

Healthwatch East Sussex

Quarter 3 Report 2025 – 2026

1st October 2025 – 31st December 2025



healthwatch
East Sussex

www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

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About Healthwatch East Sussex

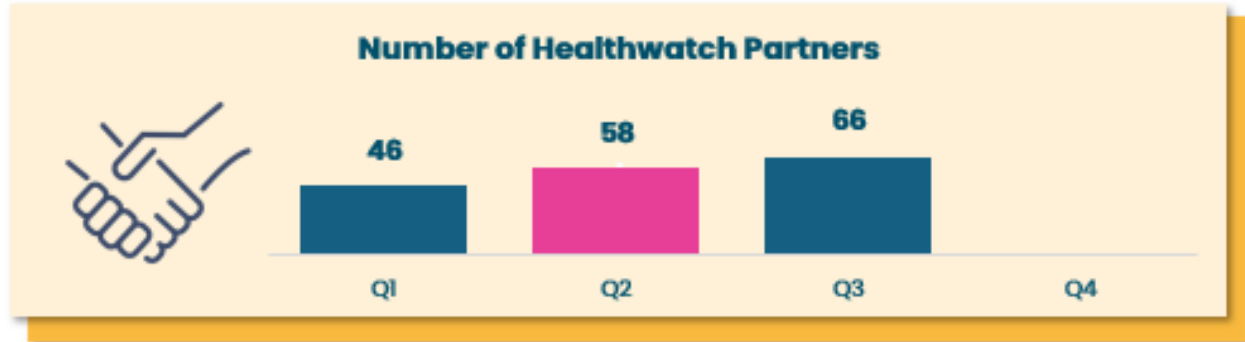
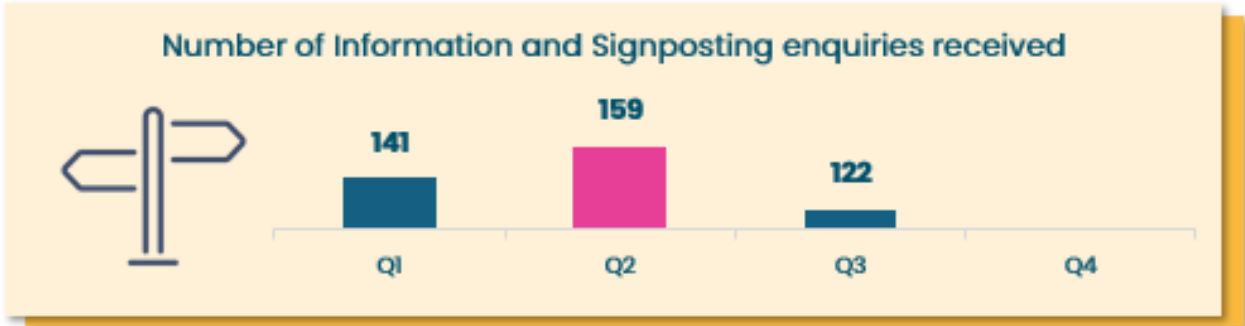
Healthwatch East Sussex is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and local council decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



About this report

The purpose of this report is to summarise the activity, publications and impact delivered by the Healthwatch programme in East Sussex this quarter.

Quarterly Dashboard



Highlights of the quarter

Care Awards

In November, we received a Special Recognition Award at the East Sussex Partners in Care 2025 Care Awards. The award honoured the collective contribution of our Healthwatch team and the outstanding dedication of our volunteers in championing patient voice in healthcare over the past 12 years.

University visits

We delivered workshops at the University of Brighton to around 100 nursing students. During the workshops, we explained the role and remit of Healthwatch and the importance of patient involvement and patient experience in improving services, including how clinicians could gather and use this information.

PLACE visits

Healthwatch volunteers and staff participated in the annual Patient Led Assessment of the Care Environment (PLACE) visits to hospitals and hospices across East Sussex. Healthwatch representatives commented on their experience of the care environments from a patient point of view, supporting health staff to identify areas for future investment in their buildings. In total, Healthwatch volunteers contributed 195 hours of unpaid work towards PLACE.

Pharmacy recommendations

After publishing our Community Pharmacy in Hastings [report](#), we met with NHS Sussex to identify how our recommendations could be implemented, including improving the physical accessibility of pharmacies; increasing the profile and clarity of information on Pharmacy First; and ensuring that accessible information for those with additional communication needs is provided in pharmacies.



Did you know?

Healthwatch East Sussex is part of a [network](#) of over 150 local Healthwatch, working together to use your feedback to better understand the challenges facing health and care providers.

