



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Herefordshire Annual Report 2025/26

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Chief Executive
Christine Price

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The health and care system plays a vital role in our lives, and we know it faces real challenges. Listening to people’s thoughts about their care is one of the best ways to improve services. Every comment, concern, and compliment helps health and care professionals see what works and what needs to change, so care can be safer and better for everyone.

“We want to say a heartfelt thanks to all the local people who have taken the time to share their experiences, and to the health and social care professionals who have listened and acted on that feedback. Your commitment has helped make a real difference for our community.”

A message from our chair

Listening to Communities, Shaping Better Care

This report highlights another successful year of listening to the people of Herefordshire and using their experiences to help improve local health and social care services. It reflects the breadth of work undertaken by our dedicated staff and volunteers, from supporting individuals and carrying out research to visiting services and working alongside partners to influence positive change. At the heart of every project are the voices of local people and a shared commitment to making services better for everyone.

Healthwatch plays a unique role within the local health and care system. As an independent organisation, we ensure the experiences of patients, carers and communities are heard by those responsible for planning and delivering services. Our role extends beyond gathering feedback; we identify themes, provide robust evidence and work constructively with partners to support learning, collaboration and continuous improvement. We recognise the significant challenges facing health and care services and strive to ensure public insight informs practical, balanced and meaningful change.

Throughout the year, I have been reminded that the experiences of those using services often reveal what statistics alone cannot. They highlight acts of compassion, identify barriers and help us better understand how care is experienced in practice. These insights are invaluable in shaping services that are not only effective but also responsive to the needs of local people.



I hope this report demonstrates the value of independent patient and public engagement. High-quality health and care services are built not only on professional expertise and innovation, but also on listening to the people who use them.



Chair
Dr Andrew Watts

Every experience shared helps celebrate what works well and identify opportunities for improvement, ensuring local voices remain central to the future of health and care in Herefordshire.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our work this year. My sincere thanks go to everyone who shared their experiences, and to our staff, volunteers, trustees and partner organisations for their dedication, professionalism and continued commitment. Together, they demonstrate the powerful difference that listening to local people can make.

About us

Healthwatch Herefordshire is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that Council & 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

A world where we can all get the health and care we need in the way that we need it.



Our mission

- To help make people's experiences of health and care better.
- Listen to the people who live and work in Herefordshire.
- Work in partnership to build a strong community voice.
- Champion the involvement of the public in shaping health and care services.
- Contribute to the development of an Integrated Care System.
- Support Healthwatch England to shape national policy.



Our values are:

- Independent – working on behalf of all to challenge those in power to design and deliver better health and social care services.
- Inclusive – working for everyone, not just those who shout the loudest.
- Influential – working with other local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England to make an impact locally and nationally.
- Credible – holding ourselves to the highest standards and gathering authentic experiences.
- Transparent – reporting our findings and the difference we have made back to the public.
- Collaborative – working with the public, health, social care and the voluntary and community sector

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than **3100** people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ **6** staff and, our work is supported by **70** volunteers.



Reaching out:

2691 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

207 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as **GP Appointment Access accessing hospital services** and **sharing their experiences of social care services**.



Championing your voice:

We published **8** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like: **accessing Emergency Department Care, Understanding Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Communities, Severe Mental Illness, Neurodivergent Spaces, Childhood Immunisations, Loneliness & Community Health Champions**.

Our most popular publication was our **Neurodivergent Spaces in Herefordshire: Listening, Learning and Improving Inclusion**, highlighting what helps and what hinders Neurodivergent individuals when accessing public spaces, services, transport and community venues.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by **Herefordshire Council** In 2025/26 we received **£140,000** which was **the same amount** 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 **Herefordshire**. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Menopause & Me report was published, speaking to 213 women in Herefordshire about how difficult and varied the menopause journey can be.



We developed our Community Health Champion Programme further to focus more on the top 5 cancers, and we began targeted recruitment for Cancer Champions.

Summer

We published our Loneliness Report – Loneliness a Grass Roots perspective from Herefordshire.
Childhood Vaccination project – Working with Herefordshire Public Health to support uptake of Vaccinations in certain pockets of the county



We explored the experiences of people living with Severe Mental Illness to inform more coordinated, compassionate and person-centred care. Culminating in an informative report which also included views from organisations working across mental health, voluntary sector and statutory services.

