



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch West Sussex annual report
2025/26

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Acting Chief Executive
Chris McCann

“

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

We are proud of the influence our work has had and of the strong partnerships we have built with health, care, voluntary sector, and community organisations across Sussex. Together, we have helped ensure that the public voice remains at the heart of service improvement.

Staying Focused on What Matters Most

As we reflect on the past year, I want to thank everyone who has supported our work and shared our commitment to improving health and adult social care across West Sussex.

This year has been one of change and challenge, with the announcement that Healthwatch will come to an end next year. While structures may change, the insights gathered from local people and our commitment to ensuring public voices shape services will continue to influence the future of health and care across our communities.

Throughout this period of uncertainty, our focus has remained clear: listening to local people and ensuring their experiences inform decision-making and drive improvement. Over the past 12 months, thousands of residents have shared their experiences with us, highlighting both what works well and where services need to improve.

As we look ahead, we will continue to prioritise the work that has the greatest impact - amplifying voices that are too often unheard, championing lived experience, and helping people navigate health and care services during this transition. We remain committed to supporting local people and advocating for positive change.

Above all, I want to thank our dedicated staff and volunteers. Their professionalism, compassion, and commitment, particularly during a period of significant change, have been exceptional. Their passion for helping people and improving services continues to make a lasting difference.



Board Chair
Steve Cooper

6 To everyone who has shared their experiences with us, thank you. Your voice has shaped our work and helped make a difference.

As we move through this next chapter, we remain committed to listening, learning, and acting on what matters most to the people of West Sussex, while ensuring that the influence of your experiences continues to be felt across the health and care system.

Thank you for your continued support.

About us

Healthwatch West Sussex is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS leaders and decisionmakers 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 decisionmakers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than **40,000** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **7** staff and, our work was supported by **67** volunteers.



Reaching out:

40,855 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1,010 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as treatment and care, waiting times, interactions with staff, advocacy and support available.



Championing your voice:

We published **32** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like women's health, sexual health and cancer care.

Our most popular report was **Horsham District Women's Health Survey Report**, highlighting people's responses to a proposed Women's Health Hub.

Other popular reports included: the **Young People's Experiences of NHS Communication and Appointments Report** and **NHS Sussex Sensory Impairment Health Inequalities Summary**.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by West Sussex County Council In 2024/25 we received **£234,696**, which is the same as last year.

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 West Sussex. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We heard from 18,000+ women in Horsham calling for better healthcare access. Our work helped support improvements and priorities for a new Health Hub to tackle gaps in GP services, menopause support, and specialist care.

Healthwatch West Sussex, Macmillan, and NHS Sussex empower patients and carers by using real feedback to **improve digital palliative care**, easing NHS pressures and enhancing quality of life.

Summer

We submitted a response to the **UK Parliament Committee for reproductive health conditions: girls and young women**, to ensure that the voices of women in West Sussex are considered.

In July, we held a Summer Mental Health and Wellbeing Information Event at Saint Wilfrid's Church in Bognor Regis.

Autumn

We promoted and contributed to an independent NHS England expert review of the **Cardiac Cath Lab Service at St Richard's Hospital** in Chichester.

Our collaboration with UK Harvest meant that we could support their service delivery, promote our work and hear local voices in six neighbourhoods across Chichester and Bognor Regis.

Winter

Since the Crawley LCN Temporary Accommodation report was published, members have focused on its key themes, including producing a booklet on cooking affordable meals with limited equipment.

Partnership working with Stonepillow has led to a strong collaboration, including the co-design and delivery of a **Lived Experience Project** that amplifies local voices.

Working together for change

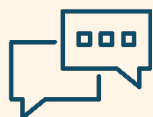
We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in West Sussex are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services across the county.

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



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

We led the formation of a network of 14 local Healthwatch, helping to change health and social care services at a regional and national level. Funding from our Integrated Care Board allowed us to run surveys, workshops, and more, gathering regionwide public feedback. A representative from our network now works directly with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), ensuring they hear the public's voice.



A big conversation:

Along with eight other Healthwatch, we learned from over a thousand residents what good care looks like to them: accessible, personcentred, and trustworthy. Our regional ICB (Integrated Care Board), which funded the work, used the findings to take steps towards a new framework for measuring success, focusing on outcomes for local people. This focus will make a difference in the areas, residents care about the most.



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

In November, we met with decisionmakers from our Integrated Care Board to talk how best to work together in the coming year. We agreed on fresh representation of Healthwatch and our community at ICB level, with Healthwatch West Sussex taking up this vital role. We look forward to continuing to collaborate to care about the most.

