



COVID related Public Feedback for Kent

**Monthly Summary report
September 2020**



Background

Throughout September, Healthwatch Kent have worked with the Kent User Forums to gather direct feedback from 190 people about their experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic and life under social distancing. We have combined this with anecdotal feedback from 15 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 peoples' 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!

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:

- Confusion and frustration about the Government guidelines and Covid testing
- Continued concerns from people worried about their finances and getting food
- Increase in the need for mental health support and challenges getting support
- Specific challenges for people living with Autism
- The impact on children and parents, particularly new Mums
- Access to GPs, primary care and medication
- Delays in hospital treatment due to Covid
- Continued issues for people trying to get dental treatment
- Impact of the pandemic on elderly people as well as carers

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

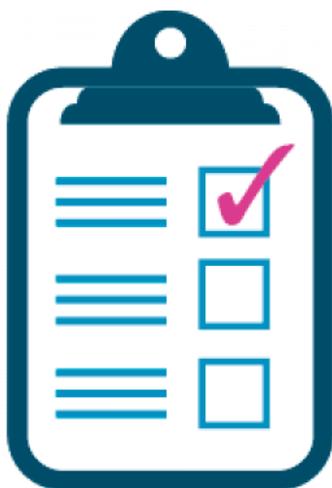
SECTION 2. (Page 11) **MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING;** issues such as the domestic environment, general mental health and wellbeing, secondary mental health services and the wellbeing of staff.

SECTION 3. (Page 17) **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 31) **TESTING;** issues such as access to tests, covid experiences, track and trace.



SECTION 1. The impact of lockdown

There were 10 themes within this topic area:

1. Government guidance
2. Rule of Six
3. Local issues
4. 2nd Lockdown
5. Shielding
6. Facemasks
7. Job loss
8. Access to food
9. Death & bereavement
10. Finance

GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

- *"I got tested last week for coronavirus and it came back as positive which was a huge shock. I had already sent my daughter into school that day before the result came back. None of us had symptoms, just a bit of a cold and the school said it was fine as long as we didn't have a cough or temperature. We got tested because we had been near someone who was tested positive a couple of weeks ago so we took a test just to be safe. The government are now saying only take a test if you have symptoms, but look at me! I had NO symptoms and still came back positive, so I'm glad I defied that advice. Anyway, I told the school that I was positive and they've not been very nice to say the least. The teacher is pregnant which I feel awful about and now my daughter is positive so they've shut her year group and sent them all home. I feel so guilty about the pregnant teacher. But I still maintain that I done the right thing by taking a test even though the government guidelines tell you to get a test only if you have symptoms"*
- *"the government tell us to stay home and be safe, but give us half price food in restaurants on Monday/Tuesday/Wednesday. Do they want us to eat out or stay home safe?"*
- An Age UK centre told us that their service users are feeling more relaxed about the current situation and rightly or wrongly, are forming their own extended bubbles, despite the guidance about this. Confusion still reigns on many things and people are still asking questions about who can come into their homes, who can they sit beside if they go out for dinner etc.

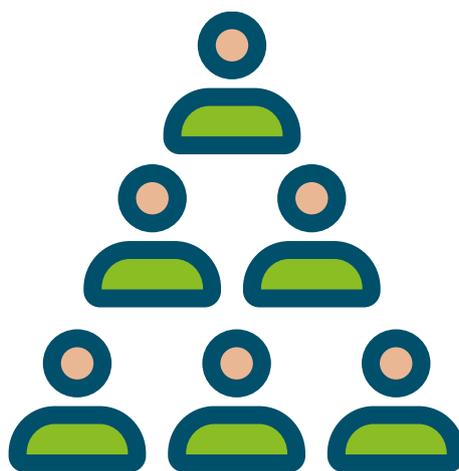


RULE OF SIX

- *“Now that we can't see more than six people, I will be unable to visit my grandchildren in Deal in a couple of weeks for a birthday celebration, as there will be eight of us. Devastated is an understatement, we probably won't be able to see this this side of Christmas. For the first time ever, I'm actually dreading Christmas, it's going to be very lonely for a lot of people if they can't get together”*
- *“If the illegal gathering of more than 6 people is still going at Christmas then I'll break this rule. I'm not going to avoid spending time with family, or seeing grandparents who have limited time with us. I'll happily take the £100 fine”*
- *“Christmas is going to be extra special in our house, the children suffered enough this year. I won't be stopping them from seeing family members on the big day. We'll be having our usual Christmas day with the rest of our family and we will not be adhering to the rule of six. It's too much to ask of people”*
- *“There is no way that the vast majority of the country will stick to the 6 people rule for Christmas. It's ridiculous to expect people to do this”*
- *“I'm so fed up of all this now! We can go on holiday in a place with 200 strangers, work in a supermarket with 50 colleagues and 100 customers, go to a pub with 100 strangers, kids go to school with 1000 other kids....but now I can't see any more than 6 family members. I'm so sick of this covid business now! It's wrecked peoples hopes and dreams, weddings and funerals, holidays and careers, exams, and now they want us to abide by this new rule! I've lost all respect for other people in this country who can't stick to the original rules”*
- *“This new rule of over 6 people being illegal is stupid. There are over 1000 children in my kid's school. We are a family of 6 so we now can't see anyone else”*

LOCAL ISSUES

- *“If COVID-19 is so deadly and bad then why have Folkestone and Hythe district council allowed a travelling fun fair in our town? Are they making sure that all the rides are thoroughly disinfected after every use? Is everyone sanitising their hand before every ride? I can't believe they were allowed to have a permit for this fun fair in such risky times”*
- *“I saw on my news alerts that the Gravesham infection rate has gone up from 5 to 15 now; people have not been sticking to the rules and I'm glad that things are getting more strict now”*



SECOND LOCKDOWN

- *"I don't want another national lockdown, I don't think it will make a difference. We're heading into the winter months so colds and flu will be on the increase anyway"*
- *"I would only support another national lockdown if the furlough scheme was reinstated. I couldn't afford to lose that kind of money if I wasn't able to work"*
- *"I think the plan is to put us into this semi-lockdown for a few weeks and then full-on lockdown when the schools are on half term. Hopefully that will flatten the curve again, but it's not going to get rid of it"*
- *An Age UK centre in East Kent told us that as new restrictions are being put back in place this week due to numbers of Covid cases rising, their clients are worried about another long lockdown.*

SHIELDING

- *"I'm still shielding, I have been since March. My oncologist told me to shield until my surgery which is in October. It's incredibly difficult to see the pandemic die back and now start to rise up again. I have real concerns that my surgery will be cancelled if the new cases continue to rise and use hospital resources. I've done everything that was asked of me, but my cancer surgery is now in jeopardy because of the careless and mask-less people who break the rules"*
- *"My husband has already received another shielding letter and he tore it up and put it straight in the bin. He is on immunosuppressants and worked up until March. He went back to work in June because we needed the money and were worried about our long term income. We still go to the shops and restaurants etc, but we wear masks and use hand sanitiser. Just like the flu and other viruses, we will have to live with it!"*
- *"No one has spoken about shielding again, should the vulnerable go back to shielding now that the number of infections are increasing? I don't know where to find the information on this"*
- *An Age UK centre in South Kent told us that many of their clients who call the helpline are anxious and unsure of going out. Most are over 70 with existing health conditions however, one lady is in an extremely rural location in her 40's and is "terrified" of going out again since she has finished shielding.*
- *An organisation who support people living independently told us that their clients are becoming concerned and feeling low. They are worrying about having to go into isolation again. With the increase of the Covid-19 infection rate rising, they are wanting to know why the shielding and assistance regulations are no longer available to enable them to protect themselves.*

FACEMASKS

- *"I had an email from my child's school saying facemasks were now compulsory despite the government saying that this would only happen in areas of local lockdown. My child has already lost half of year 6 and now in high school it looks like there will be no music classes, no sports classes, no science experiments or any work in pairs. This is not a good education that kids are getting"*
- *"My son is anxious about going back to school. He has ADHD and has gotten so used to being at home. Being told he will need a face covering is not helping"*
- *"I was on the bus the other day and three men got on without masks. When the driver asked them to wear a mask they all smiled and said that they were exempt. The driver just drove off, I don't imagine it's his job to confront everyone. Something needs to be done though, it's putting other people at risk"*
- *"If it gets to a danger point of having to get kids to wear masks in school during lessons then I won't be sending my child to school. Private schools and full Parliament are still not going back, why are the rest of us having to send our kids back?"*
- A support group told us that many people with autism have tried wearing facemasks and can't get on with them. They have stopped using them but are now feeling victimised. They feel pushed pack into the home and have stopped going out.

