

Healthwatch Southwark



Priorities Report 2025-26

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Executive Summary

Healthwatch Southwark champions the voices of local people to ensure health and social care services meet the needs of our diverse communities—especially those who are most vulnerable. Each local Healthwatch operates differently depending on its size, structure, board experience, and local environment. This means we must carefully prioritise our work to focus on the issues that matter most to the people we serve.

This report highlights the key health and social care issues affecting Southwark residents, drawing on a wide range of sources including community feedback, surveys, local data, and national and regional priorities. It explains how we've used these insights to shape our work for 2024-26.

Our three main priorities for 2025-26 are:

- Temporary accommodation and health - exploring how housing conditions and instability affect people's health and access to care.
- Children and young people's mental health and social care experiences - focusing on early support, transitions to adult services, and the impact of social care.
- Southwark Resource Centre (Disabilities Hub) - using our statutory powers to review services supporting vulnerable residents.

These priorities reflect the most pressing concerns raised by local people and align with wider strategies across Southwark and South East London. We will continue to work with communities, service providers, and decision-makers to improve access, quality, and outcomes in health and care.

We will monitor progress through regular reporting, community engagement, and formal reviews, ensuring our work remains transparent, accountable, and impactful.

Background

Who We Are

Healthwatch started in April 2013 and is the independent consumer champion created to gather and represent the views of the public nationally, through Healthwatch England, and locally in the London Borough of Southwark. Healthwatch Southwark is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country.

Healthwatch Southwark is your local health and social care champion. We are independent and have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

What We Do

Healthwatch Southwark listens to residents' concerns about local health and social care services. They use this feedback to improve services, aiming to give people a voice and influence how services are designed and delivered in Southwark.

Our role is to:

- Listen to the needs and experiences of residents and communities.
- Learn from the experiences of local people and influence the professionals who plan, buy and deliver services. To help us do this we sit on many NHS and Southwark Council boards and committees.
- Report concerns to service providers and make recommendations for services to find solutions.
- Visit health and social care services to understand service user experience and Provide information about local health and care services and signpost to support.
- Work with organisations that scrutinise and inspect local services such as the Care Quality Commission.
- Provide Healthwatch England with the insight it needs to enable it to perform effectively.

Introduction

Our Aims

Our priority setting is essential to help us identify and address health inequalities in Southwark. Through a structured process, we can focus our efforts where they will have the greatest impact, strengthening trust and collaboration between communities, service providers, and decision-makers.

Local insights inform our community-led research and help us exercise our [core functions](#), where we can drive meaningful change through our projects. We aim to:

- Identify current and emerging needs of our residents.
- Empower residents to actively participate in shaping health and social care services.
- Ensure services are co-creating high-quality, accessible, and inclusive services that are meeting the diverse needs of Southwark's communities.
- Promote prevention and early detection for better long-term health and outcomes.
- Influence policy and service improvements with community insights with key stakeholders.
- Strengthen relationships between residents and service providers

Our 2022-23 Priorities

Due to capacity limits and unforeseen challenges, we did not complete all projects that were previously set to end in 2023 which led to projects being extended into 2024. We focused our efforts on key initiatives with the greatest potential for community impact, refining how we hold services accountable to the recommendations from our research, and strengthening relationships to increase our presence in Southwark. Reviewing our internal processes helped us produce more robust project work, boosting our ability to influence change.

[Priorities for 2022-23](#) included:

1. Health Inequalities: split into two main areas of focus

- Mental health within Black African and Caribbean communities - This [research](#) explored the persistent inequalities faced by Black African and Caribbean residents in accessing mental health services. It highlighted barriers such as stigma, cultural insensitivity, and lack of trust in services. The report called for more culturally appropriate care, better representation in service design, and stronger community engagement to improve outcomes and rebuild trust in mental health support.
- Accessibility of health information for Latin American communities - This [project](#) researched how Latin American residents in Southwark access health and social care information. It found that language barriers, digital exclusion, and lack of translated materials continued to hinder access. We completed a [one year](#) update, which acknowledged improvements in outreach but stressed the need for sustained efforts to ensure equitable access to information and services.

2. Access to health and social care services for people with learning disabilities and Autistic adults: This [project](#) examined the experiences of adults with learning disabilities and autistic adults in navigating health and social care services. It revealed significant challenges including poor communication, lack of reasonable adjustments, and limited understanding among professionals. The report recommended co-produced training, clearer pathways, and more inclusive service design to address these disparities.

