



Annual Report 2024–2025

**Unlocking the power of
people-driven care**

Healthwatch Surrey

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“The feedback local Healthwatch hear in their communities and share with us at Healthwatch England is invaluable, building a picture of what it’s like to use health and care services nationwide. Local people’s experiences help us understand where we – and decision makers – must focus, and highlight issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. We can then make recommendations that will change care for the better, both locally and across the nation.”

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our Contract Manager and Co-chairs

As we reflect on 2024–25, we are proud to present the progress Healthwatch Surrey continues to make in driving improvements and innovation in health and care, rooted in the lived experiences of Surrey residents.

We passionately believe that listening to, and acting on, local people’s experiences is essential to creating health and social care services that truly meet the needs of our communities. We remain dedicated to championing the voices of those who are often not well heard, and to identifying ways services can improve in response.

This year, we’ve listened with compassion to neurodivergent individuals about their experiences in secondary care, explored what matters most to college students, and supported family members in planning for their loved ones’ future care needs, among many other examples.

Every story matters. That’s why we’ve continued to strengthen the ways we enable people to be heard. Community engagement remains at the heart of our work, and we’ve expanded both digital and non-digital tools to ensure that every Surrey resident has the opportunity to speak up. In turn, their voices have helped shape quality assurance across Surrey Heartlands and Frimley ICB, contributed to the evaluation of the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, and informed providers and commissioners directly.

Over the past year, we’ve also supported the drive for better integration of services, collaborating closely with our VCSE partners to ensure that the voices of the people they support are heard at the highest levels of decision-making.

We are incredibly proud of our achievements this year. As we look ahead to a period of significant change in local systems and services, we are well-positioned to adapt, thrive, and continue giving voice to the people of Surrey.



Sam Botsford
Healthwatch Surrey
Contracts Manager



Deborah Mechaneck
Co-chair of Luminus
Board and Local
Healthwatch Advisory
Group member



Jason Davies
Co-chair of Luminus
Board
(Luminus, home of
Healthwatch Surrey)

About us

Healthwatch Surrey is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS and local authority leaders and decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help people navigate the complex health and social care landscape via our information and signposting service.

About us



Healthwatch Surrey champions the voice of local people to shape, improve and get the best from NHS and social care services. We are independent and have statutory powers to make sure decision makers listen to the experiences of local people.



We passionately believe that listening and responding to local people's experiences is vital to create health and social care services that meet the needs of people in Surrey. We seek out people's experiences of health and care services, particularly from people whose voices are seldom heard, who might be at risk of health inequalities and whose needs are not met by current services. We share our findings publicly and with service providers and commissioners to influence and challenge current provision and future plans.



We also provide reliable and trustworthy information and signposting about local health and social care services to help people get the support they need.

Our year in numbers

We've supported more than **2,000** people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ **8.5** full-time equivalent staff and our work is supported by **49** volunteers.

Reaching out:



2187 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

424 people came to our Helpdesk for clear advice and information on topics such as complaints procedures, social care funding, accessing GP practices and mental health support.

Championing your voice:



We published **33** reports about the improvements people would like to see in their local areas as well as **GP practices**, **pharmacies** and **social care**.

Our most read report was **Neurodivergent people's experiences of outpatients in Surrey hospitals**, highlighting good experiences when adjustments were made and less positive experiences regarding communication, attitudes and accessibility. Based on this report providers made a number of significant changes to improve the experience of neurodivergent patients.

Statutory funding:



We're funded by **Surrey County Council**. In 2024/25 we received **£488,210**, the same as 2023/2024.

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 Surrey. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Harnessing insights from residents we worked with Surrey Heartlands to improve information on how to complain on their GP website.



In spring we empowered our volunteers to make a difference in their community by delivering Making Every Contact Count (MECC) training.



Summer

Uptake of the MyCare portal by patients at a local hospital Trust increased by almost 10%, following actions taken by the Trust in response to the patient insights we provided.



Following our feedback, NHS Digital made a permanent change to the national 'Find a GP' web page to make it clearer, meaning people will now find it easier to register with a GP.



Autumn

Our insights and recommendations re-shaped the approach to co-production within a Trust, ultimately ensuring their services better meet the needs of users.



Findings in our report – detailing local concerns and priorities around urgent and emergency care – fed into the local NHS's strategic thinking around changes to provision.



Winter

By the end of the year we'd distributed over 900 copies of our coproduced leaflet, '[What do I need to know about GP practices?](#)' (in standard and Easy Read format) to venues across Surrey to support residents.



In winter we worked with two individual GP practices to offer insights and support to improve the experience for patients.



