



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent

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"The impact that local Healthwatch have is vitally important. Healthwatch are empowering their communities to share their experiences. They're changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people's views are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our Chair

I continue to be honoured to be able to hold the role of Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent Chair with this being my twelfth year in this vital position. Our local Healthwatch is here to listen to your health and care stories and share these with the people who plan, buy and provide these services, using your truths to seek improvements to care and services you need.

With the NHS and Adult Social Care continuing to experience a challenging funding landscape, the work of Healthwatch continues to be vital in making sure that patient voice and experience are heard. It's essential that Healthwatch continues to reach out to people to hear their stories and truths so that we may take them to people who have to listen to us and hear how their services or lack of them impacts on you.

It is impossible to detail all our work in this report, so only the highlights are included. If you wish to discuss any aspects of our work, then please do contact our staff team. If our work inspires you, why not volunteer with us, please get in touch for more details. Finally, thank you to all our Healthwatch staff members and volunteers plus all who have supported and contributed to the work of Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent. I look forward to working with you in the future in these challenging times.



"I'm proud that Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent continues to work tirelessly to ensure that we address the concerns of local people. Of course, our aim isn't just to "catch people doing it wrong" and so we have also endeavoured to compliment when we hear stories of good practise and excellent customer service."

Lloyd Cooke, Chair of the Independent Strategic Advisory Board, Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent

About us

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent 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 2586 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 2 staff and our work is supported by 10 volunteers.

Reaching out:



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

5,575 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as [managing blood test appointments online](#) and [help with making a complaint](#).

Championing your voice:



We published 8 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like pharmacies, GPs, and perinatal mental health services.

Our most popular report was the [Perinatal Mental Health report](#) highlighting parent's struggles with receiving mental health support during the perinatal period.

Statutory funding:



We're funded by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. In 2024/25 we received £90,904, which is 0.77% less than 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 Stoke-on-Trent. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

In addition to our Enter & View programme, we are working alongside Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT) on their Quality Standards Assurance Visits, offering an independent patient perspective.



We encouraged users of Brighter Futures services, such as Safe Spaces and the Clubhouse Network, to share what the impact of the loss of these services was to the commissioners.



Summer

In response to last year's '[Who Cares for the Carers?](#)' report, we piloted a digital carers forum. The forum was held online on various days and times to ensure all carers had the opportunity to have their say.



We launched our Citizen's Involvement Charter to recognise and celebrate local organisations that have been silent supporters, helping to share surveys and gather people's health and social care stories.



Autumn

As part of the Adult Social Care Health Integration and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, we championed people's stories and made recommendations for the review of wheelchair and orthotic services.



We sought to find out what people's experiences and understanding was of the new Pharmacy First scheme. We also raised awareness to those who were unfamiliar.



Winter

We elevated the voices of people who were on low incomes and people who are parents/guardians to children under 18 on access to GPs, as part of a Healthwatch England project.



We have joined the Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Community Lounge's, offering access to speak to our team face-to-face in venues across the City.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Stoke-on-Trent are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS.

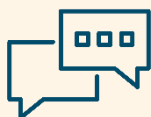
This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire to achieve the following:

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



With the geographic nature of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, it is often that services are being utilised across the boundaries to where patients reside. So, we have worked jointly with Healthwatch Staffordshire on Enter & View visits to The Royal Stoke University Hospital and Keele Practice and will continue to do so in future Enter & View visits.

The big conversation:



Over the last year, University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust (UHNM) has had several declarations of critical incidents which were raised to the Adult Social Care Health Integration and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee along with a need to encourage joint working between services and Trusts. As a member of the committee, we shared intelligence received within 12 months that highlighted some of the challenges that patients and members of the public faced.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



In June, we launched our Citizen's Involvement Charter to reinforce our connections within the community and to better recognise the impacts they have on our work through more difficult-to-track ways such as promoting our survey's. We look forward to continuing to collaborate to make care better.

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 Stoke-on-Trent 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.

Stoke-on-Trent residents kindly shared their stories and allowed us to highlight their individual experiences of using local health and social care services via a case study.

Together with people like Michael* and Chloe*, we have covered issues such as [prescription problems](#) and [signposting in circles](#).

