



Boscombe Voices

Shaping better health and social care in Dorset's local communities

February 2025

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About us

Healthwatch Dorset is your health and social care champion.

We listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and hear about the issues that really matter to you. We are independent and impartial, and your feedback is confidential. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice to help you to get the care and support you need.

As an independent statutory body, we have with the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care. This report is an example of how your views are shared.

Healthwatch Dorset is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the geographical area of Dorset, which includes the unitary authority areas of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) and Dorset.



Background

Project aim

During July and August 2024, we engaged with people living in Boscombe (a suburb of Bournemouth). We wanted to find out about their experiences of local health, social and community care services and how they would like to see local services developed and delivered to better meet people's needs. Feedback and insight from this community engagement project will help shape the development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams across Dorset.

What are Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs)?

Dorset's Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) strategy, *Working Better Together*, sets out how the NHS, councils and other partners within the ICP will work together to make the best possible improvements in the health and wellbeing of local people. This requires partners to work in a more proactive and holistic way, particularly paying attention to early help and prevention, and enabling communities to thrive. The ICP believes the key to achieving this is to understand local resources, use insight and information about population health, and most importantly, listen to communities.

An INT is the group of professionals and practitioners from primary care, community care, adult social care, children and young people services, and the voluntary sector who work closely together and have a high level of interaction with the local population and each other.

The idea of a 'team of teams' is often used to describe this way of working where the teams work closely together and have a shared responsibility for working with their communities to improve the health and wellbeing of the population.

Dorset are building INTs around the existing Primary Care Network footprints, and they will co-ordinate the different teams and bring them together to provide more joined up care.

Each INT will support a number of natural communities, working with them to understand what is important to them and co-designing services that meet local needs, delivered in a way that works for the community.

How will they work?

Currently health and care practitioners and teams often work independently, which means information on individuals may not be shared in an efficient or timely way. This can lead to delays in receiving care or result in missed opportunities to provide care early.

The INT will bring together those individual health and care practitioners so they can share their knowledge of patients and service users with complex health and care needs. They will help solve problems, streamline the care that people receive and determine the right person to best meet the needs of an individual person within the whole team's available resource.

Rather than waiting until people become ill, or have an urgent need, INTs will increasingly support personalised care that is as proactive as possible. There will be a greater focus on preventative care and making connections into communities.

Why Boscombe?

Boscombe is the second pilot area identified by the Integrated Care System (ICS) for this development work. According to recent [census data](#), Boscombe Central, the heart of Boscombe West, is one of the most deprived areas in southwest England. The population is about 21,000 people, and 43% of children in Boscombe live in poverty, which is significantly higher than the national average. People living in Boscombe have significantly lower life expectancy than in BCP overall. Levels of deprivation play a significant role in health inequalities, which are systematic, unfair, and avoidable differences in health across the population and between different groups in society.

Boscombe has a thriving and multicultural local community, green spaces, independent shops and local businesses, and many well embedded and supportive voluntary and community organisations.

Key messages

We analysed all the feedback gathered and identified the following key themes.

- **Difficulty seeing a GP:** People are experiencing long waiting times on the phone when trying to book an appointment; if they call after 9am there are often no appointments left.
- **Face-to-face appointments:** People who want to see a GP are being offered phone appointments rather than face-to-face appointments, or appointments with a nurse instead of a GP.
- **NHS dental care:** People are unable to find an NHS dentist and can't afford to pay privately.
- **Specialist services:** Some people told us about specialist services that are working well, for example, drug and alcohol services and mental health postpartum care. But access to community mental health support is difficult and people are not able to see the same support worker. We also heard about long waits to get treatment for leg ulcers.
- **Social care:** Concern that social workers change frequently and were often not in touch with issues in the local area.



What we did

Talking to people at local services

Over an eight-week period in July to August 2024, we talked to around 180 people aged 18 and over who are currently using local services and gathered their feedback.

We wanted to speak to people face-to-face, in places that were familiar to them and where they would feel comfortable. We contacted local health, social and community care services who are already well known to us and arranged to visit and speak to the clients and service users they support.

