



Speaking up for Better Care

Healthwatch Southend Annual Report
2025/26

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Acting Chief Executive
Chris McCann

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“The NHS 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



It is my great pleasure to be able to introduce the Healthwatch Southend (HWS) Annual Report for 2025-26.

This year has again been both rewarding and challenging as we continue to act on behalf of patients to signpost them to appropriate services in addition to addressing any concerns they have with local NHS and Social Care services as well as hearing what our local community find works well for them.

Last year I reported on a 'Change NHS' meeting at our local Southend Association of Voluntary Services This was well attended by both residents and Health Professionals alike and further discussed the potential move of services provided in a hospital setting to the community. I was therefore delighted to attend the official opening of the new Southend Health Centre based in the heart of the town this year with access to state-of-the-art technology including operating theatres, MRI and CT scanners. They also have a secure communication link with Southend Hospital for confidential patient consultation and record sharing. A triumph of co-operation between Southend City Council and the Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board.

Our Advisory Group continues to meet regularly to discuss both local and national issues affecting health and social care in Southend. Opportunities have also arisen to meet with our local MP who continues to show a keen interest in our local NHS and Social Care issues.

Following the success of our first Enter and View visit reviewing patient signage at Southend Hospital, we embarked on two further E&V visits this year covering the Accident and Emergency Department and, more recently, the Eye Clinic. Both these visits were made in response to patient feedback to HWS from patients. Reports will be compiled from both visits and feedback given to both patients and hospital administrators alike with the view of addressing any concerns raised,

You may be aware that on the 27th June 2025 the Government introduced the Health Bill which sets out proposed changes to the health system, including the Healthwatch network. This has caused a lot of concern and, if nothing else, the existence of Healthwatch has clearly demonstrated the absolute necessity for a 'patient voice' in Health and Social Care. Currently, HWS are very fortunate to have a seat on the 'Health and Wellbeing' Board at Southend City Council where we can voice patient experiences of health and social care services both good and bad.

Last, and by no means least, I would like to take the opportunity to thank our very hard working and dedicated staff and volunteers who provide such an exemplary service for our residents and for whom nothing is too much trouble. Particular thanks go to Jean and Elizabeth in the office and to all the long-standing members of our Advisory Board for their time and expertise.

I would also like to thank our Chief Officer, Owen Richards who has taken well deserved retirement after many years of working for the NHS through all its various guises. We all wish him well and a long and enjoyable retirement!

David Bowry
Chair of the
Advisory Board



About us

Healthwatch Southend is your local health and social care champion. Subscribe to our free newsletter for updates on local health and social care: www.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk

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 2025/2026 we supported more than 7500 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed one new member of staff and, our work was supported by 6 volunteers.

Reaching out:



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

734 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as General practice, accessing NHS dental care, community mental health including ADHD prescriptions and Southend Hospitals orthopedics and fracture clinic.

Championing your voice:



We published two reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like see when using the NHS app and views on using an online hospital.

Our most popular report highlighted language barriers for use of the NHS app and the need to develop it to include management of medical appointments.

Statutory funding:



We're funded by Southend City Council. In 2025/26 we received **£125,050** which is **5%** more than last year. We do not receive any funding from the Integrated Care Board.

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 Southend. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We joined conversations with Macmillian Community Voices and the Caring Well Partnership to gather the views and experiences of those affected by Cancer and those who are care givers for those with Long Terms Conditions or in Palliative Care.

Directly engaging with families and their Carers at Havens Hospice and Carers First, we have been able to understand better, and report back about the challenges people face in accessing support. We help them navigate and access support.

Summer

We attended several events and festivals across summer months including the Feel-Good Festival and Southend Pride. We listened to people's views and experiences by visiting residents who use local support organisations.

The experiences of those who used a variety of public health services were captured and reported back to the commissioners. We fed back straw poll data about what people would like to see change in services locally.

Autumn

Our research highlighted healthcare inequalities through language barriers and the lack of digital knowledge, preventing people from using new platforms to book GP appointments, arrange blood tests and navigate healthcare systems.

We compiled a survey to capture residents feedback about their experience of using the NHS app. We produced a report and raised these concerns to the Integrated Care Board with Recommendations to improve access.

Winter

The NHS online consultations opened for discussion, questions and feedback about the development of a new NHS Online Service and the merger of an online healthcare services including remote appointments.

