

BERKSHIRE WEST HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY (HWBS)

2021- 2030



Public Engagement Report

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Executive Summary

In 2019, the Chairs of the Health and Wellbeing Boards for Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham partnered to produce a Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Berkshire West. It was decided that public consultation and engagement would be a critical element to develop the final priorities for the strategy. The public engagement was co-produced and delivered through a Consultation & Engagement Task and Finish group. The engagement took place between 4th December 2020 and 28th February 2021 and was a key part of determining local priorities for the 2021-2030 period.

The public engagement consisted of focus group discussions and an online public survey. Through these, we asked members of the public about the importance of 11 potential priorities for helping themselves and their community live happier and healthier lives. These 11 potential priorities had been refined from a list of approximately 30, during an earlier stage of the Strategy development. Six main themes were identified from the responses to the free-text questions in online surveys, and discussions during focus group meetings. These themes were 1) Health inequalities, 2) Information and guidance, 3) Service integration and appropriateness, 4) Targeted support, 5) Social and physical environment, and 6) Covid-19. Public feedback was largely supportive of the proposed priorities and five top priorities were identified. In no particular order, the top five priorities were found to be: 1) Reduce the difference in health between different groups of people; 2) Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes; 3) Help children and families during the early years of life; 4) Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people; 5) Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults.

1. Background

In 2019, the Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs) for Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham took the decision to develop a shared Health and Wellbeing Strategy along with the Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), in order to improve population and community health. From the very beginning, it was agreed that public consultation and engagement would be key to developing the final priorities for the strategy. Therefore, the aim of this public engagement was to actively listen to people's views and to work in partnership with the public to discuss and find consensus on the final priorities for the Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The strategy itself will guide the next ten years of work across the three local authority areas, to create a robust programme of community health and wellbeing priorities and to support the process of recovery from Covid-19.

The vision for Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham over the next ten years, is to promote longer, healthier and enriching lives for all. The mission statements under this vision are as follows:

1. All our children and young people have the best possible start in life and the opportunity to thrive, no matter what their circumstance.
2. Children and adults most at risk from bad health outcomes are safe and safeguarded.
3. Everyone of working age has access to decent employment opportunities.
4. All people have the best opportunities for good mental health and wellbeing – to realise their potential and connect with the community.
5. Our communities are strong, resilient, thriving and inclusive, with all residents benefitting from a healthy, accessible environment.
6. All people will be able to gain access to integrated health and social care services.

2. Overview and Methodology

How we consulted

A Public Consultation & Engagement Task and Finish Group was established to co-produce and deliver a robust engagement process through a public survey and focus group discussions. The membership of the group spanned across the three local authority areas and included representatives from the public health teams for each council, Healthwatch Reading, Healthwatch West Berkshire, Healthwatch Wokingham, Reading Voluntary Action, West Berkshire Volunteer Centre, Involve Wokingham, Community United West Berkshire, ACRE, Berkshire West CCG and Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. By partnership working with these organisations, it was intended to ensure that diverse ethnic communities and those traditionally marginalised in these types of engagement were represented. The public engagement ran from 4th December 2020 to 28th February 2021.

The engagement was intended to be far-reaching and comprehensive, hearing from as many residents as we could. It included a public-facing web page (on the Berkshire West CCG website) with information on the Strategy and a link to the survey, a generic inbox inviting comments, an online public survey, engagement with Town and Parish Councils and focus groups with targeted communities. An Engagement Toolkit was produced to support the public engagement, including a background narrative to each priority (both a facilitator and a public-facing version) and a feedback template. This was to ensure consistent and robust discussions throughout. This toolkit was used at the focus groups and was also offered to other organisations, to use if they wish, to facilitate discussions amongst their members.

The survey was distributed through a number of different mechanisms. First, an extensive stakeholder list was mapped out by members of the Task and Finish group, each of whom were sent the survey link and asked to share with their contacts. Every Town and Parish Council across Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham was contacted and invited to engage with the strategy development through the survey and also to share it with their residents. The survey was regularly promoted on social media, including sponsored posts on purposely created “A Happier and Healthier Berkshire” Facebook and Twitter pages. The three local authority communications teams also promoted the survey through their respective Facebook and Twitter pages and also through regular resident e-newsletters.



Focus groups formed another key part of the public engagement. These were planned by the Task and Finish group and facilitated by members including the three Healthwatch organisations. They were intended to ensure engagement with groups who were less likely to participate through different routes or those whose voice was often not heard in public engagement. This included specific focus groups for individuals with learning disabilities, unpaid carers (including young carers), older people, and diverse ethnic communities. In addition, there were three virtual public meetings held which were open to everyone to attend. A number of other organisations chose to hold focus groups with their members and were able to use the Toolkit to do so. In total, 18 focus groups were conducted (Table 1).

Table 1: List of focus groups, by organisations facilitating and number of attendees

Organisation facilitating	Focus	Number of attendees
West Berkshire Council – Young carers	Young carers	9
Strategy group	Older people	20
Strategy group (Reading)	Older people	29
Patient Voice	General public	17
Together UK	Parent, students, ethnic diverse communities, older people	5
Strategy group	General public (3 meetings)	15
Talkback	Learning disability	25
Healthwatch West Berkshire	Maternity/parents (2 groups)	30
Healthwatch West Berkshire	Older people	17
Strategy group	Adults from Ethnic diverse communities	18
Healthwatch Wokingham	Learning disability	15
Healthwatch Wokingham	Carers	9
Healthwatch Reading	Ethnically diverse communities	9
Healthwatch Reading	Young people	10
Patient voice	Patients	16

What we consulted on

During the public engagement, residents were asked to discuss and comment on 11 potential priorities for improving health and wellbeing in their communities. These 11 potential priorities had already been determined through a process of reviewing data on population need and through discussions with stakeholders and organisations. The potential priorities were as follows:

- Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people
- Support vulnerable people to live healthy lives
- Help families and young children in early years
- Reduce the harm caused by addiction to substances (smoking, alcohol or drugs)
- Good health and wellbeing at work
- Physically active communities
- Help households with significant health needs
- Extra support for anyone who has been affected by mental or physical trauma in childhood
- Build strong, resilient and socially connected communities
- Good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people
- Good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

As part of the online survey, respondents were asked ‘*how important do you think each of the potential priorities are to helping you and your community to live happier and healthier lives?*’

At the end of each focus group, attendees were asked to rank the 11 priorities together in order of importance to the group.

Methodology for the qualitative data analysis

Qualitative data from the focus group and free-text within the survey were analysed using thematic analysis. This flexible and accessible method consists of the following six iterative phases:

Table 2: Description of the six phases of thematic analysis

Phases	Process
Familiarising oneself with the data	Reading and re-reading the data while noting initial ideas.
Generating initial codes	Systematically assigning codes (i.e. a word or a short phrase that capture the essence of a data segment) to interesting features across the entire dataset.
Searching for themes	Collating codes and their relevant data to form potential themes.
Reviewing themes	Checking that the themes work in relation to (i) the coded extracts and (ii) the whole dataset. Generate a “thematic map” of how the themes and codes relate to one another.
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the themes and the overall story. Generate clear names and definitions for each theme.
Producing the report	Selecting vivid, compelling extract or quotes for examples; relating the analysis back to the research question and wider literature in writing up the report.

3. Results

3.1 The online survey

Demographics of respondents

A total of 3967 responses were received via the online public consultation survey. Demographic data of the respondents was also collected as part of the survey, and the following results were obtained. However as seen in the below table, many of our respondents (over 50%) chose to not answer the questions specifying their demographic details. Therefore, this may not be truly representative of the demographic profiles of those who answered the survey.

What is your gender?

Answer Choices	Responses	West Berkshire	Wokingham	Reading
Male	12.63%	49.60%	49.50%	50.10%
Female	32.22%	50.40%	50.50%	49.90%
Transgender	0.00%	Only sex data available (not gender)		
Non-binary	0.18%			
No Answer	54.98%			

How old are you?

Answer Choices	Responses	West Berkshire	Wokingham	Reading
Under 18	0.83%	28.80%	30.20%	34.30%
18-24	0.66%			
25-34	4.39%	10.50%	10.50%	16.20%
35-44	7.44%	12.60%	14.40%	14.90%
45-54	9.18%	15.40%	15.10%	12.60%
55-64	9.83%	13.30%	12.30%	9.70%
65-74	9.25%	10.80%	9.30%	6.60%
75 and over	3.58%	8.60%	8.40%	5.90%
No Answer	54.85%			

What is your ethnic group?

