



**Healthwatch St Helens  
Communications & Engagement  
Strategy  
2020 - 2023**

## About Healthwatch St Helens

Healthwatch St Helens is the independent watchdog around health and social care, giving local people a voice about the services they use in St Helens. The legal foundations of local Healthwatch are set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

We are here to listen to your views and experiences of using services and signpost you to local organisations that can help you and support you. We keep you informed about what's available so you can make the best choices to meet your needs.

We give local people the chance to influence the design and delivery of local services. We gather views and experiences of local people and pass them on to providers and commissioners of services, to help make improvements in health and social care across the borough.

We offer an Independent Complaints Advocacy service for people who need that extra bit of support when making a complaint about an NHS service.

Healthwatch has the power to '*Enter & View*' health and social care services, to offer the community's views on how they are delivering services, and make recommendations for change.

We have a seat on the St Helens People's Board to make sure that local people's views are taken into consideration in the development of new services and local strategies. We also share feedback with other local Healthwatch, Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission.

Our contract is held by Halton & St Helens Voluntary & Community Action and we operate under their policies and procedures.

## **The purpose of this document**

This Communication & Engagement Strategy is designed to outline how we ensure our interactions with the public are clear and appropriate and highlight how we make sure that all people across the borough can be involved and have their say.

## **What does 'communication' mean?**

By nature, communication is a two-way process where a connection is made. Communicating coherent information to all stakeholders will help everyone to make informed decisions. Communicating involves listening which is fundamental to the process and to decisions being made. It is also crucial that Healthwatch St Helens is seen to be a credible, ethical and independent organisation.

## **What does 'engagement' mean?**

Engagement is a term used to describe a two-way communication between Healthwatch St Helens and the residents of St Helens. This includes all members of the public. The aim is to keep them informed and also have effective ways to find out their views, experiences and needs, and then communicate the information to the providers and people who design services.

Engaging with the people of our borough helps Healthwatch St Helens to make sure that patients and public are at the heart of the decision making process for health and social care services.

## **Accessibility**

At Healthwatch St Helens, we always strive to make all of our communications accessible to all people living in our communities, including people with sensory impairment, learning disabilities and difficulties, literacy difficulties and people for whom English is not their first language.

All communications are checked by individuals within our staff team who have experience in teaching and working with people with a range of additional needs. Where certain expertise does not sit within the team we liaise with local partners to ensure that our materials are accessible to all.

Our literature is produced in Trebuchet MS in accordance with guidance from Healthwatch England and where possible, in point size 14, for ease of reading. Stock colours are used, again in accordance with the Healthwatch England colours and, drawing on expertise from VCA colleagues, we are able to create marketing material that is more appealing to the eye.

We have a QR code on our leaflets so that people in our D/deaf community can watch a video about us and what we do, in British Sign Language. We added a section to our website where this video can be viewed and our information is available in other languages on request.

## Target Groups

Healthwatch St Helens use a range of communication methods to appeal to and meet the needs of its audience. Ranging from supplying information on paper to using social media to get our messages out, we aim to ensure that all groups in our communities can access our service.

- Older people:

We have a good working relationship with Age UK Mid-Mersey as well as St Helens wellbeing services which enables us to engage with older people in our borough. Enter & View visits enable us to reach people who live in residential care. The Stroke Association, Carers Centre and Alzheimer's Society are also key contacts.

- People with learning disabilities:

We engage with people who have learning disabilities through our relationship with local group The Coalition of Disabled People, SEND teachers at our local colleges and teams from our day centres. The LD specialist nurse at our local hospital Trust and the LD Clinical Lead at our local mental health Trust are also key partners in helping us to reach people with learning disabilities. We call on their expertise to adapt our consultation methods to enable the people they work with to participate. Surveys are produced in Easy Read where appropriate.

- People with disabilities and sensory impairment:

Our colleagues at the Deafness Resource Centre help us to engage with D/deaf people as well as Signing Solutions who translated our information into British Sign Language. The local authority Visual Impairment team offer advice and guidance around engaging with people who are blind or have sight loss.

The Stroke Association, St Helens wellbeing Service and various other local groups help us to engage with people who have physical disabilities as well as the Carers Centre. We also have local links with Diabetes UK.