We ran a survey to capture the opinions, concerns and questions of Southend residents and potential future service users of NHS online. The findings were used to respond to the initial consultation by the ICB.

Supported by The Advocacy People

In addition to being one of 153 local Healthwatch, Southend is part of a network of 7 Healthwatch hosted by the Advocacy People.

The Advocacy People have provided consistent infrastructure, governance, and operational support to the seven hosted Healthwatch, enabling them to work both locally and collectively.

This includes shared leadership, senior guidance, and co-ordination across contracts. We have created space for collaboration, ensured consistency where needed, and supported each service to retain its distinct local voice.

“The 7 local Healthwatch hosted by The Advocacy People have worked closely together in the last year. We have been proactive in our learning objective which was to understand the changing landscape for Healthwatch in response to Government proposals announced last July to transfer the functions of local Healthwatch to Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities. ”

Steve John – Head of Operations



How The Advocacy People supported the 7 local Healthwatch to support community conversations

The Advocacy People supported the seven Healthwatch to lead meaningful community conversations by providing practical tools, coordination, and strategic oversight.

This included enabling shared knowledge, supporting engagement planning, and facilitating the exchange of approaches and learning. We ensured local teams were equipped to respond to community priorities while linking these insights into a broader, coherent narrative at a regional level.

Working together for change

We've worked with neighboring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Southend are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at Essex ICB

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Essex to achieve the following:

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Shared community engagement including at the Rayleigh Mega Centre as the Research & Engagement Network (REN) organised an event to invite families across Southeast Essex to get involved in Healthcare research and to find out about support available to them. Healthwatch Southend created an info-leaflet with contacts for all three Healthwatch's in Essex.

A big conversation:



Along with other Healthwatch, we have also collaborated with local groups in Southend. Together with the Southend Association of Volunteers (SAVs) we co-produced the COPD community connectors. Our Connectors brought their experience of living with COPD to groups such as the Research Engagement Network, and they contributed to Essex-wide work on understanding the barriers to using the NHS App. This program concluded in 2025, and we published a final report.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



We have worked with Mid & South Essex Hospitals as part of their co-production policy and approach, we have stressed the need to invest in supporting patients and clinicians to allow meaningful dialogue. We have used our ongoing links with deaf people to help the Trust implement the Accessible Information Standard, highlighting areas for improvement with the new electronic patient record

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here are some examples of our work in Southend this year:



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

We ran a focus group with members of the deaf community to hear about their experiences of accessing healthcare. With a BSL interpreter in place, people shared the challenges they face and what could be improved.

We shared this feedback with a working group for MSE hospitals. Their discussions focused on urgent support for deaf patients when an in-person BSL interpreter is not available, including remote/video options. The insights from this small group helped inform their decisions.



Getting services to involve the public

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

In 2025, the COPD Community Connectors programme concluded, delivered with the Southend Association of Voluntary Service. A report outlined progress and learning from engaging people with severe ill-health.

Connectors shared lived experience with groups like the Research Engagement Network to increase clinical research participation and supported Essex-wide work exploring barriers to using the NHS App.

The groups still meet, after the project has ended and support one another to continue with shared activities.



Improving care over time

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

We have worked with Mid & South Essex Hospitals in two areas over the last year:

- As part of their co-production policy and approach, we have stressed the need to invest in supporting patients and clinicians to allow meaningful dialogue
- We have used our ongoing links with deaf people to help the Trust implement the Accessible Information Standard, pointing out areas for improvement, especially with the new electronic patient record.

Listening to your experiences

Do you use the NHS App?

The NHS is increasingly promoting digital solutions as part of the 10 Year Plan.

Whilst this will be helpful for many, we know that it may cause difficulties for others.

OFCOM estimate that 5% of the population are digitally-excluded, possibly around 9,000 people in Southend..

What did we do?

Using both digital and paper copies of a survey, we tried to find out how easy the NHS App is to use, what patients use it for and whether they would recommend it to family and friends. Our COPD Community Connectors also took part in a digital skills audit, which also fed into our report. We ensured that we heard from a range of age groups.

Key things we heard:

78%

of respondents said they had used the NHS App

82%

Of respondents were likely, or very-likely to recommend the App to family and friends

30%

Of the participants did not know or were unsure that they could use a computer or tablet to access the functions of the NHS App

Listening to your experiences

Experiences of using the NHS app continued...

