



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch York annual report
2025/26

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Front cover image from Emma Simpson on unsplash



“

Thank you to every single person who shared their experiences with us this year. Sometimes the most important thing we do is just listen. But we always want to do more.

In this report we share how in the past 12 months we have used your words to try and make York better for us all. We couldn't do this without you!”

A message from our chair

We should all have the opportunity to shape our local health and care system.

Healthwatch was set up to gather and champion the views of users of health and social care services. Not only does this give people a voice but those voices are used to support improvements and influence developments in services. Healthwatch is often referred to as a watchdog which detracts from its strength in York of acting as a partner, working with health and social care providers to make sure that whoever you are, wherever you work, as a citizen of York you have a voice.

We are living in uncertain and difficult times. When people have felt they don't know where to begin with health and social care issues they have turned to us. Whether for information and signposting, to share experience of accessing support or increasingly for explanation of current changes in processes in health and social care. In 2025-26 more than 9,000 people in York were in contact with Healthwatch York. These people have felt their voice should be heard and have been able to talk to someone who has listened. Someone who knows that their views matter, their experiences are recognised and makes sure that as far as possible those views and experiences influence decision making.

In times of change and uncertainty much is said about the need for resilience. Healthwatch York publishes "What we are hearing" quarterly reports. These shed light on some of the stories that individuals share with us – they illustrate how people in York have shown incredible resilience in the most stressful situations. These stories have highlighted examples where individuals had a right to a better outcome from their interaction with health and social care services. Stories have also been shared where staff working in those services have gone above and beyond to provide a positive experience in challenging circumstances.

A message from our chair, continued

Having a voice, being connected, knowing how to get information and using community resources help to support our resilience. But currently these resources and support are themselves under threat.

Our brilliant Healthwatch York team needs a high level of resilience at this time as we wait to hear about their future. The professionalism, commitment and integrity of the team and their work has been recognised more than ever this year by people in the city, voluntary sector partners, local councillors and MPs, and colleagues across the health and care system.

I must also thank our fabulous group of volunteers. Their support is invaluable, they are an essential part of Team Healthwatch, but they share our uncertain future. Their commitment to the work of Healthwatch York has been unwavering. We simply could not do what we do without them.

I hope you enjoy reading about the breadth and variety of work that the whole team at Healthwatch York has undertaken during the year. Making sure your voice helps shape our future health and care!



Chair
Janet Wright



“Having a voice, being connected, knowing how to get information and using community resources help to support our resilience. But currently these resources and support are themselves under threat.”

About us

Healthwatch York is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure that health and care services hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

Together we can make York better.



Our mission

Healthwatch York puts people at the heart of health and care services, enabling you to be heard. We believe that together we can help make York better for everyone.



Our values are:

Accessible : Empowering : Informative : Flexible
Participative : Valuing Diversity : Responsive
Inclusive : Supporting Choice : Accountable



“Healthwatch York brings an independent, trusted voice into the local health and care system by capturing and amplifying lived experience, particularly where it may not otherwise be heard. Their work helps bridge the gap between communities and system leaders, providing insight that is grounded in real experiences and can meaningfully inform service design, improvement and accountability. Their ability to work constructively with both residents and partners adds important balance and challenge to local decision-making.”

Stakeholder feedback

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 9,000 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed four staff and our work was supported by 37 volunteers.



Reaching out:

1,611 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

7,838 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as dementia support services, mental health support, finding an NHS dentist, and support available over the festive season.



Championing your voice:

We published 26 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like women's health, patient transport, mental health, healthcare services for trans, non-binary and intersex people and care homes.

Our most popular report was *What Trans, Non-binary and Intersex People told us about health services in York*. We found that many people are not treated with dignity and respect, and there needs to be better training for healthcare professionals around trans, non-binary and intersex people's healthcare.



Statutory funding:

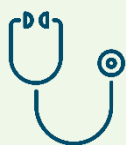
We're funded by City of York Council. In 2025/26 we received £115,610 under our core contract, which is the same as the previous year.

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 York. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Volunteers and staff visited all 33 GP surgeries across the city to complete access audits. We shared reports with each practice. Some quickly made changes to signage, seating and more.



Our volunteers also reviewed every GP practice website to see how easy it is to find the information you need. Again, the practice-specific reports led to positive change.



Summer

We published our report on women's health. This has already led to changes to the hospital pathway for babies with tongue ties.



Our reports on GP practices led to York Medical Group getting in touch. One of the city's larger practices, they have been working with us to better understand their patients' experiences.



