



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Doncaster

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"As a trustee of Healthwatch, I see firsthand how we turn patients voices into action- making sure local health and care services truly reflect the needs of our local communities. Together we are shaping a healthier, more inclusive Doncaster for everyone.

Cath Witherington, Trustee, Healthwatch Doncaster

A message from our Chair

This year has shown us — again — the strength and heart of Healthwatch Doncaster.

Despite facing personal and professional challenges, our small but dedicated staff team and trustees have brought their full selves to the work. Between us, we've faced and beaten cancer, recovered from emergency surgery, undergone planned operations, and even tested Doncaster's blue-light response system firsthand. This lived experience has deepened our compassion and strengthened our resolve — because we know, personally, what good care should feel like.

Throughout the year, our team has remained committed to listening to local voices and turning feedback into influence. From street-level conversations to system-level strategy, we've championed people's experiences and brought insight into spaces where decisions are made.

We've also strengthened our governance. A recruitment drive has added invaluable expertise to our Board — including a GP, a former dentist, a voluntary sector CEO, and more recently, former councillors with direct links to some of Doncaster's most deprived communities. This diverse insight helps us to better represent the people we serve.

As we look to the year ahead, I do so with real pride in what we've achieved — and real optimism for what we can build together.

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Jon Finegold
Acting Chair, Healthwatch Doncaster

About us

Healthwatch Doncaster is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

To make sure that people's experiences help make health and care better.



Our values are:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

We've supported more than 1346 people to have their say and get information about their care. This year, 1070 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. We currently employ 4 staff and our work is supported by 6 volunteers.

Reaching out:



1346 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

37 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as **GP access** and **finding an NHS dentist**.

73,515 reach on social media with **2,944** followers

Championing your voice:



We published **8** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **Urgent and emergency care**, **A&E attendance** and **GP surgeries**.

Our most popular report was analyzing attendance in A&E and what had led to the decision to go there.

Statutory funding:



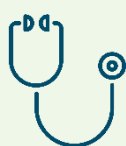
We're funded by City of Doncaster council. In 2024/25 we received **£175,734**, which is the same as last year.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Doncaster. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We reported to the local hospital regarding the lifts not working for access to the physio department, making some patients unable to attend their appointments. Estates have now sorted the problem and access is restored.



We held our Ask the Expert session, where the general public questioned dentists and learnt how the system worked. This helped the public understand the system and raise concerns directly.



Summer

We attended Pride in Doncaster and heard from many people who do not feel safe accessing GP services. We are now piloting an inclusive GP accreditation scheme to address this.



Our drop-in sessions attracted many people needing help to find an NHS dentist. We signposted over 100 people, and secured same-day appointments for over 15 of them.



Autumn

We ensured the Deaf society's lived experience featured as the patient story at a South Yorkshire ICB meeting, raising the profile of accessibility in care.



Our survey into A&E reached a wide patient base. Following our recommendations, Healthwatch Doncaster is now on the design group for the upcoming emergency care contract.



Winter

We are working on the Doncaster Pharmacy Needs Assessment for the next 3 years. Our input is helping to ensure equal access whether travelling by car or public transport.



Our safeguarding survey showed the DSAB board that the public wants more accessible information on safeguarding. This feedback is now shaping future communication strategies.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatches to ensure people's experiences of care in Doncaster, Barnsley, Rotherham and Sheffield are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board

This year, we've worked with Healthwatches across South Yorkshire to achieve the following:

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Healthwatch's in South Yorkshire meet bi-weekly to share knowledge and identify any countywide issues where collaboration would be beneficial to improve health inequalities across our area.