Answer Choices	Responses	West Berkshire	Wokingham	Reading
Asian or Asian British	1.92%	2.50%	7.40%	13.60%
Black or Black British	0.71%	0.90%	1.40%	6.70%
White or White British	40.21%	94.70%	88.20%	74.70%
Mixed or multiple ethnic group	0.91%	1.60%	2.10%	4.00%
Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller	0.03%	0.10%	0.20%	0.10%
Other ethnic group – please specify	1.16%	0.20%	0.70%	1.00%
No Answer	55.08%			

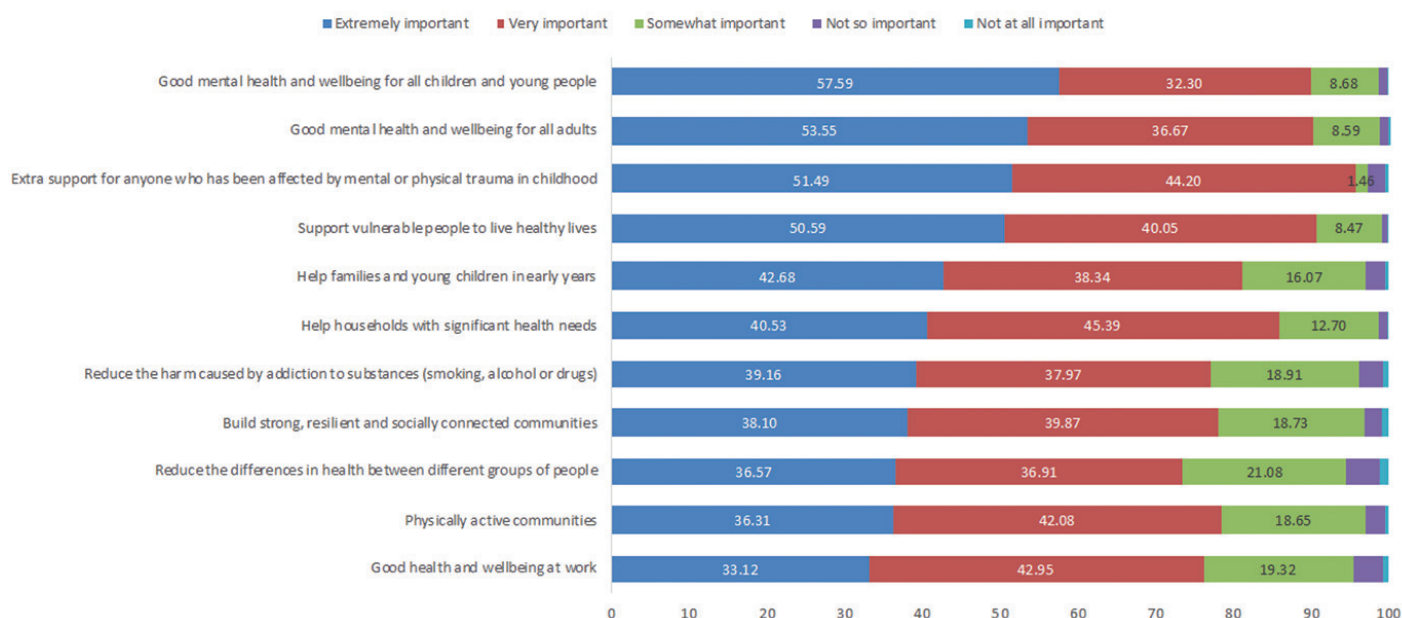
Of the 1786 people who specified, the majority of respondents were female (71.56%), followed by male (28.05%), and non-binary (0.39%). The most common age range specified was 55-64 (21.78%), closely followed by 65-74 (20.49%) and 45-54 (20.32%). A small minority of respondents were 24 or below (3.29%). Most of the respondents who specified (1782) identified as White or White British (89.51%), with Asian/Asian British the next most selected ethnic identity category (4.26%). Black/Black British (1.57%), mixed/multiple ethnic group (2.02%), gypsy/traveller (0.06%), and other ethnic groups (2.58%) were relatively under-represented.

Local Authority	Count of Which local authority area do you live in?
Wokingham	1566 (39.5%)
West Berkshire	1201 (30.3%)
Reading	1200 (30.3%)
Grand Total	3967

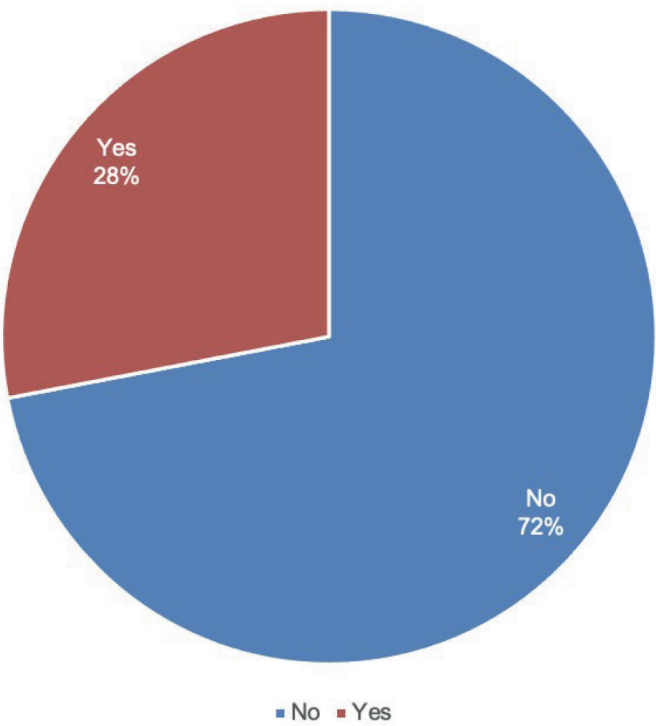
Regionally, most respondents were from Wokingham (39.5%), jointly followed by Reading (30.3%), and West Berkshire (30.3%). The majority of respondents provided feedback as individual respondents, with a small proportion responding on behalf of an organisation (158 responses).

Responses to individual questions

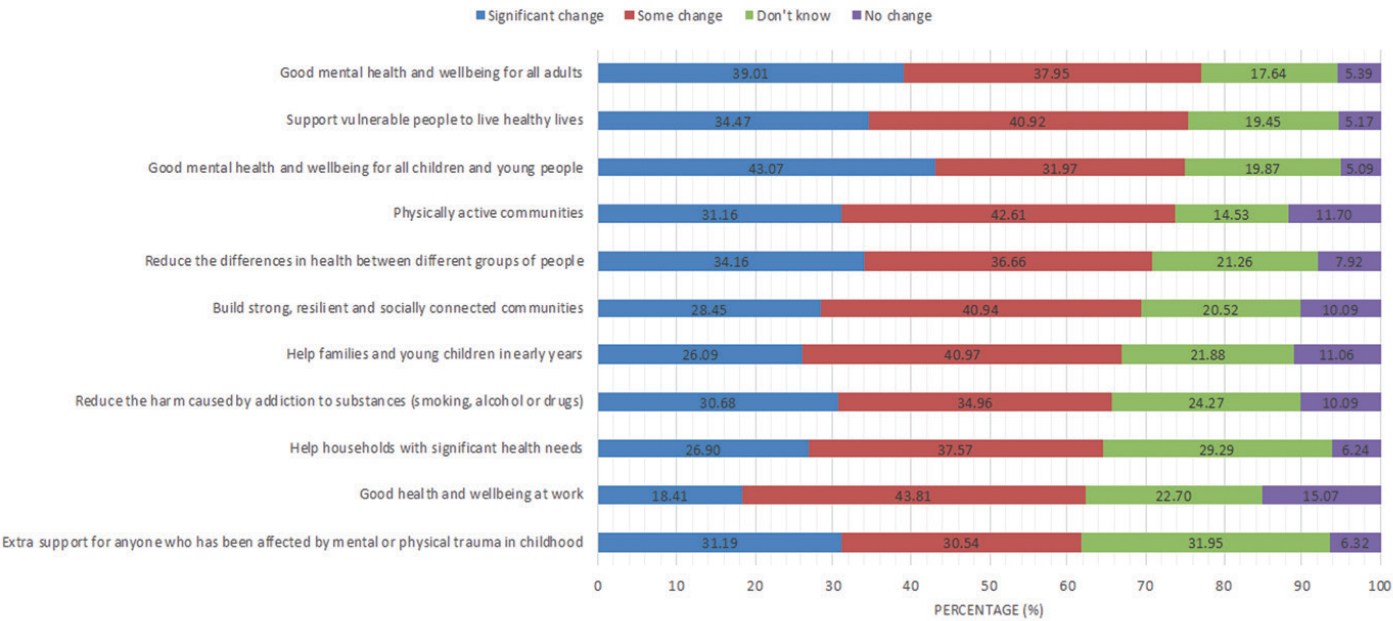
Q2. In order of importance, one being the most important, how would you rank the potential priorities?



