

The value of listening

Healthwatch St Helens
Annual Report 2023–2024



healthwatch

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"Healthwatch play a vital role as a key partner working within health and social care. As full members of St Helens People's Board and St Helens Place Partnership Board, their input and constructive challenge is vital as they represent the voice of the patient and service user.

Their objective and independent assessment of both primary and secondary care services as well as the residential care sector provide that independent view of how safe and effective services are. They are a vital partner in St Helens Cares work and we couldn't work without them."

Geoffrey Appleton, Deputy Chair of St Helens People's Board and Independent Chair of St Helens Place Partnership Board.



Healthwatch St Helens – Annual Report 2023 – 2024

Message from our Chair

Healthwatch St Helens continue to work hard in the ever changing landscape of health and social care for the communities of St Helens. We have seen the population feeling a great burden with the cost of living increases and the impact that brings. We have completed a piece of work which greatly illustrates a really poor state for some of our population not being able to afford prescriptions or travel to appointments. :

We work hard to reach people from all parts of our local population to gather their views and experiences. Being part of the voluntary sector infrastructure organisation, Halton & St Helens Voluntary and Community Action gives us immediate access to hundreds of groups across St Helens who represent a vast range of people, including young people, older people, refugees and asylum seekers and people who are homeless. Relationships built up over time with many third sector groups and being established and recognised within local communities enables us to have a wide reach into those communities, to ensure that all voices are heard.

Our strong relationships with our St Helens Place colleagues, the Local Authority, Public Health and various providers means that we are an equal and respected partner in many forums, such as the Place Partnership Board, Primary Care Group and People's Board, where our contribution is recognised and our feedback is acted upon.

We've been able to impact on many lives, from people struggling to access services, such as NHS dentists, to supporting people to make a formal complaint, via our Independent Complaints Advocacy service.

The close working relationship we have with the other local Healthwatch across the region has enabled us to continue an effective collaboration that allows us to look at shared concerns and make shared recommendations. We can identify themes and patterns that affect services across the Cheshire and Mersey region, which we then raise at an ICS level, by having a seat on various committees and maintaining ongoing communication.



“We enjoy a very knowledgeable, friendly staff team that run and organise the fabric of Healthwatch and create many opportunities for the volunteer group to be involved. One thing is for sure, it’s a fantastic opportunity for people to volunteer and gain knowledge of a system that they will at some time touch for support.”

[Tom Hughes, Chair, Healthwatch St Helens



About us

Healthwatch St Helens is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.



Year in review

Reaching out:

503 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

26,474 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and access to NHS dental treatment.



Making a difference to care:

We published

4 reports

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Access to NHS Dental Care in St Helens

which highlighted the struggles people face to get affordable dental treatment.



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

21

outstanding volunteers who gave up too much of their time for us to calculate, to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

£159,427

which is the same as the previous year, and includes funding for our Independent Complaints Advocacy service.






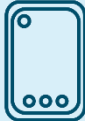


We currently employ

5 staff

who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>Our updated report around inequalities enabled local partners understand what support they need to offer.</p>	 <p>Our feedback to the Social Isolation & Loneliness group ensured that the impact on mental health and wellbeing was recognised as a consequence.</p>
Summer	 <p>We made sure that local people's financial and emotional circumstances were taken into account for the project running in St Helens around healthy weight.</p>	 <p>We strengthened our relationship with the d/Deaf community via our local Deafness Resource Centre</p>
Autumn	 <p>Our report about access to dental treatment gave our local Scrutiny Committee the information it needed to campaign for change and better funding.</p>	 <p>We highlighted the problems that some patients were having with GP websites and IT systems.</p>
Winter	 <p>We helped Place colleagues to identify issues with the NHS app that could affect local residents.</p>	 <p>We made sure that young people across the borough were able to share their experiences of accessing mental health services.</p>

Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborate with other local Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Cheshire & Merseyside influence decisions made about services at the Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This enables the Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) to hear what matters to local people on a much wider footprint. They can then use this information to make informed decisions about the provision of health and care services.



Local Healthwatch have worked together on a variety of issues such as Dentistry, access to Primary Care, waits at A&E, discharge from hospital and ADHD/Autism. This enables the Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) to hear what matters to local people on a much wider footprint. They can then use this information to make informed decisions about the provision of health and care services.

Local Healthwatch have an agreed process for working together which includes confidentiality, Data Protection and an information sharing policy. We do not share information with any 3rd party (except if we have been asked to be involved and consent is received) and we do not store any details about individuals, except where a local Healthwatch provides the Complaints Advocacy Support for NHS complaints. This is particularly helpful if a person has to travel out of their area for their care/support; for example Clatterbridge Cancer Centre, Walton Neuro, Alder Hey.



Healthwatch are invited to meetings locally and at a Cheshire & Merseyside ICS level. The meetings include Integrated Care Board, Primary Care Board, Clinical Effectiveness Board, Quality & Performance Committee, System Quality Committee, Women's Services Committee and many more Committees and sub-groups. Local Healthwatch have been involved in the development of the Primary Care Strategy, and the Communications & Engagement Strategy, among others.

