

Together

we're making health
and social care better

Annual Report 2022–23

healthwatch
Birmingham



Contents

Message from our Chair	3
About us	4
10 years of improving care	6
Listening to your experiences	7
Hearing from all communities	11
Advice and information	13
Volunteering	15
Finances and future priorities	17
Statutory statements	18



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“In the last 10 years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of local Healthwatch hasn’t. Your local Healthwatch has worked tirelessly to make sure the views of local people are heard, and NHS and social care leaders use your feedback to make care better.”

Louise Ansari, Healthwatch National Director

Message from our Chair

There have been big changes in health and social care services since Healthwatch Birmingham was established as the independent voice for patients 10 years ago, yet listening to people's views of the services they use and acting on their concerns remain the core reason we exist.

Understanding what people tell us about their experiences enables us to be a watchdog over the myriad services providing health and social care across Birmingham, allowing us to give credit when services are performing well, alongside highlighting areas that need to be improved. Crucially, by advocating for the views of patients and the public, we help them to shape the way services are delivered in future.

The importance of our role as an independent public champion was recently demonstrated when we helped expose serious problems at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB). Staff at UHB have always shown amazing dedication to their lifesaving work – not least during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a local resident myself, I have good reason to thank UHB staff for my own recovery from serious illness. However, patients have been failed in key areas and Trust leaders have presided over a bullying culture that has no place in the NHS. Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull were among the first to call for an independent investigation and commitment to substantive changes at UHB, which we will be holding the Trust accountable for delivering.

We have also been working hard across many other areas of health and social care in Birmingham. We have investigated access to GP services and dentistry – the services where most people experience how well the NHS is working in their daily lives. We have helped to instigate important changes to mental health services for children and young people and are advocating for people of all ages to get the mental health support they need. We have given users of day opportunity services funded by Birmingham City Council an important say in how these vital sources of support for people with disabilities and their carers are being developed. Plus, we are continuing to fight health inequalities by going directly into Birmingham's diverse communities to listen to the people most likely to experience barriers to health and social care.

These achievements build on a solid record of impact over the past 10 years. I am particularly proud of the fact that Healthwatch Birmingham has achieved more with less money each year: from collecting just over 1,000 pieces of feedback in 2013/14 to over 8,000 in 2022/23, while our funding has fallen from £566,381 to £461,557.

That we can make such a difference with such tight resources is due to all the local people who have shared their experiences with us and the hard work and commitment of the incredible Healthwatch Birmingham staff team, volunteers and my fellow board members. For whatever issues arise in health and social care in the city, Healthwatch Birmingham will always be on the side of local people helping to secure the quality care they need and deserve.

- Richard Burden, Chair, Healthwatch Birmingham

About us

Healthwatch Birmingham 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.

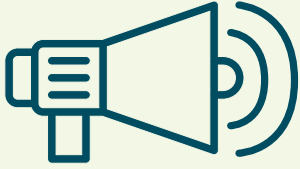


Our values are:

- **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



8,080 people

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

5,624 people

came to us for clear information about topics such as mental health and the cost of living crisis.

Making a difference to care

We published

6 reports

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

Our most popular report was

How easy is it to access NHS dentistry in Birmingham and Solihull?



Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

33

outstanding volunteers who help to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2022-23 we received

£461,577

which is **13% more** than the previous year.

We currently employ

10 staff

who help us carry out our work.

10 years of improving care

This year marks a special milestone for Healthwatch. Over the last 10 years, people have shared their experiences, good and bad, to help improve health and social care. Here are a few of our highlights:

How have we made care better, together?

Covid-19

During the pandemic we signposted people towards sources of support for urgent issues like food parcels, PPE and prescriptions.



Primary care

We worked with primary care services to improve patient-centred care for young people and improve access to emergency appointments for patients with clinical need.

Mental health

Our investigation into community mental health services led to improved systems for ordering and delivering medication alongside more flexible drop in times for patients.



Health inequalities

We worked with local NHS Trusts and Birmingham City Council to ensure different communities in the city get information about health and social care in an appropriate language and format.

Hospitals

Our investigation into people's experiences in hospital waiting rooms led to shorter waiting times and better support for people with disabilities.





Richard Burden
Chair, Healthwatch Birmingham and Solihull

NEWS  NIGHT

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 feed this back to services and help them improve.

Patient safety at University Hospitals Birmingham

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull led calls for an urgent investigation into University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB), following reports that a culture of bullying was affecting patient safety.

We have been concerned for some time by poor public feedback about the four hospitals (Queen Elizabeth, Heartlands, Good Hope and Solihull Hospital) that make up one of the largest NHS Trusts in England, meeting regularly with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and senior figures at UHB to raise the issues people were telling us about.

Due to our role as the independent champion for local patients, Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull Chair Richard Burden was invited onto BBC Newsnight to comment on allegations from former and current UHB staff members about a toxic management culture impacting the quality of care at the Trust.

Stressing the importance of patient safety and confidence, we subsequently demanded an independent investigation into UHB. In response, Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (NHS BSOL) has commissioned three reviews into UHB examining:



1. Patient safety
2. Staff culture
3. Leadership

What difference will this make?

