



**Annual Report 2024–2025**

**Building partnerships,  
changing lives**

Healthwatch Suffolk

# Contents

<b>About us</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>A message from our chair and CEO</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Our year in brief</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Engaging in communities</b>	<b>10</b>
Engagement in numbers	11
Supporting local services	12
Mapping our engagement	14
Hearing from all communities	16
<b>Shaping local care with insight</b>	<b>22</b>
Our feedback centre	23
Our research – waiting for hospital care	25
A new approach to dementia care in Suffolk	28
Briefing – cancer care in Suffolk	31
Working with local maternity services	32
<b>Partnerships and collaboration</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Information and signposting</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Our money</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Looking ahead</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Statutory statements</b>	<b>63</b>

**Please note:** This document contains links to partner websites that might be of interest to you. Links were identified from reputable sources of information (e.g., the NHS or local community groups and charities with which we have engaged).

If you follow these links, it is important to know that we do not have any control over the website you are visiting. Therefore, we cannot be responsible for the protection and privacy of any information you provide whilst visiting the sites. Such sites are not governed by our privacy statement.

## About us

### Healthwatch Suffolk is your local health and social care champion.

Our services are delivered by Healthwatch Suffolk CIC – a social enterprise delivering insight and co-production to shape health and social care services.

We gather people's experiences, and we use them to influence and improve standards of local care and support. We passionately believe that listening and responding to people's lived experience is vital to create health and social care services that meet local needs.

For more information about us, visit [www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/about-us](http://www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/about-us).



#### Our core purpose is to...

collect and share lived experience to influence better standards of health and social care.



#### We live and breathe...

co-production in everything possible. We are inclusive, transparent, accessible, and accountable.

### What's in this report?



Find  
more

**This annual report is about the work we have delivered with the funding we receive to deliver a Healthwatch service in Suffolk. It does not include significant detail about work or impact associated with other commissioned Healthwatch Suffolk CIC projects.**

**To learn more about the fullest extent of our impact this year, read this report and select our button left to find more of our work.**

### Our strategy

We have published a strategy about our priorities. It will help us to make sure we are using our funding to achieve the biggest impact for local people. You can learn more about our strategy, and why we chose our priorities, by visiting:

[www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/about-us/ourstrategy](http://www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/about-us/ourstrategy)

## A note from our Chair & CEO

### Building a partnership that changes lives

As a local Healthwatch, we occupy a unique place in our health and care system. However, as we publish this report, it has become clear that the role of independent health and care champions for the public is under threat.



Wendy Herber  
Independent Chair



Andy Yacoub  
Chief Executive

Established originally by the 2012 Health and Care Act, our role is to seek out, collect, collate and present people's lived experiences of the health, care, and education system in an engaging manner that informs and influences change. It's a tall order.

We are a small organisation, established as a charitable enterprise with our own Board and constitution that rigorously enshrines and protects our independence. Like the public we serve and listen to, we face a huge health and social care machine and influencing those processes and organisations takes experience, connection and robust evidence that leaves no gaps and packs a punch.

We enable one voice to become many, and our team carry those experiences into spaces that may not be motivated to hear them. We bring them anyway, and leaders listen and respond. This report shows how our work has an impact and why this work remains vitally important, not just to those who need and use services but to those who shape and deliver them too.

We are a small voice with a big mission in a huge system. And yet that scale, the feeling of facing a huge public sector machine, so often reflects the experience of all of us who



*"We enable one voice to become many, and our team carry those experiences into spaces that may not be motivated to hear them. We bring them anyway, and leaders listen and respond. This report shows how our work has an impact and why this work remains vitally important, not just to those who need and use services but to those who shape and deliver them too."*

■ Wendy Herber & Andy Ycoub (Chair and CEO, Healthwatch Suffolk)

use health and care services. All of our voices matter, but we often need a megaphone to be heard. Our Healthwatch aims to be just that.

We understand that there are three vital things about being a Healthwatch that underpin our impact: breadth of remit, partnership, and independence.

The hardest thing about our role is that we cover the whole range of health and care services, including education. The beautiful thing about our remit is that we see the way in which health issues, social struggles and life opportunities affect one another in everyday life. In a health and care system that so often treats individual symptoms or issues, we can see why dealing with the whole person – what matters to them and not just what the matter is with them – is so vital, perhaps now more than ever. Our research exploring people's experiences of waiting for hospital care is a perfect example of exactly that ethos.

How do we do it?

As a small organisation with a huge job, we always seek to work in partnership. We work in partnership with those who trust us with all their stories and feedback: good and bad, difficult and life-changing, and sometimes heart-breaking. We don't wait for them to come to us, we proactively and relentlessly go out and find them, through our engagement work and our research, through our partnership with other organisations, by working with hospitals GPs and social care services. We seek to work with all those who can help us to reach those whose stories we want to hear.

We accessibly gather feedback from everyone in communities (more than 174,000 comments and experiences since we were established), utilising relationships and partnerships to reach people who would not have a voice otherwise. We know that we need to hear from everyone if we are to help people stay well and reduce demand on services, so that we can all access them when we need to.

We know it's not enough to just occupy a seat at the table if we want to have impact, especially in a busy overloaded system. Our partnerships with health leaders are based on trusted insights, strong evidence and a knowledge of the system that ensures evidence reaches those who have the power and will to make change. We deliver our role robustly and powerfully, balancing challenge and collaboration, and always with impact for the public as our aim. The testimonials featured throughout this report demonstrate how much that is valued.

We are always driven by impact, which sometimes takes time to emerge. Our work on people's experiences of dementia is an example of this. It shows how our research and key learning have become embedded into service planning and continue to inspire local change. Our relationships, reach, trust, and local knowledge have been built over time. They are an asset to the system, which has been grown slowly but steadily, reaching across locations, sectors and communities. Once ripped out, that connectivity and experience can never be instantly replaced by in-house systems.

But perhaps the most crucial feature that underpins our impact is our independence – that's why the local Healthwatch network was created in the first place.



**"...perhaps the most crucial feature that underpins our impact is our independence – that's why the local Healthwatch network was created in the first place. "**



- **Independence matters because it's hard to be honest when someone holds your care or funding in their hands:** The freedom to listen to what people want to say requires independence of the system. People need distance to give feedback about services with honesty, and without fear, consequence, or judgment. So many experiences will go untold if people cannot trust in how their experiences are being gathered and used.
- **Independence matters because we need to hear from everyone if we are to create meaningful change:** We are not there to champion politically led health and social care services or systems, and we cannot be silenced by 'in-house' pressure or external political direction. We deliver our role robustly and powerfully, balancing challenge and collaboration, and always with impact for the public as our aim. To do this, we gather feedback from everyone in communities, utilising relationships and partnerships to reach people who would not have a voice otherwise. It is this independent connectivity into communities that will be immediately lost if these plans remain unchanged.
- **Independence matters because services are siloed, lives are not:** The NHS and social care system is intimidatingly huge and too-often works against the most vulnerable people. Without an independent organisation that works across systems, we cannot understand the gaps in provision that lead people to fall into crisis. You cannot see outside the box if you are the box.

Each year, as we draw together our annual report on our work and impact, we use the opportunity to reflect on how we can do more, as a small organisation in such a huge and complex system. This year, it's also become horribly clear what could be lost – and with nothing to be gained from its passing except the clarity that comes from only listening to what you want to hear.

History tells us that there's little effective change to be found there, just more inequality and more need.



*“This year, it's also become horribly clear what could be lost – and with nothing to be gained from its passing except the clarity that comes from only listening to what you want to hear.”*

*“History tells us that there's little effective change to be found there, just more inequality and more need.”*







## Partner testimonial



“Healthwatch Suffolk has continued to be a very supportive but critical friend of the ICB and has offered constructive feedback which has strongly influenced our way of working. They have once again proven to be an invaluable partner over the last year with a range of different issues.

“Their support was most notable with our system’s public engagement exercise that sought views on a proposal to move some elective orthopaedic services from west Suffolk to the new Essex and Suffolk Elective Orthopaedic Centre in Colchester. They have also been constructive by sharing insights and feedback from local people about their experiences of health and care services, which has helped us to shape policy, decision-making and ways this system provides services to communities.

“As our organisation implements changes set out in the ICB Model Blueprint and the 10-year plan, which is due to be published during 2025, the continued support from Healthwatch Suffolk will be crucial. We look forward to working with Healthwatch Suffolk in sharing these changes with local people and communities across Suffolk and north east Essex over the next year.”

– Ed Garratt OBE (Chief Executive of NHS Suffolk and North East Essex ICB and Interim Chief Executive of NHS Norfolk and Waveney ICB)



# Our year in brief

## Five ways we achieved change as Healthwatch Suffolk CIC

As a CIC, there are five ways we seek to influence health and social care in Suffolk. Some of them are explored within this report, but you can find more examples at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/impact25](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/impact25).

One

### Community engagement

Our team encourages people to speak out about their care and builds relationships to enhance our reach. We also support services to connect with their local community, and to communicate about service change.



Find out more from **page 10**

Two

### Research and insight

We complete research and encourage feedback on our website to capture people's experiences. We share insights with decision-makers to shape strategies and improve services.



Find out more from **page 22** & **online**

Three

### Co-production

Our team works with services and commissioners to help them embrace co-production as a culture, involving people as equal partners in planning and delivering services.



**Explore online**

Four

### Information and signposting

We help people to find their way to information, advice and support. We use insights from our service to influence change, and to make improvements for others.



Find out more from **page 52**

Five

### Working with others

We work in partnership with local people, partners and networks to improve services and support. We also share intelligence with other organisations that can make a difference.




Find out more from **page 36**



# One page highlights!


Throughout this report, you'll find examples of how our teams have been working to influence better local care and support. Here are just a few key numbers and outcomes from our year.



**Pg. 23**

**2,020**

Comments were logged to our online feedback centre.



**Pg. 32**


Maternity leaders took action to improve continuity of care for mums-to-be in Stowmarket.



**Pg. 22**

**17,954**

people took part in our research (both core and commissioned projects).



**Pg. 25**

People's experiences are being used to influence better support while people wait for hospital care.



**Pg. 52**

**671**

people were signposted to local services, information and support.



**Pg. 28**


Our research has shaped the design of a new £2.5m service offering dementia support.



**Pg. 36**

**58**

partnership agreements signed with local organisations and charities.



**Pg. 48**

We influenced NHS leaders to retain an important service for people with an acquired brain injury.



**Pg. 11**

**4,600+**

people were engaged by our team working in communities.

## There's more to us... find insights from our CIC



**Visit our website** to find information about projects we delivered outside of our Healthwatch Suffolk (core) contract.

You'll find published reports focused on local ageing, smoking and vaping, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, young people's wellbeing, virtual care in hospitals, home care services, back, neck and spinal services, and more.

# Engaging in communities

Our engagement and community team has an important role to include people in our work by visiting local communities, and representing us in various groups and forums.

They do this by:

- recording people's feedback about NHS and social care services;
- delivering a signposting service in the community;
- connecting us with local partners;
- helping the NHS to engage communities about service change;
- offering local groups and networks a way to be heard by services and commissioners;
- attending strategic forums to share people's experiences.

This year, the team completed hundreds of engagement activities across Suffolk, gathering almost **1,465** comments about people's experiences in health and care services. They have been used in many ways to respond to local issues, and influence standards of care and support.

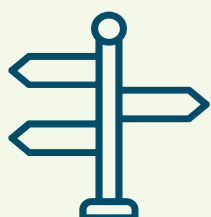
## Engaging with NHS partners



It was a privilege to join the Be Well Bus at the Arc shopping centre in Bury St. Edmunds – a specially converted bus, dedicated to offering support to women, birthing people, and their families with postnatal and antenatal health.