What difference did this make?

The Integrated Care Board accepted our recommendations around raising awareness. They also recognised our concerns that alternatives to digital access are available to all patients and promised to promote this. We were also able to let patients know that surgeries will support them if they cannot access or use digital means to interact.

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"I do not find it easy for appointments It is very difficult to put your problem in words on the app rather than speaking to a human. I was very surprised to hear how many skills you need to use the NHS app, no wonder I struggle"



Our work shows that more needs to be done to help residents understand the range of functions available, ensure the information is reliable and reassure patients that there are other ways of accessing services are available to them.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Southend. 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:

- Engaging with patients, friends and family at Southend Hospital, where we ran an information stall and supported people to access the care they need.
- Regularly visiting community groups and services to speak to attendees, notably for SEND parent & child support, Resident association meetings, groups fostering friendship and many others.
- We attended several events and festivals to listen to people's experiences and to raise awareness of the support available for those who may experience healthcare inequalities.
- We kept in regular contact with Essex ICB to raise issues and to advocate for positive change, this was made possible by the people who spoke to us.
- We made sure we continued contact with people new to Southend by working with Welcome to the UK. We attended Bereavement Groups and Head injury support Group 'Headway' to offer direct support.



Supporting people new to Southend understand care services locally

We worked with Welcome to the UK to offer information and advice to people who are new to Southend.

Some people find it hard to get health and care support because of language barriers or not knowing how the system works. This can make getting the right help more difficult.

What difference did this make?

We created an easy-read guide to local NHS services. The guide uses clear and simple language to help people understand how to get the care they need, including:

- Children's health
- what to do if someone in your family becomes unwell
- ways to get medical help
- how to register with a GP
- routine health checks and screening

This is now part of the welcome pack given to new residents and is particularly helpful to families. Participants tell us they are able to refer to the guidance when they have a question or need to contact the correct health professional.

Sharing accurate local healthcare updates

Working with NHS and local health and social providers we have published regular articles to help people stay informed.

During the year we published regular articles online through our website and on social media. These included updates on local services and resources shared from stakeholders, providers and partners.

Our most popular news post was on changes to parking at Southend Hospital which was viewed by nearly 4,800 people.

What difference did this make?

By sharing information, we raise awareness to the people that use local services about any changes which may affect their access. This enables people to be more prepared and to adapt so there is less confusion, stress. Ultimately, they can attend their appointments or visit health providers more easily.

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 over 600 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Supporting a neurodivergent couple

Thanks to communication between our team and a local GP surgery, we were able to remove obstacles to care for two young autistic adults.

Ashley contacted us for help registering for a new GP in Southend. He and his partner are young autistic adults who had recently moved to the area to live independently.

However, when trying to register for a GP they found navigating the system difficult. We spoke directly to the practice manager and explained that patients aren't needed to produce photo ID for registration.

After acknowledging the miscommunication, the practice accepted the new patients and helped them arrange an appointment.

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"We were really struggling to get a GP, we were relieved to finally have a new GP and a first appointment to help with medication."

Improving GP care

Thanks to our intervention and conversations with the GP and the district nursing team, an elderly patient was able to be re-assessed as housebound and get access to blood tests at home.

Martha was struggling to care for her husband who has dementia and severe mobility issues. She has a long-term condition too that requires her to have monthly blood tests

It was proving very difficult to get care in place for her husband whilst she was attending a blood test or GP follow up. As she was relatively active, she was not deemed housebound. She found it hard to contact the surgery on-line and get through by phone.

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""This has made such a difference to me, not having to take my husband with me to get a blood test or someone to look after him. It was so difficult getting the bus or even in a taxi with him. Thank you so much."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given their time 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 including at the SECHA conference for care home and domiciliary care providers and their clients
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out provider supported scrutiny of services both on site and by reviewing annual reports. Providing feedback on what's good and what could be better as well as recommendations for improvement.



At the heart of what we do

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

We are extremely grateful to our Team, who are willing to support us at events, meetings and helping to plan care that is accessible to as many people as possible.

Volunteering with Healthwatch Southend has given me the opportunity to listen to people's experiences and help ensure their voices influence local health and care services. Through Enter and View visits, community engagement activities, and representing Healthwatch at partnership meetings, I have developed a deeper understanding of health inequalities, accessibility, safeguarding, and person-centred care.

