

# The value of listening

Healthwatch East Sussex  
Annual Report 2023-2024



together  
making health  
care better

**healthwatch**  
East Sussex

2022-23

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**"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."**

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



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# Message from our Chair

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Last year when I highlighted Healthwatch's tenth anniversary and the activity undertaken to date, I had not appreciated the further changes that would occur as we moved into our second decade, which have seen us appoint a new Chief Executive and several new staff. We have also moved to offices that better cater for our needs, so we are best-placed to continue our important work during 2024-25.

Our health and care sector has continued to face pressures, and we have worked hard to ensure feedback is heard and acted on by commissioners and providers. We believe this is more important now than ever before, especially for less heard groups in our communities.

Healthwatch East Sussex championed the patient-voice in approximately 40 different fora during 2023-24, including the Sussex Health and Care Assembly, East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board and Health Overview Scrutiny Committee, as well as with the Care Quality Commission, Safeguarding Adults Board, NHS Trusts, County Council departments and individual service providers such as GPs and pharmacies.

We continued our wide-ranging engagement activities, including Enter and Views of care homes and community diagnostic centres, exploration of long COVID, and mystery shopping of GP websites. Our Rye and rural Rother Listening Tour enhanced links with local communities, and we continue to raise the issues around access to primary care and the provision of transport for isolated communities in discussions around the new local transport plan and creation of Integrated Community Teams.

Like our NHS, social care and voluntary sector colleagues, we have seen increasing volumes of public enquiries compared to previous years. Our Information & Signposting service supported 578 people to navigate health and social services, including asylum seekers, prison residents and users of food banks.

Young Healthwatch has grown by leaps and bounds, recruited more members and progressed its activities, including the development of an accreditation of GP practices for children and young people.

I am proud that we achieved 'Investors in Volunteers' accreditation which reflects the hard work of our staff and volunteers in developing volunteer policies, procedures and ways of working. This has supported the recruitment of more volunteers enabling us to undertake core activities such as Enter and View visits, as well as build further links with our local communities.

As always, can I finish with a big thank you to my fellow non-executive board members, the management team, our wonderful staff and of course our volunteers of all ages for making it possible.



**“Our continued collaboration with other Healthwatch, the Sussex Health & Care Assembly and East Sussex Health & Wellbeing Board has enabled us to ensure the profile of Healthwatch and the patient voice is kept at the forefront of decision making.”**

Keith Stevens, Chair of East Sussex Community Voice, delivering Healthwatch East Sussex



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# About us

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## Healthwatch East Sussex 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 care. We can also 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 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.



# Year in review

## Reaching out:

**1,367 people**

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



**578 people directly and 23,840 virtually**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as access to dentistry, social care, vaccinations, complaints and cost-of-living.

## Making a difference to care:

We published

**36 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**What we heard in our 2022 Listening Tour**

which highlighted the health and care experiences of people living in and around Eastbourne.



## Health and social care that works for you:

We are lucky to have

**21 adult and 12 Young Healthwatch**

outstanding volunteers who gave up 125 days of their time to make care better for our community.

We are funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

**£364,470**

which is the same as the previous year.









We currently employ

**13 staff**

who help us carry out our work.



# How we have made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We published our 'guide to complaints' to help people understand how and when to make a complaint to health and care services. It also explained advocacy support and how to access it.</p>	 <p>We contributed to the East Sussex Adult Social Care Strategy Action Plan, encouraging activity to raise public awareness of social care services and how to access them appropriately.</p>
Summer	 <p>Our roadshow events held across East Sussex helped us capture and understand the health and care experiences of local people from a range of different communities.</p>	 <p>We undertook audits at GP practices in Eastbourne to support them in assessing their physical accessibility for patients and the public and shared recommendations for improvements.</p>
Autumn	 <p>Our staff and volunteers undertook 16 Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) to review local services settings and ensure they are fit for purpose.</p>	 <p>We highlighted the impact of increased cost of living on people's wellbeing, including changes in their use of health and care services, with the East Sussex Financial Inclusion Steering Group.</p>
Winter	 <p>We contributed to a Health Overview and Scrutiny Review of changes to paediatric services at Eastbourne District General Hospital, helping ensure the patient voice was captured and heard.</p>	 <p>Our host organisation received 'Investors in Volunteers' accreditation which reflects the importance we place on supporting our volunteers in delivering programmes such as Healthwatch.</p>

# Feedback from our partners



## East Sussex County Council

“Healthwatch East Sussex continues to gather and promote important insights into residents’ experiences of health and care services (as well as playing a valuable role with the VCSE Alliance for our county via East Sussex Community Voice). The Rye and rural Rother Listening Tour was a great example of Healthwatch’s work, providing a wide range of feedback from all parts of the community, and building a stronger understanding of local developments across the health and care system.