Our 2023-26 Strategy

In 2023, we updated our [strategy](#), which aims to empower local people to influence health and social care services to build a more inclusive, responsive, and accountable landscape in Southwark, particularly for those experiencing barriers to services from historically underrepresented groups.

Tackling these issues will require statutory partners and residents to work together to achieve progress. We will continue to work with local communities to further develop how we embed community voices into our work.

What Has Informed Our Priorities

To prepare for this future work, we planned a [listening tour](#) in Summer 2024 to ensure alignment with Southwark residents' concerns and other work in the borough. A variety of insights, data sources and additional factors are used to shape Healthwatch Southwark's priorities.

Survey: We conducted a survey asking service providers, residents and service users questions to determine what they think we should be prioritising. This included an opportunity to give feedback on recent experiences of health and social care services. See Appendix A for full survey.

Community Health Ambassadors (CHA): each quarter we ask our CHAs to provide insights into recurring issues highlighted by their communities, so that we can provide relevant information and support to address these needs.

Signposting and feedback intelligence: We analysed our signposting and feedback data from 1 April 2022 - 31 March 2024 to identify trends. This is reported in our quarterly and annual [reports](#).

Secondary data/ information: We compare our insights against other local, regional, and national priority information compiled by the Council, Integrated Care System (ICS), NHS, as well as research organisations, Voluntary and Community sector (VCS) stakeholders, interest groups etc.

Context: The impact of COVID-19 continues to shape yearly health priorities. While concerns such as access to GP appointments have been addressed through various initiatives, they remain a recurring theme in our feedback, indicating a need for sustained focus. Reflecting on past efforts helps track progress and maintain attention on persistent issues. In recent years, the cost of living crisis—driven by rising inflation and economic instability—has significantly influenced the health and wellbeing of residents. This context has brought to light an increasing demand for financial assistance and support services, particularly among vulnerable groups.

Potential for impact: We focus on areas where our actions can create the greatest benefit for the community. By prioritising strategically, aligning with community needs, and building on existing work, we aim to deliver meaningful and sustainable improvement.

Timeline for improvements: Service providers need time to implement recommendations before changes are visible to patients. We actively follow up on projects to monitor progress and ensure improvements are on track.

Capacity to carry out the work: It is crucial for us to manage our workload by not taking on too many new priority projects at once and ensuring we allocate sufficient time to complete each

initiative effectively and for services to implement appropriate changes that efficiently support residents and patients.

The Bigger Picture of Health and Social care

Partners across the health and care system must ensure the concerns and priorities raised by residents are addressed through development of local services and plans. Partners need to work together and with communities, to address the extent of inequalities that exist in health care and health outcomes.

National Priorities

- Independent Investigation of the NHS in England - Lord Darzi report themes

Lord Darzi's [review](#) of the NHS highlights serious and systemic issues across health and care services, including long waiting times, declining quality in areas like cancer and cardiovascular care, overstretched GP and A&E services, and a growing disconnect between NHS spending priorities and community needs. These findings speak directly to Healthwatch Southwark's strategic mission.

Darzi's call to "*re-empower patients*", "*lock in care closer to home*", and "*simplify and innovate at neighbourhood level*" is well aligned with our strategic goals and contributes directly to these ambitions by:

- Highlighting barriers to accessing care, such as difficulties getting GP appointments or long waits for mental health support.
- Raising awareness of unmet needs in seldom-heard groups, and working with partners to close these gaps.
- Supporting more equitable service delivery, by making the case for greater investment in community and preventative services.
- Promoting transparency and accountability, ensuring services act on feedback and commit to continuous improvement.

As the Government has released a new 10-year plan for NHS reform, Healthwatch Southwark will continue to independently represent the voice of our borough at ICB place/neighbourhood level.

- Change of government

The Labour party's winning [manifesto](#) indicated one of its missions was to build an NHS fit for the future. Introduction of the '[Change NHS](#)' consultation categorised changes into three specific shifts:

- Shift 1: moving more care from hospitals to communities
- Shift 2: making better use of technology in health and care
- Shift 3: focussing on preventing sickness, not just treating it

The [Labour party](#) missions could potentially address other issues that impact people's health, known as the wider determinants of health, which include social, economic, and environmental factors such as income, education and employment, quality of housing, working conditions, equitable access to healthcare, education, safe housing, and nutritious food to name a few.

Our [organisational response](#) uses data from our signposting and feedback, project insights, our listening tour and connections to our host organisation to provide a locally focused response to the proposed NHS changes, highlighting how many of these factors impact on people's health.