Getting services to involve the public



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

Following the concerns around local wheelchair services, we worked with the Adult Social Care Health Integration and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, noting people were only able to share their voice with Healthwatch, with no formal system in place for the provider, commissioner and public to see what impact people's voices had. The result was the creation of an AJM Healthcare Service User Forum to ensure every resident had the chance to share their opinions and receive regular improvement updates on the wheelchair service.

Improving care over time



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

In 2023, we ran a project to learn about the lived experience of local unpaid carers. Thanks to what people shared, we've been able to give valuable insight to the Stoke-on-Trent City Council and partners. As a result, our recommendations have been implemented into the new All-age Carers Strategy which is yet to be released.

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, including Mothers Mind Staffordshire, Thrive at Five, Action Deafness, Goldenhar UK, The Angel at Austin's, Park Church, Family Hubs, DEAFvibe, Together Active, Community Lounges, and more.

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

Pharmacy First: the hidden healthcare resource

'Pharmacy First' was launched in January 2024 and enabled a range of minor ailments to be treated by local pharmacists rather than requiring a GP appointment.

The service aims to free up GPs to be able to treat those with more serious ailments and those with long-term health conditions.

What did we do?

Earlier this year, Engaging Communities Solutions (ECS), who deliver Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent and six other local Healthwatch, put out a survey to gather people's understanding of and experiences with services offered at local pharmacies with a focus on Pharmacy First and the impacts the new scheme was having on residents' access to care.

Key things we heard:



52%

of respondents were not at all aware of Pharmacy First.

21%

had accessed their local pharmacy for one or more of the Pharmacy First services.

80%

of those who had used Pharmacy First were self-referrals.

Our work showed how people from Stoke-on-Trent were largely unaware of Pharmacy First and although those who had used the service responded positively, there were concerns raised about the limitations and lack of knowledge of the services offered at local pharmacies.

What difference did this make?

Our findings have been raised and are contributing to the development of the next local Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA), which is due to be published later in the year.

Listening to your experiences

Mental health support for parents during the perinatal period

The perinatal period, from pregnancy to the first year after birth, is a time of significant change for both mothers and partners.

We heard from 171 mothers and partners about their experiences of traversing healthcare during the perinatal period with a focus on mental health support, through focus groups and surveys.

Key things we heard:



61%

reported that either themselves and/or their partner had experienced mental health issues during the perinatal period.

46%

of respondents said that either they and/or their partner had received mental health support. The most common place if support was from family.



"They did not acknowledge my mental health issues because they were not serious enough, I wasn't suicidal, even though I have a history of mental illness, and I was struggling with everyday tasks."

We have also undertaken some joint Enter & View visits with Healthwatch Staffordshire to the Royal Stoke University Hospital's Maternity Unit, hearing from services users at the time of using the service.

What difference did this make?

Since our first visit, the team at the Royal Stoke University Hospital have implemented or made plans to make changes based on our recommendations. However, parents will be engaging with many more services. Our latest report offers recommendations to be considered by services across the system to ensure people's healthcare throughout the perinatal period is more streamlined and consistent.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Stoke-on-Trent. 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:

- A social media campaign encouraging users of specialist wheelchair users to feedback their experiences to highlight local provision difficulties.
- Regularly attending Community Lounges across all areas of Stoke-on-Trent.
- Shared intelligence from last 12 months that highlighted some of the challenges that patients and members of the public faced accessing University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust.



Discharge to hospice and withdrawal of treatment

A family were concerned about their frail elderly parent/grandparent over a festive period in respect of the hospital plans to discharge.

A family were told it was in the best interests of their loved one, Jav*, to move to a hospice. They were told treatment would continue, the hospice said the plan was for no treatment only palliative care. The family were distraught. We gave information on their rights and advice on complaints, how to seek advocacy support, using PALS as an immediate backstop to be sure the Ward Manager, Doctors and divisional managers were clear on the frail persons wishes and that of the family.

What difference did this make?

Given the festive period we made direct contact with Director of Nursing, shared details and sought assurances family would be listened to. Jav stayed in hospital, treatment was resumed, after several weeks Jav was discharged home with the family pursuing complaints with the hospital.

Signposting support during lengthy CAMHS assessment process

Towards the end of the year there was an increase of parents sharing their experience with CAMHS, Autism and ADHD assessments.

