



A time like no other

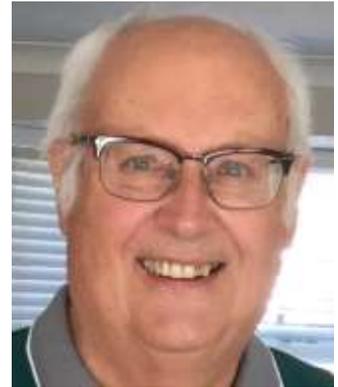
On March 17, just a few weeks shy of the end of our charity's 2019-20 financial year, our staff team learnt that the council was closing our office at Reading Central Library, as part of a town-wide shut down of public buildings. Coronavirus was sweeping the globe and within a week the entire nation would be placed in lockdown.

Overnight, we'd lost the ability to hold a public drop-in service for information and advice. We could no longer safely visit GP surgeries, hospitals and care homes, where we'd normally meet people to hear their experiences. Regular meetings with decision-makers were put on hold. Referrals to our advocacy service, Reading Voice, were suspended.

Our team responded quickly, decisively and with the needs of Reading's most vulnerable people, foremost in mind. By 30 March we had mobilised a prescription delivery service, using our DBS-checked staff and a local volunteer army, to ensure vulnerable, shielding and self-isolating people could get the medicines they needed.

Prior to lockdown, our year had focused on how the NHS would implement the Long Term Plan and changes in primary care, through two key surveys.

We aim to continue an agile, imaginative and people-centred approach as we head into the uncertain and socially distant world of 2020-21.



David Shepherd, chair of trustees, Healthwatch Reading



It wasn't the end to the year we were expecting, but our actions showed once again that Reading people are at the heart of everything we do.

Providing support



411 people

received one-to-one advocacy from our Reading Voice service to help them resolve complaints or have their say about their care and wellbeing.

118 people

sought advice from our information and advice service, mostly about hospital services (37), GPs (20) or council services (17).

Reaching out



We put out:

506 tweets,
12 e-newsletter editions
& 3 printed newsletters

to keep the community informed & updated on local services, events and our work.

Making a difference to care



We collected views of

1,204 people

through four Enter and View visits, three surveys, four focus groups and three training sessions, leading to nine reports that recommended changes.

Responding to Covid

They came by bike, car and on foot, to get medicines to local people as the Covid-19 pandemic hit our town. Meet the locals who signed up to Healthwatch Reading's crisis response service.

We are grateful to the support of 14 local people who stepped forward to help with a prescription delivery scheme, which we launched to ensure vulnerable, shielding or self-isolating people wouldn't be left without vital medicines during the pandemic. This was weeks before the national NHS Volunteers scheme had got off the ground.

The volunteers included husband-and-wife teams, a PhD student, a retired GP, a former social worker and Reading Football Club's safety officer. They have cycled, walked or driven thousand of miles to respond to – at last count – 1,100 requests from individuals, charities or the council's Community Hub. The volunteers proved adept at thinking on their feet as they dealt with incomplete medicine orders, clients who'd gone missing, and different pharmacy rules. Our own staff have also carried out deliveries, on top of coordinating volunteers, dealing with emergency requests, and raising safeguarding concerns in some cases with social workers or GPs. We will throw a thank-you get-together for these volunteers when it's safe to do so!



Alex Bayliss



Cathy Bull



Jenny Newman



Dave Parker



Mustafa Ramadan

Plus:

- **Adam & Liz Davies**
- **Julie Goring (pictured on the report cover)**
- **Lynn Launchbury**
- **Jennie MacLean**
- **Nik Much**
- **David Newman**
- **Helen Savidge**
- **Kathryn Shelley**

Helping you shape the NHS



We worked with local Healthwatch in Wokingham, West Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire to survey 1,250 people about their views on the future of the NHS.



We also held 10 focus groups to get in-depth views from 87 people on how The NHS Long Term Plan could work for our communities.



You told us you needed quicker help for mental health problems, better transport links to hospitals and information tailored to people with learning disabilities.

NHS Long Term Plan

Following a government commitment to increase health service funding by £20bn a year, the NHS published its Long Term Plan in January 2019, setting out key ambitions for the next decade.

To help local areas decide how they should spend their share of the extra funding, NHS England asked local Healthwatch to carry out a major engagement project in April and May 2019 to gather public views on the Plan.

We heard that more people were concerned about mental health than any of the six other priority conditions in the Long Term Plan, such as cancer. You described long waiting times and a lack of empathy from some staff. You also shared lots of ideas about healthy neighbourhoods, such as access to affordable exercise classes, better transport links and

more support to stay living at home in the later stages of life.