I am also delighted that the national profile of Healthwatch East Sussex received a well-deserved boost in 2023, after presenting the ‘Putting a face to Unmet Need’ report to the Healthwatch England Committee. I am pleased that Young Healthwatch has grown so much in the last year – with young people volunteering to audit health settings, design surveys, and create artwork. On behalf of East Sussex County Council, I look forward to continuing to work closely with Healthwatch East Sussex in improving the experiences and outcomes for residents across the county.”

**Mark Stainton**

Director of Adult Social Care and Health, East Sussex County Council



## Sussex Integrated Care Board (NHS Sussex)

“Over the past year, work with Healthwatch has continued to support NHS Sussex in ensuring that the voices and experiences of people and communities in East Sussex are heard and responded to.

Collaborative work to develop support for NHS Sussex volunteers, to develop ways for Children and Young people to share views and be involved in decision making and to produce a toolkit to support patient engagement in GP practices has highlighted the value of working with Healthwatch as a trusted partner.

Healthwatch continues to support NHS Sussex to ensure that the focus remains firmly on putting people and communities at the heart of all we do.

I have valued the positive working relationship with Healthwatch over the past year and look forward to continuing this into the next year and beyond”.

**Jane Lodge**

Deputy Director, Working with People and Communities, NHS Sussex

# Feedback from our partners



## East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

“Healthwatch East Sussex has continued to support East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust during 2023/24 ensuring that all feedback received regarding the experiences of patients, carers, relatives and local communities is shared directly back with our patient experience team, to enable them to use this information to shape and develop services which we provide.

Enter and view activities were undertaken in our Emergency Departments, Paediatric Services (Conquest) and Bexhill Community Diagnostic Centre. The feedback Healthwatch gained as part of these activities has made a positive impact for these areas.

We look forward to delivering further activities during 2024/25 in collaboration with Healthwatch East Sussex.”

**East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust**



## Healthwatch in Sussex

“Three local Healthwatch (Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex) cover Sussex.

Over the past year, the three Healthwatch teams have collaborated as ‘Healthwatch in Sussex’ to capture and share feedback on the transformation of outpatient services, and experiences of long COVID, dentistry, NHS complaints, Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) and Memory Assessment Services.

Partnership working has enhanced our ability to champion public and patient voices on these and other health and care themes at a Sussex-wide level.

Our collaborative working has been recognised and acknowledged as good practice by our national body Healthwatch England and NHS Sussex, and we will continue to work together to ensure that people sit at the heart of health and care services over the next 12 months and beyond.”

### Chief Officers

Healthwatch Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex



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# Your voice heard at a wider level

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## We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences and views of people in East Sussex influence decisions made about services at Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year we've worked with Healthwatch in Brighton & Hove and Healthwatch West Sussex to deliver:



**Achievement one:** We delivered four workshops with diverse participants to support the transformation of local outpatient services. This helped the NHS to understand how best to deliver Advice and Guidance, Patient Choice, Patient Initiated Follow-Up (PIFU) and reduce Did Not Attend (DNA) whilst improving the patient experience. NHS Sussex are now progressing these changes using the feedback from local people.

**Achievement two:** We regularly shared people's experiences of dentistry with NHS decision-makers and dentists to ensure barriers to access and impacts were understood. NHS Sussex have improved advice on their website, clarifying how and where emergency and routine services can be accessed. Pilots are being launched to explore the expansion of local NHS dental capacity and enhance oral health in care homes.



**Achievement three:** We supported the Sussex Integrated Care Board (NHS Sussex) in surveying Sussex residents' views on the priorities of our Shared Delivery Plan, the use of patient data within the NHS, and their satisfaction with local NHS services. Healthwatch used its reach and links with local networks to maximise contributions from diverse communities, helping to amplify people's experiences and views.

