

# What matters to you

**Healthwatch St Helens  
Annual Report 2021-22**





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# Message from our chair

Without a doubt, another year of challenges for everyone, working so hard to make a difference to the lives of people in St Helens.

We understand that people will carry for generations the impact of COVID, their personal loss and grief, and the changes to services provided to them. The health inequalities highlighted by the pandemic are very apparent, with waiting lists a big concern, which is why we've made this one of our priorities for another year. Our team has worked hard to make sure that people who aren't always listened to, got to have their say, including older people and people with learning disabilities.

As always, our local providers have shown their appreciation for the feedback we provide, that helps them to improve the services they deliver.

Following on from all the good work we've done, in partnership with our local Authority and CCG, we'll work with the Cheshire & Mersey Health and Care Partnership to make sure that our local residents get the best care possible.



Tom Hughes  
Healthwatch St Helens Chair



“The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities.”

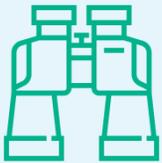
Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England



# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch St Helens is your local health and social care champion. From mental health services to social care and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also signpost you to the services you need and 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.



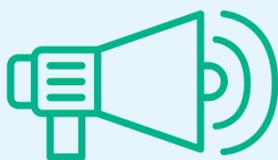
### Our values

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

# Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

## Reaching out



**1,832 people**

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

**40,920 people**

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

## Making a difference to care



We published

**5 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**Accessing services during COVID-19**

which highlighted the struggles people have, related to the pandemic, a year on.

## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**18**

outstanding volunteers, who gave up their time to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our Local Authority. In 2021-22 we received:

**£159,427**

Which is the same as the previous year and includes our Independent Complaints Advocacy service.

We also currently employ

**5 staff**

who help us carry out this work, the same as last year.

## How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring



Our report on accessing NHS dental treatment contained useful information and contacts.



Our advice and guidance to a local provider helped to make their communications with the public more patient-focused and easy to understand.

Summer



Our report about accessing treatment during the pandemic helped commissioners and providers to understand what local people were experiencing.



Our survey aimed at people living in residential care and their friends and families helped the people caring for them to understand what was important to help them to live a good life.

Autumn



The findings of our Report about accessing maternity services led to services being reviewed, with better communication at the heart of patient care.



We teamed up with the Resettlement Team in our Local Authority, to make sure that refugees and asylum seekers had the right care and support for their health needs.

Winter



We helped commissioners and providers to understand what's important to people with learning disabilities, when accessing health care.



We helped to get the messages across about the importance of both the COVID-19 vaccination and the flu jab, to stay healthy through the winter.

# Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the past 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 back to services to help them improve.



## Making Maternity Services better

Thanks to women and their partners sharing their experiences of accessing maternity services, our local hospital Trust and the St Helens Maternity Voices partnership (MVP) has worked together to improve the overall experience for patients.

The Trust's Midwifery Lead used the findings in our Report to help staff to understand what's important to patients in their care, and to inform their team action plan.

The MVP Chair used our Report to help inform conversation in the work being done around neonatal and perinatal mental health.



### 100% of women

**felt that their overall experience had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic**

The recommendations in our Report :

- Highlighted the need for better communication, between teams and with patients.
- Emphasised how patients and their families need to have clearer information and for staff to check they understand the information given to them.
- Highlighted the need for the Trust to keep developing a culture in their maternity services, where all patients feel supported and don't have the sense of being isolated and alone.
- Gave real life examples to local groups that support families who are struggling as new parents, to help them understand that they are not alone in how they feel.

### What difference did this make?

Hospital teams are going to greater lengths to ensure that their communication is better and the standard of care they provide is as high as possible.



“As a first-time mum I felt overwhelmed and unsure of things at times.”

Quote taken from our Maternity Services Survey



## Helping a local man to get the changes that gave him his life back.

When Peter told us about the effect that what was written in his medical notes was having on his life, our advocate worked tirelessly to support him to get his records put right.

When Peter took an accidental overdose of insulin, resulting in an episode that resembled a seizure, what was written on his medical notes meant that he lost his driving licence, so could no longer work as an HGV driver. He was desperate to get back to work and be 'a useful member of society' as he put it. With no income, he was made homeless, sleeping on friends' couches or in a caravan.

We liaised with the ambulance service, Peter's GP and the Complaints Team at the hospital Trust to get to the bottom of what was happening, and supported Peter in his communications with the people who could help him.



"You were the only one who ever listened to me when no-one else did, and without your support I would have not got this far, so thank you."



### What difference did this make

Our intervention put Peter in touch with the consultant who wrote to his GP to ask for his records to be amended, to reflect that he had never had a seizure.

Peter's GP was able to write to the DVLA to ask for his licence to be reinstated.

Peter had both his driving and HGV licences reinstated and was able to return to work and get on with his life.

## 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 the NHS and social care services to listen to and learn from the experiences of local people, to find out what matters to them and what can be done to make the biggest impact on their lives.

We supported Keith to work with providers and help them understand how their communication with patients' next of kin needed to be improved and how lack of communication between teams can mean a distressing time for both the patient and their family. This led to those teams reviewing their practices and introducing new ways of working with the people they care for and their loved ones.



### Getting services to involve the public

Our presence on various committees has made providers aware of the benefits of involving their patients to help improve services.

We have given advice and direction to our local Hospital Trust on how best to engage with local people and involve them in the design of new services, so that they meet the patients' needs.



### Improving care over time

Change takes time. We involve the public in highlighting when services are working well and where they need to be improved..

Our ongoing work around Long-COVID gives people who need to access support and treatment the opportunity to share their experience of the services they have used and tell providers how they can make services better.

# Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch St Helens 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 helped people by:

- Providing up to date information on COVID-19
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme
- Helping people to access the services they need



## Listening to people with additional needs

We know that sometimes, people with learning disabilities don't get the chance to share their experiences of using health and care services.

We designed an Easy Read survey, visited local colleges, sheltered housing and community groups to make sure that people with learning disabilities had their say and felt listened to.

We heard about the experiences of 90 people, specifically around their Annual Health Check, and what would have made it better. Most of the time, it was communication and explaining things properly that was highlighted as the most important thing.

This feedback can now be used by GP practices to make sure that they communicate well with their patients and continue to work on improving their services for people with learning disabilities.



## Feeling less confused about accessing NHS dental treatment

With accessing NHS dental services being a national issue, we wanted to understand how this was affecting people in St Helens.

We utilised the information we had gathered from enquiries and requests for support, and used our social media channels to gather more feedback. Our local picture was very similar to what was happening across the Cheshire and Mersey region.

We produced advice for the public, telling them what to expect from services as well as giving details of all dental practices in the borough and their current status, regarding waiting lists and whether the practice was accessible and dementia-friendly. We also included information about how to access urgent treatment and what to do if the person needing treatment is unable to leave their home. This information has been well received by people in our local area and we've had lots of positive feedback.



# Volunteers

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

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say from home, by sharing the views and experiences of friends and neighbours with us, on their behalf.
- Taken part in consultations on a range of issues and services.
- Assisted as part of our 'Lay-readers' panel' – checking local services' publications to make them easier to read and understand.
- Helping to get the message out about COVID restrictions, testing and vaccination.





**Judi**

“I really enjoy doing the Enter and Views. I have had close family in care settings, so feel I have some knowledge on being on the receiving end of services.. Having said that it was quite a steep learning curve, looking at services in a structured and ‘through the senses way’ ... I have now picked the care home I would like to spend the rest of my days in!”



**Kath**

“I became a volunteer several years ago as I wanted to help out in my local community and I was looking for a rewarding piece of work that would help make a difference.

Unfortunately a lot of our activities had to be postponed during COVID but I am very much looking forward to starting again in the very near future.”



**Linda**

“I joined Healthwatch as a recently retired nurse, with extensive experience as a community nurse and nationally with NHS Digital. I thought that I had a lot to bring to the discussion. As an elected member of St Helens Council I sit on numerous panels so have a deep understanding of issues raised.

I also consider myself to be a ‘people person’, so love chatting to residents.”



**Do you feel inspired?**

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



[www.healthwatchsthelens.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchsthelens.co.uk)



0300 111 0007



[info@healthwatchsthelens.co.uk](mailto: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. This includes our NHS Complaints Advocacy service.

Income	
Funding received from local authority	£159,427
Additional funding	£0
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£159,427</b>

Income	
Staff costs	£85,000
Operational costs	£30,747
Support and administration	£7,000
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£122,747</b>

## Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. Health Inequalities
2. Mental health and wellbeing
3. Long COVID and the ongoing challenges of the pandemic

## Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, which is why we've carried this over as one of our priorities.

Mental health and wellbeing is, and has been for a very long time, a challenge for our town. We will continue to work alongside our St Helens Cares colleagues to improve access to services for our residents.

Many of our residents face bigger challenges to accessing health care than ever before as a result of the pandemic and our Cheshire & Mersey Healthwatch network will be looking at how easy it is for people with Long COVID to access the right treatment and support..

# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch St Helens, Halton & St Helens Voluntary & Community Action, St Marie's, Lugsdale Road, Widnes, Cheshire, 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 local community. Through 2021/22 the board met quarterly and made decisions on matters such as our work on health inequalities and long-Covid.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. The information we receive from requests for support and through our signposting activities inform our priority areas. We engage with our Advisory Forum members before we consult our wider membership, and use social media to reach the wider St Helens population.

### **Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience.**

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to talk to us about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, engaging with people with learning disabilities.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website and present it at our local Stakeholder Forum, People's Board and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **Responses to recommendations and requests**

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. As a result no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

## St Helens People’s Board

Healthwatch St Helens is represented on the St Helens People’s Board by Tom Hughes, our Chair. During 2021/22 Tom has effectively carried out this role by making sure the views of local people and what matters to them are taken into consideration when decisions are made.

### 2021-2022 Outcomes

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
<p>Becoming a Marmot Community – creating an equitable health and care system.</p> <p>Health inequity is a concern for the people of our borough and is something that has been made worse by the pandemic.</p>	<p>The Inequalities commission (a sub-group of the People’s Board) has been created, with representation from partners across the People’s Board, including Healthwatch. This commission is developing a local work plan for becoming a Marmot Community.</p>
<p>The St Helens Sexual Health Strategy.</p> <p>We have highlighted, among others things, how people in our most deprived areas have less access to good quality health care, with sexual health care included.</p>	<p>The development of an integrated, modern and financially sustainable system that delivers high quality outcomes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention and Sexual Wellbeing.</li> <li>• Target service provision where it is needed with increased support for those who need it most.</li> <li>• Reduce unintended pregnancies;</li> <li>• Tackle the prevalence of and prevent the adverse consequences and health harms of STIs and HIV.</li> </ul>
<p>The People's Plan – the St Helens Cares strategic plan.</p> <p>Healthwatch has been fully involved with the work of St Helens Cares, feeding in intel from the public to help inform what priorities are agreed.</p>	<p>The main focus of commissioning in St Helens will now be based on the 3 priorities of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Wellbeing;</li> <li>• Tackling Obesity</li> <li>• Resilient Communities</li> </ul>



# healthwatch

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