



healthwatch Slough

The Big Health Chat
Slough
August 2023

Thank you, Slough

We would like to say a massive thank you to all the 119+ people who entrusted us with their experiences and views through conversations with Healthwatch.



Background and Scope

We wanted to hear from a variety of people from different communities, gathering insight into the health and social care experiences of residents in Slough.

The Big Health Chat allowed us to collect a wide range of views and experiences across the area.

The tour and report recognise how a variety of services and the environment people live in affect the health and wellbeing of our community. These include housing, transport, leisure, police and community assets.

We wanted to listen to people about what matters to them. We kept our questions open to encourage individuals to share their views.

Methodology

When planning our engagement, we wanted to make sure we went to places where people of different ages and demographics are. We visited places on different dates and times, to capture experiences from people who may be at work, school or have caring responsibilities.

Our locations were:

- The Town Square, Slough
- Wexham park hospital
- Slough Refugees
- Parallel Event, the Great Park



What we asked

- 1. What things would help you to improve your health and wellbeing?**
- 2. What could make your neighbourhood a happier and healthier place to live?**

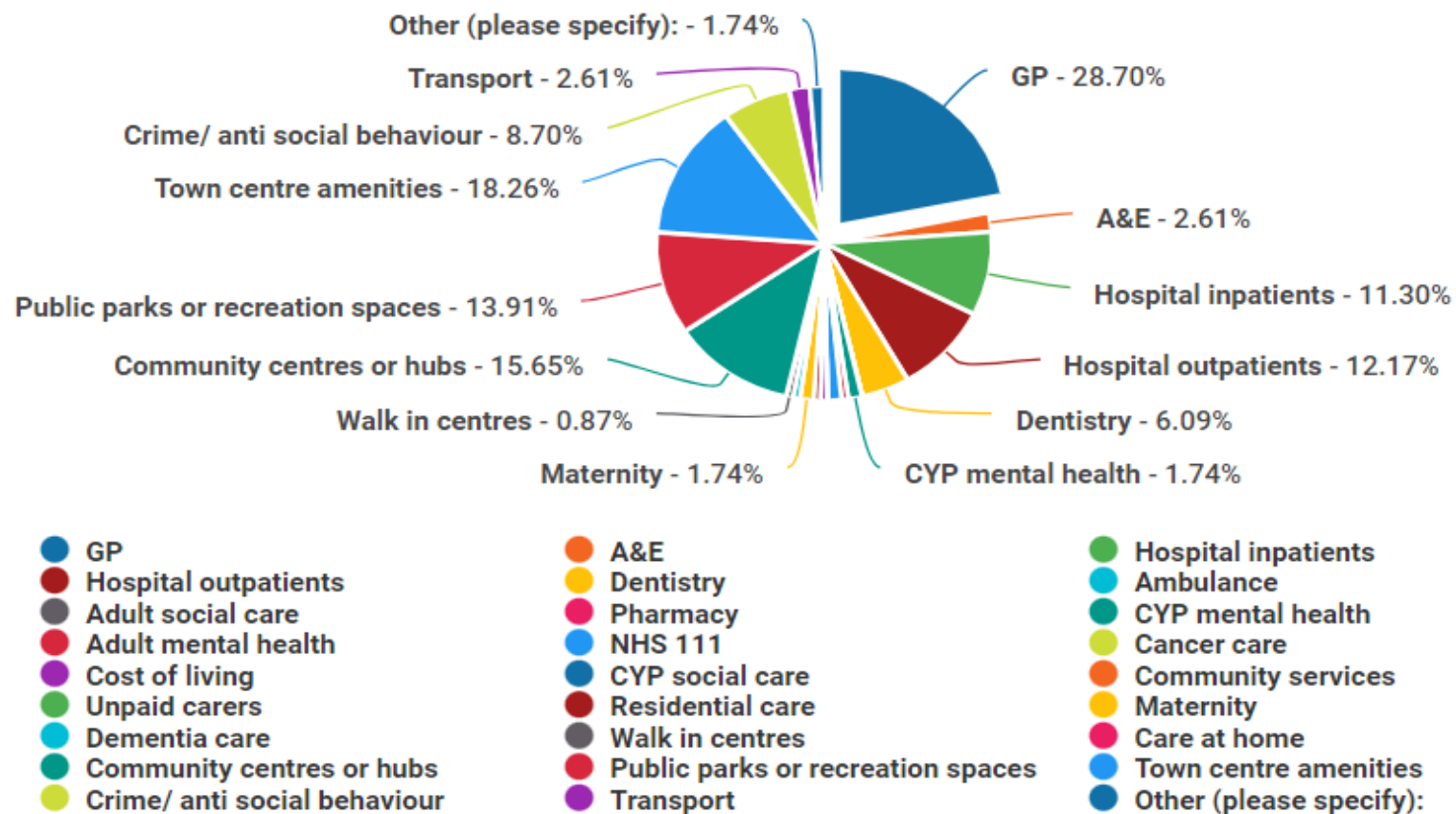
We heard that health and care experiences are varied, but that there are common themes. Slough residents told us that the town centre environment and lack of community spaces had a negative effect on their health and wellbeing.