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 decisionmakers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here are some examples of our work in Sussex this year:



Shaping a Women's Health Hub for Horsham

Local women's experiences are driving the design of more accessible and joined-up health services.

Healthwatch West Sussex gathered feedback from women across Horsham District to understand their experiences of accessing healthcare, barriers to support, and priorities for future women's health services. Our findings informed the development of a Women's Health Hub in Horsham.



Improving Support for People Experiencing Homelessness

Lived experiences helped highlight barriers to healthcare and influence more inclusive service planning.

Working alongside Stonepillow and people with lived experience of homelessness, Healthwatch West Sussex gathered insight into the challenges faced when accessing health and care services. The findings were shared with NHS Sussex and system partners, helping to strengthen understanding of health inequalities.



Giving Young People a Voice in Neurodiversity Services

Children, young people, and families helped shape conversations about improving neurodevelopmental support.

Healthwatch West Sussex engaged with young people, parents, carers, and support organisations to understand experiences of neurodevelopmental assessment pathways and support services. Feedback was shared with NHS Sussex and wider system partners, helping to inform ongoing improvement work within neurodevelopmental 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.



Championing equality of women's rights in health care.

Last year, we championed the voices of our community to recommend a new health hub.

Although women and girls make up 51% of the UK population, evidence suggests they do not receive the same level of care, investigation, or treatment for common and significant diseases as men.

Local data for Horsham District in the last 2 years shows that smear uptake is lower than the national average, contraceptive uptake has reduced from pre-Covid levels and there has been an increase in sexual offences locally.

What did we do

Discussion with local people, clinicians and the community, the problem appeared to have worsened in recent years due to increased demand for appointments at GP practices and a deskilling of staff during the Covid pandemic. Park and Orchard Primary Care Network, Horsham Local Community Network and Healthwatch West Sussex wanted to ensure that these views were captured in a survey.

We gained insights into the potential benefits of developing a specific Women's Health Hub for women in the Horsham District area to address these concerns.

Key things we heard:

We heard from 1,247 people.

- **Women's health services are fragmented** and difficult to navigate.
- **Travel outside Horsham is often required** to access specialist care.
- **Greater access to women's health specialists is needed**, especially for menopause support.
- **More joined-up, holistic services** combining physical, mental, and reproductive health are wanted.
- **Demand exists for wider support services**, including maternity, pelvic health, cancer, and bereavement support.

What difference did this make?

Healthwatch's engagement work has provided valuable insight into the needs and priorities of women in Horsham, helping to shape the next steps for developing an effective Women's Health Hub.

The findings informed service improvements, supported a co-produced approach involving local people and partners, and helped prioritise accessible, personalised services that address health inequalities.

Shaping the Future of Digital Palliative Care Through Patient Voices

Healthwatch West Sussex and partners gathered local experiences of healthcare technology to help design digital services that better support people receiving palliative and end-of-life care at home.

We worked with Macmillan and NHS partners across Sussex to explore how people use digital health technology and identify any barriers to its use.

This included a focus group, a public survey completed by 56 people, and follow-up discussions to gather detailed feedback on digital healthcare experiences.

Key things we heard:

People shared their experiences of using technology to monitor their health, highlighting preferences, ease of use, and challenges with digital platforms.

Feedback emphasised the importance of accessible, user-friendly technology that supports patients and carers while enabling clinical support at home.

As a patient, survey respondents were asked what they thought an App such as DOCCLA could offer a patient. All respondents reported they would:

- Feel more independent, as not having to wait to report symptoms.
- Less alone as they know the Team will be monitoring.
- Contact would be improved as they can update their symptoms.
- The App would help to address how they feel about their diagnosis.
- Helps them to identify when and why they need help.

What difference did this make?

The findings helped to inform the development of digital healthcare services for people receiving palliative and end-of-life care.

This work has progressed to testing the DOCCLA app, which enables remote monitoring, virtual consultations, and clinical support from home.

Patient feedback will continue to shape the design and implementation of these services, helping ensure technology improves care, accessibility, and patient experience.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of West Sussex. 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:

- Working directly with 20 community groups to capture the experiences of parents and carers, including those from communities whose voices are often underrepresented. In partnership with West Sussex County Council and Right Start, Healthwatch West Sussex gathered lived experiences of accessing information, advice, and early years services, this work is helping to ensure future service planning is shaped by a diverse range of local voices and better reflects the needs of families across West Sussex.
- Reaching people experiencing socioeconomic deprivation, by co-hosting a Summer Mental Health and Wellbeing Information Event at Saint Wilfrid's Church in Bognor Regis, providing accessible information, support, and connections to local services within the community.
- Ensuring local voices influenced decision-making by gathering feedback through surveys, focus groups, outreach events, Helpdesk insight, and partnership projects.
- During 2025, community experiences directly informed the development of a Women's Health Hub, digital palliative care services, early years support, and improvements to patient transport services.
- Through regular engagement with NHS Sussex and Integrated Care System partners, Healthwatch West Sussex helped ensure that local people's priorities and experiences are reflected in service planning and improvement.