JOB LOSS

- *"I am desperate to find a part time role where I can recover from my mental health issues but denied the support I need. I have a CV and can do application forms but because I had a career gap due to have a child and dealing with my mental health issues, I have been over-looked by employers. This is where I hoped I would have been able to receive support from mental health services in my area. I am unable to get support at the job centre because my husband earns over the cap and employment agencies have turned me down as I am looking for part time work. I have applied for vacancies but mostly receive no response, probably due to the gap in my CV"*
- An organisation who supports people with housing and finance issues told us that people are struggling with the starting process, particularly those who have historically worked; they don't understand the process for making a homeless application or applying for universal credit.



ACCESS TO FOOD

Meals on Wheels

- An Age UK centre in South Kent told us that they continue to deliver around 600 hot meals per week for people staying in their homes.

Supermarkets

- *“Supermarkets are already selling out of goods and the prime minister only mentioned tougher restrictions last night! Previously I was furloughed so I was able to queue outside the supermarket early to get food. Now I'm working from home, so I'm not able to change my work pattern to queue outside early again. I'm concerned that I won't be able to get a variety of food for my family, or be able to get the things that we need. So many corner shops and conveniences outlets hiked up the prices of toilet paper and hand sanitiser before. I can't afford to pay those prices. There should be a limit on how much fresh produce and other goods (toilet roll, breads, baked beans) that one person can buy at a time”*
- *“My local Morrisons in Dover have reintroduced the limit on certain goods again. It's good because people won't be able to stockpile like they did before, but I have a family of 5 kids and 2 adults, so we get through pasta and rice quickly. I need to visit the supermarket more frequently just to maintain enough food for my family but I would rather not have to visit too often during a second wave”*
- *“My local Aldi had already sold out of toilet roll this morning by the time that I got there. People were walking out with huge packs of it, leaving nothing for anyone else. I can't face going through this again because it was so stressful the first time around”*
- *“When you have a large family it can look like you're stockpiling food, and I was criticised in the first few months of the first wave when I was at the supermarket. It was horrible at the time, so when restrictions eased I made sure that I tried to buy a few extra bits here and there. I now have a healthy stock of food in my cupboard, so I hope I won't get questioned this time around. Not all families come in the same form, and it takes a lot of food to feed my brood”*
- *“I remember the week before lockdown, I went to the supermarket as usual and the shelves were empty. I cried because for once I had money to buy food but there was nothing available to me and my son. I had to resort to using the local petrol station to buy convenience food like pasties and microwave meals, which were very expensive. I have to buy food on a week to week basis with the money that I have, and we don't have food in reserve. My flat is tiny with very little storage space. Since then I decided to create a little area for storing food so hopefully I won't run out of food again. I have two packets of pasta and some jars of sauce, a spare box of cereal and a few tins of tuna”*

ACCESS TO FOOD

Eat out to help out

- *“I loved the Eat Out to Help Out scheme. I’m a single parent and my daughter and I had some really good and filling meals for half the price. It was a blessing for us not to have to pay the full price, it should be extended to help parents feed their kids”*
- *“They should give takeaways the ability to use the 50% off scheme; that way it keeps people safe by eating at home and in their own bubble and it helps struggling businesses”*

Foodbanks

- An Age UK centre told us that some people have asked if they can still access the foodbank, now that furlough has ended.
- An organisation supporting people with food and housing issues told us that access to food is an emerging issue now that the Kent Together service is no longer sending out food parcels. With current restrictions on foodbanks and not allowing people in, people have to get professional support work to pick up the food for you.
- The same organisation told us that if people don’t have enough money for food, access to foodbanks is a real issue. A lot of people do not understand the system of foodbanks. There is a lot of ongoing redundancy happening.

DEATH & BEREAVEMENT

- *“I have avoided seeing my precious Dad for the past 6 months to keep him safe as he was very ill. He has just passed away, not from covid, and I feel that I’ve missed out on the past few months and keeping him comforted and making memories”*
- An Age UK centre has seen an increase in the number of enquiries for making a will.
- *“My Dad passed away in April from covid, I wasn’t able to see him in the 8 weeks before he died. We’ve been waiting for restrictions to lift to give him a good send off, and now the restrictions are back, and more rigid than before. There are more than 6 people in our family who want to get together to toast my father and to have a proper send off”*



FINANCE

- *“The reason covid is spreading is because people cannot afford to isolate anymore”*
- An Age UK in South Kent told us that they received 58 requests for benefit advice in a two week period.
- A support group spoke to us and said that the biggest issue they currently hear about is around finance; as autistic people can have communication difficulties, they struggle dealing with PIP claims over the phone. It is difficult to talk to people, but the only way to apply for PIP is on a paper form. No one is able to do it on the phone or online. New claimants for Universal credit are done on the phone which is stressful.
- The support group also said that if PIP is withdrawn, it can take 1 year for it to go to a tribunal (normally). Since COVID caused a backlog, it is now more like 18+ months. So many people are afraid of losing their benefits. This isn't just a COVID issue but it is always an issue for people with autism.
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that around 30% of their enquiries have been for welfare benefit checks, making claims for Attendance Allowance/Pension Credit.
- We heard from Citizens Advice Bureaus throughout Kent that they have seen huge increases in calls from people who are needing debt and financial advice. The Bureaus are expecting that the need for this type of support “will explode” in the coming weeks.
- Another Age UK in East Kent told us that their enquiries service has received 4 calls regarding state pensions (in the past 2 weeks) “because the DWP is unobtainable by phone”. They have also had enquiries about getting financial support for funeral costs, the client found it “impossible” to be able to talk to the social services benefits office.
- The same Age UK centre have organised 7 home visits in the past few weeks to help people with their attendance allowance and pension credits.
- A mental health support group told us that one of their service users has been fighting for PIP for 15 months for themselves when they have a disability and mental health issues. The service user is also a carer for two adults and has been struggling to find the appropriate support. After 15 months of battling to receive PIP they have finally received the help they have needed.



SECTION 2. Mental health & wellbeing

There were 6 themes within this topic area:

- 1. Mental health**
- 2. Impact of isolation**
- 3. Impact on young people & children**
- 4. Impact on parents**
- 5. Abuse**
- 6. Refugees**

MENTAL HEALTH

- *“Mental health services in Maidstone have been appalling. I have been to multiple services including Live Well, RBLI and the services just do not exist once you have signed up to them. I have started the process of trying to get on the IAPT service as I have been told by the Centre for mental health to try it. But now I have been told I have to go through an assessment where if I do not get accepted. I cannot access the service I need. I am at such a low ebb and do not know where to turn”*
- A breastfeeding support group told us that they think there will be a spike in post-natal depression, especially if Mums don't have a reason to get out, like a new mums group. Breastfeeding Mums haven't had a chance to practice feeding in public, so that also builds anxiety.
- An Age UK centre told us that there currently seems to be no capacity for people who have low level mental health issues.
- An Age UK centre in South Kent told us that they are reintroducing exercise sessions in September including Tai Chi and aerobics classes as they believe that physical and mental health and wellbeing are significantly linked and they hope to encourage people to begin to feel good about themselves again.
- An Age UK centre in East Kent told us that they have a new initiative to provide counselling for their volunteers, which has been financed by fundraising. The volume and breadth of the activities that volunteers carry out has changed significantly over the Covid period, and they will be provided with dedicated support and coordinated training.
- An organisation supporting people with housing issues told us that they have heard about a lot of suicidal ideation recently. In the last couple of weeks they have noticed an increase in the number of cases reported.
- *“I was in St Martins for just over 3 weeks and I was terrified about getting Covid. I was put in a room for a few days to get the test results back to make sure I didn't bring the disease onto the ward. This made me feel better that I was less likely to get it from the ward. I was on 2 different wards during the week, I don't know which ones. I felt safe enough. There wasn't much to do on the ward but I had my phone and it was difficult to get it charged as sometimes the office staff weren't paying attention, so I got bored and frustrated a few times but the TV was free a lot so that was good. The staff were good mostly, the night staff were a bit more stand-offish but I got to know the good ones and they were nice to talk to. I got my meds sorted so I felt better about leaving but it was hard to see the doctor as they weren't there much, or they were busy. I got a good care plan and know what I need to do to stay feeling better”*

- A mental health support group told us about a service user who has recently given birth and is continuing to receive support from the CMHT and MIMHS. She has been receiving fortnightly phone calls from her CMHT care coordinator and fortnightly home visits from her MIMHS CPN. She is also receiving home visits from the MIMHS nursery nurse. The regular support has helped maintain her stability and monitor her mental health so she feels well supported and that any issues will be picked up quickly.
- A mental health support group told us that one of their service users is now facing problems with their son's medication and has been messed about by XXXXX and the hospital into finding the correct medication. The service user's son has not had an appointment at the hospital for 8 years. They are concerned for their son's wellbeing, health and mental health condition which is anxiety provoking.

