



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Sefton Annual Report 2025/26

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Diane Blair
Manager
Healthwatch Sefton



"I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to share their experiences and engage with Healthwatch Sefton over the past year. Your feedback is at the heart of everything we do, and this report demonstrates the positive impact that can be achieved when residents, services and organisations work together to drive improvements. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to our dedicated volunteers, whose commitment and passion make so much of our work possible. I would also like to recognise Nigel Bellamy for his invaluable support in stepping into the role of Interim Chair during the year. We value the ongoing support from our residents and our partners and look forward to continuing our work together to ensure residents' views help shape the future of health and care services across Sefton."

A message from our chair

This year has been one of strong collaboration, meaningful influence and impact for Healthwatch Sefton. Thanks to the feedback, experiences and insights shared by residents, we have continued to ensure that the voices of people across Sefton help shape the services they rely on.

Working alongside our dedicated volunteers, community champions and partner organisations, we have reached deeper into our communities and strengthened our understanding of the issues that matter most to local people. Thank you to every member of our staff and volunteer team for your ongoing support.

Resident feedback has led to positive changes across primary care, urgent care and community services, including improvements to access, communication, privacy and patient experience. Our work on GP access, treatment room provision and corridor care has ensured that decision-makers at both local and Cheshire & Merseyside system level, have heard and acted upon the experiences of Sefton residents.

As health and care services continue to evolve, Healthwatch Sefton remains committed to being an independent and trusted voice for local people, ensuring that lived experience continues to drive improvement and shape more responsive, inclusive services for everyone.



Nigel Bellamy
Interim Chair

“

I am proud of the difference made when local people, volunteers, community organisations and partners work together. By listening carefully and acting on what we hear, we have helped ensure residents' experiences lead directly to meaningful improvements across Sefton.”

About us

Healthwatch **Sefton** 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 and 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

In 2025/26 we supported more than 2000 people to have their say. We employed 5 members of staff and, our work was supported by 34 volunteers.



Reaching out:

We engaged with 3,250 residents, 2386 people sharing their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

401 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as finding an NHS dentist, support for long term conditions, and accessing social care.



Championing your voice:

Our most popular report was 'The views of Sefton Residents – GP Access Survey' highlighting residents experiences of accessing appointments at their GP practice.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by Sefton Council. Our new contract commenced on the 1st October this year and the contract value was £182,629, which is 27% more than last year.

A year of making a difference

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

Spring

At the Shaping Care Together Steering Group, our recommendations were fully adopted, significantly improving the consultation document's clarity, readability, and accessibility for local residents.



We championed community concerns, securing important respiratory care information on treatments, vaccinations, referrals, and home oxygen guidance.



Summer

After reports that patients at Ford Medical Centre were told that appointments could only be booked online, the practice committed to retraining reception staff and a review of call recordings to support further improvements.



Following our concerns that poor Wi-Fi increased anxiety by limiting contact with loved ones at Southport Emergency Department, the estates team ensured upgrades significantly improved connectivity.



Autumn

Healthwatch expanded Sefton's Oral Health Strategy consultation to include pregnant women and shared insight into the challenges residents face with e-vouchers when offered as a token of appreciation for engagement.



We completed an in-depth response to the 'Inequalities' theme for the refresh of the Health and Well-Being strategy, including feedback on oral health, access for older adults and health literacy.



Winter

Our Information Hub model was featured in Sefton's National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme submission as an exemplar of effective Neighbourhood-led community engagement.



Our contributions strengthened resident-focused messaging in Sefton's approach to neighbourhood health.



Working together for change

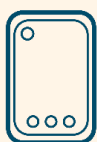
We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Sefton are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and that they influence decisions made about services at NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (ICB).

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside to achieve the following:



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

As a Healthwatch Collaborative, we have continued to work together to ensure the voices of the 2.5 million people who live, work and use health and care services across our region are heard. This collaboration helps the ICB understand local priorities and experiences across a wider area, supporting more equitable services. Healthwatch leads meet weekly to discuss key health and care issues, share updates from ICB meetings, engage with partners, and coordinate responses to regional matters. This has included contributing to consultations on proposals such as NHS Online, the new NHS online-only trust.



A big conversation:

Working with the Healthwatch Collaborative, we helped gather the views of 759 residents, including 156 people from Sefton, on their experiences of accessing healthcare online and using the NHS App. The findings revealed strong support for digital healthcare services when they are easy to use and complement existing services. However, respondents also highlighted barriers that can limit access for some groups. The resulting draft report and recommendations call for digital services to support, not replace human contact and for non-digital options to remain in place, helping to create a more inclusive healthcare system that works for everyone.



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

We continue to maintain strong relationships across the ICB, attending the public and private board meetings and various committees while retaining representation at place level in Sefton. Through shared and rotating attendance at Cheshire & Merseyside ICB meetings, we collate and present data to inform key discussions. In 2025–26, this included primary care, dental access, ADHD care, end-of-life care and corridor care.

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 Sefton this year:



Improving patient privacy at North Park Health Centre.

Patients told us they were unable to enter North Park Health Centre to book appointments and instead had to use an external intercom, raising concerns about sharing confidential information publicly. We asked the provider to review the arrangement. As a result, the practice reassessed its approach and limited intercom use to Fridays only, for patients attending under the Special Allocation Scheme. This change improved privacy and confidentiality for the wider patient population, while maintaining appropriate safety measures.



Using Lived Experience to Strengthen Communication in Adult Social Care

In January we shared feedback from residents and family members about adult social care experiences. This feedback helped shape a reflective workshop for social care practitioners by emphasising the value of accessible, person-centred communication. It highlighted the importance of managing expectations, understanding individual communication needs, providing regular updates, and working collaboratively with people to find solutions that enhance their overall experience of care.



Concerns Raised, Communications Restored

Through Healthwatch's engagement work with Hightown Village Surgery, concerns were raised that some patients were not receiving practice newsletters. We shared this feedback with the provider, prompting a review of communication processes and the re-issue of newsletters across all practices. As a result, patients were reminded how to access practice newsletters, and additional communications were distributed to help ensure important updates reach everyone. We continue to monitor the situation, supporting improved communication between the surgery and residents and helping patients stay informed about their healthcare services.

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.



Corridor Care, A Red Line? – The Patients' Perspective

'Corridor care' refers to the practice of accommodating patients in areas of hospitals that are not designed for patient treatment during periods of exceptionally high demand. This includes temporary escalation spaces, such as corridors in accident and emergency (A&E) departments, as well as 'boarding', where patients are cared for in temporary spaces within hospital wards. The practice has become increasingly common as NHS services continue to face significant capacity pressures, particularly during peak demand periods. While national and local efforts are focused on eliminating the need for corridor care, Healthwatch wanted to better understand the experiences of patients, carers and relatives who receive care in these settings. Our aim was to capture real-time experiences, observe how hospitals manage operational pressures, and identify examples of good practice as well as opportunities for improvement.

In early 2026, we carried out an Enter and View visit to Aintree University Hospital, alongside Healthwatch Knowsley and Healthwatch Liverpool. In addition, Healthwatch Sefton visited Southport Hospital in March. The visits focused on patients' experiences of care within temporary escalation spaces. Using the Cheshire and Merseyside Urgent and Emergency Care Red Lines Toolkit (2024) Care and Comfort Standards as a framework, we assessed how patient safety, dignity, comfort and staff wellbeing were maintained within these environments. Across both visits, we completed 12 observation reports and gathered feedback from 22 patients and one family member, alongside observations of care settings and discussions with staff.

Aintree A&E Corridors:

Several concerns were identified around patient safety and comfort, including some vulnerable individuals positioned in corridor areas with limited staff visibility, inconsistent access to call bells, difficulties accessing toilets, limited space for food and drinks, and bright, busy surroundings. This affected patients' comfort, hydration and rest. Cleanliness standards also varied across the areas observed.

