

Croydon's COVID-19 shielders feedback helps develop support service

Press release: 23 December 2020

- Shielders said that overall service was good, but communication could have been better and some organisation more consistent.
- Friends and family had big role to play in supporting people.
- Mental health support is needed, particular for those who live alone.

Croydon COVID-19 shielders shared their experiences on first lockdown to help deliver better services for the second one, because of insight led by Healthwatch Croydon, which is published today.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Croydon Council were required to lead the delivery of shielding services for over 8,000 residents. Healthwatch Croydon, the local resident's champion for health and care services, ran a survey from August to October 2020. They wanted to find out the views of shielders including their experience of shielding, how effective the Council's actions had been in providing information about services, whether shielders needed extra services beyond those initially suggested. They also wanted to know their experience when shielding has been paused, including the use of telephone and video consultations.

The experience of those using shielding services in Croydon due to COVID-19, published today presents the following findings and recommendations. These were shared with Croydon Council in October before second lockdown which enabled services leaders to make changes to improve services for shielders based on their views.

These are our findings bases on the feedback we heard:

- **Food shopping and medication deliveries were most used:** For food and shopping, medication and information and advice shielders did get the information they needed in most cases, but this was less successful for befriending services, where a higher number did not get the information provided.

- **Friends and family met most needs:** Friends and family met most of shielders needs over a quarter relying on neighbours. They also helped counter loneliness along with access to the phone and online services.
- **Organisation was not always consistent:** While for many, the national government-led food box scheme was welcomed particularly if they cannot get supermarket slots, some received them who did not want them. Some also did not seem to receive early notifications.
- **Communication of services available could have been better:** Significant numbers were not aware of specific services but said they would have used them had they been told, suggesting a communications gap between services available and unmet need. This included 47% needing mental health support and 39% wanting befriending services, perhaps reflecting the impact of isolation and loneliness.
- **Mental health support is needed:** After food shopping and pharmacy as the one item shielders needed, the next priority service was mental health support, reflecting the impact that lockdown has had.
- **Shielders were satisfied with the Council's service:** Most shielders are happy with the service they previously received and want to see no change. Some need support in accessing health services and those whose work was affected by having to shield also need support.

These are our recommendations which are relevant to provider and commissioner:

- **Do not change the service, enhance, and focus it:** The service is much appreciated by shielders meeting their core concerns of food shopping and medication deliveries. However, there are more ways the service could be amended to meet peoples' expectations and avoid shielders getting service they do not need or that do not work for them.
- **Improve communication with shielders:** It was clear that there was significant demand for some services such as befriending, but not enough awareness of these services leading to low take-up. Some shielders also heard about services much later. Likewise, other services being offered by voluntary and community groups beyond the very local and informal street-based mutual aid were not so well used. Better communication could help with this. For many, family and friends have been the key support network, so find ways to work in partnership with them to ensure all shielders needs are met and this could be reflected in the communications.

including those classed as shielding. It is therefore reassuring that Healthwatch has found that those shielding were generally satisfied with the service provided by the council.

“As the pandemic continued we and our partners have improved our joint response, from offering a more tailored service to local people to improving access to information both on the council’s website and for those not on the internet. With Covid-19 restrictions in place for the foreseeable future, we will continue to work with Healthwatch and our partners in the community to get help to those in need.”

Editor’s notes

Healthwatch Croydon is here to improve the experience that Croydon people have when they need to use health and social care services. We believe that the best way to do this is by listening to patients and service users.

There is a local Healthwatch in every local authority area in England.

Our role is to make sure that that local health and social care services, and the local decision makers, put the experiences of people at the heart of their care.

We are a statutory body - this means that we have a legal status to exist within the Health and Social Care Act 2012. This means decision-makers should listen to us when we give them feedback and make suggestions.

For more information, please contact: Jeet Sandhu, Communications Lead,
jeet.sandhu@healthwatchcroydon.co.uk