- **Healthwatch England**

Healthwatch England outlines the following [future focus](#) within these priority areas

- People's experience of GPs, dentists and other primary care services because it is the number one thing people talk
- Social care because it is a significant area of care people say
- Women's health because women wait longer for care and have poorer experiences needs fixing

Regional Priorities

- **South East London Integrated Care System (SELICS) Strategic priorities**

The South East London Integrated Care System (SEL ICS) Joint Forward Plan (JFP) outlines a comprehensive approach to improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities through a series of targeted care pathway programmes addressing [five key areas](#) of need as outlined in the graphic below:

Our priorities				
Prevention and wellbeing 	Early years 	Children's and young people's mental health 	Adults' mental health 	Primary care and people with long-term conditions 
Improving prevention of ill health and helping people in South East London to stay healthy and well.	Making sure that children get a good start in life and there is effective support for mothers, babies and families before birth and in the early years of life.	Improving children's and young people's mental health, making sure they have quick access to effective support for common mental health challenges.	Making sure adults have quick access to early support, to prevent mental health challenges from worsening.	Making sure people have convenient access to high-quality primary care, and improving support and care for people with long-term conditions.

These programmes are designed to address specific health needs across the population, aligning with Healthwatch Southwark's 2023-26 strategy

Key Care Pathway Programmes:

1. **Urgent and Emergency Care:** Aims to enhance the responsiveness and coordination of services to reduce waiting times and improve patient outcomes during emergencies.
2. **Mental Health:** Focuses on expanding access to mental health services, integrating care across providers, and addressing disparities in mental health outcomes.
3. **Children and Young People:** Targets early intervention and support for physical and mental health needs, ensuring services are accessible and tailored to younger populations.
4. **Learning Disability and Autism:** Seeks to improve diagnosis, support, and care pathways for individuals with learning disabilities and autism, promoting inclusivity and person-centered care.
5. **Planned Care:** Works to reduce elective care backlogs and streamline referral processes, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of planned medical procedures.
6. **Maternity:** Aims to provide equitable and high-quality maternity services, addressing disparities in maternal and neonatal outcomes.
7. **Cancer Care:** Focuses on improving early detection, diagnosis, and treatment pathways to enhance survival rates and patient experiences.
8. **Long-Term Conditions:** Addresses the management and prevention of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions, emphasizing integrated care approaches.
9. **Primary Care:** Enhances access to general practice services, supports workforce development, and integrates primary care with other health services.
10. **Palliative and End-of-Life Care:** Strives to provide compassionate and coordinated care for individuals nearing the end of life, ensuring dignity and support for patients and families.

The [Joint Forward Plan](#) emphasises the importance of community engagement and co-production in designing and implementing these programmes, ensuring that services are responsive to the needs of diverse populations.

Healthwatch Southwark's role in this context is to facilitate the inclusion of resident voices, particularly from seldom-heard communities, in the development and evaluation of these care pathways.

- **South East London Anchor System Programme**

Themes gathered from the alliances [listening campaign](#) learnt from large anchor organisations such as the NHS, local government, universities, colleges and arts organisations that have a significant, and usually permanent, stake in their local area that the main issues affecting people's ability to thrive are housing, migration and race, work, wages and cost of living, mental health and social isolation, alongside concerns for appropriate provisions for children, young people, and parents.

[Pledges](#) brought forward from their Community Health Assembly committed to becoming a Living Wage system, improving access to fair employment—especially for underrepresented groups—and supporting English language learning to boost job opportunities and health. It also aims to open NHS and anchor institution spaces for use by local community and youth groups. Finally, the programme will work with partners and communities to develop solutions that tackle the health impacts of poor housing.

- **South East London Healthwatch priorities**

The South East London Healthwatch partnership, comprising six local Healthwatch organisations, represents patient and public voices in key Integrated Care System (ICS) and Integrated Care Board (ICB) meetings.

The priorities for South East London Healthwatch organisations, as outlined in the [quarterly insight reports](#), will focus on the following:

1. Barriers to Accessing Primary and Community Care

- a. Difficulty registering with GP practices without ID or proof of address, especially for homeless individuals (Greenwich).
- b. Long waiting times and occasional medicine shortages in pharmacies (Lewisham).
- c. Prioritisation of private dental patients over NHS patients, reducing access to NHS dental care (Lewisham).

2. Mental Health Inequalities

- a. Culturally appropriate support for Black African and Caribbean service users with Severe Mental Illness (Lambeth).
- b. Insights from the Black Mental Health Project (Southwark).
- c. Dual diagnosis challenges for homeless people (Lambeth).
- d. Wellbeing-focused projects including 360 feedback and mental health support (Lewisham).

3. Hospital Discharge and Aftercare

- a. Concerns around discharge processes and post-hospital support for residents (Bexley).

4. Equity in Access for Vulnerable Groups

- a. Young carers' experiences accessing health and care services (Bromley).
- b. Housebound residents with long-term conditions facing access challenges (Bromley).
- c. Evaluation of equity initiatives like the Anti-Racism for Health Equity Community of Practice (Greenwich).

5. Youth Health and Prevention

- a. Youth-led action to raise awareness and improve uptake of the HPV vaccine in partnership with the Cancer Alliance (Greenwich).

6. Community-Led Wellbeing Initiatives

- a. Collaboration with Be Well (South London Listens) and public health teams to support local mental wellbeing (Greenwich).

- Health Innovation Network (HIN) South London

The Health Innovation Network (HIN) focuses on fostering health and care innovation across South London, with [key priorities](#) including mental health, diabetes, cardiovascular health, and patient safety.

Health Innovation Network (HIN) has led significant projects, including the use of digital tools for diabetes prevention and management, tech-based mental health support, and improved patient safety in hospitals. These initiatives often integrate clinical research, community input, and new care models, with examples including streamlined cardiac care pathways and health promotion efforts.

Local Priorities

- Southwark Council - Southwark 2030 Strategy

The Southwark 2030 [strategy](#) focuses on six interconnected goals:

1. **Decent Homes for All** - Ensuring access to safe, affordable, and well-maintained housing by investing in social housing, supporting private renters, and tackling homelessness.
2. **A Good Start in Life** - Providing children and young people with the support they need to thrive, including improved health services, educational opportunities, and targeted assistance for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
3. **A Safer Southwark** - Addressing crime and antisocial behaviour, reducing violence, and building trust in local policing to ensure all residents feel safe in their communities.
4. **A Strong and Fair Economy** - Creating inclusive economic growth by supporting job creation, apprenticeships, and ensuring that all residents can benefit from Southwark's economic opportunities.
5. **Staying Well** - Promoting health and wellbeing by ensuring access to mental health support, reducing health inequalities, and supporting individuals with long-term conditions and disabilities.
6. **A Healthy Environment** - Enhancing green spaces, promoting sustainable transport, and improving energy efficiency to create a cleaner and more sustainable borough.

By aligning with these goals and principles, Healthwatch Southwark can contribute to the borough's vision by ensuring that health and social care services are responsive to the needs of all residents, particularly those from seldom-heard communities.

- **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and Annual Report**

Southwark Council's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) is designed to address the Joint Health and Wellbeing [Strategy](#) objectives and informs local health and wellbeing plans. The 2023 [annual report](#) provides a broad overview of health and wellbeing in Southwark, noting key findings:

- Residents often struggle to access services, such as GP appointments; due to demand, or because they feel excluded, unsure of where to go or unable to interact with services.
- Residents want to be able to access services in their neighbourhoods as much as possible.
- There is ongoing concern regarding rising cost of living, food poverty and affordable housing.
- Mental health and wellbeing for children, young people and adults is a priority
- There is a concern that vulnerable people continue to fall through gaps in support.

Therefore, based on these findings, Southwark Council's [progress report](#) sets out the following development areas:

- **A whole family approach to giving children the best start in life** - identify opportunities to strengthen how data on adverse childhood experiences is shared between services.
- **Healthy employment and good health for working age adults** - identify and utilise opportunities to use the apprenticeship levy in Partnership Southwark and voluntary and community sector roles

- **Early identification and support to stay well** - improve referrals to the ‘Hospital Buddies’ programme which provides support to older people before and after elective surgery.
- **Strong and connected communities** - promote cost of living support available to residents through other health professionals, such as pharmacists and dentists
- **Integration of health and social care** - Fully embedded multi-disciplinary teams (including primary care, secondary care, social care) within neighbourhood settings are expected by April 2025.

- Partnership Southwark’s Health and Care Plan Priorities

The purpose of Partnership Southwark is to identify opportunities to deliver better outcomes for Southwark residents through the South East London Integrated Care System (ICS). The delivery of Southwark-based [priorities](#) lies within the ‘Wells’ framework that span a person’s life course - Start well, Live well, Age Well & Care Well.

The Board refreshed its priorities under this framework as of September 2024, the new and merged workstreams are detailed as:

- Children and young people’s mental health
- Adult mental health
- Prevention and health inequalities
- Integrated frailty pathway
- Integrated neighbourhood teams

Other Southwark-Based Considerations

Cross cutting priorities and themes from Community Southwark’s R.E.A.C.H Alliance, [ClearView](#) Research, Kings Health Partners, [Centric](#), Impact on Urban Health, Kings Fund.

