



**Annual Report 2024–2025**

# Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Thurrock

# Contents

A message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Our year in numbers	5
A year of making a difference	5
Working together for change	6
Making a difference in the community	7
Listening to your experiences	8
Hearing from all communities	11
Information and signposting	13
Showcasing volunteer impact	15
Finance and future priorities	17
Statutory statements	19



"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

Healthwatch Thurrock is the independent body for the people of Thurrock to voice their own views on all aspects of local health and social care services. Healthwatch Thurrock staff and volunteers engage with people directly, through interviews, surveys, group sessions and community visits, with the objective of securing the actual views of Thurrock residents. This feedback provides local people with a voice in discussions on all aspects of local care services, ensuring their views are represented effectively and objectively.

In the past year, individual projects have covered the following: –

- **Dementia** – Over the past year, Healthwatch Thurrock has been actively engaging with residents of Thurrock to gather insights into dementia support and the lived experiences of individuals within the borough.
- **The NHS 10-Year Plan** – The aim of the work was: to support Thurrock residents in submitting their views to the national portal and to gather local insights that reflect the unique needs and views of the community. (Healthwatch Thurrock was commended by Healthwatch England for the work undertaken on this project.
- **Access to Stop Smoking Services** – a qualitative research project to better understand the needs, barriers, and challenges faced when accessing support to quit smoking.
- **Making Safeguarding Personalised** – A follow up to the previous year's safeguarding project, this one delved deep into the real-life experiences of individuals and their families who have navigated the safeguarding process.



“Equally important as individual projects is the support given to people seeking advice and information about care services. Healthwatch ensures people receive independent advice about health and care services in Thurrock to assist them to best address their own concerns.”

**Kevin Brice, Healthwatch Thurrock Chairperson**

## About us

# Healthwatch Thurrock 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 to 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 933 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 6 staff and, our work is supported by 16 volunteers.

## Reaching out:



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

**131** people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as mental health support and finding an NHS dentist.

## Championing your voice:



We published **6** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **maternity, smoking cessation** and **the future of our NHS**.

Our most popular report was **Place based view of NHS 10 Year Plan**, highlighting people's local vision for the next 10 Years.

## Statutory funding:



We're funded by **Thurrock Council**. In 2024/25 we received **131,987**, which is the same as last year.

# A year of making a difference

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

## Spring

We facilitated a focus group for children and young people in Thurrock to discuss their current priorities for Health and Social care with a focus on mental health provision in schools.



We spoke with healthcare professionals and patients to understand their experiences with the current discharge system following the merger of the three hospitals in MSE.



## Summer

We continued our efforts to determine whether the safeguarding support provided in Thurrock was genuinely personalised and tailored to meet each individual's unique needs and circumstances.



We participated in all eight community Big Lunches this summer, connecting with people of all ages and strengthening relationships across diverse groups.



## Autumn

We continued our efforts to understand how residents access dementia support in the borough, and to identify ways to clarify and improve pathways for assessment and care.



Over the past year, we've consistently emphasised the vital role of unpaid carers' voices in shaping strategy renewal and improving patient safety outcomes.



## Winter

We conducted extensive engagement to create a place-based report on the NHS 10 Year plan to retain at a local level and feed into the national database.



Healthwatch Thurrock were commissioned by public health to understand residents' needs in relation to support to stop smoking and the barriers and challenges they face in accessing those services.





# Working together for change

**We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Thurrock are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at Mid and South Essex ICS.**

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across the south of England to achieve the following:

## A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Healthwatch Essex asked us and Healthwatch Southend to collaborate on a project about children and young people's experiences with dyslexia in Essex. The project focused on how dyslexia affects the wellbeing of children and their families, exploring its impact on confidence and mental health. This collaboration aimed to better understand these challenges and support the community more effectively.

## The big conversation:



In the second half of 2024, several Healthwatches from southern England collaborated on a joint report titled *A Pain to Complain*, highlighting barriers to making formal NHS complaints. The report showed that low public confidence discourages people from complaining. Healthwatch Thurrock, Essex, and Southend have since held meetings with the MSE ICB to discuss concerns about the current patient complaint process.

## Building strong relationships to achieve more:



Following on from our commissioned piece of work with MSE ICS last year, which focused on the current discharge pathway, we have maintained ongoing representation at Transfer of Care Hub meetings. This consistent involvement enables us to actively advocate for patient safety across the ICS, ensuring that patient needs and concerns remain a priority throughout the discharge process and beyond, fostering improved care coordination and safer transitions.

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 Thurrock this year:

## Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



**Championing better youth mental health services, our Healthwatch Thurrock Young Ambassadors' powerful advocacy recently enabled Thurrock CVS to secure significant funding.**

This targeted programme will empower local organisations to deliver enhanced mental health and wellbeing support across Thurrock. Crucially, the Young Ambassadors' priorities have shaped the initiative from the start, and they will continue to guide its design and delivery. Their leadership ensures the programme truly reflects and responds to the needs of children and young people in our community.

