

Statement from Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull on West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) University NHS Foundation Trust Quality Account 2021/22

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull welcome the opportunity to provide a statement on the Quality Account for West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust 2021/2022. We are pleased to see that there is an open evaluation of the Trusts performance between 2021 and 2022. There is a clear identification of areas where the Trust has done well and areas where further improvements are needed. We acknowledge that Covid-19 related pressures in other areas of the NHS have had a significant impact on the demand on WMAS services (e.g., 999, 111). We note that the Trust has faced significant delays in handing patients over when taken to hospital leading to a deterioration in response times to patients. Therefore, some patients have been waiting for an unacceptable length of time. Indeed, some feedback we have heard from the Trust's service users at Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull demonstrate a frustration with the waiting times for calls to be answered, and ambulance to come out. And as the Trust has noted, delays have also led to an increase in serious incidents.

We agree that these challenges will continue as other parts of the NHS work to address some of the challenges brought on by the pandemic (e.g., waiting times). We, however, seek more clarity on the actions the Trust will be taking to address issues of delays and their impacts on patient outcomes. In particular, how the Trust is working to ensure that there is support for people as they wait. What links is the Trust making to work with other hospital trusts and third sector organisations to ensure that those waiting have the right information as they wait or are signposted to other organisations. Especially those with mental health concerns. We therefore welcome that one of the priorities is the *utilisation of alternative pathways* whose target is refer patients to alternative pathways (including urgent community response). For this work to be successful, it will be important for the Trusts staff to not only conduct a thorough assessment but also to be aware of not only NHS organisations, but also third sector and community support for various issues. This is an aspect of support that some service users have told us, they have found useful.

Mental Health Triage Car - Very supportive, made calls to other mental health services. Supported my nephew into a mental health bed. We avoided an unnecessary trip to A & E.

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull agree with the four main priority areas for the Trust for 2022/23. We recognise many of the issues from our own engagement with the public. In particular mental health has been an issue that we are increasingly hearing about since the pandemic with many calling Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull for support for their mental health. We have also seen a greater level of negative feedback for mental health services in the city. People have also told us about the effect on their mental health from the delays to care and treatment. Hence, the likelihood of increasing demand for mental health support. We would like to see the Trust involve local Healthwatch, service users and

members of the public in developing a work plan following the appointment of a Head of Clinical Practice for Mental Health. We look forward to reading in the 2022-2023 Quality Accounts how the Trust has involved various stakeholders in developing and implementing this priority.

We are pleased to also see continued work on *maternity issues*; plans under the *Integrated Emergency and Urgent Care Clinical Governance* priority to quickly and accurately assess patient needs and identify the best response. We would like to read the impact of this on delays and patient outcomes in the 2022-23 Quality Accounts. We also welcome the Trust's plans to develop its role in improving population outcomes and tackle inequalities.

We are pleased that across the Trust, patient feedback is seen as important and welcome examples of learning from feedback outlined in the Quality Account. However, having looked at the performance indicators for patient experience and feedback, we believe that more can be done. We note that the Trust is reviewing systems it uses to seek feedback and make it easy for the public to contact the Trust with their views. We hope to see the Trust using varied ways of engaging with services users and members of the public that go beyond the use of online methods to ensure that the communication needs of diverse groups are met. For instance, the Trust states under the 'Think 111 First' discussion in the Quality Account that "a decision as to whether it is possible to implement a short telephone-based survey, with an onward link to the website for patients who are happy to complete the full survey; or whether the message at the end of the call is purely a recorded announcement for the full online survey" will be made. We believe that there should be other alternatives for people to complete the survey such as the option to receive a paper copy or provided in an alternative format or language. As we indicated in our Quality Accounts Statement 2020-2021:

- The key objective of engagement should be 'to use patient and public insight, experience, and involvement to identify, understand and address the potential consequences of service improvement, design and development on health inequalities and barriers to improvements in health outcomes (including increasing independence and preventing worsening ill-health).'
- Public health data should inform engagement plans to ensure that the trust is hearing from all sections of the community particularly those impacted negatively by changes or improvements to services. Also use this to understand wider impact on health inequalities that have an impact on how the trust delivers its services.
- The Trust is using varied ways of engaging with services users and members of the public that go beyond the use of online methods to ensure that the communication needs of diverse groups are met.

We look forward to reading about the establishment of the post-call surveys and the learning from this in the 2022/2023 Quality Accounts.

16th May 2022

Lastly, we acknowledge the tough conditions WMAS staff work at times being at the end of verbal and physical assault in the course of their work. Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull is happy to support the Trust in sharing any social media campaigns on the issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Cave".

Andy Cave

CEO

Healthwatch Birmingham