

Healthwatch Bucks update (July 2021)

This paper summarises recent work we have undertaken in relation to health and social care services, as aligned with the priorities of Joint Health & Wellbeing strategy.

Live Well

[Ask NHS Report – Healthwatch Bucks](#)

Ask NHS is an online tool and app that offers patients another way to access frontline services. It contains a symptom checker, hosted by a virtual assistant known as 'Olivia'. The virtual assistant asks people questions about their symptoms and directs them to the most appropriate care nearby.

General Practices in Buckinghamshire are encouraging patients to use Ask NHS as one of the ways in which they can access services. We ran a survey during February and March 2021 to understand the patient experience of using Ask NHS.

We asked patients about:

- How they accessed Ask NHS
- Their experience of using the symptom checker
- How they felt about the outcome of using the symptom checker
- Their overall experience of using Ask NHS

The majority of people told us they had a positive experience of using the symptom checker. They were particularly satisfied if they ended up speaking to a GP. Some people did not find the symptom checker helpful in describing their symptoms and were not happy with their experience. Our report highlights the need for increased communications with patients. Specifically, around the digital tools available to them in Buckinghamshire, including Ask NHS, NHS App and NHS 111 online.

[COVID-19 vaccination programme in Bucks – Healthwatch Bucks](#)

We wanted to learn about people's experience of having the vaccine and to learn why some people may choose not to have it. We developed an online survey to ask people's experience of:

- Being invited to have the vaccine
- Getting to the vaccination site
- Having the vaccine

We ran the survey between February and June 2021 and heard from a total of 4543 people, 181 of whom told us they had chosen not to have the vaccine. Each week we passed our key findings about the sites to the Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG) and the Bucks Vaccine Cell. We have also published a full report on our findings between February and March, with a final report analysing the results between April and June coming shortly.

[Accessing Remote Appointments in Bucks – Healthwatch Bucks](#)

Between April 2020 and March 2021 there were over 2.3 million general practice appointments in Buckinghamshire. Almost half of these were held remotely.

Whilst many people have been able to adjust to having their appointments by telephone or online, there are some who have difficulties with this type of appointment.

This may be due to:

- Disability or health conditions
- No access to the necessary technology needed or an inability to use it
- Issues with communicating over the phone

We wanted to hear from those people. From January to March, we heard from 30 people across Buckinghamshire who had experienced at least one remote appointment. They mainly fell into the following groups:

- Those over 65, including those living with dementia
- Those with ASD, a mental health condition or a learning disability

We wanted to know what made remote doctor's appointments difficult for them so that we could recommend improvements for this type of appointment. We have passed on our findings to BCCG to work with GPs to improve people's experiences of remote appointments.

Community Engagement

Local Healthwatch working together – Healthwatch Bucks

Together with four other Local Healthwatch, we carried out a review of 9 reports. These reports represent the health and social care experiences of local people during the first national lockdown. The reports reviewed were from Healthwatch Bucks, Healthwatch Oxfordshire, Healthwatch Reading, Healthwatch Wokingham and Healthwatch West Berkshire.

Residents across these areas told us they needed:

- Timely information about changes to services and reassurance that services are operating safely
- Accessible information in a variety of formats
- Access to emergency dental care and up to date information about access to routine and emergency dental services.

We also recommended:

- Mental health services need to communicate about available support for new and existing patients
- Care Homes and Local Authorities should review with Care Home residents, their families and home providers, what could be learned from the experience of lockdown. Such as the use of digital technology to support communication between the home and families of residents. Also enabling the communication between residents and their families.
- The need for a post-pandemic communications plan to illustrate the vision for services resuming operations.

We shared these findings and recommendations with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care System (BOB ICS).