

Healthwatch Solihull's response to the Tackling health inequalities: a blueprint for Solihull 2022-2025 Consultation

Healthwatch Solihull welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on tackling health inequalities. Our key role is to make sure that patients, the public, service users, and carers are at the heart of service improvement in health and social care. In line with our role, we have focused our comments on patient and public involvement and the proposed strategy.

Patient and Public Involvement

Healthwatch Solihull are pleased to see that the consultation has been available to respond to for several weeks, giving the public a long time to consider the strategy and respond.

However, in the draft strategy the council stated "COVID-19 restrictions have accelerated a shift towards more digital working, including seeing a GP online rather than in person. And while welcomed by many, patient voice groups have expressed concern that this has excluded those who are not online, or able to use such technology, which can be those in more marginalised groups to begin with."

We are disappointed to note that we are only aware of the documents that have been available online, and are unaware of any other steps taken to engage the public in this consultation. We also note that the documents have not been offered in any other format, such as easy read, excluding those with language or sensory impairment needs from taking part. There is not a phone number or postal address to allow anyone without digital access to respond.

Given that the documents outline the council's wish to address structural barriers to equality such as technology, it appears a large oversight that the consultation on this has perpetuated some of the same barriers to engaging equally with Solihull's residents. If other engagement activities have taken place, Healthwatch Solihull would like to see these publically and clearly displayed to inform.

We are interested in how many responses the council will have received to this consultation. The survey is not too lengthy, structured over nine questions. The respondent is asked to read this document (and referred to sections of it) and then comment on each area individually and potentially in some detail (if they answered partly/no/not sure to a question). This is why we are disappointed to

note that the documents have only been available online or documents have not been offered in any other format.

The responses to this consultation need to be assessed to see if they are representative of citizens in this borough. If the responses are not representative, then further engagement work needs to be held on this strategy. This could include targeted engagement for certain populations, and would require materials to be produced that are much easier to read and understand.

A clearer understanding of the next steps for this strategy would help people to understand in more detail how this will actually affect them and the people they know. This could be more detail on the framework for action and the timescales for next stages. An impact assessment would also more clearly outline who will be most affected by any changes, and what needs to be in place to ensure this is done fairly and equitably.

Healthwatch Solihull would like to urge you to not only listen to people's views but also demonstrate how these views have affected the final strategy. This will ensure that people feel part of the decision-making process not just rubber stamping decisions that may have already been made.

Proposed Strategy

Healthwatch Solihull are pleased to see the commitment from the council to reduce health inequalities and improve the current services available. We welcome the council having an ambitious approach to tackling this subject.

However, Healthwatch Solihull would like to see an emphasis on using the insight, experience and involvement of people who face health inequalities to drive service design and continuous improvement through the life of this strategy. As such it should be clearly noted who will be responsible for ensuring this feedback is collected and the process for considering the feedback, improving service design and feeding back to the public the changes their feedback has made.

There needs to be a continuous cycle of feedback and engagement with the public now as the strategy moves forward. This needs to clearly outline the changes made as a result of feedback and to inform how this ambitious strategy directly links to implementation plans. It needs to be made clear what improvements and changes a service user can expect to see when accessing services, as a direct result of this strategy.

Generally, Healthwatch Solihull agrees with the vision outlined in the strategy. However, the council needs to consider drawing up implementation plans that are measurable, are clear on who is responsible for carrying out particular actions, are realistic in regards to resources required and clearly state when they will be

achieved. The public of Solihull need to be kept informed and engaged as this moves forwards.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Oluwakemi Adebajo', with a stylized, cursive script.

Oluwakemi Adebajo

Project Officer

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Natalie Travers', with a stylized, cursive script.

Natalie Travers

Healthwatch Solihull Manager