Community Experiences Driving Improvements in Adult Social Care and helping to inform healthcare decisions to become more person-led

Local people's experiences of care and support were gathered and shared with health and social care leaders, helping to shape priorities for improving adult social care services across West Sussex.

People told us about language barriers, a lack of cultural understanding among service providers, and failure to address concerns about religious and dietary needs. Other concerns involved the stigma surrounding social care.

What we did?

Healthwatch West Sussex shared these insights with local decision-makers through regular meetings with health and social care partners, including the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee and Sussex system leaders.

This ensured that the experiences of people using adult social care services and their carers were reflected in discussions about service improvement and future planning.

What difference did this make?

As a result, local voices helped shape priorities for adult social care across West Sussex, with access to information, support during hospital discharge, and improving people's experiences of care identified as key areas for continued focus.

The work also strengthened the evidence base used by health and care partners to improve services and support people to live independently for longer.

What we did?

Healthwatch West Sussex identified through the homelessness project that people with complex conditions, including those facing language barriers, were being excluded or disadvantaged by fragmented services and poor communication.

What difference did this make?

This evidence was used to push NHS partners towards more inclusive, accessible, and joined-up care models, particularly within inclusion, health and homelessness pathways.

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 40,855 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



Empowering Safer Hospital Discharges through Advocacy and Information

We helped a vulnerable patient secure a safer, more informed discharge by strengthening their voice in care planning.

We empowered a vulnerable patient to play a more active role in her discharge planning by providing clear information about her rights and the hospital discharge process.

As a result, she felt more confident raising concerns, ensuring her safety needs were considered, and advocating for appropriate support, including involvement of her family. This helped promote a safer, more person-centred discharge and improved her ability to make informed decisions about her care.

Supporting a Patient to Raise Concerns About Delayed Test Results

We provided guidance and advocacy support to help the caller escalate concerns and access appropriate complaint support.

A caller with diabetes contacted the Hub after experiencing a significant delay in receiving cholesterol test results and feeling unheard by her GP practice.

The Hub advised her to arrange a GP appointment to discuss her condition, supported her intention to make a formal complaint, and referred her to IHCAS for independent advocacy. This ensured she was supported to raise concerns appropriately and access help in navigating the complaints process.

Helping a Caller Access the Right Support for Chronic Pain

We helped a caller navigate healthcare services and secure access to specialist pain and physiotherapy support.

A caller experiencing severe chronic pain and increasing isolation contacted the Hub for advice after struggling to get support from their GP. The Hub provided practical guidance on accessing information about specialist referrals, encouraged engagement with physiotherapy services, and signposted mobility support.

As a result, the caller secured appointments with a pain management clinic and was added to the physiotherapy waiting list, improving access to the support needed to manage their condition.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given **2,018 hours** 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
- 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.



Sue

“My volunteering journey with Healthwatch West Sussex began before Healthwatch existed, when I joined the West Sussex Local Involvement Network (LINK) after retiring from a career in nursing and NHS management. When Healthwatch was established, I transitioned into the new organisation and am now its longest-serving volunteer.

Over the past 12 years, I have supported Enter & View visits, patient engagement activities, NHS trust liaison work, and, more recently, served on the Local Leadership Board. Seeing how local people’s experiences have directly influenced service improvements has kept me passionate and committed. It has been a rewarding experience, and I remain dedicated to supporting Healthwatch through its transition and beyond.”

“I first became involved with Healthwatch West Sussex after meeting the team during a Listening Tour in Littlehampton. At the time, I was a stay-at-home mum of two children with additional needs and volunteered with my local Children & Family Centre and Parent Carer Forum.

After learning about Healthwatch’s work, I became a volunteer, helping gather community feedback and support local projects. Encouraged by the Volunteering Lead, I later applied for a Community Involvement Worker role despite having been out of work for seven years. Nearly nine years later, I am still proud to be part of the team, helping ensure local voices are heard and valued.”



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.



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Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from West Sussex County 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	£234,696	Expenditure on pay	£239,048
Additional income	£22,250	Nonpay expenditure	£47,435
		Office and management fee	£36,000
Total income	£256,946	Total Expenditure	£322,483

Additional income is broken down into:

- £10,000 received from West Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB) for Pan Sussex Healthwatch work.
- £500 received from West Sussex County Council for the Early Years Project.
- £10,000 received from University Hospitals Sussex for Mystery Shopping.
- £1,750 received from Steyning Medical Practice for support with the Patient Experience Survey.

