



# What People Told Us About Health and Social Care in Staffordshire

April 2026

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## Introduction

During 2025/2026, as part of wider research projects, Healthwatch Staffordshire spoke to people across the county about their experiences of health and social care services. Most of the feedback we received focused on GP services, hospitals, dentistry, pharmacies and social care.

96 additional respondents shared feedback with us during the period of research, this number doesn't include feedback received through our usual channels. Over half of respondents described their care as good. However, many people also told us about ongoing problems, particularly around accessing appointments, long waiting times, poor communication, and systems that do not work well for older people and those with disabilities.

People also praised individual staff for being kind, caring and professional. Where care worked well, it was often because staff listened, explained things clearly and treated people with respect. Where care did not work well, it seemed to be due to system pressures rather than individual staff.

## Emerging Themes

### 1. Difficulty Getting a GP Appointment

Many people told us it is hard to get a GP appointment, especially when trying to book on the phone.

Common concerns included:

- Long phone queues, sometimes over an hour
- Having to ring early in the morning to secure an appointment
- Limited same-day appointments
- Frustration with receptionist-led triage

Some people felt this made them delay seeking help or look elsewhere for care.

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*"Getting an appointment is a nightmare. Just getting past the receptionist and getting booked in as a miracle."*

*“Can't get appointments, have to call 111.”*

*“Appointment system is terrible when you ring you can be number 30 in the queue, waiting 1 1/2 hours to be told there are no appointments until the following week.”*

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Some people did note improvements where online systems worked for them.

*“The online triage works better for me because I can't ring at 8am due to work.”*

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## **2. Digital Exclusion and Lack of Reasonable Adjustments**

A strong theme was that digital-first systems do not suit everyone.

People told us that:

- Older people often struggle with online booking systems or apps
- Deaf people find telephone-based systems inaccessible
- Some services no longer allow face-to-face or in-person booking
- Reasonable adjustments are not always offered or followed when requested

Several people felt this left them with fewer choices and made it harder to access care safely.

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*“Don't make any reasonable adjustments for anyone who can not use the technology. Won't allow you to book appointments in person at surgery or via phone all through a system. It really ridiculous. Hence you don't go and at my age that could be detrimental but its not worth all the hassle, so you sit in silence”*

*“Communication is very difficult over the telephone. I cannot make telephone appointments due to my deafness.”*

*“Older people generally not familiar with email procedure. Telephone wait too long”*

*“I do not use a computer so cannot access records”*

*“There is no help for dyslexic people.”*

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### **3. Problems Accessing NHS Dental Care**

Access to NHS dental care was another common concern.

People told us:

- Many NHS practices are not accepting new patients
- Some dental practices have moved to private-only care
- Cost prevents some people from getting treatment
- Delays have led to worsening dental problems

Some people described losing teeth or needing extractions because they could not afford private treatment or find an NHS dentist.

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*“Struggling to get an NHS dentist. look online and contact dentists to register, and always be told not to accept NHS.”*

*“Dentist shocking. Can't get an NHS dentist. During covid I had to go to emergency appointments as no one being seen. Once Dentist opened back up they all went private.”*

*“Due to this what could have been a filling ended up being an extraction as I couldn't afford the private cost. Since covid I have lost a number of teeth through this method and its disgusting.”*

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We have recently published a ‘deep dive’ report into NHS Dentistry in Staffordshire as part of the research we conducted during 25/26, available in English, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu, Easy Read & BSL. Read it here: [Staffordshire NHS Dental Services Explained](#).

## 4. Long Waiting Times for Hospital Care

Many people reported long waits for hospital appointments, tests and surgery.

Concerns included:

- Waiting many months, or sometimes years, for specialist appointments
- Surgery being delayed or cancelled, sometimes more than once
- A lack of updates during long waits

People with long-term or complex conditions were particularly affected and worried about their health getting worse while waiting.