Addressing health inequalities

A shared priority across the data sources is tackling persistent health inequalities. Reports from [Impact on Urban Health](#) and the [King’s Fund](#) emphasise disparities impacting B.A.M.E. communities, barriers to accessing services, and systemic issues like racism and discrimination. These concerns have been echoed many by advocating for inclusive strategies, empowering community voices, and [reducing disparities](#) through holistic and equitable care.

Environmental and social determinants

Air pollution, housing, and economic pressures emerge as cross-cutting themes. Research has highlighted the disproportionate health impact of poor air quality, especially on children and the elderly. Housing instability and financial strain are flagged as significant stressors affecting mental and physical health, underscoring the need for interventions targeting social determinants of health.

Mental health and accessibility

Improving mental health services is a common thread, with reports calling for better access, flexibility, and inclusive engagement. Services have stressed the importance of tackling medical scepticism and enhancing GP services, particularly in underserved areas, while acknowledging the importance of integrating mental and physical health to deliver holistic care.

Community-driven solutions

All sources emphasise the role of community input in shaping health strategies. Services have focused on gathering resident insights, while prioritising the need for collaboration with local groups to amplify marginalised voices. Emphasising on equity and inclusion aligns closely with these approaches, reinforcing the importance of community-led health improvements.

Innovation and sustainability

Solutions such as innovation and sustainability are vital for long-term impact. Digital health solutions, population health initiatives, and sustainable funding models are highlighted as pathways to more effective, value-based care that meets the evolving needs of diverse populations.

Healthwatch Southwark Insights

Southwark Soundboard Listening Tour

For the Healthwatch Southwark [Listening Tour](#) 2024, we held six in-person events and an online survey, engaging with 133 people. We gathered information on 5 key questions, including general service feedback and diversity data:

1. What health care issues have impacted you in the last year?
2. What social care issues have impacted you in the last year?
3. What other factors have impacted your health in the last year?
4. What do you think we should focus our priorities on?
5. Why they you chosen those topics?

Feedback from the tour helped identify some themes as areas of concern:



When asked about the areas we should focus on, 116 individuals made 256 suggestions across 69 categories, some of which included:

- GP Access - booking an appointment/waiting for/access to face-to-face appointment, contact and communication with reception staff
- Community Needs - cultural needs, social isolation
- Failures in service - infrastructure, lack of follow-up care
- Adult mental health and wellbeing services - housing impact on mental health, accessing Mental Health Services
- Housing - suitability of housing to medical condition, housing security in temporary accommodation
- NHS dentist access - booking an appointment/Waiting for appointments, failure of service
- Hospital care - waiting times, quality of treatment
- Social prescribing and health support - wellbeing services, support services

88 individuals gave 104 reasons for why they chose these topics, such as how it affects them personally, social concerns, structural concerns, general wellbeing and issues seen in their local community to name a few.

‘Voice of the Forgotten’, a heartfelt poem crafted by a local volunteer, captures the voices and experiences of Southwark residents gathered during the tour. Drawing on community feedback, it reflects shared hopes, concerns, and the collective desire for more compassionate, accessible, and inclusive health and social care.

Voices of the Forgotten

In corridors where silence grows,
Vulnerable voices, unheard, untold.
Eyes cast down, seeking support,
Yet access and care are a distant thought.

For communities fragile, under strain,
Each facet of life bears heavy pain.
Unpaid carers, rough sleepers, migrants in flight,
Asylum seekers, searching for light.
Black Afro-Caribbean mothers, standing tall,
Caring for sons in a system that stalls.
Families with children in SEND's tight grip,
Struggling, yearning, but futures slip.

Blood pressure rising, anxiety swells,
Care workers racing, trapped in red-tape hell.
Permits lost, travel time in vain,
Lives delayed in a system's strain.
Mental health hangs by a thread,
While older hearts seek light instead.

Peckham's children dream of more,
Theatre halls echo with wellness in store.
Support for young minds, growing bold,
But in this system, care is cold.
Lack of information clouds the way,
For services, health, where to stay.

Financial aid for youth in despair,
Job loss looms, but who will care?
Retirees, too, seek a space,
A hub for connection, a needed place.

In the shadows of care, under-staffed walls,
Ethnic divides echo, bureaucracy calls.

Rough sleepers shiver, left outside,
While unpaid carers quietly cry.