The top five themes obtained during our conversations with residents were:

- GP access
- Town centre amenities
- Community centres or hub's
- Public parks or recreation spaces
- Hospital outpatients

Themes

Feedback from 119 local people



What people told us.

Theme 1: GP Access

Lots of residents were happy with their GP Access and services. They acknowledged the pressure that GPs were under and wanted to recognise good service.

"Britwell Surgery is a very good doctor's surgery. I can always get an appointment when I need one".

"Dr Sharma's surgery is very good. I have been a patient for 35 years. I keep fit by doing lots of walking and gardening".

"South Meads Surgery are very good. However, they used to have lots of extra clinics such as chiropody which stopped during Covid and haven't come back. That is a shame".

"Crosby House have always been good, I am able to see my GP. I had to come to Wexham for a blood test as they don't do them at my GP but that's OK, I don't mind"

"Bharani medical centre" is great, very good service. I feel safe in Slough, the people are good.

"Hershall medical centre is very good"

Some people provided negative feedback about GP access or service.

People expressed frustration about long waits to get through to their GP practice on the phone or difficulty completing E-consult forms. ***“E-consult takes more than 15 minutes to complete. Even when I call at 8am I wait, and all the appointments are gone. I am waiting more than 6 Months for a knee appointment.”***

Some more vulnerable residents with multiple health conditions wanted to see a named GP. ***“I am an elderly person and want to see my own GP, I can never get an appointment with them. Because of my age I want to see someone who knows about me and my family.”***

We spoke to people who felt that they had not received good care.
It was affecting their day-to-day life

“I have been waiting for 2 months for a referral from my GP for dementia. I can feel myself going downhill and I feel hopeless for the future. We don't know when we are going to be able to get any help”.



Theme 2: Town centre amenities

Lots of residents shared their views regarding the Town Centre

People told us that the town centre used to be a destination but now there was no reason to visit. ***"...needs to be more facilities and things for people to do like the cinema or theatre. There is nothing for people to join in with"***.

Local people do not feel they have been consulted with and they are not aware of any plans for town centre re-generation. Healthwatch staff were able to find information about proposals online but no-body we spoke to mentioned this.

Many people described feeling isolated and needing a space to gather with members of their community. The empty shops were seen as an opportunity to provide spaces for all, ***'Closed shops need to be used as drop in community areas and spaces to use, especially in the winter. Warm, safe spaces, run by volunteers"***

"We need more volunteering opportunities and learning/ training for vulnerable people. How about a cafe staffed by vulnerable people which would help others who are lonely and isolated?"

For one resident with a disability, lack of toilets made it difficult for him to spend time in Slough. ***"There are not enough public toilets in town. Queensmere have closed theirs and there are no disabled facilities"***

Some residents told us that the run-down town centre encouraged crime that made them feel unsafe

"Drug taking in the town centre is out of hand. You can smell hash in the air. More community police would help".