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*Only negative, awaiting an immunology referral for diagnosis - looking at 2 years plus"*

*"Waited about 6 months for an appointment. Nearly 12 months now, still awaiting surgery."*

*"Re: Royal Stoke. Wait for too long for initial specialist appointment. Eg 12 months for dermatology"*

*"Lack of critical care bed availability for elective/urgent surgery. My surgery has been cancelled twice."*

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## 5. Poor Communication and Care Co-ordination

Communication problems came up across services.

People told us about:

- Conflicting information from different staff
- Test results not being shared unless chased
- Poor follow-up after hospital appointments or discharge
- Feeling they had to manage their own care and referrals

This left some people feeling anxious, confused, or unsupported.

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*"A very confused service. Information given by doctors which is then contradicted by receptionist, then medication not available from the pharmacy."*

*"Have been backwards and forwards over the last 2/3 years with an unidentified chronic condition. I have been sent for tests but never get told what the results are."*

*"Had nothing at all from the hospital regarding anything. No follow up call, no instructions, no nothing."*

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## **6. Positive Experiences of Care**

Alongside the challenges, many people shared positive experiences.

People praised:

- GPs and nurses who listened and explained things clearly
- Hospital staff who were kind and reassuring during stressful times
- Carers and support workers who were reliable and compassionate
- Fast referrals where serious illness was suspected

These examples show the difference good communication and continuity of care can make.

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*"Quick efficient service, didn't have to wait very long, informative and patient centred care. Couldn't be better"*

*"GP was thorough and efficient."*

*"I was quickly referred to hospital on a fast track service for suspected cancer."*

*"Colostomy experience - excellent service. Wonderful staff when in a stressful situation."*

*"Carers come 3 times a day - all very nice, arrive on time and do a great job"*

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## 7. Pressures in Social Care

Fewer people commented on social care, but the feedback themes included:

- Delays in assessments and care planning
- Changes in carers and lack of consistency
- Poor communication from social work teams

Some carers and families described feeling stressed and left to cope on their own.

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*“It took months to be assessed, and the whole process was very stressful.”*

*““There have been times when social workers haven’t got back to us in months.”*

*“Social services seemed to be under a lot of pressure and took a long time to come out to hospital and then be assessed for a care home – around three months. Very stressful.”*

*“Care in the home - Different Carers from care company”*

*“Had a wonderful carer that had to leave due to her health. The next carers I had were horrendous.”*

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## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

This feedback shows health and social care systems that are under pressure, but also where compassionate, good quality care is still being delivered every day by committed staff.

Addressing access, communication and inclusion will help ensure that everyone in Staffordshire can get the care they need, when they need it, in a way that works for them.

## **Recommendations**

### **Access to GP Appointments**

People want GP access systems to be easier and fairer to use. We recommend that feedback about long waiting times and difficulties booking appointments is reviewed, particularly the impact on people who cannot phone early or wait in long queues. We acknowledge that access to GP appointments has recently gone through some changes, which we hope will improve things for patients in terms of accessing appointments more quickly & availability for booking online.

### **Digital Exclusion and Reasonable Adjustments**

Services need to work for those who cannot use digital systems. We recommend that accessibility needs and reasonable adjustments raised through this feedback are considered, to ensure patients can access care in ways that work for them.

### **Access to NHS Dental Care**

People told us that lack of NHS dental access is having a significant impact on their health. We recommend that this feedback is shared with commissioners and relevant partners to consider availability, access and information about NHS dental services.

### **Improving Communication & Care Co-Ordination**

People want clearer and more consistent communication. We recommend that feedback about communication gaps and care co-ordination is reviewed, including how information is shared between services and with patients.

### **Waiting Times for Hospital Care**

People want clearer information and reassurance during long waits. We recommend that feedback about the impact of delays and cancellations is considered, particularly how people are supported and kept informed while waiting.