Autism

- A support group for adults with autism told us about the struggles that their service users face to get access to mental health support. SLAM have been withdrawn from Kent services, and the new CBT provider has not yet been commissioned, it is only Pscicon at the moment (in East Kent). They told us they expect the waiting list to massively increase. GPs are still generally unaware that SLAM are not taking new cases and so GPs are still sending new referrals for CBT. At present, Pscicon are doing online counselling only.
- *"My son (an adult) was receiving 6-12 sessions of IAPT talking therapy. Due to something that he said during one of these sessions he was referred to the community mental health team in XXXXX. I obviously went with him to this appointment as he does not travel to new places or where he does not know procedures etc. due to his Autism Spectrum Disorder. When he arrived, he became completely stressed out because of (his words) druggies and weirdos in the waiting room. He went to the toilet twice because of this anxiety. I have to say some of the people waiting to be seen were suffering quite severe symptoms/side effects. He told the person who saw him (by himself) that he would not be able to return and that he didn't need help. He could really use some talking therapies but now he has been put off, unsurprisingly. Nowhere else to go so he will have to look online for future support. This is the reality of trying to get help. No one, not one person, has been in touch with him in over two years from the medical profession to see how he is doing or to check how his meds are performing. And as I am his carer and am aware of this, I seriously wonder how many people with ASD do not have this support from a family member and slip beneath the radar so to speak"*



- *“My son just spent 7 weeks at an in-patient facility in XXXXX. My son has a diagnosis of autism, learning disability and schizophrenia. On his admission to XXXXX he was searched and asked to remove his shoes while being surrounded by 4 large male nurses who didn’t even ask his name. I had gone to the hospital with him so I was witness to this. Anyone with autism hates to be surrounded, he became very scared and ended up punching one of the nurses. This resulted in him being restrained and taken to his room which was obviously very scary for him and distressing for me to witness. I emailed the matron on the ward to tell her I wasn’t happy with the way he had been treated on admission and to be fair she apologised and said she would talk to the staff involved as she herself wasn’t happy with the way his admission had gone. There is no provision in mental health units for adults with my sons needs in Kent. XXXXX do not have any staff specifically trained in autism or LD and I find this totally unacceptable considering the high level of adults suffering with their mental health who also have these additional needs/disorders. I ended up having a good relationship with the staff on the ward and my son was treated with kindness and compassion by the staff. However I feel that there needs to be a specific ward or provision for someone like my son with complex needs, the staff need to be trained to understand autism as this can easily be seen as a symptom of their mental health condition if the staff are not familiar with it”*
- *“As a mother who has Aspergers, this lockdown has made me re-evaluate my life. I used to think that I coped well getting the kids up in the morning, making breakfast, and getting them to school on time. Then I would rush off to work and get on with my day, and not relax until the kids were in bed at night. When the kids weren’t going to school I realised that I didn’t get stressed about leaving the house at a certain time, worry about them eating enough breakfast, and not worry about going to work because I was furloughed. I realised that I was a lot more chilled out and relaxed, and I felt more like myself than I have done in years. Now that school is back, I find that the stress has returned and the “mask” that I wear to do the school run and wear at work is back. I didn’t understand just how much of myself is hidden behind a façade and how much it takes its toll on me. I don’t know what to do about this, and I’m not sure how to try to address it. I don’t have any support for my diagnosis, there isn’t much in the way for adults”*

CMHT

- *“I have been unable to access CMHT in the way I need for self harm. It has got worse under lockdown. This has been the same for years. I have written to senior management and am awaiting a response, it has been going on for too long”*
- *“XXXXX have not been in contact with me since I have gone into hospital and they need to put a care package in place so I can come out. They are meant to be doing Zoom calls with me but haven’t done one”*
- A mental health support group told us that one of their service users had her assessment with XXXXX on 21st July 2020 and was told that Doctor would call her regarding a treatment plan. By mid-September she still has not heard anything and is still struggling. She has received a letter acknowledging her attendance and stating that her medication will be reviewed, however this has not been done. The service user has tried calling them 3 times and has either had no response or is told someone will call her back and then they don’t. She told them that she is unable to take her medications due to the side effects, but no action has been taken.

- *"I can't get help with my BPD because the CMHT say I'm not bad enough to get help so they won't help me which is not helping me to manage myself. I'm thinking of going private if I'm honest."*
- *"I have had a massive struggle to be taken seriously and get a complete diagnosis of my mental health conditions. The GP suggested anti-depressants, but I didn't want to go down that route. I am on the waiting list for CBT but I am struggling to get a diagnosis for Borderline Personality Disorder and therefore can't get the correct help ie DBT. I have been diagnosed with generalised anxiety disorder with OCD and depression, but I am sure I have BPD and Bi-Polar and I am struggling. After I accessed the CMHT I was discharged and left with no support and the crisis team weren't of use, they were patronising. I have been told I am not seriously unwell enough to access the CMHT and have been discharged"*
- *"I had a phone call from KMPT mental health team. I had discussed with my family that this service was making my mental health worse and I was advised to just draw a line under it as it's a very poor service and to move on. This lady kept me on the phone for over half an hour explaining that my mental health was not severe enough to merit help from secondary Mental Health services. I tried to end the call three times but she was trying to give me excuses why I cannot enter the services and what organisations I should go to from here (Services that I have already tried and where they failed to help me). If I had known the criteria at the beginning (practically suicidal) for entry to this service I would not have bothered. It has been made even worse that the nurse who assessed me made it clear that I was suitable for secondary mental health support. Mental health support in Maidstone has totally failed me and I will never try and access support again no matter how ill I become"*

IAPT

- A mental health group told us that one of their service users recently accessed IAPT talking therapies, she did not like having to answer the questions at the beginning of every phone call (rate from 0-5) as she felt (for her) they were unnecessary. She understood that some people benefit from that and require that to monitor the way they feel from week to week, however for her it was just about talking through some issues to better understand and manage anxieties. She felt that Talking therapies should be to suit the user rather than a one shoe fits all process.

IMPACT OF ISOLATION

- *"I had my baby on April 24th, so he's now 5 months and I'm really lonely as I don't have a support network close by. My husband is fantastic but is frantically trying to keep his business above water. He's also had to take on a part time job with Royal Mail just to keep our heads above water, so I don't see him much"*
- A voluntary service in East Kent told us that they have completed risk assessments for their clients and volunteers. Social visiting in gardens and through windows has now been established. Unfortunately for care home clients, they are unable to have social visiting if they do not have phones in their rooms. The poor availability of phone access within the home is causing these clients to be deprived of social contact, and is causing stress to some clients.
- An Age UK centre told us that it is clear that the people who normally came to the centre before the pandemic have deteriorated over the last six months, and their carers are really in need of respite.

IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE & CHILDREN

- *“My daughter is 4 months old now and is a very happy and easy baby. Usually she is very content, however when anyone else holds her (other than me or my husband) she gets really scared and upset. She has only recently been introduced to my parents because they were shielded. When my Mum held her the baby just screams and it’s heartbreaking. I believe this is due to the lockdown and the fact that life and normal interactions just aren’t the same as what they used to be. I’ve tried socialising as much as we can but it’s very difficult under the circumstances. We can’t even go to a baby group so she can see other babies”*
- *“My little girl was born before lockdown but hasn’t been around many people, or family members. She’s now struggling with separation anxiety and if she can’t see me or my husband then she screams so much that she makes herself sick. She’s only 9 months old but the impact is quite profound”*
- *“Post lockdown my 3 year old is experiencing what I think is separation anxiety from his dad returning to work. He’s normally very well behaved and quite easy going but has become anxious, emotional and is pining for his Dad all day. He obsessively talks about him and asking if he is ok and thinks he sees his car when we go out. This comes with defiance and tantrums and generally really out of character bad behaviour. He’s waking up earlier in a panic to make sure he sees his Dad before he goes off to work and ultimately becoming sleep deprived which really isn’t helping. He seems overwhelmed with emotion and it’s upsetting for us to see him so young and not coping”*

IMPACT ON PARENTS

- *“I just can’t home-school anymore. My Wi-Fi isn’t good so I can only get 2 of my 4 kids on at a time. It means I have to pick and choose who does their school work; the kids have been given work to do throughout the summer holidays too. I desperately need them to get back to school!”*

ABUSE: (Please note, that safeguarding action has been taken in response to these comments)

- We have heard 3 stories this month about modern day slavery. Due to the sensitive nature of these stories, we have not included them in the report but we are making sure that these stories are known to the Kent & Medway Safeguarding Adults Board.
- An organisation supporting people with housing issues told us that they haven’t seen any decrease in domestic abuse, it has stayed steady. They expected an increase in the summer, when restrictions started to lift. They were getting 20 calls in June, with another 26 in July. In September they received 29 calls and around 25% of those calls have been from men. Not all of the calls are relating to abuse from partners, it can also be abuse between parent and adult children.
- A mental health support group told us about one service user who is struggling with some issues with her neighbour – she is having some help from Victim Support who are helping her with emotional support – they have been very good. *“At one point I felt harassed – a bit like being stalked. He has a girlfriend now so things are easier but they make a lot of noise at night. The atmosphere between us is toxic and I’m quite frightened of him”*

SECTION 3. Access to medication & physical health

There were 10 themes within this topic area:

- 1. Access to primary care**
- 2. Access to medication**
- 3. 111 service**
- 4. Hospital treatment/care**
- 5. Cancer services**
- 6. Phlebotomy**
- 7. Dental**
- 8. School nursing team**
- 9. Obesity**
- 10. Maternity & health visiting services**

ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

- *“I just got over a heart attack and was feeling unwell one day. I phoned the surgery and waited for a call back from the GP. I explained how I felt and the GP said it sounded like I have fluid round my heart and then prescribed water tablets. I was not happy being diagnosed over the phone with what could have been a dangerous condition”*
- *“I went into lockdown OK but changing back to a normal routine is tearing me to pieces. I have to wait at least 3 weeks for a non-urgent appointment with my GP and the only option given to me is on the telephone. I have terrible phone anxiety and my autism means I can’t use phones and I tried to tell them that, but they said that they are only offering phone appointments at the moment. I’ve had to decline the appointment until I can see someone in person”*
- *“I had to ring my GP and I was met with a very long recorded message which I can’t follow because I have a hearing impairment. It’s so difficult to get through to an actual person on the phone and I told them that I can’t hear, could I email instead? I don’t know what she said but she went through a lot of questions on the phone with me and I couldn’t figure out what they were saying. I have no idea if I have an appointment or not”*
- *“My husband has a leg ulcer and the district nurse has been dressing it. She told us to look for signs of infection and told us to dial 999 if necessary because we would have no chance of seeing a doctor. She said that face to face appointments are for absolute emergencies only and it would be quicker to see someone if we called for an ambulance”*

- *Our Helpline heard from a man who cannot get through to his GP surgery on the phone. He told us he tries all day and it is almost always busy. When he got through a couple of weeks ago, he was told the GP would call back in the morning but they never did. Last week he tried to get through, calling 185 times in one day, in the end he asked his chemist to arrange his repeat prescription. He's lived in Lydd for 5 years and says that he has never had a good service stating he has had strokes and a heart bypass and nobody really examines him they just give him pills. He has arthritis, which is painful and debilitating, he has not had a proper examination. Now he needs his ears syringing, they are painful and make him dizzy. He has had them done before but they won't do it now due to Covid-19, he states he can have it done if he pays for it. Previously he has tried to make a complaint to the Practice Manager but when he has managed to get through, on three occasions, he was he told they are not in. He states it's a waste of time, he never gets to speak to the Practice Manager. "We can't get a doctor, we are elderly and not well people" His arthritis is the worst it has been, he cannot walk round to the surgery, is not well enough to write and he can't get through on the phone.*
- *"My niece was really poorly, she called the GP clinic and the receptionist told her that we should call an ambulance, but she should be prepared in case the ambulance took my niece without my sister being allowed to come. My sister was too afraid to call the ambulance in case she was separated from my niece and eventually my niece got worse and we were forced to call. The paramedics couldn't have been nicer and said that there was no way that they would not let my sister go in the ambulance with my niece. We will be complaining to the GP clinic about the receptionist when they get out of hospital"*

Scheduled screening

- *"My GP surgery are still not seeing patients in the clinic, so my child hasn't had their asthma review. In a period of time where people with lung conditions are particularly at risk, I'm very surprised that my surgery isn't making an effort to see these children. I spoke to the practice nurse and they said that they could send a doctor for a home visit if it was urgent, but routine reviews are not happening"*
- *"My cervical screen was cancelled due to covid, which is s**t because cervical cancer runs in my family and my mum had it. It's vital that I get my screening check"*

Ear syringing

- *We received a call on our helpline to say "I have been deaf in one ear for the past 6 months with a possible ear infection. The doctor wasn't sure if there was an infection because she couldn't see the ear drum, and treated me because I was in pain, but I needed the ear syringed. During the last 4 months I have tried to make an appointment, but I am told that they will not syringe it because of Covid. How can people eat out, go to work etc, but a nurse will not do a simple procedure to ease pain and discomfort?"*

GP Support

- *A mental health support group told us that one of their service users feels that their GP Dr XXXX from Grosvenor Road Surgery has been very helpful and understanding during Covid and particularly helpful in sorting out tablet medication in place of her depot which cannot be carried out at present time. The service user changed to this GP and feels they have a better understanding and compassion for those with mental health issues.*

ACCESS TO MEDICATION

- A mental health support group told us that in the case of one client, the pharmacies and the doctors aren't communicating. The client has been to the pharmacy twice and her tablets haven't been there.
- "some pharmacies are really good at answering phones and dealing with people who are under the influence of drugs and alcohol - but it doesn't matter how many suicide attempts you make, how many times you've been in prison and how many mental health problems you have you are always at the bottom of the pile"
- A mental health support group told us that a service user had applied for his mental health medication on 23rd September but will not be able to receive it until 28th September. He desperately needs his meds and is in a vulnerable position with his mind state and situation.
- A mental health support group told us that they have heard reports that pharmacies are running out of Metformin (the drug used to treat diabetes) in Ashford.
- A mental health support group in West Kent told us about one client who has recently been diagnosed with arthritis in both hips and lower spine. The client described the process for collecting their medication; they need to use the bus to get to the surgery then they have to go to the back of the surgery and ring a buzzer for entry. When they go into the building, they need to go up lots of steps to get to the surgery and collect their medication. The client is finding this difficult and painful due to their arthritis. The client described one occasion where they got their collection time mixed up. They are meant to arrive 5 minutes before collection time. They arrived 30 minutes early and were made to wait outside, with nowhere to sit for 30 minutes. The client said the surgery is aware that they now have arthritis and despite this being very difficult and uncomfortable for them, they were still made to wait outside until the collection time.
- *"I ordered a covid test and was told it was coming by courier. I waited in all day but it hasn't arrived. I need to get to the pharmacy to collect a prescription. I called the pharmacy to explain but they said that they wouldn't deliver to me. I don't want to risk leaving the house in case I do have covid, and in case I miss the courier. My pharmacy said that they don't want to put their driver at risk by visiting my house, but I've now run out of medication"*

111 SERVICE

- *"My kid had a constant cough and couldn't taste her food. I kept her off school and her breathing was shallow so I called 111. They told me to send her to school because the symptoms didn't fit with Corona. I kept her at home, they can fine me if they want, my child's safety is more important than a school fine"*
- *"My son is only 3 and he's been back in nursery for 2 days. Tonight it's all gone wrong and we had to call 111. They sent an ambulance round and they took him to Padua Ward. He's got a bad case of croup, but at least it's not covid"*

