



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of listening

Healthwatch St Helens

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“Healthwatch have supported a number of changes in the way services are delivered as well as ensuring care homes and other care settings are providing good quality services, through the Enter & View programme. They are active members on various executive boards where they have influenced change and supported the reduction of inequalities and access to health services.”

Jamaila Hussan, Deputy Executive Director of People and NHS Services and Director of Adult Social Services

A message from our Chair

Another busy year for our hardworking staff team and volunteers, committed to improving the health and social services on offer to the people of St Helens.

Our varied membership of organizations and individuals makes us available to all people in our communities, sometimes with one signposting or giving out a piece of information, making a massive difference to someone's life.

Our priorities, as always are influenced by local trends, including our upcoming work around suicide prevention, which is a sad, tragic and unacceptable issue for our town.

Our positive relationship continues with our statutory providers in the town, and we value our independence and legal right in being able to challenge, ask questions and hold services to account.

Our longstanding good relationship with the other Healthwatch across the region means that we can continue to influence decisions taken by Integrated Care Boards and Partnerships, not just locally, but across Cheshire & Merseyside.



“

“I can't stress enough how important it is for people to get involved with their local Healthwatch, to influence changes in decision making. After all, these are the services that impact on you, your friends and your families.

[Tom Hughes, Chair, Healthwatch St Helens]

About us

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

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



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

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



Our values are:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

We've supported more than 700 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 5 staff and, our work is supported by 20 volunteers.

Reaching out:



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

55,424 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as finding an NHS dentist and communicating more effectively with medical professionals.

Championing your voice:



We published 5 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like care homes, dentistry and mental health services.

Our most popular report was 'Finding out about our Residential Care Providers across St Helens.'

Statutory funding:



We're funded by St Helens Council. In 2024/25 we received £159,427, which is the same as last year.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in St Helens. Here are a few highlights.

spring

Our listening event at Children's A&E gave young people the opportunity to share their experiences and views about their care.



We heard about our feedback around NHS dentistry being used by the local Scrutiny Committee to ask for more funding for NHS dentists.



summer

We reviewed our popular report about accessing NHS dentists to ensure the information it contains is current.



We identified how people in need of weight management support were sometimes being wrongly referred.



Autumn

We strengthened our relationship with domiciliary care providers and social workers to help more people to access our support.



Our feedback led to a local provider reassessing how they communicate with the families of patients with learning disabilities.



Winter

Our input into the design of a booklet about End-of-Life care ensured that the information provided is accessible and user-friendly for local people.



We raised awareness of the associated health risks, through our involvement in the Stop Smoking campaign across Cheshire & Merseyside.



Working together for change

During the last 12 months, the 9 Cheshire & Merseyside (C&M) Healthwatch Organisations (HWO) have continued to work together to provide a strong voice for the 2.5 million people who live, work and use health and care services across our region.

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Cheshire & Merseyside to achieve the following:

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



We have a Memorandum of Understanding and a Data Sharing Agreement which enable us to collaborate on a wide range of issues. This helps ensure the Cheshire & Mersey ICS hears what matters to local people on a much wider footprint and can use this feedback to make informed decisions about the provision of health and care services.

The big conversation:



The C&M ICB recognised the value of a collaborative approach to gathering feedback in relation to Primary Care Access Recovery (PCARP) and commissioned C&M HWOs to engage with the 2.5m people across the area. All 9 LHW took part in designing and distributing the survey – with HW Cheshire taking the lead on analysing and drafting the individual and combined reports.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



We continue to build relationships within the wider ICS structure as well as maintaining those already established at Place. In November 2024 we met with the Chair of the ICS Quality & Performance Committee, commencing a discussion about how the patient feedback we collect can be better incorporated into the discussions of the Committee.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

Here are some examples of our work in St Helens this year:

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



Hearing personal and individual experiences helps services better understand the added issues that some people face.

People who have caring responsibilities for adults with learning disabilities are having their concerns listened to about the added challenges they face. Providers now better understand that consideration needs to be given, not just to the patient, but the needs of the person they care for as well.

Getting services to involve the public



By involving local people, primary care services improve for everyone.

More and more, our GP practices are understanding the value of engaging with their patients to understand what matters to them. Increasingly, we are seeing improvements in the experience of patients, when practices have made the effort to listen to them around appointments, getting to speak to the right medical professional and getting their medication on time.