Yet, gratitude shines through weary eyes,
For those who lift and empathize.
Appleby Blue, a beacon bright,
Support workers easing the fight.
Silverlock's follow-ups, a kind embrace,
Their check-ins bring a steady grace.

King's Hospital, with healing hands,
Shingles treated, with care that stands.
Honour Oak, though time takes its toll,
Their top-notch service enriches the soul.
Good hospital transport, a helping hand,
In tough moments, they understand.

Appointments made, cardiology care,
In every step, satisfaction is there.
Gratitude flows from hearts once torn,
For those who help, who care, who warm.

The costs for the disabled rise,
Diabetes, menopause in disguise.
Cancer awareness, mental health strain,
Stress management whispers through the pain.
Cyber security, a modern need,
As the vulnerable continue to plead.

Yet whispers of hope rise through the fight,
Community Ambassadors bringing light.
"Listen," they call, "to every voice,
For change will come if we make the choice.
Invest in support for the weak and the bold,
Let their stories finally be told."

For in every tear and every cry,
Lies the strength to lift us high.
In every corner, in every plight,
We will spark the flame to ignite the night.

The full methodology of the listening tour's engagement, reflection report, survey data and demographic information about the participants is available to read on our website.

Feedback and Signposting Data

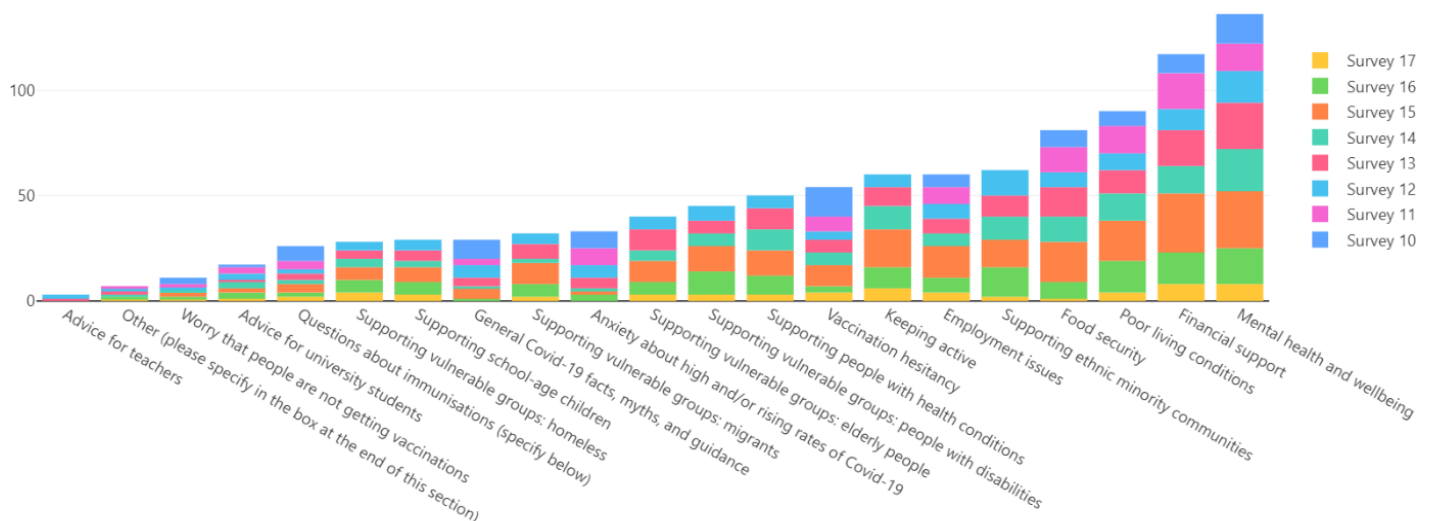
We analysed the signposting and feedback data from 1st April 2023-31st March 2024, looking for key themes across the signposting topics, aspects of care, issues, types of services and system-wide themes. These themes are summarised in the table below and are explored in-depth in our [quarterly monitoring reports](#).