Theme 3: Community centres or hubs

People in Slough would like more community centres or hubs.

Residents were looking for opportunities to be active to improve their wellbeing

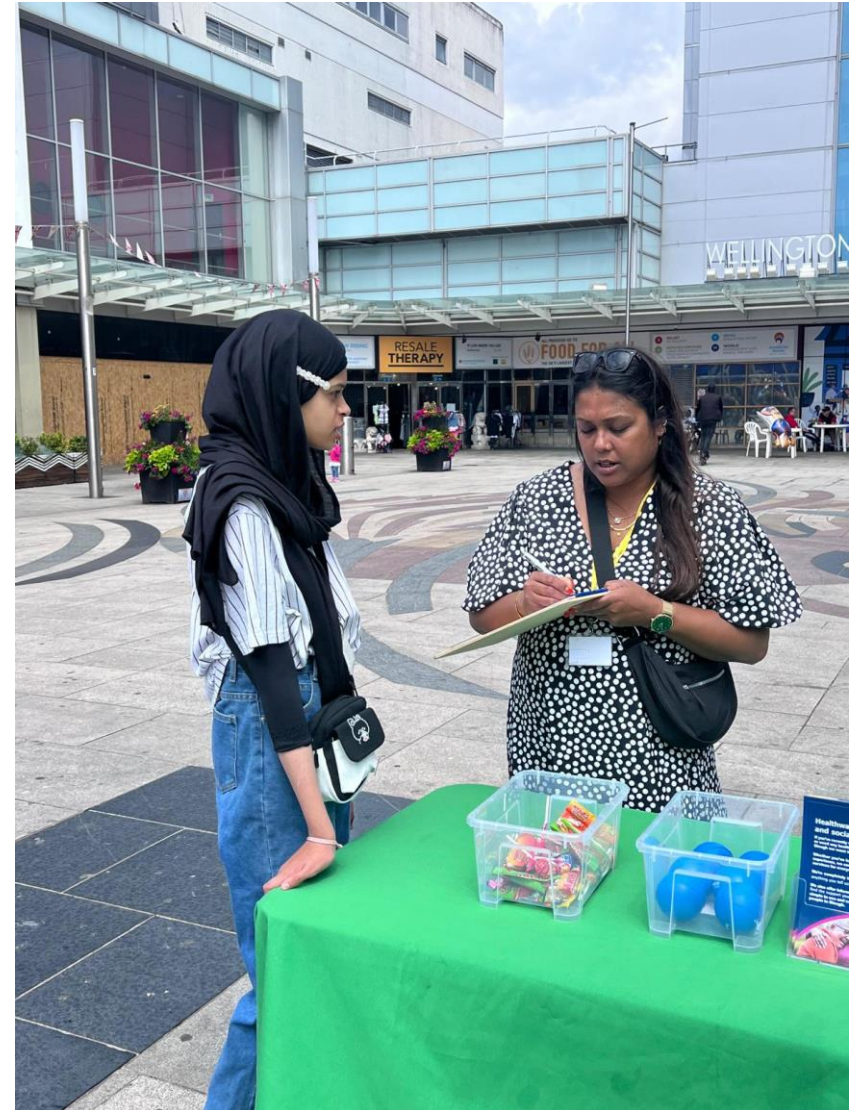
“I would like more community groups in centres for sports, not just football. I would like to try different things to keep fit”

People told us that there needs to be more provision for children and young people outside of school, women’s groups, groups for vulnerable people with health conditions and the elderly population. People felt lonely and did not see Slough as a town with a strong sense of community.

“Children need more clubs; I've lived here for 20 years and I'm worried about my children growing up in Slough. Sometimes I think about moving back to Scotland”

“Pensioners have a lot of experience to give. They could share their knowledge with the young. Helping both generations”.