Aintree ward Boarding:

A patient boarded in a ward corridor had no access to appropriate washing and toileting facilities and lacked privacy. Unlike patients in A&E corridor spaces, who despite the sub-optimal temporary spaces, still felt they were progressing through the system, ward corridor boarding created a greater sense of isolation, appearing overlooked despite the activity happening around them.

Corridor Care, A Red Line? – The Patients' Perspective

Southport A&E Corridors:

The corridor remained clean, organised and sufficiently staffed despite operational pressures. The provision of blankets, pillows, refreshments and support for relatives contributed positively to patient comfort and dignity. Nevertheless, the corridor environment impacted the patient experience, limiting privacy and making rest difficult because of noise and lighting levels. Trolleys had no trays to support patients to eat and drink safely and there was some uncertainty about care plans.

Southport ward Boarding:

For those boarded in ward corridors, they were more likely to report feelings of isolation, despite the busy environment around them. Patients raised concerns about privacy and dignity, particularly due to a lack of curtains or screens. Limited personal space also negatively affected patient experience, with a lack of storage for belongings and restricted access to entertainment, such as televisions available to other patients on the ward.

Key things we heard:



Some patients shared concerns about privacy and dignity:

“You can hear people being given their diagnoses... there is no dignity or privacy.” – Aintree A&E Corridor

“There is no curtain or screen, so I feel a bit exposed, especially when staff are monitoring me” – Southport A&E Corridor



Some patients shared barriers to rest and recovery:

“It’s so bright and busy... I couldn’t sleep.” – Aintree A&E Corridor

“My trolley was right by the toilet... the sound of the door and the light was distracting.” – Southport A&E Corridor

“I didn’t get a pillow last night.” – Aintree A&E Corridor

Corridor Care, A Red Line? – The Patients' Perspective

What difference did this make?

Enter and View reports of our findings, were shared with both NHS University Hospitals of Liverpool Group and Mersey and West Lancs Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.

The reports identified the challenges for patients and staff when care is being provided in corridors or ward boarding. The reports also highlighted ways in which provision had been made to make the situation safer and less distressing than it might otherwise have been, in line with the Red Lines toolkit requirements.

Our reports across the two sites gave 15 key recommendations, which focused on patient safety & dignity, comfort and rest, and communication.

Everyone (patients, staff, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside and the wider health and care system) wants corridor care to no longer be needed. The learning from these visits is informing the work of trusts and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside as they work towards ending corridor care.

The Healthwatch Collaborative has also joined the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Urgent and Emergency Care System Board to provide a patient perspective on corridor care and work to eliminate the need for it.



**Executive Clinical
Director, NHS
Cheshire and
Merseyside**
Fiona Lemmens

“

“The work of the 9 Healthwatch organisations across Cheshire and Merseyside has been instrumental in helping us ensure that patient experience is understood and acted upon across our commissioned services. I have found the work done on Emergency department waits and corridor care particularly insightful. This is a priority area for the ICB to improve for our population, and the Healthwatch work has strengthened the ICB's UEC improvement plan.

The contribution that Healthwatch colleagues make to our committee and board meetings is invaluable in bringing the voice of the public and patients into the room and undoubtedly improves the decision-making processes in the ICB.”

From long waits to system-wide action

This year, we championed residents' voices to improve treatment room access for routine wound care.

Residents told us that they were attending Litherland Urgent Treatment Centre and the Walk In Centre in Ormskirk for routine wound care, including stitch removal and dressings, not by choice, but due to an inability to secure appointments at treatment rooms across the borough.

What did we do?

Given the feedback received, we were concerned that the capacity constraints may be impacting patient experience and leading to increased pressure on urgent care services. We launched a campaign to gain further feedback, providing residents with the opportunity to share their patient story and the impact this was having on their care pathway.

Key things we heard:



Waiting times and access to appointments at treatment rooms was the key concern shared.

Poor communication and discharge information was contributing to patient anxiety.

Clinical care was rated highly when patients were seen.