We are fortunate to have a really strong Healthwatch network in Cheshire and Merseyside. In 2023-24, our nine local Healthwatch organisations continued to play an influential role in the work of both NHS Cheshire and Merseyside and our wider Health and Care Partnership – as an equal partner and constructive critical friend.

I, personally, really value the vital contribution that each Healthwatch organisation – and the wider Healthwatch network – continues to make to our Integrated Care Board, our nine Place Partnerships, and many important programmes of work.

Most important of all, remains the unique value that the Healthwatch network brings in connecting system partners to people's views and experiences of the health and care services that we provide – in doing so helping us to identify and implement improvements.

Graham Urwin, Chief Executive, NHS Cheshire & Merseyside





Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing the views of people who use them. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Improving the lives of people who are suffering due to the cost of living crisis.

Last year, we published findings of the experiences the public shared with us about their struggles to pay for prescriptions and attend medical appointments because of the cost of living crisis. Thanks to this insight, Public Health and The Inequalities Commission have done a lot to improve the situation for many local people.

You shared worrying experiences with us that told us that people with long term conditions such as asthma and diabetes are at risk of suffering severe long term effects on their health because they can't keep their houses warm, pay for food or manage their conditions with medication.

65%

of respondents told us that the cost of living crisis is having a negative impact on their health and wellbeing, including their mental and emotional health..



What did you tell us about your struggles during the crisis?

- 32% of people have either missed an appointment or struggled with the cost of getting there due to lack of funds.
- 22% of people have not had part or all of their prescription filled because they struggle to pay for it

Our local Public Health team and inequalities commission welcomed our intel to inform their priorities moving forward.

What difference did this make?

- Partners across the borough took our report seriously and have allowed it to influence their offer going forward..
- Public Health and the inequalities Commission continue to strive in their goal of reducing health inequalities in St Helens and supporting people to live healthier, happier lives.
- Organisation from all sectors across the borough continue to develop various projects and strategies to give local people access to warmth, healthier food and ways to meet their health and wellbeing needs.

Is our Local Crisis Line able to meet the needs of our residents?

Working with one of our Healthwatch members has helped us to identify where the needs of people in a mental health crisis were not always able to be met. Our strong relationship with our local Trust has led to developments.

When one of our Healthwatch members called us, in crisis, because she was waiting so long for treatment, our first step was to call the crisis line as this lady was known to the service and we wanted to alert the team there to what was happening.

On the day we were able to ensure that the lady was contacted and a plan put in place to treat her ongoing mental health issues,.

However, we wanted to raise our concerns about the length of time it took our call to be answered when we called the Crisis line, which we did by contacting a colleague at our local Trust.

Our local Trust were keen to address the issue around the Crisis Line and assured us that they would review the service in order to improve it.

What difference did this make?

- We highlighted that there were not enough staff available to answer calls in a timely manner, to local people in a mental health crisis.
- Our local Trust has done a lot of work to develop the service and have new measures in place to improve the service and speed up the time that calls are being answered.

Mental health services have been an area that we have done a lot of work on over the years. A case like this illustrates how our close working relationships with providers can lead to effective outcomes, changes in services and a better experience for the patient.

Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Improving access for people who are unable to communicate by telephone.

Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.

A local resident raised his concerns with us, via email, that he was struggling with the IT system at his GP practice. Unable to communicate by telephone he relies on using his computer to make appointments and order medication. We highlighted the technical issue with his practice's IT system which were quickly addressed, therefore enabling other patients with communication issues to access the services they need..



Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

We worked together with our Place colleagues to involve local people in the development of services for people with diabetes. We shared what we already knew about people's experiences as well as advising on how best to communicate with local people to get the best response to their consultation activities..



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.

We were aware that NHS Cheshire & Merseyside were doing some work to find out about young people's access to mental health services. We wanted to make sure that we engaged with our local young people to make sure they had a say about the services they have accessed or are waiting to access. This work will continue over time as we work with our local mental health Trust to develop their services for young people.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Helping people access the services they need
- Helping people access NHS dentistry
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost-of-living crisis

Important changes to how people access their test results

It's essential that people have clear, accurate communication about their care.

Thanks to the efforts of Healthwatch St Helens, in working alongside our St Helens Place colleagues, people in St Helens no longer run the risk of accessing their test results, and becoming confused and distressed by the information they see, until a medical professional has contacted them to discuss.

The Cheshire and Mersey Healthwatch network became aware of incidents where people across the region were accessing their test results via the NHS app, before their GP or other medical professional had contacted them to explain the results, discuss the diagnosis and talk through next steps.

Our Place colleagues responded quickly to hearing this and action was rapidly taken to address this, via comms teams and primary care colleagues. Guidance is now in place across primary care to block patients being able to view things that may not be suitable for them to see without a proper consultation and before a medical professional has spoken to them..

Now, patients are being spared the additional distress that seeing their results too soon would cause and the ambition is that, in future, changes will be made to the NHS app itself, as a failsafe.

