

# The value of listening

Healthwatch Southampton  
Annual Report 2023 - 2024



**healthwatch**  
Southampton

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# Message from our Chair

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**Healthwatch Southampton is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country and we are your independent and impartial local health and social care champion. Our role is to provide NHS leaders and council decision makers with local feedback to improve health and care services so that they can improve services as a result.**

We are here to listen to issues that really matter to local people and to hear about your experiences of using local health and social care services. Thank you to everyone who has contacted us to share their experiences. This has helped us to facilitate improvements and give policy makers and service providers with some patient perspectives. In the coming year, we would like to improve our profile so that many more people contact us about their views and experiences of the local health and care systems.

On behalf of HWS, I would like to thank Harry Dymond, who chaired the Healthwatch Southampton Strategic Group for many years and retired as Chair in November 2023. Harry has been involved in health and care forums in the city for many years and his contribution is recognised and valued. We will continue to benefit from his expertise as he leads on Place assessments and Quality Accounts for Healthwatch Southampton (HWS).

Decisions about health and care services in the city, including how much is spent in the city are made by Southampton City Council and the Hampshire and IOW Integrated Care Board (ICB). The ICB is the statutory NHS organisation responsible for setting the strategic plan for the NHS and allocating NHS resources. They are responsible for making sure the right health services are being delivered to people across the area. The last year continued to see challenging times for the health and care systems with staff changes, deeper cuts and recruitment difficulties, all of which have an impact on access to services and service delivery.

HWS has focused on the 3 top priorities from our 2023 survey:

- **Dentistry:** Dentistry is a big issue in the city, as it is across the country. We responded to the consultation organised by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) on their draft Dentistry Strategy. We hope to work together with the ICB in the coming year to raise awareness of local issues relating to access, inequalities and better integration of services around patients, in order to drive change and improve services locally.
- **GPs:** Access is key and HWS conducted a mystery shopping exercise on registering as a new patient, details of which are elsewhere in this report.
- **Mental Health:** We have also just published our Dementia Report which was in response to and approach from the Alzheimer's Society, about issues relating to the experience of dementia patients and their carers within the hospital setting. The impact of the recommendations HWS made is

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detailed elsewhere in this report. More generally, we have been very encouraged by the City Council's offer to work with us on social care – we will focus on improvements to accessing mental health services and the improvements that can be made.

Work with other Healthwatch groups in Hampshire: Collaborative and joint working between the Healthwatch groups in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight predates the establishment of the ICB. Hence, this has provided a strong foundation to work with the ICB and health service providers on many issues. In this past year, joint work has included Accessible Information Standards report, liaising with the ICB on their Dentistry Strategy and monitoring the development of the Fusion Project which brings together community, mental health and learning disability services.

Governance: In the last few months we have prioritised changing our membership model to encourage greater participation of local people in the activities of Healthwatch. In the coming months we hope to have a larger Strategic Group with a wider range of skills and experiences. In particular we would like to encourage participation from young people and/or people who work with children and young people. We have recently revamped our website and intend to make more changes so that it is more current and up to date.

We are grateful to Southampton Voluntary Services for their support, for hosting us and for working with us in changing our membership model. Finally I would like to thank Amanda Kelly and her team for their work and their commitment to working with people who find it difficult to participate and give their views. I would also like to thank all members of the Strategic Group for their time and commitment to Healthwatch Southampton.

**Suki Sitaram**



**“On behalf of HWS, I would like to thank Harry Dymond, who chaired the Healthwatch Southampton Strategic Group for many years and retired as Chair in November 2023. Harry has been involved in health and care forums in the city for many years and his contribution is recognised and valued. We will continue to benefit from his expertise as he leads on Place assessments and Quality Accounts for Healthwatch Southampton (HWS)”**

- Suki Sitaram  
Healthwatch Southampton Chair

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# About us

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## Healthwatch Southampton 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 health and care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

### Our vision

A city where everyone can all get the health and care they need, in a timely way.



