

Healthwatch East Sussex Quarter 4 Report 2025 – 2026

1st January 2026 – 31st March 2026



Contents

Quarterly Dashboard.....	2
Highlights of the quarter.....	3
Listening Tour	4
Information and Signposting.....	5
Projects	6
Volunteer Updates	7
How can Healthwatch help you?	7
The East Sussex Picture.....	8
Coming up next.....	9
Chief Executive’s Comment	9
Recent Publications.....	10

About Healthwatch East Sussex

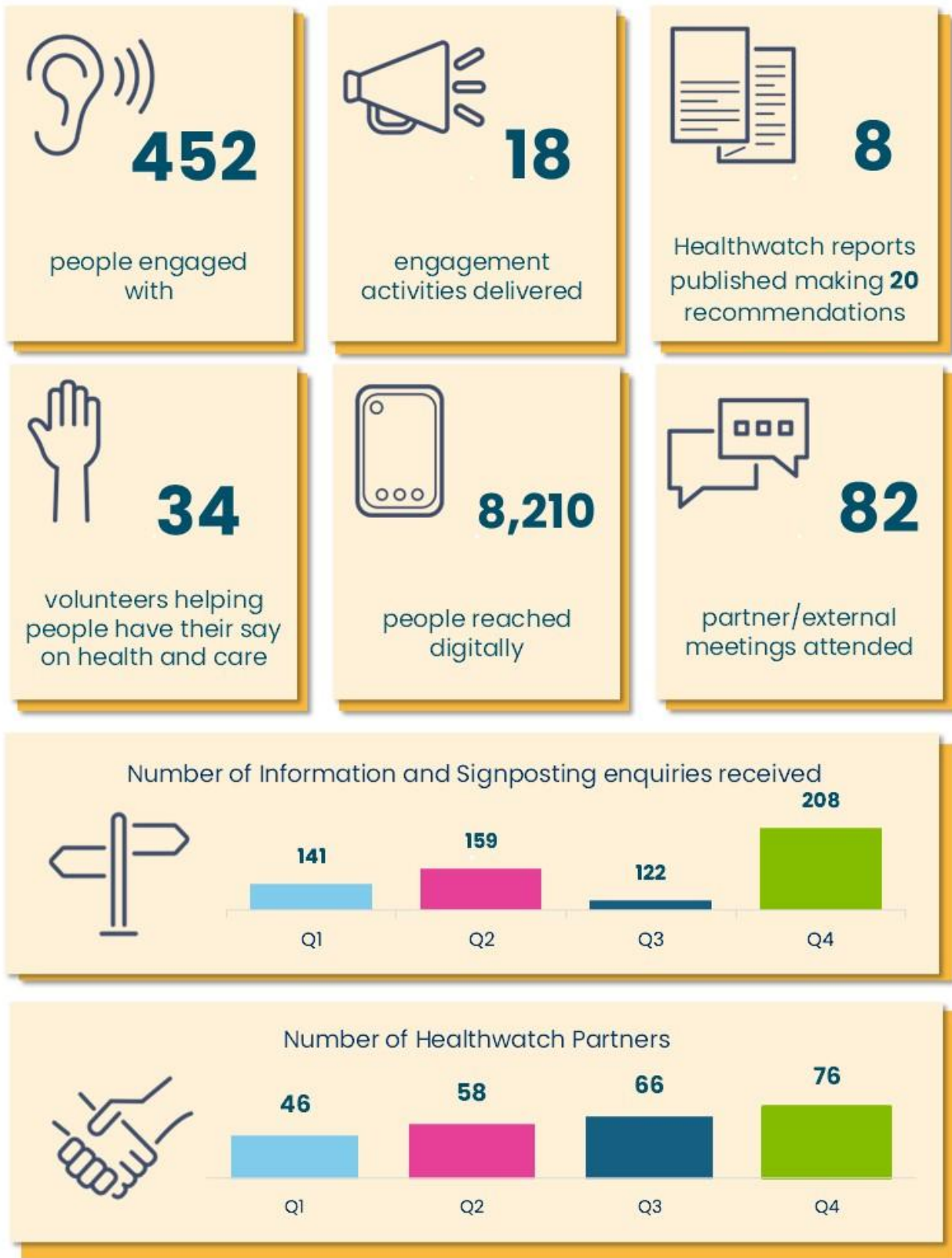
Healthwatch East Sussex is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and local council decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



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

Healthwatch funding confirmed for 2026–2027

We are pleased to confirm that Healthwatch East Sussex is funded until March 2027, with 2026–27 set as a transition year as national reforms reshape public and patient voice. We feel we are well-positioned, actively engaging with the local NHS integrated care board (ICB) and local authorities to influence future models and strengthen partnerships as the new system develops.

Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS)

Insight and [recommendations](#) from our engagement with users of NEPTS in late 2025 informed a review of service performance at the East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) in [March 2026](#). Our feedback helped commissioners and councillors to understand patient experiences and concerns and to identify priorities for positive change.

Audiology services

In late 2024, we fed evidence including our [report](#) on people's experiences of ear wax treatment into a HOSC [review of local audiology services](#). In March 2026, HOSC [papers](#) outlined how Healthwatch recommendations had informed improved communications about NHS ear wax removal services, inter-practice referrals and access to translation services.

Sussex Surgical Centre visit

In February, Healthwatch volunteers visited the new Sussex Surgical Centre at Eastbourne District General Hospital to complete an environmental audit of the reception and exterior of the service. The audit highlighted the need for new external signage, which East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT) has since implemented. A report will be published in the coming months.



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 continued our Listening Tour in Eastbourne, hearing from 96 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

Across the groups we visited as part of our in-person engagement, we heard about people's positive experiences of receiving support from individual members of staff across different services. We also heard about instances of poor communication, with people sharing examples where they felt they were not communicated with in the right way, as well as where they felt different healthcare services were not talking to each other and sharing information effectively.

We heard about people's frustrations with the constant messaging to 'avoid A&E', with people sharing experiences of attempting to use other healthcare services instead, only to find that these services were unavailable or not the right place for them, resulting in them having to attend A&E despite their attempts to avoid doing so. We also heard about challenges accessing services and receiving support when telephone is a primary method of communication. This included difficulties for people with hearing impairments, as well as the stress and anxiety that telephone calls and appointments can cause for people with phone anxiety.

What we've done with your views

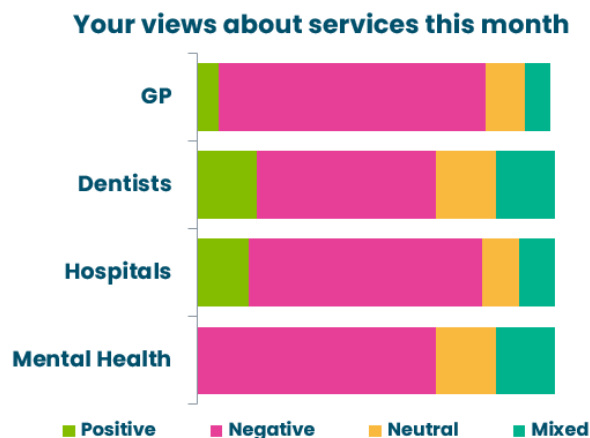
Across our Listening Tour engagement around the county this year, we have heard feedback about people's experiences of GP practices, and we've also heard from people about the impact of mental health challenges.

As a result of hearing this feedback, in 2026 our workplan includes:

- undertaking work with GP practices across the county to explore how practice staff and PPGs can best meet the needs of their patients;
- undertaking a project alongside the charity Compass Arts to better understand the needs of men with serious mental illness when accessing primary care services.

Information and Signposting

This quarter, our [Information and Signposting service](#) has received 208 public enquiries from phone calls, emails, web-based contacts, and from outreach sessions at [Amaze](#) parent and carer support groups across the county. We have received a 70% increase in contacts to our service compared to quarter three, and these remain diverse in theme.



Key themes from enquiries

This quarter, we heard about:

- **GP services** – long waits and communication issues when trying to book an appointment, complications and delays with referrals to secondary care, variances in adherence to the [GP charter](#).
- **Hospitals** – issues relating to limited parking at local hospitals, dissatisfaction with long waits and care at A&E, lack of contact or follow-up appointment after hospital procedures.
- We’ve also heard about delays to ADHD assessments, inaccuracies in patient health records and varied experiences of maternity care.

What we have done

This quarter, we have:

- Escalated concerns from enquirers about non-emergency patient transport ([NEPTS](#)), referral pathways from GP to hospital, the availability of diagnostic tests in secondary care, and [lung health check](#) provision, to the providers and commissioners of services for their investigation and response.
- Produced a public-facing information bulletin on [NHS pharmacy services](#).
- Signposted to a range of organisations including [Support through the Court](#), the [General Dental Council](#), and [the Patients Association](#).
- We have also pro-actively shared resources from East Sussex County Council including the [Mental Health Directory](#) and [Health and Care Passports](#).

Projects

Emergency and Temporary Accommodation

We undertook 11 visits to four emergency temporary accommodation (ETA) sites in the Hastings area during January and February. During these visits, we engaged with people living in ETA to better understand how their health and wellbeing are affected by their housing situation.

We spoke with 19 people across the various accommodation sites. Some of the key themes that emerged from people's feedback were:

- Challenges in accessing health and care services due to poor transport links and a lack of access to technology;
- Lack of support from statutory services to help people move on from ETA;
- The vital role of support from the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to those living in ETA.