Working together for change

We've worked with our VCSE partner organisations to ensure people's experiences of care in Surrey are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about local services.

This year, we've worked with VCSE organisations locally to achieve the following:

A collaborative network with VCSE partners



We lead the Voice Portfolio for the Surrey VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) Alliance, meeting regularly with other VCSE Voice organisations to share what we are hearing from the community. This has led to the development of a subgroup of 4 organisations to look specifically at people's experiences in relation to the Accessible Information Standard.

We also help to strengthen the relationship between the voluntary sector and our system partners and to deepen understanding between the two. We facilitated a presentation from our advocacy service to the Complaints Lead Network for example, meaning people needing support will be signposted more effectively.

Building strong relationships to achieve more



Our strong working relationships with local partners has strengthened some of our activity this year:

- We worked with Surrey Coalition of Disabled People to ensure the voices of disabled people were heard in relation to the wheelchair service and EMED (local providers of the NHS non-emergency patient transport service)
- We collaborated with Action for Carers Surrey and Surrey Coalition of Disabled People to challenge changes to CHC (Continuing Healthcare) funding.
- Surrey Choices highlighted our ['What do I need to know about GP practices'](#) leaflet during their Surrey wide Oliver McGowan training.

Sharing insights to add value



Our research into the hidden value of a diagnosis for neurodivergent people supported learning at the Surrey Youth Focus Community Practice day.

At the VCSE Alliance conference - 'Disability Inclusion and Accessibility in Surrey' - our research looking at hospital feedback and our video about the Accessible Information Standard helped to bring the pertinent issues to life for attendees.

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 **Surrey** 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.

We worked with one of our volunteers – who has a daughter who is neurodivergent – to create a [powerful video](#) highlighting the personal impact of the healthcare system not adhering to the Accessible Information Standard (AIS). The video has been shared at numerous system meetings and is being used by local hospitals as part of their staff training to help to increase compliance.

Getting services to involve the public



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

Following our recommendations (based on what people had told us via surveys and engagements events) some significant changes to the assessment criteria used by the Surrey Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment Steering group were made, ensuring that pharmacy provision was evaluated based on what really matters to people.

Improving care over time



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

Following our 2023 [report highlighting the importance of a formal neurodiversity diagnosis](#), we were made aware that diagnostic delays were causing concern and confusion for patients and carers. We shared this with providers and asked for assurance that people were being appropriately communicated with. As a direct result, a comprehensive communications plan was implemented – including regular updates to parents and all stakeholders and a webinar for schools – to reduce the distress and worry induced by such delays.

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.



Listening to your experiences

Shining a light on the self-funders' journey

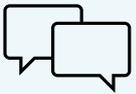
Last year our insights guided Surrey County Council (SCC) and Age UK's 'Planning for Your Future' campaign.

SCC approached Healthwatch Surrey to support them with gathering insight into the journey self-funders (people paying for their own care home accommodation) may take to arrive in a residential care home setting.

What did we do?

We visited care homes, community settings and Age UK Surrey 'Planning for your future care' events to speak to people about what information and advice sources they would turn to at various stages of their journey. These in person interviews were supported with an online questionnaire. In a follow up survey we engaged specifically with current self-funders and their friends and family, with a desire to understand more about their journey to living in a care home. We spoke to almost 200 people in total and shared our findings and a series of recommendations with SCC.

Key things we heard:



Future care planning is a subject that many people don't want to talk about; they are happy to 'leave it to their children.'

Many people have very limited knowledge of the basics - people don't know that they might have to pay for social care, and many that do still haven't made plans. Very few people have a good understanding of the financial mechanisms that are available to help them pay for their care.

When people do then have to make arrangements for social care it is often in a crisis situation.

Less than a quarter (23%) of carers feel extremely/very confident about making decisions about their own/their family member's future care in a care home.

What difference did this make?

Our findings and recommendations have helped to guide SCC's Planning for Your Future awareness campaign strategy, including materials to share with care homes. They have also facilitated SCC working closely with local care homes to ensure they themselves provide the information people and families have told us need before making a decision for long term care in a residential or nursing home.

Listening to your experiences

Improving the outpatient experience for our neurodivergent population

In March 2024 we spoke to almost 100 people in 6 Surrey Hospitals to understand the barriers and enablers to patients giving feedback about their care. Following this work, we wanted to explore how people who are neurodiverse experience outpatient care in Surrey hospitals.

We sought to highlight the experiences of neurodivergent people before, during and after their outpatient appointment for medical conditions, and to highlight what would help to improve this experience. Working closely with one of our volunteers with lived experience – a parent of a neurodivergent child – we developed an online survey which was completed by 70 Surrey residents.

