

Statement from Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull on Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust Quality Account 2021/22

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull welcome the opportunity to provide our statement on the 2021/22 Quality Account for Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust. We welcome that the Trust has been clear in its assessment of its position, in particular the areas where it has performed well and areas needing further improvement. We acknowledge that Covid-19 continues to have a significant impact on the Trusts activities and on how the Trust delivers its services. We are however pleased to see that the Trust is using the learning from this period to design facilities which can be used flexibly.

We welcome plans to reshape the Trusts environment over the next year including taking full advantage of the opportunities that technology offers, both for the Trust and patients. The pandemic necessitated a change in how the Trust delivers its services. However, the pace of change was so fast so much so that in many cases patients, carers and the public were not taken along on the journey of change. We are pleased to see the Trust commit to continued engagement with service users, carers, and the public. We would like to read in the 2022/23 Quality Account how the Trust has engaged with service users, carers, and the public in reshaping how care is delivered. Including how engagement has informed and shaped the Trusts plans.

As noted in our statement to the 2020/21 Quality Account, Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull would like to see varied methods of engaging and enabling access to health care. In theory, the use of technology for citizens to enhance their use of health and care services is a good thing, however, technology can be both an enabler and a barrier to accessing services. Thereby leading to variability in access and care, and health inequality. We would like to read in the 2022/23 Quality Account how the Trusts engagement strategy and inequalities work has informed the adoption of technology in the delivery of care.

We also ask that the Trust reconsiders the issues we raised in our statement to the 2020/21 Quality Account:

- Existing barriers such as language should not be ignored. It is therefore important that guides on how to access mental health services using digital technology are developed in various languages and accessible formats.
- The digital divide that exists among socio-economic classes in Birmingham and Solihull should be taken to account. People from lower socio-economic status often have reduced accessibility to digital technologies. In addition, due to lower household income, people from lower socio-economic status are likely not to have broadband, own a computer or smart phone or indeed afford credit for internet use on their phones.
- According to NHS Digital, one in ten people in England lacks basic digital skills and nearly six million people have never used the internet. Therefore, the number of people digitally excluded is significant and needs to be taken to account when considering transforming with digital. For instance, familiarity with modern technology for the elderly and those with language barriers is difficult. It is important that the Trust engages with various groups to ensure that their needs are met.

- It is important that the trust considers developing a digital communication strategy that identifies the diverse ways of engaging and delivering care using technology alongside the relevance of these for different service users.

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull agree with the priority goals for the Trust for 2022/23. We recognise many of the issues from our own engagement with the public. In particular improving access to crisis and community care in order to reduce unwarranted variations and harm across the service. We are also pleased to see a focus on understanding health inequalities or aspects of discrimination in the delivery of mental health care. We look forward to reading in the 2022-2023 Quality Accounts how the Trust has involved various stakeholders (including service users and carers) in developing and implementing this aspect of the patient safety priority.

We are pleased to also see continued focus on patient experience, especially on plans to improve the involvement of service users in MDT meetings; involvement of carers in service user care and recovery and ensuring an equal voice for service users at governance level. We look forward to reading in the 2022/23 Quality Accounts how insights from these involvement activities have informed care delivery and improved patient experience. Over the past year, Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull have seen an increasing number of contacts from service users and carers concerned about access to mental health services. We have seen over the year a greater level of negative feedback for mental health services in the city, with no one leaving us a positive review in the last two quarters of the year. Of the experiences people told us about mental health services:

- For Quarter 4 (January – March 2022) - 94% were negative, and 6% neutral experiences.
- For Quarter 3 (October – December 2021) - 96% were negative with 4% were neutral.
- For Quarter 2 (July – October 2021) - 95% were negative, 3% positive, and 2% neutral; and
- For Quarter 1 (April – June 2021) - 73% were negative, 22% positive experiences, and 5% neutral.

Issues people have told us about have included:

- staff attitudes
- delays accessing the support they need from mental health services.
- lack of support or services from mental health teams
- lack of mental health support for people with a gender identity different from what they were assigned to at birth, either when accessing mental health services, or waiting for an appointment at a gender identity clinic
- being treated as an inpatient out of area, or difficulties visiting their relatives who are receiving inpatient care
- length of time it has taken to receive care following a crisis event such as a suicide attempt
- poor care from home treatment teams.

15th June 2022

People have also told us about the effect on their mental health from delays to care and treatment. During the two quarters where we received some positive feedback, people told us about the following:

- mental health help for older people
- access to longer term treatment
- home visits
- supportive staff

Throughout the year, Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull collect experiences and insights from the Trust's service users, carers, and members of the public. We believe that this is a valuable resource for the Trust that can complement the Trusts engagement activities and help inform or shape the delivery of the priority areas for 2022/23. We look forward to engaging with the Trust through our 'right to respond' program.



Andy Cave
CEO

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull