

Annual Report

Healthwatch Wigan & Leigh
2025-2026

Facing Change



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Message from our Director of the board – Adrian Hardy

Well what a year 2025–26 has proved to be for Healthwatch, here in Wigan and Leigh and also nationally! Under the NHS 10–year plan it’s been decided that our functions can be split between local councils and Integrated Care Boards, but there’s no guarantee of the funding being provided or the need to maintain a direct voice for the patient and the public.

Here in Wigan and Leigh we are fortunate to have had some pre-emptive action (as it now transpires) to enable continued Public Involvement and Engagement in the form of the Public Involvement Engagement (PIE) hub, which is being housed within the Wigan Borough Community First (WBCF) organisation. This will retain funding and staff to support individuals and groups undertaking research and proposing actions to address concerns that arise in their local communities.

Working directly with local people will ensure that those who have the best knowledge of the issues that face them are also enabled to come up with proposed solutions that can be put to the council and the health service. Working via the PIE Hub also gives renewed impetus for volunteers to get involved in practical activities that lead to visible results for their areas.

Message from our Director of the board – Adrian Hardy

Wigan Council continue to pass on to Healthwatch Wigan and Leigh the nationally allocated funds to see us through to 2027, by which time HealthWatches are likely to have been abolished by law. We have been pleased to work with both Council and local health and social care organisations in a constructive manner since we took on the contract 5 years ago.

Constructive suggestions regarding amongst others hospital discharge, home care improvements, and mental health provision alongside participation in action groups and Overview and Scrutiny meetings have all been means to ensure that practical changes can be brought about.

Whilst the environment in which Healthwatch activities will be undertaken will change, the flexibility that has been demonstrated by Karen, Lacey, Andrea, Ann, other staff and the Board Members will continue to support means of dialogue and potential for change well into the future.



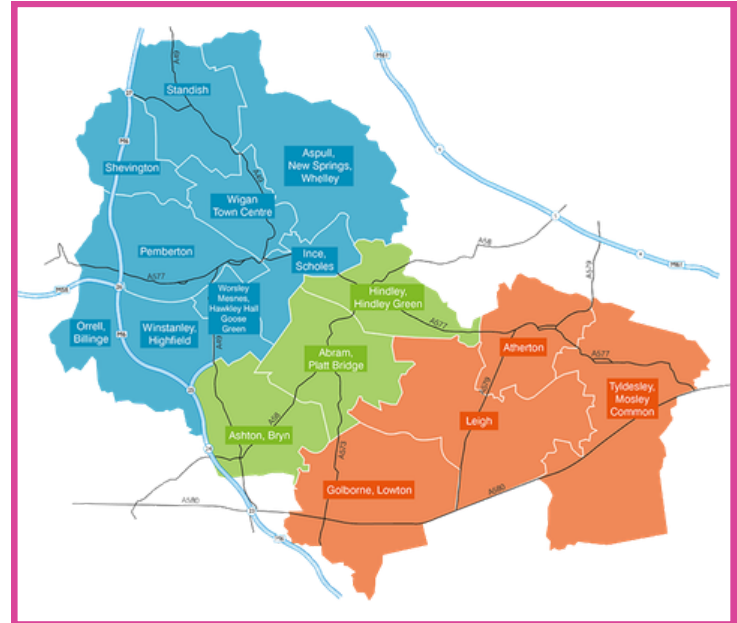
Our patch map



Our Neighbourhood Map

At Wigan and Leigh Healthwatch, we exist to ensure our community's voices are heard across Wigan Borough. We cover:

- Abram, Platt Bridge Ashton, Bryn
- Aspull, New Springs, and Whelley Atherton
- Golborne, Lowton Hindley, Hindley Green
- Ince Scholes Leigh
- Orrell, Billinge Pemberton
- Shevington Standish
- Tyldesley, Astley and Mosley Common
Wigan Town Centre
- Winstanley Highfield Worsley Mesnes,
Hawley Hall Goose Green



Meet our team



Karen Parker
Chief Executive Officer



Lacey Briscoe
Chief Operating Officer

healthwatch
Wigan and Leigh



Andrea Arkwright
Healthwatch Lead &
Community Research
Lead



Sophie Walker
Communications
Assistant

Our Values



Empowered Leadership – provide citizens with the skills and knowledge to facilitate change and have their voices heard.



Integrity – Honest and selfless and act solely in terms of the public interest.



Accountable – open and transparent in everything we do.



Independent – in purpose, voice, and action.



Objective – take decisions impartially and fairly without discrimination or bias.



Inclusivity – we will support communities that are not normally heard to have a voice and challenge inequality.



Critical Friend – We will be constructive as well as challenging to service providers and the system.

Our Year In Numbers

8,600

Website
Views

1,817

People
engaged

50

Signposting
and
information

0

Enter &
view visits

26

Volunteers

2

Reports
Published

A year Of Making a Difference

Spring

Our Home Care Project was recently launched, exploring people's experiences of using Home Care Services. The project gathered feedback from service users about the quality, reliability, and overall impact of the support they receive at home. These insights will help us understand what is working well and identify areas for improvement, ensuring services continue to meet people's needs effectively.

Summer

We began developing our Public Involvement & Engagement (PIE) Hub in partnership with Wigan Borough Community First. The aim was to establish a sustainable, long-term engagement structure that would continue to support community involvement even after Healthwatch's commissioned responsibilities conclude, ensuring local voices remain heard and represented.

Autumn

Our Pharmacy First Project was launched to explore local experiences of the Pharmacy First Service. We invited members of the community to share their views via social media, gathering feedback on accessibility, convenience, and overall satisfaction to help us better understand how the service is working in practice.

Winter

We launched research training for members of the Public Involvement Engagement Hub, equipping them with the skills and confidence to take part in meaningful engagement work. As part of this, we assigned the Hub's first project, focusing on access to Women's Gynaecological Services, to help explore local experiences and identify any barriers to care.

Engagement

Leigh Job Centre

Healthwatch Wigan and Leigh were contacted by the Disability Advisor from the local Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) Service to see if we could go along to one of their staffs Communication Events. The event was for work coaches for upskilling and awareness of what organisations deliver in the Wigan & Leigh Borough, to assist with their most vulnerable of clients.



Andrea went along to the session and spoke to around twenty of the coaches to explain what Healthwatch and our NHS Complaints Advocacy Service offers and how we could assist their clients. It was a great morning, and we were made very welcome by everyone.

Andrea and Annick, our volunteer Healthwatch representative, who attends the Carers Network Meeting attended the Carers Voice Session which was held at the Diamond Community Centre in Ashton in Makerfield

The Carers Voice sessions provide a welcoming space where unpaid carers and their loved ones can access advice and information, share their views and experiences, and engage directly with the Carers Lead and a representative from the Carers Centre. These sessions aim to empower carers by giving them a platform to express what matters most to them in an open and supportive environment.

Topics and Experiences Shared:

- Being denied the opportunity to stay with their loved ones during hospital admissions, despite prior arrangements.
- The lack of continuity in care due to too many different carers attending to the same individual.

As a part of mental health week awareness week Atherleigh Park arranged a Market Place Event. Healthwatch were invited to have a stall at the marketplace event. The event was around promoting different community services that patients could access.

The event was well attended by patients services and staff members. There were services in attendance such as We are With You, Digital, Carers etc.



Whilst we were at the event, we promoted the GM ICB Adult ADHD Consultation which a lot of people were interested in. Some of the themes from people sharing their health and social care experiences were around community pharmacy and also how grateful families were when the Consultants explained in detail about their loved ones mental health diagnosis.

Supporting Our Veterans

We regularly attend the Armed Forces HQ Monday club to hear the voices of people who have served in the armed forces around their health and social care and wellbeing

Armed Forces Community HQ

It was a crisp Monday morning as I made my way to the Armed Forces HQ for one of my regular visits. Stepping inside, the familiar atmosphere brought a sense of comfort. The room buzzed with quiet conversations and the occasional burst of laughter as veterans shared stories and updates with one another.

Impact

One of the first people I encountered today was a veteran I had supported during my last visit. He had been concerned about accessibility and privacy issues at the local swimming pool, and I was delighted to hear that the outcome had been positive. His smile spoke volumes, and I was pleased to know that his concerns had been addressed.

