

The value of listening

Healthwatch Thurrock
Annual Report 2023–2024



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"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



Message from our Chair

Welcome to Healthwatch Thurrock's annual report. Healthwatch Thurrock is here to make sure everyone's voice in the community is heard when it comes to health and social care.

First off, a huge thank you to our amazing staff and volunteers. Your hard work and dedication are what make everything we do possible. Each of you has played a crucial role in building our reputation as a listening organisation. We've established ourselves as a trusted voice in the community, advocating for those who often feel unheard. Our commitment to listening and acting on feedback has helped to build a stronger connection between health and social care providers and the people they serve.

This year has been particularly challenging. Our health and social care system is under strain, with long waiting times and limited resources. Despite these difficulties, our team's resilience has shone through. We've continued to make a real difference, tirelessly working to influence policies and practices to advocate for what people truly need. Even though we're a small team, our impact is big because we're passionate about what we do.

The report highlights the numerous initiatives we have initiated aimed at improving health and social care delivery and patient experiences. From organising public consultations to producing insightful reports, our efforts have helped shape a more responsive and patient-centred health and social care system in Thurrock. We've made sure that the perspectives of patients and residents are central to decision-making processes.

Looking ahead, we're excited to keep championing the voices of our community and striving for excellence. We're proud to be a vital part of Thurrock CVS and will continue working hard to ensure everyone in Thurrock gets the care and support they need.

Thank you for your continued trust and support in Healthwatch Thurrock. Together, we'll keep making a difference.

- Mark Tebbs, CEO of Thurrock CVS



"Our staff meet and talk to people face to face; run surveys and focus groups; visit community and other groups and identify what matters most to the people of Thurrock. This work ensures the views and concerns of local people are heard by those that influence the commissioning and provision of local care services. This year we have focused on safeguarding, maternity and discharged pathways throughout the borough"

Kevin Brice, Healthwatch Thurrock Chair



About us

Healthwatch Thurrock is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.



Year in review

Reaching out:

1137 people

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

3562 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost-of-living crisis.



Making a difference to care:

We published

2 reports

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Stories from: Thurrock Stroke Project

which highlighted the struggles people face on local support post having a stroke



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

12

outstanding volunteers who gave up 56 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

[131,987.24]

which is the same as the previous year.







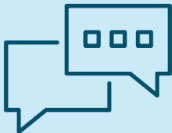

We currently employ

4 staff

who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We continued our roadshow series across the borough to make sure everyone in Thurrock had the chance to share their views on local health and social care services.</p>	 <p>We took part in a sea farers health and wellbeing day at Tilbury Docks which allowed us to engage with a new community in Thurrock.</p>
Summer	 <p>We continued our engagement work with refugees and asylum seekers around the barriers they face in access to primary care.</p>	 <p>We continued our engagement with young people through the 'Big Lunches' held in Thurrock throughout the six weeks holiday.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We started our 'Maternity Matters' work, looking at the lived experience of local maternity services, working closely with the newly established family hubs.</p>	 <p>We started a 'My health in Care' project with CAHMS and children's social care to look into the physical and mental health needs of children in care.</p>
Winter	 <p>We created a report highlighting the fantastic work Thurrock Stroke Project do to support local residents who have suffered a stroke.</p>	 <p>We began our commissioned work via TOCH around the lived experience of the current discharge pathways in Thurrock to help inform opportunities for service change.</p>

Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in **Thurrock influence decisions made about services at **Mid and South Essex Integrated Care System (ICS)** level.**

This year we've worked with Healthwatch across Mid and South Essex to achieve:



Healthwatch Thurrock worked closely with Healthwatch Southend and Healthwatch Essex around strengthening healthcare services for our communities in winter of 2023. We carried out public consultation around the reconfiguration of community rehabilitation beds. This work also looked at relocating the birth unit from St Maldon's Hospital.

Healthwatch Thurrock worked closely with Mid and South Essex ICB around gender care for those who had transitioned in Thurrock. This was achieved through a working relationship with Thurrock Alliance. By identifying issues around prescribing rights for hormone medication, we were able to provide a new care setting for those who needed it.



