

Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Cheshire West
Annual Report 2021-22



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Message from our Chair and CEO



We are delighted to present to you our Annual Report for 2021-22. The year has brought many challenges locally as we continued to feel the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring we heard from as many people as possible to help in our work alongside partners delivering health and care services. However, it has been a year where our staff and volunteers have enjoyed once again physically getting out into communities to talk with people about their views and experiences of health and care.



Top: Lynne Turnbull, Chair, and; Bottom: Louise Barry, CEO – Healthwatch Cheshire CIC

We would like to both acknowledge and thank the staff and volunteers from all of our partners across health, care and the community for their incredible commitment and hard work during this period, and would like to congratulate partners on the success of the COVID-19 vaccination programme. We have continued to promote and provide information to people about the vaccination programme, and through our survey of 18-30-year-olds have been feeding people's experiences and our observations, into Cheshire's Vaccination Steering Group and Communications Cell to enable the programme's continued development and to help in the messaging to encourage people to get their vaccines.

Our Healthwatch Across Cheshire programme allowed us to get back out into our local communities on a wider scale, with our promotional van allowing us to reach areas we have not been able to before by giving us a base from which to talk to people. Over a 9-week period we held 1,140 conversations at 52 venues across all 17 Care Communities in Cheshire to find out what matters most to people about their local health and care, and to share key information about health and care services. The reports resulting from these conversations have been vital in informing future planning and delivery of services in our local area, and during the development of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System.

Access to GPs has been raised by lots of people during the year. Due to an increased focus on online information and appointments, with the help of our volunteers we completed 85 reports on individual GP Practice websites, to see how easy it is for people to find the information they need and to make appointments. Almost 1 in 4 people contacting us this year wanted to talk about dentistry. Their concerns were raised in a report which has been presented to Local Authorities and raised in meetings with NHS England who commission dentists. Therefore, we have been able to ensure that people's concerns have been front and centre of the debate to improve access to services locally.

We hope that you enjoy reading more about all of our work in this Annual Report. We would like to thank our team of staff and volunteers, and everyone that has worked with us this year, for their hard work and passion to make sure that people's voices continue to be at the heart of planning and decision-making in Cheshire.

Many thanks

Lynne Turnbull, Chair

Louise Barry, Chief Executive



“The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities.”

Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England



Cheshire West
and Chester

Delyth Curtis, Deputy Chief Executive -
People; and
Ian Ashworth, Director of Public Health
- Cheshire West and Chester Council



"2021/22 saw the second year of the COVID pandemic which is still very much with us. During this time all partners in our health and wellbeing family pulled together very successfully to manage the pandemic and keep our population safe.

When COVID first curtailed normal Enter and View activity last year, Healthwatch produced a care home survey of residents and their families that resulted in over 800 responses. This year, with a greater emphasis on online information and appointments, Healthwatch extended this work to the accessibility of GP websites. Other information about the community impact of COVID included the views of the 18 to 30 age group on COVID vaccinations. This work was very helpful in shaping planning and communications.

Healthwatch has continued to play an impressive role strategically, with dedicated membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Place Executive and work at the Cheshire and Merseyside Partnership footprint.

The mobile and extensive Healthwatch Across Cheshire campaign last autumn gave many of our communities the chance to comment on the health, care and wellbeing issues that mattered most to them, including access to GP and health and care services, dentistry and vaccinations. It is so important that our population has a dedicated consumer champion in health, care, prevention and wellbeing.

Healthwatch actively supported the Health and Wellbeing Board's three development sessions in 2021 and was still able to support many of our thematic partnerships such as those for learning disabilities and mental health.

Healthwatch has been a valuable source of advice and support to the Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - for example, its Citizens Focus Panel survey on mental health, report on dentistry, and the thorough A&E Watch last summer were instrumental in informing scrutiny reviews.

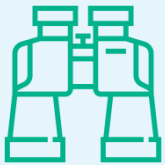
Next year will be no less challenging but there are exciting opportunities in the new Integrated Care System to improve the health and wellbeing of our communities and we have every confidence and expectation that Healthwatch will play a prominent part in that."