The first review by Professor Mike Bewick has already concluded with some important recommendations for UHB, including:

- External reviews of 'never events'
- Changes in governance and leadership
- Better staff welfare support
- Ensuring staff are confident in coming forward to report concerns

We will hold the Trust accountable for implementing these and any actions from the further reviews. But the fact that issues at UHB went unaddressed for so long also raises questions about the current effectiveness of oversight in the NHS. Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull are determined to play our role in improving scrutiny throughout the health and social care system, so issues can be identified and addressed before they become serious problems for staff and patients.

Access to primary care services

Primary care services such as GP practices and dentists aren't just most people's gateway into the NHS – they are important keystones of local communities too. Being able to get a GP or dentist appointment when they need one, and in a way that suits their needs, has become a big problem in Birmingham and is one of the main reasons people contact us for information.

In response to the growing number of concerns and negative feedback we were receiving about access to primary care we launched separate investigations into access to GP services and NHS dentistry.

GP services:

Our investigation into GP services examined the experiences of over 2,000 local people and found common issues including:

- Problems booking appointments on the telephone or online
- Difficulties getting face-to-face appointments
- Long waiting times for consultations and treatments

We also discovered that more deprived areas have poorer access to primary care services and that people from ethnic minority groups and those with long-term conditions encounter more barriers to care.

NHS dentistry:

Our investigation into NHS dentistry with Healthwatch Solihull examined the experiences of over 800 local residents and found that lack of access, long waiting times, affordability and poor access to urgent and emergency dental care were leading some people to:

- Forgo or reduce much needed treatment
- Access private dental care, which has left some people in debt
- Use A & E or frequently call NHS 111 to access services

What difference will this make?

We reported our findings back to NHS commissioners, who introduced a number of changes to improve access to primary care, such as:

- More appointments
- Drives to recruit additional staff
- A specific focus on more deprived people and communities

While we welcome these moves, it is clear from the number of people still reporting issues to us that the impact of these changes has yet to be felt by many local residents. Recognising the important role high quality GP and NHS dentist services play for the health of both individuals and the wider community, we will continue to work closely with primary care services to ensure everyone can get the care they need when they need it.

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.

Listening to everyone

We go directly into different communities to make sure people of all backgrounds can have their voices heard.



We have collected feedback from all ethnicities and from across all 69 wards in this hugely diverse city. We reached out to groups we need to hear more from to help us understand the specific issues that may affect their access to health and social care services. Our community engagement team have visited events to listen and provide information to people particularly likely to experience inequality, such as Ukrainian refugees and people experiencing homelessness.

Getting services to involve the public

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



We emphasise the importance of listening to people's experiences in our responses to consultations about changes to health and social care services. This year NHS England's policy team for the ambulance dataset survey met with us to discuss our response and acknowledged their work would benefit from increased public participation and involvement. Following our response to Birmingham City Council's consultation on support around hospital and rehabilitation discharge, we also advised the NHS on the barriers some people face accessing pharmacy services after leaving hospital.

Improving care over time

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



Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull are key partners in the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System (BSOL ICS), which brings together all the region's health and social care services. Our seat on the Integrated Care Board (NHS BSOL) means we can ensure the voice of service users is heard by key decision makers at the highest levels, while we are using our expertise engaging with diverse communities to help frontline services tackle health inequalities.



Hearing from all communities

Over the past year we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone in Birmingham. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently, to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard and services meet their needs.

Improving day opportunity services

Day opportunity services play a valuable role in the lives of people with disabilities and other needs, but many people who use them are concerned about the services' future.

We spoke to nearly 150 service users and their carers about their experiences, who told us that day services had a positive impact on their quality of life, but there needed to be better regulation of and more information about services. We shared this feedback with Birmingham City Council, who used our findings as part of a review designed to make the service improvements people want.



“Make sure the service continues to be available – this is a lifeline for many service users. It is the only or one of very few opportunities for them to be social and make friends in a safe environment with trained staff.”

Carer



Better mental health care for children and young people

Young people who have experienced mental health issues are helping others going through similar difficulties in the Forward Thinking Birmingham (FTB) service, after service users and carers told us people with lived experience should be involved in designing mental health care.

The Peer Support Worker programme was introduced by FTB in response to our recommendations, alongside other changes including better communication with patients and improved training for staff.

“I supported her in going for walks in her area and in going on the local buses. This along with talking about my experience of psychosis has helped her in believing there is life after diagnosis.”

Peer support worker



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Birmingham is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide free and confidential information to help you understand your options and get the support you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or learning more about your patient rights – you can count on us.

Helping local people find mental health support

The cost of living crisis, lack of access to GPs and dentistry and long waiting lists for treatment are some of the issues we hear about that also affect people's mental health.

We want to ensure that people know where they can go to get help for their mental health.

We have updated our website with the latest information regarding pathways for mental health support from BSOL ICS. This has been presented as a helpful FAQ, which people can follow step by step to get support.