Domain	Feedback	Signposting
Healthcare	- Difficulty booking timely GP and specialist appointments - Long waiting lists for hospital and community services - Delays in referrals and complex referral processes - Inadequate support in A&E, GP, mental health, oncology, and crisis services - Poor hygiene, noisy environments, and medication issues - Poor communication between services - Patients not feeling listened to - Inaccurate or confusing information (e.g., appointment letters) - Staff rudeness and dismissiveness - Lack of updates or clarity on complaint outcomes - Lack of continuity and consent in care - Fragmented service delivery across departments - Difficulty using online portals for appointments - Exclusion of patients without digital literacy or access	- Help resolving GP and outpatient access issues - Support with appointment booking and follow-ups - Guidance on how to complain about GPs, hospitals, and services - Support with complaint escalation and outcomes - Referrals to POhWER, PALS, and other advocacy services - Information on wait times, long COVID services, and service availability
Social care	- Difficulty accessing domiciliary and residential care - Inadequate support for people with autism and learning disabilities - Poor integration between health and social care - Lack of follow-up and continuity in care plans	- Help finding appropriate social care services - Advice on eligibility and access to support - Support for safeguarding, housing, and care continuity - Guidance on raising concerns with councils and care providers

	- Reports of discrimination and safeguarding concerns - Removal from patient lists without explanation - Concerns about social care charges and affordability	
Wider determinants of health	- Barriers due to lack of digital skills or access - Systems not designed for visually impaired or digitally excluded users - Prescription costs and social care fees limiting access - Limited public consultation and engagement in service design - Emotional strain due to inadequate support for carers	- Help locating mental health, disability, and wellbeing services - Support after hospital discharge - Referrals to Citizens Advice, Cambridge House Law Centre, and local MPs - Increasing diversity in services referred to, including social prescribing and community hubs

Community Health Ambassadors

The graph below highlights the most frequently reported community concerns across eight surveys conducted between 2022 and October 2024. While response rates varied, the data reflects input from a growing and diverse group of over 200 Community Health Ambassadors. Since the programme's inception, the top three consistent concerns have been mental health and wellbeing, financial support, and poor living conditions.



In each feedback survey, we ask Community Health Ambassadors which groups they think would benefit the most from additional support. The most frequently mentioned groups include:

1. **Older people**, particularly those living alone, with poor health, and/or from BME communities
2. **Young people**, especially those affected by mental health issues, unemployment, and disruptions due to Covid-19.
3. **Disabled people**, including both physical and learning disabilities, and their families.
4. **People experiencing homelessness**, with emphasis on housing, basic needs, and mental health support.
5. **Migrant communities**, particularly those with no recourse to public funds or who are facing barriers to public services.
6. **Low-income families**, with a focus on access to housing, food security, and financial support during the cost of living crisis.
7. **BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) communities**, who face systemic disadvantages and require culturally appropriate services.
8. **Carers** and families caring for individuals with disabilities or special needs.

Other additional factors that have been frequently mentioned are people experiencing:

9. **Mental health** support needs, especially for young people, older people, and people living with disabilities.
10. **Social isolation** among vulnerable individuals who lack strong community or family support.
11. **Poor housing conditions** and the need for affordable housing.

Community Health Ambassadors have stressed that local health-improvement projects need funding and permanent premises to operate consistent and sufficient services for the communities they support. These concerns are consistent with Community Southwark's [State of the Sector 2023 report](#).

Choosing which Issues to Focus on

How We Choose Our Priorities

The Healthwatch Southwark team held a brainstorming session to discuss and shortlist the priority areas mentioned throughout this report.

This was presented to our Advisory Board to vote on the short list, ranking priority areas using a scoring matrix that aligns with the seven criteria in our [Decision Making Policy](#). The decisions made were to score priorities for two community-led research projects and one area to explore to restart our statutory [Enter and View](#) function.

The shortlist for both research areas and Enter and View selections are indicated in the table below:

Shortlist for projects	Shortlist for Enter and View
1. Temporary housing and links to health: essential utilities, cost, isolation, wider inequalities, extra care and support services 2. Women's Health: cost of living impact on women 3. Children and young people: mental health / experiences of social care / transitionary support to adult services 4. Preventing obesity: food and activity, links for parents and children and families	1. Southwark Resource Centre: Disabilities Hub 2. Integrated community services (GP, gym, family/all age services, social support, nutrition, mental health etc.) 3. Women's Health services 4. Older peoples care homes

It was agreed that our priorities will be grounded in the following principles:

- Connects to or enhances ongoing projects and supports initiatives in local neighbourhoods.
- Draws insights from diverse sources of health population data.
- Addresses interconnected issues across health, social care, and broader health determinants, without duplication of existing work
- Provides a practical solution/outcome such as resources, guides, signposting information, maps, blogs and videos.

Priorities Selection 2025-26

While we received a broad range of valuable suggestions, not all could be prioritised for 2025-26 due to our limited capacity and the complexity of the health and care landscape. Using a structured process, we selected areas where we could have the greatest impact, based on community need, strategic alignment, and feasibility. However, other important issues remain on our radar and will continue to be monitored through our board roles, committee positions, statutory partnerships, and ongoing community engagement and feedback.