Improving care over time



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

We've been concerned about the high levels of suicide in St Helens for some time. We've been contributing to the work already being done by our statutory sector colleagues and we will continue our commitment to help bring down the worrying rates, by assessing existing services and collecting the views of people bereaved by suicide.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Listening to your experiences

Highlighting the care and treatment people are receiving in residential care homes.

We found out what support and care is on offer for people who live in residential and nursing care homes in St Helens.

We wanted to gain an overall picture of what the experience is like for people living in residential care, what access they have, to medical and other treatment, and how any additional needs are met.

What did we do?

We launched a survey that asked questions about access to medical treatment, dental care and eye health, that also gave providers the opportunity to highlight any difficulties they were having in accessing services for their residents.

Key things we heard:



66%

of care homes can easily access NHS dental treatment for their residents.

100%

of care homes are visited regularly by a GP or advanced nurse practitioner.

100%

Reported using all options available to them to support residents who have had a fall, avoiding a visit to A&E, where possible and appropriate.

Our work showed that overall, people who live in a residential or nursing care setting in St Helens are receiving a consistently high standard of care.

What difference did this make?

We have strengthened our relationships with residential care providers, emphasizing how our services are available to them and their residents.

Our Place colleagues can utilize the information contained in our report to identify what needs to improve, such as access to NHS dentists.

Listening to your experiences

Young people speak out about accessing support with their mental health.

Young people want a better experience when they are trying to access support for their mental health concerns.

We spoke to young people about referral, follow-up support and their overall experience of trying to access services.

Key things we heard:



53%

of respondents told us they didn't feel listened to .

47%

of respondents said they weren't signposted for any kind of support.



"The system is very broken. I felt patronized and like my problems were diminished."

"I shouldn't have to get to the point of crisis to get support".

What difference did this make?

We made sure that our Place colleagues were aware of the poor experiences that young people were having so that they could review the design and delivery of mental health services.

Commissioners and providers welcome our insight and continue to call on us to provide the feedback that young people share with us about their experiences.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of St Helens. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Sharing information with our D/deaf community via the Deafness Resource Centre.
- Being part of the Inequalities Commission to contribute to their work on health inequalities due to poverty and deprivation.
- Ensuring that our St Helens Cares colleagues are aware of issues affecting all communities, via forums such as the Place Partnership Board, Quality & Performance Group and Place Primary Care Group



Improving access to dental treatment for members of the Asian community

Accessing dental treatment can be difficult enough without added challenges.

Some members of our Asian community have the added complication of being disabled and possibly housebound as well English not being their first language. It takes our local knowledge and contacts to signpost them for the treatment they need.

What difference did this make?

Our knowledge of what's available locally and having the right contacts enables people with multiple challenges to access NHS dental treatment, both for emergency treatment and in some cases, treatment in their own home.

Helping refugees and asylum seekers understand and access NHS care

Many of the refugees and asylum seekers adapting to life in St Helens struggle to understand how the NHS works, due to lack of up-to-date information and the language barrier.

Through our good relationships with local organisation who support people whose first language is not English we can provide the information and signposting they need.

What difference did this make?

The two-way lines of communication mean that we can seek advice from our colleagues who support speakers of other languages, in the same way that they can contact us on their clients' behalf, for help and support.

Information and signposting

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, over 700 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Information and signposting

Better communication on hospital wards.

Thanks to Marie's feedback, a local Trust is now aware of the importance of proper communication with patients and their families.

After Marie's diabetes diagnosis she was pleased to be told to call her husband to come and collect her from hospital. While he was helping her to get to grips with her new medical device, he was told to leave as it wasn't visiting hours, without anyone asking why he was there.

"He was there because I'd been asked to call him, but nobody asked him, or even spoke to me, they just told him to leave".

When we put Marie in touch with the right people to talk to about her experience, they were keen to get to the bottom of what had happened and why nobody had asked the right questions.

Now staff at the Trust understand the importance of proper communication to avoid added stress for patients in an already stressful situation.



"Thank you for listening to me about how we were both made to feel."

Helping with closure after a bereavement

Arthur still had doubts about his wife's quality of care, but the time had lapsed for him to make a complaint.