Some parents shared how their children had already been through a lengthy wait and process before they were added to the CAMHS assessment waiting list which was advised to be years long.

What difference did this make?

We worked with the Stoke-on-Trent City Council SEND Local Offer team to identify available services that could offer support while they wait. We are also, because of parents sharing their experiences, looking into CAMHS assessments for autism and ADHD as one of our annual priorities in 2025/26.

* Jav – name anonymised

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 5,575 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



Pursuing options outside of standard process timelines

Summary of case.

George* contacted us after years of trying to address concerns of mis-diagnosis and lengthy investigations that didn't answer their queries and concerns despite many requests. George had patiently followed all the standard steps, going through PALS, making a formal complaint but never getting to the real issues in their opinion. Time moved on and George found themselves out of time to seek redress through the courts or to the Ombudsman. We provided George with clear information on their rights, signposting them to the relevant published guidelines on complaints on what their rights were, plus to organisations like Citizens Advice and local law centres.

*George - name anonymised



"...the information you've given me is blowing my mind and giving me the confidence to forge ahead."

Seeking support following sudden closure of mental health services

Local people were left feeling confused and in limbo following the unexpected closure of some mental health support services.

Service users rallied to inform us of the sudden notice that they received instructing them of these services closures, stressing the importance and value the services have had in people's lives.

As the closure was unforeseen and unclear, we raised it to the Health and Wellbeing Board as an urgent matter, requesting that more notice is given upon the renewal or expiry of a contract and that provisions are put in place for alternative services so that those who need it are not left without support.



"The knock-on effects of this decision on other services and on our wellbeing has not been considered to the fullest extent as far as we are concerned."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given us 85 hours of their time 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:

- Visited communities and attended local events to promote our work
- Gathered public data to provide oversight and supporting information of services for future project work
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve



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 has not only helped me enhance my CV and develop transferable skills, but it has also given me the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the local community. I'm passionate about amplifying the voices of patients and service users to ensure that services are responsive, inclusive, and effective.

Through this role, I've been able to engage directly with the public, participate in Enter and View visits, support community events, and assist with admin.

This experience has deepened my understanding of health systems while allowing me to play an active role in shaping the future of care."



Mark

"Volunteering at a strategic level as a member of the Independent Strategic Advisory Board (ISAB) has been a deeply fulfilling extension of my professional and civic commitments. The ISAB role, to me, is not merely advisory—it is a platform for shaping the direction of public health and social care services through evidence-informed insights, community intelligence, and ethical scrutiny. We ensure that the voices of local people are not only heard but meaningfully integrated into service design and delivery.

Volunteering, in this context, is a conscious act of service—an opportunity to give back with purpose, to influence systems for equity, and to mentor through example.

Through this role, I continue to learn, contribute, and advocate for a NHS, and health and care system that is inclusive, responsive, and just."



Bamidele

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.healthwatchstokeontrent.co.uk



0300 130247



info@healthwatchstoke.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Stoke-on-Trent City Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

| Income | | Expenditure | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Annual grant from Stoke City Council | £90,904 | Expenditure on pay | £75,613 |
| Additional income | £1,959 | Non-pay expenditure | £11,112 |
| | | Office and management fee | £10,647 |
| Total income | £92,863 | Total Expenditure | £97,372 |

Additional income is broken down into:

- £292.33 received from Healthwatch England Bursary for Conference
- £1,666.67 received from Healthwatch England for GP Choice project

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 patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

- 1. CAMHS' Autism and ADHD Assessments –**
Understanding the barriers that parents and their children face when seeking an assessment for autism and/or ADHD via CAMHS to determine if there are any actions that can help to remove these barriers.
- 2. Adults Mental Health Services –**
Gain a better understanding of the access issues people are facing across the different levels of Mental Health Services and how access can be made easier.
- 3. Adults Autism and ADHD Support Services –**
Working with adults who are diagnosed with or are awaiting assessment for Autism and/or ADHD to understand what services currently exist, how users feel about those services, and what services they feel are missing that could offer the support needed.

Statutory statements

Engaging Communities Solutions CIC (ECS), Meeting Point House, Southwater Square, Telford TF3 4HS, hold the Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent contract.

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the Healthwatch England licence agreement.

