.
- An organisation supporting people with dementia told us that doing meetings on Zoom has been very successful, for those who have the ability to use IT. Using new technology has reportedly given confidence and pleasure to those who thought they would not be able to use it. Some group members have purchased new IT equipment in order to stay in touch with each other.

## **SECTION 6. Testing**

**There were 4 themes within this topic area:**

- 1. Accessing tests/Testing sites**
- 2. Track & Trace**
- 3. Covid experiences & symptoms**
- 4. Covid vaccine**

### **ACCESSING TESTS**

Our social media insights led us to three stories regarding testing sites;

1. One person was concerned about the high number of positive cases in one area even though the testing site was empty on most days.
  2. Another person was keen to get rapid testing sites set up in areas of Kent that had the highest levels of infection.
  3. One story explained that they tried to register their home test but faced problems and 119 told them it was a spoilt test; they are not able to receive another test now.
- An organisation supporting carers told us that they are hearing concerns from their clients regarding the infection rate, particularly in Thanet. Their clients are wanting to know when mass testing will take place, particularly for care homes.

### **TRACK & TRACE**

- We saw five stories through our social media insights that informed us of the problems people were facing with the Track & Trace app;
  1. One person had been indoors for the past 12 days but received a notification to self-isolate even though they had not been out.
  2. Another person had two contradicting results emailed to them but were told to isolate anyway, they questioned how robust the system is.

### **COVID EXPERIENCES**

- We heard of three Covid experiences through social media; all stories described symptoms such as “lungs on fire”, vomiting, body aches, and exhaustion.

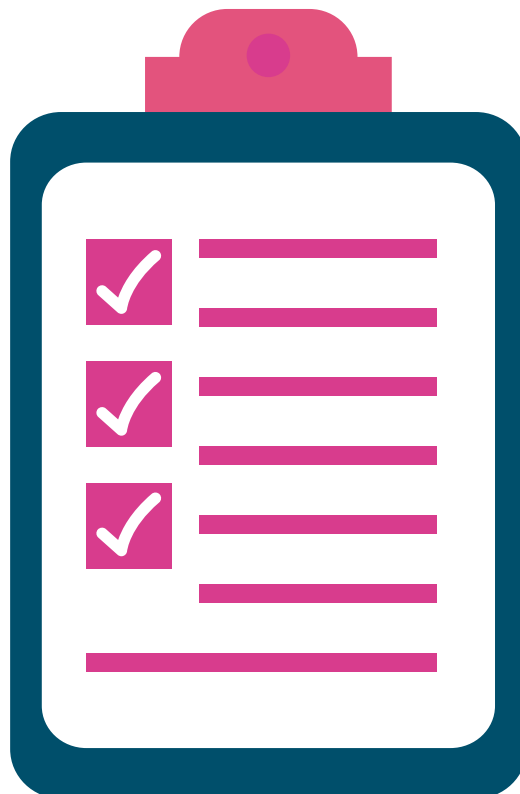
### **COVID VACCINE**

- We heard from nine people who gave their views on the Covid vaccine that is being produced. There were a range of views with some people eager to get it straight away, and other people who are very unsure about receiving a vaccine that has not produced any long term research data.

## 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.

- **We are going to explore how young people are supported when leaving care systems and what can be done to improve this process**
- **We are going to seek reassurance from the CAMHS service following the feedback we heard about parents having difficulty accessing medication for their children**
- **We are going to gain clarification around the Infection Control Policy, regarding care workers who do not feel comfortable wearing short sleeves due to mental health related concerns**
- **We are contacting hospitals throughout Kent, to understand what the current allowances are regarding oncology patients bringing someone to an appointment**



# Thank You



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

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

 [@hwkent](https://www.facebook.com/hwkent)

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

 [@healthwatch\\_kent](https://www.instagram.com/healthwatch_kent)

 **0808 801 0102**