About us

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Cheshire West is your local health and social care champion. From Neston to Northwich and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other 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 at Healthwatch Cheshire is simple:

To be an independent voice for the people of Cheshire, helping to shape and improve local health and care services.



Our principles:

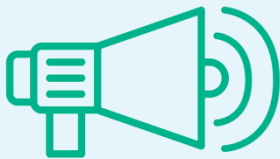
Healthwatch Cheshire:

- independently collects the voice of the people of Cheshire about their health and care experiences
- uses its networks and public engagement to gather meaningful and robust local evidence and intelligence, working in partnership across all sectors of health and care
- challenges and informs providers and commissioners to influence key decision making in health and care
- sets the standard for excellent public engagement, enabling diverse and seldom heard voices from across Cheshire to be heard
- ensures that all people have good quality, up to date information and advice
- provides a range of ways to gather the experience of people of Cheshire
- provides an NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) supporting people to raise their concerns and complaints.

Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

Reaching out



1,208 people

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

We attended

212

engagement events, community groups, and meetings.

Making a difference to care



We published

17 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services, on topics such as:

Dentistry access, views on COVID-19 vaccinations, experiences of A&E, and more

Health and care that works for you



We are fortunate to have

51 volunteers

who contributed **1,111 hours** to support our core staff team in making care better for our community.

We are funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received:

£150,298

Which is 10% less than the previous year. This figure includes funding for the Independent NHS Complaints Service (ICAS).

How we've made a difference throughout the year

Projects we have worked on from April 2021 to March 2022 include:

Healthwatch Across Cheshire



Over a 9-week period, the Healthwatch Cheshire team visited every Care Community in Cheshire, to find out what matters most to people about their local health and care, and to share key information about health and care services. Reports on the conversations that took place at these events are split into 17 individual Care Communities to ensure that information is presented as locally as possible, and have been presented at Care Community Steering Groups.

Views of 18-30-year-olds on COVID-19 vaccinations



Anecdotally, Healthwatch Cheshire had been hearing that there could be an issue amongst 18-30-year-olds in regard to getting the COVID-19 vaccination. We were approached by NHS Cheshire CCG to look into these concerns further, and launched a survey asking about people's views and experiences of the COVID-19 vaccine. The work influenced communications messages around encouraging vaccine uptake amongst people in this age-group.

A&E Watch



In July 2021, Healthwatch were approached by members of the Cheshire A&E Delivery Board to undertake an A&E Watch across the three emergency departments located in Cheshire. The aim was to better understand the reasons why people were attending, specifically whether they had attempted to access any other services prior to going to A&E. A report on our findings has been published on our websites, including responses from the three Hospital Trusts.

Dental Queries Follow-up Report



The number of people contacting us with issues accessing NHS dentistry remains high, resulting in a follow-up report outlining people's comments and queries dating from April to December 2021. The report has been shared with NHS England who commission the dental services, and with Healthwatch England to assist with their wider dental campaign. It has also fed into the focus of local Health and Wellbeing Boards and we were asked to present it at the Cheshire West and Chester Overview and Scrutiny Committee on dentistry access.



Read all of our reports:

www.healthwatchcwac.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why we make listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feedback to services to help them improve.



Healthwatch Across Cheshire



Healthwatch Across Cheshire, Frodsham Brio Leisure Centre – 4 November 2021

Healthwatch Across Cheshire

Visiting every community in Cheshire

20 September – 19 November 2021



Over a 9-week period from 20 September to 19 November 2021, Healthwatch Cheshire West and Healthwatch Cheshire East visited all 17 Care Communities across Cheshire using a promotional van to find out what matters most to people about their local health and care, and to share key information about health and care services.

In Cheshire West and Chester, we visited 27 venues across 9 Care Communities. We held conversations with 606 people about health and care services, gaining 371 comments on people's views and experiences.

Conversations with people linked into priorities known to us including COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters; flu jabs; self-care; access to services; pharmacies; promoting recruitment into the care sector, voluntary sector support, etc. We were able to receive feedback from people, and also share information and signpost to relevant support or services.