As the morning unfolded, various discussions took place, each highlighting different challenges and shared experiences.



One prominent topic was the issue of cars parking on kerbs and how this affected individuals using mobility scooters. Some of the veterans at the centre devoted their time to refurbishing mobility scooters and wheelchairs, offering them to those in need within the community. Their dedication was inspiring. Another pressing matter was the frequent battery failures in mobility cars. One veteran recounted a frustrating incident from the previous evening when his battery had gone flat at the local rugby match, leaving him stranded until the breakdown service arrived. The reason the batteries go flat is because the lift takes all the power out of the battery. The group nodded in understanding, sharing their own experiences and suggesting some possible solutions, which lay with the vehicle companies.

Towards the end of my visit, I had the pleasure of meeting one of the Directors Chris and his companion, Jess. We reminisced about our experiences in the forces, bonding over shared memories. Chris had served as a submariner, while I had been the wife of a soldier. What made our conversation even more delightful was the realisation that we had both married in 1979, and his wife and I had both been just 19 at the time. The coincidence sparked laughter and added a touch of warmth to an already meaningful visit.

As I left the HQ, I reflected on the morning's discussions. Each visit reinforces the resilience and camaraderie of the veterans, and I always walk away with a renewed appreciation for the community they have built.

GP access was, once again, a significant concern. Many of the veterans expressed their frustration at the struggle to secure appointments. The need to call exactly two minutes before 8 AM to even have a chance of getting through to a doctor, coupled with the MYGP App shutting off at 10 AM, made the process stressful and inefficient.

As the conversations began to wind down, we found ourselves discussing something a little lighter, star maps and the wonders of the night sky. The shift in topic brought a sense of curiosity and nostalgia as we exchanged stories about constellations and space events.





It was another one of my regular visits to HQ Armed Forces a place that's become familiar and welcoming over time. As always, I was greeted by Mike, the dedicated Primary Care Liaison Coordinator. Mike never seems to slow down; he's constantly building bridges with GPs across the borough, making sure the needs of veterans are always on someone's radar. While I was there, I had the chance to sit down and chat with a few veterans and their carers about our Home Care Project.

Some of the veterans were already receiving support, and I was inspired by how willing they were to complete the survey and share their honest thoughts. It's clear that for them, this project isn't just a service, it's a lifeline for them. As the conversations flowed, a woman approached me. Her father, a veteran in attendance, had expressed an interest in joining some sort of exercise class, but they weren't sure where to start. Another veteran nearby had a different question, he wanted to know if there were any Be Well membership discounts available for Veterans on Universal Credit and living with a disability.

I told them I'd look into their questions raised. IMPACT. I got in touch with both the Be Well Department and Leigh Sports Village, to find some answers.



- To take part in Be Well activity sessions, the veteran would need an assessment by their Wellbeing Team. I passed this information back to the daughter, who was grateful for the information.
- As for the membership query, Be Well offers a monthly Direct Debit for veterans at £25 per month. But there may be an even better option: the new Be Well Pass. It could work out cheaper, offering both pay-as-you-go and monthly payment plans. For anyone who wants to explore this further, the membership can be contacted on 01942 828535.
- It's worth noting, though, that both the Be Well Pass and Veterans Direct Debit only cover activities offered directly by Be Well.

Every visit to HQ reminds me why this work matters. It's about more than just services, it's about connection, care, and community.

While I was at HQ Armed Forces, I had the pleasure of catching up with Alex Winstanley, the Managing Director of Happy Smiles Training CIC. As we talked about the Home Care Project, Alex was genuinely interested and supportive. Without hesitation, he offered to promote the project to the members of Happy Smiles Training, this is another reminder of how collaboration can make a real difference.

Health and Wellbeing Event

Jess our Research Lead and Sophie our Communication and Social Media Officer attended the Health and Wellbeing Event at Hindley organised by BeWell, Wigan Council.

There were around 48 stalls at the event ranging from health checks, benefit advice to information on sexual health services information. Over 200 residents attended the event taking up the offers of health and blood pressure checks.

In December, Sophie and Jess held a stall at Babyzone to promote what Healthwatch offers and how we can support people with their experiences of health and social care services.