This approach allows us to remain responsive to changing needs and to advocate for improvements where necessary as we understand that maintaining visibility across a broad range of issues ensures that voices are not lost and that future priorities remain grounded in the lived experiences of Southwark's communities.

Healthwatch Southwark Priorities 2025-26

Rationale for Priority 1 - Temporary accommodation and links to health

- Strong community feedback highlighted poor housing conditions, instability, and overcrowding as major health stressors.
- Community Health Ambassadors consistently reported poor living conditions and housing insecurity as top concerns.
- The cost of living crisis has exacerbated housing-related health issues, especially for vulnerable groups.
- Aligns with Southwark Council's "Decent Homes for All" goal and the South East London Anchor System's focus on housing as a determinant of health.
- Supports Healthwatch's aim to address wider determinants of health and health inequalities.
- Connects to ongoing projects addressing housing and health inequalities in local neighbourhoods.
- Draws on diverse data sources, including signposting data, JSNA, and community engagement.
- Addresses interconnected issues across housing, health access, and social care, without duplicating existing work.
- Provides an opportunity for practical outcomes, such as housing workshops, signposting resources, guides, and community-informed recommendations.

Rationale for Priority 2 - Children and young people's mental health/experiences of social care

- Repeatedly raised in feedback from residents, surveys, and the Listening Tour as a critical concern.
- Young people were identified as a group needing urgent support, particularly around mental health and transitions from child to adult services.
- Aligns with Southwark's "Good Start in Life" strategy and the SEL ICS "Start Well" workstream.
- Addresses gaps in early intervention, culturally appropriate care, and support for those in or leaving social care.
- Builds on previous Healthwatch work and insights from the Southwark JSNA and Partnership Southwark priorities.
- Connects to existing youth mental health initiatives and supports local service improvement efforts.
- Informed by multiple data sources, including Listening Tour feedback, Ambassador insights, and JSNA findings.

- Tackles complex, cross-cutting issues in mental health, education, and social care.
- Opportunity to deliver practical outputs, such as youth-friendly resources, service maps, and co-produced content.

Rationale for Priority 3 - Southwark Resource Centre: Disabilities Hub

- Identified through Enter and View shortlisting as a key site for review due to its role in supporting disabled residents.
- Responds to feedback about poor integration of health and social care services for people with disabilities.
- Supports the “Staying Well” goal in Southwark’s 2030 strategy and the JSNA’s call for better service integration.
- Offers an opportunity to use statutory powers to assess and improve service quality and accessibility.
- Reflects ongoing concerns from disabled residents and carers about service gaps and support needs.
- Builds on existing work around disability access and service quality.
- Uses insights from feedback, site visits, and community partners to inform the review.
- Addresses systemic gaps in care coordination and accessibility for disabled people.
- Aims to produce actionable recommendations, service improvement reports, and accessible information for users.

Priority Alignment

There are many strategies and activity plans in operation within Southwark. Overlap between these workstreams is detailed below.

<u>Strategy/Plan</u>	<u>Priority 1</u> Temporary accommodation and links to health	<u>Priority 2</u> Children and young people’s mental health/experiences of social care	<u>Enter and View Priorities</u> Southwark Resource Centre: Disabilities Hub
	Goal 1: Decent homes for all	Goal 2: Good start in Life	Goal 5: Staying well

	Prevention and wellbeing	Children's and young people's mental health	Prevention and wellbeing
	Live Well: Prevention and health inequalities	Start well: Children and young people's mental health	Live Well: Prevention and health inequalities
Southwark Council JSNA 	Drive 4: Strong and connected communities	Drive 1: A whole-family approach to giving children the best start in life	Drive 5: Integration of health and social care

Delivery and monitoring impact

Governance and delivery mechanisms

Healthwatch Southwark's Advisory Board helps guide our work by overseeing the key priorities we set. While the Manager takes care of day-to-day operations and delivery, the Board provides strategic direction. The Board meets every three months—and sometimes in between—to review progress, discuss important actions, and hear updates from those leading specific tasks to achieve priorities set. These individuals may also ask for support from the Board when needed.

Monitoring Progress

We will monitor delivery against these priorities through the following metrics:

- Completion of projects resulting in formal responses and progress reviews.
- Quarterly monitoring reports containing service provider/community case studies, feedback and signposting data, insights from community engagement events.
- Completion of Enter and view visits resulting in a report, formal responses and progress reviews on recommendations being implemented.
- Annual report containing information about how we have met the priorities outlined.

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