In addition to our team of staff and volunteers, we invited health and care partners to join us on this engagement, further creating and building partnerships with community representatives and members and organisations within communities, e.g., Police Community Support Officers, social housing organisations, voluntary sector, pharmacists, councillors, etc.

These reports provide summaries of activities and themes and have been shared with the local NHS, Local Authorities, voluntary and community groups, and Care Community Steering Groups. They will also feed into Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA), Place Plans, and the priorities of Integrated Care Partnerships.

What people told us

- The most common themes raised by people were regarding **GP Practices**. When people were able to see a GP or nurse face-to-face, they were generally positive about their experience. However, there were difficulties in accessing appointments, long waits on the telephone to make an appointment, long waits for referrals to other services, and mixed experiences of telephone and video appointments.
- Lots of positive feedback about the **COVID-19 vaccination rollout and booster programme** - well organised, well communicated, and efficient.
- The **flu vaccination** programme also received a lot of praise. In particular, the role of local pharmacies in providing vaccinations was spoken of positively, with pharmacies being the subject of many positive experiences.
- In terms of **hospitals**, there was praise for the attitude and approach of staff. Although people said communications and administration around appointments has been poor in regard to letters, phone calls and cancellations. Accessing hospital appointments using public or hospital transport was also said to be difficult in some rural areas.
- Issues around **dentists**, including people unable to register with NHS dentistry or being told they could receive treatment if they went private.
- Criticism of **mental health services** in various settings, particularly with regard to referrals and waiting times.
- Long waits and poor experiences were also noted with **Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP)**.
- People told us they felt that there was a lack of **support for carers** generally, but there was praise for community groups that provided support for a variety of conditions and situations.



Healthwatch
Across Cheshire,
Winsford town
centre –
27 September 2021



Left: Healthwatch Across Cheshire, Chester city centre – 22 October 2021; and
 Right: University of Chester – 22 September 2021

What difference did this make

- During Healthwatch Across Cheshire, everything that people told us was continually fed back anonymously on a weekly basis to give those who plan, make decisions, and deliver health and care services access to live real-time information. For example, at the Cheshire COVID-19 and System Pressures Communications cell, and the Cheshire East Partnership Communications and Engagement Network.
- The timely insight and intelligence from residents of Cheshire was instrumental in influencing messaging around issues including access to primary care, and the rollout of flu and COVID-19 vaccines.
- It also meant that we were able to take the latest messages and updates from health and care partners out into the community to tell people about vaccines, self care, and other topics.
- These reports were shared with the local NHS, Local Authorities, voluntary and community groups, and Care Community Steering Groups. They will also feed into Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA), Place Plans, and the priorities of Integrated Care Partnerships.



“We really have enjoyed coming along to a good handful of events and meeting both the team and community.

I particularly noticed discussions around GP access and medicine management, i.e. pharmacy in reach with community pharmacies.”

Jodie D’Enrico – Head of Communications, Marketing and Public Engagement, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust



Concerns over access to NHS dentistry

Thanks to people sharing their experiences of accessing NHS dentistry, we have been able to raise concerns with NHS England and our Local Authority partners, putting the issue in the spotlight.



The number of people contacting us regarding NHS dentistry has remained high throughout 2021-2022, and our follow-up report published earlier this year further details the queries and comments Healthwatch Cheshire are receiving.

Since June 2020, Healthwatch Cheshire has continued to receive increasing numbers of enquiries asking for details of local dental practices taking on new NHS patients across Cheshire. Issues have included inaccurate information listed on the NHS England website, a lack of NHS appointments or treatment available, long waits or having to register with a dentist outside of Cheshire, concerns about the Cheshire and Merseyside Emergency Dental Helpline, and people being unable to access a dentist due to them being deemed inactive.

The report, along with all comments and feedback received, was shared with the individual dental providers, and NHS England who commission dentistry services. Healthwatch Cheshire have held regular meetings with the NHS England dentistry team in the North West, to raise the concerns shared with us by the public. The report was also been presented at the Cheshire West and Chester Council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and shared with the Cheshire East Council Public Health team. We have attempted to assist people through signposting and advice where appropriate, and have also been circulating NHS extra dental help leaflets to members of the public when on engagement activity so that they are aware what support is available.



