

Together

healthwatch
St Helens

**we're making health
and social care better**

Annual Report 2022–23



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"In the last ten years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of local Healthwatch hasn't. Your local Healthwatch has worked tirelessly to make sure the views of local people are heard, and NHS and social care leaders use your feedback to make care better."

Louise Ansari, Healthwatch National Director

Message from our Chair

The team at Healthwatch St Helens have remained steadfast with their commitment to driving the views of the public as much as possible into the decision making process. Their commitment is a credit to them and the results they obtain.

Covid seems to have dropped from the Headlines to be replaced by huge cost of living rises. Our work around this issue has shown how people are struggling with huge demands on their budgets and the impact it's having on their health and wellbeing.

Our longstanding relationships with our Place colleagues means that we have been able to influence change locally as well as in collaboration with our other local Healthwatch, across the Integrated Care Partnership. We look forward to those relationships continuing.

Health inequalities continue to be a problem for our borough as people are struggling more and more with waiting times and we will continue to share local people's experiences so this stays a priority for commissioners and providers.



Tom Hughes
Healthwatch St Helens Chair



I encourage the residents of our borough to please get involved with Healthwatch St Helens, to inform and shape services that they will possibly need to be available to them one day.”

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.

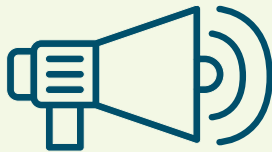


Our values are:

- **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



692 people

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

25,132 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost of living crisis.

Making a difference to care

We published

8 reports

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

Our most popular report was

Cost of Living Crisis

which highlighted the difficulties people face around staying well when they are struggling financially.



Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

20

outstanding volunteers who gave up so much of their time that we're not even able to calculate it, to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2022-23 we received

£159,427

which is the same as the previous year.

We currently employ

5 staff

who help us carry out our work.

How we've made a difference this year

Spring



Alongside our Cheshire & Mersey Healthwatch network, we helped the ICS to understand what was important in communication with local people.



We made sure that the leaflets and video for the Urgent Community Response programme are accessible and user-friendly

Summer



Through our survey and interviews, our local provider of the Long Covid service could better understand what was good about the service and what needed to improve..



We supported the development of Care Communities, to ensure that the patient voice was heard.

Autumn



Our work with Place colleagues helped make their messages around accessing primary care easier for local people to understand.



Our involvement with the local Hospital Trust's Faster Diagnostics Pathway steering group ensured that the design of services was patient-led.

Winter



Our survey around the cost of living crisis showing people are struggling to pay for prescriptions and transport to medical appointments, helped other local organisations to adapt the support they offer.



Our revised booklet about accessing NHS dental treatment contains the most up-to-date useful information and contacts.

10 years of improving care

This year marks a special milestone for Healthwatch. Over the last ten years, people have shared their experiences, good and bad, to help improve health and social care. A big thank you to all our Healthwatch Heroes that have stepped up and inspired change. Here are a few of our highlights:

How have we made care better, together?

Autism

Our work around autistic spectrum disorder help to reinforce the need to develop a neurodevelopment pathway..



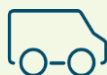
Maternity Services

We highlighted the experiences of women and their families and helped the Maternity Voices Partnership to identify their priorities for improvement.



Ambulance service

Our local ambulance service reviewed its approach to communicating with their patients' carers and family members.



Additional Needs

After we highlighted the difficulties that some patients were having, particularly with communication, a local health care Trust introduced a flag system to alert when a patient has additional support or communication needs.



NHS dentistry

We continued to voice public concerns that access to NHS dentistry is poor and people are suffering in pain as a result..





Healthwatch Hero



Celebrating a hero in our local community.

Judi is a Healthwatch Hero for all she has done for us over the years, sharing her experiences with us, raising awareness about important issues and being a valued member of our Enter & View team.

Healthwatch St Helens have been lucky to have Judi as a volunteer for the past 10 years. In that time, she's attending many Enter & View visits, always providing clear and detailed feedback.

In addition, Judi has always fulfilled her role as a Healthwatch Champion and kept us informed about important issues, such as in the social care setting where a family member lives. This made it possible for us to raise concerns with our Local Authority and highlight where improvements needed to be made in the residents' care.

"Our daughter, unfortunately, has profound disabilities and autism, so getting involved in services, enabling change, seemed an obvious route to take. I gravitated towards Healthwatch St Helens as I have experience of both health and social care. I love it!"



Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing the views of the people who use them. That's why listening to all feedback from people across all communities in St Helens is always a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them develop and improve.

Advocating for better access to NHS dentistry

NHS dentistry is in desperate need of reform and this year the Healthwatch network has successfully moved NHS dentistry up the political agenda, calling for the improvements in access that local people have told us they need.