Autumn

In July, with the help of local partners, we launched our survey for people who are trans, non-binary or intersex. The survey asked about experiences of healthcare in the city.



We heard from increasing numbers of people about the impact of changes to non-emergency patient transport. We worked with Healthwatch North Yorkshire to see what it meant for local people.



Winter

As a result of our work on women's health, we were asked to develop and run a session on ME/CFS (myalgic encephalomyelitis or chronic fatigue syndrome) for staff in local GP practices.



We published our fourth edition of the Winter services list. This was shared by local MPs, councillors and other key partners, helping hundreds of people find support across the festive season.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to make sure people's experiences of care in York are heard and influence decisions made about services by Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care System.

This year, we've worked with the Healthwatch network and others across the country to achieve the following:



Harnessing urban and rural voices

With Healthwatch North Yorkshire, we heard from 225 people who had been negatively impacted by changes to the criteria for non-emergency patient transport. We heard about the financial pressure of paying to get to hospital appointments especially in rural areas; the impact on disabled people already struggling, people struggling with mental and physical ill health resulting from having to arrange transport and the people who gave up on treatment. As a result of our report a summit on transport was held in North Yorkshire to discuss ideas to address the new challenges.



Building strong relationships

Since September 2025 we have worked in partnership with Lived Insights to facilitate Participatory Action Research alongside a team of community researchers, including individuals with personal, lived experiences of poverty and homelessness. The research project focused on the Local Welfare Safety Net in York. The project was a collaborative effort involving seven partners: The University of York, City of York Council, Age UK York, Citizens Advice York, York Foodbank, Peasholme Charity and the Welfare Benefits Unit.



Working together to raise concerns

In June 2025 the government announced its plan to abolish Healthwatch including all local Healthwatch. We did not expect this decision and do not agree with the plan. 131 local Healthwatch worked together to call for independent patient voice to remain a central part of how people can feedback about their experiences of health and care. Together we launched a petition which gained 11,042 signatures, 405 from the two York constituencies.

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 York this year:



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

Highlighting women's experiences of accessing health services

We regularly review the feedback we hear to identify themes. One theme we see repeatedly is women not being listened to, feeling their needs were ignored and having to cope with ill health without receiving support, empathy and timely treatment. This is particularly an issue where health issues are specific to women or affect women more often. Our report highlighted many issues later included in the City of York Council's women's health needs assessment, the Integrated Care Board's women's health hubs and the renewed women's health strategy for England.



Turning patient concerns into action

By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone

We worked with Nicky Proctor, a local person with ME/CFS, to support her to plan and run training for staff at GP practices about patients' experiences of the condition. We talked to more than 40 GPs, nurses and others from GP practices across York. Much of the information we shared came from people with the condition, including two of our volunteers. The information will also feature in our forthcoming report about women's experiences of long-term health conditions.



Making sure local services are fit for local people

We work behind the scenes to raise issues and bring about change

In 2025 – 2026 our wonderful trained volunteers visited nine care homes across York. While most of the care homes visited were of a good standard, there's usually something that could be even better. Our suggestions were raised with each manager during the visit and included in our reports. As a result, local care homes have made changes. These include creating better colour contrast between walls and floors when redecorating, consistently offering smaller portions at mealtimes or using larger font sizes for signage.

Listening to your experiences

Services can only improve if they know when things aren't working. 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.

We have sought the experiences of young people through our Core Connector project, older people through our care home visiting programme, and everyone in between through our numerous engagement stalls across the community.



Listening to the experiences of trans, non-binary and intersex people

Last year, we championed the voices of trans, non-binary and intersex community to raise the challenges they were facing accessing healthcare.

We were hearing about issues with shared care and trans people struggling to get hormones via local GPs as well as wider issues. We felt it was time to act.

What did we do

We worked with colleagues from GeneraTe, the LGBT+ Forum, the ICB, local hospital Trust, GP practices, our volunteers and students from York St John University to devise and circulate a survey for people themselves, their family and friends and healthcare professionals. This made sure we got a good overview of the issues from different perspectives.

Key things we heard:



82%

of survey respondents face barriers because of who they are

50%

hid their identity to access healthcare services

69%

received no support while waiting for a referral to the local Gender Identity Clinic – a wait of up to 20 years.

Our report showed that while there is good practice in the city, further training and work is needed to establish a model of good practice for shared care in York is needed. The report included a model introduced in Brighton and Sussex that could be a template for the North Yorkshire and Humber ICB.