**Achievement four:** We gathered qualitative experiences of long COVID from across Sussex, using people's stories to highlight the wide range and often significant scale of impacts on their lives. We shared our insight with the NHS, including the Post-COVID Assessment and Support Service (PCASS), to help them adapt and diversify their activities to best meet the needs of those experiencing ongoing symptoms.



# Improving the patient experience of using the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS)

Since 2016, the three Sussex Healthwatch teams have collated nearly 600 patient experiences of NEPTS across four separate reviews, our latest in 2020. Since then, we have worked with NHS Sussex Commissioners to ensure that improvements patients wanted were acted on. We also wanted to make sure that the new provider could deliver the service and avoid past mistakes.

NEPTS is for people whose condition means they need support to and from hospital and other medical appointments. This year, Healthwatch contributed to the commissioning and delivery of NEPTS by:

- **Being part of a Sussex Communications and Engagement Group** where we influenced the final wording and requirements for the new NEPTS contract being delivered in Sussex from 2025.
- **Evaluated bids to deliver the new NEPTS contract**, focusing on what patients told us mattered most to them: focusing on patient communications, timeliness, assessment of eligibility, continuous service improvements and accessibility of the service.

Previously, local Healthwatch in Sussex have supported the current provider of NEPTS to deliver patient forums, so user voice is captured and used to inform service delivery. We also fed into a national review of NEPTS to ensure that the views of Sussex residents and patients were heard in the process.

## What difference did we make to the Sussex NEPTS service?

Using people's feedback and our independent review of the NEPTS service, we developed several recommendations. Those commissioning the new service acted on these, including:

**We recommended the new provider should invest in delivering improved communications including clearer patient guidance around eligibility and how to apply. The service provider should also provide information about alternatives to the service.** There is a new requirement for the provider to develop a Single Point of Coordination which will refer patients who meet the eligibility criteria to an expanded and more responsive patient transport service, and signpost ineligible patients to alternative transport options.

**We recommended the new provider should use innovative technological solutions such as mobile phone tracking apps and a patient online account facility to help patients track their vehicles.** There is a new requirement for the NEPTS provider to embed modern technology such as apps and web-based portals to ensure patients, their carers, and hospital staff are kept informed of the location of their transport so that they are ready on time for its arrival.

**We recommended that the new provider should establish fully accessible patient forums for patients.** The new transport provider is required to establish and support patient groups across Sussex to assist in the ongoing cycle of service monitoring and improvement, so it will always have patients working with it to plan for a better service.



**“As someone whose role it is to make sure patient concerns are central to decision-making, I can honestly say that I have never seen a more meticulous, patient-centric contribution.”** Feedback on Healthwatch



# Listening to your experiences

Services cannot 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.

# Listening Tour 2023: Rye and the surrounding villages

Each year we focus on one area in East Sussex to gather in-depth feedback and hear about local people's health and care needs and aspirations.

Our 2023/24 Listening Tour visited Rye and the surrounding villages and engaged with over 300 people as well as community groups, services providers and commissioners. Throughout the tour we:

- Held a networking event with representatives from 13 local voluntary organisations
- Conducted mystery shopping of websites at 6 GP practices to assess information provision
- Had six pop up stands at community locations to capture people's views
- Ran two focus groups and visited three local community groups for one-to-one conversations
- Conducted Enter and Views at 19 care homes to assess experiences of care settings
- Distributed our Listening Tour survey, available online and in hard copy, to capture people's experiences of local health and care services, impacts of cost of living and priorities for change.

## 24.3%

of survey respondents told us the greatest barrier to accessing services were the challenges associated with using public transport



## Our recommendations called for:

- East Sussex County Council to ensure development of the forthcoming local transport plan appropriately considers enabling access to health and care services across the county.
- Adult Social Care services to deliver on their engagement strategy and ensure communities in Rye and surrounding villages are aware of the support that is available and how they can access it.
- NHS Sussex and local primary care networks to ensure reasonable adjustments are provided to patients with additional communication needs when engaging with GPs and other services.
- Services to investigate opportunities for delivering into rural communities, rather than expecting residents to travel, especially for key activities such as health screening and outreach surgeries.