As a public health professional, these experiences have strengthened my passion for improving health outcomes and reinforced my belief that meaningful change begins by listening to communities. It has been a privilege to contribute to work that helps make local services more responsive, inclusive, and focused on the people they serve.

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Amarchi Anyaehie
Healthwatch Southend
Volunteer



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.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk



01702 416320



info@healthwatchsouthend.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Southend City 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	£125,050	Expenditure on pay	£72,343
Additional income	£370	Non-pay expenditure	£8,439
		Office and management fee	£15,598
Total income	£125,420	Total Expenditure	£96,380

Additional income is broken down into:

- £200 received from Healthwatch Essex for Facilitating a workshop as part of the NHS 10 Year Plan Consultation
- £170 received from the sale of 2 Office Desks when moving office.

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch Southend does not receive funding from the Integrated Care System.

Priorities for the Future

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of the local community in Southend, especially people in the most deprived areas, so their voices can be heard.

We will also work together with stakeholder and our local Integrated Care System to help improve accessibility and ensure equity of care.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

- 1. Looking at the experiences of people living in care homes.**
- 2. Working more with communities at risk of health inequalities.**
- 3. Contribute to the development of new structures and systems to capture the experiences of Southend residents using NHS health and Social care services.**



Statutory statements

Healthwatch England, 2 Redman Place, Stratford, E20 1JQ
Healthwatch Southend is hosted by The Advocacy People, a registered charity based at Rock House, 49-51 Cambridge Road, Hastings, East Sussex.

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

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 5 members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. By analysing themes in feedback and service access requests, such as difficulties making GP appointments, they identified common issues that informed work on Pharmacy First as part of the wider Primary Care Access Recovery Plan.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met members of the public through its Community Assemblies. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

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. We use public sector partners' staff newsletters to promote surveys, knowing that many employees are also local residents.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisation' as possible. We will publish it on our website and send copies out upon request.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

There were no providers who did not 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 People Scrutiny Committee, as well as real life experiences from those who share their stories with us.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Mid & South Essex Integrated Care System (now renamed Essex ICB). For example, we have been members of the SE Essex Alliance Committee, which brings public sector and voluntary partners from Castle Point, Rochford and Southend together to improve health and care. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level..

Healthwatch representatives

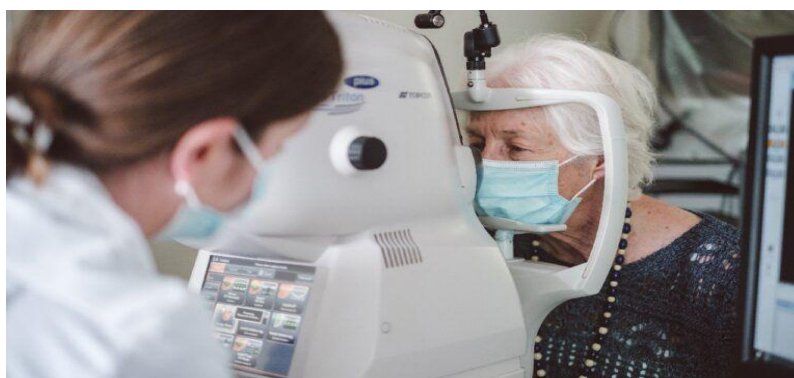
Healthwatch Southend has for this past year been represented on the City council Health and Wellbeing Board by Owen Richards, Chief officer (retired earlier in 2026). Subsequently this role has been taken up by our board member Amarachi

During 2025/26, Amarachi has attended the board meetings and ensuring that the patient voice is heard, and issues or gaps in services are flagged with the provider and followed up.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Southend University Hospital Eye Clinic	Patients raised concerns about waiting time way past their allocated slot.	Arranged to carry out an Enter & View visit in mid June, to observe barriers to treatment



2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Survey on people's experience of using the NHS app	Recommendations made to the ICB and experiences highlighted
Survey on people's views on NHS online – an online hospital trust	Responses used to inform public consultation for the NHS online Trust
Deaf community focus group: Deaf peoples experiences of using GP services and the Hospital	Feedback and experiences used to inform Mid and South Essex Accessible information standard working groups implementation of improvements for BSL users.

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