Around 1 in 4 people

contacting Healthwatch Cheshire this year have wanted to talk about dentistry

What difference did this make

Our findings and reports are fed into Healthwatch England to help build up a national picture of the situation. In October 2021, Healthwatch England and the British Dental Association sent an open letter addressed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for a recovery plan for NHS dentistry, citing evidence from local Healthwatch across the country. We have held meetings with the NHS England dentistry team in the North West, to raise the concerns shared with us by the public, included in this and our previous report. NHS England are fully aware of the concerns, and have explained the circumstances as to why some of them occur, helping us to better understand the system. They are currently working towards resolving these issues and dental contracts are being reviewed. We will continue to work together using regular meetings and contact to raise concerns and provide feedback.

Listening to the views of 18–30 year-olds on COVID-19 vaccinations

Anecdotally, Healthwatch Cheshire had been hearing that there could be an issue amongst 18–30-year-olds in regard to getting the COVID-19 vaccination.

We were approached by NHS Cheshire CCG to look into these concerns further. In late June 2021, we launched a survey asking about people’s views and where appropriate, experiences of the COVID-19 vaccine, and published a report detailing the findings from our 130 respondents in July 2021.



What people told us

- Positive comments about getting the vaccine included wanting to protect others, to feel less anxious about Covid, and a desire to get back to normal. Work or academic life also had a strong connection with getting vaccinated.
- The majority of people told us that they most trusted the NHS and health and care professionals as reliable sources for information about the vaccine.
- 21 of 130 people told us they did not want to have the vaccine or were unsure. Reasons include: Phobia of needles, sentiment that the risks of the vaccine outweigh the benefits as some in this age group don’t feel particularly at risk, not enough information on short and long-term side effects, such as on fertility and pregnancy, and sentiment that the vaccine is still in a trial phase.
- Most people told us about friendly and welcoming staff, who looked after them well. People generally felt that they experienced a short waiting time and accessibility, both to and on the site of their vaccination was good.
- Some people told us that their experience was negatively effected by the logistics of getting a vaccine, such as parking, feeling that they waited a little too long to receive their vaccine, or appointments being far away.

What difference did this make

This work enabled people planning the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Cheshire to understand young people’s views on the vaccine, and influenced communications messages around encouraging vaccine uptake amongst this age-group.



“We know that some young people are worried about taking the Covid vaccine and we wanted to understand why so that we can address those concerns. It is really important that everyone makes an informed choice when deciding whether to get their jab. This work by Healthwatch has allowed us to hear the voices and experiences of younger local residents which we will use to inform our communications messages and the way we deliver the vaccine. Another great piece of work from Healthwatch.”



Dr Sinead Clarke, Joint Medical Director for NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group

Improving people's experiences of emergency care through A&E Watch



Healthwatch Cheshire
A&E Watch at
Countess of Chester
and Leighton
Hospitals – 19 July
2021

In July 2021, Healthwatch were approached by members of the Cheshire A&E Delivery Board to undertake an A&E Watch across the three emergency departments located in Cheshire.

This was in the context of unprecedented levels of attendance in the departments, and pressures across the whole health and care system. Through the independent conversations Healthwatch could hold, partners sought to better understand the reasons why people were attending, specifically whether they had attempted to access any other services prior to going to A&E. A&E Watch allows Healthwatch Cheshire to gather the experiences of individuals, which provides additional rich and detailed information, enhancing the statistics regarding A&E attendance.

What people told us

- Across each of the hospitals, 71% of respondents told us they had not tried to contact NHS 111 before attending A&E. Many people we spoke to were unaware that this was the process they were meant to follow.
- 54% of respondents overall told us they had not attempted to go anywhere else before coming to A&E. People said this was for reasons such as a perception they would be sent to A&E anyway, or they thought it was more convenient and would be seen quicker, and a perception that they would not be able to get a GP appointment.
- Of those who had attempted to go elsewhere before A&E, 74% (83 people) said they had first tried to access their GP, with 58 of these people saying that the GP themselves had advised them to go to A&E. Other people mentioned being advised by receptionists to go to A&E due to a lack of GP appointments.
- Generally people complimented the staff on their attitude, and were understanding of the busy conditions they were working in.
- In all three hospitals, people felt there was a lack of communication as to how long and why they were waiting for long periods, with not much understanding of what would happen to them next. This contrasts with our previous A&E Watch in January 2020 when waiting times were displayed on television screens and people felt well informed.
- However, across all three hospitals 78% (170 people) rated their experience in A&E as 4 or 5 out of 5 ('good' or 'excellent').