## What difference will this make?

Our Rye Listening Tour helped us raise public and organisational awareness of Healthwatch and what we do in a predominantly rural part of our county. It has provided us with a starting point for developing our relationships with local community groups and service providers, helping us to amplify the voices of people we haven't previously reached.

We have already begun working with local groups, providers, and commissioners to progress our recommendations, and used what we learnt to shape our work plan and further explore the issues raised.

With the support of the Health and Wellbeing Board, we have already begun work with our local authority to address concerns about local transport links to health and care services.

# Listening Tour 2023: Rye and the surrounding villages.

## What has the Listening Tour achieved so far?

- Through our face-to-face engagement and promotion via local and social media, we created a greater awareness of Healthwatch amongst Rye residents, groups and service providers.
- We raised the profile of health and care issues in Rye and the surrounding villages with the East Sussex Health & Wellbeing Board through our reports and by presenting our findings.
- We highlighted the challenges faced by patients in accessing GP services with NHS Sussex and the Clinical Director of the Primary Care Network, and work to address these is ongoing.
- We are responding to the feedback we received from our Enter and Views by collaborating with NHS Sussex to explore oral health and access to dentistry in care homes in 2024/25.
- We liaised with the local Primary Care Network and a voluntary group to explore improvements for clients with learning difficulties in accessing cervical screening and holistic health and wellbeing support on a rolling basis.

## Next Steps

- Healthwatch will continue to share our reports and what we heard with key partners including local health and care commissioners and providers and the wider public.
- We will feed the learning from this Listening Tour into our priority setting and project planning for 2024/25, and into initiatives such as the creation of the Integrated Community Team for Rother.
- We will produce a 'One Year On' report to update partners and residents on the progress that has been made since the tour during 2024.
- We will work with Primary Care colleagues to explore options for improving access to services within the rural communities surrounding Rye, especially GP provision, and screening services.
- We will sustain relationships with key partners and communities across Rye and rural Rother to ensure patient and public voices are fed into the design and delivery of local services.
- We will work with Adult Social Care and the NHS to explore experiences of oral health and access to dentistry in care homes, and the implementation of Modern General Practice amongst GPs.



**“Need a medical hub in the Rye area as we are quite rural. Somewhere where we can get X rays, check ups, blood tests, basic treatments etc. quickly without travelling to Hastings or further.”**

Local resident surveyed by Healthwatch East Sussex

# Bexhill Community Diagnostic Centre

**The NHS is struggling to meet key diagnostic targets. Since February 2017, the NHS has not met its target for 99% of patients waiting for less than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test at a national level. Demand for diagnostic tests is increasing.**

Setting up Community Diagnostic Centres (CDCs) is a flagship policy for the NHS and crucial part of the elective care recovery plan. CDCs aim to transform diagnostics in England by reducing the pressure on acute services, ringfencing resources for elective diagnostics, and increasing diagnostic capacity. In response to this, in early 2024 we asked people about their experiences of Bexhill CDC, which had opened in March 2023.

## 94%

of respondents using Bexhill CDC reported that they waited less than 6 weeks for their test or scan.



## What did you tell us about care?

- 85% of patients were either satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experience of their test or scan at Bexhill CDC. The quality of facilities and adjacent free parking were highly valued by patients.
- 55% of respondents reported being offered a choice about the date and time of their appointment, which was highlighted as a positive in the patient feedback.
- 89% of respondents travel to Bexhill CDC by car. There are limited public transport options for patients and staff. There is a need for disabled parking bays and a drop off-pick up zone for taxis and non-emergency patient transport.
- The environment is accessible for people with dementia and there is good use of pictorial signage. Further improvements could be made with signage and patient information in reception.

## What difference did this make?

- We reported patient and user feedback to NHS Sussex, who will combine our findings with their Experienced Based Design to implement our recommendations on further improving the patient experience of Community Diagnostic Centres.
- We shared our findings with Healthwatch England, contributing to a national report on Community Diagnostic Centres which will evaluate their impact on tackling waiting times for diagnostic testing.



