



Speaking up for Better Care

Healthwatch St Helens Annual Report 2025/26

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HEALTHWATCH ST HELENS - ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

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Manager
Jayne Parkinson-
Loftus

“

Listening to people’s thoughts about the care that they and their families and loved ones receive, is one of the best ways to influence the improvement of services. Every comment, concern, and compliment that we collect helps health and care professionals to understand what matters to local people, what works and what needs to change, so care can be safer and better.

“We want to say a huge thank you to all the local people who have taken the time to share their experiences, and put their trust in us, as an independent body, to represent their views.”

A message from our Chair

Another busy and challenging year.

In these challenging times, the Healthwatch team have taken on some very demanding pieces of work this past year, including listening to the experiences of people who have been affected by suicide.

A big issue for our town for some time now, the work we have carried out has given people in a very vulnerable situation the opportunity to talk about how difficult their situation has been and will help lead to developments in how services are commissioned and designed.

As always, our independent NHS Complaints Advocacy services has been extremely busy and has helped many local people to resolve their issues, get some answers and achieve some closure at what can be a very distressing time.

Despite the current uncertainty, the work we do provides independence and objectivity to the people in our Borough.



Chair
Tom Hughes



“The dedicated team and volunteers continue to work hard in the interest of local people, especially those who might not otherwise have a voice, about the care their receive.”

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

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 900 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed 5 staff and, our work was supported by 20+ volunteers.



Reaching out:

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

80,597 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as support to find an NHS dentist and accurate information around waiting lists.



Championing your voice:

We published 3 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like diabetic services and support for people affected by suicide.

Our most popular report was Reducing Suicide in St Helens, highlighting what people who are affected by suicide are experiencing.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by St Helens Council. In 2025/26 we received £175,768, which is a 10.25% increase from 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

Working with experts by experience gave local people the opportunity to shape our consultation activities.



Our involvement meant that the redesign of the Long Covid service had the public's best interest at the forefront.



Summer

Our expertise around patient engagement enabled a local provider to better listen to what their patients need from their service.



We responded to feedback that people with rare conditions often feel they are not listened to or understood by medical professionals.



Autumn

We shared what local people had told us about what mattered to them with the Peer-Led Mental Health steering group



Our presence at the Multi-agency approach steering group allowed decision makers to understand what's important to local people..



Winter

Our Report about people affected by suicide highlighted the need for more community-based support and services for people at risk of losing someone to suicide.



Our input helped commissioners to understand what's important to local people, in the redesign of the NHS 111 service.



Working together for change

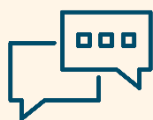
All 9 HW organisations across Cheshire & Merseyside have worked on several projects this year, providing the wider health and care system access to the experiences and views of what matters to the 2.5 million people across our region.

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



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

The C&M network of Healthwatch organisations is a strong, reliable and reputable source of information, allowing health and care commissioners the opportunity to design services with people at the heart. More importantly, Healthwatch fundamentally provides the public with confidence that their voice is being listened to and used in decision making.



A big conversation:

Together, the 9 HW organisations have completed the following projects, providing reports and recommendations on behalf of C&M citizens: -

- Primary Care Access Recovery Plans
- Women's Services
- Dentistry
- NHS App



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

Healthwatch Leads meet weekly to keep up to date with all things health and care related. We also use this time together to exchange information with invited colleagues from the ICB, Public Health, CQC and other partners.

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 experiences and their impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

More attention is being given to residents in supported living after it was highlighted that care plans aren't always accurate and up to date. Understanding the potential risks around information being inaccurate helps providers to ensure that all records are up to date and correct.



Getting services to involve the public

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

We worked very closely with a young man that has struggled with his identity for many years and, with a significant number of mental health issues, was not getting the help he needed. Our advocate supported him to navigate a pathway of care and enter into negotiations about the treatment that was going to address his needs.



Improving care over time

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

Our survey around access to services for people with diabetes highlighted the inconsistency in what people were experiencing and the need to develop a consistent approach to treating diabetes. Our findings will help providers to understand where services need to improve and what is important to people is the support they receive to manage the condition.

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 people who have been affected by suicide.

Last year, we gave a voice to people who have been affected by suicide, either by losing someone to suicide or living with the fear that someone they love might take their own life.

High rates of suicide has been a concern in St Helens for several years, and we wanted to support the work already being done to address this, by our Place colleagues.

What did we do

We launched a survey to better understand the impact of having experienced a bereavement by suicide and how this can have a long-lasting effect on people's mental wellbeing, also increasing their own risk of having suicidal thoughts. We spoke with people who wanted to share their own experiences to help others.

Key things we heard:



39%

of people had experienced bereavement by suicide.

18%

of people didn't know what support was available to them.

30%

had experienced their own suicidal thoughts.

Our work showed how that people want a more peer-peer approach to getting support and talking to people who understand how they feel is often preferred over professional help.

What difference did this make?

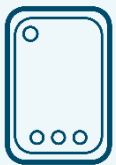
Our findings have influenced Public Health's work going forward and from our recommendations, decision makers better understand what's important to local people in the design and commissioning of services.