Key things we heard:



Crowded, noisy, confined, small spaces, and bright lights are triggers which cause increased anxiety.

Appointment letters can be unclear and lack detail.

Individual needs are not being met when it comes to communication options.

Our findings, and a series of recommendations, were shared with all hospital trusts across Surrey.

“We acknowledge to date that the experience for our patients and carers needs work and focus, and the lived experience in this report truly helps develop this work. We have used this report to develop our commitments in response to the experiences highlighted.” Royal Surrey County Hospital.

What difference did this make?

Based on our report, providers made a number of significant changes to improve the experience of neurodivergent patients. These included the appropriate placement of designated areas for those with additional needs, a review of appointment letters by the Learning from Patient Experience panel to ensure that they meet the needs of neurodiverse patients and website updates to ensure accessibility.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Surrey. 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 in a number of ways, including:

- Visiting a men's mental health peer support group to gather experiences which men may not have felt comfortable sharing in another forum.
- Visiting a Safe Haven to speak to service users, staff and volunteers, and facilitating an information sharing session between Safe Haven and i-access staff, so that both could more appropriately signpost and direct to the other vital service.
- Other places we've been include a hospice, community fridges, an event for the Hong Kong community, hospital discharge lounges and emergency departments, learning disability support groups, a breast cancer support group and over-50s fitness classes at leisure centres.



Hearing from all communities

Helping to ensure that carers are recognised and well supported

We meet with the Primary Care Digital team at Surrey Heartlands ICB regularly, to ensure the patient perspective is considered in the design and development of GP practice websites.

As part of this work – and in collaboration with our Giving Carers a Voice colleagues – we noted that the carers registration form on GP websites was no longer available. We also noted that the section on unpaid carers didn't include a definition of a carer or call for a carer to register to access the benefits this enables. We requested action from Surrey Heartlands to rectify this.

What difference did this make?

Thanks to our input the carers registration form – a vital mechanism for helping to ensure that unpaid carers are appropriately recognised and receive the support they need – is now available once again.

Engaging with young people across Surrey

We know that young people are less likely to have a voice in decision making about healthcare, so this quarter we decided to go to them!

In September, to coincide with the new academic year, we visited 4 Freshers Fairs across Surrey and spoke to 670 students, many of whom expressed an interest in becoming student volunteers.

What difference did this make?

We empowered our young volunteers by equipping them with the tools to speak to their peers about the subjects that matter to them, and to feed back their findings.

Chatting to the young people also gave us valuable insights into what matters to them, which in turn will inform what we share with service providers, as well as guiding our strategic priorities.

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 over **400** people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up to date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services.



Improving pharmacy access for those with a hearing impairment

Tim, who has a hearing impairment, emailed our Helpdesk following a distressing experience at his local pharmacy.

One member of staff told Tim they didn't have a hearing loop, despite a sign to the contrary, and one claimed to not even know what one was.

We contacted the CEO of Community Pharmacy Surrey and Sussex who was able to speak to the pharmacy directly. Tim was then provided with clear information on the availability and location of the hearing loop, so he felt confident returning to the store to collect his medication. Information on the hearing loop was also made more visible and the store team were reminded how to use it and how to guide customers appropriately, ensuring other people wouldn't have the same experience as Tim.

Ensuring equity of GP access for all

Thanks to feedback from one resident, training was provided to GP practice staff on how all patients who are less digitally able must be supported to ensure they can obtain an appointment how and when they need it.

Albert contacted the Helpdesk having been turned away from booking an appointment in person and told to use the online form, something he struggled with.

Our Helpdesk advisor contacted the Head of Primary Care Commissioning and Development at Surrey Heartlands ICB who reached out to the practice directly. As a result, Albert had a phone call from a GP at the practice, reassuring him and helping him to book an appointment. Training was also provided to staff on how all patients who are less digitally able must be supported to ensure they can obtain an appointment how and when they need it, meaning that patients will be better supported to access the care they need.

Helpdesk user feedback

"Many thanks for your help. You are amazing... You took the time to hear me out, many people haven't."

"You have been fantastic; I don't feel as alone in this process now I have spoken to you."

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.

"I volunteer regularly for Healthwatch Surrey at The Hive in Guildford and at the Age UK Surrey Planning for your Future events. At these events I raise awareness of Healthwatch and talk to people about their experiences of health and social care. I also encourage people to have their voices heard by completing our surveys.