**“Very happy with the staff and they made a difficult situation so easy ... staff at this centre are obviously experts in the field. Clean building and friendly staff. I was very impressed “** Patient who responded to Healthwatch survey

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# Hastings Children and Young People GP Accreditation Project

**Young Healthwatch East Sussex is made up of volunteers between the ages of 12 and 21 who work to shine a spotlight on issues that affect young people in health and social care. Our young volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds and are vital in ensuring that the voice of young people is represented and acted upon.**

In 2023, we were commissioned by Hastings Universal Healthcare to co-design an accreditation for GP practices in Hastings and St Leonards. The project aimed to improve young people's confidence in GP services by enabling practices to demonstrate that they consider and support the needs of children and young people (CYP).

Our activity has focused on building knowledge of practices' current provision, and exploring what young people feel could help practices to be more welcoming. To date our volunteers have:

- Collaborated to co-design the accreditation criteria based on what makes practices children and young people friendly
- Taken part in 'mystery shopping' of GP practice websites to assess their suitability for children and young people
- Undertaken pilot audits of GP practices in Hastings and St Leonards to test the criteria, providing feedback and recommendations directly to practice staff during their visits

The accreditation criteria cover a range of themes: information about things that affect young people; anxiety, neurodiversity, and the practice environment; booking appointments; and welcoming and listening to young people.

We will soon be arranging visits to GP practices by our young volunteers, who will assess which are children and young people friendly.

All participating practices will receive feedback to help them identify actions that respond to any identified areas for improvement. It is hoped the process may be rolled out more widely in the future.

## What difference did this make?

- Feedback from young people has been shared with GP practices to enable practices to have a greater understanding of what is important to young people, and how best to support them.
- Volunteers involved in the project are reporting greater confidence in accessing their GP compared to the beginning of the project.
- An accreditation has been designed which focuses on what is important to young people, ensuring that GP practices who receive the accreditation are taking the steps needed to give young people the confidence to access services when required.



**"I have enjoyed working with everyone and working on very essential skills like communication, teamwork and understanding the standards in the NHS."**

Young Healthwatch East Sussex volunteer

# Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences are not often heard.

## Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

**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.**

People may experience a range of long COVID symptoms, with the severity also varying from person to person. Healthwatch in Sussex collated 15 case studies to illustrate how long COVID can affect people's physical and mental health, as well as impact on people's education, employment, housing and quality of life. These were shared with NHS Sussex to help inform delivery of the Post COVID Assessment and Support Service (PCASS) in tailoring support that responds to these needs.



## Getting services to involve the public

**Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.**

Healthwatch East Sussex collaborated with Bexhill Primary Care Network to develop a new website for one of its GP practices. Our volunteers undertook 'mystery shopping' of the design, content and navigability of the site before it went live, sharing feedback with PCN staff and the website developer. This helped ensure it was accessible to the public and patients and would support local people in identifying how, when and where to access services from their practice.



## Improving care over time

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

Attending health appointments often incurs costs, especially for travel. Similarly, medication and prescriptions may also have charges attached. The NHS has schemes that provide support with healthcare costs to those on low incomes or eligible to receive them, but public and patient awareness of them is often low. Healthwatch East Sussex has pro-actively shared our guidance to raise awareness of them, as well as offering information and signposting support at food banks and other locations.







# Hearing from all communities

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, make sure their voice is heard, and ensure services meet their needs.

**This year we have reached different communities by:**

- Working with Diversity Resource International (DRI) to deliver health and wellbeing drop-in sessions to support people from ethnically diverse communities and listen to their experiences.
- Attending food banks to hear from individuals struggling with daily life and sharing insight on the impacts of changes in the cost of living with the East Sussex Financial Inclusion Steering Group.
- Attending the Ethnically Diverse Engagement Forum and community initiatives to gather insight from migrants and asylum seekers and feed this into the new East Sussex Migration Partnership.
- Holding discussion groups with parent carers to listen to their experiences of working with multiple services, including the NHS and Adult Social Care and Health.
- Attending networks, meetings and groups across East Sussex to hear from different communities.

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## Supporting the fishing community

**Healthwatch East Sussex attended a health and wellbeing event organised by the Fishermen’s Mission, aimed at providing support to the fishing community.**

We heard from fishermen who were concerned about new legislation which required them to have a signed medical certificate (ML5) from their GP deeming them medically fit to go to sea. This was an optional service for GPs to provide with a cost implication for the fishermen.