HOSPITAL TREATMENT/CARE

- *"My Dad has throat cancer and is currently being treated at Kent & Canterbury Hospital with radiotherapy. He's just had a feeding tube fitted and had a temperature so Mum called the ambulance. Ambulance took him to William Harvey Hospital (they live in Hythe). He sat in a room in A&E on his own for hours. No-one saw him or took any details. Eventually he called Mum to come and get him. He left with no-one has seen him. The next day he had radiotherapy back at Kent & Canterbury. When he mentioned he had been to WHH they immediately moved him to a side room and all staff returned in full PPE because they were so worried that he had been to a hot zone. Thankfully his temperature came back down and he was sent home"*
- *"My 86 year old mum fell trying to shower herself. She usually has a helper come to her house but that's not happening because of the restrictions at the moment. She was meant to have surgery on her ankle yesterday but the surgery was cancelled and they don't know when it will be rescheduled. I'm not allowed to go to the hospital to see her so I can't bring her any clean clothes or home comforts. She's alone, scared and vulnerable, and I wish I could tell her when she can come home"*
- *"Huge thanks to all the staff who looked after my husband in Maidstone hospital. Kept him safe while treating his heart, and I felt very safe visiting with the covid tests etc"*
- *"Never hear from my Consultant anymore and I'm not sure I ever will! I suffer from auto immune diseases but I'm sure there are many more deserving cases than my chronic problems! A funny thing is that I've been contacted (1st time) by my GP for flu vaccine! I said no as I was going to my local pharmacy! They've been around during the whole lockdown!"*
- Our helpline heard from a lady whose daughter has Downs Syndrome. She rang 111 who arranged for her daughter to be seen at A&E at QEQM. She was told that she was not ill enough to be admitted to hospital even though she was having breathing difficulties; she had tests done and was sent home. The family called 111 again and the paramedic said the symptoms were normal. The next day she was admitted to A&E after a 999 call. She went to a ward & her mum stayed with her. She was not checked for 5 hours. Her condition deteriorated and she was admitted to ICU on a ventilator, tested positive for Covid and spent 15 nights in ICU and 6 weeks in Hospital. She is now home.

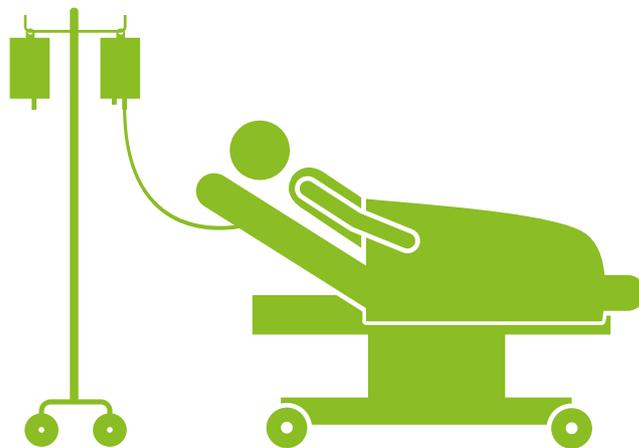


Hospital delays

- *“I had a covid test before going to hospital. The results should have been at the hospital for the 27th of the month, but they didn’t arrive there until the 30th. This resulted in the operation being cancelled and I have to go through the whole process again. The covid tests and labs are failing to deliver”*
- Our helpline was contacted by a lady who had been referred to a consultant due to osteoarthritis in her foot. The appointment was due in April but was postponed due to the pandemic and rescheduled for June. She was then notified that the appointment was cancelled until further notice and was told that she would be contacted when the backlog of patients was cleared. She is now due to see the consultant this month and hopes that treatment will be swift, since the cold weather is setting in and she is only able to wear flip-flops at present.
- Our helpline heard from a concerned gentleman, who told us that his father was due to have a cataract operation. It was cancelled in March with 3 days notice due to the pandemic. Since then he has not heard from the hospital and his cataracts have got worse. His father has now changed to the same GP as the client, so that he can speak to the GP on his father’s behalf. They have written to the hospital consultant to ask when surgery will be resumed but have not heard anything back.
- *“There are far more deaths from other illnesses at the moment, shouldn’t we be addressing that? We need doctor surgeries and hospitals to see more people. Thousands of people are going without the necessary treatment and operations. Cancer deaths and suicides are high, but no one mentions this on the mainstream media, only covid deaths and numbers seem to matter”*

Hospital discharge

- *“My Dad had to go to WHH during lockdown with a heart condition. He had a cough so they tested him and he was then put on a covid ward before his results came back, which were negative. My Dad was discharged home and we think he came home with covid, but he didn’t want to be tested again so we can’t be sure. The ward staff didn’t test before discharge”*



CANCER SERVICES

- An Age UK in East Kent have introduced a new service because they found that many of the other support services & agencies that were available before Covid, are still not fully functioning. They told us that they have answered some specific and unusual issues, including 3 enquiries about wigs. It appears that the “wig service” has been suspended temporarily, but the needs of people affected by cancer are still ongoing.
- *“It’s a disgrace that cancer checks have been put on hold because of covid, I’ve been in remission for 3 years and my checks have stopped. I’m only getting a phone call but how’s that going to check if it’s come back or not. It’s so sad that people are not being treated”*

PHLEBOTOMY

- We heard from a lady who had visited the phlebotomy service at Gravesend Community Hospital. She told us that she had to queue in the street on a boiling hot day for 1hr 15mins, and saw one member of staff who gave out tickets. She was concerned about what would happen in the winter time. Once inside she had to sit and wait another 5 mins before blood taken, The chairs were NOT wiped down between patients. She told us that facilities were cramped and her arm was bent in such a way that she was left with bruising that lasted 3 weeks. The client has other health conditions including being 4 months post chemo. She said that she had to take 2 lots of painkillers before bedtime to help ease the pain from queueing for so long.

DENTAL

- *“As a military family I moved from overseas to Canterbury in the height of the pandemic. Since then I’ve not found one NHS dentist who will let me on their books. They won’t entertain it even if I state I don’t need a check-up right now. It’s really frustrating and dentists in Canterbury and nearby areas have clearly not heard of the military covenant”*
- *“My son just turned 18 and can no longer remain with his current dentist unless he goes private at a cost of £34 per month. That’s a lot of money for a student who has never needed as much as a filling. In the meantime no local dentists are taking on NHS patients, so after 18 years of dental care, paying for braces privately because he didn’t meet criteria on the NHS, he has basically been kicked to the kerb. Furious”*
- *“My husband lost a front tooth during lockdown. Already it’s cost £650 to sort out where the old tooth was pegged, and a temporary filling. The dentist is on holiday for all of August and the lab for making a replacement tooth is shut too. Eventually this tooth will have cost around £1000”*
- *“My daughters NHS brace fitting has been cancelled and she’s been placed back on the waiting list with no idea how long the waiting list is. We’ve been told if we want to go private than this can be done immediately”*
- *“My daughter’s dentist decided to stop treating children two months ago. We cannot gain access to another dentist, our dentist told us that they have an 18 month waiting list. We contacted the helpline for the NHS and told to phone back in October. My daughter is 11 and is due a check up with no possibility of one”*

- Our helpline took a call from a client on behalf of his partner; she is in terrible pain from toothache. Her own dentist referred her to have a tooth removed but there is a 6 month waiting list. They couldn't get to see the dentist on the NHS so paid privately (£300) but he was unable to remove the tooth and he sent her to A&E. The hospital is willing to remove the tooth but need a referral first. The client has contacted the dentist and is waiting for them to get back with regards to making a referral to the hospital. The client is concerned for his partner's health as she is taking a lot of painkillers and isn't in good health generally.
- Another client contacted us to say that she had called 7 dentists, both local and in the surrounding area but has been unable to register with an NHS dentist. She has very bad toothache and told us that she has watched people online removing their own teeth and has tried to remove her tooth herself using a pair of pliers. They are too big so she is going to buy a smaller pair; she said that this is the desperate measures she is contemplating as the toothache is so bad.
- A client called our helpline to say that she had a dental emergency. She rang all practices in Canterbury and Whitstable and no one could provide her with an emergency slot. She was told that NHS funding had been cut and she must pay £100 to be seen and given antibiotics. Unfortunately she now needs 4 teeth removed which are baby teeth with no roots left. They are being held in place by her other teeth but will cause recurring problems until they are removed. Due to her teeth being quite "gappy" at the front she would need a retainer to bring the teeth together in order for bridges to be fitted. She looked into the cost of this to be done privately which ranges from £7-10k but she is not in a position to pay.
- *"My appointment was stressful, I was told sternly that I had not attended a routine appointment since the end of 2018 - I explained that covid had not allowed me to attend! Throughout the appointment, the dentist kept making reference to private treatment. He advised that I required root canal treatment; on the NHS it would only be 60% successful but if were to choose to pay an extra £450 for private treatment it would be 90% successful. This made me think that the NHS care that I would receive would be substandard, he also kept asking me to have dental implant at the cost of £3000". The client told us that the dentist kept pushing for them to choose these options. It made them feel "inadequate, substandard and demoralized".*
- A client contacted our helpline to tell us that their Dental practice is not making routine appointments, and they can only get seen or checked when there is a severe problem. The client had cracked a filling, lost a filling and had to wait until it had caused tremendous pain for them to be seen. Outside the practice there was no signage information and nowhere for private conversations with staff. Six people were waiting and a list was being shown with all the client names and contact details on.
- Another client called us and said that their 11 year old daughter needs a dentist and their usual surgery told them that they have an 18 month waiting list.
- Our helpline received a further nine calls this month from people trying to find a dentist, who have already called up many of the dentists in their area (and beyond). All clients were advised to contact the Kent Dental Helpline.
- A client called our helpline to say that they had been able to see their dentist and were concerned because he wasn't wearing a facemask. The assistant wore a facemask, but removed it after a while