What difference did this make?

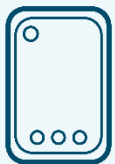
The ICB has started to look at the prescription local enhanced service including shared care and monitoring for trans people taking hormones. GeneraTe has delivered training for local GP practices. The hospital trust and mental health trust are planning training for staff about some of the report's themes.

Core Connectors – identify vaping among young people as local concern

Young people from our Core Connectors project raised concerns about the level of vaping among young people in York, so we decided to start a project to find out more about the experiences of local young people and vaping.

So far, we have talked to over 390 young people about their experiences of vaping. Their stories highlight how normalised vaping has become among young people, and how many of them feel that they are being directly targeted with sweet flavours and child focused packaging.

Things we have heard so far:



58%

of respondents say that a major factor leading them to vape is peer pressure.

26%

of respondents noticed changes in their breathing after taking up vaping.



"I didn't really have any opinions on vapes [before I started vaping] except everyone my age had one, so I thought it was normal."

This project highlights the impact that vaping is having on young people in York. Vaping has become so normalised amongst young people that they fear isolation and loneliness if they don't vape, despite being aware of possible health risks.

What difference did this make?

With this project we set out to talk to young people who vape and also to those who don't. We have received thoughtful, interesting and some surprising responses.

The survey closed in June and a report will follow. We hope the report will help inform the local conversation about young peoples' vaping, highlight support services available and provide helpful suggestions about policy change locally.

Mental health – experiences and ideas for a better service

We kept hearing from people living with complex health needs that local mental health services were not giving them the support and care they needed and people felt abandoned and alone.

We collated the feedback we had received since our Breaking Point report on mental health services in 2023, heard from 38 individuals in a survey and from local organisations that support people with mental ill health about experiences but also what they thought a better service should look like.

A good mental health service should:

- **Include the voluntary sector as a fully funded part of the system.**
- **Prioritise building and developing relationships.**
- **Offer a range of support options delivered with a multi-disciplinary approach.**
- **Be truly trauma informed and recognise the needs of neurodivergent people.**
- **Provide timely support, quicker referrals and support while people are waiting.**
- **Provide support for as long as people need and for people with complex needs.**
- **Learn quickly from what hasn't worked.**



“The crisis services and hospital provision are not fit for purpose as they lack compassion and Community Mental Health Teams avoid any complexity.”

What difference did this make?

We worked on this project with local MP Rachael Maskell, including running a joint feedback session. Rachael took our findings and people's feedback to a meeting with the Minister which was part of work that led to a public enquiry being announced into our local mental health trust.

People's feedback and ideas were also shared with the local mental health trust's new chief executive. We are developing relationships with new contacts in the trust and, working together, launched a project on children and young people's experiences of mental health services.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for everyone in York. 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 better meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Working with local trans charities like GeneraTe and going to Quiet Pride to hear about trans, non-binary and intersex people's experiences of local health services.
- Working with the local Mosque to hear from people after Friday prayers.
- Partnering with Lived Insights to hear from people about how secure the welfare safety net in York is.



Working together with Community Sharehouse

We worked to understand the health and care experiences of people using a local food bank.

People told us about the challenges they faced in getting timely access to GP services, appropriate mental health support and most importantly accessing an NHS dentist.

What difference did this make?

In partnership with MyDentist in Stonebow, York, we were able to help people who hadn't seen a dentist in years and were struggling because of their teeth access to NHS dental treatment. All the people who came to us were seen quickly. They are now NHS patients receiving the excellent dental care they need.

Helping Deaf people get the support they need

We heard from members of York's Deaf community about the issues they kept facing in trying to get British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters for appointments.

We raised the concerns with the local hospital trust, local GP practices and the Humber and North Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership.

What difference did this make?

The Health and Care Partnership introduced an interpreting contract for all GP practices in the region, including BSL. We continue to work with the Deaf Café to feedback experiences of the new interpreting service. A member of the equality, diversity and inclusion team at the local hospital trust visited the Deaf Café to hear feedback which was used as the trust appointed a new interpreting provider.

Deaf Café members said they'd like to talk to people making health decisions, so we arranged for the chair of the hospital trust to visit the Deaf Café. We also supported a local GP practice to get advice on getting the best new hearing loop system for its surgeries. They will go to the Deaf Café next year.

Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

This year 7,838 people received advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust.
- Launching a new website full of local information, as well as all our guides and reports.
- Publishing an updated version of our Dementia Guide, used by individuals and advice and support workers across the city.
- Publishing our annual Winter Services List – a guide to services and support available over the festive season when many of the usual services are closed.
- Publishing a monthly email bulletin sharing news, support and service information.
- Helping people access the services they need.
- Signposting people to additional support services.



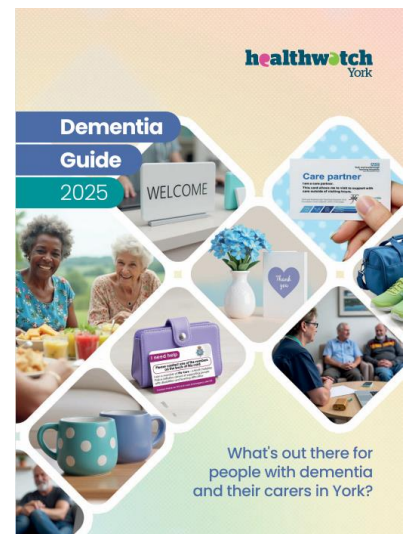
Dementia Guide – what’s out there for people with dementia and their carers in York

This year we updated our Dementia Guide to services and support for people with dementia and their carers in York.

The Guide shares information about the journey from pre diagnosis, who to talk to and where to go for information and support whilst waiting for an assessment, to what to expect post diagnosis.

It outlines what is available in the community, being in hospital with dementia, and the support provided by North Yorkshire police for people at risk of going missing.

Available on our website or contact us for printed copies.



Linking people with services: York Frailty Hub

We often hear from people who are struggling to access the right care at the right time, particularly older people and the people supporting them.

We heard from someone whose mother was in hospital and about to be discharged, but they were scared that things weren't in place. We supported them to contact the local Frailty Hub service and a social prescriber went to see the mother and daughter in hospital. They supported them to make sure the discharge was safe and everything was in place when the person's mum got home.

“

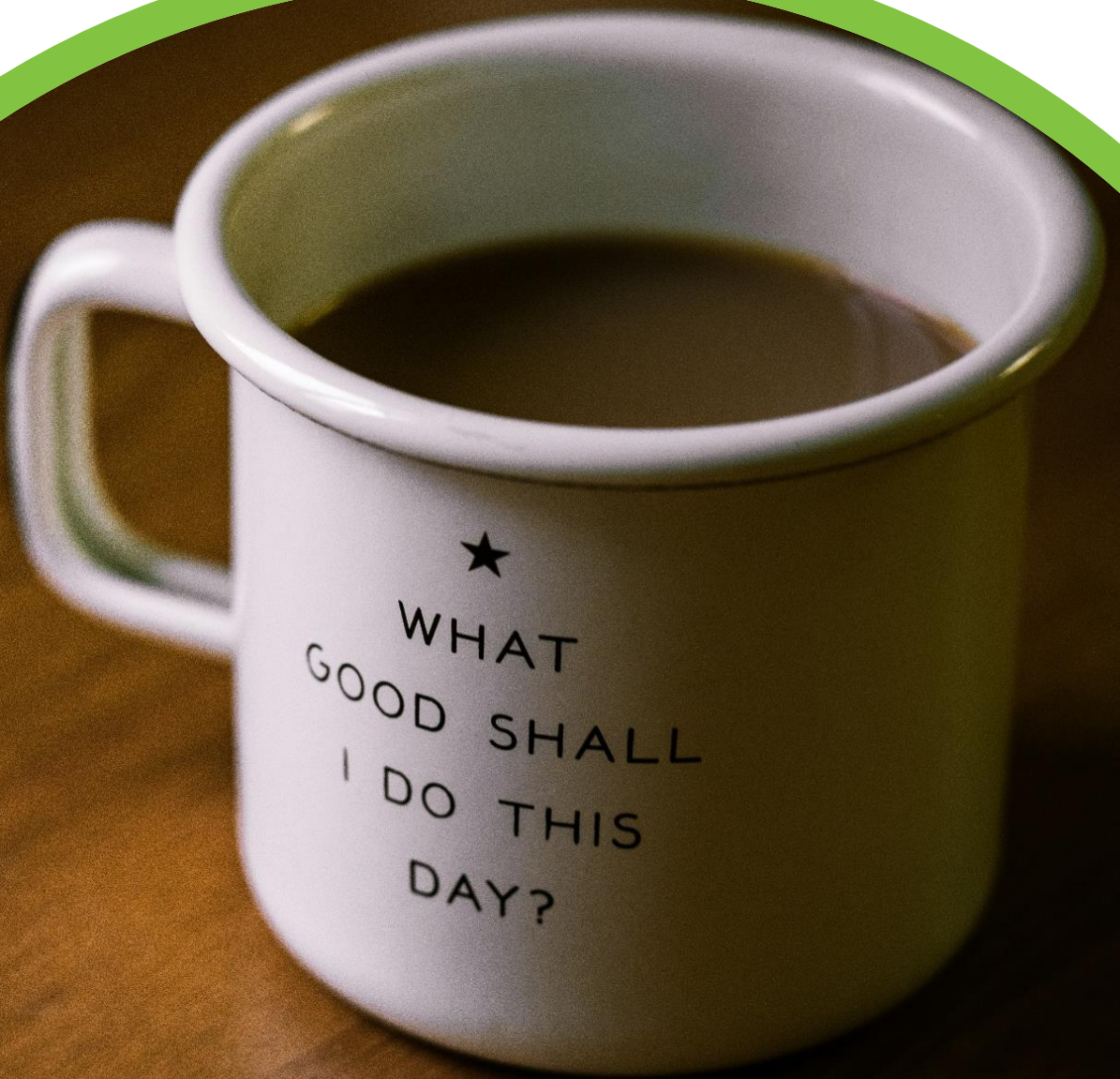
We would both like to thank you for taking an interest in trying to make life that little bit better and making us feel that there are people that are prepared to put themselves out to help. We hope whatever the future holds for Healthwatch and you personally that you continue to help people like us feel someone out there cares.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