### **As a result of what we heard, we:**

- Liaised with the Fishermen’s Mission to understand the potential impact of the new legislation on fishermen, who already face health inequalities and are sporadic users of health services.
- Raised the issue with the Integrated Care Board, who provided information to GP practices via primary care networks to plan for the increase in requests for GP appointments from fishermen.
- Ensured arrangements were in place at PCN level for appointments to be available at neighbouring practices for those whose own GP practice opted out of the scheme.
- Shared information with the Fishermen’s Mission so they could promote this arrangement with individuals from the fishing community, so they were informed about how to access services.

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## Hearing from residents at HMP Lewes

**Healthwatch East Sussex delivered monthly drop-in sessions for residents of HMP Lewes to hear about their experiences of accessing healthcare services and provide information and signposting to help them access services to meet their needs.**

This included:

- Hearing about the barriers and challenges residents face when trying to access health and care services within and outside of the prison.
- Liaising with the HMP Lewes Patient Engagement Lead, to identify areas for improvement and making suggestions to make positive changes that enhance residents’ experiences.
- Providing drop-in sessions alongside colleagues from The Advocacy People so that residents could access advocacy support to make a complaint about health services if required.
- Meeting with the Independent Monitoring Board and the Care Quality Commission Regional Manager for Prisons to ensure residents’ voices were being heard.

Healthwatch East Sussex plan to further explore the key themes that have emerged from the drop-in sessions at HMP Lewes, by holding focus groups with residents.

It is hoped that by undertaking further engagement with people from this closed community, we will:

- Gain greater understanding of the issues faced by residents when accessing healthcare services.
- Identify improvements made to date.
- Identify areas where work is still required.
- Share learning and best practice so others may learn from these experiences.



# Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch 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, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

## This year we've helped people by:

- Publishing guidance on topics including how to complain about health or care services, accessing cost of living support, navigating social care, and accessing home adaptations and equipment.
- Offering Information and Signposting drop-in sessions to less-heard groups, including food bank attendees, ethnically diverse communities and residents at HMP Lewes.
- Meeting regularly with NHS Sussex, Adult Social Care and Health, and Care Quality Commission colleagues to share patient and public experiences and contribute to service development.
- Developing our monthly 'You Said - We Did' publication to highlight what we've heard and the actions we've taken.

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## Responding to the cost-of-living crisis

**We listened to how the cost-of-living crisis is impacting on people's wellbeing and their ability to access services.**

We delivered regular Information and Signposting drop-in sessions at local food banks and cost-of-living support sessions, to offer advice to people who were struggling to access health and social care and to raise awareness of available help with health costs. People told us:

- They had stopped using prescribed medicine due to lack of affordability.
- They struggled to make and attend appointments for a variety of reasons, including lacking a reliable phone, inability to afford transport costs, and lack of locally accessible services.
- Ill health, coupled with challenges in knowing how and where to access appropriate support, was often a cause of people's financial struggles.

Through event attendance, our newsletter and website, we let people know about sources of help with healthcare/travel costs, where they could access local health and care services, and what further forms of support, including for carers and home adaptations, they could apply for.

We published a 'Help with Healthcare Costs' article and shared people's experiences with NHS Sussex at regular meetings, also advocating for flexibility in the appointment times for working people.

We shared public and patient feedback on the cost barriers of dentistry services, prescriptions, and medication charges with the East Sussex Financial Inclusion Steering Group.

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## Improving equality of access to services

**We work in collaboration with local health and social care staff and decision-makers to share people's experiences of using services and to support improvements in patient experience.**

An East Sussex resident contacted our Information and Signposting service to complain that they had not received reasonable adjustments from their GP practice for their sensory impairment. This affected their ability to access services. We raised this with NHS Sussex, who passed the patient's concerns on to the surgery and received a positive response, including assurance that the patient will receive communications in a format suitable for them. The surgery recognised the need for staff training around the Accessible Information Standard, identifying potential for the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) to support the surgery in embedding adjustments that will appropriately support people with a visual impairment.

### Support to provide feedback and complain

We regularly receive enquiries from individuals requesting information, advice, and guidance on how to make a complaint regarding NHS or social care services. People often report finding information on complaints confusing, not knowing who to contact to make a complaint or the process to follow.