Babyzone is held at Wigan Youth Zone every Friday from 9.30am to 2.30pm. It is a free drop-in space for families with children aged 0–5 years, offering a full programme of activities throughout the day with no need to book.



Home care services play a crucial role in supporting community health and wellbeing. They enable many residents across the borough to remain independent in their own homes and stay connected to their communities, often delaying or avoiding the need for long-term care. Because home care is delivered directly in people's homes, it is a service that can be less visible than others, making it an important area to explore and understand more deeply.



The aim of this project was to listen to the experiences of people who use home care services commissioned by Wigan Adult Social Services, as well as their families. We wanted to understand what is working well and where there may be opportunities to strengthen support. We also sought the perspectives of the staff and registered managers who deliver these services every day.

Although only a small number of people responded, their feedback still offered valuable insight into how home care is experienced locally.

A few helpful themes emerged, showing clear opportunities to strengthen the home care service. These insights provide a helpful foundation for strengthening home care services and ensuring they continue to support residents to live well at home. The findings from the project fed into the CQC Inspection at the local authority.

119

Surveys
Completed

40

Family

13

Clients

5

Friends

Impact

Parents experience of ADHD referrals and support

Despite a strong family history of ADHD and clear difficulties at school, the child's ADHD referral continues to be rejected. Parent has been trying since before Christmas to secure a paediatric referral, but conflicting information about age criteria and repeated refusals have prevented any progress. School interventions are not helping, and without a diagnosis the child cannot access the support they need. Parent is becoming increasingly distressed as they have repeatedly sought help from the GP, ADHD nurse, and appointment lines with no resolution.

What difference did this make?

By speaking with the parent and liaising with partner services alternative support options within the borough were identified and shared, ensuring the parent was aware of available pathways despite the service not being able to diagnose or prescribe for children under six.

With the parents' consent, concerns have also been passed to education colleagues, enabling a review of the support in school and promoting a more coordinated approach to meeting the child's needs.

The local Community Link Worker contacted Healthwatch with an urgent request for support regarding three children who were unable to access dental care. One of the children was experiencing significant dental pain, raising concerns about the need for prompt assessment and treatment. Recognising the urgency of the situation and the difficulties families can face when trying to register with an NHS dentist, Healthwatch acted quickly to help coordinate support.



To ensure the children could access appropriate care as soon as possible, Healthwatch liaised with the Professional Advisory in Dentistry to seek assistance in identifying a suitable dental practice that would be able to accept the children and provide the necessary treatment. Through this collaborative approach, every effort was made to secure timely access to dental services and reduce the risk of the children's oral health deteriorating further.

What difference did this make?

The dental advisor responded promptly and was able to identify a dental practice willing to register all three children. This swift intervention ensured the family could finally access the dental care and support they had been struggling to secure. Most importantly, the child experiencing significant pain was able to receive treatment without further delay, helping to relieve immediate discomfort and prevent the issue from worsening.

The outcome brought considerable reassurance and relief to the family, who had been anxious about accessing appropriate care for their children.



Our Volunteers

Our volunteers have invested **7,346** hours of their time this year—**1,049** working days—helping to drive our work forward. Their dedication to improving care allows us to better identify strengths in the system and highlight where improvements are necessary.

We were lucky to have in total

26 Volunteers

who gave up 1049 days to make care better for our community. This equates to over

£98,803

(Based on living wage)



A word from Our Volunteers



Annick

As a volunteer in the Healthwatch team, I take part in bi-monthly sessions with the Carers Network, where I share updates and feedback on current Healthwatch activities. I have been attending these sessions since April 2025. In addition to this, I served on the Healthwatch Advisory Committee, which was responsible for identifying and prioritising potential projects. During my time on the committee, I contributed to a project reviewing the services provided by Home Care providers.



A word from Our Volunteers



Elaine

I am Elaine and joined Healthwatch six years ago, first as a volunteer and later as a member of the Advisory Committee. This allowed me to engage with local people, listen to their experiences and contribute to decisions about project priorities. I also supported work such as delayed hospital discharge and patient engagement in A&E at Wigan Infirmary.