Sharing stories of living with diabetes

Local people want consistent care after a diagnosis of diabetes.

A strong theme throughout the feedback was dissatisfaction with GP services particularly around delayed diagnosis, lack of proactive treatment, and insufficient follow-up care. Many people reported difficulty in accessing diabetic specialist services.

Key things we heard:



41%

of respondents felt they were well informed and supported at the time of diagnosis.

64%

of respondents have accessed support in the last year.



“In four years, I’ve had no contact from diabetic services.”

Our report has highlighted how services need a more joined up approach to caring for people with diabetes.

What difference did this make?

Commissioners and providers can learn from the experiences of people living with diabetes to shape services of the future, leading to faster diagnosis, better follow-up care and easier access to specialist services.

Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

This year over 80,000 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.

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 own health and wellbeing
- Signposting people to additional support services



Acknowledging lack of support for a patient in hospital.

Thanks to one lady's feedback, a local hospital has apologised to a patient and her family for the poor care she received on the ward.

Clare contacted us for support with talking to the complaints team at the hospital, to get some explanation as to what went wrong and how care can be improved in the future.

The concern was thoroughly investigated by the Director of Nursing, and the ward is committed to deliver a better experience for patients.



“Healthwatch St Helens helped me speak to the right people to get things improved for patients’ future care.”

Improving Domiciliary Care

Pauline felt that the stress of dealing with concerns around domiciliary care was getting too much.

Pauline contacted us because she was worried about the standard of the domiciliary care she was receiving and wasn't confident in speaking to the providers.

After making contact with us, Pauline was able to have a frank and open conversation about her care and to explain what was worrying her, leading to a better standard of care overall.



“The support I received helped to take away my stress and let me explain what was worrying me.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given up 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:

- Visited communities to promote 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



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.



Rita

“Volunteering with Healthwatch St Helens is important to me as we can help to ensure that some of the most vulnerable people in our community are represented by an independent voice in St Helens.”

Being on the Volunteer Advisory Forum, I really enjoy helping to develop the annual work priorities programme. Being part of the Enter & View team gives me a sense of knowing that we’re doing such an important job in making sure that our residential care and nursing homes are of a high standard.”

“It’s important to me to be part of something independent like Healthwatch, to make sure that we give a voice to care home residents and their families, who might not otherwise be heard.”

Judi has been a volunteer with us for many years, part of our Volunteer Advisory Forum and our Enter & View team.

“As the mother of a daughter in residential care I want to help make sure everyone gets the care they deserve..”



Judi

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 St Helens Borough Council, under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£175,768	Expenditure on pay	£113,000
Additional income	£0	Non-pay expenditure	£39,350
		Office and management fee	£23,418
Total income	£175,768	Total Expenditure	£175,768

Finance and future priorities

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to people in all of our local communities, 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:

- Barriers to accessing support and treatment

We will explore what enables people to attend for appointments, what stops them being able to and what support is needed to enable them to look after their health.

- Mental Health & Wellbeing

We will find out what people are doing to keep themselves well and what is their experience of accessing support.

- Assessing the effectiveness of specific mental health services.

How effective are the services that people have been referred for, and did they meet the patients' needs?

Statutory statements

Healthwatch St Helens, Halton & St Helens Voluntary & Community Action.
The Beacon, College Street, St Helens, WA10 1TF.

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 2025/26, the Board met four times and made decisions on matters such as dealing with staffing issues and what our priorities for the following year should be. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities via our wider membership, Advisory Forum and by attending local groups and events.

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 2025/26, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and 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 sent to the Place Partnership Board, Scrutiny Committee and People's Board.

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 local organisations who support people from other countries, people with disabilities and those in deprived communities have the same opportunity as everyone else across the borough to access our Advocacy service, signposting service, and to take part in our consultation and engagement activities.

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 Place Partnership Board, Mental Health & Wellbeing Committee and Primary Care Group.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Cheshire & Merseyside. For example, we, as a Healthwatch network, share responsibility for providing information to the Clinical Effectiveness Council and System Quality Group, among others. 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 2025/26, Tom has effectively carried out this role by ensuring that our engagement with local people has been listened to by decision makers.

Healthwatch St Helens is represented on Cheshire Integrated Care Partnerships Integrated Care Boards by a representative from the Cheshire & Mersey Healthwatch network, who share the responsibility.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

We carried out 7 visits last year including the three mentioned below

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Abbey Rose Care Home	Selected at random	Recommended a staff board in Reception with photo, name and job title, which has improved the experience for new residents and their families.
Elizabeth Court Care Home	Poor CQC report	Recommended replacing some of the old window frames and decorating the wall with memorabilia to prompt memories and conversation, which has improved the overall experience for the residents.
Cedric House	Selected at random	Recommended a disabled parking space and removal of some items from the front garden, which has led to a safer environment for residents and visitors.

2025 – 2026 Outcomes


Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Reducing Suicide in St Helens	Our findings have influenced the work of Public Health, and our recommendations will shape the design and commissioning of services going forward
Waiting Times from Referral to First Appointment	Providers understand the need to assess their individual services to establish their waiting times.
Access to Support for People with Diabetes in St Helens	Commissioners and providers understand the need for a more consistent service for people with diabetes



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