We were especially moved by the chance to speak with the perinatal mental health team, sharing heart-warming feedback from a mother who credited their support with helping her feel she was 'a good mum' and supporting her to become confident to leave the house again.

## Our team helps people to find their way to services



When we're gathering experiences of using NHS or social care services in communities, people tell us about their circumstances and often ask about available sources of support.

**In 2024/25, our team helped 471 people in communities to find their way to information, services or support they needed. See more detail about our signposting from page 52.**

# Engagement in numbers



**306 opportunities to capture people's experiences**



The team completed hundreds of engagements in the year across a variety of events, meetings and visits to services.



**68 visits were to NHS services**



This year, such engagements have included visits to local GP practices, community services, and hospital clinics. More detail is shown overleaf.



**1,465 comments were gathered in the community**



They were uploaded to our Feedback Centre (see page 23), analysed, and included in our work and projects.



**4600+ people were engaged by our team**



See our map on page 14 for more detail about where we visited this year.

## It's our bread and butter...

**Our team helps us to record representative views about local services.**

**72%**

This year, the team gathered nearly three quarters of comments logged to our Feedback Centre. They help to reduce bias in reporting, gathering feedback in a fair and balanced way (reflecting on both good and poor aspects of people's experiences).

## Thank you Caroline!



**"By volunteering with HWS I still feel connected to the NHS, which I remain passionate about - and always will."**

*"When I retired from the NHS, I had a list of things I wanted to do with my new found freedom. One area I wanted to explore was to undertake some voluntary work and was keen to use my past experience in various roles within the public sector to do this."*

*"Having worked in the NHS for 17 years, a colleague suggested I may want to contact Healthwatch Suffolk to help them in the valuable work they undertake. I did this and was very pleased when they agreed to my volunteering with them."*

*"I have attended several engagement events with a colleague from HWS, where the role of the organisation is highlighted and then people are invited to share their experiences of the NHS with us. This information is then collated and feeds into research projects and reports being undertaken by HWS. This feedback from local Suffolk people is so important to help commissioners improve services going forward."*

- Caroline (HWS Community and Engagement volunteer)

# Supporting local services

In the last year, more than **68** visits were completed to local GP practices and other NHS services.

These engagement visits:

- helped services to communicate about changes with patients and the public;
- helped people to find information and support through signposting;
- increased local understanding about how practices operate, and the pressures they have been facing;
- helped practices to respond to feedback and make informed changes.

Following visits, service managers received a summary of the things people told us. This helps them respond to patient feedback and understand more about the impact of any changes they may be making to services. They can also understand more about adjustments that have been welcomed by patients and build on positive feedback.

Our feedback helps services to raise the morale of their teams and to respond to patient experience issues. One example of impact from this type of engagement is shown below.

## Improving patient comfort and access

**A local GP practice has responded to feedback following our visits. Patients will now benefit from more supportive chairs in the waiting room and an improved telephone system. The new seating will help those who struggle with mobility when attending for appointments.**

**“It would be nice to have chairs with higher arms and seats that are easier to get out of.”**

*“We really appreciate your visits to the surgery. The patients always seem onboard when chatting with you and are not afraid to offer both positive and constructive feedback. It’s always interesting to see that the patients do notice when we have some temporary glitches, but also when we are able to offer positive change, such as with regard to our phones and seating.*

*“I have to say your reports always offer much better insight and understanding of our patients’ needs as your visits are much more frequent and relevant to ‘real time’ events – and of course we can make improvements in response to your reports. The yearly GP National Patient Survey, although offering some insight, isn’t always well received by patients or responded to whereas the personal touch does seem to get them talking (in a good way!).”*

*– Julie Williams-Wilson (Business Manager at the Haverhill Family Practice)*

## Engaging with patients using west Suffolk NHS community services

**We have been supporting community services in west Suffolk to engage with patients about their experiences (visiting clinics for various services in Sudbury, Mildenhall, Newmarket and the West Suffolk Hospital). Our visits help services to know what patients feel is working well, and what could be improved.**

Overall, despite some reported waits for appointments, many people were positive about their experiences of using the services. Key issues regarding disabled parking access at some sites and experiences of using online booking systems to access services are currently being considered.

*"Having independent feedback on our service and receiving insights from patients is really helpful. This benefits us by raising awareness of issues or concerns that patients have, and it also keeps patients as our focus as the service develops. It is rewarding to understand how well the service at Newmarket is working and great to be able to feed this back to staff and colleagues that help to support our service. The issues around access at some locations will be looked into and considered as the Trust's longer-term aim is to provide more locations for phlebotomy outside of the hospital, closer to patients."*

- Joanne King (Haematology Laboratory Manager – Pathology)



**"Having Healthwatch Suffolk speaking face-to-face with our patients is greatly appreciated and the independent point of contact assures those patients, and us as a practice, that their views are listened to and acted on wherever possible."**

"Healthwatch staff build an excellent rapport with our patients. Their feedback is delivered clearly and is always balanced between what our patients suggest we can do to improve the service and passing on positive feedback regarding our teams and our service. We share the feedback with our Patient Partnership Group and they find it very beneficial in supporting their key agenda in advocating for our patients."

**"Thank you Healthwatch Suffolk, please come often."**

- S Fountain (Hardwicke House Group Practice)



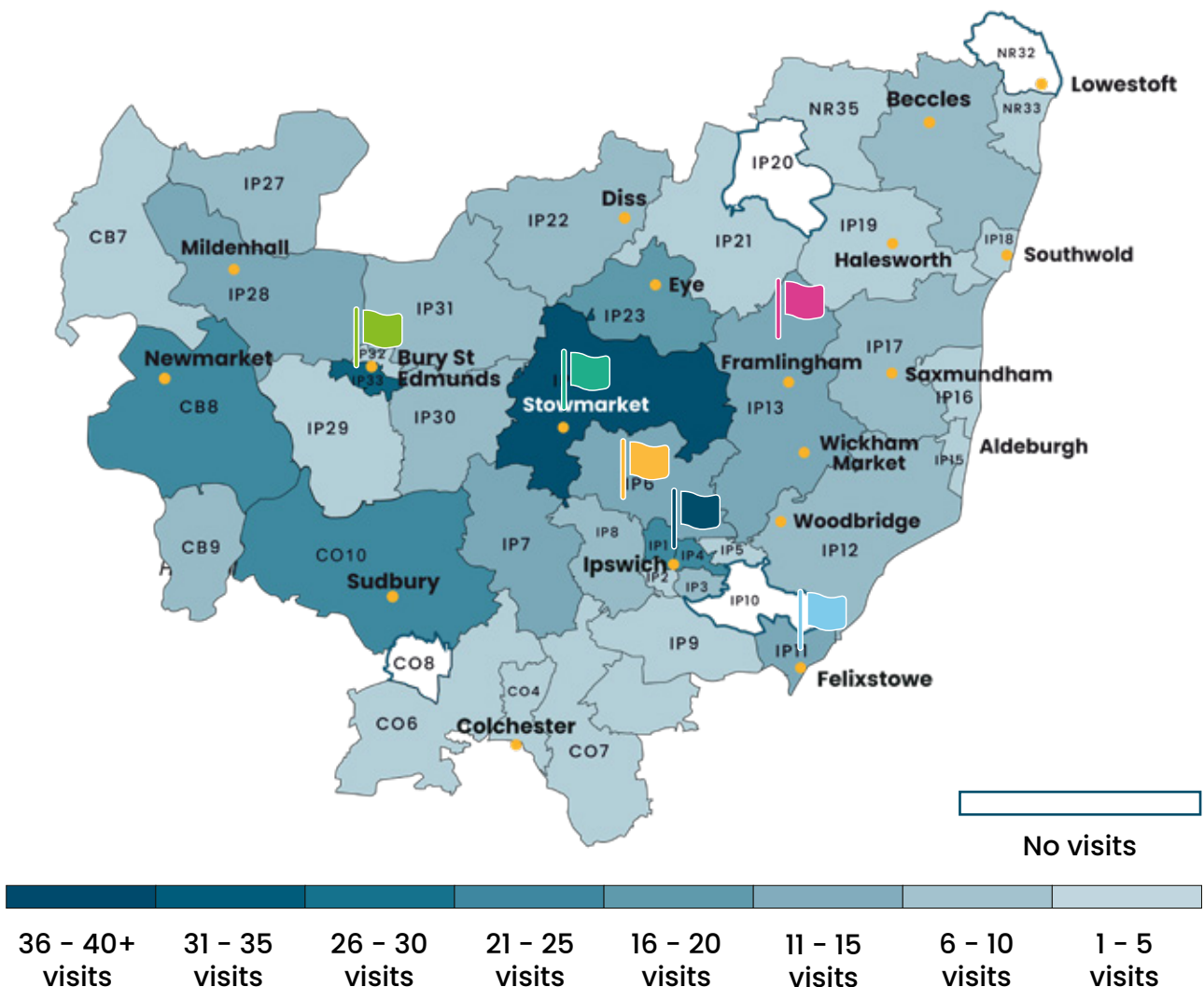


# We've visited communities across the county

Our small team has engaged with **4,600+** people at **306** local events, meetings, services and groups across the county.

On this page we're sharing just a few highlights from the year, but there were too many to list in this report! We received a warm welcome at so many places where people were happy to talk to us about their experiences and were grateful for every invitation to meet a diversity of people and communities within the county.

The map shows how we visited most **postcode areas** covering Suffolk at least once. Darker colours indicate areas where more visits were completed by our team. We hope to find more opportunities to meet people in the less-visited areas throughout 2025/26.



April - May 24

We joined our friends at Ipswich Community Media for their Health and Wellbeing Day. The event aimed to help people from all communities know how they can stay healthy. Over 75 people attended, including a group from our local partner Suffolk Refugee Support. A fantastic opportunity to engage people from various local communities.





Jun - Jul 24

It was sunny smiles all around at the Community Fun Day in Stowmarket (pictured). Our freebies definitely went down well amongst local families as we spoke to them about their experiences of services. We also attended events with the NHS to include people in an important local engagement about the future of orthopaedic operations in west Suffolk.



Aug - Sept 24

The perfect opportunity for a hot drink and chance to meet people at the mid-week tea and coffee morning at The Hope Trust in Felixstowe. We explored people's views about what it means to 'age well' in Suffolk and gathered their experiences of other services.



Oct - Nov 24

What a lovely welcome we received at Communities Together East Anglia's CommuniTEA Chinwag at Great Blakenham (pictured). We also joined the Wellbeing Wednesday crew, hosted by Triangle Church (part of the Top Up Shop network for Ipswich), where we engaged people as they supported over 40 people with a warm space, toast, and a hot drink.



Dec 24 - Jan 25

We visited Worlingworth to engage people attending an inaugural Rural Coffee Caravan group (pictured). RCC has been a long standing partner of ours, unlocking many opportunities for our team to connect with people in rural communities across Suffolk.



Feb - Mar 25

As spring was starting to emerge, we were busy attending an event organised by Cancer Support Suffolk and Thrivefest for young people in west Suffolk (pictured). We also engaged people at the West Suffolk Health Festival together with many other local organisations and held a stand at the Queer Health Matters event organised by Suffolk Pride in Ipswich.



# Hearing from all communities

**We're here for all residents of Suffolk. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.**

Our work and engagement is informed by our comprehensive Strategic Equality and Quality Impact Assessment (SEQIA) toolkit – a live process that will lead to broader outcomes for us in both the short and long-term, and for us to fully comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

This year, we completed specific engagement to reach hidden voices in communities. For example, we attended a key local event organised by Lighthouse (a local refuge for women and children facing domestic abuse) for International Women's Day. We also visited various food banks, and attended events organised by partners providing support to vulnerable and diverse communities across Suffolk (e.g., Ace Anglia, Future Female Society, Ipswich Community Media, and Ipswich Opportunity Group to name only a few).

We regularly engage people whose first language is not English when attending local GP practices. Our translated feedback forms (available at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/translation](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/translation) or as printed copies) support our engagement in communities. In addition, we have established multiple accessible methods for people to provide feedback about their experiences (e.g., easy read surveys, and access to dedicated British Sign Language support and web forms). Our aim is to make sure no one is excluded from being able to participate in our work and projects.

It is possible to learn more about accessible ways to feedback to us at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/feedback](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/feedback).

## Could we carry a tune?

We loved our time engaging with the Unscene Singers (Unscene Suffolk), a welcoming choir for visually impaired people who love to sing for fun. This incredible group learns songs of all styles by ear, with large print worksheets and audio tracks provided. It was such a warm and inclusive space to capture people's experiences of accessing local health and care.



# Partner testimonials – engaging people in all Suffolk communities

We visited a huge variety of local groups and organisations working with people in all Suffolk communities. Here's what some community leaders said about how those they support benefited from our engagement.

*"As the Facilitator of Sudbury Sporting Memories, and an Ambassador for Sporting Memories, the partnership we have established with Suffolk Healthwatch supports our mission to give individuals attending trust that we are not only a safe space but somewhere they can safely raise their experiences of the local health care scene. This has resulted in good practice being shared with Healthwatch Suffolk, as well as areas for improvement. Our average age is 70-plus, with 95% living within seven miles of the centre in Sudbury where we host our meetings that have a weekly attendance of over 50 people – a good representation of the Sudbury area."*

**Andy Read**



Find more info



*"Walton Parish Nursing covers the Walton area of Felixstowe which is one of the most deprived parts of our town. As registered nurses, we provide whole-person healthcare to the community through home visits, health clinics and groups including chair-based exercises and a mental health group called 'No Labels'.*

*"Healthwatch has kindly visited one of our health clinics and No Labels, providing clients with a valuable opportunity to talk about their health care experiences and journey navigating the (often daunting) array of service provider information. With this in mind, Healthwatch are able to signpost and support clients accessing healthcare. With Walton Parish Nursing's ongoing support, clients feel better informed, listened to and hopefully empowered to access the care they need."*

**Lorna Bellamy (Lead Walton Parish Nurse and Queen's Nurse Felixstowe)**



Find more info



*"My name is Caroline Specca and I run Musical Lifelines. We are a community group based in Bungay for those in later life living with dementia, Parkinson's and loneliness. We use music to help alleviate symptoms of these health conditions and offer a supportive and welcoming space.*

*"Healthwatch Suffolk enabled the group to understand the work the organisation does in a very personable way. They were very friendly and kind, offering advice or just an ear to some of my participants. It is lovely to have the opportunity to email them with opportunities and also reassuring to have them at the end of the phone should I need some advice."*

**Caroline Specca (Musical Lifelines)**



Find more info



[Find more info](#)

*"Bob Hamilton, a pioneer developer working for the Church of England Inspiring Ipswich project, set up Safe Harbour at St Helen's Church in Ipswich. Safe Harbour's aim is to love and serve those who have been battered and bruised by the storms of life. We do this by providing a safe community for people to come together on a Thursday and have a free lunch or evening meal. We are members of the Ipswich Top Up Shop network ([www.ipswichtopupshops.co.uk](http://www.ipswichtopupshops.co.uk)) and people can make a donation of £2 and fill a basket with food and essential items. Our amazing team consists of members from St Helen's Church and member from the local community and they support Safe Harbour financially and through volunteering.*

*"Healthwatch Suffolk was invited to engage with people who attended Safe Harbour and, as a result, many people shared their varied health experiences. Attendees and staff are now much more aware of what Healthwatch Suffolk is and how to contact them if information is needed."*

**Bob Hamilton (Safe Harbour)**

[Find more info](#)

*"I am the group facilitator for the Together Tuesday group. Our group forms part of the Abbeycroft organisation, but this type of group is unique to Abbeycroft. It is for adults of all ages and all abilities. The group meets on a Tuesday between 2pm and 4pm and it's a place where people connect and engage. They enjoy tea and cake, and a meal together once a month. But it is also somewhere people can experience various activities, including outings. As we are a sports centre, we are able to offer people the opportunity to take part in physical activity (such as indoor bowls, table tennis, table cricket), which is something not available at most groups. We offer opportunities for mental stimulation, such as craft activities and quizzes, but also we attempt to provide information and education. Over the ten years the group has been running, several organisations have been made welcome to give talks, share information - one of which is Healthwatch.*

*"Healthwatch offer support in various ways. Formally via a talk in which useful information is shared and questions are answered. One-to-one conversations with attendees about subjects concerning them and offering support and advice. Lastly support to me when I am faced with situations and need to find a way forward. I know I can pick up the phone or talk to Healthwatch staff about situations, such as one recently about a safeguarding type issue. They provided an objective view, but also ways of supporting the couple. Together with the knowledge they have of other services/organisations, we often manage to signpost people to other organisations. Finding ways together of doing this has prevented people being banned from this or other groups and often has delayed admission to a home or hospital. Healthwatch provides a voice for the people and systems to address concerns. Professional without appearing buracratic. Thank you Healthwatch - long may our partnership continue."*

**Jill Mason (Together Tuesday Co-ordinator, Abbeycroft)**



*"When Healthwatch Suffolk approached me about visiting the groups I run, I was unfamiliar with the organisation but intrigued by the idea. Their friendly staff*

explained Healthwatch's mission and spoke individually with members who wanted to share their health sector experiences, both positive and negative. The feedback was over-whelmingly positive. Many had not heard of Healthwatch before the visit, and I believe they will now reach out with their healthcare concerns and praises."

**Christine Pearce (Studlands Friendship Club, Time for Tea and Friendship)**



"I heard about Healthwatch Suffolk from a friend in the village who thought our local Ladybelles Group (female retirees who meet monthly for lunches, speakers and quizzes) would welcome a visit from their team. I am the secretary and Helen Maybank, our Chairman. We have members in Great and Little Waldingfield, Acton, Long Melford, Sudbury and Great Cornard.

"We have all been experiencing difficulty in getting appointments to see our GPs since the first outbreak of COVID and experiencing delays in getting to see a consultant or to have necessary operations, or to see a NHS Dentist. We are in despair about the GP booking system, which involves trying to ring surgeries at 8am, being in a long queue, holding on for most of the morning and then wasting the rest of the day waiting for a doctor to ring us back. Even when we get to see a nurse at the surgery, we have been told to make an appointment at reception on the way out and then reception have said phone us in the morning, we don't make appointments now! We are told to do everything online, not an option for most of our group who do not have a mobile phone, iPads or technical skills to do this. Many do not have family nearby to do this for them and it is eroding our independence to have to ask neighbours.

"We also have problems with eyesight, hearing and transport. Hospital and other support services are centred on Bury St Edmunds and there is no public transport to the West Suffolk Foundation Trust or the New Medica Eye Clinic, so again we are forced to ask neighbours for help. We would like our local health centre in Sudbury to offer more clinics to see consultants and especially eye check ups. We have been feeling that nobody is making adequate provision for our needs and not listening to our requests for the help we need to keep us fit and mobile and to prevent us needing hospitalisation. We have been forced to use 111 and the ambulance service (who we cannot fault) rather than our health centre and GP support.

"When Sue and Brenda came out to meet the group to explain the role of Healthwatch Suffolk and then spent time speaking to us individually and noting our concerns, we all felt relief that someone was listening to us at last and hopeful that they might relate our worries to the right people and that things might improve. We all see the need for virtual healthcare, but we need a lot of support to use it and be encouraged to use it."

**Eileen Coleman (Ladybelles)**



**Find more info**

"It is always great to have Healthwatch Suffolk join us at our Chinwags, to meet with attendees, and to listen to their lived experiences within health and social care."

**Sharon Hobbs (Community Engagement Co-ordinator, Communities Together East Anglia)**

[Find more info](#)

*"Moving Well Debenham is the outcome of a project initiated by the local NHS Commissioning Group, who began August 2022 to improve the health and wellbeing in the over 65's age group. The key focus is to improve fitness, health, mobility, balance and loneliness. Funding granted from Sports England and the National Lottery and attendance changes, £2.50 per week per person, will enable the community group to function beyond 2026. The age group served have a high level of engagement of health services whether this be for self or partners."*

*"Healthwatch Suffolk was engaged to visit and speak with the group on the work they do in the health sector. People appreciated the work areas covered by Healthwatch Suffolk, opening up a channel to engage and highlight impacts they encountered from their first hand experiences; whether this be in positive or negative engagement of the health services used."*

*"Healthwatch Suffolk has taken on board issues encountered and fed back outcomes from various health agencies. The group greatly appreciates this independent channel of engagement Healthwatch Suffolk offers as a voice for improvement to the health services."*

**Chris Goldsmith (Treasurer, Moving Well Debenham)**

[Find more info](#)

*"We are grateful to have Healthwatch Suffolk participate in our grassroots events engaging with the public about mental health and wellbeing. We hear firsthand perspectives from individuals of the challenges, stigma, and frustrations they face."*

*Working together with fellow support organisations, we signpost people to direct sources of support. Most people are unaware of the wide range and levels of mental health support provision available throughout Suffolk until they need it, or simply unacquainted with how the system works. Healthwatch Suffolk keeps abreast of the currently available services, bringing a valuable resource when taking part in these events."*

**Irene Tibbenham, Mid Suffolk Voluntary and Statutory Partnership Chair)**

[Find more info](#)

*"It has been an absolute pleasure working alongside Healthwatch Suffolk. The support we've received from Healthwatch—particularly at our rebrand event in February 2024 and our World Cancer Day event in February 2025—has been outstanding. They have been incredibly supportive since I started my role in October 2023, taking the time to connect me with others in the sector, which I greatly appreciated. I often see HWS engagement and community staff at other health and wellbeing events, where they fly the flag for Healthwatch Suffolk in a professional and friendly manner."*

**Kimya Piper (Education, Engagement and Outreach Manager, Cancer Support Suffolk)**



## Partner testimonial



Suffolk  
Primary  
Care

**“Allowing patients to review and feedback via the Healthwatch feedback centre widget has been invaluable to all sites at Suffolk Primary Care. We have been able to learn from the reviews and change our practices accordingly.**

**As an example, one patient described how it was frustrating for them that their medication had changed manufacturer and this had not been explained to them. Due to the feedback, the nursing team were made aware and now ensure they highlight the changes to the patients so they are expecting it and understand the reasons for the change.**

**“The other benefit of the feedback is that we can learn what we are doing right. When a patient leaves a positive review about the service they have received, we can continue to build on this feedback, ensuring that we continually improve our services.”**

Suffolk Primary Care



### Look out for information about us on local service websites

You will find our feedback centre widget and information about us across GP practice websites managed by Suffolk Primary Care, as well as other provider websites (such as those managed by our local acute hospitals).

These features helped nearly 1,500 website users to find out site in 2024/25.



**Click here to  
feedback**

**healthwatch**  
Suffolk

# Shaping local care with insight

## Find our latest Healthwatch Suffolk CIC insights and impact



Find  
more

This annual report is about the work we have delivered under the funding we receive to deliver a Healthwatch service in Suffolk. It does not include any references to work or impact associated with other commissioned projects.

To learn more about the full extent of our impact this year, select the button on the left.

## Tracking trends and sharing experiences

We have established systems and methods in place to effectively gather and evidence the experiences of people using health and social care services across Suffolk.

In this section, you can learn more about the evidence we published regarding people's experiences of NHS and social care this year, and how it helped to shape local standards of care and support.

### Our evidence

We use social research and other methods to understand people's experiences. We use methods that will let us share the public's concerns quickly, and work with stakeholders to make improvements. [Learn more about our evidence.](#)



Our engagement team gathers comments and builds 'soft intelligence' from interactions with services.



We record and share anonymised information about our signposting enquiries (see page 52).



We complete specific research and write reports to explore topical issues in depth.



We collaborate with partners and attend meetings to gather evidence and information about systems.



We access evidence from Healthwatch England, and use national reports to influence local change.



## Our Feedback Centre

With **24,750 (2,020 in 2024/25)** items of feedback now featured across hundreds of service listings, the Feedback Centre offers insights people can use to make informed decisions about local care.

Amongst other examples, Feedback Centre reviews supported us to:

- safeguard people from harm in services;
- share insights about people's experiences with Healthwatch England;
- share intelligence with the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee, Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board, the Care Quality Commission and other similar bodies;
- include public voice in media features on a range of topics;
- include people's experiences in our research and briefings;
- provide evidence to inform local reviews by NHS or other partners;
- respond to Quality Accounts produced by some NHS providers.

### Responses from providers

Providers of NHS care responded to **442 Feedback Centre reviews in 2024/25**.

Their responses help people to know feedback has been shared with staff (e.g., to raise morale, or to make them aware of key issues in people's comments). The example below shows how providers can address patient experience matters via the platform.

#### Comment

*"The notice recommends you check if you haven't been seen in 15 minutes of your appointment time, but when this happened, I was told that I hadn't been here, even though I had checked in on the screen. I was then told I should check within ten minutes as I had been marked as 'not attending', so I feel the message should be changed."*

#### Provider response

*"We will certainly look into this and ensure that the information given by our reception is consistent with that displayed on our notice board."*

**Sometimes, providers ask us to connect them with people who have left a review because they feel the issues raised could lead to learning for services, and avoid formal complaints. We will only share people's contact details with their full and informed consent.**

This year, one particular comment about end of life care and support on our feedback centre led to an ongoing review by the East Suffolk and North Essex Foundation Trust known as a Clinical Review of Care (CRC).

A CRC is process of investigation that takes place outside of the normal complaints handling practices by services. In this case, a CRC was initiated because the issues raised in the comment were older than could be considered within the usual 12-month timeframe for formal complaints to the NHS.

The Trust undertook an initial CRC investigation and agreed to meet with the person who had submitted the feedback to our site. This meeting took place in May 2025, and the person concerned had the opportunity to meet with members of the clinical team involved in their care. That meeting led to further issues being raised, requiring investigation by the Trust across other parts of the hospital.

The Trust has committed to sharing the outcomes of its CRC investigation once the process has been completed. It is hoped that it will lead to specific learning that may improve people's experiences in the future.

To protect the anonymity of those involved, we have not included details of the case in this report. However, we hope to be able to share more information about this impact at a later date.

## Our research: waiting for hospital care

### Our research is helping the NHS to consider how people are supported during a wait for hospital care.

More than 1,400 people took part in our survey, which was supported by local hospital leaders. They told us how their lives were being affected by their wait for hospital care, often severely.

#### How will NHS leaders use the findings?

We know that local integrated care boards in Suffolk and north east Essex (SNEE) and Norfolk and Waveney are coordinating a response to this research.

Elizabeth Moloney (Director of Operations for the SNEE Integrated Care Board) said:

*"In May, this report was discussed at the Planned Care Group – the strategic body within Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board responsible for oversight and improvement of elective care. Members include representatives from general practice, community services, hospitals (East Suffolk and North Essex Foundation Trust and West Suffolk Foundation Trust) and the ICB as the commissioner of local health care services. The group very much welcomed Healthwatch Suffolk's research as a means of improving personalised care whilst people wait for treatment. The key learning provides further local insight to enable delivery of NHS England's commitments to reform elective care, including empowering patients. The group will oversee the ICB's response to this research with a proposed action plan to be considered at its July meeting for approval."*

### Our thoughts

Our findings have revealed how waiting can alter the foundations of people's lives. It shrinks people's worlds. It affects jobs and financial security, relationships, and can seriously impact people's mental and physical wellbeing.

We've revealed an epidemic of pain that needs to be addressed. For some, pain can isolate them from key sources of support. Coping with pain is at the very forefront of people's minds, and yet support appears difficult to find.

We're asking the NHS to consider what more can be done to prevent crisis before people can be treated.



Local hospitals have supported the research extensively by helping us to contact waiting patients and to develop the survey. They are planning to address our key findings and recommendations.

Dr Shane Gordon, Executive Managing Director at James Paget Hospital, said:

*"Healthwatch Suffolk have provided further valuable insight into the experience of patients waiting for elective procedures at our hospital, showing the distance we have travelled in meeting the needs of patients, but crucially, where we still need to improve. The James Paget will work on the considerations outlined in the report to improve how we communicate with patients waiting for elective care, and work in partnership to help them keep well while they are waiting."*

Matt Keeling, Deputy Director of Operations at West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, said:

*"Waiting for treatment can bring a range of physical, mental and emotional challenges. This report provides important and valuable insight into some of the experiences of our patients."*

*"The feedback shows how far we've come in meeting their needs but also clearly indicates improvements we can make in managing expectations and the ways we support them during their wait. We'll use these findings to develop our 'waiting well' programme, with a specific focus on supporting patients to manage pain. At the same time, we're working incredibly hard to continue reducing waiting times so people can get the treatment they need sooner."*

## Explore this research

Our latest updates about the impact of this research can be found at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/elective24](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/elective24). You can also visit this page to find:

- Our full report
- Our online summary of key findings and learning
- Our key learning poster summary
- Signposting to support if you are waiting for care



**Download our full report**



**Read the online summary**



”

"If my tumour bursts **I'm at risk of sepsis/death** so this kind of service is really not good enough. I was told I'd wait no more than three months and **now been waiting 20 weeks.**"

Explore this research at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/elective24](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/elective24) or visit [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/ourresearch](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/ourresearch) to find our full catalogue of insights (A-Z).



# People's experiences of dementia in Suffolk

**A new approach to care is making dementia support better for people in Suffolk, after those with the illness, their families and carers shared experiences with us.**

We wanted to understand how well efforts to support people with dementia in the county were working, and what could improve things.

So, in 2023/24, we teamed up with the Dementia Action Partnership, a local network of leaders and organisations that supports people with or caring for someone with dementia. We researched the experiences of people in the community with dementia and their carers when accessing local health and care services, and we shared recommendations based on what people said, covering the entire experience of living with dementia.

Our report has had a key role in shaping the Suffolk Dementia Strategy. Numerous recommendations we made are key priorities in the document, from increasing public awareness, to providing the right training for hospital staff to support people with dementia and their families.

The goal of the local strategy has been to create a society without stigma. It intends to make people with dementia feel safe in the knowledge that services are based on an understanding of their needs. And it aims to empower people to access information, advice, guidance, and support, which should be readily available whenever they need it.

## Influencing better local support

A new **dementia support service** in Suffolk, provided by national charity Shaftesbury, launched from 1 April 2025.

The specification for the new service was based on key learning from our research with people who had dementia and their carers.

It means people's views and experiences have been factored into the design of the new service and what it is expected to deliver for Suffolk residents.

Recently, the local NHS and Suffolk County Council provided £2.5 million in funding to deliver a new dementia support service based on the strategy and a specification based on our research findings. This service aims to empower people with dementia to live independently, safely and well in their community.

## Inspiring the Leading lives dementia project

This research has influenced dementia support across Suffolk, including a project managed by Leading Lives locally. Its Dementia Project Development Officer, Milly Gaskin, told us:



*"When I started my role in June 2024, it coincided with the publication of the SCC Dementia Strategy informed by Healthwatch Suffolk's research. These two documents were the starting point into researching and looking at what Leading Lives may be able to deliver.*

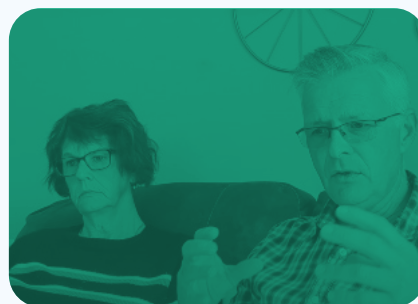
*"I met with the HWS team, who offered important leads, and linked me with key people. From the report, we found there were areas we could directly impact and this helped us form the pillars on which my role is now based – (1) Specialist residential support for people with learning disabilities and dementia, (2) Dementia Awareness for our organisation, our family carers and for people with Learning Disabilities and Autism, and (3) Alternatives to current respite for people with dementia.*

*"To support these pillars, we have worked with ACE and Thinkclusive and have produced a film, social story, and guide for people with learning disabilities hosted on Suffolk Ordinary Lives. We have also developed pilots where people with dementia can stay in a home-from-home setting for up to seven nights that is less overwhelming than traditional respite settings. This pilot was in direct response to feedback from carers highlighted in the HWS report.*

*"The strategy and report has supported our thinking and helped us focus our work on areas of most need, knowing the strategy and report were co produced and represent the needs, aspirations and wants for the people of Suffolk."*

## "A roundabout without exits"

Our video with Peter and Teresa remains a powerful reminder of why Suffolk must remain focused on improving local dementia care and support. The video has become a tool used by organisations like the Care Quality Commission and others to shape perspectives.



**Watch the video**

## Partner testimonial



**Shaftesbury**  
**All together better  
for disability**

**“Shaftesbury Suffolk Memory and Dementia Support is a newly commissioned service to empower people concerned with their memory (diagnosed with dementia across the county of Suffolk), their carer’s, and wider family, to live as independently, safely, and well, for as long as possible within their communities.**

**“The contract specification was based on the views and experiences of people living with dementia, which were gathered in Healthwatch Suffolk’s insightful report ‘A roundabout without signposts’. This report has been the blueprint for the model we will provide.**

**“We are acutely aware of the importance to deliver a service based on what people need and have said is important for them. The feedback and recommendations in this report are extremely helpful to guide us in our approach and to hold us to account when the service is evaluated.”**

Jo Marshall (Shaftesbury Neurological Services Manager)







## Briefing: cancer care in Suffolk

### We've included people's experiences of a cancer diagnosis in a local review that aims to improve rates of early diagnosis.

The NHS in Suffolk and north east Essex (SNEE) wants to improve rates of early cancer diagnosis because catching it early, before the cancer has spread or grown, is critically important to successful treatment. That is why the local SNEE Integrated Care Board commissioned NHS Confederation to lead a local review of people's care with stakeholders.

Our briefing, to inform this review, featured 137 comments submitted to our Feedback Centre. Eighteen of these comments were gathered during a rapid call for feedback to inform the review.

Our report has also been shared with other stakeholders interested in local cancer care, such as Kerrie-Michelle Barker who is leading a project to inform this review on behalf of the Integrated Care Academy. She told us:

*"The HealthWatch Suffolk cancer feedback report has been helpful to my work. It was valuable to hear feedback that had already been gathered from local people, and has helped to save time and avoid duplication in asking similar questions. Having all the insights compiled in one place made it easy to access, and the information also aligned well with other data and findings I had, strengthening my project. All of this has meant I've been able to get on with the work more quickly, which is especially important given the time-limited nature of the project. It's helped ensure that I can focus on delivering outcomes rather than duplicating effort. Alongside the report, the team at HWS have also been supportive and accommodating when I have reached out for various things."*

### Find our report

Our report features 137 local reviews of care related to cancer.