Back in 2021, Healthwatch Thurrock were commissioned to do a piece of work around support for unpaid carers in Thurrock. Our report has gone on to form the basis of the new carers strategy and we continue to work closely with local authorities and MSE ICS to achieve the best outcome for local unpaid carers.

Through work with By Your Side, another project of CVS that provides home from hospital support, we identified an increase in both unsafe and failed discharges. By raising this with MSE ICS, Healthwatch Thurrock have been commissioned to do an extensive piece of work around the current discharge pathway.





Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Stories from: Thurrock Stroke Project

This year we published our 'Stories from Thurrock Stroke Project' report. We spoke to members of the group about the support for those who have had a stroke in Thurrock and how the group itself has played a huge role in their recovery and rehabilitation.

Lots of these experiences noted that there is not much support in Thurrock for those that have had a stroke in comparison to places such as London. At the group, residents are able to access peer to peer support, partake in activities, attend day trips and come together. It was really felt as though the group itself was a vital tool in the recovery for those who have had a stroke in Thurrock.

2607

people in Thurrock have suffered a stroke. We hope our work with Thurrock Stroke Project will enable all of these residents to access their service.



What did we find from our conversations

- Group members wanted more awareness of the effect having a stroke can have on someone
- 100% of members wished that more people knew about the group. The support that people get from the group is incredibly valuable to a stroke survivors recovery and they wanted better advertisement of the group.

We listened to the wishes of the stroke group and ensured that information about their club was sent to every GP in Thurrock alongside the stroke ward at Basildon Hospital.

What difference did this make?

- Once we had sent the information about the group to the GP surgeries in Thurrock, they were able to text anyone registered with them who had had a stroke, information about the group and how to sign up. This in turn, increased the stroke groups membership and allowed those who may have not known which support to access a chance to have some peer to peer support.
- Healthwatch Thurrock will continue to raise the recommendation that someone from Thurrock stroke group should be able to have a working relationship with Basildon stroke ward, to offer support and let them know about the club. This would enrich the support for stroke survivors in Thurrock.

Are maternal services in Thurrock working?

In 2023 we set out our ‘Maternity Matters’ work. We wanted to hear from new mums and dads in the borough, what was working for them and what they wanted to see improved.

With the implementation of the family hubs in Thurrock it seemed like an apt time to carry out this piece of work.

The experiences of over 80 respondents showed us that there were more concerns over antenatal care than post-natal care. Responders wanted to see better patient expectations around community midwives and wanted to be able to see the same midwife at each appointment. Our work also showed that 50% of responders had their antenatal appointments in a family hub, rather than a medical setting. This demonstrated a huge move to more community based care and support with more positive outcomes for new mums and dads.

What difference will this make?

- Our report has been presented to commissioning bodies to inform them what is working well and what needs to be improved in the way maternal care is delivered in Thurrock. We feel as though our report highlights the importance of the family hubs in positive antenatal and postnatal care in Thurrock. We hope that this will strengthen the function of the family hubs and further adds to their positive asset to local communities.

In 2023 we saw the publication of NHS England’s three year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services that has a focus on making services safer, more personalised, and more equitable for women, babies and families.

Health secretary Victoria Atkins announced that improving maternity care was among the top priorities for women’s health in 2024, bolstering maternity care before, during and after pregnancy by continuing to deliver on NHS England’s three year delivery plan.



“Because I am high-risk, my midwife explained what would be best for myself and unborn baby and everything was very helpful explaining everything with me and my husband”

Mother interviewed by Healthwatch Wirral

Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

It's important for services to see the bigger picture. Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.

Those needing translators are now able to access them in multiple ways. Healthwatch Thurrock continually raised the issue of patient's appointments being cancelled as an 'in person' translator was not available. This was impacting patients on a two week cancer pathway, delaying vital care. Through our work patients are now able to receive care quicker and in a more accessible way.



Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

Healthwatch Thurrock worked together with MSE ICB to ensure that residents voices were included in the re service structure for four Integrated Medical Wellbeing Centres in Thurrock. Through co produced public consultation, we were able to identify borough wide anxieties around the closure of Orsett Hospital, and the provision of services based there. As a result of these conversations we have been able to bolster public confidence that Orsett Hospital will not close until the services that run from it, have a new place to be situated in Thurrock.