“There needs to be community centres for older people to be able to exercise. They keep knocking them down to build flats or houses”



Theme 4: Public Parks or recreation spaces

Some residents told us that spending time in their local park helped to improve their wellbeing.

Maintenance of parks and walkways was essential so people could safely use them.

“Public spaces in Slough should be easier to use. The grass is so long we can't go into the parks. This affects our exercise and wellbeing”. People also told us that they feel unsafe in local parks, so they do not use them. ***“People carry needles, you see lots of children in the parks when they should be in school. I feel very unsafe”***

Children and adults told us that play equipment and outdoor gyms in parks helped them to stay fit. They would like more equipment and for it to be maintained. ***“They should put more climbing frames in the parks to help keep children fit, a lot of the swings are broken” - Child aged 9***

“I would like to see more cycle routes around the town for families and more play parks for children.”

Green spaces were seen as important for improving wellbeing ***“Would like to see more trees being planted in the local parks. More green spaces for the children would improve their wellbeing”*** Slough has less natural green spaces than other parts of East Berkshire. As part of the town centre planning proposals a new urban park and town centre community space are planned. Residents were not aware of these plans.

Theme 5: Positive feedback for hospital outpatients

Many people we spoke to told us they appreciated the invaluable job that hospital volunteers do. The patient transport buggy and it's volunteer driver at Wexham made a stressful experience more positive for people who have limited mobility

People told us that they had experienced improvements at Wexham Park, ***“I could see the transformation that has taken place at Wexham over the years. The staff at the hospital care for the patients, I am saying this from personal experience, especially cardiology”.***

“The hospital has been through such a positive transformation”

Slough residents praised the care they received from physiotherapy, maternity and the gastric department at Wexham.

“I had a few sessions of physiotherapy in the last few weeks and received wonderful care from the physio”

“Gastric department at Wexham are very good. They are always efficient”



What Slough Refugees told us: GP Access

We visited the Slough refugees group on 2 occasions to talk to people about their health and wellbeing. In Datchet, a refugee who was injured in their country of origin visited the GP. They said the GP did not want to listen and they received no treatment.

The language barrier made it hard for some people to access care ***“It is hard when you can't speak the language, that is why I am trying to learn English, GPs do not want to listen, they just give tablets”*** Although there is no legal requirement to provide translation services, the British Medical Association (BMA) advises that NHS providers have certain obligations to reduce inequalities between patients accessing services, “which may apply to language interpretation needs”.

Some refugees told us that their health issues had been managed in a way that they felt was inappropriate. One person told us about a war injury that needed regular check-ups that their GP was not providing, and another told us that they had been given medication for an injury that was not effective. In both cases the individual was not sure about what next steps were possible.

Some of the refugees had a good experience. One person was happy that the GP had organised a repeat prescription for hay fever medication. Another mentioned good care in the cardiology department.

What Slough Refugees told us: How hotel accommodation affects health

Several people told us that the food at the hotel was not healthy or plentiful. If they have to go out for an appointment, they will miss a meal and nothing else is provided.

The refugees we spoke to did not have access to money to be able to buy food for themselves so they would go hungry.

People did not have choice about what they ate, ***“Food is not good at the hotel, it’s not fresh”***

“The hotel is clean but there is not much to do, we struggle to find activities for the children that do not cost much”

Refugees told us that they enjoyed the English classes they attended and used the local parks near to their hotel to play football and keep fit.



Is Slough a safe place to live?

Residents of all ages told us that they are concerned for their safety. Drug taking and crime are preventing people from using public spaces. ***“The Council need to leave the lights on in smaller streets for safety, there is a lot of anti-social behaviour. I am an OAP so I don't go out, I'm too scared”.***

This will lead to loneliness and isolation for vulnerable people.

Some people told us that they had been victims of crime but often it was the fear of crime or smell of marijuana that was mentioned. ***“Slough is the worst place to live. In Langley Park, 5 boys in balaclavas tried to rob us. Why are the kids not in school?”***

People told us that increased police presence would make them feel safer. During our second visit Police were visible in the town centre talking to residents and discouraging anti-social behaviour.

