

# Complaints Handling - Handling in health and care

## What did we do?

In 2014 we carried out some research to gain a clearer picture of the NHS complaints system in Wiltshire. We talked to local people about their experiences and to Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) and Patient experience Managers about their processes. We looked at the information available to the public about making a complaint (on websites and leaflets for example). This fitted in with a national piece of work being carried out by Healthwatch England.

## Why did we do it?

In 2014 Healthwatch England engaged with the public to find out more about their experiences of navigating the complaints system. People were unclear about where to turn when they have a concern or complaint and have little trust or confidence in the system. They called on the local Healthwatch network to feedback to them the experiences of local people around the country. Healthwatch Wiltshire believed that it is important that the 'Wiltshire Voice' was heard within the national work.

## What did people say?

- People did not find the complaints system easy to navigate and struggled to find clear information about how to make a complaint. Often the information was out of date, or not in accessible formats.
- Children and young people reported a similar view and experience of raising complaints. In addition they described feeling scared and/or embarrassed about raising a concern.
- Often people simply want to provide feedback and have a 'dialogue' about their experience of a service rather than raise a complaint. However, the systems often do not make this possible or easy.

## What happened next?

- We wrote a report and made some recommendations for improvements to the system.
- The report was presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board in September 2014 and the recommendations endorsed.
- One of the recommendations was that PALS/ Customer Care Managers from acute NHS providers come together periodically as a complaints liaison group to share good practice and problems with a view to making improvements locally.
- The first meeting was convened in 2015 and has continued on a quarterly basis on the request of attendees. Those attending include the acute hospital trusts, the mental health trust and Wiltshire NHS CCG: is chaired by Healthwatch Wiltshire.

## What was the impact?

The membership has continued to grow and now includes representation from all three acute hospital Trusts, NHS Wiltshire CCG, Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (AWP), Wiltshire Council and SeAP (NHS Advocacy Provider). It includes representatives from Wiltshire Council. Other organisations have expressed an interest in being involved in the future. Healthwatch Wiltshire feel that the enthusiasm shown by members of the group and the willingness of others to be involved with the group is a positive step forward and shows a commitment to improving complaints handling processes, and taking feedback provided by those who use health and care services seriously.