



healthwatch
South Gloucestershire



**A SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT WITH
RURAL COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH
GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

INTRODUCTION

Between September 2014 - March 2015 Healthwatch South Gloucestershire visited 9 rural community groups to find out more about their experiences of accessing local health and social care services. The areas visited include:

- Boyd Valley and Bitton
- Charfield, Cromhall and Tortworth
- Chipping Sodbury and Cotswold Edge
- Frampton Cotterell, Westerleigh, Coalpit Heath and Iron Acton
- Hanham and Longwell Green
- Siston and Warmley
- Thornbury and Alveston
- Winterbourne, Hambrook and Frenchay

South Gloucestershire's Sustainable Community Strategy 'South Gloucestershire 2026: A great place to live and work' states that 60% of the authority's population (approximately 254,000 people) lives in the built up areas immediately adjoining Bristol, such as Filton, Bradley Stoke, Kingswood, Staple Hill and Hanham. Around 19% of people live in the towns of Yate, Chipping Sodbury and Thornbury and the remaining 20% of people live in the more rural areas of South Gloucestershire.

In conjunction with South Gloucestershire Council's Community Engagement team, Healthwatch South Gloucestershire visited 8 Safer and Stronger Community Groups across the district, totaling around 200 people. These groups are community-based and have a broad remit which includes: promoting pride in local areas; reducing crime and disorder; empowering local people to have a greater voice and influence over decision making; and improving the quality of life of people in their local areas. Healthwatch South Gloucestershire also visited the Town and Parish Council Forum, which brings together Parish Clerks and community leaders from across the district, to ask for their support in spreading the word about Healthwatch South

Gloucestershire through local magazines, websites and noticeboards.

YOU SAID...

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire heard a huge number of comments from the residents it met covering everything from GP surgeries to social care and access to information. The following is a breakdown of the key themes that have emerged from the feedback received.

GPs and Primary Care

For many their GP surgery is the first port of call if they are feeling unwell. Healthwatch South Gloucestershire heard from the residents it met the importance of being able to access appointments quickly, with the availability of same day appointments being very popular:

“13 people reported that St. Mary’s Street Surgery (Thornbury) is excellent” “.....if poorly you can ring up and make an appointment the same day”

“Commentator received outstanding service from Close Farm Surgery (Oldland Common).....consultations are available, same day appointments and good response to correspondence”

A service thought to be useful in rural areas was telephone appointments, particularly for older residents who may not be able to get to their GP surgery. This service does not appear to be offered by every GP surgery:

“Three Shires offer a telephone appointment service for older people which is crucial due to dispersal of patients over a large area and limited public transport”

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire also heard some residents’ concerns and feedback about where services could be improved, as follows:

Residents from Siston and Warmley raised concerns about access to GP surgeries for people with sensory impairments, particularly hearing loss. A group member described their friend’s difficulties when registering for appointments and accessing interpretation services. Others in the group had heard similar experiences.

This is a theme that has emerged from other groups across the district and has been captured in the quarterly monitoring reports that Healthwatch produces (<http://tinyurl.com/qdg4wf4>). Healthwatch South Gloucestershire is working with South Gloucestershire Council and NHS South Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to explore how access and support for people with sensory impairment or loss can be improved within health and social care services.

Inconsistency with information regarding availability of treatments and appointments was discussed by several groups, for example:

In Frampton Cotterell, some group members were aware of a Shingles vaccination for people aged 70, 78 and 79. Others were unaware and felt that not enough information was being made available about this.

In Frampton Cotterell, some residents had received letters advising of times and dates for their flu vaccination and some had not - even though they all attended the same surgery.

Some residents were aware of the free Health Checks that are available for people aged 40 - 74 years of age and others were not. It was queried why these messages are not more universally advertised.

Finally, some residents raised concerns about the future, in particular demand on surgeries which they perceive as already pressurised, as a result of the new housing developments that are being built across South Gloucestershire.

