

# Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Thurrock  
Annual Report 2021-22



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# Message from our chair

Healthwatch Thurrock promotes and supports the involvement of local people in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of local care services.

Our staff and volunteers identify what matters most to people by: -

- Visiting services to see how they work.
- Running surveys and focus groups
- Going out in the community and working with other organisations.

When all this is considered, one can imagine the difficulties in continuing this work throughout the pandemic. Yet, in the past year our staff and volunteers have been successful in obtaining the views of local people in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of local care services.

Our staff are key to the successes achieved. The past year saw significant staffing changes which has bought a new dynamism to the Healthwatch Thurrock team. This has been complemented with changes to the Advisory Group also, bringing in new voices and views to enable future progression.



Kevin Brice  
**Healthwatch Thurrock  
Advisory Group Chair**



“People don’t always know how to get the information they need to make decisions about their own health and care. Healthwatch Thurrock plays an important role in providing advice and pointing people in the right direction for the support they need.

We look forward to working with Thurrock residents to improve care services to meet local community needs, now and in the future.”

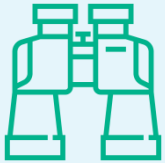
**Kevin Brice, Chair of Healthwatch Thurrock Advisory Group**



# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Thurrock is your local health and social care champion. From Grays to Corringham 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

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.



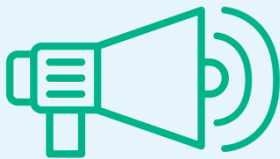
### Our values

- Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

# Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

## Reaching out



**1609 people**

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

**676 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and COVID-19.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**3 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**Covid Mental Health report which highlighted the how the pandemic affected residents' mental health**

## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**15**

outstanding volunteers, who gave up **32 days** to make care better for our community.

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

**£126,844.18**

Which is **1.32% more** than the previous year.

We also currently employ

**6 staff**

who help us carry out this work. previous year.

## How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring



Our staff worked alongside volunteers to help isolated residents access advice and guidance and medication during the pandemic..



We spoke to residents about their experience using services and getting information since the beginning of the pandemic

Summer



Our new team worked with community groups to get back out and undertaking face to face engagement with residents.



We spoke to residents about how the pandemic affected their mental health and how they accessed mental health support during the pandemic

Autumn



We undertook engagement with partners at CVS for the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, speaking to residents about what they felt priorities should be locally.



We held a Facebook Live Event to allow local residents the chance to speak to members of the Primary Care team about GP access.

Winter



We engaged with local residents to find out their experiences accessing dentistry services since the pandemic.



We began our engagement for our Carers Report, hosting workshops in schools and collaborating with local organisations to maximise reach to unpaid carers in the area.



# Listening to your experiences

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



## Giving Young People a Voice

In Quarters 3 and 4 we went out and engaged with young people to provide advice and information about Health and Wellbeing and to gather their feedback on using health and social care. This feedback will be included in our report on Accessing GP services in Thurrock due to be published in Quarter 1 of 2022/3.

Working with children's services, local primary and secondary schools and local cubs groups we were able to hold assemblies and workshops with young people aged 8-18. We gathered the feedback of 717 young people in total. We incorporated awareness raising about young carers so that any young people who identified as young carers could tell a responsible adult and access the support they required. We also used it as a recruitment opportunity for Healthwatch Young Ambassadors.



### 26% of Year 9s

**We spoke to in a workshop felt that GP appointments were difficult to access due to wait times and phone lines.**

This will ensure that young people have a voice in health and social care going forward, working with them to ensure their voices are heard.

The key issues young people identified were:

- Waiting times for appointments with GPs
- Difficulties in getting appointments, e.g. the phone lines taking a long time to navigate
- Being listened to as a young person. Some students said they felt ignored next to adults.
- The friendliness of different clinical staff

### What difference did this make

We were able to recruit some young people as young ambassadors and create a positive relationship with the schools and groups we visited, some of which have invited us back for further engagement. Meaning young people's voices will continue to be included in local decision making.



“Doctors are very kind to me when I am nervous and make me feel ok. They also give me stickers. They helped my dad when he had kidney failure.”