Arthur believed that his wife had not received sufficient care and treatment in hospital, before she passed away. He needed to feel that someone was taking his concerns seriously and the chance to air his anxiety, stress and grief.

After we supported Arthur to write a letter to the hospital Trust, he was given some explanation about his wife's care and treatment. He told us that it gave him a sense of control, and he now felt that he had 'done something' for his wife.



"I am very thankful to Healthwatch St Helens for helping me to find some closure about my wife's care. Now I can try to move on"

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given countless hours to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Spoke to people 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



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.

"Through Healthwatch I became involved in Applied Health Research Collaborative in the North West Coast and have written for a website about equality and equity."

Alan has been involved with Healthwatch and many other health and care organizations for more than fifteen years..

"I have a son with a learning disability, autism, epilepsy and other things and I have become very aware of the need for Health and Social care to work together for so many communities – not just people like my son, but elderly and frail people, those with dementia, and so many others."



Alan

"I find the role of visiting local Care Homes very important, enabling residents and their families to have a voice about the care they receive.."

Kath has been involved with us for a long time but joined our Enter & View team after retiring from her long career at St Helens Citizens' Advice Bureau.

"This role continues to be rewarding for me and helps to ensure residents receive the highest standard of care they need and deserve.."



Kath

Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatchsthelens.co.uk



0300 111 0007



info@healthwatchsthelens.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£159,427	Expenditure on pay	£120,916
Additional income	£9,166	Non-pay expenditure	£26,482
		Office and management fee	£20,000
Total income	£168,593	Total Expenditure	£167,398

Additional income is broken down into:

- £2,500 received from the local ICS for joint work on a project around improved access to primary care.
- £1,666 funding received from Champs Public Health Collaborative to support their smokefree project.
- £5,000 carried over.

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across Cheshire & Merseyside also received funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
PCARP (Primary Care Access Recovery Plan) engagement	£2,500

Finance and future priorities

Next steps:

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

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System, St Helens Cares, to help to continue to 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:

Suicide prevention – gathering insight from people who have been bereaved by suicide about what they believe led to or would have prevented their loved one from taking their own life, giving them the opportunity to share their views and experiences in a supportive environment.

Access to support for people with Diabetes – finding out how easy it is to access support to manage diabetes itself, weight management support and other relevant services, linked to the safe management of diabetes.

Waiting time from Referral to 1st Appointment – comparing the waiting times from referral to 1st appointment with a consultant/specialist. What is the impact of long waiting times?

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 voluntarily 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 2024/25, the Board met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as limiting our online presence on platforms that were demonstrating values we do not share and agreeing the priorities we should present to our Advisory Forum for agreement. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities via our website and monthly newsletter.

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 2024/25, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website, through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

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 promote it via social media.

Statutory statements

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 the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were 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 shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to The People's Board, the Place Partnership Board, Quality & Performance Group, and Primary Care Group.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Cheshire & Merseyside. For example, we regularly attend the Health & Care Partnership, System Quality Group and Clinical Effectiveness Group, in collaboration with the other local Healthwatch across the region. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch St Helens is represented on the St Helens People's Board by our Chair, Tom Hughes.

During 2024/25, our representative has effectively carried out this role by ensuring that the local voice is listened to by decision-makers.

Healthwatch Leads across the region rotate and share representation on Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Partnerships and Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Boards.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Sherdley Court Care Home	Part of Enter & View schedule	Recommendation to keep up the good work and some improvements suggested.
Adamston House Nursing Home	Part of Enter & View schedule	Recommendation of keeping up the good work and to carry out a repair to the building, which has now been done.
Brown Edge House	Part of Enter & View schedule	Recommendation of keeping up the good work and to develop the service further for residents with dementia.
Madison Court Care Home	Part of Enter & View schedule	Recommendation of keeping up the good work and for addressing an issue with accessible parking spaces.
Elm Tree House Care Home	Part of Enter & View schedule	Recommendation of keeping up the good work and to develop the service further for residents with dementia.

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Maintaining our attention on mental health services for young people	Raised awareness of the experiences of young people accessing services
Increasing our focus on supported living and domiciliary care	We will continue to give increased attention to the care provided in these settings, to create a clearer picture for commissioners.

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