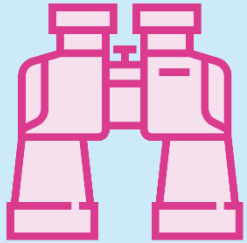




Priority areas of focus & Workplan 2026/27

Our strategy



Our vision

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



Our mission

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

What are our core beliefs?

Belief one

We believe that health and social care providers can best improve services by listening to people's experiences.

Belief two

We believe that everyone in society needs to be included in the conversation. Especially those whose voices aren't being listened to.

Belief three

We believe that comparing lots of different experiences helps us to identify patterns and learn what is and isn't working.

Belief four

We believe that feedback has to lead to change. Listening for listening's sake is not enough.

Belief five

We believe that we must always remain independent and impartial while working with partners to get things done.

What are our values?

Listening

We recognise the value of listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.

Including

We value inclusivity. Listening to the first-hand experiences of diverse groups improves care for everyone.

Analysing

We value the insight that's gained from analysing many different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.

Acting

We act on feedback and drive change. Listening has to positively affect outcomes and influence important decisions about people's care.

Partnering

We value strong partnerships with care providers and Government – serving as the public's independent advocate.

Setting the scene



Since the Government announcement in the summer of 2025 to abolish Healthwatch England and Local Healthwatch and transfer our functions to new systems, we have been working hard to champion the value of an independent public voice entity, which can scrutinise, challenge and add value to statutory public health & care services, commissioning and policy.

We have been doing this alongside and without compromising our statutory functions and contractual obligations, ensuring that we continue to proactively engage with and listen to local people, in order that their voices, views and experiences feed into and influence local decision making and improvements.

Current & Previous Priorities

We last reviewed our priority areas of focus in 2024 and our current topics are:

- Mental Health
- Dentistry & General Practice
- Adult Social Care
- Women's Health

With our other focused functions being:

- Information, advice & signposting
- Independent Health Complaints Advocacy

And overarching key themes being:

- Inequalities, Accessibility & Partnerships

Over the last 12 years, we have identified priority areas of focus based on a number of influential factors including, but not limited to –

- Local, regional and national health & care strategies
- Local Public Health priorities and data
- Our local system areas of priority – Health & Wellbeing Board / Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee / Integrated Care System Commissioning Priorities
- Healthwatch England priorities and forward plan

And of course, most importantly,

- Our local insight – what local people are telling us and what our stakeholder partners are sharing with us

Our areas of priority have traditionally been therefore, specific service and service provider areas or care/treatment pathways.

In light of recent news and the limited ability we have to forward plan, we have chosen to think differently this year and take a more creative and hopefully more impactful approach.

Influencing our Priorities

The team came together in February at a workshop to consider our priorities and 2026–27 workplan.

We looked at the following documents and data to support our discussion

- Healthwatch England Forward Plan
- NHS England / DHSC 10 Year Health Plan – ‘Fit For The Future’
- NHS Sussex Commissioning Priorities
- NHS Sussex Health & Wellbeing Strategy – ‘Improving Lives Together’
- WSCC Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2025–2030 (Health & Wellbeing Board)
- WSCC Children & Young People’s Plan 2026–2029
- WSCC Adult Services Strategy – Living Well and Staying Independent
- Healthwatch in Sussex Insight Reports
- Our local insight and partnerships data
- And others

Change & Transition

The overwhelming theme throughout the health and social care sector at present is CHANGE.

We have changes occurring at national level with the Health Reform Bill tabled to be read in Parliament this year. This will include the abolishment of NHS England, Healthwatch and other arms length bodies, with functions and statutory powers being transferred or ceased.

Nationally, the DHSC is developing a new Department of Patient Experience, which will deliver some of the national functions of Healthwatch England and analyse public insight and feedback.

Our local NHS commissioning body, NHS Sussex, has been transitioning to a new, leaner organisation. The changes locally include a merger with NHS Surrey Heartlands and a comprehensive internal restructure with significant loss of staff and changes to roles from executive level to junior posts.

Our largest local hospital trust, University Hospitals Sussex Foundation Trust, is also restructuring and refocusing their executive directorates, staff structure and undertaking major service reviews in several areas.

Our regional mental health trust, Sussex Partnership Foundation Trust, is undertaking similar internal restructuring and service reviews in a bid to enable financial efficiencies.

From a public health and social care perspective, West Sussex County Council, have recently published their refreshed Adult Services Strategy with clear priorities supported by codesigned principles and enablers.

The Public Health Team continue to lead on county wide JSNA's, including new themes and topics, as they are introduced by central government.

However, all plans and strategies are subject to significant change in the coming months, as devolution and local government reorganisation progresses and takes shape.

Following the recent local elections and the appointment of a number of new County Councillors, membership of the West Sussex Health & Wellbeing Board and Health & Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee will be changing.

These changes will undoubtedly impact and influence future discussions.

The theme of CHANGE is something that we therefore feel, as a team, is a significant and important focus for us throughout the current financial year – understanding the change(s) and ensuring local people receive accurate and up to date information about changes to services and pathways.