"Clinics all full. I ended up taking them out myself"

"How can there be no appointments in the whole of Sefton?"

What difference did this make?

Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust acknowledged the concerns raised by Healthwatch Sefton. System partners are now reviewing wound care capacity, staffing and patient pathways — helping residents access the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

Listening, Improving, Delivering: Positive Progress at Litherland Urgent Treatment Centre

Patient feedback didn't just get heard—it led to lasting improvements in how urgent care is delivered in Sefton.

In 2024, Healthwatch Sefton worked with Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust to gather feedback from patients using Litherland Urgent Treatment Centre and identify opportunities to improve people's experiences. Following the publication of our findings and recommendations, the trust developed and implemented an action plan. In February 2026, we undertook an unannounced Enter & View assurance visit to assess the progress made and determine whether the agreed improvements had been embedded in practice. By observing the service, speaking with patients and staff, and reviewing key areas highlighted in our original report, we were able to see first-hand how patient feedback had influenced positive change.

Key things we found:

Patients benefited from clearer communication, with staff regularly visible in the waiting area and information available throughout the centre.

Some minor conditions were being treated at the triage stage, helping to improve patient flow and access to care.

Patients received better information on arrival, including leaflets explaining the urgent treatment centre journey and information about triage processes.

Waiting times were clearly displayed and regularly updated, and patients were generally seen within the times advertised on the information screens.

Staffing levels had improved, with no vacancies reported and a full complement of staff on duty during our visit.

The environment was clean, well maintained and more welcoming, with regular checks taking place and a vending machine available for patients and visitors.

Listening, Improving, Delivering: Positive Progress at Litherland Urgent Treatment Centre

Opportunities for patient feedback were easier to access, including 'Friends and Family' Test forms, QR codes being displayed around the centre.

The centre introduced a pilot wound-care service, providing additional support for patients needing dressings or stitch removal.

What difference did this make?

Most recommendations from our original report had been completed, demonstrating the Trust's commitment to responding to patient feedback. A small number of areas still required further attention, including sensory toys for children, additional children's activities, and improvements to seating safety features within the waiting area.

Our work helped ensure that patient feedback led to real, measurable improvements at Litherland Urgent Treatment Centre. Through ongoing partnership working and follow-up assurance, we confirmed the implementation of recommendations that improved communication, information sharing, patient experience and the overall environment for local people accessing urgent care.



Trish Bennett MBE
Chief Executive Officer
Mersey Care NHS
Foundation Trust



"Thank you again for Healthwatch Sefton's continued engagement with our services and for the constructive way in which the Enter and View process supports improvement."

Shaping the Future of GP Access in Sefton

We amplified the voices of 689 Sefton residents, ensuring their experiences of GP access were heard by NHS leaders and decision-makers

Working with our Cheshire and Merseyside Healthwatch colleagues, we conducted a GP Access Survey to understand residents' experiences of accessing primary care services and to assess how recent improvements under the Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP) are being experienced by patients. We gathered feedback from 689 residents through both online and paper-based surveys, supported by community engagement activities, partner organisations, social media promotion, GP surgeries, pharmacies and public venues across Sefton and this year we were able to report on this work and share with key decision makers.

Key things we heard:



Accessing a GP appointment remains one of the biggest challenges residents face.



Once they were able to access care, they were satisfied with the support they received.



Some groups face additional barriers to accessing services, including disabled people, unpaid carers, people with hearing impairments and those less confident using digital access.



Many residents told us that they were using alternative routes to seek healthcare, including pharmacies, NHS 111 and self care.



There were mixed experiences of communication and interactions with practice staff.

Shaping the Future of GP Access in Sefton

What difference did this make?

Healthwatch Sefton gave 689 residents the opportunity to share their experiences of accessing GP services, creating one of the most comprehensive recent evidence bases on primary care access in Sefton.

The report identified clear barriers to accessing GP services, including difficulties securing appointments, challenges with telephone and online booking systems, and inequalities experienced by people with additional needs. By highlighting these issues alongside examples of good practice, we provided decision-makers with detailed insight into what matters most to local patients.

Our findings have been shared with NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, local Primary Care Networks, Place Leads, Local Authority partners and wider health and care stakeholders.

The insights were valued by NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, with the overall results across Cheshire and Merseyside being presented at the NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Public Board meeting in July and Sefton Primary Care Forum.

A presentation on the findings was given to the Sefton Health and Well Being Board in September. The board resolved that the findings be used to support local work following the publication of this year's GP Patient Survey to benchmark and make improvements to GP access performance across the borough.



Jan Leonard
Associate Director
Primary Care and
Community
Integration
NHS Cheshire &
Merseyside (Sefton)

"We work closely with Healthwatch and value their support in proving feedback from patients and residents on local services. The team at Healthwatch Sefton always advocate for patients regardless of the size or scale of the issue and have a wide reach through their groups and forums.

We particularly value the work they do with inclusion groups. It is a pleasure to work with the team, and we look forward continuing the close work in the future."

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Sefton. 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:

- Expanding our Community Champion networks, with more organisations joining our Healthwatch family.
- Continuing to reach into neighbourhoods, 18 'Information Hubs' taking place in supermarkets, and other well trusted community venues.



Community Champion Networks: Delivering Community-Led Change

Our 'Community Champion' networks play a vital role in helping us hear directly from local people. By working with over 60 trusted voluntary, community and faith organisations, we can reach residents in familiar settings and gather insight from those who may otherwise go unheard. This year we supported and facilitated 11 network meetings across the borough.

Through our networks, we collect feedback from people with a wide range of lived experiences, including those facing health inequalities, social isolation or barriers to accessing services. This insight strengthens our evidence base and ensures community voices are shared with decision makers.

Network meetings also create a direct link between communities and health and care partners. Local organisations can raise concerns with decision-makers, while services can share updates and respond more effectively to community needs.

As a result, the 'Community Champion' networks help ensure lived experience drives improvements and supports more inclusive, responsive services across Sefton.

Restoring Fair Access to GP Appointments

Responding quickly to patient concerns to protect inclusive access to care

Following attendance at St Leonard's Women's Group in April, Healthwatch Sefton identified that Ford Medical Centre had contacted patients, to update that patients could no longer phone at 8am or book in person, meaning appointments could only be made online unless urgent. This was creating barriers for patients without digital access or with accessibility needs.

What difference did this make?

After raising this immediately with NHS Cheshire & Merseyside, the practice reviewed its approach, updated its messaging, and recontacted patients to clarify access routes.



Matty Smith
Primary Care Network
Deputy Manager
Southport & Formby
Primary Care Network

"Working in partnership with Healthwatch is vital to ensuring we are actively hearing and responding to the authentic experiences of patients within our local area. Their insights provide a clear and balanced view of services, highlighting areas of strength, identifying where improvements are needed, and recognising what is working well."

Incorporating the patient voice is essential to delivering high-quality, person-centred services. Healthwatch plays a key role in making this happen locally, bringing valuable perspectives that help shape and improve service delivery."

Through strong collaboration and partnership working, Healthwatch supports us to better understand our communities and ensure that services are designed with the needs of local people in mind."

Opening the Digital Front Door

A collaborative approach to increasing confidence, awareness and use of the NHS App

Listening to our Community Champions, we partnered with NHS Cheshire and Merseyside to deliver a 'Digital Front Door' session in January. Following discussions at this session, NHS colleagues agreed to support our network members in engaging residents and increasing awareness and uptake of the NHS App.

What difference did this make?

In October, the first session took place at a coffee morning at Sefton Carers Centre, attended by 10 carers. Feedback was very positive:

"Our carers felt informed and empowered. Jane answered all their questions and helped them download the app for those who had a smartphone." Sefton Carers Centre

Further sessions were held, one example being at the 'Kindfulness Coffee Club', improving digital confidence, enabling residents to access NHS services more easily and manage their health more effectively.