Autumn

A year's engagement leading to the publishing of Life & Health in Herefordshire Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Communities report.

Explored why people attend the Emergency Department, informing improvements to urgent care pathways and access to primary care.



Neurodivergent Spaces in Herefordshire: Identified practical ways to make public spaces and services more accessible, inclusive and welcoming for neurodivergent people. Resulting in an informative report with great practical recommendations.

Winter

In late October we produced the Homelessness Charter for Herefordshire. On World Homeless Day, more than 30 organisations from across Herefordshire came together at Community Power's new hub in St Peter's Square.



We held our second Hear our Voices event for our Learning Disability Communities in Herefordshire, an event bringing together over 60 individuals, giving them a platform to talk about how they want health & care to work for them and what's important.

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 **Herefordshire** this year:



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

Hearing personal experiences and their impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

Lee's Place has increased understanding of homelessness across Herefordshire by amplifying the voices of people with lived experience. Their insights have challenged stigma, highlighted barriers to healthcare and essential services, and helped shape more accessible and compassionate support.



Getting services to involve the public

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

Healthwatch Herefordshire worked with health system partners such as Taurus Healthcare in Herefordshire to ensure public and community voices informed efforts to improve cancer screening uptake. Through engagement with underserved communities, including rural residents, agricultural workers, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, and people experiencing homelessness, we gathered insight into barriers to screening participation. Findings were shared with service providers and commissioners, helping to shape more accessible and culturally appropriate approaches to engagement, communication, and service delivery.



Improving care over time

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

Through our engagement with Lee's Place and the local homeless community, Healthwatch Herefordshire amplified the voices of people experiencing homelessness and multiple disadvantage. The insights gathered highlighted barriers to accessing housing, healthcare and support services, informing discussions with Herefordshire Council and system partners. By ensuring lived experience remained central, we contributed to the development of a more coordinated, person-centred approach to supporting people with complex lives.

Listening to your experiences

Meaningful improvement starts with listening. By sharing your experiences, you help identify issues, inform decision-making, and support positive change across health and care services.

Throughout the year, we listened to people from across Herefordshire to understand their experiences of health and care services. Their feedback helped us identify what is working well, where improvements are needed, and enabled us to influence positive change across local services.



Taking the Chatty Van around the county to ensure all local voices are heard

Our Chatty Van gives us a flexible engagement point within our communities in Herefordshire.

What did we do

We used our Chatty Caravan to reach people in their own communities and listen to their views. We took the caravan to local shows, housing estates & parks, community events, and areas identified as deprivation hotspots, often working alongside other local services. It is a welcoming, informal space where people feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

Through these conversations, we gathered valuable insights into both individual and wider community needs, helping ensure all voices are heard.

Key things we heard:



44%

Housing, living conditions & financial pressures

30%

Transport and accessibility

26%

Literacy, communication & digital barriers

Our work showed how a complicated bureaucratic process and poor communication across services can leave communities without access to basic healthcare.

What difference did this make?

The Chatty Van enabled Healthwatch Herefordshire to engage directly with communities in familiar settings, reaching people who may not otherwise share their experiences. This approach captured more diverse community insights, helping to shape more responsive and inclusive health and social care services.

Engaging with our communities

During the year we have undertaken three significant pieces of engagement within Herefordshire. We have worked with individuals experiencing Serious Mental Illness, the Neurodivergent community and those accessing emergency care to understand their views, experiences and identify health inequalities.

Severe Mental Illness – Breaking Barriers Together

Healthwatch Herefordshire undertook an engagement project to better understand the experiences of people living with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) and the inequalities affecting their health. The project highlighted the close relationship between mental and physical health, alongside significant barriers to accessing care, including fragmented services, poor continuity, stigma and diagnostic overshadowing.

The findings informed recommendations for more coordinated, compassionate and person-centred care, including improved access to services, proactive physical health support and stronger community-based provision. By amplifying lived experience, the project has helped shape local discussions on reducing health inequalities and improving outcomes for people living with SMI.