## Getting services to involve the public



**The rollout of total triage in Thurrock revealed significant patient access barriers, including language, long-term conditions, and digital exclusion.**

Many struggled with the online-only service. Collaborative discussions with Thurrock Alliance led to better communication with patients across PCN areas. It is now clear that GPs will offer assistance to those unable to access the online system. This ensures a more inclusive and effective service for all borough patients.

## Improving care over time



**Many health and social care strategies, including Health and Wellbeing, Better Care Together and local plan are up for renewal in 2026.**

We are working to consolidate all mentions of transitions from these individual strategies into one comprehensive strategy. This will ensure transitions receive the recognition they deserve, help standardise processes and allow services to be held accountable for their promises regarding smooth transitions across all care aspects.



# 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

## Improving Access to Stop Smoking Services in Thurrock

**In late 2024, Healthwatch Thurrock was commissioned to explore why some residents were not engaging with the local stop smoking services, particularly among priority groups outlined in the Thurrock Tobacco Control Strategy.**

We worked to hear from those traditionally underrepresented: routine and manual workers, ethnic minorities, individuals with long-term mental health conditions, pregnant smokers, and people facing substance misuse issues

### What did we do?

We conducted a deep dive—gathering insights through 54 survey responses, face-to-face conversations, and targeted community engagement across deprived wards and underserved groups.

### Key things we heard:



**78%**

**of responders had tried to quit smoking at some point.**

**31%**

**had heard of the current stop smoking service, highlighting a visibility gap.**

**86%**

**Of respondents identified themselves as a routine worker validating the focus on the priority groups.**

This work revealed that awareness and accessibility—not motivation—were the primary barriers to quitting. We identified actionable changes, including the need for better service promotion, more personalised and face-to-face support, and community outreach workers to build trust with vulnerable groups.

### What difference did this make?

Our insights directly led to dedicated communication funding for stop smoking services, enabling targeted messaging to underserved communities. Our recommendations are also shaping the new Health Trainer Service's online presence, ensuring clearer information and easier access for those seeking to quit smoking.

# Listening to your experiences

## Making Safeguarding Personal in Thurrock

**In early 2024, Healthwatch Thurrock was commissioned by TSAB to assess whether safeguarding practices in Thurrock were truly personalised.**

The focus was on understanding whether residents and their families felt that the support received was tailored to individual needs and outcomes. This independent report offers valuable insight into how safeguarding services are experienced and highlights strengths and areas for improvement.

### Key things we heard:



**81%**

**of carers felt that the adult they support received the right amount of support.**

**100%**

**of respondents directly involved in a safeguarding said that they felt safe after receiving input from the team.**



**"I feel that my mother is not as safe as she should be, but she herself is oblivious to the dangers around her and therefore feels perfectly safe"**

Feedback revealed consistently positive experiences among residents who had received safeguarding support. All respondents who were directly involved in safeguarding cases said they felt safe, supported, and included in decision-making. Families and carers also shared positive feedback, although some noted inconsistencies in communication and involvement.

### What difference did this make?

We are proud to continue our collaboration with the Thurrock Safeguarding Adults Board, working to ensure that the voices of carers and family members are not only heard but meaningfully embedded in the safeguarding process. Personalisation in safeguarding cannot be fully realised without recognising the vital insights and experiences of those who support vulnerable adults every day.



# Hearing from all communities

**We're here for all residents of Thurrock. 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:**

- Holding different focus groups across the PCN areas
- Building on existing relationships with our local faith sector by attending various events
- Continuing to advocate for the voices of seldom heard communities in monthly local alliance and stakeholder meetings



# Hearing from all communities

## Collaborative Health Day Empowers Learning Disability Community

Healthwatch Thurrock, in partnership with Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions and TCIL, hosted an LD Health Day. This event aimed to raise awareness of health and social care within the learning disability (LD) community, focusing on preventative measures and addressing health disparities.

### What difference did this make?

The Health Day provided vital health checks and information, reaching a seldom-heard group within our community. Representatives from LeDeR (Learning Disabilities Mortality Review) engaged with attendees, highlighting their crucial work in understanding and preventing early deaths among individuals with learning disabilities, particularly from conditions like sepsis and circulatory/respiratory diseases. Nurses from NELFT were on hand to provide essential blood pressure and diabetic checks, offering immediate health insights and promoting proactive health management within the LD community. This collaborative effort ensured a comprehensive and supportive environment for all participants.

## Healthwatch Thurrock Engages Faith Group on Dementia Awareness

**Healthwatch Thurrock attended a faith network group in Stanford-le-Hope to discuss dementia.**

We engaged with members to understand their perceptions of the condition and where they would seek support. This outreach, part of our effort to connect with seldom-heard communities, revealed significant misconceptions and a strong desire for more accessible information. The conversations highlighted the emotional challenges faced by families and the community's preference for at-home care.

### What difference did this make?

Initial feedback showed a belief that dementia is not a disease but a manageable part of ageing: "If we care for them...we can get rid of it." Many admitted their knowledge was limited due to a lack of first-hand experience and expressed a desire to "really know more." The emotional toll was clear, with one person describing it as "watching someone you love drift away." While some knew to seek a diagnosis from a mental health hospital, others found information was "not readily available."