Alongside signposting people to their GP for mental health support, we regularly point them towards organisations such as Mind or Samaritans which are available 24/7. We have also compiled an up-to-date list of sources of support, which we have promoted social media as well as to people who contact us for help.

Case studies: People we have helped

A caller with ME and other medical conditions was being assessed for Multiple Sclerosis (MS). However, the doctor told her it was to assess her headaches. She was then referred between services and had poor quality treatment. We signposted her to an advocacy service to help her with the complaint she was writing and to help her navigate the system. She has told us that the advocacy service had been very helpful and she was now making progress.

We received a call from a service provider our team had met at a training event. He had received a call from a couple who had been seen by opticians and paid for glasses but then never received them. He was unsure what to do with this information, but was aware we would be able to point him in the right direction. We signposted him towards adult safeguarding at Birmingham City Council and he was grateful for our help in resolving the situation.



Volunteering

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

Investing In Volunteers

We are proud to be awarded the Investing In Volunteers quality mark again this year. It shows that we value our volunteers and demonstrates our commitment to volunteering within the organisation.

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations involving volunteers. Awarded by the UK Volunteering Forum, Investing in Volunteers aims to improve the quality of the volunteering experience and demonstrates that organisations value the enormous contribution made by their volunteers.

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull were assessed against six quality areas and proved to excel in all aspects of working with its volunteers.

1. Vision for volunteering
2. Planning for volunteers
3. Volunteer inclusion
4. Recruiting and welcoming volunteers
5. Supporting volunteers
6. Valuing and developing volunteers



"This has been my second involvement in the Investing in Volunteers process, and I have found it to be engaging and interesting. Volunteering with Healthwatch is full of varied experiences and I enjoy meeting the diverse community of Birmingham."

Tim, Volunteer Representative

"We could not achieve all that we do without the help and support we get from our dedicated volunteers. Our volunteers bring many skills with so much knowledge and enthusiasm to everything they do and they are really appreciated by the whole team. We are proud to offer a welcoming and supportive volunteering journey and we are pleased that the achievement of the Investing in Volunteers Award reflects this. The Investing in Volunteers process has helped us learn even more about the volunteers' perspective and we are very thankful for all the volunteers' input into the process."

Georgina, Volunteer Coordinator



Do you feel inspired?

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



www.healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk



07960 124286



volunteering@healthwatchbirmingham.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

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£461,557	Expenditure on pay	£319,567
Additional income	£0	Non-pay expenditure	£22,838
		Office and management fee	£47,931
Total income	£461,557	Total expenditure	£390,336

Next steps

In the 10 years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in helping the health and social care system understand what is working, spot issues and think about how things can be better in the future.

Services are currently facing unprecedented challenges and tackling the backlog needs to be a key priority for the NHS to ensure everyone gets the care they need. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving them a voice to help shape improvements to services.

We will also continue our work to tackling inequalities that exist and work to reduce the barriers you face when accessing care, regardless of whether that is because of where you live, income or race.

Top three priorities for 2023-24

1. Ensure BSOL ICS uses patient feedback in all aspects of service development
2. Hold UHB accountable for implementing wide ranging changes for patients
3. Increase our work with communities who experience the biggest inequalities



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Birmingham, Cobalt Square, Hagley Road, Birmingham, B16 8QG

Healthwatch Birmingham 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 board consists of nine members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. We also have two volunteer representatives on our board. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2022/23 the board met formally four times and made decisions on matters such as tackling inequalities, the cost-of-living crisis, our role within the ICS and the reviews of UHB.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. People's experiences prompt and lead our activity and investigations, with our reports focusing on improving services for everyone. People's experiences collected through our feedback centre, community engagement and information and signposting are collated and themed. Key issues go through our Topic Identification and Prioritisation (TIPS) process where our volunteers and members of the public help us select issues for us to investigate.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain peoples experiences

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 social care services. During 2022/23 we have been available by phone and email, have provided a webform on our website, provided a feedback centre/rate and review system, attended meetings of community groups and forums, visited services and engaged with the public through social media.

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 social care decision makers.

This year we have done this by, for example, working with community groups who have direct access to the people we need to reach.

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.

Responses to recommendations and requests

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insight and experiences that have been shared with us.

We share information with Local Authority commissioners, NHS BSOL and the CQC on a quarterly basis. We also utilise our seats on decision making boards and committees to share insight we have gathered. These meetings include Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board, the Birmingham Safeguarding Adults Board and the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

We also take insight and experiences to decision makers in BSOL ICS. For example, we utilise our seats at the Integrated Care Partnership, Integrated Care Board, Birmingham Place Committee and the Quality Stakeholder Group.

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

Enter and view

This year, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Birmingham is represented on the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board by Andy Cave, Chief Executive. During 2022/23 he has effectively carried out this role by championing the involvement of local people in decisions and supporting the board to understand citizens' experiences. This year we presented our findings from our cost-of-living survey to support the wider system approach to support people in Birmingham.

Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System

Healthwatch Birmingham is represented in the following ways:

- Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Partnership – Richard Burden (Chair)
- Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board – Andy Cave (CEO)
- Birmingham Place Committee – Andy Cave (CEO)



healthwatch Birmingham

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