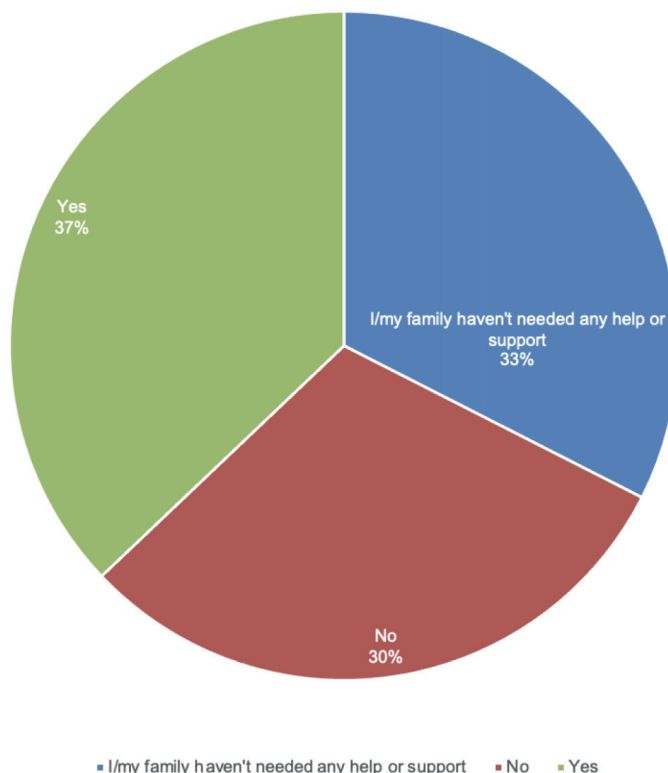
Q3. Are there any other priorities you think we should consider including in the draft Strategy that we haven't mentioned in previous questions?



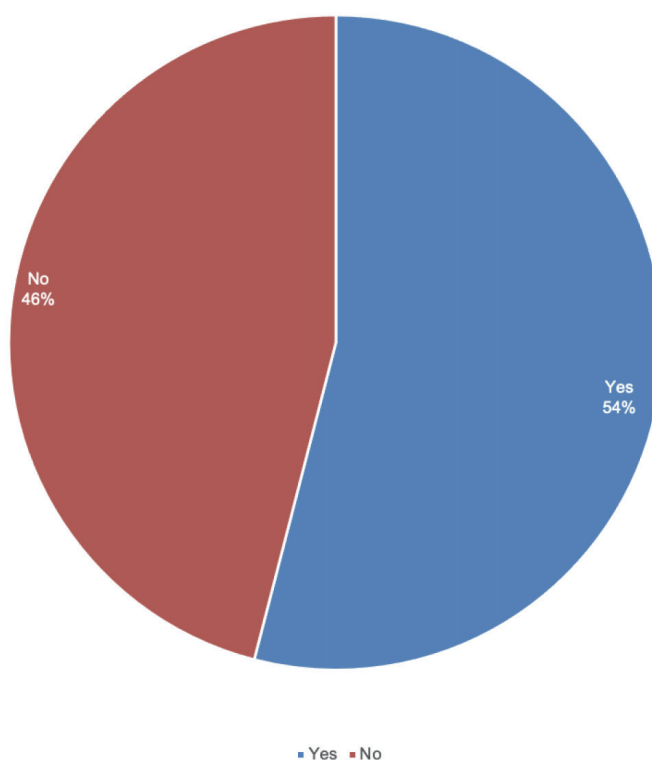
Q4. How much change do you think is required for each priority?



Q7. Are you, your family, or other people you care for able to get all the help or support you/they need for any health and wellbeing problems?



Q8. Has the help or support been sought during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Responses to the free-text questions

We also asked three open-ended questions to follow up on survey questions 3, 4, and 7:

Are there any other priorities you think we should consider including in the draft strategy that we haven't mentioned in previous questions? *Please tell us what priorities you like to see included and why.*

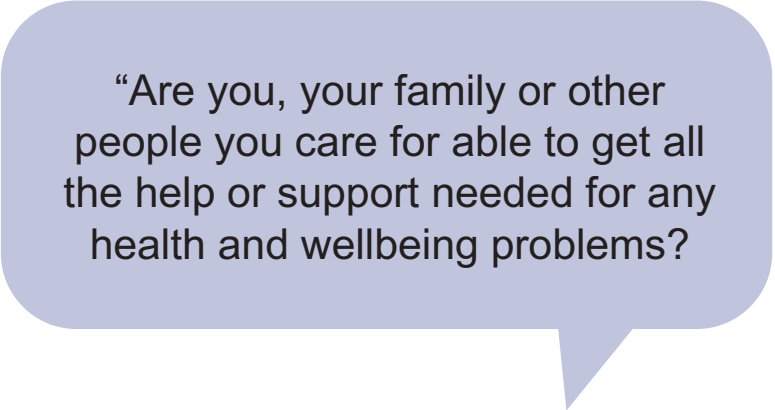
How much change do you think is required for each priority ("no change", "some change", "significant change", "don't know"). *Please tell us the reasons for your response, including details of any changes you think are needed.*

Are you, your family or other people you care for able to get all the help or support you/they need for any health and wellbeing problems? *If no, please tell us about the issues you/ your family have encountered.*

Free-text responses from the first two open-ended questions were analysed and explored in the "Developing the Final Priorities" section. In this section, we will focus on the third question which concerns access to health and social care support. We will first introduce a guiding framework based on a person-centred approach before presenting our findings by themes.

Guiding framework to achieve person-centred health and social services

To achieve a person-centred approach to health and social care access in Berkshire West, we sought to understand the issues people face with getting help and support needed for health and wellbeing problems (Figure 1).



"Are you, your family or other people you care for able to get all the help or support needed for any health and wellbeing problems?"

Figure 1: Survey question about issues in accessing help and support for health and wellbeing problems.

Using the framework in Figure 2, we define person-centred access to health and social care as the opportunity to have needs for health and social services or support fulfilled. This involves a series of identifying needs, seeking help, reaching and using the services, shown in the arrow.

From the Service Provider's Perspective (Top Panel)
Accessible health and social care has to be: approachable, acceptable, available, affordable and appropriate
From the Service User's Perspective (Bottom Panel)
Accessible health and social care systems have to empower services users to increase their: ability to perceive health needs, ability to seek help, ability to reach for help, ability to pay and the ability to engage meaningfully with services

The red boxes represent the six themes from our analysis of the responses to this survey question, and where they sit within this framework. These are:

- i. Health Inequalities
- ii. Information and Guidance
- iii. Targeted Support
- iv. Service Integration
- v. Social and Physical Environment
- vi. Covid-19

The boxes above and below the arrow represent some of the specific issues raised by respondents in more detail.

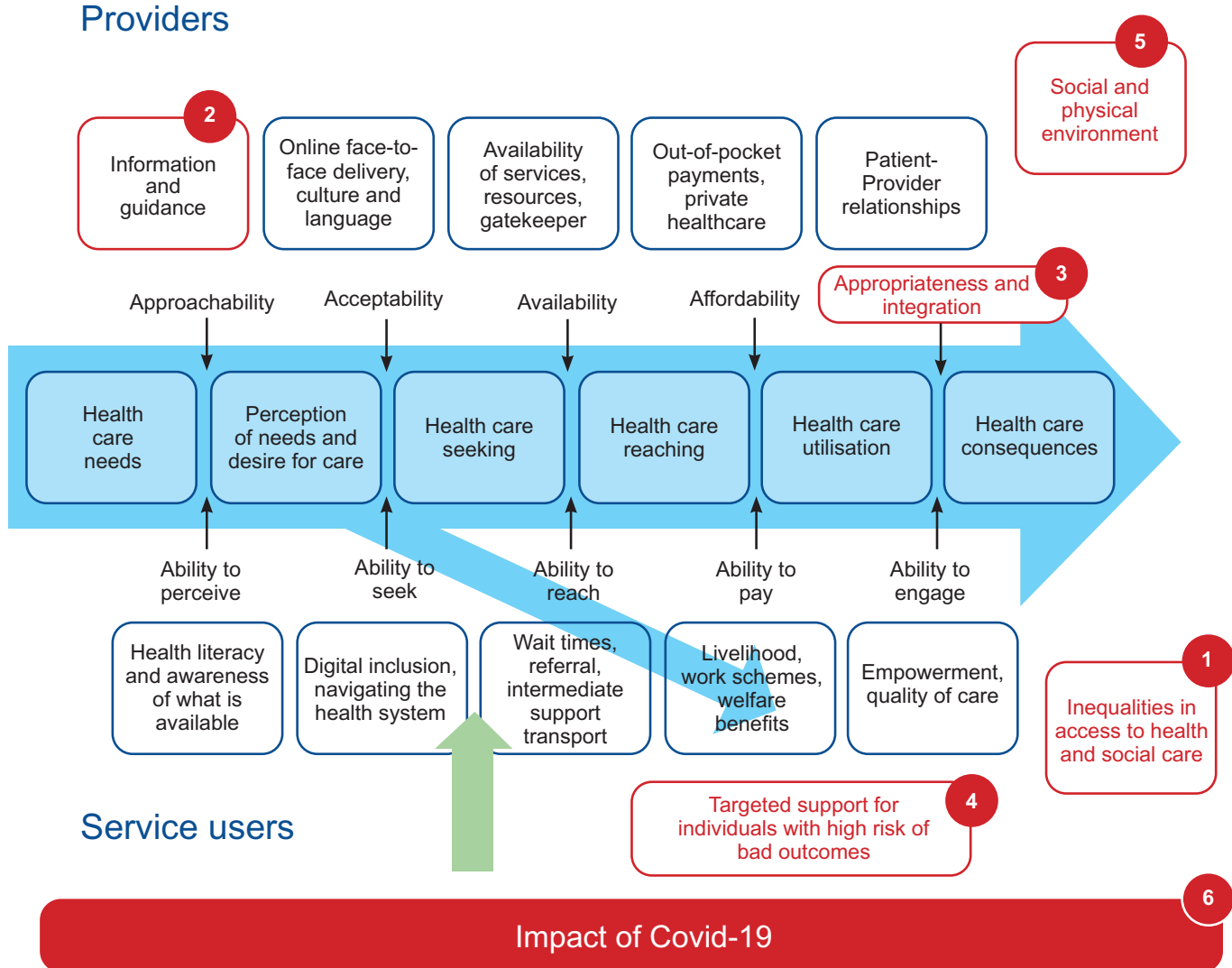


Figure 2: Conceptualisation of the challenges to person-centred access to health and social care services in Berkshire West, as adapted by Chuah et al., 2018 from Levesque et al.'s framework. The red boxes indicate six themes from our public engagement survey and focus group findings.