Neurodivergent Spaces in Herefordshire

Healthwatch Herefordshire undertook one of the county's largest engagement projects with neurodivergent people to better understand the barriers and enablers to accessing public spaces, services and community venues. The findings highlighted the importance of sensory-friendly environments, clear communication, predictable routines and, above all, welcoming and understanding staff.

The project demonstrated that simple, practical adjustments can significantly improve accessibility and inclusion. Its recommendations are helping local organisations create more welcoming environments, ensuring neurodivergent people can participate more confidently in everyday life while improving experiences for everyone.

Engaging with our communities

Understanding Emergency Department Attendance

Healthwatch Herefordshire conducted a major piece of engagement work and spoke with 501 patients attending the Emergency Department at Hereford County Hospital, this also included 73 in-depth follow-up interviews, to better understand why people choose to access emergency care and their experiences of the service.

The project found that many people attended because they were concerned about the seriousness of their symptoms. More than half of those experiencing difficulties accessing primary care reported being unable to secure a GP appointment before attending ED. Others had been advised to attend by NHS 111 or another healthcare professional or were unsure where else to seek help. While patients consistently praised the kindness and professionalism of NHS staff, they also highlighted long waiting times, communication gaps and limited awareness of alternative urgent care services.

The findings informed recommendations to improve access to primary care, strengthen public understanding of urgent care pathways and support investment in community-based alternatives, helping ensure people receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

Information and signposting

Healthwatch Herefordshire provides free, independent information and support on issues such as accessing NHS dental care, navigating health and care services, understanding rights and making complaints, helping people make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing.

During the year, we supported 207 people by providing trusted advice, information and signposting to health and care services. We helped people access the support they needed, understand their rights, navigate complaints processes, and share feedback about their experiences. By empowering individuals to raise concerns and advocate for themselves and their families, we ensured their voices were heard and their experiences helped inform service improvement.



Understanding marginalised communities

Thanks to Rose's feedback, professionals now have a better understanding of the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller community.

During our engagement with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, one family shared the barriers they faced accessing healthcare, including difficulties registering with GP services, attending appointments and feeling judged because of their background. By providing a trusted space to talk openly, we gained valuable insight into the challenges affecting their health and wellbeing. Their experiences informed recommendations to improve access and encourage more inclusive, culturally responsive services across Herefordshire.



"People finally understood what life is really like for us. It felt good to know someone was listening and wanted to understand. Too often decisions are made about us without anyone asking what it's actually like."

Improving the journey through emergency care

Kathleen felt she was unsupported, through her feedback simple changes have been made to address this and make the journey better for everyone.

As part of Healthwatch Herefordshire's Journey through Emergency Departments project, we spoke to a local resident who had attended A&E several times with ongoing health concerns. Although they received the care they needed, they described feeling anxious and unsupported due to poor communication and uncertainty about what would happen next.

By sharing their experience, they identified simple improvements, including clearer communication, better information about waiting times and greater emotional support for patients and families. Their feedback formed part of a wider body of evidence shared with local NHS partners to help improve the experience of urgent and emergency care..



"For the first time, someone actually listened. I didn't expect anything to change, but being able to share my experience made me feel heard. If it helps make things easier for someone else, it was worth it."

Understanding marginalised communities

By sharing Paul's experiences, he helped highlight the barriers that many people experiencing homelessness encounter.

Paul (name changed) had experienced periods of homelessness for several years and was struggling with poor mental health, isolation, and the daily challenges of navigating support services. Having been released from prison with no fixed accommodation, he found himself trying to manage housing applications, benefits, healthcare appointments, and recovery support while also coping with the uncertainty of where he would sleep each night.

Through attending Lee's Place, Paul found a safe and welcoming environment where he could access practical support and speak openly about the challenges he was facing. By sharing his experiences, he helped highlight the barriers that many people experiencing homelessness encounter, including difficulties accessing housing, fragmented support services, digital exclusion, and the impact of loneliness on mental wellbeing. His story contributed to wider discussions with local partners about the need for a more coordinated approach to supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage.



"People think homelessness is just about not having a roof over your head, but it's everything that comes with it. Having somewhere to go where people listen and understand made a huge difference. It reminded me that I wasn't invisible."



Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given **6798 hours** to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote our work and raise awareness of the early signs of cancer, cancer screening and signposted the public to trusted sources of information.
- Supported homeless guests at Lee's Place, recorded their lived experiences and signposted them to appropriate services
- Collected experiences about a variety of health matters and supported their communities to share their views.



Showcasing volunteer impact

Cancer Champions

Our Cancer Champions play a vital role in helping us reach communities that may be less likely to engage with traditional health promotion activities. Working within their own communities, networks, and social groups, they help raise awareness of cancer prevention, encourage participation in screening programmes, and normalise conversations about cancer and early diagnosis.

As trusted members of their communities, Cancer Champions provide valuable insight into the fears, misconceptions, and barriers that prevent people from accessing screening and seeking help early. They help us understand the real-life experiences of local people and identify practical solutions that could improve awareness, accessibility, and uptake. This two-way flow of information enables us to tailor our engagement approaches and ensure that community voices directly influence future cancer awareness and screening initiatives.



Being a Cancer Champion has given me the confidence to start conversations that people often avoid. I've seen first-hand how fear, misinformation, and embarrassment can stop people from attending screening or seeking help when something doesn't feel right. By having open conversations within my community, I can help people feel more comfortable talking about cancer and understanding the importance of early detection. It's rewarding to know that by sharing information and listening to people's concerns, I am helping to break down barriers and support Community Power's work to improve cancer awareness and save lives."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Lee's Place Volunteers

Volunteers are at the heart of Lee's Place. Over the past year, our volunteer network has grown to more than 100 individuals who generously give their time to support people experiencing homelessness and multiple disadvantage. Through building trusted relationships, offering practical support, and creating a welcoming environment, volunteers play a crucial role in helping people feel valued, connected, and supported.

Beyond their day-to-day contribution, volunteers help us develop a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges, and needs of the homeless community. Their observations, conversations, and relationships provide valuable insight that informs our engagement work, service development, and wider conversations about homelessness and health inequalities.

To support this growing volunteer workforce, we introduced the Beacon volunteer management system during the last year. Beacon has streamlined recruitment, onboarding, communication, training, and record-keeping, making it easier for people to apply, become involved, and stay connected with volunteering opportunities across Community Power.

"Volunteering at Lee's Place has completely changed my understanding of homelessness. I've learned that everyone who walks through the door has a story, and many people are facing challenges that most of us never see. Sometimes the most important thing we can offer isn't just a hot meal, it's a friendly face, a conversation, and a place where people feel welcome and respected. Being part of Lee's Place has shown me how much trust matters and how small acts of kindness can make a real difference. It's rewarding to know that, together, we're helping people feel less isolated while also giving a voice to experiences that can help improve support for others in the future."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Supporting the next generation of health professionals

Healthwatch Herefordshire welcomed Seb, a Health and Social Care student from Hereford Sixth Form College, for an eight-week, 60-hour work experience placement. During this time, he gained practical experience in community engagement, public health promotion, research and service evaluation, developing a greater understanding of how Healthwatch works with communities to improve health and social care services.

Seb supported engagement activities at Ledbury Food Bank and a Shared Lives Service event, helping to gather feedback and raise awareness of Healthwatch's information and signposting services. He also contributed to research on behalf of Wye Valley NHS Trust, exploring patients' journeys into the Emergency Department and the factors influencing their decision to attend.

During his placement, Seb became one of our youngest Cancer Champions and researched new ways to engage young people in conversations about cancer awareness, screening and preventative healthcare. His placement demonstrated the value of providing meaningful opportunities for young people to develop practical skills while making a positive contribution to improving local health and care services.

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.



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Finance and future priorities

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

Our income and expenditure:

At the time of publication for Healthwatch England year end accounts have not been finalised.

Income		Expenditure	
Annual Healthwatch grant from Government	£140,000	Expenditure on pay	£
		Non-pay expenditure	£
		Office and management fee	£
Total income	£140,000	Total Expenditure	£

Finance and future priorities

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. Tackling health inequalities
2. Ensuring the communities voice is heard in the developing landscape of neighbourhood health
3. Plans to reach parts of the community we don't currently hear from.

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