As well as visiting local services, our Engagement Officer volunteered on Tuesday afternoons at the We Are Humans – Base Camp Café community lunch club. She served teas, coffees and hot meals to their customers, and chatted to them about how they would like to see local services shaped and delivered.

During our conversations, we asked questions to help us understand how well services are working for local people and what needs to be improved, and to find out how people would like to see their services shaped to better serve the community.

We asked the following questions:

- Which local health, social and community care services are you currently using?
- Have you experienced any difficulties when trying to use these services?
- How would you like to see local these services shaped in the future?

We also interviewed the Hub Manager at Access Wellbeing Boscombe, a new drop-in hub managed by Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA).

What people told us

The conversations we had with local people at organisations in Boscombe are summarised below.

Boscombe Family Hub

This [Family Hub](#) offers early help services and support for children and their families living in BCP. It provides weekly groups, such as Toddler2gether, Stay and Play, Ready Steady Go and a Food Sensory Group. The group attendance varies and can be anything from four to nine people at each session.

Issues and experiences people raised with us:

- Ongoing concerns around social care and not being able to see looked after children on a regular basis, linked to a shortage of contact workers and appointments being cancelled at the last minute.
- Limited postnatal care and a lack of information available about services and support.
- Not being able to see a GP face-to-face and only being offered an appointment with a nurse.
- Long ambulance waiting times and long A&E waiting times for children.



Boscombe Family Hub

- Q I can't get an appointment with my GP, only the nurse who then misdiagnosed my daughter's issue.
- Q Accessibility is an issue; long waiting times and an 8-16 hour wait in A&E.
- Q There are no contact workers at the moment, so I haven't seen my twins who are in foster care for five months now. I'm meant to have a meeting every three months, where all the professionals who are involved are to be present. They keep getting cancelled because there are less than three present. The police never attend either. I have one social worker who is good, the rest are terrible and there is no communication.
- Q When I was a new mother, I wasn't given any information. The aftercare when I had a baby was very limited.

Q The one thing that did seem to crop up regularly with families involved in social care was that social workers changed frequently and that there was no rapport between the family and the social workers. Also, the social workers were living a long way from the BCP area and were therefore not really in touch with issues in the local area.

Staff member, Boscombe Family Hub

BH1 Project

A [community project](#) based in Boscombe, run by The Salvation Army which supports vulnerable people. The centre is open Monday to Friday, from 10am–2pm and offers practical support such as washing and showering facilities, help with referrals to other agencies, plus teas/coffees and hot food.

Issues and experiences people raised with us:

- Long telephone queues when trying to book a GP appointment, so some people give up.
- Being unable to get a GP appointment if they call after 9am, which causes delays when trying to get medication.
- Unable to register with an NHS dentist and access dental treatment.
- Inconsistent community mental health services. People aren't able to see the same support worker and feel like they are being passed around the system.



BH1 Project

Q I use Providence Surgery, but if you call after 9am you can't get an appointment. I didn't have any inhalers for 2/3 days because of that system. There needs to be a better appointment booking system.

Q I got attacked in town by seven youths. They knocked all my front top teeth out. I've been waiting a long time for a dental appointment so that I can have new teeth fitted but they are so snowed under at the moment. I keep getting automated messages to say I am in the queue but who knows how long I will have to wait. How long is a piece of string!

Q I was under Kings Park Hospital for drug induced psychosis but because I stopped smoking weed, they signed me off but I'm still getting the symptoms.

Q Mental health services aren't great. You get passed from pillar to post. My mental health support worker doesn't do a lot. Most of the time we sit there in silence. They don't help with the voices in my head, I just get given another number to call.

Q The main problem I find is for my clients with mental health issues. If a client is street homeless, we are able to refer them to the homeless mental health service, but for those in accommodation it is very difficult to get the help that they need. Services for mental health support should be increased.

A lot of GP services offer eConsult, which is a great service but not when you don't own a smart phone, and have limited access, or the resilience to go to a library to ask to use a computer to report health issues. I always suggest to clients that they physically go to the surgery rather than call, but for some their frustration and lack of resilience can cause problems when attending a surgery.