We work together as Healthwatches to make sure that a local representative from our network attends all high-level meetings, ensuring that the needs and experiences of local residents are reflected in the planning and delivery of health and social care services at a regional level.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



Healthwatch Doncaster has strengthened its partnership with the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (SYICB) at place level. Through consistent collaboration and the credibility of our public insight, we now hold an equal seat at the decision-making table. Our role has evolved from being consulted after the fact to shaping strategies from the outset. This trusted relationship ensures that the voices of Doncaster residents are influencing priorities, policy, and service design at the highest level

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

Here are some examples of our work in **Doncaster** this year:

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



Hearing personal experiences and their impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face

Wheelchair users told us about long-term issues accessing their GP and discomfort in the waiting room. After sharing our report, the practice listened – cleaning the space, reupholstering seating, and finding a long-term solution for the entrance. A small number of voices made a real difference to everyone's experience.

Getting services to involve the public



By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.

We worked with Doncaster Deaf Society to share their experiences of audiology at the South Yorkshire ICB. A powerful 15-minute slot became a 40-minute conversation – and led to an action plan. Interpretation services have already been recommissioned, and the ICB has committed to lasting improvements.

Improving care over time



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

Our A&E survey challenged assumptions around why people use emergency services. The contract renewal was paused for redesign, and Healthwatch now sits on the steering group. Thanks to patient insight, the new approach will better reflect local need – and this time, service users are part of the process.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.

Our insights reports and the enter and view we undertake allows us to report to the services on frequent basis



Listening to your experiences

Championing community concerns to restore the Audiology Service

Last year, we championed the voices of the deaf community of Doncaster to reduce delays and restore trust in local services.

What did we do?

We listened to three Deaf groups frustrated with delays, poor access, and a lack of interpreters in audiology. Each had raised concerns separately, but little changed. We brought them together — building a stronger, unified voice. Healthwatch then engaged the ICB and hospital teams to create a shared action plan. Instead of fragmented fixes, all providers are now working to a single plan with clear deadlines and accountability. We helped connect the dots and made sure lived experience drove the solution.

Key things we heard:



Patients reported waiting times over two years



Patients stated that No interpreters had been booked — family members were used instead



Patients reported they are still told to call for appointments

“I’d been waiting two years. Nothing changed until Healthwatch got involved — then I got an appointment in two weeks. I finally feel like someone listened.”

What difference did this make?

A single action plan — shared across providers — means a joined-up response. Services can no longer pass the buck. Clear timelines and joint reporting make every organisation accountable. Interpreter provision has already improved and commissioners have publicly committed to fix long-standing issues. Most importantly, the Deaf community now feels heard — and involved.

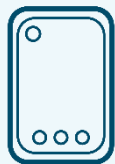
Listening to your experiences

“The best place for patients – Is it A&E?”

Patients accessing A&E often did so after contacting another service, but they still ended up there when a different service would have been a better option.

We gathered information in a report based on our deep dive into the experience of patients we met in 18 visits to A&E from October to December. The visits covered every day of the week and spanned a range of different times of day so that we could gather a broad view and an effective sample of data.

Key things we heard:



65%

Of patients had accessed another service first.

26%

Were attending on a Monday

55%

Attended with Chest Pains



“I’d Rather have a heart attack here”

“GP Practice reception staff advised me to go to Accident & Emergency (A&E)”

What difference did this make?

Our report has highlighted the need for more information and patient views with regards to the urgent and emergency care. We are now helping to design the Urgent and Emergency Care (UEC) contract making sure that it is fit for the residents of Doncaster.

Hearing from all communities

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

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Reaching out for Community Libraries, Voluntary Groups, Mental Health groups, Sex Workers, Gypsy Roma and Traveller community, Muslim women groups, Asylum Seekers and Homeless, we also speak to groups in deprived areas.
- Reaching out at events such as Pride, Recovery games and community galas.
- All of our data, is taken to Place committee and Health and Wellbeing board.



Hearing from all communities

Improving Dental care for the Asylum-seeking community

We investigated access to Dental Care for the Asylum-Seeking community.

At Conversation Club, we heard from asylum seekers unable to access NHS dental care – many were in pain, and some had given up trying. They felt invisible. Healthwatch Doncaster shared their experiences with local and South Yorkshire system leaders. This led to the creation of a dedicated dental access route for asylum seekers. Their voices were finally heard – and acted on.

What difference did this make?