What difference did this make



“The level of information acquired demonstrates a thorough, insightful and competent approach to conducting a survey in an environment which can often contain distressed and anxious individuals. Their [Healthwatch Cheshire] report is therefore to be commended and the contribution to the Cheshire urgent and emergency care agenda is greatly valued. Your comments and feedback from our patients using the Emergency Department is very timely as this helps us to identify the reasons for the increase in attendances and assists us in working with our Primary and Community Care colleagues to improve communication, increase awareness and focus on areas in which we can improve.

This report will be discussed at Board level and distributed to all relevant teams in the Countess of Chester to ensure that all staff are aware of the issues raised and the actions that will be introduced to support the required changes that have been indicated.

This valuable report which will be fundamental in our efforts to deliver excellent care, and in the system's endeavours to ensure that patients receive the right care, in the right place, first time every time.”

David Coyle, Chief Operating Officer – Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust



“The feedback from the review is extremely welcomed and helpful and we are grateful for the insights that the Healthwatch team have provided in the report.

The final report will be considered in detail by the Trust Executive Quality Governance Committee to ensure that all necessary and reasonable action is being taken, learning from the very helpful insights in this report, to further improve the experience patients have of emergency services at Leighton Hospital and across the whole organisation.

Once again, thank you for spending time to review our Emergency Department through the lens of our patients and for the extremely helpful feedback.”

Oliver Bennett, Chief Operating Officer – Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



Providing 'health checks' on GP Websites

Feedback that we have gathered from people across Cheshire since the start of the pandemic has demonstrated the importance of GP Practices – with appointments and access being main areas of concern for members of the public in Cheshire.



The ability to find relevant information easily through GP websites is more pressing at a time when there are long waiting times on GP phone-lines, due to increased traffic and staff shortages due to illness. With increased reliance on virtual access and information due to the pandemic, our 85 reports on each individual GP Practice in Cheshire, look at the user experience of GP websites. These reports give insight to both GP Practices and the public into how easy they are to use to find information, book appointments, and manage medication.

What we found:

- Many websites have limited or no options to view the website in other languages or accessible formats.
- The use of small fonts and particular colours without an option to increase the size or colour also presented problems for accessibility.
- In a lot of cases we found out of date information displayed, for example around COVID-19 guidance and processes that had not been updated since 2020.
- Sometimes, there were links to pages that were either not working or no longer available.
- Information on Patient Participation Groups was often out of date, including minutes of meetings. However, it is acknowledged that this could be because of groups not meeting due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- Various websites did not have adequate signposting links to places where people could find additional support, for example to the Live Well websites, Healthwatch or social prescribers.
- Often there was limited or no evidence of a complaints procedure for patients, or how to make an external complaint.

What difference did this make

The reports have been shared with NHS Cheshire CCG who commission GP Practices, as well as each individual GP Practice. Practices have provided feedback relating to our findings, and many have produced action points or committed to work to make changes to websites to improve accessibility and the experiences of the public.



Find out more

Reports continue to be published, and can be read in full by visiting our website:

www.healthwatchcwac.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Healthwatch Cheshire Citizens Focus Panel

Healthwatch Cheshire's Citizens Focus Panel enables us to get feedback on current topical issues from a set group of Cheshire residents on a regular basis. Our panel currently has 169 members, and is made up of a wide range of people from all across Cheshire. We're always looking for new volunteers to join us.

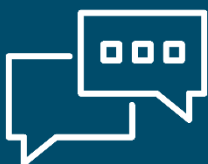
In 2021-22, we teamed up with partners including NHS Cheshire CCG, and the End of Life Partnership to put questions on topical issues to our panel. We have then correlated the results into reports that have been used by partners to help our local health and care partners to plan, deliver, and evaluate services.