Access to treatment when someone is not able to leave their home

Not everybody is able to attend appointments or access services at a hospital or in the community.

There are many reasons why some of our residents are not able to leave their home. This could be agoraphobia, severe anxiety or a mobility issue. One of our Healthwatch members has a range of issues that keep him at home and he raised his concerns with us about accessing treatment.

It's important that patients have clear communication with their providers so they know that they are going to get the treatment they need.

The resident who raised concerns with us had the treatment he needed.

This gentleman had the COVID-19 and flu vaccinations he required in the comfort and safety of his own home.

Another health issue was managed by the Acute Home Visit Team.



Volunteering

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote their local Healthwatch and what we have to offer
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out Enter and View visits to local services to help them improve



" I became involved many years ago as I felt it was a channel for expressing my own views on local health issues and listening to feedback from others.

It is a means of looking at what is already good with local services and improving them, as Healthwatch has the power to make NHS leaders and other decision makers to listen to members' feedback and improve standards of care.

Healthwatch St Helens has a really important role to play and it's good to be part of something that is a positive force for the improvement of local health and care services.

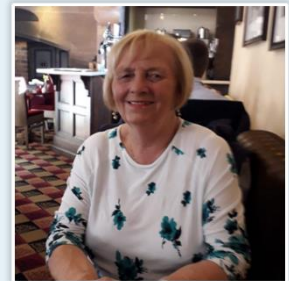


Geoff –
Healthwatch St Helens
Advisory Forum
member



"Living in Ireland for some years, I became involved with volunteering around patient safety after my husband passed away. I returned to the UK to be nearer to my family and obviously, I wanted to continue voluntary work of a similar nature so I contacted Healthwatch St Helens.

I have been involved in a number of projects over the years. I am a member of the Advisory Forum and the Enter & View team. These visits I find extremely interesting as I put myself in the position of saying, "How would I feel if one of my relatives was a resident here?" Would I feel happy and relaxed knowing they were being well cared for or would it be possible to make recommendations for improvements?



Ann –
Member of the
Healthwatch St Helens
Advisory Forum and
Enter & View team.

Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

- www.healthwatchsthelens.co.uk
- 0300 111 0007
- info@healthwatchsthelens.co.uk



Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government including funding for the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service.	£159,427	Expenditure on pay	£108,600
Additional income	0	Non-pay expenditure	£9,063
		Office and management fees	£5,926
Total income	£159,427	Total expenditure	£123,589

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas and with additional needs, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Oral health in residential care.
2. Access to services for people with a learning disability.
3. Access to primary care services.

In addition to our agreed priorities we will continue to support our Place colleagues in their work around health inequalities and improving access to mental health services.



Statutory statements

Healthwatch St Helens, Halton & St Helens Voluntary & Community Action, St Marie's, Lugsdale Road, Widnes, WA8 6DH.

Healthwatch St Helens uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 4 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Board met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as the areas of work we should focus on and sponsorship of two Saints RLFC players, to help raise our profile and increase awareness.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities, via our Advisory Forum and Healthwatch membership.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard from. This year we have done this by working with our local Deafness Resource Centre, to connect with the d/Deaf community, with local support organisations to reach people for whom English is not their first language, and with the Young Carers Centre to hear the views and experiences of young people in our community.

We ensure that this Annual Report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website and shared widely with Local Authority and NHS colleagues..

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us..

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to the Place Partnership Board, Stakeholder Forum and Quality & Performance Group.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Cheshire & Mersey Integrated Care System. For example, we contribute to the System Quality Group, the Integrated Care Board and the Health & Care Partnership, often providing insight that is from three or more of the local Healthwatch across the Cheshire & Mersey region.. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Enter and view

This year, we made 3 Enter and View visits. We only made 5 recommendations as most of the homes we visited were so good we only asked them to keep up the good work.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Segal Gardens Care Home	Part of Enter & View schedule	We wrote a report which was welcomed by management, who were clearly pleased with our findings.
Ainsdale Court Care Home	Part of Enter & View schedule	We wrote a report which was welcomed by management, who were clearly pleased with our findings.
Victoria Care Home	Part of Enter & View schedule	We wrote a report that contained 5 recommendations for the improvement

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch St Helens is represented on the St Helens People's Board by our Chair, Tom Hughes. During 2023/24 Tom has effectively carried out this role by always offering challenge to what is being discussed and making sure the voice of local people is acknowledged when decisions are being made.

Healthwatch St Helens is represented on the Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Partnerships and Integrated Care Boards by representatives from the Cheshire & Merseyside Healthwatch network.


2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Access to NHS Dental Treatment	Local Councillors have committed to putting pressure on NHS England to increase funding for NHS Dentists. Local people have the most up to date information on how to access treatment.
Access to treatment for people with additional needs	We identified some inequalities in accessing treatment for people with sensory impairment. Providers have responded well to our findings and are committed to delivering the best service possible. We will continue to look at this issue.
Access to mental health services for young people	The findings so far have caught the attention of our Young people's Mental Health Commissioner and the work will continue to gather more feedback.

healthwatch

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