SCHOOL NURSING TEAM

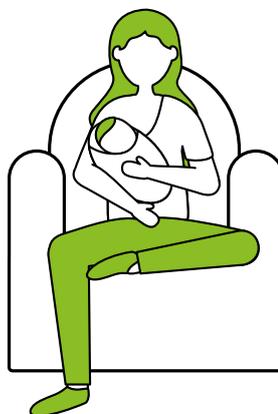
- *"I have attempted to contact the school nursing service on a number of occasions for advice or to arrange a school nurse drop in sessions for parents - as offered on their website but I can't even manage to get speak to anyone or a response to an email. We have no relationship with a school nurse" (North Kent area)*

OBESITY

- *"I had a weight management appointment online. I told my advisor that I was weighing myself at home and I worked out that I had lost 6kgs and lowered my BMI from 50 to 45. She said that I had done everything that the Government wanted overweight people to do. I am still overweight though and I know I need to get out and exercise, but obese people have a worse time of it if they catch Covid, so I'm reluctant to go out. I feel stuck between a rock and a hard place"*
- *"I'm so worried about the new shielding letters that are supposedly going out. They will be asking people to shield based on their weight, height and age etc. If it comes down to BMI, then I'll definitely get a letter. BMI is not a recognised measure of someone's health"*

MATERNITY & HEALTH VISITING SERVICE

- We have received a large volume of feedback regarding maternity and health visiting services this month. Due to the volume and severity of the comments, we have decided to publish a separate, more detailed report focusing on the issues we have heard.



SECTION 4. Care & support packages

There were 3 themes within this topic area:

1. Care homes

2. Community services

3. Carers

CARE HOMES

- *“My son has cerebral palsy and lives in a residential care home in Staplehurst. I am 70 and have arthritis and heart failure and live more than 40 miles away. Last week my son needed emergency hospital treatment, which ended with minor surgery. When he returned to his home he was immediately placed in self isolation for 2 weeks, and I was told I could not visit, even under the usual rules of sitting outside and wearing a mask, because although the home has remained Covid free, they now have a tummy bug. My son is becoming increasingly isolated and withdrawn, a situation that will grow progressively worse as each time he leaves the house for ongoing treatment his isolation will be extended by 2 weeks”*
- *“They need to lockdown care homes again, stop people visiting and bringing potential virus particles in and out of vulnerable homes. The most vulnerable should be protected and care home staff need priority over testing appointments and PPE”*
- An Age UK in East Kent told us that eight of their clients have moved into residential care recently. These were planned moves however, an additional four have moved into a care home because their health has deteriorated during the lockdown period.
- Our helpline spoke to a client whose husband was in a care home but sadly passed away in July. The deputy manager of the care home said that the client was entitled to a refund on the money that she had already paid, as her husband was self-funding. The money has not been forthcoming after 2 months of waiting.
- A client contacted our helpline as she was concerned that her mother-in-law has been isolated in her care home since the outbreak of lockdown, apart from a brief three weeks in the summer, when one person was allowed to see her in the garden. The home say that it is because 'someone' has tested positive for Covid-19 but they are not told if it is a resident or a member of staff.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

- An Age UK in East Kent told us that many of the services normally available in the centre are still not open. However, some important services such as foot care and hairdressing are operating again. In addition to the physical benefits these services offer, the improved sense of well-being has clearly improved mental health.
- Another Age UK told us that people are calling in to ask for the Handyman Service; previously they were reluctant to let anyone into the house but are feeling more relaxed now. They are looking for decorating, gardening, general DIY tasks to be done.

CARERS

The impact on Carers

- *“We have decided to move my 89 year old mum into our house as she has Alzheimer's and can't live on her own any more. I won't let her move into a care home at the moment; they were hit worst in the first wave and it'll be the same in the second wave. She needs to be around family and she's not getting any support living on her own”*
- A support group for adults with autism told us about one person who is waiting for an eye appointment at outpatients. His wife is his Carer and he is worried that he cannot take her to the appointment with him. He needs her there to listen to the doctor/nurse and repeat back what is said so that he understands. The hospital policy at the moment is not to allow a second person at appointments. The support group suggested that he contact the disability team to ask for a reasonable adjustment to this rule. They told us this is an issue that is coming up for a lot of people. So many people have their spouse/partner as their official carer, or as a hidden carer. Paid carers going to appointments are not questioned, but hidden carers don't seem to have the same rights.
- The Age UK centre in East Kent told us that they are painfully aware of those carers who before Covid had benefited from a 10:30 till 3pm break in their day, are struggling. During the 'shutdown' phase of the pandemic many were supported, and given respite, by family members who were on 'furlough'. Now, the return to work has left them on their own and they are now in, increasingly difficult, isolation.
- An Age UK centre in East Kent told us about the emotional needs and worries that the family & carers of their service users are experiencing.
- A different Age UK centre in East Kent told us that in the past month they have dealt with calls supporting people with shopping, cleaning, social visits, gardening, mentoring, having chats and playing games. They told us that it has been very successful, not only meeting practical needs, but also giving respite for carers who have often been struggling themselves.
- An Age UK in East Kent have a specific project set up to support people with dementia. They can organise shopping, cleaning and they carry out welfare checks. On one welfare call they identified a carer who was living with their mother and was in need of a holiday. The carer felt that no support was available to her, but the project team were able to facilitate this carer and enabled some invaluable respite.

Carers in the home

- A mental health support group told us that one service user has had a regular carer coming in for the last year but this has since changed to a new person. She is worried as the 2 things she needs help with are online shopping and clearing a room. The new carer won't do this and states she is unable to use an ipad. This is worrying to the service user as she is unable to go out to do a shop herself.

SECTION 5. Education, Transport & Housing

There were 5 themes within this topic area:

1. Education
2. Housing
3. Access to medical appointments & transport
4. Kent Police
5. Public facilities

EDUCATION

- *"My daughter has worked hard from home all through lockdown and her anxiety calmed down. She is dreading returning to school this week and her anxiety has hit an all time high"*
- *"Because of covid, my daughter's school aren't doing hot dinners. My daughter doesn't like packed lunches very much and it's difficult to find things that she will eat. What makes it difficult is how rigid the school are about what they will allow in a packed lunch. They won't even allow a flask with hot food in case of burns! Surely they should loosen the rules a little bit since they can't access the hot school meals?"*
- *"They need to prepare schools to be able to do online teaching. It was a farce the first-time round. As part of their contingency plan, they should have been able to load lesson plans onto a portal for children to access, and for teachers to do live teaching. Have local authorities learnt nothing from the first wave? Let's get schools closed from now until Christmas and move all teaching online"*

Impact on staff

- *"I work in a school as a catering assistant and I'm not happy about going back next week. Serving hundreds of kids their lunch with the possible risk of passing covid onto me, and then me onto vulnerable members of my family, fills me with dread"*
- *"I'm a teacher and I'm terrified at the prospect of going back to work next week. My job has changed due to a reshuffle and my mental health is rock bottom and I'm now having to get in-house training about how to keep the students safe and do handwashing, new safety measures, reassuring students, looking after their mental health etc. The pandemic has brought out a lot of issues for me and now it's impacting on my job, the one thing that I was good at."*