Our report from this work will be published next quarter.

You & Your GP Mapping

The NHS introduced '[You and Your General Practice](#)' (YYGP) to improve consistency across GP services and communications. Early in 2026, we published [our review](#) of all Sussex GP practice websites, identifying where YYGP content was present and where communication channels (face-to-face visits; phone calls and digital platforms) operated at required times (8am to 6.30pm, Mon-Fri).

We found:

- 77.3% of practice websites had 'You and Your GP' guidance or links
- 62.0% had information on face-to-face access between 8am and 6.30pm
- 77.9% had information on phone access between 8am and 6.30pm
- 66.9% had information on digital access between 8am and 6.30pm
- Where information was present, it wasn't always easy to find or understand.

NHS Sussex, who commission local GP services, responded to our five recommendations and findings, saying:

"We appreciate the scale of the work undertaken, the clarity of the insights provided, and the constructive spirit in which this exercise has been carried out."

Volunteer Updates

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

- Visiting four emergency and temporary accommodation (ETA) providers in Hastings (see page 6).
- Visiting the Sussex Surgical Centre at Eastbourne District General Hospital to complete an environmental audit of the reception and exterior of the service (see page 3).
- Supporting the development of an online survey on children and young people's experience of using nicotine pouches.

Volunteers also took part in one in-person volunteer meeting and two online volunteer meetings in the quarter.

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

East Sussex County Council budget

In February 2026, East Sussex County Council agreed its draft budget for 2026/27. It outlined ongoing financial pressures, and plans to explore further savings through reviewing staffing and discretionary services, cost reductions, and identifying opportunities for income generation.

Local government elections

Elections for East Sussex County Council will take place on 7th May 2026, after being postponed from May 2025. These will determine the make-up and focus of the administration and may impact on membership of the committees that oversee health and social care, including the Health and Wellbeing Board and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Healthwatch activity and communications may be limited during the pre-election period.

Local government reform

We are currently awaiting news of the government's decision on proposals around local government restructuring in East Sussex. A ['One East Sussex'](#) proposal was submitted by East Sussex County Council, which outlines moving to a single local council (unitary) rather than county council alongside districts and boroughs. After a final option is chosen, elections are anticipated in 2027 with a new unitary council or councils operating from 2028.

Changes to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)

The new Surrey and Sussex ICB, which will oversee NHS commissioning across both counties, will come into existence on 1st April 2026. Q4 saw a consultation on the merger and confirmed plans for the new shape of the staff team, which are now likely to be in place towards the end of Q1.

Patient voice in health and care

Updates suggest that spring 2026 will see the publication of the draft health legislation that will outline the dissolution of Healthwatch and the transfer of patient voice functions to local authorities and ICBs, with a timeline for completion of spring 2027. In Sussex, Healthwatch, local authorities and the ICB continue to explore how patient and public voice can be most effectively embedded as local government and NHS reform evolves.

Coming up next

Nicotine pouches: Following on from our work around children and young people's experiences of nicotine pouches, later in 2026 we will launch our all-age nicotine pouches survey. The survey will aim to hear people's experiences of nicotine pouches across different age ranges.

GP practices: During 2026, we will work with GP practices across the county to explore how practice staff and PPGs can best meet the needs of their patients.

Men's mental health: We will work in partnership with Compass Arts to gain insight from men across East Sussex about accessing primary care, including trans men and men who experience serious mental illness.

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

This quarter has been marked by continued change across the health and care system at both local and national levels. During this period, Healthwatch East Sussex has maintained delivery of its statutory role, ensuring that people's experiences and concerns continue to inform service planning and review. Our work this quarter has contributed to scrutiny and improvement activity, including in relation to non-emergency patient transport, audiology services, and patient environments.

Alongside ongoing delivery, the organisation has continued to plan for the future in the context of national reform, local system change, and financial pressures. Staff, volunteers, and board members have remained focused on sustaining activity while supporting necessary transition work. Partnership working across Sussex, and engagement with NHS, local authority and voluntary sector colleagues, continues to underpin this approach.

This will be my final report as Chief Executive of East Sussex Community Voice. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of staff, volunteers, board members and partners who support the organisation's work. I leave with confidence in the organisation's role and its ability to continue adapting as the system evolves.

Recent Publications

[February 2026: You Said, we did](#)

[A Healthwatch in Sussex report on Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service](#)

[Healthwatch in Sussex – ‘You and Your GP’ mapping](#)

[Listening Tour Area Report: Rother](#)


[Healthwatch in Sussex Pharmacy Poll 2026](#)

[January 2026: You Said, we did](#)

[Healthwatch East Sussex Quarter 3 Report – October to December 2025](#)


[December 2025: You Said, we did](#)





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