Working Together For Our Communities



Jane Elliott
**Commissioning
Manager – Localities
Sefton. NHS Cheshire
and Merseyside**



“Working with Healthwatch Community Champions is a truly rewarding experience. It gives me the opportunity to listen directly to the voices of the community, understand what matters most to them, and feed that insight back into primary care to help shape better services. At the same time, it allows me to share clear, honest updates about what is happening within primary care, helping to build trust and understanding. This two-way communication strengthens relationships between practices and patients, ensuring people feel heard, valued, and actively involved in their care.”



Sarah Alldis
**Executive Director
Adult Social Care and
Health. Sefton MBC**



“Working with Healthwatch Sefton has provided independent and valuable insight into people’s experiences of contacting Adult Social Care. Their approach has helped us to understand what is working well and where we need to improve, strengthening our response at the first point of contact. Their passion for listening to local people and championing their voices helps us better understand what matters most and shape services that truly reflect people’s lives.”

Community Champion Information Hubs

Listening, Informing and Connecting Communities.

This year, we further developed our 'Community Champion' Information Hubs to make it easier than ever for residents to get involved, share their experiences, and access support. 18 sessions were held across south and central Sefton, this being our pilot area.

These local drop-in sessions provide welcoming, informal spaces where residents can:

- Share their experiences of health and care services
- Access clear, accessible information and advice
- Learn about local support and opportunities from community groups

To ensure we reach as many people as possible, including those who may not already be connected to services, we decided to deliver the hubs directly within local neighbourhoods. By meeting people where they are, we were able to engage a wider and more diverse range of residents.

Hubs have been delivered in a variety of everyday, accessible locations, including supermarkets, shopping centre's, leisure centre's, libraries and a variety of community organisations.



Being present in these familiar spaces allows us to connect with residents who may not typically attend organised community activities or know where to go for help.

Our information hubs are also closely linked to our 'Community Champion' network. Network members play a vital role in helping us build relationships within communities, promote the hubs, and ensure that support remains visible, relevant, and easy to access.

Recognition for the Healthwatch Information Hub Model

Our hub at St Leonard's YCC Pantry was recognised as leading practice and was submitted as a case study by Sefton Partnership for working with communities within neighbourhoods.

Bootle's Information hub was hosted in January at St Leonard's YCC Pantry, who are a proud part of the community already providing food, warmth, building connections and fighting loneliness. Residents were able to pick up information and advice from local voluntary, community and faith sector groups and find out more about how to share their feedback with Healthwatch Sefton.

Organisations on the day included: Life's for Living, Sefton Carers Centre, Alzheimer's Society Sefton, Galloways Society for the Blind, the Cancer Alliance and Cradle to Career.

healthwatch
Sefton



"As an organisation, we have worked closely with Healthwatch Sefton on a number of occasions, and our experience has always been extremely positive. Over the past year, Wendy has visited all our pantry locations, discussing the interactions members have had with their local health services (or lack of!) and has built strong and meaningful relationships with our pantry members, volunteers, and staff.

Through our collaboration with Wendy and Healthwatch Sefton, the Community Champion Information Hubs have become an important and highly valued area of partnership working between our organisations. The hubs have provided valuable information, support, and educational opportunities for those attending our pantries, and the feedback from members has been overwhelmingly positive.

We greatly value our partnership with Healthwatch Sefton and appreciate the positive impact the Information Hubs have had within our communities. We look forward to the opportunity to host further sessions together in the future."

Danny Corless, Food Distribution Manager, St Leonard's YCC.

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 we have signposted to 688 organisations, supporting 401 residents with advice, support or help finding services for 526 issues. 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
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



A Painful Search for Treatment

Helping Jane secure urgent NHS dental surgery after being left without a clear treatment pathway

Jane came to us in severe pain after being told she needed urgent wisdom tooth surgery. She felt caught between NHS and private services, unsure where to turn and worried she would be left to cope alone.

