



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch East Sussex Annual Report
2025/26

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Chris McCann
Acting Chief Executive

Healthwatch England

“

“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 delivered an extensive amount for the people of East Sussex during 2025/26, and this report provides a snapshot of our work and achievements.

The last 12 months have been challenging. The government announced plans to close Healthwatch and move its functions into Integrated Care Boards (ICB) and local councils; our Sussex ICB merged with Surrey ICB; and local government re-organisation has continued to progress. We also sadly lost our long-term Chair following a short terminal illness.

However, during this period we supported a record number of people with their health and care enquiries, listened to and recorded people's views, both in person and online through our newly revamped website, and shared what we heard with commissioners and providers to help make a difference to people's experiences of using local services, including GPs, pharmacy, patient transport and temporary accommodation amongst others.

None of this would have been possible without the tireless work of our staff and dedicated volunteers, and we were grateful to receive an award in 2025 from East Sussex Partners in Care recognising our twelve years of work and volunteer efforts in championing the patient voice.

We look forward to working with our partners and local communities in 2026/27 to progress our work and ensure patient voice is heard.



Chair
Vanessa Taylor



“In a time of significant change, an independent voice for patients and the public has never been more important. We thank everyone who shares their feedback with Healthwatch, which helps us champion the voice of the public and patients.”

About us

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

We use our membership of the Sussex Health and Care Assembly and East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure decision-makers use your feedback to improve care.

We share our insight with the Care Quality Commission, Safeguarding Adults Board, NHS Trusts, County Council, and individual service providers such as GPs, pharmacies and care homes.

We help people find reliable and trustworthy information and advice via our Information & Signposting Service.



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 decision-makers.

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

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 3,000 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed 10 staff and our work was supported by our 34 volunteers, who contributed the equivalent of 69 days of their time to our activities.



Reaching out:

2,451 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

630 people directly contacted us and **19,534** used our website for advice and information on topics including how to access NHS health screening and obtaining NHS dental care.



Championing your voice:

We published **29** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like Non-Emergency Patient Transport, GP access, healthcare for women and girls, and access to community pharmacy.

During the year our most read reports shared insight from our poll on nutrition and dietary conditions, our work on Discharge to Assess pathways, and our Listening Tour summary.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by East Sussex County Council.

In 2025/26 we received £347,200, compared to £364,470 in the previous year.

Our partners

We have worked closely with local health and care commissioners and providers to ensure public and patient voice sits at the heart of their activity and decision-making.

East Sussex County Council

"Healthwatch East Sussex continue to play a vital role in ensuring local communities are heard in relation to health and social care services. During 2025/26, they actively engaged existing and emerging health and social care structures, ensuring professionals had valuable community insight to inform service development; worked alongside each Integrated Community Team (ICT) across the county, helping ensure local knowledge and connections are embedded in ICT plans; and received a well-deserved Special Recognition Award at the 2025 East Sussex Care Awards – many congratulations to the team.

Our local Healthwatch is a strong example of effective partnership working, meaningful community engagement, and, most importantly, empowering people to help shape local practice and relationships for the benefit of all."

NHS Surrey and Sussex (Surrey and Sussex Integrated Care Board)

"We have truly appreciated our work with Healthwatch East Sussex over 2025-26, and the important contribution they make in ensuring that the voices of patients and residents are heard and taken into the commissioning of health services locally.

They have provided valuable insight across a wide range of NHS services and are also important partners in the development of neighbourhood health in line with our five-year strategy and we look forward to continuing this work next year."

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT)

"Healthwatch continued to support ESHT throughout 2025/26 via PLACE assessments, projects, and sharing valuable insights based on feedback from patients, carers, relatives and local communities. This insight remains instrumental in helping us shape and improve our services, and we greatly value our ongoing partnership with Healthwatch and the positive impact it brings to our work.

We look forward to continuing to work closely with Healthwatch East Sussex during 2026/27, collaborating on the planning and delivery of further engagement activities to support the ongoing development of healthcare services across our area."

A year of making a difference

Over the year we have been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in East Sussex. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Our new Healthwatch website provided user-friendly access to our reports, advice articles, news items and volunteering opportunities.



Our volunteers supported user testing of the East Sussex Adult Social Care and Health website to support content and navigation to be user friendly.



Summer

We heard from over 200 people at the Eastbourne 999 event and used their feedback to help us understand experiences of local services.

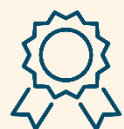


We mapped local Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) to support our work in building relationships with local GP practices.



Autumn

Our volunteers received a Special Recognition Award at the 2025 East Sussex Care Awards for their 12-year contribution to Healthwatch activities.



We visited local college 'freshers fairs' which helped us hear the health and care experiences of young people locally.



Winter

The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee cited our report into ear wax removal services as a driver for improved information on what is available locally.



Working alongside other Healthwatch in Sussex we reviewed GP websites for compliance with 'You and Your GP' access requirements.



Working together for change

Funding from the Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB) enabled the three local Healthwatch organisations to combine their insight and attend key decision-making meetings, including the Sussex Health and Care Assembly and primary care boards, to independently scrutinise services and represent patient views.

