

The value of listening

Healthwatch Wolverhampton
Annual Report 2023-2024



healthwatch
Wolverhampton

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

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



Message from our Co-Chairs

We are delighted to present the Healthwatch Wolverhampton annual report 2023–24. It describes the broad range of work we have undertaken to help health and social care services understand and respond to the needs of Wolverhampton’s diverse communities.

In my first six months as Co-Chair, we explored ways to enhance your involvement in our work. We revised our work plan and priorities, ensuring that your voice is central to our focus, and we strengthened co-production and community engagement through our new Oversight Group. We eagerly anticipate continuing this collaborative approach and aim to expand our partnership working to enhance this.

I have learned a great deal, including the importance of staying abreast of health developments to ensure we make a difference in health and care quality. There is always more work to be done, so please feel free to reach out about any issues or suggestions you would like us to address. Thank you for your continued support and involvement.



Suffia Perveen

I am delighted to be Co-Chair of Healthwatch Wolverhampton and to build on my previous work as Chair of Healthwatch in Walsall.

Our purpose is to influence better care for the public by making sure local service providers, decision makers and partners understand what people want. Our work is driven by what local people tell us, so it’s important that you share your experiences, including your challenges, concerns, compliments and questions. It’s also important that we ensure equality and diverse representation, which we achieve by speaking with people from a wide range of backgrounds and via our new Oversight Group.

We are facing many challenges, such as the rising cost of living, health inequalities and the continued impact of the pandemic. It is imperative that we continue to listen to our local communities, relay information about their needs, and work with local organisations to inform positive change in local services. In the coming year, we will visit health and care settings, including hospitals and report on patient experiences, and look in more depth at mental health services.

Finally, I would like to thank our small, dedicated staff team and our wonderful volunteers for their commitment and hard work which enables us to make care better for local people.”



Mandy Poonia

About us

Healthwatch Wolverhampton 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:

378 people

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

2,761 people

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



Making a difference to care:

We published

3 reports

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

Our most popular report was

Improving access to GPs in Wolverhampton

which highlighted the struggles people face when booking appointments.



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

38 outstanding volunteers

who gave up **385 hours** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2023-24 we received

£168,950


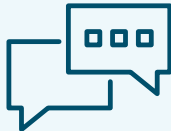








We currently employ

4 part-time staff

who help us carry out our work.

How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We raised awareness of mental health support for different communities and heard how services could be improved. This led to better public information and our project on mental health support for adults with autism.</p>	 <p>We visited community spaces and groups, including markets and shopping centres, and asked local people about the issues that matter most to them to inform our work planning and priorities.</p>
Summer	 <p>By working with local partners we influenced strategy and decision-making to help address health inequalities; guiding improvements in physical health, digital access, mental health and autism support.</p>	 <p>Our volunteers supported the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust with three hospital PLACE assessments. Our reports will inform improvements to patient safety, reduce risk and improve care.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We welcomed two Co-Chairs to develop, lead and provide strong governance for our new Oversight Group, to bring a wider community voice and representation to our work, including deciding our work priorities.</p>	 <p>We carried out an Enter & View visit as part of our joint working with the Council and the CQC to support quality monitoring of residential care homes; our report will inform the care home improvement plan.</p>
Winter	 <p>We published our fourth report evaluating patient experience of booking GP appointments by phone, including our investigation into online booking systems and where improvements could be made.</p>	 <p>We asked adults with autism and those who care for them about their experiences of mental health support while waiting for an autism assessment, and how this could be improved to help people manage better.</p>

Your voice heard at a wider level

We ensure the experiences of people in Wolverhampton influence decisions made about services at Black Country Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year we've worked to achieve:

Achievement one



We helped the City of Wolverhampton Council to communicate and engage effectively with residents to gather their views to inform better sexual healthcare for local people. Our volunteers helped shape the public survey to make sure it was accessible and relatable. We now sit on a steering group with healthcare and voluntary sector organisations looking at how services can be developed and improved.

Achievement two

We shared people's feedback at the Council-led steering group to inform plans to improve physical inactivity among residents. We reviewed and contributed to the first ever physical improvement strategy for Wolverhampton. We will continue to work with the steering group to ensure implementation of the strategy and help people to get the support they need to be healthy and well.