*"My cancer diagnosis was stumbled upon by a locum GP. He looked through my notes for something else, opened a discharge letter, and then read out that a cancer had been found. I was shocked. He was surprised and said, 'Haven't they told you?'..."*



[Go to our report](#)



**“A really good idea for new mums”**

**This year, working with NHS maternity leaders across Suffolk and north east Essex, we have helped to improve standards of maternity care and support in several ways.**

We regularly share reports and insights about people’s experiences with the NHS Board in SNEE responsible for planning and coordinating local care (the Local Maternity and Neonatal System Board – or LMNS). This activity has resulted in the outcomes reported below.

### **Postnatal checks in primary care**

**We supported a national Healthwatch research project about people’s experiences of six-to-eight-week postnatal checks and shared the local findings with maternity leaders. They used them to inspire a new initiative that will help people to find support after the birth of their baby.**

**Our research** showed how birthing parents felt six-week postnatal checks – required of GPs – were failing many new mothers. In particular, a quarter of respondents were not satisfied with the time their GP had spent talking about their mental health. Almost half said their GP had not asked about their mental health.

Responding to these findings, a pre-appointment checklist for the six to eight week postnatal GP check was co-produced by the local maternity system in Suffolk and north east Essex (SNEE) to help women make the most of their appointment.

Six-to-eight-week checks aim to make sure people feel well after the birth of their baby and are recovering properly. The checklist will help women to prepare for their check and support better conversations with their GP (including about wellbeing). The checklist also contains signposting information for self-help before the appointment.



The checklist was tested in five GP practices and then eventually distributed across SNEE practices later in the year. Feedback from those involved in the pilot was very promising:

***"I thought the checklist was great. There was so much on there that I hadn't thought about. I asked my GP about subjects he hadn't asked me about."***

## Improving continuity of carer for mums-to-be in Stowmarket

### Maternity leaders took steps to reduce risks for pregnant women in mid-Suffolk by improving continuity of midwives involved in their care.

We know from people's feedback just how important and valuable having continuity of carer is when it comes to maternity experiences. Evidence shows it can lead to better outcomes and safety for birthing people and babies, and also a more positive and personal experience.

Empirical evidence reported by the NHS shows that women want and benefit from having continuity of carer in their maternity care. The Cochrane review (2016) found that women who received midwife-led continuity of care were less likely to experience preterm births or lose their baby in pregnancy or in the first month following birth:

- 16 per cent less likely to lose their baby.
- 19 per cent less likely to lose their baby before 24 weeks.
- 24 per cent less likely to experience pre-term birth.

Equally, safety is not just about whether their baby lives or dies, safety for childbearing women and their partners and families also means emotional, psychological, and social safety. This holistic sense of safety is what people can receive through continuity models of care.

Whilst many people told us they experienced good continuity with midwives involved in their care (e.g., from antenatal appointments through to postnatal support), our feedback suggests this was not always the case. This is particularly true for those who live on the boundaries of 'maternity systems'. This can mean that different parts of maternity care are provided by midwives employed by different hospitals or services, which can lead to issues that may affect people's experiences – especially in the event of a complicated pregnancy.

Here's an example of feedback we received:

***"Living in Stowmarket made pregnancy experience difficult. The midwifery is led by Ipswich however I wished to deliver at West Suffolk. Due to this, there is a lack of communication and different guidelines for each trust... As a first time mum-to-be, the different trusts made pregnancy extra stressful... [it] meant minimal options for pain relief, resulting in traumatic birth via forceps under general anaesthetic which I believe is rare."***

Frances Bolger (Director of Midwifery, Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board) told us about how maternity leaders are addressing this local patient experience issue:

*“Following useful insights into women’s experiences in cross border areas, a meeting was convened to try and address the feedback and challenges of cross border care provision by maternity teams in these areas. As Stowmarket is located within Suffolk, and does not involve any other ICBs, we decided to initially focus our attention there.*

*“Women in Stowmarket are given a choice as to whether they want a home birth or to have their baby born at West Suffolk Hospital or East Suffolk and North East Essex Foundation Trust. The care historically was provided by midwives from East Suffolk and North East Essex NHS FT, but the midwives did not have access to West Suffolk Hospital’s maternity records and blood results.*

*“Following successful discussions, West Suffolk Hospital midwives are commencing an antenatal clinic in Stowmarket (week commencing 31 March 2025). The midwives will be providing antenatal care for those women who have chosen to have their baby born at West Suffolk Hospital. Work is ongoing to develop a postnatal care model for this group of women.”*

## Partner testimonial



Public Health  
& Communities

**“Healthwatch Suffolk played a valuable role in supporting the development of my 2024 Annual Public Health Report on ageing well. Their commitment to amplifying the voices of our residents—particularly those whose experiences are too often underrepresented—has been instrumental in grounding our work in lived experience. Their work in gathering and presenting the voices of Suffolk residents has helped ensure that the report reflects the real experiences and priorities of older people across our communities. This collaboration has enriched our report with authentic insight and has challenged us to think more inclusively about how we support independence, dignity, and wellbeing as we age. It is only by listening—really listening—that we can build a Suffolk where everyone has the opportunity to age well.**

**“In addition to this, Healthwatch Suffolk also provided valuable insights in relation to COPD, providing a powerful foundation for understanding the lived experience of people managing chronic respiratory conditions in Suffolk. Furthermore, they completed work supporting the tobacco and vaping needs assessment by gathering qualitative insights through online engagement and case study interviews. Their findings helped in adding depth to the epidemiological data and highlighting key challenges and opportunities. Thank you, Healthwatch Suffolk, for being a trusted partner in this journey.”**

Stuart Keeble (Director of Public Health, Public Health and Communities at Suffolk County Council)



### Find our latest Healthwatch Suffolk CIC insights and impact



Find  
more

This annual report does not include detail regarding work or impact associated with our commissioned projects, but you can explore them on our website.

Find a summary of our year, including updated impacts regarding our work with the Public Health and Communities team in Suffolk, at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/impact25](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/impact25).

# Partnerships and collaboration

**A collaborative approach is the best way to reach people for their views, and to achieve lasting change in health and social care. In this section, discover some of the ways we've been working with others to include people in the scrutiny, design and delivery of local health and social care services.**

We know that our clearest impacts are derived from our most effective relationships with decision-makers in systems. And as the structures of our local health and care systems are shifting to respond to national reform, the strength of these relationships will become tested, yet ever more critical.

In the year ahead, and whilst maintaining our status as a trusted independent partner, we will make it clear that we are ready to support decision-makers to include people in potential radical system change.

Through partnerships and collaboration, we find mutual interests and benefits, both for those using services, and those who run and commission them. We can collectively combine our skills, capacity, and capability to include people in shaping standards of care, and to influence effectively. It is only through a truly co-productive approach that we can hope to achieve the best possible health and social care for our local communities.





# The Healthwatch network

**Our influence is extended beyond local borders through work with Healthwatch England and other local Healthwatch.**

Here are some of the ways we supported our national network in 2024/25.

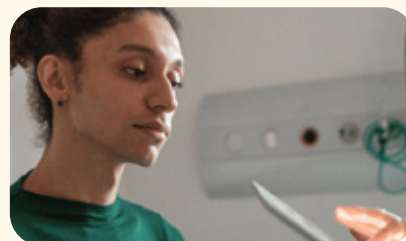
## A strain on sight – local views in national research

We included the views of 33 Suffolk residents in national research about experiences of access to NHS eye care. The responses show how long waits for eye care were having a huge impact on people's daily lives. They have contributed to the formation of national recommendations to the NHS and Government.



## Trans and non-binary people's experiences of primary care

Healthwatch England funded us to include people in a national survey about trans and non-binary people's experiences of using GP practices. Our work to host the development of the SNEE THINC network (a network for people who want to improve health and care for transgender and non-binary people and those exploring their gender identity) helped us to include 37 people in the research – exceeding Healthwatch England's target of up to 20 responses from each local participating area.



A local summary will be released when Healthwatch England publishes its research in summer of 2025.



**Working with other local Healthwatch has also been an important way to influence across local systems.**

*"Healthwatch Essex has a strong relationship with Healthwatch Suffolk and this year has seen that strengthen and develop further. Through joint working and information sharing, we have been able to increase the breadth of projects across a wider geographical landscape and offer a valuable evidence base to the Integrated Care Board in Suffolk and north east Essex (SNEE ICB)."*

*"Healthwatch Suffolk are a long established team and this maturity within the sector has proved incredibly valuable recently as we have reset the East of England Local Healthwatch Network. As the system changes and we move towards new models of delivery in health and social care locally, Healthwatch Essex are keen to not lose the momentum gained and continue to have an open sharing relationship with Healthwatch Suffolk."*

- Sam Glover (Chief Executive, Healthwatch Essex)







In 2024/25, **more than 2,000** anonymised comments from our Feedback Centre were uploaded into a national data store that helps Healthwatch England monitor trends in people's experiences. Together with sharing of our research reports, this is how we meet our statutory requirements to support Healthwatch England's priorities with local data.

## A local response to national research on complaint handling

**NHS leaders working in patient advice and liaison will adopt a framework that aims to improve people's experiences of making complaints to services. A working group will be established after we shared recommendations from our national network.**



This local response follows a national report 'A pain to complain' by Healthwatch England, which warned people face many barriers to making a complaint about NHS healthcare. It found low public confidence is preventing people from taking any action after experiencing poor care and little evidence that complaints were being systematically used to improve care.

This research has shown that the NHS does not consistently welcome, handle, respond or learn from complaints in a patient-centred manner. We shared it with NHS leaders in Suffolk and north Essex and encouraged them to consider a local response.

Liesel Kennedy (Research and Intelligence Programme Manager, Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Partnership Secretariat) said:

*"The report was discussed at the People and Communities Programme Board meeting. Following this, some analysis was conducted with a view to developing a self-assessment framework that PALS teams could complete to help them identify areas that are working well and areas for improvement. It involved examining a number of publications that detail best practice, including from different sectors, to find areas of commonality and have a broader basis for learning.*

*"Using this information, a first draft of a table was produced that set out some outcomes for people in the form of 'I statements', how organisations could make a difference, what they could do, and also suggested some initial mechanisms for measuring effectiveness in doing these. This has been shared to a wider group to gather interest in forming a small working group that involves people working in PALS or complaints across a number of local organisations, so that we can come up with a framework that hopefully everyone is happy to adopt."*

The implementation of this framework will be supported by discussions at our very own network that brings local health and care professionals involved in complaints handling together to share information and collaborate.

## Partner testimonial



"Healthwatch Suffolk is an excellent local Healthwatch with a committed and passionate team engaged in delivering impactful work across two health and social care systems. It operates at the forefront of best practice in participatory approaches, research and co-production, ensuring people's lived experiences are influencing and improving local standards of care. This from my perspective is particularly true of their approach in gathering people's experiences of waiting for hospital care, where they have worked collaboratively in local systems to engage thousands of people known to be waiting.

"It is clear that we have a mountain to climb to provide all patients in England with timely care. Nationally, we remain concerned that headline progress on waitlists may mask large inequalities when it comes to waiting for care, and so research of this scale within our network has huge value in continuing to evidence the need for change. It is clear that initial steps from NHS leaders to respond to this local research in Suffolk have been positive, and it is to be hoped that this will lead to improved experiences for people waiting for care.

"Healthwatch Suffolk has shown great support to national Healthwatch campaigns throughout the year, most notably continuing to champion national work regarding accessible health and social care, ensuring local action to address people's experiences of complaining to services, and encouraging one maternity system to focus on improving people's experiences of postnatal checks in primary care. All of this activity and more means that they have helped to ensure local voice has an influence as part of national policy change, and ensured local impact from our work together."