Listening Tour

Who we have engaged

This quarter, we completed our Listening Tour in Rother. Across the tour, we heard from a total of 112 people. We heard from a variety of people through our online survey, in-person engagement, our information and signposting service, and as part of our Listening Tour workshop.

What we've heard

Throughout the tour, we continued to hear issues around accessing GP services, although we also received positive feedback about people's experiences of care, particularly from those living in the Rye area. We heard about people's mixed experiences of using NHS 111, with some saying that they had been signposted to services which were unavailable or they felt were inappropriate for their needs.

We heard concerns that waiting areas and appointment systems in healthcare settings are not designed for those who are neurodivergent or living with a mental health need. Individuals shared their stories about finding noisy, busy waiting areas stressful, as well as about barriers to booking and attending appointments where these are done via telephone. Alongside this, the issues of mobile and broadband coverage in parts of Rother were also raised, with some people sharing that the reliance on digital systems can make it challenging for them to access healthcare services.

What we've done with your views

What we hear on the Listening Tour influences and informs our wider work. The two projects further outlined on page 6 of this report are two examples:

- Following feedback heard through the Listening Tour around transport, we undertook a project aimed at better understanding people's experiences of Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services (NEPTS). We hosted an online survey and spoke to people at Bexhill hospital about their experiences of travelling to the hospital via patient transport.
- Following feedback about issues contacting GP practices as well as the launch of the [new GP charter](#) in October, we undertook mapping of all GP practices across East Sussex to find out if practices were meeting new requirements around availability of different communication channels.

Information and Signposting

- This quarter our [Information and Signposting service](#) has received **122** public enquiries from phone calls, emails, web-based contacts, and from outreach sessions at [foodbanks](#) across Eastbourne and at [Sanctuary](#) Friday Gathering.

Key themes from enquiries

This quarter, we heard about:

- **GP services** – admin errors impacting care, issues with [patient choice](#), concerns about the use of artificial intelligence (A.I.), mixed feedback about the use of digital tools, delays for repeat prescriptions, and problems with telephone consultations.
- **Dentists** – lack of transparent communication about the role of different practitioners, confusion about NHS root canal provision, inaccurate guidance given to patients with a [HC2 certificate](#), but prompt and helpful care from the Urgent Dental Service.
- **Hospitals** – long waits to be seen and lack of facilities in A&E, mixed feedback about quality of care & levels of compassion from staff.

What we have done

This quarter, we have:

- Escalated concerns from enquirers about Right to Choose pathways, breastfeeding support, Covid vaccination text reminders, NHS root canal provision, GP home visit eligibility and GP complaints procedures to the providers and commissioners of services for their investigation and response.
- Produced public-facing advice articles on the new Patient Charter '[You and your GP](#)' and the [Accessible Information Standard](#).
- Signposted to support and resources from a range of organisations including [Possability People](#), the [Welfare Benefits Helpline](#), [Turn2Us](#), [Age UK East Sussex](#), the [BMA](#), the [Stay Alive App](#), [Amaze Sussex](#) and [Autism Central](#).
- Presented key findings from our report on [Residents' Experiences of Health and Care Services at HMP Lewes](#) to the [Sussex Health Equity Partnership](#).

Projects

You & Your GP

During November 2025, Healthwatch reviewed 163 Sussex GP practice websites to see if NHS guidelines on '[You and Your General Practice](#)' (YYGP) were published, and if practices were maintaining face-to-face visits, phone calls and operating digital platforms between 8am and 6.30pm, Monday to Friday as required.

We identified that 77.3% had published the YYGP guidance. Between 62.0% and 77.9% of GPs published information on the operating times for each communication channel, but in up to 40% of cases these did not appear to operate for the full duration of the required times. Poor visibility and clarity of information were regularly identified as issues across many GP practice websites.

Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS)

During October and November 2025, [Healthwatch in Sussex](#) asked NEPTS users about their experiences via a digital survey and face-to-face in NHS settings. We heard how people felt the new provider (EMED) had delivered the service since April 2025. Service users and NHS staff told us about positive and negative experiences, as well as suggestions for change and improvement, which will be shared with EMED and service commissioners. Our report outlining our findings and recommendations will be publicly available in early 2026.



Volunteer Updates

This quarter, our volunteers were involved in a range of activities with health and social care partners, which included:

- Reviewing the websites of 55 GP practices across East Sussex to see if they had published the '[You and Your General Practice](#)' guidance and offered access between 8am and 6.30pm Monday to Friday (see page 6)
- Visiting Bexhill Hospital to talk to patients about their experience of Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPTS), contributing to the wider Healthwatch in Sussex Project (see page 6)
- Participating in the annual 'Patient Led Assessment of the Care Environment' (PLACE) visits to hospitals and hospices across East Sussex (see page 3).