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.

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. Insight
2. Influence
3. Impact

Golden Threads	Priority	Activities
Inequalities Change & Transition Information & Communication	Insight	Community & Partnership Engagement Events Surveys & Polls Projects Enter & View Service Visits Information, advice and signposting via Healthwatch Hub
	Influence	Statutory Meeting Attendance System Meetings Community Partnership Meetings & Networks Public Meetings & Engagement Activities Enter & View Service Visits Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service (IHCAS) Case Work
	Impact	Publishing Reports Escalations and Insight Sharing (Local system partners, Healthwatch England, Care Quality Commission (CQC) and national research programmes) Revisiting previous work / follow up activities Legacy Project IHCAS Resolutions & Learning

Statutory statements

Healthwatch West Sussex is hosted by Help & Care a registered Charity No. 1055056. Registered as a company limited by guarantee and registered in England No.03187574. Registered office at Unit A49, Aerodrome Studios, 2-8 Airfield Way, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 3TS.

Healthwatch West Sussex 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 decisionmaking.

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 7 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.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met 4 times and supported decision making on matters such as recruitment and our quarterly priorities. 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 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, share on social media and in our newsletter.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had 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 decisionmakers

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 Health and Care Scrutiny Committee, Health and Wellbeing Board and Sussex Health and Care Assembly.

We take insight and experiences to decisionmakers in Adult Social Services (West Sussex County Council) and Working with People and Communities in Sussex Partnership NHS Trust and also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and social care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch West Sussex is represented on the West Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) by Zoey Harries and Jo Tuck.

Presenting community insight and priorities

Healthwatch West Sussex secured agenda time at the January 2025 Health and Wellbeing Board to present its Annual Report, sharing key themes emerging from community engagement, Helpdesk enquiries, and research projects. The Chair publicly thanked Healthwatch for its contribution and the value of the insight provided.

Raising emerging issues

Through its HWB representation, Healthwatch West Sussex ensured that local experiences and concerns were fed into discussions about:

- Access to NHS services
- Health inequalities
- Community wellbeing
- Safeguarding priorities
- Integrated working across health and care systems

Board minutes note that Healthwatch regularly contributed agenda items and community intelligence to support strategic discussions.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Locations

April 2025:

St Richards Hospital, Chichester
Princess Royal Hospital, Haywards Heath

May 2025:

Horsham Community Hospital, Horsham

June 2025:

Bognor Regis War Memorial Hospital,
Bognor Regis

July 2025:

Crawley Community Hospital, Crawley

August 2025:

Princess Royal Hospital,
Haywards Heath

What you did as a result

Verbal reports and feedback given on site at each visit.

Summary [written] reports shared via email, with actions, following each visit.

Actions shared and followed up at Patient Engagement & Experience Committees.

Improvements noted and logged via return visits.

Used insight and feedback to contribute to Service Reviews and commissioning decisions with ICB.

Statutory statements

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Turning Local Voices into Positive Change Across West Sussex

A major achievement was the Women's Health Hub project, where feedback from over 18,000 women informed plans for a new Women's Health Hub in Horsham. Healthwatch West Sussex also worked with NHS Sussex and Macmillan to shape the development of digital palliative care services, ensuring patient experiences informed the testing and design of the DOCCLA remote monitoring app for people receiving end-of-life care.

Healthwatch West Sussex amplified the voices of children and young people, shining a light on the challenges they face when accessing NHS services, particularly those with additional needs such as neurodiversity. By gathering and sharing their experiences of communication, appointments, and continuity of care, we provided vital evidence to system leaders, helping drive improvements that make services more accessible, responsive, and inclusive for young people and their families.

Healthwatch West Sussex played an important role in supporting individuals to navigate health and care services. Thousands of enquiries were handled through the Helpdesk, with people receiving information, signposting, and advocacy support.

Partnership NHS Trust and also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and social care issues at a national level.

Partnership working remained a key strength throughout the year. We collaborated with Local Community Networks, NHS trusts, voluntary sector organisations, carers' groups, and community partners to reach seldom-heard communities, address health inequalities, and promote more joined-up care. Through this work, local voices helped shape priorities for improving access, patient experience, and health outcomes across West Sussex.


In Summary

Healthwatch West Sussex's key achievements in 2025–26 were ensuring local voices influenced health and care decisions, shaping new services such as the Women's Health Hub and digital palliative care support, improving understanding of young people's and carers' experiences, supporting thousands of residents through information and advocacy, and strengthening partnerships to reduce health inequalities and improve patient experience across the county.

Healthwatch West Sussex

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