In Thornbury, reference was made to some work that had been done to review demand and the ability of local health services to provide what is required. There was a feeling that this information had been ignored and a new review was now required to see if local GP provision is fit for purpose.

Southmead Hospital

Southmead Hospital, run by North Bristol NHS Trust, is the main acute health service for South Gloucestershire's residents. In 2014, staff and services from Frenchay Hospital and Southmead Hospital were merged into the new Brunel building, which opened in May.

There were several key points that emerged from the feedback Healthwatch South Gloucestershire received from rural communities, which were consistent across the district:

- 1) The existing bus services to Southmead Hospital are not meeting the needs of rural residents. Services are either too infrequent or take too long due to their circuitous route.
- 2) Some residents thought it helpful that public transport information is provided from their GP surgery to assist with travelling to Southmead, Bristol Royal Infirmary (BRI), Royal United Hospital (RUH) Bath etc. This information does not appear to be offered by every GP surgery.
- 3) Many residents are now choosing to attend the Accident and Emergency department at RUH Bath for treatment instead of Southmead Hospital as it is easier to access. However it was acknowledged that this is likely to be putting stress on services.

Healthwatch schemes in Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Somerset worked together during July and August 2014 to survey patients, carers, relatives

and staff at Southmead Hospital to find out what they thought about the new service. A joint report was produced collating the findings of this work (<http://tinyurl.com/l3gho5o>) and shared with Clinical Commissioning Groups across the feedback regarding the new hospital has continued to come in from people across the area over the last 6 - 8 months.

Out of Hours and Urgent Care

As a result of the limitations of the existing bus services to Southmead Hospital, some rural residents felt it important that other options and services are better promoted. It was felt that more information is required about what services people can access through Minor Injuries Units (MIUs), NHS 111 and the Out of Hours service, and why you should choose to go there instead of your GP surgery or Accident and Emergency.

Yate West Gate Minor Injuries Unit is well used by the district's rural communities, particularly those living to the north and east in places such as Cotswold Edge and the Boyd Valley. Healthwatch South Gloucestershire received positive feedback regarding the services being provided:

“Physiotherapy services at West Gate are excellent”

“Commentator received an excellent service at Westgate even though they had attended on a busy Monday. They was seen and treated in 4 hours - a brilliant service!”

However it was felt by many that longer opening hours would be useful and there should be an x-ray service at weekends:

“Commentator said how difficult it is that Yate MIU as it is not open at the weekends when most minor injuries tend to occur”

“Yate West Gate provides an excellent service but it is a shame that there is no x-ray available at weekends”

“There is no x-ray service weekends at West Gate “

“Would like to see longer opening hours at West Gate”

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire also heard some negative comment regarding Yate West Gate:

“Commentator reports that the Audiology service needs upgrading”

“Parking outside of Yate Westgate is very difficult”

Other Out of Hours services were also mentioned, for example:

“Commentator reported using the Southmead-based tele-health service over the weekend. Received excellent service and upon attending the hospital they were seen within 10 minutes”

Some residents stressed that with the closure of Frenchay Hospital residents are now having to travel greater distances for treatment, scans and minor injuries. For those residents living in the areas of Frampton Cotterell, Siston and Warmley, Hanham and Longwell Green, Boyd Valley and Bitton and Winterbourne it was felt that an outcome regarding Cosham Hospital is a priority for local people.

Other services

Feedback about other services was captured, such as:

"Meals on Wheels in South Gloucestershire have been excellent"

“Commentator reported that they had visited Hengrove Hospital recently and had received excellent care. It is easy to get to and use”

“Triage system works well at main hospitals”

“Commentator reported that he had already contacted Healthwatch and had found that information regarding the service was not freely available in medical outlets”

This information has been collated and shared via the quarterly reports that Healthwatch produces and shares with service providers and commissioners.