I find volunteering with Healthwatch very rewarding as I am helping people to have a voice. I feel like I am helping the community." **Shaun**



The Healthwatch Surrey Reading Panel: a vital sounding board for our system partners

Our Reading Panel scrutinise reports, strategies and other documents and suggest changes and improvements to ensure clarity and accessibility.

Amongst other external projects, this year they have played a vital role in the refresh of our information and signposting materials, providing invaluable feedback on our suggested changes. And when Surrey Heartlands called on us as they began transforming their hard copy booklet for caring professionals – Stop Look Care – into a digital resource, our Reading Panel sprang in to action, reviewing copy and suggesting changes which were implemented to ensure it was clear and understandable to a lay audience.

This year our volunteers have also conducted 5 PLACE assessments. Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) involve local people going into hospitals as part of teams to assess how the environment supports the provision of clinical care. The assessments take place every year, and results are published to help drive improvements in the care environment.

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.healthwatchesurrey.co.uk



0303 303 0023



07592 787533 (text and WhatsApp)



enquiries@healthwatchesurrey.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

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

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Local Healthwatch Contract	£488,210	Staffing costs	£373,541
Additional income from Surrey County Council including Independent Health Complaints Advocacy contract	£97,275	CIC costs	£13,011
		Operational costs	£198,705
Total income	£585,485	Total Expenditure	£585,257

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 also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from people to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Champion the involvement of people in all service design and delivery, including in the implementation of the NHS 10 year plan.
2. Connect communities by investing in relationships and community cash fund, as well as targeted engagement focused on seldom heard voices.
3. Obtain evidence of change through research projects and thematic reports to help address health inequalities.

Statutory statements

The Healthwatch Surrey service is run by Luminus Insight CIC.

Registered office: GF21, Astolat, Coniers Way, Burpham, Surrey, GU4 7HL.

Healthwatch Surrey 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 CIC Board consists of 7 Non-Executive Directors who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities. They are supported by a Local Healthwatch Advisory Group which brings some of our Healthwatch volunteers together to advise on Healthwatch priorities and duties. This group helps us ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities, and together with the Board, ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2024/25, the Local Healthwatch Advisory Group met monthly, and the CIC Board met in Public 4 times and made decisions on matters such as our annual workplan and policy updates.

Information from the public has shaped our priorities in various ways. For example, insights provided to our Helpdesk advisors around GP practices helped to guide the bespoke support provided to 2 separate practices. System insights also help to shape our priorities – our community engagement for example is aligned with the strategic issues for which the Public Health team and Adult Social Care team have requested our support.

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

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure 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 we see people face to face out and about at various locations in the community.

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, highlight it on our social media, send to key organisations and to our Insight bulletin subscribers.

Statutory statements

Taking people's experiences to decision makers

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

In our local authority area for example, we share information with the Adult and Health Select Committee, Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board and Surrey County Council Adult Social Care Partner Update meeting.

We also take insight and experiences to decision makers in Surrey Heartlands and Frimley Health. For example, we attend the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Board/Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), Prevention and Wider Determinants of Health Board, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Oversight Group and we contribute to the System Quality Groups across both Surrey Heartlands and Frimley Health. This is in addition to regular meetings with commissioners for primary care and a number of patient experience and involvement forums.

We also hold regular "what we're hearing" meetings with Public Health, and Adult Social Care.

In addition, we share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Surrey is represented on Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Board by Kate Scribbins, our Luminus Chief Executive. During 2024/25 she has effectively carried out this role by consistently advocating for greater involvement of people in the design of services and raising when services do not appear to be meeting needs (e.g. highlighting the impact of pharmacy closures, which has contributed to the reopening of the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment).

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
A&E, St Peter's Hospital	Surrey Heartlands ICB and NHSE raised concerns around Friends and Family Test results relating to A&E and CQC inspections identified significant areas for improvement in maternity and stroke services.	Report with recommendations developed – the hospital has committed to implementing changes to address the issues identified.
Jasmine House (short stay facility for adults with learning disabilities, autism, and complex health needs)	Enter and View requested by the learning disability management team at Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SABP).	Report with recommendations published.
Ashmount (residential care home for adults with learning disabilities and autism)	Enter and View requested by the learning disability management team at Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SABP).	Report with recommendations developed – awaiting feedback from provider.

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Self-funders project	Findings and recommendations guided Surrey County Council's Planning for Your Future awareness campaign.
Neurodiversity report	Providers made a number of significant changes to improve the experience of neurodivergent patients.
GP leaflet	Residents supported in understanding GP practices.
Aldershot Urgent Care	Insight used to inform the future of the pilot site.
Pharmacy	Significant changes to the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment criteria secured.

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