This year's topics have included:

- **Palliative and End of Life Care** - Healthwatch Cheshire and members of the Strategic Collaborative Cheshire (SCC) including the End of Life Partnership, created a short, online survey to find out what people understand about palliative and end of life care and their attitudes to discussing death and dying. The findings of this report were used by the SCC to inform the development of a long-term communications and engagement plan around palliative and end of life care.
- **NHS Help Us Help You Campaign** - During winter 2020-21, the NHS in Cheshire joined with a range of public and voluntary sector partners to run a campaign called Help Us Help You. The aim was to support people to live healthy lives, self-care when safe to do so, choose the right service at the right time if medical help was needed, and reduce demand on urgent and emergency care. This report helped our local NHS and its partners measure the effectiveness of the campaign and to plan the campaign for winter 2021-22.
- **Mental Health** - Healthwatch Cheshire have received comments on people's experiences regarding mental health, including long waits for support and referrals to services. This survey followed on from last year's "Your Health and Wellbeing During Coronavirus (COVID-19)" to collect views and experiences of services, support available and concerns at this stage of the pandemic. This has been welcomed by service providers including Cheshire and Wirral Partnership.



Become a member of our Citizens Focus Panel



Want to have your say on topical issues? Find out more about our Citizens Focus Panel, how you can become a member, and read this year's reports on our website:

www.healthwatchcwac.org.uk/get-involved/citizens-focus-panel

Advice and information

An important part of Healthwatch Cheshire West's activity is to ensure that people have good quality, up to date information and advice when they need it. Our signposting support, which is free and confidential, is carried out in a variety of ways; during conversations with local people at engagement events and meetings and also via telephone, web and email enquiries.

Over the last year, Healthwatch Cheshire West has supported signposting enquiries covering a wide range of subjects, such as:

- How to access NHS dentistry.
- Obtaining Covid-19 vaccinations in the community and at home, and the updating of vaccination records.
- Safeguarding concerns regarding quality of treatment and care or the safety of people in hospital, care homes or at home.
- Safe discharge from hospital, how to access a care needs assessment and how to go about finding a carer.
- How to register with a GP practice and help for people de-registered by their GP.
- Referrals to charity and Third Sector organisations for support for mental health, dementia, Parkinson's Disease and carers, to name but a few.



Examples to help illustrate how we have helped people to get the information they need:

Support to obtain a 'Fitness for Surgery Certificate'

During the Covid-19 lockdown we received a telephone call from the wife of a man due to have knee surgery, but who required a 'Fitness for Surgery Dental Certificate' before the operation could take place. A date for the surgery had been planned, but, despite a call to the Cheshire & Merseyside Emergency Dental Helpline, no NHS dental appointment could be obtained which, in turn, meant that the operation was unlikely to go ahead.

Healthwatch Cheshire contacted NHS England & Improvement, who commission local dental services, and they were able to arrange an appointment at a local dental practice in time for a Fitness certificate to be issued and the man's surgery to proceed.



Mental Health signposting gratefully received

An email was received from a young man in urgent need of mental health support as one of his parents was terminally ill, the other was also very ill. He had been to see his GP for help and had been told that the waiting time for counselling was 4-6 weeks, but he needed something sooner than this.

Healthwatch Cheshire gave him the Cheshire & Wirral Partnership 24-hour crisis line number, and referred him to Mid Cheshire Mind for counselling; they had immediate openings at a cost of £20. We also suggested he go back to his GP and ask for a referral to St Luke's Hospice for support.



NHS Independent Complaints Advisory Service

Healthwatch Cheshire provides an NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS). ICAS helps people to understand how the NHS complaints process works, and to support them where needed.



NHS Independent Complaints Advisory Service (ICAS)

ICAS offers telephone, online, and face-to-face support to help the people of Cheshire to progress complaints in relation to any NHS service provision provided at hospitals, GP Practices, dentists, pharmacies, opticians, and nursing homes.