Previously an NHS patient at a Sefton practice, she was told further treatment would only be available privately. After an x-ray confirmed the need for surgery, she was advised to find a private dental hospital—something she could not afford.

An NHS emergency dentist prescribed antibiotics to treat the infection but could not refer her for surgery without a completed dental assessment, leaving Jane still in pain and without a clear path to treatment.

We intervened on her behalf, liaising with the dental team to secure NHS care and the referral she needed for her surgery.



“The dentist was lovely and has done my referral for my wisdom tooth and some other work. So, thanks you for all your help!”

Supporting Access to Essential Care and Home Support

Supporting timely intervention for Paul, a housebound resident

Paul was referred to Healthwatch Sefton by Livewell after becoming housebound due to worsening health, mobility challenges, and unsafe home conditions. Despite seeking support, he had experienced difficulties engaging with the council and accessing appropriate services.

We contacted the local authority to request urgent contact and a home assessment and signposted Paul to the respiratory team to review his deteriorating condition and medication needs. This intervention helped to re-establish contact with services, enabling a coordinated response to address Paul's immediate health and living needs.



“Feels like a weight has been lifted, I have been stuck for 9 months. I am feeling more positive. The respiratory team are due to call today to discuss oxygen and with portable oxygen I might be able to get out. I'm happy the referrals are in place, so thanks for all your help, I'll never forget it.”

Supporting Patients To Make Informed Choices About Their Care

Empowering Sarah with the knowledge and resources to make informed choices about care and treatment options

Sarah contacted us as she felt unhappy with her current hospital referral and wanted to better understand her rights regarding choice of provider and clinical team.

We provided clear information about the NHS patient “Right to Choose,” explaining how she could explore alternative options for her care. We also signposted Sarah to the My Planned Care website, enabling her to review waiting times and make more informed decisions about where she may wish to receive treatment.

To help her further, we shared additional resources from Healthwatch England, including information on how data is used within My Planned Care. We also provided contact details for NHS England, giving Sarah the opportunity to raise her concerns and seek further support if needed.

As a result, Sarah felt more informed about her choices and better equipped to take an active role in decisions about her care.

“Wow! Well done! You've gone above and beyond to help me. Many thanks for all of this.”

Supporting Continuity of Care During a Critical Transition

We supported David by providing information which ensured he continued to receive palliative care

We supported David who was receiving palliative care and moving to another borough. As a vulnerable individual with complex health needs, it was essential that continuity of care was maintained throughout the transition. We provided information on GP surgeries in the Halewood area and signposted the resident to relevant contacts, while also advising on how to ensure ongoing support through their ‘Cancer Navigator’. Securing timely GP registration was crucial to enabling the prompt arrangement of occupational therapy and district nursing services at the new address.

“Thanks for your assistance to help a vulnerable client access essential health services, out of area. He got urgent care he needed and without a surgery it would have been very difficult. Your help really made a difference to their circumstances.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Thanks to the dedication of our fantastic volunteers to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited groups and organisations to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve



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.



Carol

"After retiring from the NHS in 2019 following 30 years' service, I wanted to continue supporting healthcare. Volunteering with Healthwatch Sefton has allowed me to do just that. Covering Netherton and Aintree Village, I help raise local concerns, ensuring residents feel heard. I have also taken part in PLACE assessments, helping improve patient experiences. The role is rewarding, keeps me active, and I would highly recommend it to anyone passionate about healthcare".

"Motivated by my experiences as a practicing Midwife, I have gained a first-hand understanding of the varying levels of care, especially for vulnerable groups. I've become a strong advocate for improving public health initiatives and health and social care services. I'm excited to use my experiences to help to represent the voices of residents and contribute to a more fair and robust healthcare system."



Sophie

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.healthwatchsefton.co.uk



0800 206 1304



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Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Sefton 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	£180,508	Expenditure on pay	£124,273
Additional income	-----	Non-pay expenditure	£28,750
		Office and management fee	£8,296
Total income	£180,508	Total Expenditure	£161,319



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.