Achievement three



The Wolverhampton Young People's Health Scrutiny Panel has been working to improve oral care for babies and children up to age five. We contributed to their wider work by gathering evidence of people's access to dentistry, carrying out a mystery shopper exercise to find out about the availability of NHS dentistry and what information people are given when trying to book appointments.

Achievement four

By promoting and supporting the Council's City Lifestyle Survey and gathering views of people aged over 65, we helped build understanding of what currently influences peoples' lifestyles. Survey findings have informed the Wolverhampton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. This guides health and wellbeing priorities, helping the Council, NHS and community organisations make decisions about services and support for residents.





Listening to your experiences

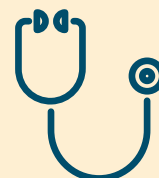
Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Improving digital access to GP appointments

We investigated people's experiences of trying to book GP appointments online and identified areas for improvement to make it easier for everyone to book appointments in the way that suits them, including addressing digital inequalities faced by some of our communities.

50%

of people said they can't book a GP appointment online via their practice website; the majority were unable to or didn't know if they could book a same-day appointment online.



What did you tell us about booking appointments online?

- Not all GP websites provide booking for appointments, and not all types of appointments can be booked online.
- Digital booking systems are often poorly designed and can be hard to use.
- People aged over 65 are less likely to use GP websites to book appointments.
- People whose first language is not English need information and support in other languages.
- People would like more support from their GP practice on how to use the website.



"Make the system user-friendly. It's far from that when I don't even know if I am registered on the system and I'm a regular computer user."

Interviewed by Healthwatch Wolverhampton

What difference did this make?

- Black Country ICB and the Wolverhampton Health Scrutiny Panel welcomed our report and we will work with the ICB to follow up on our recommendations for improvement.
- The ICB said they are working with NHS Digital to deliver new websites for all Wolverhampton GP practices to improve patient experience online, including appointment booking, patient information, and access to eConsult which asks patients for information before advice or a call is given.
- More practices have been encouraged to engage with Healthwatch Wolverhampton to help guide digital accessibility.

Better support for adults waiting for an autism assessment

We've been finding out about adults' experiences of waiting for an autism assessment in Wolverhampton and the support they received while waiting.

What did we already know?

As of June 2023, [NHS experimental data](#) shows that 143,119 people were waiting for an autism assessment in England. Getting advice and resources to help you understand your condition and manage your mental health while you wait is important. Regular communications from NHS services can also reassure you that you haven't been forgotten. It's essential to keep listening to those affected and bring about the changes people need to the autism pathways.



“Once I got diagnosed I was given leaflets on suicide prevention; thought this was very telling.”

Interviewed by Healthwatch Wolverhampton

What did you tell us?

In Spring 2024, we recorded the experiences of over 60 people, which we gathered at community discussion groups and via a survey.

- [NICE guidance](#) states that no one should wait longer than three months between being referred for an autism assessment and first being seen; everyone we heard from had waited longer.
- There is a lack of support while waiting for assessment.
- People are developing further mental health issues while waiting.
- The effects of mental health difficulties are devastating, especially for work and education.

What difference will this make?

We will share our detailed findings, including people's lived experiences, with those responsible for Wolverhampton's autism services. Our report will inform and influence Wolverhampton's new Autism Strategy and the work of various steering groups looking at health inequalities and diagnostic pathways in the Black Country.

Three ways we have made a difference in the community

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

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

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

By speaking directly with older people to support the City Lifestyle Survey, we were able to gain much more information and overcome barriers they had communicating with the Council. Everyone wants to be valued and have services tailored to their needs, regardless of age. We learnt that many older people do gardening, some do yoga everyday, while others rarely move and many are lonely. Older people want to do more but think there are few suitable opportunities; they wanted to share their stories.



Getting services to involve the public

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

Through our work supporting the ICB Wolverhampton Involvement Team's People Panels, we were able to contribute to the *NHS Joint Forward Plan*. The People Panels co-produced four events and facilitated shared conversations between 200 local people, community representatives and healthcare professionals, service providers and decision makers, which resulted in agreement around shared action.



Improving care over time

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

We influenced the Black Country ICP strategy for delivering joined up, quality health and care services. We worked together with other Black Country Healthwatch to make sure local people's views were heard and listened to as the strategy was developed. Our work has been acknowledged in the strategy which will lead to improvements in the health and care workforce and address health inequalities. In 2024, we will continue our work with the ICP as the strategy is reviewed and refreshed.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



Hearing from all communities

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

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Attending events and groups to talk to people in their community, including warm hubs and food support groups, groups supporting adults with autism, older people, men and young people with mental health difficulties.
- Working with community partners and news channels to raise awareness of Healthwatch Wolverhampton, including reaching out on Gulshan Radio.
- Reporting on issues affecting local people and sharing findings with key decision-makers.