### Our mission

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



### Our aims:

- To support more people who face the worst outcomes to speak up about their health and social care and to access the advice they need.
- To support care decision-makers to act on public feedback and involve communities in decisions that affect them.
- To be a more effective organisation and build a stronger Healthwatch movement

# Year in review

## Reaching out:

**40,570 people**

people visited our website, a 51% increase

**593 people**

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care, a 39% increase

**261 people**

came to us for clear advice and information



## Making a difference to care:

**We published 2 reports**

Some recommendations in our reports resulted in practical and tangible improvements, e.g. better engagement of unpaid carers in plans to discharge patients with dementia at the General Hospital. Following our recommendations on accessibility of GP websites, there has been some action to improve GP websites.



## Health and social care that works for you:

**We are lucky to have 12 volunteers**

We are fortunate to have 12 committed volunteers who gave up their time to make health and care better for our community. We would be delighted to hear from you if you would like to volunteer.

We're funded by our local authority. We received

**£133,259**

in 2023-24 which is the same as last year.

We currently employ

**3 staff**

who help us carry out our work.



# How we've made a difference this year

	<p>We raised with Southern Health NHS Trust the impact of the proposed closure of the Beaulieu Ward at the Western Hospital would have on dementia patients and their carers. Southern agreed to cover travel costs for Southampton patients and carers to travel to alternative wards in dementia wards in Gosport and Basingstoke.</p>	
Summer	<p>We celebrated 10 years of Healthwatch in Southampton highlighting the outcomes and changes we have been involved with in the city.</p>	<p>HWS supported Southampton City Council preparation work for the Care Quality Commission inspection, by being part of a focus group feeding back residents views on social care.</p>
Autumn	<p>We completed Patient Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) inspections in different health service settings and trusts. Practical improvements include at the General Hospital, they installed seating due to the length of time needed to walk within the hospital and improved cleaning of windows in the wards.</p>	<p>We were approached by the West Primary Care Network who wanted to improve patient participation. We were able to advise and provide them with our recent best practice guide on patient engagement, written as result of a request from a PPG group on the East of the city.</p>
Winter	<p>HWS attended a Mental Health Awareness event aimed at Black and Minority Ethnic communities organised by the St Denys Activity Group and Southern Health NHS Trust. This was attended by nearly 200 people and helped us to gain feedback from many about health and care services.</p>	<p>The National Institute of Health and Care Research awarded the Healthwatch groups across Hampshire and IOW to do a piece of work on the Accessible information standard. This was focused on people who require accessible information from the NHS. We worked with Southampton Sight to gather user experiences and fed into this wider project. The report has just been published.</p>

We provided comprehensive feedback on the ICB's Dental Strategy and responded to the initiative of a Dental Bus in the city with information on areas where such a service would be most needed. We also provided feedback on the impact on the city of Integrated Care Board's proposals to build a new Hospital in Hampshire. We highlighted that the impacts would be much wider than health and care and extend to transport, traffic, parking, the general environment, particularly air quality. We hope to work with the ICB on both these proposals in the coming year.

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# Your voice heard at a wider level

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**The four Healthwatch in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Southampton and Portsmouth) have worked collaboratively for many years. This is to ensure the experiences of people in Hampshire and Isle of Wight influence decisions made about services at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care System (ICS) level.**

This year we've worked with Healthwatch across Hampshire and Isle of Wight to achieve:



Achievement one: An agreement with, and funding from, the Integrated Care Board (ICB) enables joint working at system level, with the Healthwatch represented on the System Quality Group, Integrated Care partnership, and various Transformation Boards. Patient feedback in the form of statistics, quotes and patient stories are presented to every quarterly System Quality group. Working together we collectively respond to ICB consultations. ICB Directors, the Chief Executive and Chair, have been invited regularly to our monthly meetings where we raise issues of concern. Through this collaboration a strong patient and public voice is heard at Place and System level.