We have 37 fantastic volunteers. They have given 651 hours of their time to support our work. Thanks to their dedication we can better understand what is working and are taking action to improve local services.

This year, our volunteers:

- Reviewed 47 health-related leaflets or web pages as part of our readability scheme.
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Visited eight care homes, speaking to more than 100 residents, staff, family and friends.



At the heart of what we do

From finding out what people think to helping write reports and reviewing health leaflets, our volunteers have worked hard to improve care.



Carrie

"As a Healthwatch volunteer I have been involved in contributing my personal health experiences for use in ME/CFS training for healthcare professionals and in volunteer meetings where we discuss a variety of current issues. I have helped at an event stall and I attend my GP surgery PPG meetings as a Healthwatch volunteer.

"It is a pleasure to be involved with Healthwatch York. The team is highly knowledgeable, compassionate and driven to help individuals and provide a valuable community service. I am proud to be involved in any small way. "

"I have been part of the Healthwatch York steering group for almost two years, but my involvement goes back much further. As a disabled person, I have used the services and attended meetings to highlight disabled people's experiences for over eight years.

"I was pleased to be involved in the trans, non-binary and intersex (TNBI) report, as part of the wider queer community, and because of the intersection of experiences of being TNBI and disabled. It is great to see how representatives from different sectors (including the NHS) can work together on such an important issue.

"As someone with multiple health conditions that primarily affect cis women, feeding into the women's health work felt important and close to my heart. Gender is often a factor in how good the healthcare we receive is, or how bad it is."



Helen

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.healthwatchyork.co.uk



01904 621133



healthwatch@yorkcvs.org.uk

Volunteers make a big difference



Phoenix

"I took part in the trans, non-binary and intersex people's experiences of healthcare project as someone who is trans non-binary themselves. This was a great opportunity to work on a project with a diverse and wonderful group of people, where trans, non-binary and intersex people were central to shaping the direction of the report and key actions beyond.

"So often similar projects that are about marginalised people do not centre their views when considering direction and action. The approach taken in this project must be an example and is crucial to making progress."

We asked key stakeholders what three words they would use to describe Healthwatch York.

Here's what they said:



Finance and future priorities

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

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual contract with City of York Council	£115,610	Expenditure on pay	£95,403
Additional income	£7,023	Non-pay expenditure	£24,050
		Office and management fee	£17,528
Total income	£122,633	Total Expenditure	£136,981

Additional income is broken down into:

- £3,523 received from the University of York Evidence Synthesis Group for patient and public involvement support.
- £3,500 received from Lived Insights for the participatory stream of the Improving the welfare safety net in York project.

Integrated Care System funding:

Healthwatch across Humber and North Yorkshire did not receive any funding from our Integrated Care System.



“Working with Healthwatch York has been transformative to our work as a small VCSE organisation. They go above and beyond in their efforts to truly understand the needs of our community, using their voices and roles to advocate for us, without ever speaking for us.”

Stakeholder feedback

Finance and future priorities

2026/27 may be the final year of local Healthwatch. Our future depends on the decisions made as the Health Bill makes its way through Parliament.

We believe people still need a strong voice in health and care. Working alongside existing voluntary sector partners we amplify the voices least heard in our health and care system. We will continue to make the case for an independent voice organisation in our city.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Work alongside health and care partners in the city to keep independent voice on local agendas.
2. Continue the work we have started on mental health, gender health and poverty.
3. Maintain our Enter and View visits to care homes and support our Readability Panel to keep improving local health and care information.



“If Healthwatch was abolished a key loss would be its strong value for money: relatively small budgets generate system-wide insight that helps prevent repeat failures and supports more targeted service improvement. Its removal would also eliminate a trusted mechanism for capturing rich, qualitative public voices, particularly from people least likely to engage through surveys, digital feedback or formal complaints processes.”

Stakeholder feedback

The legal bit – the contract for Healthwatch in York

Healthwatch York is proud to be part of York CVS. Our registered office is York CVS, 15 Priory Street, York, YO1 6ET. The Chair of Healthwatch York sits on the York CVS Board of Trustees, and a York CVS Trustee sits on the Healthwatch York steering group.

Healthwatch York uses the Healthwatch Trademark for our activities under a license agreement with Healthwatch England.

The way we work

How we involve others in our governance and decision making.

Our Healthwatch York steering group consists of ten members. They volunteer with us to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities. Our Steering Group makes sure that the concerns and interests of our diverse local community shape our priority areas of work.

Throughout 2025/26, the Steering Group met four times and provided advice and constructive challenge. This has informed our approach to all the work reported on this year.

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

We use a wide range of approaches to make sure that as many people as possible can share their experiences of using services.

During 2025/26, we have been available by phone, email and social media, we provide a web form on our website. We attended community group meetings and forums. We hold pop-up stands across our community. We also hosted our own York volCeS meetings.

We make our publications available to as many people and partner organisations as possible. We publish them on our website, email them to our mailing list, and print and post copies on request. We share our Annual Report with York's Health and Wellbeing Board and include highlights in our Summer Magazine. We also provide copies of our publications with libraries across the city. Pop in and have a read at your convenience!

Statutory statements

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We make sure that people who can make decisions about services hear about your insights and experiences.

We take information to service providers like York & Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, sector representatives like York CVS and Community Pharmacy North Yorkshire, councillors and council leaders, MPs, and Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board. We also work with other local Healthwatch, Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission. We share data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

We take insight and experiences to strategic meetings in the city including York's Health and Wellbeing Board, York Health and Care Partnership Executive Committee, York Health and Care Collaborative, York Mental Health Partnership, York Drug and Alcohol Partnership, York Safeguarding Adults Board and Raise York Partnership meetings.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch York is represented on the York Health and Wellbeing Board by Siân Balsom, Healthwatch York Manager.

During 2025/26, Siân has effectively carried out this role by attending the meetings, presenting Healthwatch York reports, compiling updates at the Board's request, and taking an active role in all Board discussions.

Healthwatch York is also represented on the Humber and North Yorkshire Partnership Steering and Oversight Board by Siân Balsom.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

All visits have been completed under our care home assessment programme; a report has been published following each visit.

Location	Main recommendations
Rawcliffe Manor	Improve colour contrast for residents' room doors
Mossdale	Provide more activities and trips out for residents
Southpark	Improve green spaces and external signage
Ivy Lodge	Replace faded pictures
The Oaks	Produce information in large font sizes
The Lodge	Encourage residents to move more
Amarna House	Make sure there is variety in meal choice
The Chocolate Works	Review staffing to reduce residents' waiting for care
Meadowbeck	Redecorate to help distinguish different units

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Participatory research	Working alongside Lived Insights, people with experience of the welfare safety net shared their views.
Partnership with NHS dentist	19 people with significant dental needs now get regular NHS dental treatment.
Winter services list	648 people downloaded information about services available to them over the festive period. Over 200 paper copies were also shared.
Women's health report	Neonatal tongue-tie pathway changed.
Self harm national research work led by University of York	Provided lived experience and practitioner insight.

Healthwatch York
15 Priory Street
York
YO1 6ET

 www.healthwatchyork.co.uk

 01904 621133

 healthwatch@yorkcvs.org.uk

 /HealthwatchYork

 @hw_york

 @healthwatch-york

 @healthwatchyork.bsky.social