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire also received requests for information from residents around local services, which we were able to answer through the signposting service Well Aware, an database of activities, groups and services that people can use to help support their health and wellbeing (www.wellaware.org.uk) :

“Commentator wanted to know how and where people can access support if they have recently been diagnosed with dementia. Commentator’s friend has just gone through this diagnosis but has not received any follow-up support from GP or a community-based organisation”

SUMMARY

There were three main themes that emerged from the discussions Healthwatch South Gloucestershire held with rural communities across the district:

- 1) **Difficulty in accessing Southmead Hospital, particularly via public transport:** the relocation of all acute services to Southmead Hospital in 2014 has increased travel time and distances for many rural residents. This is particularly felt by residents who use

public transport, which in some areas is limited in its frequency and/or follows very circuitous routes to service local villages, which results in lengthy journey times.

It was clear from residents to the north and east of the district that RUH Bath is considered far more accessible than Southmead Hospital, and as a result is now drawing people from a wider area, which may be causing stress on services such as Accident and Emergency.

- 2) **The importance of the local GP surgery:** for many the local GP surgery is the first port of call for treatment, advice and information, particularly older residents who may have limited mobility and/or access to transportation. It is clear that some rural GP surgeries are providing services that really suit the needs of the local community, for example the telephone appointment service provided to residents in the Boyd Valley and Bitton, however there appears to be some disparity in the services that are provided and the level of information that people can access from their local surgery.

There is also concern about the increasing demand on primary care services that are already under strain, for example where parking is difficult, appointment waiting times are long and support for those residents with additional needs is not being met. Particular reference was made to Thornbury where there is due to be a large increase in housing and residents feel that services are already under pressure.

- 3) **Out of hours and urgent care:** the perceived inaccessibility of Southmead Hospital means that residents in rural areas are keen to find alternatives to using Accident and Emergency when treatment and advice are required. Yate West Gate is well used already with some positive experiences highlighted, however there was a strong feeling that longer opening hours and weekend x-ray services would be an improvement.

The increased distances that need to be travelled by some rural residents to access Accident and Emergency or Minor Injuries Units means that for some an outcome on Cossham Hospital is still a priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Public transport provision to Southmead Hospital should be reviewed with particular attention paid to the routes that serve rural parts of South Gloucestershire, including bus frequency and routes used to prevent very long journey times.
- GP surgeries should try to hold information for their patients on public transport routes to hospitals and other health and social care services.

- GP surgeries should try to make telephone appointments available to residents who are older and/or who have limited mobility or access to public transport.
- GP surgeries should ensure that their appointment systems are accessible for people with sensory impairment or loss, and that interpretation services are used when required.
- Campaigns such as vaccination programmes and health checks should be publicised in every GP surgery to ensure that all patients know what treatments and support are available and how they can access them.
- A review should be held around existing GP surgery provision, particularly in locations that are/ will be experiencing new housing developments, in order to assess impact on the services being provided and their ability to support the community in the future.

Healthwatch will....

All the feedback provided by the community groups has been inputted to Healthwatch South Gloucestershire's database of issues and concerns and included in Healthwatch South Gloucestershire's quarterly reports.

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire will share this report with Healthwatch partners including NHS South Gloucestershire CCG, South Gloucestershire Council, the Care Quality Commission, NHS England and Healthwatch England. The report will be available on the Healthwatch South Gloucestershire website (www.healthwatchsouthglos.co.uk) and circulated to our mailing lists via the monthly e-bulletin.

Looking forward....

Plans for future work

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire welcomes and encourages residents from rural communities across South Gloucestershire to continue to contribute their feedback using the communication methods listed at the end of this report.

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire also supports people to become Volunteer Champions so that they can represent the experiences and needs of their community group. If you would like to find out more about volunteering with Healthwatch South Gloucestershire, please contact us using the details below.

Tell Us Your Story...

Healthwatch South Gloucestershire wants to hear your experiences of health and social care services so that we can share with service providers and funders what is working well and where things could be improved



Text us - text sg followed by your message to 07860 021 603



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