Our top priorities for the next year:

1. We will continue to grow our 'information hub' model across neighbourhoods so that more people can access timely, relevant support, enabling them to make informed decisions and improve their health and well being.
2. Work alongside partners across health, social care, the voluntary, community & faith sector and public services, to create a neighbourhood health model that is responsive to local needs, improves access to support and delivers better outcomes for all Sefton residents.
3. We will champion and protect an independent voice in health and care, ensuring that the experiences, concerns and views of Sefton residents continue to shape services, influence decision-making and drive improvements in care.



"The Information Hubs delivered by Healthwatch Sefton have been invaluable in bringing organisations and communities together. Through our collaboration, we have been able to connect more people with the information, support and services they need whilst ensuring that residents experiences help to shape local services. It has been a pleasure working with Wendy and the Healthwatch Team, whose dedication to listening to local people and championing their voices within healthcare is vital in helping services understand and respond to the real needs of the community."

Kate Pope, The Salvation Army Employment Plus, Employability Practitioner



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Sefton, Sefton Council for Voluntary service (CVS). 3rd Floor, Suite 3B. North Wing, Burlington House, Crosby Road North. Waterloo, Liverpool L22 0LG

Healthwatch Sefton uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the license agreement.

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 8 members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Operations Group consists of 19 members, which ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our local community. Our 'Monitoring Panel', a subgroup of our Operations Group met 4 times, volunteers supporting work to review emerging themes and trends from community feedback, oversee the progression of recommendations arising from our reports, and identify opportunities for further action. The Community Champion networks met bi-monthly, 11 meetings taking place.

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 2025/26, 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. In addition, we held 18 information hubs across our neighbourhoods.

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, include it in our newsletter and share with partners and stakeholders. We will also ensure paper copies of the report are available to those who request them.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

There were no instances during the year where a provider failed to respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to the Sefton Adult's Safeguarding Board, Carers Partnership Board, Sefton Partnership Board and the Neighbourhood Programme Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in NHS Cheshire and Merseyside (ICS). For example, working as part of the Healthwatch collaborative, we take information to the system 'Primary Care Committee', the 'Quality and Performance' committee and have seats on both the private and public meetings of the board. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Sefton is represented on the Sefton Health and Wellbeing Board by Nigel Bellamy, Interim Chair.

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by attending meetings and this year, we have presented findings from our cost-of-living work and resident feedback on GP access. We have also contributed to discussions on NHS dentistry.

Healthwatch Sefton is represented on NHS Cheshire & Merseyside Integrated Care Partnerships and Integrated Care Boards via the Cheshire & Merseyside Healthwatch Collaborative.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Acacia Court Care Home – announced	Partnership work with Sefton Council’s Quality & Compliance Team.	Following this visit, we produced a report that highlighted good practice.
Cloisters Care Home – announced	Partnership work with Sefton Council’s Quality & Compliance Team	Following this visit, we produced a report that highlighted good practice.
Lancaster Court Residential Care Home – announced	Partnership work with Sefton Council’s Quality & Compliance Team	Following this visit, we produced a report that highlighted good practice.
Locarwoods of Birkdale – announced	Partnership work with Sefton Council’s Quality & Compliance Team	Following this visit, we produced a report that highlighted good practice.
Aintree University Hospital – announced	A focus on patients’ experiences of care within temporary escalation spaces, using the Cheshire and Merseyside Urgent and Emergency Care Red Lines Toolkit	Following this visit we shared feedback with the trust who took quick action in putting up signs to indicate the location of call bells. A report was drafted and shared with the trust.
Litherland Urgent Treatment Centre – Unannounced	A follow up assurance visit to make sure actions from recommendations had been put into practice	Following this visit, we produced a report that highlighted that most actions had been completed with some minor areas to follow up.
Southport Hospital – announced	A focus on patients’ experiences of care within temporary escalation spaces, using the Cheshire and Merseyside Urgent and Emergency Care Red Lines Toolkit	Following this visit we produced a report which included 9 recommendations.

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