-Louise Ansari (National Director of Healthwatch England)



# Service scrutiny and regulation

Other national and local bodies have a role to influence standards of health and care too, and we work with them to make sure local views and experiences are included in their work.

## Suffolk Health and Oversight Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)





Suffolk County Council has a role to complete local government scrutiny of health and wellbeing services and support. It has established a committee for this purpose (the Suffolk Health and Oversight Scrutiny Committee). The committee may review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the county and it uses our insights to inform its priorities and meetings.

County Councillor Jessica Fleming (Former Chairman of the HOSC), said:

*"The Healthwatch Suffolk Chief Executive has continued to support the Suffolk County Council Health Scrutiny committee over the past year.*

*"Healthwatch provides valuable reports and national context on behalf of service users regarding the issues we examine. The Committee benefits greatly from these reports, as well as our regular informal briefings. Healthwatch is regularly represented at scrutiny meetings to observe and offer insight, as well as to support our preparatory work and production of committee papers. I am sure that close liaison between Healthwatch and the Health Scrutiny Committee will continue into the 2025/26 Municipal Year and beyond."*

Some of our contributions to local scrutiny this year included:

-  We provided evidence that helped the committee to demonstrate the need for raising awareness of new local sexual health service provision amongst young people. Our 2023 [My Health, Our Future](#) survey found that just one in six (17%) students had been aware of the previous iCaSH services and support (based on more than 7,000 responses to the survey).
-  The committee was appraised of our analytical role within an NHS engagement about the future of orthopaedic elective surgery in west Suffolk. Our involvement helped to ensure plans for the engagement were robust and that responses were gathered and interpreted independently of the NHS. The NHS provided an update about the outcome of this engagement to the committee early in 2025 - learn more on our website [here](#).
-  We provided a brief report regarding people's experiences of local GP services. It helped to inform discussions about the actions being taken within Suffolk to ensure GP services were accessible and sustainable.
-  We presented our research regarding digital health and care to the committee, including uses of our co-produced 'Guiding Principles' that have been shaping digital care. The committee was considering new digital technologies being used within primary care services in Suffolk and north east Essex area and how these were working to improve the experience of patients and professionals. Our evidence led the committee to recommend that the SNEE ICP should work with us to embed our guiding principles into its work (and that of partner organisations), co-produce services, and evaluate digital services as they are developed in Suffolk.

## Emerging AI in primary care

This year, the Health Scrutiny Committee noted that Suffolk GP Federation had approached us regarding work to gain patient views about how a new AI application (Heidi) could support the delivery of local primary care.

Initial conversations with the Federation have taken place in 2024/25, and we hope to progress further work to include people in the developing use of this emerging technology in the year ahead. Reflecting on this, David Pannell (Chief Executive of Suffolk GP Federation CIC) said:



*"Suffolk GP Federation is owned by the GP practices in Suffolk and provides a range of NHS services to patients. We have been working with Healthwatch Suffolk to support the introduction of Artificial Intelligence or AI within local GP practices. As with all new technologies, AI needs to be introduced very carefully. Understandably many patients are worried about the potential impact of AI, particularly what happens to their personal health information."*

*"Working with Healthwatch Suffolk and local GP practices, we are slowly introducing a new AI tool called Heidi, which supports the clinician/patient consultation. Our testing suggests Heidi significantly improves the quality and experience of a consultation for patients and clinicians. For example, the clinician can totally focus on their patient."*

*"Working with Healthwatch Suffolk has allowed us to identify areas of patient concern and ensure these are addressed in our roll-out programme. We will also monitor feedback and evaluate its success."*

## The Care Quality Commission (CQC)

All local Healthwatch have an important role to make sure regulators responsible for monitoring the quality of local care, are aware of people's experience of services. Our team regularly shares feedback with CQC to inform its inspections in primary care.

Anna Gleadell (Inspector of Primary Medical Services in Suffolk and north east Essex) told us about how our insights were informing an inspection of a local GP practice in 2024/25:

*"Following a Healthwatch and CQC meeting yesterday, I wanted to pass on my thanks for forwarding patients feedback you have received. I will be using it in the 'People's experience' summary section of the report. The themed visual breakdown is really useful. It makes it easy to see the number of responses and positive neutral and negative split of feedback too, to help focus the specific areas to focus on during the assessment."*

We are also planning to inform major CQC inspections in 2025/26. This will include assessments of mental health services provided by the Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust and adult social care services provided by Suffolk County Council. The latter follows a pilot inspection last year, to which we contributed. It helped the CQC develop a new model of inspection assessing councils against the requirements of the Care Act.

# Our work with local NHS partners

**We have continued to support our local NHS integrated care boards to include people's experiences in their work.**

This year, such work has included contributing to, and shaping, decision-making at ICB-led strategic meetings and forums (across Suffolk and north east Essex and Norfolk and Waveney), as well as extensive support of an NHS-led engagement to gather views on planned changes to the provision of orthopaedic surgery in the west of Suffolk.

## Shaping decisions about orthopaedic surgery (west Suffolk)

**Our independent report has helped NHS leaders to make decisions about the future of orthopaedic surgery in west Suffolk.**

In 2024/25, the NHS moved thousands of orthopaedic operations from the West Suffolk Hospital to a new state-of-the-art centre in Colchester.

Prior to this, and to inform decision-making about the plans, the SNEE ICB commissioned us to independently capture and report on people's views about the proposals. The funding helped to enhance the extent to which we could support people to participate in this NHS engagement over and above our statutory functions funded by our core grant.

In total, we independently analysed more than 2,200 responses from people to the engagement and presented them to NHS leaders. You can find our report and recommendations at [www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/news/elective-published](http://www.healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/news/elective-published).

The SNEE ICB responded to our independent report in January. [Find its report here.](#)



## Sometimes, all it takes is a question...

**A question about monitoring winter health from our Chief Executive has triggered a cross-system response in the NHS to tackle a known gap in health data.**

We asked NHS leads if data was available concerning the numbers of people who have been admitted to hospital with flu having previously received a vaccination. It was not – but both





hospital and integrated care board leads in the NHS told us they would explore how this gap in important health data could be plugged to improve the monitoring of vaccine efficacy.

*"We can only see data for those patients who have received their vaccination from our trust, and not from other areas such as community and primary care. There will most likely be some system working required on this to achieve a fuller picture. We will come back to you as soon as we've completed this work."*

The NHS Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board has provided an update on progress as follows:

*"Our Shared Care Record team have confirmed our clinicians can identify who has received a flu vaccination from general practice, as this is in our shared care record. However, the gap relates to our ability to aggregate this information."*

*"Vaccination data is currently not included in the GP data extracts we receive for population health management purposes, which would allow us to do the aggregation. Progress on addressing this has been hindered by collective action [in primary care] which led to some practices temporarily withdrawing consent for use of GP data for secondary uses [like population health management]."*

*"We'll be looking again at our data sharing agreements with practices as we consolidate our data and analytics functions with [the NHS in] Norfolk and Waveney, and will therefore aim to address this as part of that process."*

## Partner testimonial



*"I value all the relationships I have with external partners. Healthwatch Suffolk (as well as Healthwatch Essex) are particularly important system partners in my day-to-day life. They provide an honest reflection of the views and needs of people and communities in the planning and delivery of healthcare, they have been a vital component in my work."*

*"They are my go-to resource if I need guidance or signposting to high quality co-production. Their reports are of the highest quality and are used by me regularly."*

Dr Andrew Kelso (Former Medical Director, Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board)



## The Suffolk and north east Essex Integrated Care Partnership

**We receive funding from the SNEE ICP to support it to include people and communities in shaping local care and services.**

Our partnership agreement with the ICP means that we can support a range of engagement, research and co-production projects within the NHS. It enables the ICP to benefit from the capability, knowledge and skills of our team, and it supports our capacity to deliver independent activities in partnership with NHS decision-makers. Ultimately, the agreement aligns well with our core strategic goals to include people in shaping the form, function and delivery of local health and care.

A testimonial about this partnership from the ICP said:

*"We really value the important partnership we have Healthwatch Suffolk who help support, guide and influence how we work with people and communities across Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System. Their expertise and insight make them an important strategic partner and critical friend to help us not only reach and hear from our local populations but use that insight to inform strategic decision making."*

You can learn more about impact associated with our funded Healthwatch Suffolk CIC projects at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/impact25](https://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/impact25).

66

*"Healthwatch Suffolk is a really important partner in helping us to understand and better meet the needs of our local population. They have helped with particularly invaluable insights to changes we have made over the last year."*

– Dr Ewen Cameron (Chief Executive Officer and Consultant Gastroenterologist, West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust)

99

## Partner testimonial



“The Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board has benefited from a long and established partnership with Healthwatch Suffolk. One of several areas of joint work over the past 12 months concerned the proposed relocation of some elective orthopaedic services from West Suffolk Hospital to the brand new, purpose built, elective orthopaedic centre in Colchester.

“Since it opened in 2023, the new Essex and Suffolk Elective Orthopaedic Centre has allowed patients to receive care and treatment much faster, saving them the need to wait longer while living with discomfort or pain.

“As an active champion in supporting local people’s use of health and social care services, Healthwatch Suffolk played an important role in shaping our system’s engagement plans relating to the proposed move of some services from the outset. The team at Healthwatch Suffolk agreed to gather all of the feedback the ICB and West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust received from patients and local people about the proposal from various locality meetings and mini exhibitions that took place.

“In addition, Healthwatch Suffolk produced an independent report which highlighted key trends of feedback. This was later presented to the Board of Directors, who made their decision about the future provision of services based on the feedback included within the final report.

“We look forward to continuing our strong partnership with Healthwatch Suffolk in our collective aim to tackle and reduce health inequalities across Suffolk and north east Essex.”

Simon Morgan (Associate Director of Communications, NHS Suffolk and North East Essex)



**Find  
more**

# Suffolk County Council

Here are two ways we've supported Suffolk County Council to address key issues and strategies.

## Suffolk County Council (SCC) – Care Market Strategy

**Insights from our home care research with SCC have been used to shape a local 'Care Market Strategy 2025–30' and service user leaflet.**

We delivered a comprehensive project focused on the experiences of people using and delivering home care across Suffolk. Funding for the project enhanced our capacity to include more than 1,000 users of home care services and 168 staff delivering care in the project. The findings have informed a local Care Market Strategy and also inspired a new 'guide' from Suffolk County Council for people using services to know what they should expect of care staff, providers and how to find help if they need it.



[Learn more about this work](#)

## Tackling the effects of poor air quality in Suffolk

**Our research exploring people's experiences of living with respiratory conditions is helping the NHS and SCC to tackle the effects of poor air quality locally.**

We highlighted the need for better access to information on managing respiratory conditions and the triggers of poorer health, making use of annual reviews, GP appointments, pulmonary rehabilitation sessions, and other points of contact with patients. This supported the findings of SCC's own year-long public engagement.



It is hoped specific action will be taken to address this, including:

- The development of training, guidance and procedures to help healthcare professionals understand the impacts of air quality and support them in their conversations with patients.
- The co-production of simple advice on air pollution, to empower the public and patients to prevent ill health and manage conditions. This will be developed for sharing via key healthcare professionals in clinical settings.



[Learn more about this work](#)

## Partner testimonial



"The co-production and research undertaken by Healthwatch Suffolk has been invaluable in ensuring that the voices of those with lived experience are embedded in the work we do within Adult Social Care.

"In particular, the well-publicised Healthwatch Suffolk 'A roundabout without signposts' dementia report, reporting on the experiences, needs and priorities of people with dementia and their carers in Suffolk, helped form the foundations of the Suffolk Dementia Strategy 2024-2029 and action plan. The key learning for health and care systems and leaders has helped summarise priority action points to be taken forward systemwide.