### **Support for People with Disabilities or Long-Term Conditions**

People want better co-ordination and understanding of complex needs, which includes better awareness & implementation of reasonable adjustments. We recommend that experiences shared by people with long term or complex

conditions are considered when reviewing care pathways and communication arrangements.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all the individuals and groups that gave their time, took part and shared their valuable experiences with us. Some of the groups we engaged with are listed in the table below.

Group	Area	Target Demographic	Email
Project 93	Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire	Support & Advocacy for Trans, non-binary, and LGBTQ+ individuals	<a href="mailto:Ask@p93.org">Ask@p93.org</a>
Too young to pause	Staffordshire	Support for women under 45 experiencing early menopause	<a href="mailto:Tooyoungtopausestafford@hotmail.com">Tooyoungtopausestafford@hotmail.com</a>
Staffordshire Network for Mental Health	Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire	Small local charity, dedicated to supporting local people and communities throughout Staffordshire with their mental health.	<a href="mailto:info@snfmh.org">info@snfmh.org</a>

Girlguiding Staffordshire	Staffordshire Wide	Staffordshire Girlguiding organisation – for girls and women.	<a href="mailto:county.office@girlguidingstaffordshire.org.uk">county.office@girlguidingstaffordshire.org.uk</a>
Dyslexia Association of Staffordshire	Staffordshire Wide	Supporting people with Dyslexia.	<a href="mailto:das@dyslexiastaffordshire.co.uk">das@dyslexiastaffordshire.co.uk</a>

### The North of Staffordshire

Group	Area	Target Demographic	Email
Borderland Voices	Staffordshire Moorlands (Leek)	Supporting adults with mental health challenges through The Arts.	<a href="mailto:andy@borderlandvoices.org.uk">andy@borderlandvoices.org.uk</a>
Bumps'n'Babes	Loggerheads	Parent & baby group.	<a href="mailto:Fionasfairies@gmail.com">Fionasfairies@gmail.com</a>
Leek & District Foodbank	Leek & surrounding villages	Individuals and families in financial crisis.	<a href="mailto:info@leekdistrict.foodbank.org.uk">info@leekdistrict.foodbank.org.uk</a>

Staffordshire Sight Loss Association	North Staffs	Services and support for people living with sight loss in North Staffordshire.	<a href="mailto:hello@ssla.org.uk">hello@ssla.org.uk</a>
As One CIC	Staffordshire Wide	A specialist social enrichment and wellbeing support organisation, helping individuals and families to break barriers associated with mental wellbeing and disabilities.	<a href="mailto:Info@asonecic.com">Info@asonecic.com</a>
Outlook- Ostomy Support Group	North Staffs	Support group for people with Stoma.	<a href="mailto:cm.hammond@ntlworld.com">cm.hammond@ntlworld.com</a>
Reaching CIC	North Staffs	Free short-medium term support to vulnerable adults (16+) who are struggling with the impact of physical health and mental illness.	<a href="mailto:Help@Reaching.org.uk">Help@Reaching.org.uk</a>
Circle of friends	Newcastle Under Lyme	Circle of Friends is a community group aimed at	<a href="mailto:circleoffriendsnul@gmail.com">circleoffriendsnul@gmail.com</a>

		bringing people together to improve their mental health, boost social connections and share positivity. They provide a social lifeline to many different people and rely solely on volunteers.	
Changes Leek	Leek & surrounding villages	User-led mental health charity providing a unique recovery and wellbeing service to those in mental distress.	<a href="mailto:stoke@changes.org.uk">stoke@changes.org.uk</a>
Wellies - Leek	Leek & surrounding villages	Supporting adults (19+) recovering from mental ill health through outdoor activities, arts and crafts.	<a href="mailto:julie@growingruralenterprise.co.uk">julie@growingruralenterprise.co.uk</a>
MHA Communities North Staffs	North Staffs	Social groups and support for older people.	<a href="mailto:Liz.Daley@mha.org.uk">Liz.Daley@mha.org.uk</a>
Biddulph Methodist Church	Biddulph	Local church group.	<a href="mailto:Andrea@biddulphmethodists.org">Andrea@biddulphmethodists.org</a>
Green tree house Charity	Biddulph & surrounding area	Food club/ Foodbank for people struggling financially.	<a href="mailto:Tgthfoodclub@gmail.com">Tgthfoodclub@gmail.com</a>

