

## PRESS RELEASE

18<sup>th</sup> January 2022

### ‘Seen and Heard – A Strong Voice for Local People’

Access to health and social care services has gone from ‘slightly improving’ to ‘severely deteriorated’ according to the Deaf community.

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

In a recent focus group, jointly facilitated by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and Healthwatch Bedford Borough, members of the Deaf community felt that professionals do not understand the concerns and needs of their community and the detrimental effect this has on their health and wellbeing.

There is general anxiety in the Deaf community about how to access services - who will accompany them to an appointment, whether they will have access to a qualified Interpreter, and who will be paying for the Interpreter. The Deaf community feel that health and care services have ‘**gone back in time**’ and with all the technology currently available to support marginalised people there should not be such difficulty when communicating with health and social care professionals.

The Deaf community are calling for health and care services to use tools like ‘SignLive’ more widely and frequently, if they are not able to facilitate a face to face consultation – the preferred option of the Deaf community.

Access to Healthcare is a right afforded to all citizens in the United Kingdom via the NHS. The first principle of the NHS Constitution for England is that:

‘The NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all’

Providers of health and social care services have duties to support those who access their services, who have information or communication needs because of a disability or sensory impairment.

Our report, commissioned by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), highlights the challenges and barriers faced by the Deaf community, who feel they **are** being marginalised. They share their experiences about the providers who are not supporting them to access services.

Our report to the CQC focuses on feedback received from the Deaf community and gives our recommendations, and follow-up actions, to help improve access to health and social care services for all.

The report can be read here: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/seen-and-heard-report> and <https://www.healthwatchbedfordborough.co.uk/report/2022-01-24/seen-and-heard-forum-report>

A British Sign Language (BSL) translation of the report is currently in progress and will be available to download on both Healthwatch websites in due course.

**Notes to Editor:**

Healthwatch was created by the Health and Social Care Act, 2012. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) and Healthwatch Bedford Borough (HBB) are part of a network of local Healthwatch which helps to ensure that the views and feedback from patients and carers are an integral part of the design and delivery of local services.

HWCB and HBB are consumer champions promoting choice and influencing the provision of high quality health, social care and wellbeing services for all across Bedfordshire.