Theme 1: Health Inequalities

There are apparent inequalities in healthcare access along the lines of (a) public versus private healthcare, (b) physical versus mental health services, and specifically (c) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

(a) Public versus private healthcare

The main challenge begins with accessing primary health care (GPs) due to long waits for telephone and face-to-face appointments. Respondents also indicated the difficulty and the need to see a doctor in person because not everything can be diagnosed over the phone. When they do get hold of their GP, some feel unable to talk to their GPs to properly explain their health condition because of how busy the practice is. To get help, several respondents mentioned the need to be “persistent”, “assertive” and to “chase after help”, which has caused undue worry and stress.

“Access to primary care has been challenging with very long waits for a telephone appointment and lack of response to emails despite this being the way the practice requests patients contact them.”

“Don’t feel I can talk to GP as they are so busy. Don’t know who else to turn to.”

Since GPs are often the first point-of-contact between service users and the healthcare system, not getting timely access to primary care will have cascading effects on delaying secondary and tertiary referrals as well. As a result, some resort to sorting out issues themselves or opt for private healthcare if they can afford it. However, not everyone is able to afford private healthcare.

“We basically get on with life and address the issues ourselves.”

“Only by paying privately for treatment. This feels like “queue jumping” to us.”

(b) Mental health versus physical health

There were some grievances over the lack of recognition of mental health issues to be treated equally as physical health issues. This is partly manifested in a very under-resourced mental health service provision.

“When somebody is drowning / bleeding to death it is easy to see there is a problem. But with mental health you might not feel [or] acknowledge the problem and without the social interaction, there is no one to say: ‘you look like you are drowning, do you need a life jacket?’”

“Mental wellbeing problems are not perceived as serious enough for there to be support, or for there to be understanding in the community. Community members perceive their own exaggerated risks to physical health to be of greater importance than “invisible” mental health risks and issues.”

Respondents noted the difficulty in obtaining therapy and counselling, which could escalate to a crisis point before being seen. Furthermore, some expressed that the current, limited provision of counselling sessions are not enough.

“Mental health counselling is limited on the NHS. I don’t understand why.... If you had a heart defect, you have treatment until it was fixed, why is this not the same for mental health?”

(c) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

This was particularly so for Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS), where being under-resourced had led to waiting times for as long as 18 months to get assessments.

“My role as Social Prescriber means I can research and connect with many available resources e.g. carers hub for my mum (although she declines). I was disappointed there wasn’t an apt equivalent for children to help manage my son’s anxiety as CAMHS said it was only for significant difficulties and I have patients waiting over 18 months for support even when in severe distress. Funding really needs to go to this area - healthy children have a better chance of better mental health as adults but currently I don’t feel there is enough support there. As a GP practice we are planning to develop support for teens to help address this gap for our patients.”

In the meantime, parents and carers expressed their frustration that their children were not reaching their full potential. Still others were concerned about the high threshold to be eligible for support.

“CAMHS told my daughter she wasn’t bad enough to get help, even when she was self-harming.”

For those who were able to access CAMHS after the long wait, some respondents expressed that help was inadequate, ineffective or inappropriate, such as reliance on medication. This is partly dependent on which therapies are being commissioned.

“My grandson needed help with his mental well-being due to bullying at school but was only offered telephone counselling which was of no use to him...”

Theme 2: Information and Guidance

Several respondents noted what they found helpful in signposting, provision of information and guidance, including postal community bulletins, contacting specific charities for advice and having a Mental Health Nurse or Health Visitor as a point-of-contact.

With reference to Figure 2, improvements could be made on the approachability of health and social care services. Some respondents shared that admitting that they need help and seeking help may not come naturally to them. There is also the issue of stigma surrounding mental health challenges, which seems to be more acutely present among men.

“Huge stigma surround health and well-being issues which make them hard to talk to”

“Honestly, like a lot of guys, I didn’t really talk about my depression or seek help”

At times, a lack of sympathy among service providers have also discouraged users to seek help again.

“Too much stigma around the subject and a less than sympathetic doctor on previous visits had left him unable to lay himself on the line again, he would rather suffer in silence”

“Attempts to get help would be seen as interference and could provoke a very hostile reaction”

Respondents have also brought up the need for clearer information on what is on offer and how to navigate the health and social care system to get the support they need, as some have missed out on support options that they could have benefitted from.

“...maybe here there are lots of support groups around, but you need to spend a fair amount of time to dig the info out”

“I can get help and support because I know how to navigate and challenge the systems in place. Most people do not”

“We have a disabled son and I have become aware that other children at the same school have been offered many support options that we were not even aware existed until recently”

Theme 3: Service Integration and Appropriateness

A person-centred care takes a holistic approach to care that sees the whole person instead of a narrow focus on specific illnesses or symptoms. It includes the need for care to be based on the person's unique needs and understood in the context of their social worlds. It means providing coherent care, treating the person with dignity, compassion and respect while encouraging greater autonomy in their own care.

(a) Integrated Services

Operationally, this involves moving towards more integrated services that consider an individual's diverse health and social care needs in a seamless way. This means ensuring coordinated care and continuity of care across providers or between primary, secondary and tertiary and community-based services, or between CAMHS to adult mental health services. Based on survey responses, the services between mental health and other sectors remain siloed, care is generally fragmented, and needs are sometimes treated episodically.

"GPs only see you for one problem at a time which is a problem for people with multiple health conditions. Also it's hard to get appointments and never see the same doctor which is a problem as they don't know your medical history and don't have the time to fill them in. I had a doctor tell me to take something that would have been harmful because of my arrhythmia if I had taken it."

Experiencing fragmented care has the potential to cause challenges, especially for people with complex needs and comorbidities.

"My mother has a range of unmet needs and is very depressed. She needs input from a range of people, e.g. a counsellor experienced with dementia, physio, chiropodist and simply someone else to talk to. Social services are aware and have arranged care, but this is not enough to provide for the range of needs and anyone seen as a "carer" is rejected by her, as she associates it with loss of independence."

Respondents also noted the need for follow-up after surgery and a longer-term approach to support people with mental health issues.

"I personally suffer with mental health issues and have been referred to Newbury hospital previously only to be told there was no long-term support for me. So, I would have to pay to see a counsellor on a regular basis myself. Mental health conditions are normally not short term, so we need a much better long-term approach to support people that doesn't cost them. No one chooses to have issues."

(b) Appropriate care

A second operational definition may include service users feeling listened to and enabled to make informed decisions to choose the type of care that is appropriate for themselves. While there are many excellent and compassionate GPs, health and social care providers, a sample

of the respondents noted experiences where some GPs “do not listen to the patient”, “lacked understanding”, “showed disinterest”, scepticism or hostility. This had dissuaded some patients from asking for further help. Other respondents understood that this could be due to very busy GP services, which is not their fault.

Several respondents mentioned that they were not provided with sufficient information about their health condition.

“I have not been given any information about the condition [hypothyroidism] by the GP. I found everything out myself through the Thyroid UK website. The GP didn’t even tell me about that.”

“...she was diagnosed with pneumonia, but communication was lacking so my father-in-law had no idea what was wrong. No care package in place...”

Respondents also raised the issue of appropriate treatment plans being dependent on the local offer, which may not be aligned with the patients’ preferences or needs.

“I have tried to get help but all the doctors want to do is increase my medication and I don’t want to be a walking zombie, so although the help is there it is not the help I need.”

“[GP services] are constrained to whatever the local offer is that might not be the right treatment plan for some people... e.g. always referring for CBT when this has already been done.”

“not everyone responds well to [talking therapies]. The service should be dependent on the patient, and not the other way around.”

Theme 4: Targeted Support

The respondents also highlighted several groups who are at risk of falling between the cracks when it comes to getting the health and social care they need. These include childcare support for parents with young children, people with autism spectrum disorder and other learning disabilities, and caregiving support for elderly parents and people living with dementia.

“There is very little support for new parents....The help I need for the kids I have to really fight for and there is little to no free help.”

“Dementia support for my in-laws is based at West Berkshire hospital, but they have no transport. Fortunately, we were able to do a Dementia course online during Covid.”