Annette Watts, BH1 Community Project Manager

We Are Humans

A **local charity** which runs a community cafe providing food and other essentials to residents in financial hardship. They run a weekly community lunch group, as well as a soup kitchen for people who are experiencing homelessness, a weekly breakfast club, and street kitchen in Bournemouth town centre at weekends. The café and the street kitchen have between 20-60 customers per session.

Issues and experiences people raised with us:

- Frustration when a GP telephone appointment is missed because people are unable to answer the phone, so they then have to start the whole process again.
- Misdiagnosis by a nurse when not allowed to see a GP.
- Long waits to get treatment for leg ulcers.
- Being unable to see a dentist, even when in excruciating pain with abscesses.



We Are Humans - Base Camp Café

Q I waited three years to get treatment for ulcers on my ankles. The practice nurse at the surgery couldn't cope with it, so they sent me to the surgery in Winton but then they closed. I then got sent to Shelley Road and I got compression tights. They said it will be okay in three months, but it took 12 months. They are very one track minded over compression tights.

Q I can never see a GP, only a nurse but they can't always make a diagnosis.

Q When I call the GP, I'm 27th in the queue. When I get through, they offer me a telephone appointment. I missed the call when I was in the toilet and I had to start the whole process again. It's a frustrating system!



Q The GPs are paid to service their patients, and they do not. When they can't get a GP appointment they end up in A&E, which then causes the hospital problems. The GPs have a duty of care and a responsibility to their patients. I understand that they need to be consistent, but you can't have 3,000 patients all ringing at 8am to get an appointment.



Andy Talbot, CEO We Are Humans

Boscombe Library

This **local library** offers a free warm space for people to read, study and use their Wi-Fi. They run events for children and families six days a week and provide hot drinks.

Issues and experiences people raised with us:

- Only able to get GP phone appointments.
- Long telephone waiting times when trying to make a GP appointment.

Q I can never see a GP face-to-face, it's always on the phone.

Q I don't like waiting on the phone to make an appointment, you can be waiting for an hour, so I go in and they are always helpful.

Q I moved to Providence GP Surgery because I moved house over a year ago. I have several complicated medical issues and until now I still have not seen my doctor in this surgery. I tend to get a call back from a medic or nurse but never a doctor. It is frustrating that you just get palmed off by someone who doesn't have quite the same knowledge of my medical condition, and they just prescribe Naproxen all the time.

Q Calling the surgery to make an appointment can take between 30 minutes to an hour. That is just ridiculous! I was advised by the reception staff to come into the surgery to make an appointment.



Boscombe Library

What works well

People also shared some positive feedback about experiences of services working well.

Q Poole Hospital was great. I cannot fault them.

Q The drug and alcohol services are really good, and they try and help with my mental health too.

Q I'm really happy with all the services that I have used. I had Postpartum Anxiety (PPA) after the birth and that was managed really well.



Access Wellbeing Boscombe

This **community hub** offers free, person-centred advice and support for anyone aged 18 and over, aiming to improve people's wellbeing and mental health. It is staffed by trained wellbeing coordinators and other services are also present, such as local mental health charities, social prescribers and NHS mental health services.

Interview with the Hub Manager

As part of this project we spoke to Josh Hevicon, the Wellbeing Hub Manager. This is what he told us.

Tell us a little bit about the hub

"Access Wellbeing is a new approach to mental health services, making it easier for people in Dorset to get support. It started with NHS England's plans to redesign community mental health services, so they can better meet the needs of the people who use them.

"The Access Wellbeing Boscombe Hub is just one part of this transformation across the county and is one of three Hubs in Dorset. We officially opened in September 2024 - so not long ago. We are located in the centre of Boscombe, so hopefully people can find us easily. Also, as a drop-in service, people do not need to book an appointment with us; we want to make wellbeing support accessible to people when they need it.

"Although the Access Wellbeing Boscombe Hub is delivered by BCHA, it is supported in its delivery by the local NHS and voluntary sector partners with the aim of working together to promote all round wellbeing of people in the community. It's important to mention that the Hub is currently available for adults aged 18 and above."

What type of support do you provide?