Supporting those waiting for mental health care

During Mental Health Week, May 2023, we visited many community groups to raise awareness of the issues people face, the local support available and to hear about people's experiences.

What did you tell us?

We heard from men's groups and other communities that services in Wolverhampton providing serious mental health care need improvement. There has been a reduction in community services and long waiting lists across services can lead to people developing further mental health needs. People told us that they felt patients are discharged without due care and there is a lack of activities for people who are on Tier 1. Concerns were also shared with us about the quality of staff and that there is a lack of accountability within mental health services.



"I am left with a lack of trust and a lack of confidence in the ability of Penn Hospital due to the way I was treated and if given the opportunity would seek to be treated elsewhere."

Interviewed by Healthwatch Wolverhampton

As a result of what people shared, we will be exploring people's experiences of mental health services in more details through our project work this year.

Listening to people's experiences of urology care

The Health Scrutiny Panel asked us to investigate people's experiences of urology services which have been combined for Wolverhampton and Walsall, to identify if change is required to benefit patients.

We visited the Urology Department at New Cross Hospital in Wolverhampton and found that, overall, patient experience was varied. Although most people had a good experience of care, concerns remain around travel to the hospital, finding the ward and parking.



"Signposting should be better, better access, better parking."

Interviewed by Healthwatch Wolverhampton

We shared the feedback and the CEO of the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust responded to our recommendations with improvements to be made, including improved parking.



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust.
- Helping people access the services they need.
- Advising people when they are unable to access NHS dentistry.
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost of living crisis.

Making sure patients get accurate information about their care

It's essential that patients have accurate information and clear communication about their care to help them make well informed decisions.

We heard from a patient who was advised to have a major dental procedure to remove all her teeth, but given little explanation about why and no option for a second opinion. She contacted us prior to surgery to ask what she should do.



We advised her that she wasn't obliged to go through with the appointment and should seek further information from her dentist before proceeding with such life changing treatment; failing that she should seek a second opinion from another dentist. She was hugely relieved and reassured to hear our guidance and booked an appointment to speak with the dentist and Practice Manager to get more information.

We will work with the ICB to ensure patients have accurate information and the time to process and make informed decisions about their care.

Correcting misinformation about registering with GPs and dentists

We have heard that patients are being told they need ID to register with a GP, including one person who was asked for ID going back 20 years. Also, some NHS dentists in Wolverhampton are telling people they need to register with a dentist before they can be seen.



“Individuals experiencing homelessness are told that they can access a GP without a home address, however upon arriving at a GP surgery, they are told that they cannot register without an address.”

Feedback from a homeless charity visited by Healthwatch Wolverhampton

We are working to highlight and correct the ongoing inaccuracy of information through a series of mystery shopping exercises, attending the GP Practice Managers Forum, and sending NHSE guidelines about registration to GPs and dentists.



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.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited community events to promote Healthwatch Wolverhampton and what we have to offer.
- Collected people's experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Carried out visits to hospitals and a care home to help them improve.
- Evaluated GP phone and online booking systems to make it easier for people to access services.



"I was looking for volunteer opportunities in my local area, a role where I could make a difference in society within the health and social care sector, which I'm not only passionate about, but can also help those in need. Healthwatch provides all of this and more! I've had the opportunity to volunteer at many events, attended meetings, contributed to/and shared surveys and been given the opportunity to develop myself through ongoing training.

"I volunteer for such a wonderful organisation, where advocacy and improving lives are at the centre of what we do. Giving those voices, who may not have previously been listened to, a chance now to be heard."



Nat – Healthwatch
Wolverhampton Volunteer



"I am of the older generation and wanted to indirectly give back to the NHS and my community post Covid pandemic, so I became a Healthwatch Wolverhampton volunteer, which I have been for almost a year.

I was given the opportunity to undertake lots of training both internally and externally, which has assisted my growth. I have been involved with two research projects specific to Wolverhampton in relation to GP accessibility and dental appointment availability. I enjoyed this immensely and consequently I am now in paid employment to undertake research while continuing to volunteer for Healthwatch, and I represent another organisation on the Healthwatch Wolverhampton Oversight Group. The staff at Healthwatch Wolverhampton are fantastic and I have never really felt like a volunteer, more a contributing team member."