Newcastle Staffs Foodbank	Newcastle under Lyme	Individuals and families in financial crisis.	<a href="mailto:info@newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk">info@newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk</a>
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### Southwest Staffordshire

Group	Area	Target Demographic	Email
Hearts & Hands Tuesday 55+ Mixer Group	Stafford	Social groups and support for older people	<a href="mailto:admin@heartshands.uk">admin@heartshands.uk</a>
Futures2gether	Stone	Community based service offering fulfilling and engaging activities and training for adults with learning difficulties	<a href="mailto:Kellymfutures2gether@gmail.com">Kellymfutures2gether@gmail.com</a>
Stone Community Hub	Stone & surrounding area	Community groups & support, food bank.	<a href="mailto:manager@stonecommunityhub.com">manager@stonecommunityhub.com</a>
St Marks Church	Great Wyrley	Local church group	<a href="mailto:melmaloney2022@outlook.com">melmaloney2022@outlook.com</a>

### Southeast Staffordshire

Group	Area	Target Demographic	Email
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Burton & District Mind	East Staffordshire	Mental Health Support	<a href="mailto:info@burtonmind.co.uk">info@burtonmind.co.uk</a>
Changes – Tamworth	Tamworth	User-led mental health charity providing a unique recovery and wellbeing service to those in mental distress.	<a href="mailto:yvonnechanges@yahoo.co.uk">yvonnechanges@yahoo.co.uk</a>
Wellies Project	Staffordshire & Derbyshire border	Supporting adults (19+) recovering from mental ill health through outdoor activities, arts and crafts.	<a href="mailto:Steph@growingruralenterprise.co.uk">Steph@growingruralenterprise.co.uk</a>
East Staffs PPG	East Staffordshire	Patient participation group	<a href="mailto:Trentmeadowspg@staffs.nhs.uk">Trentmeadowspg@staffs.nhs.uk</a>
Burton Caribbean Association	Burton	Community led organisation that owns and operates a community centre, located in an extremely deprived area within Burton-Upon-Trent.	<a href="mailto:info@burtoncaribbean.co.uk">info@burtoncaribbean.co.uk</a>

Harvey Girls/ Dads4Dads	East Staffs/Burton	Family support for wellbeing, boundaries & behaviour, meeting emotional needs, education & learning, progress to work, family routine, keeping children safe, physical health, social networks and home & money.	<a href="mailto:support@harveygirls.co.uk">support@harveygirls.co.uk</a>
Burton Unity	Burton	Burton Unity is a community-led organisation rooted in lived experience. We were born from the real stories of women who faced barriers to wellbeing, connection and opportunity - culturally sensitive spaces where women and families can feel truly welcome.	<a href="mailto:info@burtonunity.org.uk">info@burtonunity.org.uk</a>
Up Creative	Tamworth	Community group s& workshops .	<a href="mailto:info@theupcreativecommunity.org">info@theupcreativecommunity.org</a>
Menopause Café	Lichfield	Menopause support group.	<a href="mailto:themenopausecafe@gmail.com">themenopausecafe@gmail.com</a>
Burton YMCA	Burton	Homeless individuals and those in crisis.	<a href="mailto:office@burtonymca.org">office@burtonymca.org</a>

Sweetmore  
Meadow

East Staffordshire

Community outdoor  
education centre.

[Sweetmoremeadow@hotmail.com](mailto:Sweetmoremeadow@hotmail.com)



Riverside  
[www.healthwatchstaffordshire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchstaffordshire.co.uk)  
t: 0800 051 8371  
e: [enquiries@healthwatchstaffordshire.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchstaffordshire.co.uk)  
f @HWStaffordshireOfficial