"The Hub has a team of wellbeing coordinators who listen and help people to access support on a wide range of topics that impact mental health and wellbeing.

"For example, a person can visit the Hub for support with work, money, housing and benefits, or for help to explore and connect with local social groups and community activities. Wellbeing coordinators can also help people to access support from across the local system, whether that's through the NHS, the local authority or other providers of services.

"The support at the Hub is holistic, person-centred and empowering, meaning that people who visit for help are always at the heart of conversations and decisions made about their support. It is a 'being with' not 'doing to' trauma-informed way of working with people that have faced, and/or are facing, many difficulties in their lives."

What are the biggest issues or barriers that the people you see are experiencing?

"In our experience, a significant number of people coming to the Hub are looking for housing and benefit advice and, at the point of arriving at the Hub for help, feel that they are at risk of homelessness or being left without money to pay rent, bills and buy food. With that, the stress of their situation contributes to a downturn in mental health and can lead to crisis.

"There really are so many different reasons why people come to the Hub for support, from loneliness to substance misuse, but this is something that the team has highlighted in their work with people so far."



Give us an example of how your service has made a positive impact

“Simply providing a warm and welcoming space where people can access support on their terms, when they need it, has proven to have had such a positive impact on many people who visit the Hub. Clients also report how feeling listened to and taken seriously has allowed them to feel that they matter and, with help, confident enough to be able to begin to address the challenges they are facing.

“Practically, the team has been able to support clients to ‘nip things in the bud’, so to speak. For example, wellbeing coordinators collaborate with other services and often act as a gateway for clients into specialist support on topics such housing, benefit and mental health. The early interventions have come at a time before things have got much worse for clients, helping them to lessen physical and mental health decline, and sometimes avoid crisis, as a result.

“The Hub team has also helped people to pursue learning and personal development opportunities with BCHA Learn, colleagues whom we share the Hub space with. It’s been particularly heartening to see how the Hub has helped people grow in confidence through connecting with peers on the different course on offer and begin to look to the future with a renewed sense of purpose and meaning.”

Are there any changes that would make a difference to your role and the support that you would like to provide?

Yes, having more Hub locations across the county to extend the invite of Access Wellbeing support to as many people as possible. Fortunately, these plans are already underway!

Further information

The [Access Wellbeing Boscombe Hub](#) is open from 9.30am–4.30pm, Monday to Friday and is located at: 3–5 Palmerston Road, Boscombe, BH1 4HN. Facebook: [Access Wellbeing Hubs](#)

Recommendations

Based on our findings we recommend the following actions to ensure the INT for Boscombe meets the needs of the local community.

1. Primary care – Improve access and information.

People in Boscombe most commonly told us that they face problems using GP services in the way they would like. We also continue to hear from people who do not have access to an NHS dentist.

We recommend that the developing INT work together to improve people’s access to primary care in Boscombe and develops clear and understandable information for local people about what is available locally.

2. Mental health care – Improve access and information

We spoke to people who couldn’t get community mental health support. We also heard from people who want better continuity of mental health care, to see the same support worker so they can build up rapport and establish a level of trust.

We recommend that the INT work with the local voluntary sector to improve information and access to mental health support in Boscombe.

3. Social workers – Better continuity of care

We heard from local families involved with social care who found that their social workers changed frequently and were often living a long way from the BCP area and therefore not in touch with the locality.

Social workers will play a key role within INT, and we recommend that there is a focus on improving continuity of care.

4. Ongoing community involvement

We recommend a commitment is made to continue working with local people to ensure the delivery of proactive and personalised care in the local community.



Next steps

This report includes recommendations about how primary, community and social care services are delivered. We have shared our findings with Our Dorset and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to help them in their development of INT.

Stakeholder response

Jack Blankley, Community Development Manager at BCP Council

“This report is a strong piece of community engagement which promotes the perspectives of the community in developing and shaping better health and council services in their own neighbourhoods. Healthwatch Dorset has focused on gaining insight from a wide range of individuals across a number of community assets in the Boscombe area and it highlights a number of key challenges that lots of people will recognise.