Staying off school with symptoms & bubble isolation

- *“My son is off school with a cold. I rang school to tell them and they said he isn’t allowed back to school until he has a negative Covid test. He doesn’t have the Covid symptoms. Govt guidance clearly states not to get a test unless you have the list of symptoms”*
- *“I dropped my children off at school on Thursday and the school called within 2 hours to say that my son had a cough and my daughter was also intermittently coughing (in different year groups). I told the school that both kids had colds and runny noses. The school asked me to collect both kids as soon as possible and they sent us home with 2 testing kits that they had in the office. I can’t let the kids go back to school until we get a negative result from the tests, or after 2 weeks if they test positive”*
- *“I got a call from the school to say that a child in my daughter’s class needs a test and the WHOLE bubble (the entire class) including the teacher were being sent home. The kid hasn’t had a test yet so they don’t know if it’s positive. Surely they can’t send a whole year group or bubble home if one kid has symptoms, they must have the guidelines wrong. Let’s be honest, EVERY kid at the moment has a sniffle or a cold and is displaying symptoms!”*
- *“My husband tested positive for covid the day before school started so now our whole family is in isolation for 14 days and the kids are missing their first 2 weeks of school. After all these months being off from school they were desperate to get back and see their friends”*
- *“My 12 year old son didn’t return to school until the 11th of September. By the 21st I had received a call to say that another pupil in his year had tested positive so the year group were to stay at home. No work was sent home, and the school didn’t email anything through. They seem to have been left with nothing to do, so now he’s just been on his xbox all day and night”*
- *“My child had a cold and also a wet cough, but no temperature. I sent them to school on Thursday morning and they were sent back home after an hour. I was told not to come into school if the cough was continuous, but it wasn’t. So I kept her at home on Friday, as I was instructed, and got a phone call from a different admin staff who said that if the cough is related to a cold then she should come into school. Even school staff are struggling with the guidance and giving conflicting advice to parents. Now I don’t know who to listen to since the school can’t even make up their minds”*
- *“I’m worried about how many local schools are reporting pupils being sent home. My son’s head teacher said that he would be issuing fines as a last resort if pupils were kept at home. I wouldn’t send my son in if there was a positive case in the school and no parent should be fined for keeping their kids safe”*
- *“My daughter’s school sent her home last week because she was coughing in the classroom. We’ve tried to book online for a test but there is no availability locally (we live in Folkestone). She’s fine now, quite well, and needs to get back to school. The school are refusing to let her back until I can email them proof of a negative test result”*

Covid Precautions

- *"I read the risk assessment that my school have put in place for students; I read that only one child can be in the toilet block at a time and the rest have to queue and wait for the child to come out. I'm worried that my son will refuse to use the school toilets because he has a problem like this at home. If someone is in the toilet then he is unable to wait (when he has to go, he REALLY has to go). A lot of kids are going to be doing the same thing and will either have accidents or will stop drinking water to prevent them from needing the toilet. This isn't healthy or sustainable"*
- *"Teachers should be tested before schools opened, even if they don't have symptoms. I've heard of teachers now having to go home and isolate for 2 weeks because they have Covid, they may have passed it onto the kids in their class"*
- *"My childminder has shut her business because she can no longer afford to be self employed. My children's school is no longer offering wrap around childcare in schools, so I now have to move my work hours to weekends so that I can collect my kids from school at 3pm. Working weekends is now impacting on our family life, with no time together and family outings"*
- *"My son's school aren't doing breakfast clubs or after school clubs now because of the mixing of bubbles. It means that I don't have any care for my son, so I've had to reduce my working hours and take a 20% pay cut just so that I can do school runs. I can't even ask a friend to collect my son because she doesn't want to take the risk of looking after another kid from outside her household. The impact on working parents is crazy, and the roll on effect of the economy"*
- *"My son and daughter have been coming home from school freezing cold. The school are keeping the classroom windows open all day to keep the rooms well ventilated because of the virus. My daughter said her lips had turned blue by lunchtime. It's only September and it's going to get a lot colder in a few months, can the schools really enforce this? I asked the teacher and they said that children should wear a vest or tshirt under their normal school shirt to keep warm. They aren't allowed to wear jackets in the class, this just feels like they're setting the kids up to come down with colds over the winter season. It's not a suitable learning environment"*
- *"My son goes to school in Hythe and they are making pupils wear masks at all times, not just in the corridors. I think the school should pay if they want the kids to wear masks all day long; if it's going to be hygienic then they need to change the mask 4 or 5 times a day"*

Special Educational Needs

- *"I'm planning to deregister my kids from school in November/December and to homeschool them from January 2021, partly due to Covid and the changes that will be in place when they start back this week, but also due to the fact that both struggle with school and the workload that is set. Both kids are also waiting to have an assessment with an educational psychologist. One of them had a telephone appointment in March just after lockdown. I'm concerned that it will be harder to get a diagnosis if they kids aren't in a mainstream school though. The school have been supportive and backed my concerns, but my worry is that if I deregister them from school then it will be difficult to get backup from the school to support the diagnosis process"*

HOUSING

- *“I’m a landlord and I had a tenant who was pretending to have missed the furlough scheme and was making out he was struggling to make ends meet. Then I found out he was working full time! I served him notice. I will bend over backwards to help a tenant in trouble but not when I’m being lied to. Everything at the moment is set up to protect tenants but nothing to protect landlords from unscrupulous tenants”*
- An organisation supporting people to live independently told us about a wheelchair bound social housing client who is now working from home on a permanent basis. They decided to set up an office in their summer house due to insufficient space in their accommodation. On applying for permission to East Kent Housing to put in an electrical supply to the summer house, it was refused on the basis that it would become a permanent dwelling.
- An organisation helping people to live independently told us that a couple of their clients have had difficulty sourcing furniture when they have moved into emergency unfurnished housing following escape from an abusive household.
- An organisation helping people to find housing told us that for many people, they have been sofa surfing and now with the “rule of 6” there is less flexibility. There are breakdowns within families and people have ended up on the streets.
- *“I had an issue with hoarding and Social Services got me in touch with Peabody who helped clear my house and deep clean it afterwards enabling me to have my house back to normal just before the start of lockdown”*
- We heard a story from a mental health support group about a vulnerable person; her behaviour was considered a safeguarding risk towards her parents and she had been removed from the family home for their safety. She was placed in temporary accommodation in Maidstone during lockdown, she was originally from Sittingbourne and had been living with her parents. She did not know anyone in Maidstone and was alone and isolated with no social contact. She has struggled with temporary accommodation in an unfamiliar town. She tried keeping herself to herself as she did not want to mix with other tenants and was worried and distressed by some of their behaviour. She said that visitors were not allowed, and the other tenants would smuggle men in through the ground floor window. She witnessed drug use and drug taking and started drinking alcohol heavily. She said that after this she could not cope with the situation and called her parents and asked them to come and pick her up. She is now staying with them even though she is not meant to be living with them.

Homelessness

- An organisation told us about a man who was living in a caravan with his wife, but he moved out because of domestic abuse. He has been unwilling to report the abuse to the police, but rang the support organisation. He was referred to their rough sleeper team and also signposted to mental health support lines.

ATTENDING MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

- An Age UK centre told us that they have seen an increase in demand for their Hub's "taxi" service that transports residents to and from their doctor and hospital appointments. The hub believe that people are becoming more confident in visiting medical sites and becoming braver in their daily lives. They hope that 'developing' medical issues will be identified and treated earlier, reversing the pattern of 'waiting' that had resulted during the pandemic.
- An Age UK centre in South Kent told us that they have received an increase in the requests for transport to appointments. They had 41 requests recently.
- A voluntary organisation in East Kent told us that they had recommenced their transport services, but only for hospital and medical appointments, as there was a great need for this.

KENT POLICE

- A mental support worker received an abusive and threatening call from an ex-service user. The incident was immediately reported to their manager and then they tried to call Kent Police on the 101 service. The message on the line advised the caller to log the incident through the online service, as there was a long wait to speak to someone. The online system was difficult to follow, with many forms to choose from. Eventually on completion, it advised to call 101 again. The team member then used the live chat function to report the crime and was given a link to the report form to fill in. It took a long time to fill out the form online and they were then sent an email with the report reference number and told that they would be contacted within 24 hours. After 48 hours they still had not heard from the Police. The team member is concerned that a reported person that suffers from high-tier mental health issues is still within the community, with no follow up from the police.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

- A support group told us that many people in the autistic community use exercise as a strategy, or outlet. It has been difficult with the lockdown on pools and gyms. Some of the guidance around swimming pools reopening has been confusing and people just want to get back to their coping strategies.