It is important to note that carers themselves, who may be paid or unpaid, are also expressing their need for more support through increased social contact and appropriate advice.

“I as a carer would like a phone call or some form of contact every week. I would like people who work for dementia organisation to all live with someone with dementia for two weeks at least before they give advice to carers.”

There were several mentions of insufficient attention and support being given to people with type 2 diabetes. Finally, respondents have also flagged the need to provide targeted support for adults in vulnerable circumstances, such as people experiencing long term unemployment or have work restrictions due to chronic illness and disability.

“Still waiting since June for government and pension to grant my wife disability payment as unable to walk. Meanwhile, am having to support her as she only has child tax credits to live on”

There were also concerns about eligibility criteria for support.

“...there seems to be too many criteria for qualifying for support. Also, assessments for qualifying appear to try to exclude rather than include.”

Theme 5: Social and Physical Environment

(a) Social Environment

There is a recognition that we need a vibrant creative community to be part of for mental health wellness. We also need to continue addressing stigma surrounding health and wellbeing issues which makes people afraid to talk about them.

In terms of social support, respondents have shown appreciation to friends, family and neighbourhood whom they can rely on. Nonetheless, not everyone is being supported equally.

“I have been prescribed antidepressants over the phone but sometimes feel that if anything happened to me, no one would know as no one checks in... my kids only have me to rely on and I’m struggling to rely on myself.”

(b) Physical Environment

Several respondents drew a link between leisure facilities (e.g. swimming, youth clubs) and mental wellbeing. Other feedback concerned the built environment, such as the lack of accessible facility for those with mobility issues or with young children, as well as the request for safer, wider paths and slower traffic.

“... we literally can’t open the car doors enough to get the infant carriers out in normal spaces”

Theme 6: Covid-19

In many cases, respondents noted the cross-cutting impact of Covid-19 in exacerbating existing issues related to access to health and social care services. While there have been understandable delays, respondents have provided some insights into their experiences and perspectives on the displaced NHS services to prioritise patients with Covid-19, the transition to digital versions of care, the loss of existing social support structures, and the impact of closure in schools and leisure facilities.

(a) Usual services being put on hold

Due to the pressure of Covid-19 on the health and social care system, many usual services had to be put on hold or delayed to prioritise the management of the pandemic. These included outpatient services, preventive measures (e.g. routine screening), treatment for chronic conditions (e.g. cancer, dementia), and rehabilitation (e.g. physiotherapy). There were recognitions that the wider health system was already under-resourced, even before the pandemic. Although respondents raised concerns about not being able to see a doctor when needed, others have also expressed sympathy to NHS staff due to the pressure to cope with the increased demand in services.

“It’s all about either having the virus or not. The rest of health seems to be ignored.”

“...cancellation of ongoing investigations due to covid, my husband had a delay of cancer follow-up due to covid... cancellation of the bowel screening programme, further delay of ASD assessment (now been waiting 3 1/2 years).”

“Suspect that access to tests and diagnosis isn’t as timely as it should be, possibly partly because of the current pandemic but also because of restricted funding for health over a number of years.”

As a result of prioritising Covid-19-related services, some respondents have delayed help-seeking to shield themselves or to avoid adding extra strain on the NHS. Others responded with resignation.

“Didn’t want to add more to an already overloaded NHS”

“I would have seen the Doctor, face to face to discuss my condition - arthritis - but I know it is probably going to be a ‘live with it’ situation.”

Those who have managed to access help for issues not related to Covid-19 have only been able to seek help for major health issues, sometimes only at the point of crisis, but not for minor ailments. Some anticipated that this delay in addressing minor or early-stage health issues may lead to more serious complications later on. Some respondents also stated that they were unable to access particular operations or medications during the pandemic.

“Major issues have been addressed, but minor ones such as dental check-ups and appointment to see podiatrist have been postponed indefinitely.”

“My uncle has had a scan for acoustic neuroma growth cancelled twice now due to Covid 19 and whilst not cancerous it can affect his hearing and facial palsy if it has grown. The quicker removed the better.”

“One essential operation refused by NHS, so I had to use all my savings to go private. Further surgery needed on separate matter, delayed due to Covid.”

(b) Digitisation of health and wellbeing services does not cater for all

During the pandemic, GP services continued for patients, although an initial telephone triage system was introduced for most GP practices. Some respondents have stated their preference for face-to-face GP consultation, and for it to be restored as soon as possible. This is because those responding felt it was not as easy to discuss and provide a full picture of their health conditions over the phone and some were not comfortable with telephone communications.

“This [telephone GP service] is not the same as a 10-minute consultation with a GP and I hope this is not the way of the future.”

“I don’t do phones. At all....Getting things to a point where I can get an appointment or online help is massively stressful - y’know...”

“I’m not managing the internet ‘help’.”

(c) Targeted support during Covid-19 for the elderly or people who are clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV)

Respondents have shared their concerns about the isolation of the elderly due to shielding and elderly voluntary care services being stopped. Some had noted an impact on loneliness and mental health, especially for those living alone.

“...many have been shielding to protect themselves and their mental health has suffered greatly”

A respondent who is clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) and also a single parent shared their concerns with employment and the risk of school-going children passing on the virus to them.

“Employment concerns due to being a single parent with CEV and having to change to a zero hours when furlough was due to end at the end of October. Central government has provided no extra support/advice to those who are CEV with school age pupils. This is of particular concern to us if our children pass the virus on. Schools are to be applauded for the work they are doing in very difficult circumstances. However, the year group bubbles do not protect those year group pupils from each other. This is a real worry for any parent/carer with CEV...”

(d) Changes in the social and physical environment during the pandemic

Some respondents felt that the social distancing measures and periodic lockdowns have eroded their support network and brought distress. For those who live and care for their family members, some have expressed a growing need for respite.

“Lack of easy access to support. Lockdown is making it harder to use existing coping mechanisms”

“All three children are distressed by the repeated lockdowns and school closures”

Respondents also voiced that reduced access to leisure and exercise facilities have affected their mental or physical health, including the management of chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes.

“The Berkshire MS Therapy Centre is closed all of the time due to the Covid lockdowns etc. I know they do classes online, but I am not getting enough exercise and my physical health is suffering”

3.2 Focus group findings

In addition to the online survey findings, below are selected quotes from focus groups for the themes identified.

Theme 1: Health Inequalities

(a) Waiting time

Waiting time for primary health care services, mental health services and maternity check-ups was considered too long and often caused diseases or concerns to exacerbate further.

“Seeing the GP is an issue unless it is an emergency and that was before Covid”

“I still haven’t had the 6-weeks check and the baby was born in August”

“Mental health support for teens is very poor, with huge waiting lists for CAMHS”

“Despite multiple overdoses and suicide attempts, my daughter faced a 2-year waiting list to access adult mental health services when she became too old to access CAMHS”

(b) Eligibility

Some respondents expressed difficulties in accessing NHS services that were deemed essential to their conditions

“My flu jab I ended up having to get it privately.... and I had to explain how anxious I was, and I was getting upset about being told I was ineligible”

“Thresholds for support are too high for children who are impacted by trauma to be supported effectively”

(c) Differences in service provision and delivery depending on areas and population

Some participants noted that they see differences in service provision and delivery depending on people’s income levels, place of residence or schools they go to and how skilful they are in certain areas (e.g. digital literacy).

“Society seems to operate in tiers and that’s wrong”

“Accessibility needs to be improved to increase awareness of services amongst different groups and encourage contact”

“I think teachers do a good job in school; I know from experience that I have always been able to send an email saying I’m not feeling too good today, though I know from different schools that they do not have the same relationships”

“The food parcels for those advised to shield during the first lockdown were really unhealthy – white bread, tinned tomatoes and very little fresh food. Although advised to shield, I could afford to get other food, so I gave away those boxes, but charities need healthy food to give to those in need”

“Making sure services have non-digital offerings to meet the needs of those without equipment or digital literacy”

Theme 2: Information and Guidance

(a) Clear information that is easy to understand and follow

Many participants pointed out that there needs to be better information that guide people to the right services and to help people take care of their own health.

“Lack of knowledge within community groups and services about what support is available for different groups within the community”

“Could local councils be used to distribute health and wellbeing information more effectively?”

“Look after yourself where you can but also need to have awareness and knowledge of how to get help when needed. All of those things together help me collectively to stay healthy or become healthy”

“You can go to the gym but then there is no one to help you to check if you are doing it right”

Clear, understandable signposting and guidance is especially important in times of health emergencies.

“Interpretation on helplines is really important”

“There needs to be a redefinition of ‘crisis’, that’s coming from the person that needs help”

“I think the government should make it clear on what message they are putting out to the public. In terms of Covid-19, like exams and other things, because some people don’t understand if they should be staying at home or going to work, if there are exams or not”

One person also noted that language barriers should be considered when delivering information across the borough.

“Language seems to be a major information barrier; how can you get information across if you have not got the language to communicate with”

(b) Training for healthcare and social care professionals

Participants highlighted the need to train healthcare and social care professionals about how to approach patients and service users with disability or additional needs and the importance of their constant efforts to increase awareness in the field.