Achievement two: The lack of NHS dentistry has been and remains a huge concern. We didn't need to ask what the problem is – the public tell us! Instead, we worked with the ICB to run a "Dental Conversation", inviting stakeholders to consider how we can improve services locally. From this a series of working groups have been established and the newly approved Dental Strategy reflects the concerns raised and solutions proposed. We will continue to work with the ICB on this major issue.



Achievement three: We applied for and received funding from the National Institute of Health and Care Research (NIHR) to do some work on the Accessible Information Standard. Each Healthwatch engaged with local groups to hear from those with disabilities and hearing and sight loss to gauge awareness of the standard. We asked the extent to which people's information and communications needs were being met. We found some examples of good practice but clearly there is a way to go before everyone's needs are met. A report is being produced, in a range of formats, and the ICB are committed to working with us through 2024/25 to begin to implement recommendations.



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# Listening to your experiences

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



**“Thank you for this information. Having just merged with another practice, we are reviewing our websites to create one site. We have been awaiting the Healthwatch report before starting the project. The information you have provided will assist us in ensuring a clearer patient experience.”**

From healthcare professional following GP Website Audit results (see page 9)

## Improving access to your GP practice

**Last year we asked Southampton people to share with us their priorities in health and social care once again access to GP practices came top of the list.**

59% of all respondents to our survey told us access to GP practices were a priority. People shared their experiences and frustrations about access, availability of appointments, E-consult and inconsistencies between practices. We looked at all the GP practice websites in Southampton using the NHS England benchmarking tool which looks at a range of features including ease of use, accessibility, search tools, and information provided. Key areas of improvement were:

- The main menu and homepage's content
- The text's reading age
- Pharmacy information
- Website search tools
- Physical access information
- Information on the contact page.

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# Hearing from all communities

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**Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area.**

**We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.**

## Examples of how we have reached different communities this year include:

- We have reached out to the Serendipity group, for adults with autism, to hear about their experiences of health and social care
- A visit to the Change Grow Live group support groups and the Volunteer Allotment project, working with people affected by drug or alcohol use, homelessness and the criminal justice system. We have reached out to listen to Busy People a community group for adults with learning disabilities.
- Busy People – a community group for adults with learning disabilities.
- The St Denys Activity Group who organised a Mental Health Awareness event aimed at Black and Minority Ethnic communities.

## Raising transport concerns to decision makers

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

In the last year we have heard from professionals, community workers and residents regarding the struggles people in the community are experiencing when trying to access appropriate transport to their medical appointments. People have reported struggles acquiring appropriate transport due to their additional needs/specialist requirements aids and equipment.

We also heard from vulnerable patients with additional needs and those digitally excluded with issues using the transport booking system (online & automated telephone system). An example of this was an elderly man with sight and hearing impairments who did not have access to the internet and struggled to use the confusing and lengthy booking system on the phone.

We have shared all the feedback we received with strategic health and care partners and providers of transport services to highlight the transport concerns and issues raised. We have also made recommendations for improvements and change.

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## Improving access to dental care

**Change takes time, we often work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.**

Making the case for access to NHS dentists has been a priority for us as it has been the main reason people contact us. We have consistently raised concerns about the lack of access. In June 2023 Healthwatch in Hampshire, Portsmouth and Isle of Wight and ourselves worked with the ICB to hold a “big conversation” on Dentistry with a wide range of stakeholders.