Improving care over time

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

Back in 2021 Healthwatch Thurrock ran a survey around primary care access in a post pandemic world, focusing on how access to primary care had been impacted by COVID 19. Thanks to the people who shared their views and ongoing public conversation around primary care we were able to identify clear frustration with parts of the system. By continuing to raise these issues, we have seen the introduction of refined online booking systems and telephone systems in some practices to make access to primary care more accessible.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



Hearing from all communities

Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Attending and hosting health and wellbeing events for different communities within their communal setting such as the Sea Farers at Tilbury Docks and the local Gurdwara
- Continued work with refugees and asylum seekers around barriers they face when accessing primary care
- We have escalated issues around gender care to Thurrock Alliance and MSE ICB to create change that works for patients receiving care

Supporting those receiving gender care

Mid and South Essex (ICS) are addressing the concerns of those receiving gender care based on findings from those who have transitioned, through conversations with Healthwatch Thurrock.

Healthwatch Thurrock were contacted by a number of people who had transitioned within Thurrock and were having issues with the prescription of their gender medication.

As a result of what people shared, the following has been actioned:

- Those who have transitioned and were having issues with their medication from their GP have been allowed to receive their gender care from an external GP who is better equipped to administer the medication, whilst still being able to receive all other care from their registered GP.
- Healthwatch Thurrock have highlighted the issues around prescribing gender care medication, including the anxiety it creates for gender care patients, to NHS England.

Welcome to the UK

Healthwatch Thurrock have collaborated with Welcome to the UK, a charity created to support families coming to the UK to positively engage with the local community. Welcome to the UK, offers various essential support and information sessions, including ESOL classes, a weekly friendship group where members can share experiences, identify problems, and take action to resolve them.

Healthwatch Thurrock have collaborated with the charity by running a series of workshops about...

- The different services in Thurrock around children's health, mental health, dentistry and sexual health.
- Why and when you would either... call 111, 999 or present at A&E.
- And listening to their lived experience of NHS services they have encountered so far.

Healthwatch Thurrock's in-depth conversation with those new to the UK, has highlighted extensive barriers around access to care and that first point of contact within the NHS.

We have heard stories of people not being offered a translator, or having to rely on their children to translate for them. It has also been noted that many are told they can not register with a GP without ID or proof of address. In other instances, residents have been prescribed medication containing alcohol which goes against their religion or culture. Healthwatch Thurrock will continue to work closely with Welcome to the UK to further understand the needs of those new to the country or borough, to make access to Health and Social Care as seamless as possible.



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Helping people access NHS dentistry
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost-of-living crisis

Important communications changes for primary schools in Thurrock

It's essential that people have clear, accurate communication about their care.

Thanks to the efforts of Healthwatch Thurrock, primary schools across the borough are now going to check each student's address before the start of a new term. This is in an effort to avoid missed communications around health assessments for children of primary care age.

Healthwatch Thurrock were made aware of potential issues after Stacey*, whose child requires health checks in school, stopped receiving letters about the appointments for them. Stacey checked with the school who said that they had sent the letter to the child's registered address. Stacey questioned this and checked with the new tenants of her old address to see if they had been sent there, which they had been.

After Healthwatch Thurrock raised this with the primary care nursing team. It was agreed that all children's addresses will be checked before the start of a new term to avoid this in the future.

*Name changed

'My Health in Care': a look at physical and mental health needs of children in care

Understanding the needs of children who are looked after for positive health and wellbeing outcomes

The data shows us that children in care are less likely to have positive outcomes for their mental and physical health. This also includes, not having the right tools to take ownership of their health and wellbeing once they transition and leave care. Different services joined up with Thurrock Young Voices to look at the physical and mental health needs of children in care, to see how we can best support them. These services included CAMHS, Healthwatch Thurrock and Thurrock's children looked after nurse.

Healthwatch Thurrock wanted to make sure every looked after child knew how to access primary care services.

- We ran a workshop at the project around the different ways to access care and discussed what would work best for them. It was apparent that e consult would suit their needs best and we managed to help some of those in their transition phase to book an appointment via e consult. We also played Healthwatch monopoly with them to see where they would like to see improvements. All looked after children wanted to see better support for them to enhance their future prospects.