"Further, the Healthwatch 'My Care at Home' surveys reporting both the experiences and aspirations of those receiving home care, and those working in this sector, features prominently within the Adult Social Care (ASC), Care Market Strategy 2025-2030. This helps to ensure that ASC is hearing and responding to the views of both people and providers in shaping the Suffolk care market to meet their current and future needs and requirements".

Rachael Coombes (Contracts and Service Development Manager, Strategic Planning and Resources Team at Suffolk County Council)



### Find our latest Healthwatch Suffolk CIC insights and impact



**Find  
more**

This annual report does not include significant detail regarding work or impact associated with our commissioned projects, but you can explore them on our website.

Find a summary of our year, including an update about our work to include people in shaping home care services, at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/impact25](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/impact25).



## Keeping vital care for acquired brain injury closer to home

**We helped to influence a decision to retain a vital local service for people living with an acquired brain injury in Waveney – a service that will continue to offer a lifeline to those who would otherwise struggled to find any support close to where they lived.**

The NHS in Norfolk and Waveney had given notice to Livability Icanho that it would not be renewing its contract for the service's acquired brain rehabilitation satellite service in Bungay, citing financial concerns. The service offered highly specialised rehabilitation that does not otherwise exist in the Waveney area to those living with an acquired brain injury (including through having a stroke).



Reflecting on our involvement, Jo Marshall (Service Manager, Shaftesbury Icanho Specialist Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service) said:

*"When our funding for a long-standing contract was suddenly withdrawn at the end of March last year we approached Healthwatch Suffolk with concerns that stroke and other acquired brain injury patients in Waveney would no longer be able to access vital rehabilitation.*

*"Healthwatch Suffolk were responsive, engaging and listened to feedback from patients, referring organisations, and other key stakeholders. Healthwatch Suffolk brought the matter to the attention of the two local Health and Oversight Scrutiny committees, so questions could be asked about service provision for those affected now and in the future.*

*"Following all of the feedback received by the ICB, the eventual outcome was that funding was reinstated so that citizens of Waveney continued to have access to the service. Healthwatch Suffolk's approach was professional, and was vital in ensuring that voices of the citizens of Waveney were heard in the ICB's decision making process. We are grateful for Healthwatch Suffolk's input and the ICB's responsiveness to the feedback they presented."*

Naturally, we were delighted that the integrated care board was responsive to the concerns raised by us, and other local stakeholders. There is no question that this was the correct decision by the ICB, ensuring this vulnerable patient group will continue to receive the support they need close to home.

# Our partnership agreements

**We have continued to strengthen our partnerships with organisations and networks supporting people in communities.**

A total of 58 partnership agreements are now in place with local organisations. They outline ways of working, and form a foundation for working together, including:

- promoting shared opportunities for people to influence local care;
- the opportunity for organisations to be represented in our activities and research.
- Partnerships help us to make sure people are included in our work, and offer opportunities for professional advice and guidance about how to engage local communities.

To view the full list of signed agreements, visit our website. You can find them at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/about-us/our-partnerships](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/about-us/our-partnerships).

## Helping people to find our partner opportunities

**We aim to share information and opportunities from our partners that can benefit people's health and wellbeing locally.**

*"I just wanted to say thank you to the team who put together the Healthwatch Suffolk newsletter communications. It helps to raise my awareness of some very important healthcare issues and challenges in Suffolk, but more importantly what action is being taken to address these and how we can all help to bring about the solutions to these challenges through our feedback and support."*

*"The article on local volunteering opportunities was a great source of information, and the timing was perfect as I was keen to pursue opportunities out in the community. It gave me all the information that I needed to do that, and I am joining [a local] team of volunteers."*

66

*"Our relationship with Healthwatch has played an important role in the development of our adult pathway. Their independent engagement with our participants gives us honest, valuable feedback, helping us understand what's working well and where we can make meaningful improvements. Having an impartial organisation that participants can be referred to adds an important layer of support and accountability to our work."*

*"We also value the wider role Healthwatch plays in the system. Your ability to amplify the voices of those with lived experience, challenge inequality, and encourage more joined-up, person-centred thinking across services is crucial. The reports and research you produce not only inform our practice but also provide reassurance that our work is focused in the right areas, particularly in relation to young people and the complex challenges they face. We're pleased to work alongside you and appreciate the insight, challenge, and perspective you bring to our work and the broader system."*

- Lauren Shand (Chief Executive of Green Light Trust)

99

# University of Suffolk

**We work closely in partnership with our local university, supporting its aspiration to play a civic role in Suffolk, serving and developing the local population and economy.**

Our action research and reports, based in co-production and bringing together our expertise in engagement, communications and research, sit alongside the academic experience and learning that the university brings to the county.

Our partnership has informed events, learning and the development of the university itself, ensuring that lived experience is heard and has impact.

We are also founding partners of the Integrated Care Academy, which is a partnership between the University of Suffolk, the Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System, Suffolk County Council and Healthwatch Suffolk. Through education, research, leadership, workforce development, and digital technologies, it aspires to promote the best possible integrated care in systems.

You can read about the ICA on its website at [www.integratedcareacademy.org.uk](http://www.integratedcareacademy.org.uk).

## Supporting UoS events



**This year, our Independent Chair, Wendy Herber (pictured third from left), contributed as a panel member to key local events hosted by the university.**

These events (such as the university's 'Spotlight Suffolk' events) are supporting UOS to meet ambitions associated with its civic university agreement.

The agreement aims to 'harness the work and influence of the students, staff and alumni of the University to promote societal, economic and environmental advancements in and for the people of Suffolk'. Follow the link below to find a short video about this, featuring our Chief Executive, Andy Yacoub.



**Watch the video**





**Supporting the civic role of our local university** – our Independent Chair, Wendy Herber, contributes as a panel member at a University of Suffolk event focused on identifying the key challenges facing communities across Suffolk and how organisations can work together to tackle them.

Other panel members included Andrew Cook (Executive Director of Growth, Highways and Infrastructure for Suffolk County Council), Rob Wright (Founder and Resilience Specialist for GIANT Life Skills Ltd), Valerie Gladwell (Director of the Institute of Health and Wellbeing for University of Suffolk), and Doug Field OBE (Founder of Beacon Advantage, Member of Suffolk Business Board and Non-Exec Director of Suffolk Chamber of Commerce)





# Information and signposting

We help people to find their way to information, advice and support regarding their health, care and wellbeing.

Here's a few examples of how we've helped people this year:

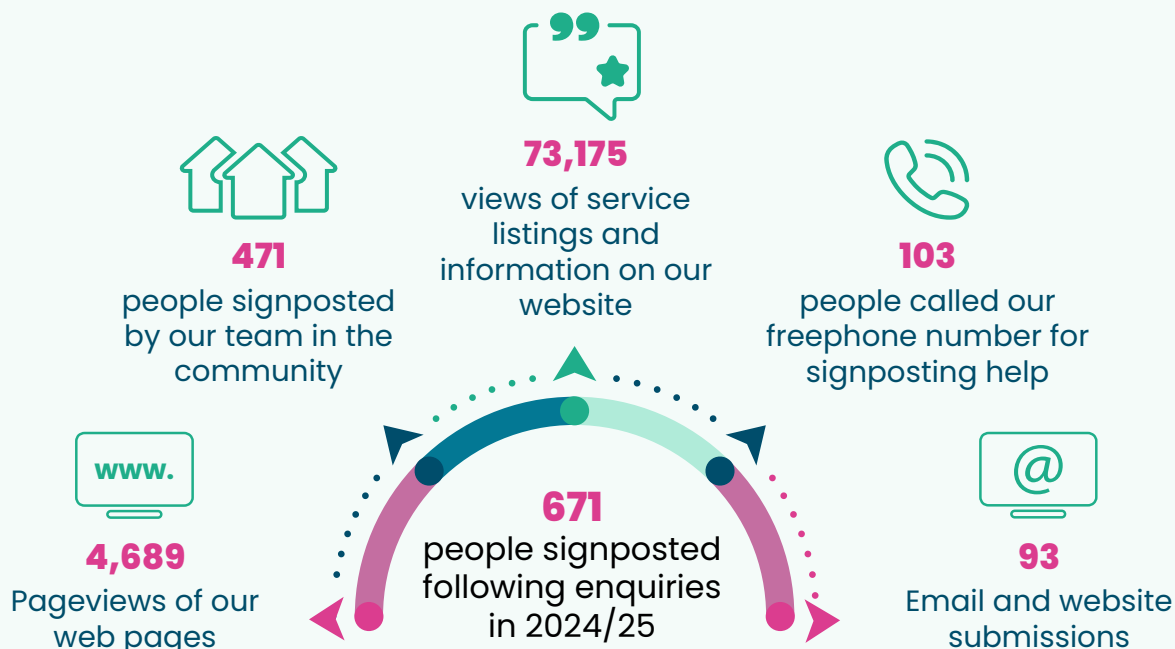
- We provided up-to-date information people can trust about local services and support, including ensuring more than 17,000 people engaged in our research and insight projects had the opportunity to find topical support pages on our website.
- We shared messages with people about critical changes happening across health and social care services in Suffolk.
- We helped people to access services they needed or to understand more about how local services work through direct engagement and contact with our team.





## Our signposting service in numbers

There are several specific ways people find information, help and signposting from our team, including through contact with staff in communities, by email, submissions to our website or via telephone enquiries.



## Our online offer

There were **4,828** views of **17** topical signposting web pages in 2024/25. Visit [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/signposting](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/signposting) to find them all.

Our signposting pages help us as a CIC to make sure people participating in our work and research projects are helped to find support if they need it. This is a key part of our inclusive and ethical approach to gathering people's experiences. We also use them to respond to online requests for information or other enquiries.

Select a square below to find our corresponding content online.





### Helping the NHS to share trusted information

Our signposting resource regarding children's asthma was included in a guidance and Information sheet developed by the NHS in Suffolk and north east Essex. The sheets were designed to be given to parents, caregivers, GP's, nurses, and schools to help them find useful links regarding asthma care and support.

## What did people ask us about in 2024/25?

### Top five most frequent enquiries

Here are the top five reason's people contacted us in 2024/25.

- 1. Contacting a service (62 enquiries)**  
We helped people to find information about contacting local services.
- 2. Complain about services (51 enquiries)**  
We shared information about making complaints and local advocacy support.
- 3. Systems & services (42 enquiries)**  
We helped people know more about their local health and care systems and services.
- 4. Mental health support (41 enquiries)**  
We helped people to know how they could find support for their mental health.
- 5. Accessing GP care (40 enquiries)**  
We helped people to know how they could access services from local practices.

People asked for information and signposting regarding an array of topics and services. We directed people to more than **146** services and sources of further information and guidance.

The top five reasons for contact this year are shown in the graphic (left), but there were many other reason's people contacted us for help this year, including:

- Help to find NHS dental care (**34 enquiries**).
- Support for unpaid family carers in Suffolk (**26 enquiries**).
- Information about accessing medication and pharmaceutical support (**24 enquiries**).
- Support for living with a disability in Suffolk and people's rights (**14 enquiries**).
- Social care support, such as help at home or to find residential or nursing care (**12 enquiries**).
- Emotional wellbeing support for children, young people and families (**11 enquiries**).
- Information and support related to living with dementia in Suffolk (**10 enquiries**).
- And many other enquiry types.

*"I can pick up the phone or talk to Healthwatch staff about situations, such as one recently about a safeguarding issue. They provided an objective view, but also ways of supporting the couple. Together with the knowledge they have of other services, we often manage to signpost people to other organisations, preventing people being banned from this or other groups and often delaying admission to a home or hospital. Healthwatch provides a voice for the people and systems to address concerns. Professional, without appearing buracritic."*

– Jill Mason (Together Tuesday Co-ordinator, Abbeycroft)



## Three signposting examples

We respond to an array of enquiries. The following examples show how we've been able to help people to find their way to information and support this year.