This year in Cheshire West and Chester:

- 149 people contacted ICAS, a 14% increase from the previous year.
- ICAS had a direct impact on 139 residents with NHS complaints, including providing information to progress their complaint themselves, or signposting to other organisations.
- 19 of these people required further in-depth practical support from our ICAS Advocate to help them access the NHS Complaints Procedure.
- A significant proportion of people contacting ICAS (23%) were complaints relating to NHS dentistry. 71% of these were concerning not being able to find a dentist that will take them on as an NHS patient.
- 25% of people contacting ICAS did so regarding GP Practices, with issues over referrals, and not being able to see or speak to a doctor; a 12% increase from last year.
- Hospital complaints were raised by 29% of people contacting ICAS, with just under half of these concerned over the quality of care being provided.
- Concerns over mental health services made up 13% of people contacting ICAS, with people raising issues over consistency of care and quality of support.

Comments from an individual supported by ICAS to make a complaint regarding discharge and end of life care:

“I would like to thank you for all your help and support throughout it all. Without you I would not have had the courage to face it all.”

“Thank you so much for being with me today. Your support was invaluable and meant a lot.”



Looking for support with a complaint?

If you need help through the complaints process, or would like to explore your options, you can find out more about ICAS on our website:

www.healthwatchcwac.org.uk/what-we-do/help-making-a-complaint

Volunteers

We're supported by a team of 51 amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch. In 2021-22, contributed 1,111 hours to make care better for our community. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in NHS and social care.

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people to have their say by taking part in engagement events across Cheshire, for example as part of our Healthwatch Across Cheshire and A&E Watch projects.
- Carried out website reviews on Cheshire's GP Practices on the information they provide and assessing their accessibility, as part of our GP Website Health Checks.
- Assisted as part of a Healthwatch Cheshire 'Readers' Panel', providing feedback on draft Healthwatch reports to ensure they are people focused and easy to read.
- Shared their views on topical issues surrounding health, care and wellbeing as members of the Healthwatch Cheshire Citizens Focus Panel.
- Offered feedback on the Equality and Diversity Assessments of local NHS Trusts.
- Provided donations such as clothing, books, DVDs, CDs and board games to the most vulnerable in our community including Care Homes, mental health support groups, the homeless, and refugees.
- Have taken part in various training opportunities on topics including safeguarding, end of life, equality and diversity, Enter and View, suicide and self-harm awareness, domestic violence, mental health awareness, social prescribing, and scams awareness.

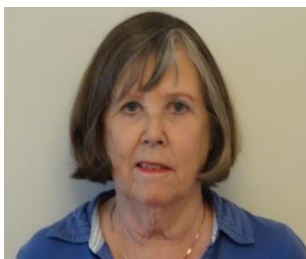


Healthwatch Cheshire volunteer at Countess of Chester Hospital during A&E Watch 21 July 2021



Peace

"My volunteering experience with Healthwatch Cheshire was a delightful one as it not only gave me practical knowledge but also hands-on experience... my favourite was Enter and View - I was an Authorised Representative, and it gave me the opportunity to visit hospitals and care homes to check if they provided quality care to people... Since volunteering, I have been able to work with two different Non-Governmental Organisations in Nigeria... I want to thank Healthwatch Cheshire for the wonderful opportunity, which enabled me to not only give back to society but also acquire knowledge and experience which will always remain with me."



Philippa

"I joined Healthwatch early in 2022 a few months after retiring. I wanted to be more involved with the local community, and Healthwatch was suggested. Volunteers have a wide choice of the type of support to be given and the time to be spent. Everyone was very welcoming, and I have received some helpful training. Everything I have done so far has been with an experienced member of the Healthwatch team. There have been 3 sessions when I have helped with the Healthwatch stall at community events, engaging with people and asking them about any recent contacts with various health organisations.

The session which I enjoyed the most was a family day at Crewe Campus where, as many children were expected, alongside the table holding leaflets and general information there was a separate table with colouring books, pencils, pens, and stickers for these children. This table was very popular the children really enjoyed it while their parents could engage with us peacefully.


I have been involved with a couple of Microsoft Teams meetings with the Crewe Care Community and the Dementia Steering Group. I have been interested to see how much is happening locally. I have recently done 'Enter and View' training, and hope to be part of the team which visits Care Homes. I am grateful for all the help and support I am being given, and I am really enjoying being a volunteer working with Healthwatch and being part of the team."