In response we:

- Produced a Healthwatch 'Guide to complaints about health and care services', which is available on our website. It explains the complaint options and support available.
- Contributed to the development and roll-out of the Sussex Integrated Care Board's (ICB) Complaints Policy and supporting information and processes, to ensure a consistent approach to complaints locally.



# Volunteering

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

## **This year our volunteers:**

- Undertook mystery shopping of six GP websites in Rother District to assess how user-friendly they are for patients and users in terms of content, design, accessibility and navigability.
- Designed, led, and delivered an Enter and View of care homes in Rye and Rural Rother, visiting 19 homes to capture the experiences of residents and staff and identify recommendations for change.
- Represented us at meetings, working groups and boards including NHS Sussex Virtual Wards – Patient and Carers Reference Group, East Sussex Care Homes Group, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust Nutrition and Hydration Steering Group, and Cardiology and Ophthalmology Joint Steering Board.
- Young Healthwatch undertook an Enter and View of the Paediatrics department at the Conquest Hospital. They completed the 15 Steps Challenge and spoke with staff, patients and carers about their experiences, identifying how the service and space could be improved for parents and children.



**"I started volunteering with Healthwatch in September 2020 after 30 years working in the care sector. It has enabled me to remain active, gather feedback, give people a voice – especially vulnerable individuals in our community, and make change happen in the health sector we all use.**

**I have so enjoyed my time as a volunteer; learned lots about the problems faced by the community and have been supported by managers and staff at ESCV to improve my interactions with others, work with a great team of volunteers and remain committed to improving for everyone the health and care services we use or may use in the future."**

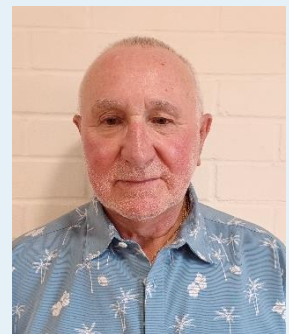


Jan



**"My name is Robert. I joined Healthwatch East Sussex in 2015 with very little healthcare experience but had to curtail my Healthwatch activities for personal reasons and re-established my commitment to the Healthwatch family in 2023.**

**Being an authorised representative for Healthwatch I have participated in announced visits to varied healthcare facilities in the Healthwatch catchment area. These have included 'Enter and View' of nursing, care and rest homes. Visits also undertaken have been to hospitals with other Healthwatch team members. I am now looking forward to a rewarding association with all team members of Healthwatch and being part of the family again."**






Robert

## Do you feel inspired?



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

-  [www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk](http://www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk)
-  0333 101 4007
-  [enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.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.

## Our income and expenditure in 2023/24

Income		Expenditure	
Funding from our local authority	£364,470	Expenditure on pay	£292,171
Additional income (including Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service – IHCAS)	£118,530	Commissioned services (including Independent Health Complaints Advocacy – IHCAS)	£114,000
		Operational costs	£76,443
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£483,000</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£482,614</b>

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### **Additional income included:**

- £10,000 from NHS Sussex to resource our contribution to the Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS).
- £895 from Healthwatch England to capture feedback on Community Diagnostic Centres.

## **ICS funding**

The three local Healthwatch in Sussex received funding to support our input into the Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS), which is not covered by our funding at place (East Sussex).

During 2023-24, the three Healthwatch pooled two years of funding from our Integrated Care Board (NHS Sussex) totalling £60,000, to fund a Healthwatch Strategic Liaison Lead post and to resource local Healthwatch staff to participate at system-level, including contributing to the Sussex Health and Care Assembly.

Our Strategic Liaison Lead co-ordinated the monthly collation and sharing of Sussex-wide Healthwatch insight with NHS Sussex, represented Healthwatch at system meetings, provided a single point of contact for ICS colleagues, and chaired a task and finish group progressing primary care communications with the public and patients.

The funding also supported Healthwatch in contributing to the Sussex-wide Patient Experience Committee, Quality Governance Improvement Group, and a range of other boards and partnerships.