- Young people:

We have a place in the Children & Young People's Engagement and Experience Group and a good relationship with our local authority colleagues who work with children and young people. We attend Freshers' Week at the local colleges and engage with young people through links with lecturers and pastoral teams.

There is a dedicated section on our website with information for children and young people.

- Faith and belief

The St Helens Faith Network and Hope Centre help us to reach and engage with faith groups in the borough.

- Speakers of other languages, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Our links to speakers of other languages is usually through the local SHAP team and the Equality & Diversity Lead at the local Council, who help us to make sure that the people they work with can access our services and participate in our consultations. The Resettlement Manager from the local authority is our key link to refugees and asylum seekers.

We attend support groups and gatherings, ESOL classes and a local café that has been set up to give people from other cultures the opportunity to gain work experience. Our local authority contacts enable us to access interpreters and we adjust communication and consultation methods to be culturally appropriate.

- Substance misusers

CGL are our local organisation offering support and treatment to people who misuse drugs and alcohol. They support us to distribute our surveys and arrange for us to hold information stands at their premises.

- People with mental health issues

Strong links with our local mental health Trust enables us to reach their service users and patients, making sure they have a say about services, by letting us attend their ward meetings and by us having a place at various forums. They regularly distribute our information and surveys through their own engagement channels. St Helens Mind are another important contact as well as some smaller, local support groups.

#### **Our methods of communication and engagement include:**

- Website
- Monthly newsletter
- Social Media
- Outreach to community groups
- Surveys - online and on paper
- Listening events - in person and via Zoom
- Enter & View
- Marketplace stalls at community events
- Communication channels via our partners across the borough

#### **Agreeing our Priorities**

Each year we set our priorities for what areas of work we should focus on. When certain themes emerge, from the feedback we receive, we consider whether we should carry out a piece of work focusing on that particular issue.

We will liaise with colleagues at the CCG or Local Authority, as appropriate, to ensure that the work we are doing isn't going to clash with something they are already doing and that we can complement any work they might be doing or planning.

In some cases, a possible area of work for us might come from local partners, such as St Helens CCG, who might request our support in gathering views around a particular service, its development or design.

We compile a list of our potential priorities, in a proposal paper, and share it with our Advisory Forum members and our wider Healthwatch membership, for comment and suggestion. This is at the early stage, before any activities or methods of carrying out the work is identified.

When we have agreed our priorities we produce project plans and carry out activities that are appropriate for the area of work, such as surveys, listening events and case studies.

### **Enter & View**

Healthwatch has legal powers to carry out Enter and View visits to providers of health and social care. These visits are usually carried out by a small team made up of a member of the Healthwatch Support team and two or three Authorised Representatives, trained volunteers who have been DBS checked.

Visits can either be announced or unannounced. Usually, the visits are announced and we will contact the provider around a week prior to the visit taking place. This gives the provider time to ask any questions they have, to help the visit run more smoothly and make sure that the right staff members are on hand to answer any questions we want to ask on the day. Unannounced visits will only be conducted in exceptional circumstances.

The purpose of the visit is to collect evidence through observing the nature and quality of the service, listening to the views of residents/patients/services users and their families/carers and speaking with the staff.

The findings from the visit will be written up in a draft report with recommendations. The report has a space for service providers to comment and outline what they plan to do to address any recommendations made.

The final report will be published on the Healthwatch website and copies sent to the Council's Quality Monitoring Team, CQC and Healthwatch England for information.

### **Getting involved with our work.**

Healthwatch St Helens is a membership organisation, with our members receiving a monthly newsletter and regular invitations to get involved with our work and the work of our partners, through workshops, summits, surveys and listening events.

We have a team of volunteers who act as:

- Advisory Forum members - helping us to make decisions about the work we're going to do, spreading the word about us in their communities, and bringing us patient experiences and views.
- Enter & View Authorised Representatives - helping us to carry out our visits to health and social care settings.
- Healthwatch Champions - spreading the word about us in their communities, and bringing us patient experiences and views.

Volunteer role descriptions and application packs are available on request.

### **Getting in touch:**

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