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Independent Strategic Advisory Board consists of 6 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 4 times and made decisions on matters such as which projects to adopt for the annual work programme and approving reports plus the recommendations contained within them. 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 and across all social media pages.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had 0 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 the Adult Social Care Health Integration and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Stoke-on-Trent Health and Wellbeing Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care System. For example, we attend the SSoT ICB System Quality Group, SSoT ICB Strategic Transformation Group Meeting, SSoT ICB Local Maternity and Neonatal System Partnership Board, and SSoT ICB Palliative and End of Life Programme Board.

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

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is represented on the Stoke-on-Trent Health and Wellbeing Board by Simon Fogell, Chief Executive.

During 2024/25, our representative has effectively carried out this role by regular attendance and contributing to the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the City.

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is represented on the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Partnerships and the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Boards (SSoT ICB) by Simon Fogell, Chief Executive.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

| Location | Reason for visit | What you did as a result |
|--|--|--|
| Haywood Hospital Walk-in Centre | A joint visit with service provider Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT), as part of their Quality Assurance Visits (QSAV). | Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these with immediate resolution where possible and plans for improvement with the outstanding recommendations. |
| Middleport Medical Practice | Based on positive intelligence from patients and members of the public about Middleport. | Made recommendations to improve signage for the Loop system, provide water for waiting patients, raise profile of PPG and foster confidence of staff through training. The practice were happy with the report and recommendations. |
| The Royal Stoke University Hospital – Maternity Unit | Our visit to the Maternity Unit was a follow-up of a joint visit that took place in late 2023 alongside Healthwatch Staffordshire. We were invited by UHNM to return to see any progress made. | Identified changes that had been made in response to previous recommendations such as; adding more inclusive and accessible posters, implementing ways to inform patients of each process particularly in the MAU, and introducing a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion post. |
| Keele Practice | Local residents shared exceptionally positive feedback leading to a joint visit with Healthwatch Staffordshire. | Raised patient's dissatisfaction with current digital appointments system. The practice agreed to better inform people they could still book through the surgery by phone or in-person and support those willing to try digital. |

Statutory statements

Enter and view

| Location | Reason for visit | What you did as a result |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Orchard Surgery | Based on intelligence from patients and members of the public about Orchard Surgery. | Agreed to look at the recommendations especially about a consistent approach to the Extended Hours Appointments service run by the PCN. |
| Glebedale Medical Practice | We visited Glebedale Medical Practice following receiving feedback on the service from patients. | Wrote a report and recommendations which the service stated they would happily take on board, including developing their feedback board to include outcomes, and to ensure that a PPG is clearly established and utilised effectively. |

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

| Project/activity | Outcomes achieved |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Perinatal Mental Health | There is ongoing work with local service providers to champion the voices and encourage implementation of the recommendations in our report. |
| Pharmacy First | Identified a need for improved awareness around services available through local pharmacies. |
| Digital Carers Forum | Offered ways for carers to be involved at times that suit their needs. |
| Citizen's Involvement Charter | We partnered with a number of local organisations through our charter to strengthen community engagement and improve recognition to the support these organisations. |



ECS

Engaging Communities Solutions CSR highlights

Engaging Communities Solutions CIC are the providers of seven local Healthwatch and an Advocacy provider. We are committed to developing our corporate social responsibility and this is a round up of our highlights for the year 2024/25

Our employees



Across our organisation we have **21** full time employees. As we have a commitment to flexible working to support our employees with their lives outside of work we also have **10** employees who work less than the standard number of hours per week.

50% of our senior management are female and **78%** of our middle managers are female.

All our staff have access to an **employee assistance** scheme that provides mental wellbeing support.

We are a **real living wage** employer.

Our community



Our employees were supported to give **27.5 hours** of volunteering time to their communities this year with paid time off to volunteer.

We provided the equivalent of **24 weeks** of meaningful work placements for school, college and university students.

Our staff raised **£304.50** for charities last year.

We supported **89** volunteers last year who gave **1163** hours of their time to our work.

Our supply chain



During the last 12 months we have spent **£25,853** with other VCSE organisations.

The environment



We have saved **4,914** car miles by using public transport this year.



Committed to quality

We are committed to the quality of our information. Every three years we perform an in depth audit so that we can be certain of this.

healthwatch

Stoke on Trent

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