Residents also spoke about education, ***“There are too many drinkers in the town centre, people need to be helped to change their behaviour.”***

We also heard that more activities and safe spaces for young people may help with public safety.

“Why are children and young people so angry? there is nothing for kids to do. They are unsafe on the street and have nowhere to go. There are parks where the swings have been taken away. There are no community centres for the kids, then they get into trouble.”



Other key areas of feedback

Mental Health

“There is still stigma involved in using mental health services. People think you have to be 'mad' to use Talking Therapies”

“I am concerned about children and young people. They are being prescribed anti-depressants when they need more support. They need more groups to get support and talk”.

Dentist

“I can't get to my NHS dentist; it is too far to walk- elderly person”

“I have been on the waiting list for braces for 3 years, since I was 13, I was told I would get free treatment on NHS. I waited for 3 years and have now been told that my treatment will cost £2400 even though I have been on the waiting list”.

“Not able to find a dentist. My back teeth hurt; I know I have root problems”- Refugee

“Dentist appointments take too long. I have been waiting 5-7 Months for a single appointment. I have been waiting 5 years for proper treatment for braces”

LGBTQ+

“There needs to be more support for LGBTQ plus people in Slough. It feels like the community would not be accepting and people are worried about the repercussions of opening a group. We have less support than others in Berkshire”.

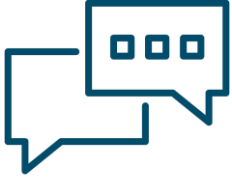
Communication and choice

“The NHS talks about choice, but they are not genuine. I took the choice not to have the covid vaccine and was hounded. A choice means that both options are acceptable, but it was clear that only one choice (to be vaccinated) was going to be supported”.

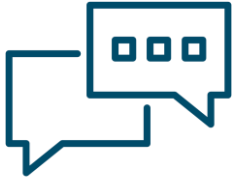
“I have a hospital appointment and I received an email and a letter that contained different information. I didn't know which one to believe so I would rather just have one type of communication, so I know what to expect.”

Healthwatch Recommendations:

GP Access:



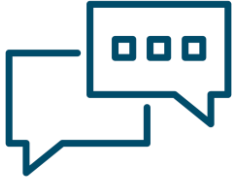
- Slough GP practices have access to cloud-based telephony systems and improved websites which should make contacting a practice easier for the patient. More needs to be done to communicate the capabilities of the new systems and monitor patient satisfaction.
- Triaging of patients to nurses or other medical professionals is possible when a GP appointment is not necessary. The government have set out the Primary Care Access recovery plan to improve access. Some initiatives are already underway, e.g. improving telephone systems so they are digital, this will enable patients to hear where they are in the queue and the option to leave a message and get a call back the same day. Other initiatives are in the pipeline e.g. being able to book more services via GP website. The government has said all patients should see their GP within 2 weeks depending on clinical need. Government press release May 2023. "If their need is urgent, they will be assessed and given appointments on the same day. If it is not urgent, appointments should be offered within 2 weeks, or patients will be referred to NHS 111 or a local pharmacy". Communicating these changes so patients understand their options is important.
- Support Refugees with GP appointments and ensure they know how the English healthcare system works. Inform them of their rights and the responsibilities of the system.
- Continue the work of the multi-generation household support team, helping to improve health outcomes in families who do not access care in the traditional way



Mental Health:

Mental Health support for adults and young people is being developed in Slough as part of the Mental Health Transformation Plan. Public and patient involvement should be central to the introduction of new services and changes to existing services.

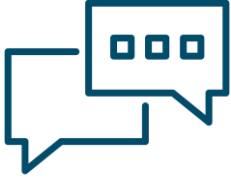
Public Parks or recreational areas:



Council to carry out an audit of parks and recreation spaces to ensure children's park equipment is safe and in use. Consider safety in parks and take any steps necessary to restore public confidence.

The Slough Central website mentions 'New green routes and connections'. Information about these plans needs to be clearly communicated with residents. People should be involved in consultation and development of plans.