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## **Next steps**

**Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in less-heard communities and 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 to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

## **Our top four priorities for the next year are:**

- 1. Listen and engage with people**
- 2. Understand the impact of pressures on health and care services**
- 3. Embed a focus on equality and diversity in our projects and increase the voice of seldom heard communities**
- 4. Explore the effects of social determinants on health and wellbeing**





## Statutory statements

Healthwatch East Sussex is delivered by East Sussex Community Voice CIC, Unit 31, The Old Printworks, 1 Commercial Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN21 3XQ.

Healthwatch East Sussex uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

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# The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of five members who 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 2023/24, our board met five times and made decisions on matters such as:

- Embedding our Business Development and Prioritisation Sub-Committee which meets quarterly to review our projects and set our priorities.
- Adopting a revised Prioritisation and Decision-making Policy so that the process for setting Healthwatch priorities is clear, transparent and accessible to all.

We ensure that there is wider public involvement in deciding our priorities by:

- Using insight gathered via Information & Signposting enquiries and Feedback Centre reviews.
- Gathering input from our multi-agency Healthwatch Advisory Group which meets quarterly.
- Undertaking engagement virtually and face-to-face so that we hear from as many voices as possible.

## Methods and systems used 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 about their experience of health and care services. During 2023/24 we have been available by phone, email, LiveChat, and via social media, as well as face-to-face at a wide range of settings, such as community networks, health and care events, food banks, migrant drop-ins and Lewes Prison.

We ensure that this annual report is made widely available to the public and our partners. We publish it on our [website](#), promote it to our partners and mailing list, share it with East Sussex County Council as our commissioner, the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board, and Healthwatch England as our national body. Hard copies are available on request.

## Responses to recommendations

In 2023-24, no providers failed to respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

## Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that the people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us. In East Sussex, we take information to the Health & Wellbeing Board, Health & Care Partnership, and Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee to support local decisions.

We take insight and experiences to decision makers in the Sussex Integrated Care System (Sussex Health and Care). We are members of the Sussex Health & Care Assembly and alongside other Sussex Healthwatch sit on a range of thematic pan-Sussex boards and groups to champion patients' voices.

We share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

## Enter and view

This year, we made four Enter and View visits to services in East Sussex and made 29 recommendations as a result of these activities.

Location	Reason for visit	What we did as a result
Paediatric services at Eastbourne District General Hospital (EDGH)	Gathering experiences of the service from children and young people and carers/parents.	Shared a report/recommendations – supporting the service to explore changes to the décor/environment.
19 Care Homes in Rye and rural Rother	Capturing staff and residents' experiences of care settings as part of Rye 2023 Listening Tour.	Provided feedback to each care home and shared findings/recommendations with East Sussex Care Home group.
Conquest Hospital and Eastbourne District General Hospital Emergency Departments	Gathering patient feedback of visits to emergency departments/urgent treatment centres in East Sussex.	Shared a report/recommendations – supporting East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust to explore changes to the décor, patient sign-in and communications.
Bexhill Community Diagnostic Centre	Assessing the effectiveness of community diagnostic centres.	Shared a report with recommendations – supporting exploration of improved access, signage and patient follow-up.

## Healthwatch representatives

### East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch East Sussex is represented on the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board by our Chief Executive. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by championing the voice of the public and patients in the key health and care issues that have come before the board:

- Sharing findings and recommendations from our 2023 Rye and rural Rother Listening Tour and collaborating with partners to identify responses and next steps.
- Monitoring the Shared Delivery Plan (SDP) which is guiding implementation of the Sussex Integrated Care Strategy '[Improving Lives Together](#)'.
- Contributing to programme planning and discussions related to service development and delivery, including winter pressures, pharmacy services, and mental health provision.

### Sussex Health and Care Assembly




Healthwatch East Sussex is represented on the Sussex Integrated Care Partnership (Sussex Health and Care Assembly) by our Chief Executive. Contributions over the last 12 months included:

- Sharing patient and public feedback on health and care received by Healthwatch East Sussex.
- Asking that assembly ambitions and activity are communicated in plain English and in a form that allows the public and patients to understand and monitor them.
- Requesting that patient-centric metrics and measures (including patient experience) are embedded in the mechanisms used to review health and care performance across Sussex.
- Contributing to an annual review of the assembly, offering feedback on its effectiveness, and sharing areas for potential change and development.

# healthwatch

East Sussex

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