With living costs on the rise and most dentists not taking on new NHS patients,, health inequalities have been getting worse, with people suffering in pain and not able to get necessary and sometimes ongoing treatment.

Our research into which dentists in St Helens have a waiting list for NHS patients, who are accessible to disabled people and who are dementia-friendly, helped the people who asked us for information to know who to contact, as well as enabling us to signpost to the Emergency Dental Helpline and the Special Care Dental Service. What it wasn't able to do was address the problem of people who were still unable to access routine dental treatment and whose oral health was suffering as a result.

What we did

- Highlighted this issue to local Councillors,
- Along with colleagues from the Healthwatch network, attended a 'Dental Deep Dive' with the Cheshire & Mersey Integrated Care Board to look at this issue in more detail.
- Made regular contact with NHS England to highlight cases that came in to us.

What difference will this make?

The Cheshire & Mersey Integrated Care Board has committed to agreeing and implementing a Dental Recovery Plan since dentistry became part of their remit on 1st April, 2023.

We will continue to share the experiences that we receive and will undergo further work on this issue.



I have been unable to find a dentist that will take on NHS patients. I need urgent care on my teeth as I'm missing several teeth due to decay and extreme toothache which have been plaguing my life for several months. I have tried calling over 9 dental practices with no luck yet."

St Helens Resident

Raising awareness of the importance of cancer screening

We all know that cancer caught early is more likely to be treatable. Screening is one way of detecting possible cancers but only works if people are called for screening in a timely manner and if they attend the appointment..

For one local lady, she was never called in for a routine mammogram at age 50, as she should have been, it was only when she turned 70 that she received a letter inviting her to attend a screening.

What happened then?

This lady went along for the routine mammogram and shortly afterwards was contacted to attend the hospital for further tests. She was diagnosed with DCIS (ductal carcinoma in situ), and surgery was needed urgently. With no time to dwell, on what was happening, within 6 weeks she had biopsies, the surgery, and was recuperating at home..

She was amazed and impressed by how quickly she was diagnosed and treated. When she shared her appreciation with medical staff, a consultant told her, *“No man or woman should have to wait for treatment. This is how we work.”*

What difference will this make?

Although it can't be ignored that this lady should have been offered screening much earlier, her story highlights the importance of attending for screening.

Attending the screening made a massive difference to what could have been a very different outcome for this lady. She can't encourage people strongly enough to attend screening when they are invited. Cancer screening does save lives..

Sharing her story and spreading awareness of the importance of cancer screening will encourage other people to make sure they attend their appointments or if they haven't received a letter, to contact their GP practice.



“I would like to express my gratitude to the Burney Breast Unit at St Helens Hospital and all the other staff involved in my care.”

Three ways we have made a difference for the community

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

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

It's important for providers and commissioners to see the bigger picture. Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.



The patient stories we share with our Place Quality & Performance Group help to emphasise what really matters to local people and highlight what needs to be improved and developed.

“Healthwatch St Helens have been a consistent attendee at the St Helens Place Quality Group meetings & prior to this at St Helens Quality Committee; their input is valued immensely and we have formatted our meetings to be not just informed by Healthwatch but to be directed into areas which members of the public are concerned about.”

Lisa Ellis, Associate Director Nursing & Care, St Helens Place.

Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone, who not only use services now but might need to use them in the future..



We worked with our local Hospital Trust to involve local people in the design of the Community Diagnostics Centre. They held engagement events to make sure that local people could join in conversations about what the service needed to look like and what they thought it should offer.

Improving care over time

Change can take time. It often takes months of work behind the scenes with steering groups and planning committees to highlight where services need to improve and to bring about change.



We worked with our local Hospital Trust around the design and improvement of their phlebotomy service. Changes have happened and the service looks different now but we are continuing to share what local people are telling us to develop the service even further.



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, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Providing up to date information about what services are available locally
- Helping people to use the right services to meet their needs.
- Helping people access NHS dentistry and get the right treatment
- Highlighting the support needed for local people to take care of their health during the cost of living crisis.

Helping a housebound lady get her COVID booster

We received a call from a gentleman who lives in Perth, Australia, who was so worried about his sister not having her COVID-19 booster that he contacted us. He told us she was housebound and unable to chase this up with her GP practice.

We spoke to our contacts at the local Hospital Trust who were running the vaccination programme and this lady was added to the home-visit team's list straight away. Although there was a small delay due to the availability of the vaccine, this lady was able to have her booster in the comfort of her own home.



“My sister has finally had her COVID booster and a flu jab at the same time.

I have been calling and emailing a lot of people about this and at last, I contacted you.”