Volunteering

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote their local Healthwatch and what we have to offer
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve



“I really enjoy my time that I volunteer with Healthwatch Thurrock. There is always something different going on and I feel as though I am able to offer support with a range of tasks. In Thurrock, there is a real dentistry crisis – no one can get registered as an NHS patient and many of the books for local dentists are closed. I helped create a database of dentists in the area who are accepting NHS patients as this isn’t always up to date on the national database. I also gather information from local dentists on how people can register with them so we have this intel to hand if someone asks”



Julie –
Healthwatch Thurrock



“As a health and social care student at college I wanted to find a placement that suited my interests however I felt that many organisations were not ready to take on younger students. When I started my placement I explained to the team that I wanted to be a midwife. They supported me in doing my own piece of work, ‘Maternity Matters’ that allowed me to gain an insight into people’s recent experiences of local maternity services. I also felt like I was able to talk freely around the health and social care barriers young people face in Thurrock which was listened to with open ears”






Dolce –
Healthwatch Thurrock

Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

-  www.healthwatchthurrock.org
-  [01375 389883](tel:01375389883)
-  admin@healthwatchthurrock.com



Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£132,587.24	Expenditure on pay	£79,654.05
Additional income	£8,000	Non-pay expenditure	£6,555
		Office and management fees	£4,782.25
Total income	£140, 587.24	Total expenditure	£90,991.30

Additional income is broken down by:

- * £3,750 funding received for discharge work from Thurrock Alliance.
- £4,250 funding for safeguarding work from safeguarding board from Thurrock local authority .

ICS funding

Healthwatch across [ICS area] also receives funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
	£
	£
	£

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Dementia support in Thurrock. Healthwatch Thurrock are working closely with local services to find out what professionals, carers and service users think of the current dementia support in Thurrock and what they would like to see changed.
2. Making safeguarding personalised. Healthwatch Thurrock will be working with the Adult Safeguarding Board to see if service users feel if safeguarding is truly personalised.
3. Continuing to work with seldom heard communities. Healthwatch Thurrock intend to continue our work with refugees and asylum seekers around primary care access, to break down stigma and to ensure that everyone can access health and social care within the borough.



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Thurrock, The Beehive Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP is a project of Thurrock CVS, The Beehive Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP.

Healthwatch Thurrock 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 Advisory group consists of 11 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Advisory Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Advisory Group met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as methods of data collection for our safeguarding work and on public messaging in relation to the decision to not build three more Integrated Medical and Wellbeing Centre's in Thurrock.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We have an Advisory Group 'ideas register' in which our Advisory Group members can feedback themes they are hearing from the public in their own role.

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 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We also created a 'We want your feedback' QR poster which was distributed within the community. This QR code took residents to a contact form via our database system, Airtable, that they could fill in within their own time which would then automatically be sent to us.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and social care decision makers. This year we have done this by ensuring engagement with seldom heard communities has regularly taken place and that face to face engagement continues for those who struggle with digital access.

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, via social media channels and make hard copies available in the volunteer centres and local libraries.

Responses to recommendations

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by Healthwatch Thurrock to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigation.

Enter and view

This year we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Thurrock is represented on the Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board by Kim James, Chief Operating Officer. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing case studies or gathered lived experience of agenda items, to represent the voice of the public.


Healthwatch Thurrock is represented on Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Partnerships by Kim James, Chief Operating Officer for Healthwatch Thurrock.

2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Maternity Matters	Our extensive work around local maternity services provides a real insight into the lived experience of new mums and dads in Thurrock. This work will be showcased in a report to be published 24-25.
Work with Welcome to the UK	Over the course of 23-24 we have carried out a series of workshops with a new charity in Thurrock, Welcome to the UK. Through these workshops we have been able to provide information, advice and guidance around Thurrock's Health and Social Care offer to those where English is not their first language. This has allowed this community to access the right care they need.
Thurrock Stroke Project report	Our report about Thurrock Stroke Project focused on the importance of the group in recovery and reablement to those who have suffered a stroke in Thurrock. We distributed our report and posters about Thurrock Stroke Project to all GPs in Thurrock and consequently, the group have had more and more people join, meaning so many more people in Thurrock are able to access peer support after suffering a stroke.

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