The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System said: "We welcome the work carried out by Healthwatch and are grateful to those who took their time to talk about their experiences, concerns and priorities. All of the feedback provided will be considered carefully by colleagues and leaders working to plan for and implement the ambitions of the NHS Long Term Plan."



You would not half treat cancer or a broken leg, so why half treat mental health conditions?"
(Survey respondent)

Our Reading Voice service

We provided advocacy to 411 people, helping them during care assessments, complaints, court hearings or compulsory treatment.

This was Healthwatch Reading's second year of delivering the Single Reading Advocacy Service commissioned by Reading Borough Council. This is extra to our Healthwatch role, and covers four types of statutory, or locally arranged, advocacy. We also accepted referrals to support parents through child protection hearings and for the first time we acted as a 'Litigation Friend'. We dealt with 411 cases, up from 361 the year before, including big increases in Care Act Advocacy and NHS complaints.

Heading into 2020-21, we have unfortunately seen a dramatic decline in referrals due to the Covid-19 pandemic but we hope to introduce innovative and safe ways to carry out our role as lockdown eases.

Advocacy cases in 2019-20



Advocacy in action: case studies

A complaint we submitted on behalf of an adult with visual impairments against Reading Borough Council, was partly upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The [LGO's decision](#) states the council had only provided care to help the person with medication five days a week despite the council previously identifying a need for seven days a week. The LGO told the council to apologise, waive some care charges, and to remind staff to update care plans.

We supported a person in their 30s to make a complaint about their discharge from a mental health ward, which they and their family felt was too soon. Had it been better managed, they felt the person would not have self-harmed and suffered life-changing injuries that will involve ongoing treatment. Following a serious incident investigation by Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, the person is now seeking legal advice.

We accepted a referral from social workers who were concerned about a person's self-neglect and their ability to live safely at home. Professionals had been unable to gain access to the property for over two years before our advocate gained the person's confidence enough for them to allow us access to the house. The person lacked capacity to make informed decisions to keep safe and we were able to take a best interests approach to support them during repairs to their home, admission to Prospect Park Hospital and eventual discharge to a care home.

A woman with mental health needs and learning disabilities was supported by our advocate during legal proceedings to remove a baby from her care. Following the court granting an interim care order to the local authority, police were called to the maternity unit to assist in removing the baby. Our advocate spent 3.5 hours successfully negotiating with the client to hand her baby over unharmed. The woman had a history of many children being taken into care.

We helped an adult in their 40s with motor neurone disease, who uses a wheelchair, to secure funded support for carers during a holiday, via NHS Continuing Healthcare. Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group had first told the person such support was against their policy, but they changed their position after our advocate got involved.

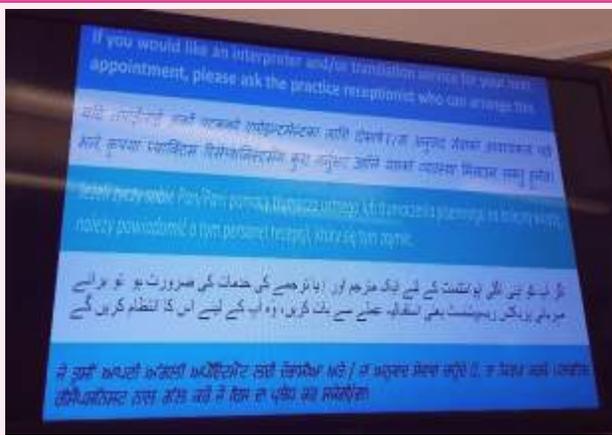
We acted as a Litigation Friend for a person who was being evicted from their tenancy. We had previously provided advocacy to the person, in their 60s, during a safeguarding enquiry and also when they were sectioned onto a mental health ward. The person lacked capacity to make decisions about where to live and we reviewed their circumstances and put forward our view of their best interests. The person was moved to a care setting.

Engaging with local people

As well as our Long Term Plan exercise (see page 4), we also engaged with a further 890 people for five other projects, via surveys, visits, focus groups and workshops.

Log on to Health

We held a series of workshops in conjunction with the Reading Community Learning Centre, to teach 17 women, and three tutors, how to sign up to GP online services. Our project was sparked by a general low awareness among Reading people of technology allowing you to book appointments or order repeat prescriptions via smartphones, tablets or computers. We shared our findings with GPs, discussing the idea of setting up digital ambassadors.