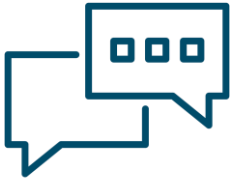
Healthwatch Recommendations:



Town Centre:

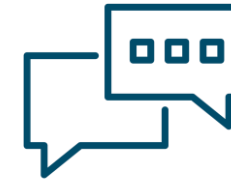
Regularly communicate plans for town centre re-generation clearly with residents. Consider the needs of those people who are not digitally enabled.

Involve local people in the planning stage and consultation for any community spaces, listening and responding to their concerns. Consider using empty shops as community spaces while work continues on planning and development of the town centre.



LGBTQ+ Community

Review the community support groups available in Slough to identify gaps in provision. Publicise existing support offered to Thames Valley residents including Support-U and national helplines.



Safety:

Share communications with residents on how to stay safe, what to do and how to report crimes. Utilize the Slough Co-production group to help generate and disseminate information within their community. Keep neighbourhood policing teams involved with community groups to enable sharing of information.

Response from Frimley ICB regarding Healthwatch recommendation

We would like to inform patients,

- of the roles within a general practice health care team, including pharmacists, mental health practitioners, paramedic practitioners, physios, and social prescribers now available in every part of the country
- how practices have continually been working hard to improve patient experience and access to their team, recently this has included adopting new digital phone systems which allow a call back, informed queuing and signposting to services if appropriate
- of the different ways to contact your practice giving patients choice: online, telephone and face to face
 - Online – Use the form found on your GP practice website. It's convenient and secure and can save time. You'll get a response within 48 hours.
 - Via the phone – Telephone lines are active during your surgery opening hours and have been improved, in line with feedback, to improve capacity, reduce waiting times and in some cases offer call back options.
 - In person – Pop into your practice to speak with the team. Let the Care Navigator know if you would like to talk privately.
- When you get in touch, you will be asked what you need help with. The information you provide will be used to help choose the most suitable doctor, nurse or other health professional in the team to help or you may be signposted to a more appropriate service.
You can always tell your practice:
 - If there's a specific doctor, nurse or other health professional who you would prefer to respond to you
 - If you would prefer to consult by phone, face-to-face, by video call, text or email
 - If you need an interpreter
 - If you have any other access or communications needs

What Healthwatch has done so far:

Primary Care – GP Access

Healthwatch Slough are currently scoping a project about GP access. This was the most commonly raised concern for residents in The Big Health Chat and our What Matters Most survey.

Positive feedback for Wexham Park

Healthwatch has passed positive feedback onto Wexham Park patient experience team and volunteers lead at Wexham Park Hospital.

Hospital communications to patients

Some residents have highlighted the mixed messages they are receiving when being notified of hospital appointments through different formats. This has been passed onto the Frimley patient experience manager for review. We will be undertaking monthly engagement sessions at Wexham and Frimley and will use this as an opportunity to ask for more information about hospital communications.

Mental Health Support:

Healthwatch are keeping in touch with mental health service providers regarding the mental health transformation plan. This will help to create a clearer, joined up mental health offer to residents, enabling it to deliver the right care, in the right place at the right time. We will continue to share public feedback about all aspects of mental health services with providers.

Continuing our engagement

Using continued feedback to evaluate any changes in services.



Next Steps:

Healthwatch Slough will share this report with Slough Health and Wellbeing Board, Slough Place Committee and Slough Borough Council

“A BIG THANK YOU “

Healthwatch Slough wishes to thank all the residents and Healthwatch Volunteers for their time and the feedback they shared with us.



All text is a group of people posing for a photo

ADVICE AND INFORMATION

We are here to help, advise, give information, and listen your experiences

Healthwatch are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need.

We also help people find the information they need about health and social care services or support in Slough.

Here to help you on the next step of your health and social care journey

We have the power to make sure that the government and those in charge of services hear people's voices. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them.



Contact Us: 0300 012 0184



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