For the past five years, I have represented the Healthwatch Chief Officer on the Wigan Safeguarding Adults Board, contributing to quarterly discussions on safeguarding activity, learning and risks. The Board consistently values the lived experiences shared through Healthwatch, recognising their importance in shaping future services. My involvement in the Board's development day helped ensure the WSAB mission "working together with our communities, helping people to live safer, happier lives"—remains central to its strategic direction



Information & Sign Posting

Whether someone needs guidance on making a NHS complaint, registering with a GP or wants to share feedback, we're here to help. Throughout the year, **50** people reached out for advice, support, and direction to services that could meet their needs.

This Year we have:

- Connected people with the right support
- Helped individuals find the contact details they needed
- Encouraged people to share their personal experiences
- Provided reliable, up-to-date information they can trust.

Our most sign posted subject was to the PALS and Complaints team as people wanted to make a complaint to the hospital regarding the service that they had received.

50

**People
sign
posted**

248

**Contacted us
for advice and
information**

During the Pharmacy First project, which took place between August and December 2025 in Wigan, we aimed to understand how the service is being used, how aware people are of it, and whether it is meeting patient needs. We carried out this project because we wanted to ensure that people in Wigan are receiving good-quality healthcare and to provide feedback that could help improve the service.

To do this, we used a digital-only approach. We collected patient experiences through social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X, as well as through an online survey, emails, and webforms. We asked people to share their experiences of using Pharmacy First and also created a survey to gather more detailed and anonymous feedback. We shared posts regularly, targeted specific areas and pharmacy chains, and worked with other healthcare services to help reach more people.



Projects

Pharmacy First



In total, we collected 14 responses. From this, we found that awareness of the Pharmacy First service in Wigan is quite low. However, those who had used the service were generally happy with waiting times and found it convenient, especially as it avoided the need to book a GP appointment. Feedback was mixed overall, with positive comments about accessibility and speed, but some concerns about the lack of clear information given to patients.

Overall, the project showed that while the service is useful and valued by those who use it, there is a need to improve awareness and communication to ensure patients have the best possible experience.

Due to the instability of the local ICB across GM we were unable to present for a response to the project.

Finance



Income		Expenditure	
Annual Grant	£200,000	Staff Costs	£128,011
		Other Costs	£26,398
Carried over into 2026-2027	£23,591	Commission out for Advocacy	£22,000

The Future of Healthwatch

The Future of Healthwatch – Louise Ansari Response – 28 June 2025

Today, media reports, have reported on the Government's plans to close Healthwatch England, the National Guardian's office, and others. The media reports suggest that following the closure of Healthwatch, our statutory function will transfer to the Department of Health and Social Care. Responding to the media reports to close Healthwatch, Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England, said:

“This is clearly a sad day for our staff, volunteers, and everyone associated with Healthwatch who have proudly supported people and communities to speak up about their experiences of health and social care. Over the past twelve years, we’ve helped millions of people raise concerns, access vital advice, and influence real change in the services they rely on. By championing the voices of local communities, we’ve helped drive countless improvements across the NHS and social care successes I understand the Government recognises. Our focus now is on ensuring a smooth transition of our functions to the NHS and Government, so that the voices of patients and the public continue to be heard.”

– Louise Ansari



Healthwatch Wigan and Leigh has been working with WBCF to create the Public Involvement Engagement (PIE) Hub. The PIE hub is here to empower the community by amplifying and supporting the meaningful conversations that are already taking place within neighbourhoods. It works to create safe, inclusive and welcoming spaces where people feel confident to share their experiences, views and ideas, knowing they will be listened to and valued. A key part of PIE Hub's approach is supporting community members to lead research themselves, not just participate in it, ensuring that local people shape the questions, the methods and the outcomes.

By building confidence, skills and knowledge, PIE Hub helps communities strengthen their ability to influence research, services and the decisions that directly affect their lives. This focus on capacity-building means that people are not only heard but are equipped to take an active role in driving change. Ultimately, PIE Hub is committed to turning lived experience into meaningful action, supporting positive, community-led change that reflects the real needs and aspirations of local people.



Contact Us



01942 834666



info@healthwatchwiganandleigh.co.uk



Healthwatchwigan&leigh.co.uk