SECTION 6. Testing

There were 4 themes within this topic area:

1. Accessing tests
2. Track & Trace
3. Covid experiences & symptoms

ACCESSING TESTS

- *"I live in Dover and I arranged a test yesterday evening. When I entered my Dover postcode, I could not access any testing sites, which was strange. I googled test sites in Kent and found one in Sittingbourne. I then went back into my request and put in the postcode for Sittingbourne as my own postcode, and I was then able to choose from Ashford, Ramsgate or Sittingbourne. It was very hard work and not at all user friendly"*
- *"My son has all of the symptoms and no available test centre nearby. When we found a test centre, he decided to go anyway by they turned him away because he had no QR code. The reason he had no QR code was because we weren't allowed to access this test site given where we live! On their advice, we put in a postcode close to the test centre and we immediately got a QR code that we could use. Not a fair system at all"*
- *"The fact that I'm having to go on a 3 hour round trip with two toddlers for a covid test this afternoon is a joke considering there are two test centres within 12 miles of my house"*
- *"The testing availability is nonsense; people are trying to get tests when they don't even have symptoms! I've heard of people in work who are coming back from holiday and trying to get a test to prove that they don't have the virus so that they can get back to work and dodge the quarantine period. It makes it more difficult for anyone who genuinely has symptoms to get a test"*
- *"I'm confused about the testing sites, Folkestone and Manston were packed a few weeks ago and now they seem to have gone. Surely people are needing tests? It's all I keep hearing about"*
- *"I tried for 4 hours repeatedly, putting all my details in just to get to the page that says that they are busy and to try again later. Twice I managed to get a step further and it said that Ashford drive-in had availability but then by the time I put more details in it had taken me back to the beginning. I tried for the rest of the day but had no luck. The next day was the same, but I finally got lucky and got one for Manston airport drive-in. There was only me and one other car there so it wasn't busy at all"*
- *"I live in Ashford and I was offered a test site in Twickenham...."*
- *"I booked my son in for Dover, I just put in a CT17 postcode and it came up with 49 spaces in DeBradeli. It was so quiet when we got there. I don't live in Dover, I'm from Maidstone but someone suggested putting in a postcode close to a different testing site to get an appointment"*
- *"We don't drive so don't have the option of going to a drive through site. I had to spend 48 hours, non stop, stalking the government site to get 4 tests sent to my house so that I could test my daughters. It was so stressful trying to get a test available"*

- *"The website to book a test is awful, you need to make sure that you've filled in the majority of the form and then save & continue dead on 8am. The appointments get snapped up immediately"*
- *"No tests available in Tunbridge Wells today. This is a serious situation. Covid 19 will spread unchecked if symptomatic people can't get a test"*
- *"I had a Covid test today at Maidstone Hospital. I arrived and showed security on the door my appointment details. I was told to 'go through' but I had no idea where to go and there were no signposts. I was wandering around Oncology trying to find the testing area. If I had been positive then surely being in an area for vulnerable Cancer patients isn't a good idea?! Luckily I bumped into a nurse I knew and she directed me. Once at the testing area, I was well looked after and they explained clearly what would happen"*
- *"The test system is terrible, my daughter needs to have a test done before she can start university but I've been trying to book one for the past week and a half and have had no luck"*
- *"The debacle over testing centres availability will put a lot of people off actually getting tested. Every town big enough to have a secondary school should really have a mobile testing station twice a week"*
- *Our helpline heard from a parent who was trying to book a covid test for their child who had been unwell. She understood that she should get a test within the first 5 days of symptoms however by the 3rd day she was struggling to access a test. She told us that she had logged into the Government website "at all hours of the day and night" to try to get an appointment at a testing centre. No home tests were available either. In the end the caller spoke to their GP who gave them advice about shielding a family member. They decided to stop trying to access a test and self-isolated instead.*
- *"My wife was advised to have a covid test after she had a persistent cough. The GP told her to call 111. After an hour of trying they answered and told her to ring 119. After another long wait she was asked a lot of questions and on completion of this, she was told to contact them by email. My wife does not use email and I proposed that she use mine, she was then presented with the same question all over again! She does not like the intrusive nature of email and refused to answer the questions, having already answered them on the phone. I rang the number but they said that they would only deal with "the patient". The system is not acceptable as it creates a new group of hard to reach people. I spoke to a supervisor who eventually agreed to send a test kit to our home. The kit arrived on a Friday and the instructions within it said NOT to post it back on a Friday! Eventually, the test was clear and all was ok, but it caused a great deal of stress"*
- *"My husband is a taxi driver and today he picked up some customers. He didn't know their destination until they got in the taxi, and they just gave him the street name. When they got closer to the destination they said to pull in; it was the Ashford covid testing centre. They got out the taxi and walked in! The family (2 of them) were all masked up, as they have to be in taxis. But my husband had to call his hub and stop working for the day so that he could fully disinfect the car! We don't know if the family were having a precautionary test if they returned from holiday, or if they had symptoms or anything!"*

TRACK & TRACE

- *"I can't download the new track and trace app because my iphone isn't modern enough"*
- *"My phone isn't compatible with the app so I can't access it"*
- *"I've downloaded it and it seems great. Personally I feel it's the right thing to do, I have nothing to hide so I'm happy to be tracked"*
- *"It was easy to download. It's great for advising me of the risk in my area, which is quite low right now, and good for checking into hospitality venues. It's a shame that everyone can't have access. There should be a device like a watch, for children and the elderly who cannot use a phone app"*
- *"It doesn't work on my iphone6"*
- *"Downloaded it to make sure we are safe and not at risk"*
- *"I wish people would stop calling it the NHS app. It's SERCO, a private company"*
- *"I won't be downloading the app, I don't my information to be known"*
- *"I can't download the app as I don't have compatible iphone software, I'm still on an iphone5"*
- *"Some older people just have a basic phone with no fancy apps and internet access. How will the government make sure that they're safe and tracked?"*
- *"My mum can't download the app on her latest handset, the Huawei p40 pro"*
- *"I would love to download this app but it's not compatible with my older iphone. Like a lot of elderly people, my phone is an older model. As it's the elderly who are most vulnerable, I'm afraid this is not going to work very well for us"*
- *"I downloaded the app this morning. Best to be safe and protect yourself and others"*

COVID EXPERIENCES & SYMPTOMS

- An Age UK in the east of Kent told us that they had received 7 phone calls from spouses where partners had contracted Covid and they were able to signpost them to the relevant support services.

No Symptoms

- *"I was due to go to Jersey on holiday. Their current rules state that you have to have a negative covid test before you can fly there. I felt perfectly fine and had no symptoms, however my test came back positive which means I couldn't go! How many people feel fine and show no symptoms but have Covid and are spreading it?"*

Symptoms

- *“My daughter is 8 and her first day back at school was yesterday. She missed it because she had cold symptoms and was tested for Covid, which came back as positive this morning. She just had cold symptoms; runny nose and a bit blocked up. I took her temperature but it wasn't particularly high. I called the school the day before she was due to return and they suggested getting a Covid test. I would never have known that this was Covid, it presented as a simple common cold. It's no wonder the virus is spreading when we can't even identify it from the common cold”*
- *“I've just tested positive for Covid, I took a test because of my cough. I feel as though I have the flu, sinusitis, a constant headache and a cough. I don't feel any more unwell than I normally would with sinusitis, so I'm a bit surprised that I tested positive. I honestly don't know where I got it from, and that's the frightening thing, because I've been so careful to wear a mask when I go out and use hand sanitiser”*

“Long Covid”

- *“I'm sure I had covid back at Christmas 2019. My flatmate and her co-workers returned from a work trip in China and they all had a cough, but they assumed it was from being on a long haul flight. I had a loss of taste, a cough and night sweats. At first I thought it was allergies but the doctor couldn't figure it out. They thought it was some kind of flu/pneumonia. I still get out of breath and fatigue, and I'm sure it was covid but obviously there were not tests around back then. I would love to get an antibody test now to see if it was covid”*

OUR ACTION PLAN

Throughout our report we have identified some 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.

- Regarding the experiences we have shared around modern slavery, we have contacted the Kent & Medway Safeguarding Board to ensure they are aware of these issues
- We have contacted the Local Pharmaceutical Committee to gain clarification around the current policy regarding delivery of medication during covid
- We are contacting the providers of wig services, to present the concerns we have received from Age UK in East Kent, regarding cancer patients being unable to access these services
- We are going to triangulate our insights regarding the use of the Track & Trace app, with Healthwatch England and Public Health with regards to experiences heard from members of the public that are without a smartphone or do not have a new enough smartphone, as we feel this could be a widespread and national issue.

Thank You



Healthwatch Kent
Church Road, Seabrooke House
Ashford TN23 1RD

 info@healthwatchkent.co.uk

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 **0808 801 0102**