Before our visit, many asylum seekers were suffering in silence – unable to register with an NHS dentist, left in pain, and increasingly hopeless. Several said they had “given up” asking for help. Through the Conversation Club, we captured their stories and concerns. We took these to decision-makers across Doncaster and South Yorkshire. As a result, a dedicated urgent dental care route has now been introduced for people seeking asylum. These changes not only improved access – they also restored a sense of dignity, showing that their voices matter and can influence real change.

Improving GP access for LGBTQ+ community

At Doncaster Pride, we listened to LGBTQ+ voices who shared difficult experiences accessing GP care. Many described fear of being judged, misgendered, or misunderstood. These stories sparked action. Healthwatch Doncaster are helping a number of GP's become accredited – one that celebrates best practice and encourages change. By taking these concerns seriously and publicly, we're working to make primary care a place of safety and trust for all identities.

What difference did this make?

During Doncaster Pride, many LGBTQ+ people told us they avoid GP appointments – some because they've been misgendered, others because they don't feel safe disclosing key information. One said, “I just don't go – it's easier.” We didn't want these voices to be lost. Healthwatch Doncaster brought them into conversations with the ICB and local GP practices. The result? A new pilot GP accreditation scheme, working with LGBTQ+ people, now in development. This work aims to highlight inclusive practice, improve confidence in primary care, and ensure LGBTQ+ patients feel seen, respected, and safe when accessing health services.

Information and signposting

Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint, or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us. This year 1070 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Securing urgent NHS dental appointments for those in pain
- Helping Deaf patients challenge long waits and poor interpretation
- Supporting asylum seekers to access fairer care
- Getting same-day help for people struggling to register with a GP
- Connecting communities to trusted support groups and safe spaces
- Making sure lived experience shaped Doncaster's A&E redesign



Supporting Deaf patients to get care more quickly

A Deaf patient had waited over two years for audiology. With support from their GP, we stepped in and helped get them seen in just two weeks.

A local GP contacted Healthwatch after a Deaf patient requested a referral to another city — frustrated by a two-year wait for a hearing appointment. We contacted the local audiology team, raised the concern, and worked together to review the case. As a result, the patient was contacted and offered an appointment within two weeks. This not only reduced delay but also restored trust in local services.



“I’d been waiting two years. Nothing changed until Healthwatch got involved — then I got an appointment in two weeks. I finally feel like someone listened.”

Helping people register with a GP without ID

Some people in Doncaster were wrongly told they needed ID to register with a GP. We stepped in and made sure they were able to access care.

Healthwatch Doncaster was contacted by several people turned away by GP surgeries because they didn’t have ID or proof of address — despite this not being required. We explained the NHS’s official guidance, supported individuals to challenge the refusal, and contacted practices directly where needed. Thanks to our support, they were registered successfully. This meant they could finally access care — including vital appointments for chronic conditions and ongoing support.



“I was told I couldn’t register because I had no ID. Healthwatch stepped in and sorted it — now I’ve finally seen a doctor”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 81hrs to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

We have six active volunteers who support us during engagement events and Enter & View visits. They're trained to speak with the public, gather feedback, and act as our eyes and ears in the community. Each volunteer contributes around eight hours a week when events are running. With 20 people on our wider contact list, we're building a growing team of passionate residents who make sure no voice is overlooked in Doncaster's health and care system.

This year, our volunteers:

- Carried out Enter & View visits to observe care settings and gather patient experiences
- Attended public events across Doncaster to promote Healthwatch and build trust
- Collected stories and insights from communities, ensuring local voices shaped service improvements

Volunteer Quote

"I really value my role as volunteer; the people I talk to also seem to really appreciate the opportunity to share their stories."

— Sarah, Volunteer



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.

Volunteering at Healthwatch has allowed me to bring attention to the voices in my community which often go unheard. It's been an amazing opportunity to speak to people I would never normally cross paths with. Knowing that their testimonials on our local healthcare services will lead to transformation to improve these facilities is incredibly empowering.