Reflect and Reset

Since the Government announcement last year regarding the transition of functions from the Healthwatch model to a new system, our team have been reflecting on and focusing on our statutory functions and contractual obligations.

Our Statutory Functions:

- Obtain the views of people about their needs and experience of local health and social care services. Local Healthwatch make these views known to those involved in the commissioning and scrutiny of care services.
- Make reports and make recommendations about how those services could or should be improved.
- Promote and support the involvement of people in the monitoring, commissioning and provision of local health and social care services.
- Provide information and advice to the public about accessing health and social care services and the options available to them.
- Make the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England, helping us to carry out our role as national champion.
- Make recommendations to Healthwatch England to advise the CQC to carry out special reviews or investigations into areas of concern.

At our workshop in February, our staff, volunteers and Board Members looked at these functions and our contractual key performance indicators and felt that our priority areas for 2026–27 should be a ‘back to basics’ focus on:

Insight

What we hear from local people through engagement, Enter & View service visits, projects & partnerships.

Influence

How we ensure local voices, views and experiences feed into local, regional and national discussions and decisions.

Impact

The difference we make. The changes and improvements we are able to influence

There will be golden threads running through these themes including:
Inequalities, Information & IHCAS

In Summary

Golden Threads	Priority	Activities
<p>Inequalities</p> <p>Change & Transition</p> <p>Information & Communication</p>	<p>Insight</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community & Partnership Engagement Events • Surveys & Polls • Projects • Enter & View Service Visits • Info, advice and signposting via Healthwatch Hub
	<p>Influence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Meeting Attendance • System Meetings • Community Partnership Meetings & Networks • Public Meetings & Engagement Activities • Enter & View Service Visits • IHCAS Case Work
	<p>Impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing Reports • Escalations and Insight Sharing (local system partners and HWE/CQC/national research programmes) • Revisiting previous work / follow up activities • Legacy Project • IHCAS Resolutions & Learning

Workplan 2026-27

Due to the uncertainty about the timeframe for the closure of local Healthwatch and the transition to a new model of public voice and scrutiny, we have decided to focus our workplan activities for Quarter 1, Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 only (April – Dec 2026).

If the Government's proposed roadmap of change is implemented, we expect to be in a transition phase from January 2027.

We have therefore worked together (staff, volunteers and Board Members), during the February workshop, to look at potential and proposed pieces of work for the next 9 months.

The following page outlines our draft plans and ambitions.

These are, of course, subject to change.

Quarter 1

April – June 2026

- Enter & View – Ophthalmology Services, to feed into the UHSx NHS Trust Major Service Review
- Macmillan/ NHS Palliative Care Project
- Stonepillow Lived Experience Work
- Agricultural Workers Survey (mental health in farming communities)
- NHS Support for jobseekers with long term health conditions work, partnership with local DWP / Jobcentre teams
- Fibromyalgia survey and engagement
- WSCC Public Health JSNA's – Homelessness / End of Life Care
- Local Community Network activities
- PPG / Primary Care Support – St Lawrence Surgery / The Strand Surgery

Quarter 2

July – September 2026

- Enter & View – Urgent Care Services & Primary Care
- Cancer Care Review Project, follow up & new work
- Neighbourhood Mental Health Teams evaluation work
- Legacy Project phase 1 – review of all HWWS annual reports and identify key impacts and opportunities to follow up
- Staying Well in Retirement Project – impact of retirement on the health of local people
- Partnership project with Carers Support West Sussex
- Local Community Network activities
- PPG / Primary Care Support – Steyning Medical Centre

Quarter 3

October – December 2026

- Enter & View – Adult Social Care Services
- Neighbourhood Mental Health Teams evaluation work
- Partnership project with disability charity, Independent Lives – survey & engagement with customers receiving and managing Direct Payments for their care – this will include a spotlight on Independent Lives
- Legacy Project phase 2 – revisit and follow up former achievements and impact, reporting on how impacts and outcomes have been sustained or grown over time
- Ten Tiny Fingers and Toes Partnership work – survey and impact report
- Turning Tides homeless charity – co-designing and delivering facilitation training for service users
- Local Community Network activities
- PPG / Primary Care Support – TBC

Business as Usual

In addition to our planned 'core Healthwatch funded' work, we will continue to deliver the following activities:

- Information Advice & Signposting – via community engagement, information events and the Healthwatch Hub
- Ensuring local voices and experiences feed into strategic health & care conversations – via our liaison representatives attending meetings and forums to share insight and champion the local voice
- Complaints Support – via our Healthwatch Hub, web-based resources and our dedicated IHCAS team
- Partnerships & Collaborations – working with both statutory and VCSE partners on all our work priorities, including our formal partnership with Healthwatch East Sussex and Healthwatch Brighton & Hove which has recently extended to include Healthwatch Surrey

This paper was drafted by Jo Tuck and the Healthwatch West Sussex Team.

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Healthwatch West Sussex works with [Help & Care](https://www.helpandcare.org.uk) to provide its statutory activities