Do you feel inspired?

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

 www.healthwatchcwac.org.uk/get-involved/volunteering

 **0300 323 0006**

 info@healthwatchcheshire.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.

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£150,298	Staff costs	£132,437.26
Additional funding	£11,000	Operational costs	£8,139.15
		Support and administration	£26,823.44
Total income	£161,298	Total expenditure	£167,190.70

Top three priorities for 2022-23

1. Access to integrated health and care services
2. Tackling health inequalities
3. Working alongside our Cheshire Care Communities.

Next steps

Over the coming year we will continue to focus our work on gaining insight and intelligence from our residents across Cheshire, to help inform every stage of the planning and delivery of health and care support. We are acutely aware of issues around health inequalities across our communities and will work in partnership with decision makers to reduce barriers to accessing joined-up services.

“Healthwatch Cheshire has proven to be a crucial valued partner for the CCG working to achieve its strategic objectives and values. The insight provided by Healthwatch has continued to ensure that the CCG stays informed and influenced by the experiences and needs of patients and local residents when designing and monitoring the performance of the health services the CCG has responsibility to commission. We are grateful that Healthwatch has continued to be a powerful voice for individual residents as well as groups with respect to their experiences of health and care services.

As Integrated Care Systems are established and new local Place arrangements are developed, it is paramount that the experience, expertise and insight offered by the local (and national) Healthwatch teams continue to feature, be seen as equal partners and be a key voice for local residents, patients and carers in matters relating to their care.”

Clare Watson, Accountable Officer – NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group

Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Cheshire CIC, Sension House, Denton Drive, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 7LU.

Healthwatch Cheshire West 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 Cheshire board members work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2021/22 the board met four times and made decisions on matters such as governance and maintaining the independence of Healthwatch Cheshire West.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by responding to what the public tell us, for example in our work this year on dentistry and GP websites.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience.

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, provided an online Feedback Centre system, engaged with people face-to-face at events and groups, attended virtual and physical meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. It is shared with health and care services and commissioners, voluntary and community organisations, and is also available for people in Cheshire to read on our [website](#).

Recommendations and requests

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity. However, feedback from the public on access to GPs led us to perform a 'health check' on the websites of GP Practices to determine how easy they are to use for people. Our regular Enter and View activity will resume during 2022/23.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.



Cheshire West Libraries
Wellbeing Week, Upton Library
– 27 January 2022

Other highlights

Activity	Changes made to services
Quality improvement based on patient experience story	The story relates to the experience of repeated hospital admissions for a Cheshire resident during summer 2021 and January 2022, and the poor communication with their family in the context of visiting restrictions. This fits into other stories we have been hearing from the public about poor communication from hospitals with patients and families. The story was presented at the NHS Cheshire CCG Cheshire West Place Committee in February 2022, and has led to meetings with the Executive Director of Quality, Patient Experience & Safeguarding, the Associate Clinical Directors of NHS Cheshire CCG, and Directors of Nursing at the Hospital Trusts in Cheshire to look at how lessons can be learned from the story to improve experiences for people in the future. In particular, the impact of communication, policies, and joined-up working.
Influencing the Cheshire West and Chester Place Plan	Healthwatch Cheshire's reports will be used in the refresh of the Cheshire West and Chester Place Plan, putting the views of people at the centre of decision-making and planning. We are also members of the Cheshire West Place Executive.
Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) Development	Healthwatch Cheshire are a stakeholder within the ICS. Our reports and findings are helpful to understanding our populations; our feedback influences messaging, and we will be co-authoring the draft Public Engagement Strategy.
Involvement in senior recruitment across the local health and care system	Our Chief Executive has been involved in the recruitment of the Chair and Chief Executive of Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust; the Chair of Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust; and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Cheshire West Place Director.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Cheshire West is represented on the Cheshire West and Chester Health and Wellbeing Board by Louise Barry, our Chief Executive. During 2021/22 our representative has effectively carried out this role by presenting findings from our reports and challenging decisions and planning, including our Healthwatch Across Cheshire report and raising concerns about access to NHS dentistry.



healthwatch
Cheshire West

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