Volunteering with Healthwatch has developed my confidence and made me more empathetic; which I'm sure will be crucial in my university studies and future career in medicine.

Kirsty



Our volunteers bring energy and empathy. From collecting feedback to authorised visits, they make sure local voices shape the health and care services that matter.

We have six active volunteers who support us during engagement events and Enter & View visits. They're trained to speak with the public, gather feedback, and act as our eyes and ears in the community. Each volunteer contributes around eight hours a week when events are running. With 20 people on our wider contact list, we're building a growing team of passionate residents who make sure no voice is overlooked in Doncaster's health and care system.

Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatchdoncaster.co.uk



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Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Doncaster under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£175,734	Expenditure on pay	£117,126
Additional income	£7,115	Non-pay expenditure	£8,075
		Office and management fee	£52,703
Total income	£182,849	Total Expenditure	£177,904

Additional income is broken down into:

- £6,000 received from SYICB for Community Conversation engagement
- £1,115 received from Healthwatch England for work on Eye Care Project

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across Doncaster also receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Engagement on Community Conversations	£6,000

Finance and future priorities

Next steps:

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will make sure that while the new ICB's, NHS and councils are finding their feet and are looking at ways to implement the governments Integrated Neighbourhood working, that it starts with the community.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Championing improvements in GP access, communication, and inclusive care.
2. Addressing dental inequalities and tackling barriers to NHS dental treatment
3. Ensuring public voice shapes the redesign of urgent and emergency care in Doncaster

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Doncaster, 2 Masham Road, Cantley, Doncaster, DN4 6BU.

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

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 7 members who work voluntarily 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 met 11 times and made decisions on matters such as

- Partnered with the South Yorkshire Insights Bank on the Communications Toolkit – The insights bank is designed to help reduce duplication of reports, amplify community voices, and support a culture of collaboration by making non-sensitive feedback, engagement reports and survey findings accessible in one central place. It reflects our commitment to listening to what people across South Yorkshire think, feel, and experience when it comes to their health and well being.
- As part of the Bawtry and Oakwood Surgery practice merger, we selected a Primary Care Network (PCN) patient involvement approach, collaborating with Oakwood Surgery to develop and distribute a survey allowing patients to express their preference regarding the PCN affiliation of their practice. The initiative received over 997 responses from patients across both practices
- We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

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

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2024/25, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

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

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

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

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to:

Joint Safeguarding Board, Oral Health Improvement, Doncaster Place Committee, Health and Well Being board, Primary Care Operational Group, UEC Board, Carers Strategic oversight Board, ICP/SYMCA

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the South Yorkshire Integrated Care System. Healthwatch Doncaster sits on the Doncaster Place Committee, where we contribute directly to decisions about services, priorities, and funding. We're active members of the Primary Care Delivery Group, the LD & Autism Board, and the Carers Board, and we regularly meet with Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) to share feedback and raise concerns. Whether it's GP access, carer support, ambulance response, or specialist pathways, we bring real stories from Doncaster communities into the heart of system-level planning. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Doncaster is represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board by Fran Joel, CEO

During 2024/25, our representative has effectively carried out this role by representing the patient and carer voice, ensuring that the local community's needs and experiences are integrated into the board's decision-making processes

Healthwatch Doncaster is represented on SY Integrated Care Partnerships and SY Integrated Care Boards by Fran Joel, CEO

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
GP Practice – The Chestnut Surgery	Anecdotal visit from feedback from Community Conversations engagement	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these and made the recommended changes.
GP Practice – Northfield Surgery	Patient raised concerns around access and not being able to book appointments	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these and made the recommended changes.
GP Practice – The Edlington Surgery	There are only two practices in Edlington covering a large area, the question of which would you choose was raised	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these and made the recommended changes.
GP Practice – The Nayer Practice	Anecdotal visit from feedback from Community Conversations during engagement	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these and made recommended changes.
GP Practice – White House Farm Surgery	Anecdotal visit from feedback from Community conversations engagement	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these and made recommended changes.
Hospital – Ward 24	Invited by DBTH	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these and made recommended changes.

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