Enter and View visits to GP surgeries

We used our statutory powers to visit four GP surgeries to survey people and observe the environment, such as waiting room screens. We spoke with 63 people at two surgeries in south Reading with quality concerns, while at two north Reading surgeries, we listened to views of 104 people to check their care following closures of other surgeries. Overall, people praised the care from doctors and nurses but sometimes said they could not get through on phones or were unaware of extended opening hours at all GP surgeries.

Urgent care

We surveyed 553 people at Reading Walk-In Centre or A&E at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group used the findings to inform plans on same-day urgent care, since postponed by Covid.

Maternity

Almost 90 Reading women took part in a survey or focus groups for a project across Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Care during labour was good but was variable in ante- or post-natal periods.

Student health

In the second phase of a project, we surveyed 62 students, including Reading College student, Amber (pictured). We found 2nd and 3rd-year students knew more about services than first-years' but stress was still an issue.



Thanking our volunteers

We couldn't operate without the local people who give their time to govern and oversee our work or help us deliver our projects.

Our trustees:

- Monica Collings
- Gurmit Dhendsa
- David Shepherd (chair) and our representative on the Reading Health and Wellbeing Board

Our board:

- Sheila Booth
- Francis Brown
- David Cooper
- Douglas Findlay
- Tony Hall
- Karen Hampshire (North and West Reading Patient Voice)
- James Penn (South Reading Patient Voice)
- David Shepherd (chair of trustees)
- Helena Turner

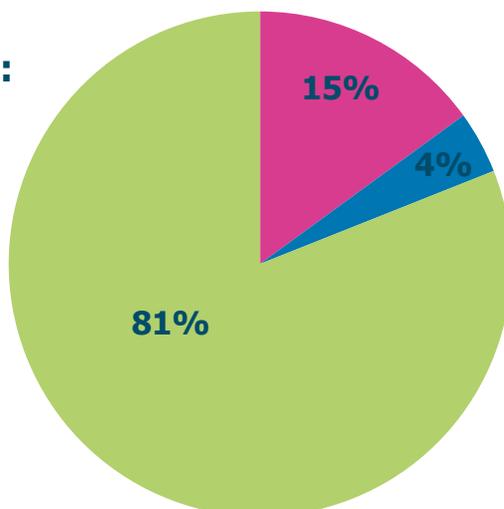
Project volunteers:

- Alex Bayliss (prescription delivery)
- Cathy Bull (prescription delivery)
- Holly Curtayne (folding & posting letters)
- Sean Curtayne (folding & posting letters)
- Jack Curtayne (folding & posting letters)
- Adam Davies (prescription delivery)
- Liz Davies (prescription delivery)
- Julie Goring (prescription delivery)
- Rafi Habib (survey engagement and input)
- Lynn Launchbury (prescription delivery)
- Jennie MacLean (prescription delivery)
- Nik Much (prescription delivery)
- David Newman (prescription delivery)
- Jenny Newman (prescription delivery)
- Dave Parker (prescription delivery)
- Mustafa Ramadan (prescription delivery)
- Helen Savidge (prescription delivery)
- Kathryn Shelley (prescription delivery)

Our finances

Total expenditure: £116,126

- Running costs (£17,584)
- Operational costs (£4,426)
- Staff costs (£94,116)



Total income: £114,850

- **£101,750** (89%) received from the local authority
- **£13,100** (11%) additional income

Contact us



3rd floor, Reading Central Library
Abbey Square
Reading
RG1 3BQ
Contact number: 0118 937 2295
Text/SMS: 07860 018 073

Email address: info@healthwatchreading.co.uk
Website: <https://healthwatchreading.co.uk>
Twitter: <http://twitter.com/HealthwatchRdg>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HWRReading>



Reading Voice
Your local advice & advocacy hub

3rd floor, Reading Central Library
Abbey Square
Reading
RG1 3BQ
Contact number: 0118 937 2295
Text/SMS: 07860 018 073
Email address: helpdesk@readingvoice.org.uk
Website: <http://readingvoice.org.uk/>

Our staff

Chief executive:
Mandeep Kaur Bains

Reading Voice advocacy services manager:
Carl Borges

Healthwatch Reading team manager:
Rebecca Curtayne

Healthwatch Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership Liaison Manager:
Catherine Williams

Joint Healthwatch Reading officers and Reading Voice advocates:
Pat Bunch
Shahanaz Uddin

Reading Voice advocates:
Rhianna Blanchard
Pauline Foy
Jenny Newman
Sue Pigott (in partnership with Talkback)
Yvette Toome (in partnership with Talkback)
Wendy Webster

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