We also held a festive celebration for volunteers in the ESCV office in December 2025 to recognise their contributions over the last year.

Do you want to make a difference to health and social care in your area? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please [get in touch](#) today.




How can Healthwatch help you?

Healthwatch can help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

If you need information or support to access health and care services, please contact our information and signposting service. We can help you to:

- Navigate health and social care services and support groups near you.
- Get information about what you can do when you have concerns or a complaint.
- Find out about support, advocacy services, safeguarding and patient rights.
- Share feedback about services.

How to contact us

-  www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk
-  0333 101 4007
-  enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

The East Sussex Picture

Patient voice in health and care

No further updates have been provided by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) since the dissolution of Healthwatch was [announced](#). However, Healthwatch East Sussex is collaborating with local Healthwatch, East Sussex County Council and NHS Sussex to explore the future shape and form that patient engagement and voice in health and care may take, as the [NHS Long-term Plan](#) is implemented locally.

Neighbourhood Mental Health Teams

December 2025 saw a new model for the way community mental health support for adults and older adults with severe mental illnesses are provided in Sussex. Neighbourhood Mental Health Teams (NMHT) bring together local NHS mental health services, GPs, and community organisations to offer more joined-up, personalised support. A team covers each borough/district in East Sussex. Healthwatch is undertaking an independent evaluation of user experiences.

Re-organisation of local government

Sussex is one of six priority areas in the government's devolution programme, which will see a mayor elected and two-tier councils replaced with unitary authorities. There are [four proposals](#) for Sussex. In East Sussex, there is a consensus between the county council and leaders in Eastbourne, Hastings, Rother and Lewes to run the county under one single unitary authority. A public consultation on the options by central government runs to 11th January 2026.

Mayoral authority for Sussex

Elections for a newly created Sussex Mayor, which may include funding and powers linked to health and wellbeing, were scheduled for May 2026. However, an announcement in December 2025 identified that these may now not occur until May 2028. It is unclear what the immediate impacts of the delay may be.

Changes to Integrated Care Boards (ICB)

Progress continues towards a single Integrated Care Board (which oversees the commissioning of NHS services) covering Sussex and Surrey by April 2026. Karen McDowall was [appointed](#) as Chief Executive and a reconfigured executive team confirmed. Wider staff restructuring was undertaken and will continue into 2026.

Coming up next

Eastbourne Listening Tour: Beginning in January 2026, we will be bringing our Listening Tour to Eastbourne. We will relaunch our online Listening Tour survey, engage with the public at a variety of community groups, and host our Listening Tour workshop for partners and the public.

Emergency Temporary Accommodation: In January and February, we will be engaging with people living in emergency temporary accommodation in Hastings to better understand how their accommodation affects their health.

Nicotine pouches: In early 2026 we will be launching an online survey to hear about people's experiences of using nicotine pouches, including how and why people choose to use them, and any health impacts they have experienced.

Sussex Surgical Centre: We will visit the new Sussex Surgical Centre at Eastbourne District General Hospital in February 2026 to explore patients' experiences.

To find out more about ways you can get involved with Healthwatch East Sussex please visit our [website](#) or get in touch using the details at the end of this report.

Chief Executive's Comment

During the quarter, Healthwatch East Sussex and East Sussex Community Voice continued to demonstrate strong leadership, governance and operational delivery. Key governance activity included meetings of the Healthwatch Advisory Group and the ESCV Board, with a focus on future priorities, risk management, financial oversight and partnership working. Sadly, after stepping down as Chair, Keith Stevens passed away. To strengthen the board during this difficult time, we recruited two volunteer board members to strengthen decision-making and increase capacity.

Staff and volunteers remained central to delivery and during the quarter we delivered a wide range of engagement and listening activity across the county. This included completing the Rother Listening Tour, contributing to PLACE visits, working with Sussex Healthwatch partners on GP access and patient transport, and responding to public enquiries through our information and signposting service. Our work was recognised with a Special Recognition Award at the East Sussex Care Awards.

Looking ahead, we await a decision on future funding and remain focused on ensuring local people's experiences continue to shape health and care services in East Sussex.

Recent Publications

[Poll Results: NHS Support for Children’s Learning Needs in Sussex](#)

[November 2025: You said, we did](#)

[October 2025: You said, we did](#)

[Healthwatch East Sussex Quarter 2 Report – July to September 2025](#)


[Community Pharmacy in Hastings](#)

[Healthwatch in Sussex Poll Results: Recent Changes to GP practices](#)

[September 2025: You said, we did](#)


[Children’s experiences of Hospital Care](#)





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