

Digital Strategy listening Exercise – Healthwatch Birmingham's Comments

Healthwatch Birmingham welcomes that Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG is looking to extend the ways it delivers health and care through the use of digital innovations. We are pleased that the CCG is seeking the views of patients and members of the public in creating a digital strategy that is responsive to their needs. Healthwatch Birmingham's key role is to make sure that patients, the public, service users, and carers (PPSuC) are at the heart of service improvement in health and social care. In line with our role, we would like the CCG to consider the following issues in the development of the digital strategy:

- whether or how well the use of technology will improve the quality of care and lead to services that are responsive to the needs of patients and service users; and
- Whether the use of technology may address or lead to health inequality

We believe that in theory the use of technology for citizens to enhance their use of health and care services is a good thing. However, the CCG should aim to ensure that varied ways that include the use of technology are offered to all individuals. We know from our engagement with the public in Birmingham, that ways of accessing services need to meet the needs and communication preferences of all potential users. People have told us that they have found that some commissioners and providers have a preference for email or telephone over face-to-face contact which is their preferred method of contact. For others, use of online services and the telephone are their preferred choice. Clearly, one method is not appropriate for everyone.

The CCG also needs to consider the diversity of the population of West Birmingham and the varied socioeconomic circumstances of individuals and households. Seventy-eight of the West Birmingham's population is under 45 years of age and according to the 2011 census 67% of West Birmingham residents are from Black, Asian and Minority groups compared to 42% across Birmingham. Of the 102,000 migrants that registered with GPs in Birmingham (between 2013 and 2017) 39% registered with practices in West Birmingham. According to the 2010 indices of multiple deprivation 56% of Birmingham's population fall into the most deprived quintile, with 40% of the population living in the 10% most deprived areas of England. Many areas within West Birmingham are amongst the most deprived in the country.

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 developing the strategy.



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Developing a digital strategy that meets the diversity and local needs of people is going to be a challenge. The impact of proposed technology use on different groups will be varied and has the potential to lead to health inequality. Considering the deprivation of West Birmingham, some people might not have access to technology (such as a smart phone) and even if they did, might not have the financial resources to use the smart phone (e.g. to make a video call). At Healthwatch Birmingham, we have had cases where people ask us to call them back, in order for us to get their feedback, because they have no credit or they are not using their own phone. We have heard from service users from different ethnicities and those with a disability about the difficulties of getting a translator when they want to access health and social care services. This would need to be considered in the development of a digital strategy.

Over 2018- 2020 period, Healthwatch Birmingham has heard from the public and service users about their experiences of using technological innovations in accessing health and care services. Below are some of the comments from service users:

- *Never get an appointment. Receptionist are rude with attitude along with doctors who don't care. Everything online, I am finding it complicated, how you are supposed to get an OAP to logon.... With no computer or Internet?*
- *It's incredibly difficult to get through on the phone to request an appointment. The phone line goes from being closed to a statement about the queue being full, goodbye, and it automatically hangs up on you, in seconds at opening time. You end up dialing multiple times to even get in the queue to be on hold to speak to a receptionist, which is very frustrating. They clearly need a phone system that offers much more capacity for callers. I've also experienced the system automatically hanging up on me if I've been in the queue for more than 15 minutes without speaking to someone!*
- *The online appointment system used to work well, but they are switching systems so it's been down for weeks, making the only option to get an appointment fighting to get in the queue on the phone!*
- *They used to offer telephone consultations with a Dr, so if you couldn't get an appointment you'd been assessed on the phone, but the receptionists don't offer you this option anymore. I rang recently to ask for a telephone appointment and was told to ring 111 or go to a walk in centre. Very unhelpful and offered no continuity of care.*
- *Helpful - They offer the option to speak to GP on the phone, which is great if no appointments available.*
- *Hard to book phone appointments on-line.*
- *This practice used to operate a drop in system for appointments, which I miss greatly.*
- *When asking for my repeat medication. You have to go online and when you do they only give you the recent medication. Un-empathetic GP regarding mental health issues. Hard to request repeat prescription. Online system problematic for repeat prescriptions. Feels misunderstood regarding mental health issues. Really difficult and inconvenient to get an appointment, waited weeks.*
- *Being deaf and relying on a BSL (Interpreter to help with communication in health situation is stressful). With my medication (BP / Heart and eye disease) I can't phone*



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my surgery without any hassle, even with help from typetalk on minicom machine. To avoid that I make a journey uphill to the surgery to order prescription. Although I use computer for emails I am not confident with online.

Based on the feedback we have received as outlined above, there are benefits to digital services in primary care. However, these might be more appropriate for some individuals more than others. This is not to say that all people within a certain age group or having a disability would be averse to accessing health and care services digitally. If the CCG is to meet one of its principles ‘*that NHS services meet the needs of everyone*’, then these needs have to be understood. These needs should underpin decisions around how technology is introduced to support health and care delivery. Thus the implementation of the Digital strategy should aim to complement other modes of delivering health and care to the people of West Birmingham.

The CQC advises that any Healthcare organisation considering the use of technology in the delivery of care should consider the following questions:

- How will you involve people who use your service in your plans and putting the new technology into use?
- What do the people it will affect need to know to make an informed choice? Do they fully understand the implications of the new technology?
- Who will the technology affect and how will it affect them?
- What outcome do you want to achieve? How will you measure it?
- Will the technology fully meet the needs of the people using your service? If not, what else do you need to provide?
- Are there more appropriate ways to meet these needs?
- What are the practical and legal issues you need to think about before you introduce new technology?
- What are the risks and how will you manage them? Particularly during transition and early implementation of the technology or system. What is your contingency plan to keep people safe?
- How have you involved your staff? What information and training do they need so they can be confident and competent? This includes understanding their responsibilities and how to respond to associated risks.

It is our hope that the feedback collected through this listening exercise will be used to understand both the benefits and potential issues we have highlighted above. Consequently, be used to address or mitigate against these issues occurring.



06/03/2020

Yours Sincerely,



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