### 1. Help to access NHS special care dentistry

Ms P met us at a local event. Her elderly brother was disabled, with very restricted mobility and was struggling to access dental care. Previous trips to the dentist had been extremely traumatic for her brother, so the family asked us about the possibility of accessing dental support in other ways.

We contacted leads within the local NHS integrated care board who shared information with us about special care dentistry. This included changes that meant referrals could be made by GPs (previously they could only be made by a dental practitioner, which was a barrier for those with no access to a dental practice). We provided guidance to the family about access to service (including the referral link that could be passed onto GPs unaware of the changes).



*"My son said the doctor has arranged for my brother [to access an NHS dentist] at Portman Road. They don't do home visits, but we can arrange transport for him (they have a special wheelchair). It means we can cancel his dental plan. I am so pleased that my son and I don't have to see what a struggle it's been for him. Thank you so much for your help, it means so much to us."*

### 2. Advice for a local school

The management team of a local school contacted us for advice because it had been notified that a child had been diagnosed with cryptosporidiosis.

Cryptosporidiosis is an infection caused by a parasite called *Cryptosporidium*. For most people, the illness is unpleasant but self-limiting. However, it can be a serious illness in people who have immune systems that are not working properly. Symptoms include watery diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach pains, and fever which may only last a couple of days, but can continue for up to three or four weeks. It can affect people with weak immune systems for much longer.



*"We had a situation where a parent had mailed in to say a student had been diagnosed with Cryptosporidium following a hospital test. This was not something we had come across before, but having completed swift research alongside the parent information it was obvious that we needed more information on the appropriate protocol to follow.*

*"We made contact with the Healthwatch Suffolk team. They pointed us to advise about the course of action to be taken, and arranged for additional information to be provided to us, including about parent protocols to be followed. The advice was very much needed to confirm that what we were doing and planning was in fact more or less correct."*

### 3. Unlocking a route to holistic support

We were contacted by someone who needed support to cope at a difficult time. They told us they were in a desperate place, facing financial challenges and struggles with their mental health and medication. They did not know who to turn to for support.



*"Staff at Healthwatch Suffolk could tell I was not in a good place mentally. I wasn't taking my medication correctly because of changes with the service at my local chemist. I was also facing financial struggles that had left me without a microwave. Life had become overwhelming. So, they kindly asked for details of my GP, and checked if it would be OK for them to call the practice. I was in a very desperate place.*

*"Not only did Healthwatch make sure my GP rang me for referral back to mental health support, but they also put me in touch with a 'Community Help Hub Officer' at East Suffolk Council. They contacted me, and we discussed all of the problems I had been facing.*

*"The officer ordered me a new microwave and an emergency food parcel was dropped off that same day. The officer also signposted me to a colleague who has provided support with council tax issues, finances and benefits. I have also had a phone call with Gateway to Homechoice (a lettings system, where social housing properties are advertised) offering support to renew my application for housing.*

*"I'm still receiving help and support from this team, and feel I've got a safe bubble around me right now. I've also today had a very successful appointment with Citizens Advice in Ipswich on the recommendation of East Suffolk Council. Without intervention and care, initially from Healthwatch, I wouldn't have known where to start to get the help and support I needed at a difficult time."*



“

**“Without intervention and care,  
initially from Healthwatch, I  
wouldn’t have known where to  
start to get the help and support I  
needed at a difficult time.”**

”



## Our money

Please see our abbreviated accounts below. The figures are correct at the time of publication and are subject to auditors inspection. Our full accounts will be available on request.

Please call 0800 448 8234, or send an email to [info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk).

<b>Turnover</b>	£543,671
Cost of sales	–
<hr/>	
GROSS SURPLUS	£543,671
Administrative expenses	£681,660
<hr/>	
	–£137,990
Other operating income	£140,393
<hr/>	
OPERATING (DEFICIT)/SURPLUS	£2,403
Interest receivable and similar income	£24,928
<hr/>	
	£27,331
Interest payable and similar expenses	–
<hr/>	
SURPLUS BEFORE TAXATION	£27,331
<hr/>	

This page is intentionally blank

# Looking ahead – five insight priorities

## We started 2025 with the good news about our core Healthwatch Suffolk services.

Following a competitive tender process, Suffolk County Council awarded us a three-year contract to provide the local Healthwatch service in Suffolk, with an option to extend for an additional two years. It means that we can plan for a longer-term future, and we'll be looking to do that together with you.

A number of priorities have already been set for the first year of this new Healthwatch contract (see overleaf). The projects, which have been the subject of a thorough decision-making process, have been determined through a combination of:

- insights and feedback from local partners about people's experiences of health and care support;
- our understanding of issues and trends from research insights and our systems for recording people's experiences;
- the priorities of local NHS commissioners and areas where lived experience could influence standards of local care;
- national Healthwatch network priorities, and more.

For more information about how we make decisions about our work and organisation, please visit <https://healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/about-us/decision-making/>.



## One

Together with our friends at Suffolk User Forum, we'll explore people's experiences of accessing urgent mental health support from Suffolk A&E departments. Our feedback will be presented to a group of professionals working across the NHS and community sectors to improve local support.



## Two

With Healthwatch Essex, we're exploring people's experiences of accessing medication for ADHD. This is in response to the NHS decision to return management and medication responsibilities to specialist services. Our work aims to inform future learning about policy change like this.



## Three

We will continue to champion people's lawful right to accessible health and social care with a continuation of our Your Care, Your Way campaign. This time, we'll explore people's experiences of accessing care if they have a visual impairment.



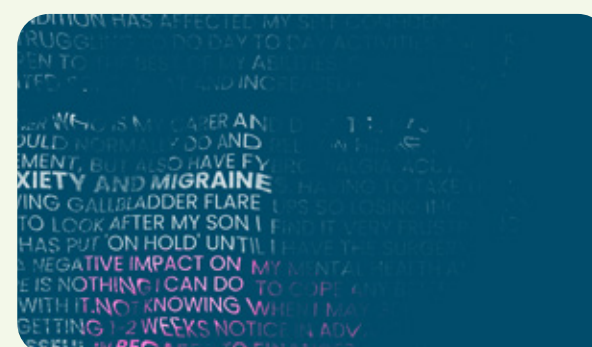
## Four

NHS decision-makers have asked us to explore the quality of local health checks in primary care for people living with a learning disability diagnosis. Building on existing work in the county by local partners, we hope to gather additional insights to improve standards of care and support.



## Five

We will continue to review how NHS leaders and services are responding to the findings of our research exploring people's experiences of waiting for hospital care. Look out for future updates in our newsletters and on our website.



## Partner testimonial



“We value and appreciate our collaboration with Healthwatch Suffolk. Their dedication to improving community health and well-being aligns perfectly with our mission.

“Working together allows us to identify local mental health care issues and key areas for quality improvement. We are currently partnered with Healthwatch Suffolk to launch a vital survey aimed at understanding people’s experiences of seeking help at a Suffolk emergency department (A&E) during a mental health crisis.

“Healthwatch Suffolk has played a crucial role in developing the survey, drawing on its strong expertise in evidence gathering. Their clear guidance and practical support were essential in ensuring the survey was accessible, inclusive, and meaningful.

“The feedback gathered will inform a report, produced with the continued support of Healthwatch Suffolk. This report will be shared with key decision-makers, including the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, NHS Integrated Care Boards, local hospitals, police, and other emergency services.

“This important work will play a key role in shaping improved urgent mental health care across Suffolk.”

Jayne Stevens  
(Chief Executive of Suffolk User Forum)





# Statutory statements

## Healthwatch Suffolk

**Our office base:** Unit 2, Norfolk House, Needham Market, Suffolk, IP6 8RW

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

## The way we work

The main statutory functions of a local Healthwatch are to:

- Obtain the views of people about their needs and experience of local health and social care services.
- Make people's views known to those involved in the commissioning and scrutiny of health and care services.
- Make reports and recommendations about how health and social care services could or should be improved.
- Promote and support the involvement of people in the monitoring, commissioning and provision of local health and social care services.
- Provide information and advice to the public about accessing health and social care services and the options available to them.
- Make the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England, helping it to deliver on its role as national champion.

In this report, we have highlighted a number of ways that we deliver our service to meet these objectives and achieve change, including:

1. **Community engagement** – by gathering and sharing views in local communities.
2. **Research and insight** – by sharing insights and reports, with recommendations, about people's lived experience of health, care and wellbeing services or support.
3. **Information and signposting** – by helping the public to find services, information and support. Sometimes achieving change for those who contact us, and others using services.
4. **Working with partners and stakeholders** – by working in systems and with key partners to shape standards of local care and support.

In addition, please note the following statements.

## Inclusive methods and systems 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. 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.

Our aim is to make sure communities are not excluded from being able to share their experiences, or from being a part of shaping local standards of care.

You can visit our website to find all of the accessible ways to feedback to us\_ ([www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/feedback/](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/feedback/)). This includes translated feedback forms in Polish, Portuguese and Romanian, and details about how people can use SignLive, or our dedicated webform, to feedback in British Sign Language. An easy read format of our standard feedback form is also available.

For more information about how we aim to be an inclusive organisations, please visit [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/inclusivity](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/inclusivity).

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of **11** members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2024/25, the Board generally met on a bi-monthly basis and made key decisions concerning our policies, business planning (such as our core research programme in 2025/26, and beyond), staffing and strategy.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities (e.g., by consulting local partners, involving members in decisions about our governance at the AGM and ensuring our priorities are aligned to themes in local feedback).

More information about how we make decisions can be found at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/about-us/decision-making](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/about-us/decision-making).

## **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.

Some details about the evidence we use to shape our work and to influence local standards of care can be found at [www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/our-evidence](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/our-evidence).

## **Responses to recommendations**

In this report, we have demonstrated how we have gathered and shared reports, recommendations, key learning and insight about people's experiences of health and social care services.

No providers or commissioners failed to respond to requests for information or recommendations in the year. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee and therefore no resulting reviews or investigations.

We did not complete any activity to enter and view local services this year.

## Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We have a seat to influence decision-making at key health and social care boards, committees and events. In the year, this has included:

- Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Partnership Board
- Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board – where we have presented our research and contributed to discussion and action on various topics, including young people's mental health in the county.
- Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership Board – building on our co-production work that led to the development and publication of 'openness principles'. They are helping the Partnership to share its business and the work it does to give the public confidence and assurance regarding safeguarding.

In addition, we attend many other decision-making groups and forums in health and care to present our work, and to make sure people's experiences are included (e.g., strategic groups and executive/management Boards or committees).

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 and share it widely with leaders and decision-makers across sectors (including NHS England, Healthwatch England, local partners and many other stakeholders). The report will also be made available to members of the Suffolk Health Scrutiny Committee and Health and Wellbeing Board.

## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Suffolk is represented on the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board by Wendy Herber (Independent Chair, Healthwatch Suffolk CIC).

During 2024/25, and together with members of our team, our representative has effectively carried out this role by presenting our research and contributing to discussions and action on various topics (please refer to the minutes of the Health and Wellbeing Board for more information and detail about the outcome of meetings – find them at <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/the-council-and-its-committees/committees/suffolk-health-and-wellbeing-board>).

**Healthwatch Suffolk**  
**Unit 2, Norfolk House, Needham Market,**  
**Suffolk, IP6 8RW**



[www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk)



0800 448 8234



[info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk)



#HealthwatchSuffolk



#healthwatchsuffolk