The discussion included routine access, urgent access, workforce, prevention and health inequalities. This was the start of the process which resulted in the ICB’s draft Dentistry Strategy for which we have provided comprehensive feedback. We are pleased to see DentAid, the Dental Bus, coming to sites in and around the city of Southampton since March 2024. We are continuing to highlight public concerns in accessing NHS dentists and have raised this at ICB, and to Southampton City Council decision makers

## Supporting those accessing information

**We worked with Southampton Sight on the Accessible Information Standard project to hear first-hand experiences from people with sight loss. They described how vital it was to have information about themselves presented in a way that they can understand.**

As a result of the workshops we ran with Southampton Sight, members of this group are keen to stay involved in this work to create and influence change in the system. We are pleased that this work will continue with a working group to progress the implementation of the AIS standard

## Creating a New NHS Foundation Trust – engaging communities

**Healthwatch Southampton has been able to highlight concerns expressed by residents about the creation of a new NHS Foundation Trust in Hampshire by bringing together 4 existing provider organisations.**

This initiative is called Project Fusion and plans to bring together community, mental health and learning disability services across Hampshire. a new trust has been progressing during the last year.

We highlighted the initial lack of community engagement in drawing up the proposals and have continued to work with Project Fusion alongside our colleagues in Healthwatch Hampshire, Portsmouth and Isle of Wight to highlight the importance of listening to people and communities who will be affected by these changes and by the provider of the services they receive.



# Advice and information

**Healthwatch Southampton is here to provide advice and information on accessing health and care services for people who use health and care services in the city.**

In times of worry, stress or if you do not know where to turn, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it is finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint, or choosing a good GP surgery – you can count on us.

## **This past year we have:**

- Supported people to seek help to improve their finances and living conditions that are impacting their health
- Helped people navigate the local mental health services and access the support they need
- Directed people through the appropriate pathways to get their voice heard
- Helped people to access essential information about themselves such as medical records, in a communication method that they require.

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# Supporting people who cannot find services

One of the top reasons for contacting HWS is mental health – we hear from people who struggle to know where to turn and who can help them. Here are 2 examples of how we have helped individuals (not their real names):

## Assisting Rose

Rose contacted us as she felt let down by mental health services and was feeling particularly vulnerable. Rose has had poor mental health for over 40 years and in recent years has been dismissed, redirected and turned away from services she sought support from. We shared information about mental health support Rose could access immediately, and she also agreed to a safeguarding referral to the City Council's Adult Social Care service to request a mental health assessment. As a result, Rose was appointed a Care Coordinator within the Community Mental Health Team to carry out an assessment.

Rose also needed help regarding her living conditions (large areas of her home were covered with black mould). We made a referral to The Environment Centre, who visited the home to assess the condition and supported Rose to communicate with her Housing Association to address the unacceptable housing situation. We also signposted Rose to the local Basics Bank for food, clothing and household goods, which had been damaged by damp caused by her poor living conditions.

## Helping Charlie

Angela got in touch with us on behalf of her adult son. Her son, Charlie, who has complex additional needs including autism had recently returned home. Although Charlie has carers throughout the day to support him with everyday tasks which meant that his physical needs were being taken care of. However, his emotional needs were not being met. Angela was concerned that her son was isolated, lonely and rarely left the house.

With Charlie's permission, we referred Charlie to the local Community Navigators Team who could support him to find information out what about groups, events and activities that were taking place in his local area that he could join and get involved with. We also signposted Angela to a local charity who provide telephone befriending scheme, with a weekly contact service from a regular volunteer to combat isolation.



**“Thanks a lot for helping and sharing useful links (signposted to dentists taking on NHS patients and details of emergency dental treatment services)”**

- Feedback from the public

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# Volunteering

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**We are supported by a team of committed volunteers who are the heart of what we do Thanks to their efforts in the community we can understand what is working and what needs improving.**

**This year they:**

- Kept us updated on the work of Busy People and the needs of people with learning disabilities accessing health services.
- Helped us progress our Accessible Information Standard work by linking us to meeting groups for people with sight impairments



**“I have been volunteering for over 33 years in total, and with Healthwatch since 2016. Volunteering has enabled me to challenge myself, improve my confidence, increase my independence and social wellbeing and gain new skills, which has helped me secure paid employment.**

**Within Healthwatch, not only am I member of the Strategic group ensuring that the voices of people with learning disabilities are heard, but I also help out in the office and get involved with events raising awareness of the work we do to local residents.**

**I enjoy volunteering greatly as I get to meet different people from all walks of life. I strongly believe there is a volunteering role for all abilities.”**

– Matt

Healthwatch Southampton Strategic Group Member

## Do you feel inspired?



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

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

 **02380 21018**

 [healthwatch@southamptonvs.org.uk](mailto:healthwatch@southamptonvs.org.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.

## Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Income	£133,259	Central Costs	£24,561
Additional income	£4600	Salaries	£96,264
Advocacy People	£3804	Insurance	£500
		The Advocacy People	£ 3803
		Operational/Other	£ 10,505
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£141,6623</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£ 135,633</b>

### Additional income is broken down by:

- £1,500 for our overarching work with the Integrated Care Board
- £1,500 for our work on the Citizens Panel Integrated Care Board
- £1,600 funding jointly awarded to HIOW HW by National Institute of Health and Care Research

## ICS funding

Healthwatch across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight also receives funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Overarching collaboration and insight	£1500
Citizens Panel work	£1500



## Next steps

**Over the next year, we will keep reaching out local people, especially people living in the most deprived areas, so that decision makers can hear their views and experiences.**

We will also work together with partners, Southampton City Council health and care providers and our integrated care system to contribute to a changing (not just NHS) organisational culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to improve health and care services.

**Our top three priorities for the next year are:**

1. Access to Primary Care/GP, Adult Mental Health and Dentistry
2. We will further investigate peoples challenges and issues with Transport, starting with a mapping exercise
3. We will continue to engage with communities in the city who are marginalised and least heard.



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# Statutory statements

Healthwatch England, 2 Redman Place, Stratford, E20 1JQ

Southampton Voluntary Services, Voluntary Action Centre, St Marys Street, Southampton, SO14 1NW

Healthwatch Southampton uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by

the licence agreement.

## **Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making**

Our Healthwatch Strategic Group consists of 9 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24 the Board met 11 times and made decisions on matters such as feeding back on the ICB's Dentistry Strategy, concerns about a new acute Hampshire hospital and changes to A&E Emergency Department services in Hampshire and the impact on Southampton General Hospital, patients and residents of the city. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

## **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 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums. We have also made several changes to our website to make it easier for people to give us their feedback and plan to make further improvements in the coming year.

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 [include details of anywhere else it will be made available].

## **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 insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to Southampton Health and Well Being Board, Southampton Health and Social Care Partnership Board, Southampton Health Overview Scrutiny Panel, Southampton Carers Partnership Board, Primary Care Operational Group (PCOG) and Southampton Community Engagement Group.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Hampshire and Isle of Wight Care System, for example, at the Quality Group. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

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## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Southampton was represented on the Southampton Health and Wellbeing Board by the Chief Executive of Southampton Voluntary Services and now by the Chair of Healthwatch Southampton. During 2023/24 they carried out this role effectively by actively taking part in discussions about local health issues, highlighting inequalities, feeding back concerns, and bringing different perspectives into the debates.

Healthwatch Southampton is represented on Hampshire and Isle of Wight Integrated Care Partnership by the Patient and Public Involvement Manager for Help and Care. Healthwatch is also represented on Southampton Health and Care Partnership Board, the Primary Care Operation Group and both Adult and Children's Safeguarding Boards.

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## 2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Dentistry	Big Conversation, Dental strategy, Dentaaid bus commenced services in the city in March 2024.
GP Access	Awareness raised of patients experiences, GP practices reminded of NHS guidance registering with a GP
GP website Audit	Practices have started using the results to improve the accessibility of their websites to enable patients can more easily access the information they need.
Dementia Work	Alzheimer's Society is now offering support and help to unpaid carers in hospital.
Accessible Information Standard	Ongoing with system leaders to make changes to improve accessibility

# healthwatch

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