Simone – Healthwatch
Wolverhampton Volunteer

Do you feel inspired?



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

 healthwatchwolverhampton.co.uk/contact-us

 **0800 246 5018**

 info@healthwatchwolverhampton.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 City of Wolverhampton Council	£168,950	Expenditure on pay	£84,101
Additional income received from the Council to support their City Lifestyle Survey	£2,938	Non-pay expenditure	£26,290
		Office and management fees	£45,632
Total income	£171,888	Total expenditure	£156,023

Next steps

Over the next year, we will focus on how we can improve the issues that matter most to local people by addressing growing feedback and concerns about mental health, poor hospital care and people’s frustrations at not being listened to. We will keep reaching out to our diverse communities, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

To do this we will work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to improve services and communication, to help ensure that staff at every level of the NHS strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Mental health services.
2. Hospital listening project.
3. Developing our Oversight Group to reach and represent those we don’t currently hear from.



“The Healthwatch Wolverhampton partnership working structure is good. They maintain a presence at high level meetings with key partners, allowing them to share the community voice where it counts and with those key people who are in the position to instigate change.”

City of Wolverhampton Council



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Wolverhampton, Regent House, Bath Avenue, Wolverhampton, WV1 4EG.

Healthwatch Wolverhampton is hosted by Evolving Communities CIC, a community interest company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with company number 08464602. The registered office is at Unit 2, Hampton Park West, Melksham, SN12 6LH.

Healthwatch Wolverhampton 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 Oversight Group (formerly known as the Panel) consists of representatives from 12 organisations who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Oversight Group met three times and made decisions on matters such as group membership to ensure we are fairly and fully representative of our community and to sign off our 2024/25 work plans.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023/24, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website, announce it via our news channels and present it at the Health Scrutiny Panel and Health & Wellbeing Board meetings.

Responses to recommendations

All providers responded to our requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

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

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to the Health Scrutiny Panel, the Health & Wellbeing Board, the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together Partnership, Dementia Action Alliance, One Wolverhampton and CQC quality information sharing meetings. We also have representation on various public health and mental health trust committees.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers through the Black Country Integrated Care System. For example, we share information with the Black Country Involvement Advisory Assurance Group and, in collaboration with Healthwatch Dudley and Healthwatch Walsall, share information with the local dentistry network and the Black Country ICB. 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 made one of Enter and View visit, and eight recommendations or actions as a result of this activity.

Locations	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Primrose Hill Nursing Home	As part of our partnership working with City of Wolverhampton Council and Care Quality Commission (CQC) we carried out this visit to support quality monitoring.	We wrote a report with recommendations which the service followed up and some implementation has resulted in improved accessible information for residents with dementia.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Wolverhampton is represented on the Wolverhampton Health & Wellbeing Board by Mandy Poonia, Healthwatch Wolverhampton Oversight Group Co-Chair. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by making the views and experiences of people known to the Board. Wolverhampton's Health & Wellbeing Board, Health Scrutiny Panel, One Wolverhampton Partnership and local Healthwatch all have a role to play in good governance and accountability across the health and care system in the city.

Healthwatch Wolverhampton is represented on the One Wolverhampton Placed-Based Partnership (PBP) Board by Stacey Lewis, Healthwatch Wolverhampton Manager, and on the Black Country Integrated Care Board by Aileen Farrer, Healthwatch Walsall Service Manager.

2023–2024 Outcomes

In addition to the work and outcomes summarised in this report, this year, we also used patient and public feedback to help shape services in the following ways.


Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Supporting various Wolverhampton Safeguarding Team groups and a joint annual partnership public safeguarding engagement event.	Helping to keep people safe and making safeguarding everyone's business.
Raising the profile of Healthwatch Wolverhampton with adult social care services.	Giving people living in care homes a voice and increasing the engagement of care providers in our Enter and View programme.
Raising cancer awareness.	Our staff were awarded the Cancer Champion certificate, so we will be better equipped to provide quality information about cancer health. We joined the Black Country ICB cancer bus tour in Wolverhampton shopping centre where over 40 people visited the bus for information and advice.
Promoting women's health	By listening at several women's groups and events and through our volunteering networking events, we raised awareness about cancer screening.

healthwatch

Wolverhampton

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