“I was once told by someone who works in the homeless sector that I don’t look autistic”

“Why isn’t the disabled blue badge recognised as the disabled parking card?”

“Education/support needed so that cycles of trauma are not continued through generations”

On the topic of addiction, participants also touched on the issue of stigma and gave insight into when people might be prone to adopt or engage in addictive behaviours.

“resource would be better spent on reducing the stigma around addiction and making it easier to ask for help, which would mean people could access support more easily, therefore reducing the harm caused”

“The gap / transition between formal education and first job is such a dangerous time for addictive behaviours”

For mental health, participants shared that de-stigmatisation, awareness-raising and training efforts need to continue. It was also noted that it is important that mental health support does not tail off after people leave school. Alternative support that is effective needs to be in place.

“Mental health --there’s still a big stigma and increasing awareness will help”

“Not everyone gets on with Zoom etc. Phone networks and WhatsApp groups have been another useful way to offer alternative support.”

“In terms of secondary school, it (mental health support) starts to drift off, little bit less talked about. You have school nurses, they were less frequent which people didn’t really use. Especially now, college years it’s a lot less support...you have to find support yourself”

“We’re seeing more frontline staff take part in Mental Health First Aid training, but we need senior managers taking part too”

(c) Transparency in governance and resource allocation

Focus groups which contained healthcare professionals as participants, raised concerns on how the allocation of funding will be done for next few years to achieve priorities listed out in the strategy. They also wanted a clearer guidance on who will be part of which team, and how “working together” will be achieved.

“Need to be clear who we see as partners in a Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This should be obviously more than a workplan for a Public Health Team or any other individual team”

“We don’t know which levers are free. Health spending is large but much of it is already committed. What could be moved or changed? Are local authority budgets slightly freer?”

Theme 3: Service Integration and Appropriateness

Some respondents recognised the importance of approaching health in a holistic manner. Improving health requires looking at the whole person, beyond symptoms of one disease to broader health-promoting or health-harming factors influenced by social factors.

“For instance, if you are going to have a programme of changing behaviour, you will probably want to look not just at physical activity but also things like diet, sleep, social connections, substance abuse and so on. So, you need to work through some of these possible strategies, look at what bits join up and what don’t, where the costs are and then you can start to prioritise”

By having a more well-rounded approach to health, it follows that silo working has to be broken to be effective in meeting complex health and social care needs. Particular attention should be paid to the service ‘boundary areas’ to ensure a smooth transition and continuity of care between services. This effort towards service integration could include sharing necessary information between providers (with the service users’ informed consent) to avoid having to repeatedly explain health conditions and to reduce the risk of re-traumatisation.

“Joined up working between services and agencies and for people to be looked at as a whole, rather than their symptoms looked at and treated separately.”

“Services are disjointed, and there are too many gaps, especially as people move from children’s services to adults”

“Often people have to go through multiple layers of re-explaining their trauma before receiving support”

Respondents also appreciated the ongoing effort to promote more joined-up services and the benefits to be reaped, including sharing ideas, funding, and exploiting economies of scale. However, some respondents from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) noted the trade-offs between participating in partnership forums and frontline service delivery.

“It is important to have a strategy and it is good that the organisations are coming together”

“From a VCS perspective, staying in touch with the various forums is a challenge. We want to collaborate, but partnership participation sometimes comes at the price of frontline delivery...”

Theme 4: Targeted support

Respondents have highlighted several groups of people who could benefit from tailored support, including ethnically diverse communities (EDC) and people who experienced trauma in childhood.

(a) Culturally sensitive care

A culturally sensitive, person-centred health and social care is one that emphasises providers’ behaviour and attitudes, health care policies and a physical environment that ethnically diverse patients identify as being respectful to their culture. Culturally sensitive care enables them to feel comfortable with, trusting of and respected by their service providers and staff. In practice, this could involve recognising and addressing language barriers by providing suitable interpreters; or providing women-only space for leisure activities.

“Ethnically Diverse Community (EDC) needs to be a priority of its own (missed priority) as it has highlighted there is a lot to address”

“Professionals also need to be aware that language can also play a part in understanding someone who is not fluent. Sometimes they talk too fast and it’s hard to understand”

“access for women only fitness /swimming sessions for some cultural groups is an issue”

(b) Trauma-informed care (TIC)

Several respondents also raised the need for recognising and supporting those who have experienced trauma in childhood. This is in line with the broader effort in Berkshire West to embed trauma-informed care (TIC) in health, social care services as well as in schools. In essence, trauma-informed care recognises the prevalence and widespread impact of trauma; people who have experienced repeated, chronic or multiple trauma, even in childhood, are more likely to show symptoms of mental illness, health problems or risky health behaviours such as substance abuse. TIC means recognising the signs and symptoms of trauma and to respond accordingly in practices and policy to actively resist re-traumatisation.

“Extra support for anyone who has been affected by mental or physical trauma in childhood”

(c) Specific roles, identities and health conditions

The focus group discussions also reiterated the need to target support to specific groups of people, as mentioned by the survey respondents. This includes families with young children, carers, the elderly and people with autism or sensory sensitivities.

“As an adult carer it is difficult to easily get to medical appointments, to get out to exercise and this all has an effect on my health and wellbeing in a way that doesn’t affect many other people who don’t have those difficulties”

“Because my arms and legs moved, I was considered fit to find a job, my mental health, autism and sensory sensitivities were completely overlooked.”

To achieve a truly person-centred health and social care that can effectively tackle health inequity, health systems can benefit from intersectionality theory. This means moving away from a one- or two-dimensional focus on ‘ethnicity’, ‘age’, ‘income’, ‘caring roles’, or ‘disability’, and instead recognising the multiple social roles and identities people hold, that may have a compounding effect in privileging or hindering access to health and social care.

Theme 5: Social and Physical Environment

(a) Social environment

Focus group participants recognised the importance of community spirit in providing emotional and practical support for one another. Social support could come from friends, family members, workers or volunteers.

“...it is important for people to have good relational connections with others - in families, in schools and the workplace and in their wider community... Having good relationships with others is key to mental wellbeing and also means that people have support in dealing with the problems of life.”

“people looked out for one another, there was less formal childcare - they looked after each other’s children and mothers tended to work part time - and there was more of a community spirit”

(b) Physical environment

To some participants, having a health-promoting environment means having outdoor and indoor infrastructures for leisure activities (e.g. swimming) that are accessible and inclusive.

“It’s important to include access to outdoors space, fresh air and sunshine as part of this”

“Our most vulnerable and disadvantaged, who tend to experience the most health issues, have the least space to be active in”

Participants from the third sector voiced the need for more infrastructure to be effective and to be able to deliver what they have to offer.

“The third sector has a great deal to contribute and it would be wise to take note of that. While to some extent it is free, that is not so totally: infrastructure has to be provided for it to be effective and to be really effective it needs a lot of infrastructure.”

Particular attention should be paid to providing safe, private spaces to people experiencing traumatic situations.

“Not having safe spaces to communicate that support is needed around traumatic situations – advertising needed for organisations that can support those affected by trauma in private places”

Participants also raised issues on active transport and general safety.

“Physical activity is about so much more than exercise. It’s about safe and healthy ways of travelling to and from school and work.”

“The roads need to be kept in a good state of repair for this. Cycling in Reading, e.g. by St Mary’s Butts, is really hazardous now”

“People do not feel safe in Reading and there needs to be a greater response to make places safe, and make people feel safe, following incidents such as the attack in Forbury Gardens.”

“[Regarding] housing, I would add that rental culture and security for tenants could be discussed as an issue which makes a big impact on mental health.”

Theme 6: Covid-19

The pandemic has had an impact on everyone, albeit in different ways. For instance, some participants noted that Covid-19 has increased the risk of addictive behaviour and posed challenges to stay physically fit.

“Covid has increased addictive behaviour.”

“It’s been extremely difficult to keep my weight this down.”

For many, the lack of social interaction, particularly face-to-face interaction as opposed to online meetups, has affected their mental health.

“Having to isolate just because you’re over 70 has been hard”

“The pandemic really hasn’t helped my mental health and being cooped up all day with no escape is very disheartening”

“Usually I would go to the park or meet up in the community to take my mind off things, but I can’t do that now and it’s affecting my mental health”

“I’m an older carer and I’m not digitally connected, so with services reduced or closed and not digitally connected, on top of the extra caring I’ve found that together with reduction in community connectivity my mental health has been affected”

“Zoom is OK, but I have 8 hours in front of a screen for school and I don’t always want to spend more time in front of a screen in the evening as its can be exhausting. Lack of being able to meet face to face or variety in life unlike other children is affecting me mentally”

For others, staying at home all the time with their family poses a different set of challenges, especially those with caring responsibilities. Some participants expressed the occasional need for quiet, personal space.

“My house is small and I’m sharing it with my entire family all the time so I’ve no escape from them. I feel I’m being watched and judged because I don’t work and yet the rest of my family are”

“I’ve had a lot of worry and sadness in the family, but I had support from one to one buddies just walking down my street for a while, just being able to share.”