“It’s clear from this report how accessing services is a real issue for residents in Boscombe and that local services need to reconsider how individuals access their support. It also raises important questions for policymakers on how best to invest in preventative services within neighbourhoods to address the wider social determinants of health to try and reduce the demands on both local council and NHS services.

“The report should be viewed as being as important as locality based quantitative studies and I hope organisations across Dorset will now recognise the significance of qualitative based engagements when developing INT. Without trying to understand the perspective of people who live and work in local communities, INT will not be able to deliver the change that the NHS desperately needs.”


Sally Northeast, Associate Director, Communications and Public Engagement, Dorset HealthCare University NHS Foundation Trust

“This engagement with the community in Boscombe is incredibly helpful and is in line with the way we plan to work with local people around the county to shape services in their area. The themes identified here will be included in the information pack which will help us tailor the Integrated Neighbourhood Team’s work around the needs people have identified.”



Acknowledgments

We want to thank the BHI Project, Boscombe Library, We Are Humans, Access Wellbeing Boscombe, and Boscombe Family Hub; without their support the public engagement work for this project would not have been possible. We also want to say a massive thank you to everyone who participated in this project and shared their stories and feedback with us.

 I really enjoyed carrying out the engagement work for this project. I am excited to be a part of the development of the Neighbourhood Teams for Boscombe and I welcome working in an integrated way around the needs of the population. The health and wellbeing needs of the community are paramount, and I hope Neighbourhood Teams will be a way of providing creative, holistic and innovative care, while building trust in the community.

Lucy Cribb, Healthwatch Dorset Engagement Officer



Appendix

Public feedback from Health Sciences University Health and Support Community Pop up event

In March 2024 the Health Sciences University (formerly the Anglo-European College of Chiropractic) held a health and support community pop-up event for two weeks, Monday to Friday. The event was held in the Boscombe Arts Depot in the centre of Boscombe, and this was an opportunity for members of the community to drop-in and have a health check, which included BMI (Body Mass Index) checks, cholesterol checks, blood pressure readings, fitness levels, pain management checks and mental health checks.

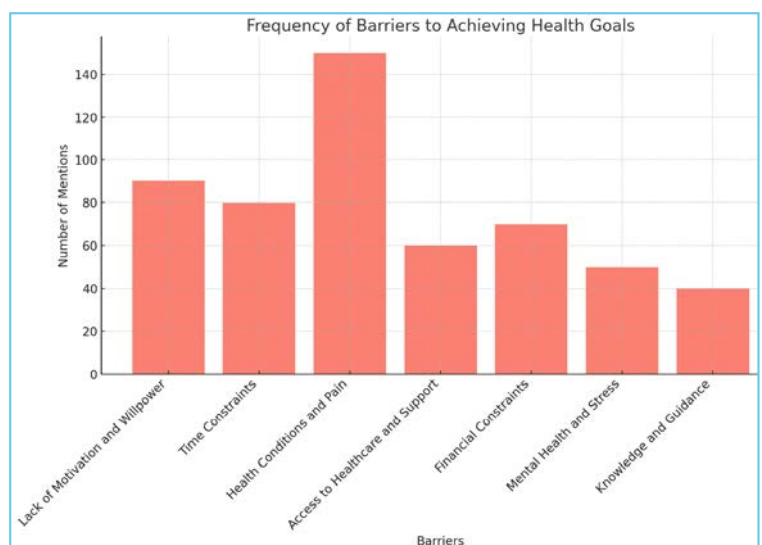
This was also an opportunity for local organisations to set up promotional stands, so they could chat to people about their services, gather feedback and handout information. Healthwatch Dorset set up a stand for the two weeks that the event ran, so we could gather feedback. [Find our more](#)

Barriers to achieving health goals (Health Sciences University analysis)

The University analysed feedback gathered at the event and revealed constraints and barriers to people achieving their health goals. Several key themes were identified that focused on internal and external factors hindering progress, such as motivation, time constraints, healthcare access, and managing chronic conditions.

Major themes identified

1. Health conditions and pain
2. Lack of motivation and willpower
3. Time constraints
4. Financial constraints
5. Access to healthcare and support
6. Mental health and stress
7. Knowledge and guidance





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