# 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 933 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





## Urgent referrals: A Patient's Shocking Discovery

**A routine appointment turned life-altering when a patient's seemingly minor lip concern led to an urgent oral cancer referral.**

The unexpected news, delivered via post, caused significant distress due to a lack of prior explanation regarding the suspected diagnosis or the nature of the referral. This highlights the critical importance of clear communication in healthcare, ensuring patients are fully informed about potential serious conditions and the steps being taken.

This patient's feedback led to immediate action, with the healthcare provider committing to clearer communication for all future urgent referrals, ensuring patients are better prepared and informed.



"I was completely shocked to receive a letter for an urgent oral cancer clinic referral. It wasn't explained to me that this was suspected, or that such a serious referral was being made."

## Neglected after spinal injury: Fight for Justice

**After a traumatic fall, Amy faced severe neglect at two hospitals. Our support helped her file formal complaints to ensure accountability and future patient safety.**

In August 2024, Amy suffered a spinal injury after falling into a loch during a charity event. Emergency services took two hours to arrive. Despite clear neurological symptoms, a Hertfordshire hospital left Amy in pain for over 15 hours, before being transferred for emergency surgery.

At a hospital within MSE, Amys hygiene needs were ignored, suffered verbal humiliation, intimidation, and dangerous care. Her catheter was left unchanged for 10 days, her room was uncleaned, and staff were hostile and unprofessional. We supported Amy in submitting formal complaints to both NHS trusts. She is now seeking both accountability and systemic change to protect other patients from similar mistreatment.



"I felt dehumanised, terrified and invisible. No one should ever go through what I did in those hospitals."

# Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 25 days to support our work. 15 of these days can be attributed to our amazing Young Ambassadors! 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 to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Supported with project delivery through continued engagement



# Showcasing volunteer impact

## At the heart of what we do

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

"Volunteering at Healthwatch Thurrock helps to spread the importance of caring and the value of being there for people who cannot speak out about issues that people face daily and are left voiceless in society."

Brodie joined us to help build his skills and practical knowledge.

"I love to support the community by volunteering at community events. I believe that if everyone has a voice, then people would be encouraged to reach out more and provide more awareness for mental health." **Brodie**



"Several years have passed since my first encounter with the Healthwatch Thurrock team. At last, I found someone who actually listened, showed compassion and cared enough to guide me to services that could help me on my journey as a carer."

"From that experience I knew I wanted to be part of Healthwatch Thurrock. So here I am as an engagement/admin volunteer. My hours are limited as my journey as a carer continues but I feel blessed to have been accepted into the dedicated Healthwatch Thurrock team." **Betty**



### 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.healthwatchthurrock.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchthurrock.co.uk)



01375 389 883



[admin@healthwatchthurrock.org](mailto:admin@healthwatchthurrock.org)

# Finance and future priorities

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

## Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£131,987	Expenditure on pay	£101,197
Additional income	£20,731	Non-pay expenditure	£11,637
		Office and management fee	£35,932
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£152,718</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£148,766</b>

## Additional income is broken down into:

- £8,000 received from Local Authority Adults Social Care for work on unpaid carers and to deliver the steering group
- £8,000 received from Thurrock Alliance for work on the placed based NHS 10 Year Plan work
- £4,731 funding received from Public Health for work around stop smoking services

# 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 patients to make care better.

## **Our top three priorities for the next year are:**

1. Continuing to gather insights relating to men's health.
2. Extend our work around the lived experience of Dementia provision in Thurrock.
3. Plan to undertake a review of transitions across both Children and Adult Health and Social Care strategies.



# Statutory statements

**Healthwatch Thurrock, The Beehive Resource Centre, West Street Grays, RM17 XP is a project of Thurrock CVS, The Beehive Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 XP.**

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

## The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Advisory Group consists of 12 members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities. Our Advisory Group 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 our work around the NHS 10 Year Plan and monitoring. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We have an Advisory Group 'ideas register' in which our Advisory Group members can feedback themes they are hearing from the public in their own role.

## **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 are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and social care decision makers. This year we have done this by ensuring engagement with seldom heard communities has regularly taken place and that face to face engagement continues for those who struggle with digital access.

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, via social media channels and make hard copies available in the volunteer centers and local libraries.



# Statutory statements

## Responses to recommendations

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Thurrock is represented on the Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board by Kim James, Chief Operating Officer. During 2024/25, our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing case studies or gathered lived experience of agenda items, to represent the voice of the public.

Healthwatch Thurrock is represented on MSE Integrated Care Partnerships by Kim James, Chief Operating Officer and MSE Integrated Care Boards by Kim James, Chief Operating Officer.

## Enter and view

This year we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

## 2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Patient safety work	Obtaining a place on a collaborative piece of work with The Health Institute of Patient Safety.
Integrated Locality Team work	Continuing to advocate for resident needs throughout the ILT groups for each PCN area.
NHS 10 Year plan	The production of two reports that will inform a place-based view for Thurrock for the next 10 Years.
Minor Injuries work	Education around the current Emergency Service system in Thurrock and how our local Minor Injuries unit fits in.

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