Nina, aged 8





## Sharing the Lived Experience of Thurrock people

**It's important for the NHS and local services to step back and see the bigger picture by hearing stories of local people and how they have found accessing health care and support. This helps to create empathy and can have a bigger impact than using data alone.**

As part of our video series [Thurrock Voices](#) we spoke to a selection of residents about their experiences, from having a stroke to looking after a loved one with a long term health condition, these residents bravely shared their stories. These were then shared on social media platforms.

One of the main issues we heard was how having a loved one with a health need can have a physical and emotional impact on the whole family and wider network around them.

As part of this series, we spoke to Phil and Sarah\*, Phil had a stroke in 2021 and Sarah has given up work to care for him. The video conveys the challenges they have faced and the adjustments they have had to make. We hope the series will help decision makers take a step back and see the bigger picture.



“Hearing Glenn’s story of caring for his brother and how it impacted him growing up made me look differently at how my daughter’s health needs may impact my other daughter.”

Susan, Thurrock Resident .



### What difference did this make

The residents who participated in this series have said they feel proud to have been able to discuss the issues, and are grateful to have a platform to do so. For some it was the first time they had spoken about their experience beyond to their close friends and family.

Local residents have spoken to Healthwatch staff about seeing the videos and finding them powerful and inspiring. The series has also been brought up and referenced by professionals in online meetings.

We hope to expand this series to include a variety of different local experiences in the future.

\*Please note real names have been used because permission was granted to share these videos in the public domain

## Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.



### Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

**By telling the stories of a small number of people we have been able to demonstrate to decision makers the impact of local services. This can be more powerful than large data sets.**

We were hearing from local residents about difficulties in accessing the Mental Health Crisis Line via 111 Option 2. Residents described how they were calling in crisis and being referred back to services that did not offer crisis support. Whilst we didn't hear from a large number of residents it was enough to indicate that it needed looking into. We fed this back to commissioning bodies and one of the residents was invited to speak at one of the meetings. The issue is now being looked into.



### Getting services to involve the public

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

We facilitated a dialogue between residents and a selection of GPs and Practice Managers via a Facebook Live event in September 2021. This video has been viewed by nearly 900 people. This allowed residents the opportunity to ask questions about accessing GP services under the changing COVID restrictions. This enabled primary care staff to hear about some of the issues residents were concerned about.



### Improving care over time

**Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.**

We wanted to understand how residents had found accessing dental care during and since the pandemic. We created a short survey that we took to residents and posted on social media. We spoke to 88 residents. This [report](#) was published in May 2022 and will be taken to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Board for their feedback on how access to dentistry services can be improved in Thurrock.

# 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, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Signposting people to where and how they could access the COVID vaccination.
- Signposting and referring people into the services they need
- Helping people resolve issues with healthcare access or advising them on the relevant complaints process where necessary
- Providing up to date information on COVID-19 and its effects on healthcare access.



## Signposting people who needed additional support

During one of the lockdowns in 2021 Healthwatch Thurrock conducted a survey of residents to find out how they had been impacted by any mental health worries or concerns and to see how they were coping, with a view to provide information, advice and guidance.

A survey was conducted via telephone and a total of 236 conversations were had. 25% of residents were concerned about lack of contact with friends and family. Other residents expressed concern about vaccine safety and the impact lockdown had on their relationships. We were able to signpost vulnerable people onto extra care, such as helping with shopping, accessing GP support or mental health services.



## Providing advice and guidance

After meeting Mrs Rooney\* at a community engagement event Healthwatch staff were able to make the relevant referrals and signposting to enable her and her husband to access the relevant support from services.

Mrs Rooney spoke about her and her husband being isolated and not being aware of what was going on in the community since COVID restrictions had eased. Mrs Rooney also wanted to ensure her husband had the right support for his diabetes.



Healthwatch staff signposted Mrs Rooney to some groups near her home and referred her to the Local Area Coordination team so she could be kept informed about what was taking place in the community. Mrs Rooney and her husband were also told about a local diabetes support group and Healthwatch ensured Mr Rooney had contact with a diabetes nurse.

We met Mrs Rooney at another event and she said she was very grateful for the prompt follow up and the information Healthwatch had provided.