“Life is more stressful, I can’t meet up with friends, school is shut, I’m in the middle of my GCSEs and the house is busy with everyone in live lessons. It’s chaos, I’m working in a shed in the garden. It is affecting my mental health more than usual as a young carer.”

Finally, there were discussions surrounding how to move forward from the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Post Covid, people are going to need a lot of support to re-adjust”

“It’s not clear how the impact of Covid is being considered. We need a ‘new deal’ for health and wellbeing because of this.”

“The strategy should take account of the possibility of future pandemics and the variety of guises in which they might appear”

4. Developing the priorities

Shortlisting of priorities

In order to quantify the key priorities of residents, three ranking systems were devised (see Appendix A). This was in order to establish what survey respondents regarded to be most important to help them and their communities live happier and healthier lives. Quantitative outputs were then consolidated using findings from the focus groups.

Through the three scoring systems to evaluate priority ranking of survey respondents; the top five (out of 11) priorities were found to be consistent across the three areas (Appendix B). This was corroborated by thematic analyses of focus group findings and free text survey analysis. The top five priorities were therefore identified as follows:

- Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people
- Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives
- Help families and children in early years
- Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people
- Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

The outputs from the free text (from surveys) and focus groups showed a broad alignment with the survey findings. The focus group findings can therefore be used as a deep dive from which to ensure that supporting action plans address the issues raised.

Priority 1: Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people

Reducing the differences in health between different groups of people was considered “extremely important” by 30% of survey respondents and consistently ranked as a top priority across the three local authorities. Below are the comments and feedback from participants or respondents who said “there were significant changes needed” in this priority.

Many focus group participants and survey respondents raised the issue of unequal access to services, particularly for those most in need. As one survey respondent expressed, there is a need to “make it available to everyone”. For instance; sports clubs and gyms, healthy nutrition and diet; and health education and promotion are often most accessible to those who are from high-income backgrounds. Participants outlined the impact of this, noting that “people in lower socio-economic groups tend to have worse health and nutrition”. Participants also highlighted the need to examine the accessibility of facilities for “physically disabled people” who “do not have the access (some GP surgeries) or are not able to use all facilities (such as swimming) to improve their health”. Collectively, these responses point to the importance of addressing the social determinants of health to promote equality of access to services vital for health and wellbeing.

Given this, participants provided suggestions on ways to tackle these root causes, and therefore address health inequities. For example, one survey respondent commented that “reducing the gap in health problems between rich and poor must be a priority, and this starts with a proper living wage, affordable housing and access to healthy living choices e.g. teaching children basic cooking skills, access to subsidised or free sport, fitness opportunities etc.”. Focus group participants also suggested introducing universal proportionalism; “at the moment things such as sports clubs, physical activity focuses etc are geared towards higher socio-economic groups or do not focus on other intersects who find it harder to be active such as women & girls or specific ethnic groups”.

Regarding access to health information, a number of focus group participants highlighted the need to work more closely with communities for whom English is not their first language and/or those with limited digital literacy. One participant summarised that “those who have English language limitation should have options that best suit them such as interactive dummies, modules, video clips, level of understanding testing tools. Also, can use simple charts. FM radio and other means of accessing health and NHS health service information”. Survey respondents also noted that better information routes for those who may not own smartphones should be given, as “a significant proportion of these people - certainly, many more than the council members are aware of - have not been able to use contact-tracing for Covid”. This points to the need for innovative and diverse means of disseminating health information and education to ensure accessibility for all.

Poverty was considered to be a major driver of health inequities; this encompasses issues of geography, housing, socioeconomic status and employment. For example, one respondent explained that “lack of income should not mean poor health... People living in deprived areas generally having poorer health, linked to poor housing, lower educational achievement and lower income”. Focus group participants highlighted the need to ensure access to services and support regardless of geography. Specifically, they noted that deprivation, isolation and poor health exist beyond areas populated by social housing. One survey respondent commented that “Often they are aware how to live healthy lives, but lack the affordable amenities to do so it may need some support to take that first step”, Respondents therefore highlighted the importance of addressing the gap between awareness and availability of services across regions and income brackets.

In order to address inter-group health inequalities and ensure locally-relevant services, participants highlighted the need for inclusion and prioritisation of community perspectives. As noted, “diverse communities have a range of knowledge and understanding about health and wellbeing issues in our local communities”, suggesting the value of incorporating local knowledge to understand community health needs. This includes involving ethnically diverse groups, who are already at higher risks of chronic diseases, and those who are disadvantaged by language and cultural barriers. Poverty and low socioeconomic status (linked to housing, employment, education), racial disparities in health access and outcomes, and gender identity and sexuality were all identified as major drivers of health inequality during focus groups.

The impact of the built environment on health inequities and outcomes, including access to green spaces, good air quality, and safe cycle/walking paths, was also noted in focus groups. Participants highlighted the need to address disparities in access to a healthy external environment to promote health and wellbeing, with respondents suggesting that improving air quality was “associated with everything from dementia to asthma”. Focus group participants also specified that “affordable housing with green space could really improve the health and wellbeing for disadvantaged families”. A holistic approach to the built environment was expressed with participants noting its impact on both physical and mental health, and suggesting diverse ways to improve it, such as via changes to transport and outdoor spaces.



Figure 1. Visualisation of words frequently used by focus group participants and survey respondents for priority 1

Priority 2: Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives

Supporting people at higher risk of bad health outcomes was found to be a key priority across Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham. 35% of all survey respondents agreed that “significant change” is required within this priority area. Below are the comments and feedback from participants or respondents who said “there were significant changes needed” in this priority.

During focus groups, people facing higher risk of bad health outcomes were outlined to have either a continuing or new need for support (including before and during Covid-19). Key groups identified as facing higher risk of bad health outcomes include but are not limited to: those living with dementia; rough sleepers; unpaid carers; people who have experienced domestic abuse; and people with learning disabilities.

In order to support people with dementia, respondents suggested “an offer of ongoing support pre and post diagnosis that is equitable to all ages and inclusive to all”. Consultees also noted the importance of a “timely diagnosis”, post-diagnosis care, and a strengthened “care pathway from diagnosis to death”. This includes “dementia-friendly” access to activities and facilities to support social contact and regular exercise. It was noted that although dementia should be “grouped with mental health”, it should also be “addressed as a standalone” issue. Participants felt that dementia should be “an identified priority in its own right” to ensure appropriate patient management and care. Several survey respondents suggested increasing social and mental health support for dementia patients and their carers, as well as for older people to prevent cognitive decline.

Focus group participants emphasised a rise in homelessness in their communities, as well as those at risk of homelessness; “[I] still see homeless people on the streets and rapid rise in use of food banks indicates that many families are struggling with even the most basic of human needs”. Survey responses also pointed to the health risks associated with this rise in homelessness, and particularly the “need to end the cycle of homelessness, drugs and crime”. Solutions identified included supporting those Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) into work; improving access to emergency and permanent housing, providing advice services (on issues ranging from budgeting to mental health); and encouraging community-based responses. For example, one survey respondent noted the “lack of adult education and its funding to further literacy and numeracy (in particular) amongst the unemployed and poorer sections of society”. Continuing, they suggested that addressing “this in itself would enhance employment opportunities, increase aspirations and thereby a better standard of living.”

Many participants pointed to the importance of the promotion of a healthy diet and good nutrition to reduce poor health outcomes for those most at risk. One focus group participant noted that showing people “how to create nutrition and healthy meals on a budget” would be an opportunity to promote healthy diets. Further suggestions included promoting healthy eating and providing outdoor gyms and free exercise classes to equalise access to the knowledge and resources needed for a healthy lifestyle. Participants noted that this should be coupled with frequent and widespread advertisement of these services to ensure that high-risk groups are aware of available support.

Importance was also placed on promoting the value of carers, particularly unpaid carers. Suggestions included raising community awareness of their importance and providing more services to support their health and carry out their responsibilities “These services need to be better funded, but also greater awareness is required by the public, so communities as a whole are more supportive”, suggested one focus group participant. Similarly, one respondent pointed to the need to redress the lack of recognition of “family unpaid carers especially for older adults”. Focus groups also highlighted an increased need in respite care for those acting as unpaid carers for a loved one. The importance of increasing social support and social cohesion was noted by several survey respondents; one of the comments suggested tackling “loneliness and isolation - this has an impact on many of the other priorities, if people feel connected, they will be more resilient to challenges which may make them less in need of other services”.

Participants outlined the need for “greater support” for those who have experienced domestic abuse. In particular, consultees noted the need for improved visiting and ongoing support for those at home, as well as the importance of support for men who have experienced domestic abuse. Survey respondents pointed to the lack of awareness and access to services for those who have experienced domestic violence – “it would also be good to see more support for victims of domestic violence being advertised”.

Survey respondents highlighted the need for learning disability-inclusive services and community activities. Respondents commented that “they need more activities, with transport included. Cooking, tailored exercise classes”, and that “more long-term support is needed, possibly a stepping stone program”. Better training for all health staff to understand the needs of people with learning disabilities and their carers were noted as key suggestions; “There is still a lot of work that could be done to improve the health of those with learning disabilities by simply working together with the local voluntary sector and without a huge investment of funding.”