Alan, Perth, Australia

Being able to access dental treatment with the support of a language interpreter.

A St Helens resident who has moved here recently, desperately needed dental treatment. In addition to the challenges that many people are facing at the moment, in accessing an NHS dentist, he had the added challenge of not being an English speaker.

A social prescriber from the St Helens Wellbeing Service, who was supporting this gentleman, contacted us both for information on how to access an NHS dentist and also for advice on how to overcome the language barrier.

The first thing we did was provide the number for the Cheshire & Mersey Dental Emergency Helpline, who can arrange for people who are experiencing dental pain to have treatment quickly. The next thing we did was track down interpreters who could support this gentleman, who speaks Tigrinya.

This gentleman was fully supported, firstly to make an appointment via the Emergency Helpline and then to communicate as he was experiencing to a dentist, ultimately enabling him to receive the dental treatment he needed to take away his pain and discomfort.



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:

- Spread the word in their communities about our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve
- Reviewed leaflets and websites to ensure accessibility

Rita

"I have been a member of Healthwatch St Helens for several years but only recently joined the Advisory Forum. I worked for the NHS for 40 years, working across all sectors. I'm really looking forward to working with other volunteers in supporting Healthwatch's priorities to improve services,, particularly those supporting the most vulnerable in our communities."



Ann

"I get a great amount of satisfaction from being a volunteer. I consider myself a people's person and feel that if I can help someone then that is good, not only for them but for me as well."



Alan


"My main passion is tackling Health Inequalities. . The ICS has adopted the Marmot Principles which means that talking Health Inequalities - especially those caused by Social Determinants - is high on their agenda. Thanks initially to an introduction by Healthwatch St Helens, I have been able to help with research into producing Health Equity."



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, which includes our Independent Complaints Advocacy service.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£159,427	Expenditure on pay	£90,039
Additional income	£1,000	Non-pay expenditure	£15,880
		Office and management fee	£36,000
Total income	£160,427	Total expenditure	£141,919

Additional income is broken down by:

- **£1,000 funding** received from Cheshire & Mersey ICS for work on a project

Next steps

In the ten years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in helping the health and care system understand what is working, spot issues and think about how things can be better in the future.

Services are currently facing unprecedented challenges and tackling the backlog needs to be a key priority for the NHS to ensure everyone gets the care they need. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving them a voice to help shape improvements to services.

We will also continue our work to tackling inequalities that exist and work to reduce the barriers you face when accessing care, regardless whether that is because of where you live, income or race.

Top three priorities for 2023–24

1. Mental Health & Wellbeing
2. Dental services
3. Access to services for people with additional needs



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 to our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Throughout 2022/23 the Board met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as how a restructure of our staff team could help us operate more effectively and how we needed a refresh of our marketing materials in order to attract more local attention.

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

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 have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of using services. During 2022/23 we have been available by phone, email, provided a webform 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 engaging with people from our most deprived areas, via foodbanks and pantries, asylum seekers and refugees via our Resettlement Team and with people with additional needs via our community groups and voluntary sector organisations.

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 present it at our Place Partnership Board, People's Board and Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee.

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 insight and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area we take information to the People's Board, Stakeholder Forum, Place Partnership Board and Quality & Performance Group. We also take insight and experiences to decision makers in The Cheshire & Mersey ICS such as the Quality & Performance Committee and System Quality Group..

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 2 Enter and View visits. We made 3 recommendations as a result of this activity.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Colliers Croft Care Home St Helens	Selected at random	To keep up the great work and continue to seek opportunities to develop the Home further.
Stocks Hall Care Home St Helens	Selected at random	Recommendation to add a photograph or memory box outside residents room to add a personal touch or as an aid for dementia resident.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch St Helens is represented on the St Helens People's Board by our Chair, Tom Hughes. During 2022/23 Tom has effectively carried out this role by making sure that what local people are telling us is shared with providers and decision makers and the varied needs of people in our communities are considered.

The nine Cheshire & Merseyside Healthwatch organisations are represented at a Place level, in our case St Helens, and at the Cheshire & Mersey Integrated Care Partnerships. These nine local Healthwatch have a trusted and effective relationship of over ten years. Our processes for joint work allow us to work proactively and responsively to ensure local people's lived experience influences decision making, both locally and at a Cheshire & Mersey level. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been written, and endorsed, by all nine Healthwatch to underpin and promote flexibility and openness.

2022–2023 Outcomes

Project/ activity	Changes made to services
Long COVID work	Providers have a better understandings of what is important to their patients and are adapting their service to better meet needs.
Access to NHS dental services	The ICB Dental Recovery Plan
Advocacy case highlighting the poor treatment of a patient	Staff training implemented for nursing staff.



healthwatch

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