\*Name has been changed to protect anonymity



# Volunteers

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch. 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 have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online.
- Assisted us to host assemblies in local schools to promote health and wellbeing.
- Carried out research to ensure our database of local groups, organisations and professionals remains up to date.
- Provided refreshments and assistance at our community engagement events.
- Continued to help with the local volunteering efforts supporting those who were self-isolating.

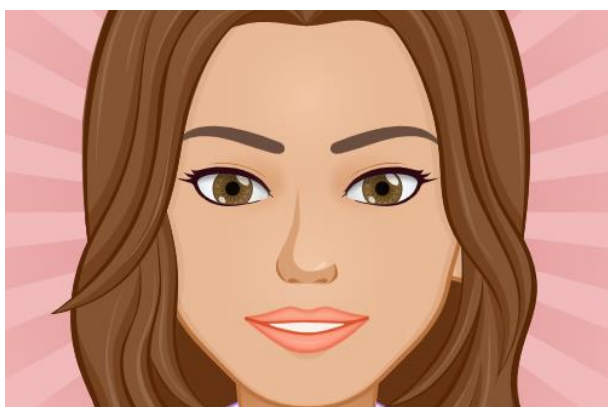






### Susie

“The best thing about volunteering with Healthwatch is that each experience is different and varied - from stuffing envelopes, to making refreshments; and chatting to, and giving out information leaflets, to social groups. Although sad, it was an eye-opener accompanying Healthwatch to speak to an elderly gentleman about what support he could get caring for his wife.”



### Poppy

“I started volunteering to get experience for my Health and Social Care course. I have learnt a lot and met new people. I have learnt about the difficulties people face accessing health and social care and how Healthwatch can help them. I have enjoyed accompanying Healthwatch to community engagement events and talking to people about their experiences.”



### Glenn

“I started volunteering because I wanted to get some alternative career experience and give something back to the community. What I have gained is a new and fantastic confidence in talking about my story and all that comes with it, the laughter, the tears, the heartache and that is due to them involving me in their young, unpaid carers work they have been promoting in the community. Volunteering gave me the confidence to talk about my experience being a young carer for my brother who passed away.”



### Do you feel inspired?

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



[www.healthwatchthurrock.org](http://www.healthwatchthurrock.org)



01375 389883



[admin@healthwatchthurrock.org](mailto:admin@healthwatchthurrock.org)

# 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	
Funding received from local authority	£126,844.18
Additional funding / commissioned work	£8333.00
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£135,177.18</b>

Income	
Staff costs	£102,043.36
Operational costs	£2250.71
Support and administration	£22,486.98
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£126,781.05</b>

## Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. A view of Mental Health services including children and young people’s services.
2. Dignity in Care Homes/hospital wards.
3. Access to Primary Care following Covid-19

## Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that’s because of where you live, income or race.

# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch Thurrock, The Beehive Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP is a project of Thurrock CVS, The Beehive Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP

Healthwatch Thurrock 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 Advisory Group consists of 9 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Advisory Group 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 updating governance procedures and agreeing an engagement plan for Healthwatch Thurrock in the evolving pandemic context.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We have created an Ideas Register in which our Advisory Group members can feed back themes in what they are hearing from the public, we can then assess whether there needs to be a piece of work to look into this using our Governance decision making profile. We undertook the Dentistry survey in response to feedback from residents about difficulties accessing dentistry services.

### 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, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media. When COVID restrictions have allowed we have also attended and hosted face to face community meetings and taken hard copies of our surveys to those meetings to ensure that people who struggle with digital access can engage.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, ensuring that engagement with local people can take place in a face to face or hybrid capacity where possible to ensure that residents who are digitally excluded can still provide feedback about local services.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website, via social media channels, and make hard copies available in the volunteer centres and local libraries.

### Responses to 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.

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

## Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Thurrock is represented on the Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee by Kim James, Chief Operating Officer. During 2021/22 our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing a case study or experience for whichever topic is on the agenda, so as to represent the voice of the public

### 2021-2022 Outcomes

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
Complex Care Project	Healthwatch Thurrock have worked with local organisations to ensure Thurrock voices feed into changes to complex care provision going forward.
Carers Report	The Carers Report will be published in Quarter 2 of 2022/3 and will ensure local voices feed into the Local Carers Strategy Refresh.





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