Figure 2. Visualisation of words frequently used by focus group participants and survey respondents for priority 2

Priority 3: Help families and children in early years

Around 40% of all survey respondents across the three local authorities considered this to be an “extremely important” issue. Below are the comments and feedback from participants or respondents who said “there were significant changes needed” in this priority.

“Sometimes I would like to have help with childcare”. Focus groups identified how mothers feel isolated and unsupported, with issues exacerbated by Covid-19. Limited childcare and youth support services, including due to Covid-19 closures has meant increased challenges, particularly for young, single or new mothers. Some noted that “funding for youth service activities has been decimated. Better funding for local authority services for young people and for sports facilities is needed”. Focus group discussions highlighted barriers such as loss of self-esteem and expensive childcare; these were often worsened by mothers losing jobs and partners. Despite experiencing these challenges, there was also limited awareness of support services available to parents and families. Focus group participants said, “it’s very important that families are aware of the local opportunities and resources which are open to them”. The need to support working parents was also noted in both survey and focus groups responses; some commented that “childcare for full time working parents outside of school hours is extremely expensive and options are limited”.

Focus groups touched on how the wellbeing of parents is largely linked to the development of their children – participants discussed how parents are able to influence their children when they themselves have good relationships and are emotionally and financially secure as part of a wider resilient community. A survey respondent noted that “maternal mental health” should be addressed, and the community should work on removing stigma around it.

Focus groups highlighted how families with young children often struggle economically. The lack of valuable structural and social support was described and included concerns that “family hubs [were] closed”. Focus groups also underlined the limited access and diversity of services offering help to young families. Some survey participants also noted that “children’s centres were a great hub and source of practical and emotional support” for children and that they “wish[ed] to see more provision”. Many noted that the family activities should include outdoor and/or exercise activities; one participant said, “Personally I am not active enough, I would like activities available for families and better facilities like parks and swimming pools to encourage this.”

It was also identified that “it’s very unclear what support is available” to families. Focus groups underlined that the replacement of universal services with targeted services has, in part, led to the stigmatisation of receiving child support. In addition to this, certain families do not immediately meet the criteria for requiring support within targeted services, and so it is easy for them to “slip through the net”.



“Not enough support in schools.” Focus groups highlighted how children and young people require additional support during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the stresses of isolation; it has been recognised that young people are likely to be suffering more in the later, rather than earlier, stages of the pandemic due to ongoing lockdowns. With the reopening of schools, participants drew attention to the need for “dedicated support staff to draw on and support children and not just rely on teachers to do that in addition to their already busy roles.”

Several focus group participants and survey respondents noted the long waiting times for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and the implications of this for young people in need of urgent and/or long-term support. Access to such services was viewed as “important especially during the pandemic, as so many social interactions and relationship[s] have been affected.” Respondents also noted the need for “more specialist support” to safeguard the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. As noted above, this included suggestions for the expansion of school-based mental health support, which in turn could help to reduce the pressure on CAMHS.



Figure 4. Visualisation of words frequently used by focus group participants and survey respondents for priority 4

Priority 5: Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

Over 70% of people 35 years of age or older, and about 50% of all survey respondents, considered good mental health and wellbeing for all adults an “extremely important” issue; more than 40% of all respondents believe that “significant change” is required in this priority area. Below are the comments and feedback from participants or respondents who said “there were significant changes needed” in this priority.

“Not everyone is online.” Focus groups revealed the impact of the digital divide on access to mental health and wellbeing support and particularly how this affects older people. For instance, participants highlighted that not all individuals know where and how to search for help online. Additionally, it was expressed how loneliness and isolation amongst older people could be overcome through forming both online and in-person community networks. Focus group participants described that physical health is often “linked to mental health”; Individuals who have mental health conditions may end up in a vicious cycle of poor physical and mental health owing to the challenges of maintaining a consistent income, housing and social connections - all critical for maintaining good physical and mental health. Participants commented on the need to improve non-clinical interventions, such as “social prescribing and green spaces”, accessible and subsidised exercise classes, and arts and wellbeing courses.

“Ethnically diverse communities find it difficult to access mental health resources”. Focus group discussions highlighted the challenges for non-fluent and non-native English-speaking communities in accessing mental health resources; these included the lack of communication of available services and culturally appropriate resources. In addition, there were opinions about the need to raise public awareness to reduce stigma surrounding mental health and care-seeking, especially for groups not previously familiar with mental health resources. For example, as “many BAME people find it difficult to access mental health resources”, there is a “need for more interpreting resources”. In addition, “cultural competency training” was suggested to improve the cultural sensitivity of mental health support workers when “dealing with all types of trauma”.

Improving the timeliness and quality of mental health services was considered a key priority by both focus group and survey participants. Similar to responses about CAMHS, focus group participants felt that “the wait time for referrals for mental health issues is too long”, while “the duration of treatment is inadequate to resolve the issue”.



Figure 5. Visualisation of words frequently used by focus group participants and survey respondents for priority 5

5. Conclusion

Through the online survey and focus group discussions, public engagement has been at the heart of the development of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Berkshire West. Residents were able to help identify key themes surrounding the current state of health and wellbeing of Berkshire West and what could be done better. Quantitative analysis of survey responses through a robust scoring system identified five priorities to improve health and wellbeing in their communities.

In addition to this, extensive qualitative analysis of free text in surveys and focus group discussions ascertained the results of the quantitative data; allowing the public consultation to inform both the main areas of focus for the five priorities as well as the priorities themselves. These priorities as outlined in the health and wellbeing strategy are: 1) reduce the differences in health between different groups of people; 2) support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy live; 3) Help families and children in early years; 4) promote good mental health and wellbeing for children and young people; 5) promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults.

6. References

1. The framework in Figure 2 has been adapted from Chuah et al., 2018 and Levesque et al., 2013 <https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-018-0833-x> ; <https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1475-9276-12-18>
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7. Appendices

Appendix A: Scoring Systems

Survey data analysis

1. The first ranking system used was to establish what respondents ranked as number 1. This allowed us to understand what people considered the most important issue. However, this was not an intuitive method to give an overview of all the priorities, as consideration would only be given to what responders placed as their number 1 priority, rather than their top five.
2. The second ranking system allowed us to consider all 11 priorities equally when ranking them. This was done by assigning each priority a score (in accordance with where the priority ranked out of 11) and then totalling the scores. This allowed for a better understanding of the data spread in terms of the ranking. All 11 priorities were equally considered when ranking.
3. The third ranking system assumed that responders gave more importance to what they considered a top three priority when answering the survey. Thus, more weight was put on these responses. The scores were then totalled as they were in (2).

Regardless of which scoring systems was used, the top five was consistently the same (in no particular order):

- Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people
- Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives
- Help young children and families in early years
- Good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people
- Good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

Focus group and free text analysis

Following the 18 focus group discussions, thematic analysis was done to categorise the issues raised into the 11 priorities. Top three priorities were ranked using the same scoring system as (2).

Appendix B: Overall results on the ranking of priorities

Priorities	Counts			Rankings		
	#1	Average Score (total)	Weighted Score (top 3 weighted more)	#1	Average Score (total)	Weighted Score (top 3 weighted more)
Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people	467	17495	20294	1	4	4
Support individuals with high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives	345	20080	23329	2	1	1
Help families and young children in early years	277	18143	20816	4	2	3
Reduce the harm caused by addiction to substances (smoking, alcohol or drugs)	120	14527	15865	8	8	8
Good health and wellbeing at work	48	12859	13768	11	11	11
Physically active communities	151	14591	16103	7	7	7
Help households with significant health needs	118	15747	17145	9	6	6
Extra support for anyone who has been affected by mental or physical trauma in childhood	86	14428	15613	10	9	10
Build strong, resilient and socially connected communities	245	14107	15718	6	10	9
Good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people	308	18136	20827	3	3	2
Good mental health and wellbeing for all adults	258	17126	19481	5	5	5

Footnote: The table shows that the top five priorities remain the same and this is shown in green. The red cells show the lowest three priorities. Number 1 represents the most important priority and 11 shows the least important priority.

Appendix C: Questions included in the online survey

1. How important do you think each of the potential priorities are to helping you and your community to live happier healthier lives?
 - a. Extremely important, Very important, Somewhat important, Not so important, Not at all important
2. In order of importance, one being the most important, how would you rank the potential priorities?
3. Are there any other priorities you think we should consider including in the draft strategy that we haven't mentioned in previous questions?
 - a. Please tell us what priorities you like to see included and why
4. How much change do you think is required for each priority (asked for each individual priority)
 - a. No change, some change, significant change, don't know
 - b. Please tell us the reasons for your response, including details of any changes you think are needed
5. Have you or your family had any health and wellbeing concerns recently
6. Would you like to tell us briefly what they are? You can skip this question if you would rather not tell us
7. Are you, your family or other people you care for able to get all the help or support you/they need for any health and wellbeing problems?
8. Has the help or support been sought during the Covid-19 pandemic
9. Are there any further comments you would like to make?