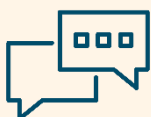
This year, by working together, we have achieved the following:



Bringing independent scrutiny of services to commissioners' attention:

The NHS introduced 'You and Your General Practice' in late 2025. We reviewed 163 GP practice websites across Sussex, finding variations in how GPs were complying with requirements to be available to patients from 8:30am–6pm by phone, online and in person. Information for patients was often confusing and contradictory.

Commissioners for primary care agreed with our recommendations and committed to working with us and Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) to improve patient understanding and access.



A big conversation:

During 2025/26, the three Sussex Healthwatch teams ran seven digital polls to gather public views on key themes and hot topics. We heard from 2,360 people, including 647 from East Sussex. All our poll reports are published on our website.

Locally, we led polls on people's experiences of support for nutritional and dietary requirements and local pharmacy services, sharing our insight with commissioners and providers to support their awareness of experiences of local people.

Findings also informed our workplan and priorities for 2026/27.



Building relationships to achieve more:

Following our award-winning collaboration which influenced the contract for provision of Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS) in Sussex, we asked users for feedback six months after the new provider (EMED) started delivery.

We found worrying declines in satisfaction and heard stories of patients affected by delayed journeys. We also heard about the impacts of NEPTS delays on other NHS services.

Our work informed a Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee review and we met with the provider and NHS commissioners who accepted our recommendations in full and agreed to develop an action plan.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here are some examples of our work in East Sussex this year:



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

Hearing personal experiences and their impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

Parents and carers of children and young people presenting with Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) shared frustrations with us about the absence of a dedicated ARFID pathway in Sussex.

These experiences were fed back to Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB), highlighting how existing commissioned services were not adequately meeting the needs of these young people. The ICB is exploring development of an ARFID model of care locally in response to feedback and new national guidance.



Getting services to involve the public

By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.

We worked with several GP practices in East Sussex to ensure residents had the chance to have their say and were made aware of any proposed changes to services locally.

This included offering practices advice and examples around engagement techniques, providing feedback on draft practice surveys and reviewing patient-facing information for websites and letters to ensure they were clear, accessible and patient-friendly.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We work behind the scenes with service providers to consistently raise issues and bring about change.

We chair the East Sussex Safeguarding Community Network, raising awareness of safeguarding locally and gathering insight on issues that may affect safeguarding.

Over the last year the network expanded with new members from the East Sussex Safeguarding Children's Partnership. It also identified that discriminatory abuse was underreported in East Sussex, which led to East Sussex County Council producing a [video](#) about people's lived experience of abuse to raise awareness of this issue.

Listening to your experiences

Service providers cannot improve if they do not know what is wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we have listened to feedback from all areas of our community.

People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what is not, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Residents' experiences of Emergency and Temporary Accommodation in Hastings

Residents of Emergency and Temporary Accommodation (ETA) ask for more flexibility on the 'no visitors' rule to support their mental health and wellbeing.

We interviewed 19 residents across four emergency and temporary accommodation providers in Hastings to enquire about their health and wellbeing. We heard about challenges accessing healthcare appointments, barriers accessing information, digital exclusion, and challenges people faced in moving to permanent housing. Positives were around support from staff.

A key concern for some ETA residents was the 'no visitors' rule applied at some sites, which they felt led to social isolation and reduced their support network.

Key things we heard:



53%

of residents told us they lived in temporary accommodation for more than one year.

32%

of residents rated their health as either poor or very poor.



"A proper flat, no cameras, where I can have friends' round for a cuppa and a chat."

We shared [our findings](#) with Hastings Borough Council Housing Department and the four housing providers who welcomed our insights and responded to our recommendations.

What difference did this make?

Hastings Borough Council has agreed to review information provided after residents move into temporary accommodation. They acknowledged the impact of the 'no visitors' rule for ETA residents and that flexible adjustments can be considered on a case-by-case basis. They will also provide additional training to housing providers on financial help available to people moving into private rented accommodation.

Funding has been agreed to pilot a free bus service for residents in the most isolated temporary accommodation.

Healthwatch East Sussex Listening Tour 2025–26

Following our Listening Tours to Wealden, Lewes, and Hastings last year, in 2025–26 we visited Rother District and Eastbourne Borough.

Our Listening Tour aimed to better understand residents' experiences of health and care services in these areas, and things that impact on people's overall wellbeing, such as housing, transport and other local factors.

What did we do

We visited community groups across both areas, held Listening Tour events for professionals and the public, hosted an online Listening Tour Survey and reviewed what we'd heard through our Information & Signposting Service.

We heard from 268 people and received feedback from local organisations on the issues affecting health and wellbeing in these areas.

Key things we heard:

- **Digital exclusion impacts a wide variety of people, and there is a need to ensure there are a range of methods, including face-to-face methods, for communicating with health services and booking appointments**
- **Concerns were raised around different health services not being joined up effectively, with individuals sharing examples of this, including being told by NHS 111 to use services that were unavailable at the time**
- **Accessing GP appointments was an issue, with people struggling to book appointments through all available methods**



“From my own experiences this year, NHS 111 doesn't seem very joined up with other services”
Rother Resident

What difference did this make?

Our findings were shared with Integrated Community Teams in Rother and Eastbourne to inform their insight and priority setting.

The feedback led us to undertake further work including mapping adherence to “You and Your GP” access requirements and escalate the lack of a treatment pathway for Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID) which is subsequently being re-visited.

Engaging Children and Young People

Our Young Healthwatch looks at the healthcare issues that directly impact young people. Alongside our young volunteers, we undertook a range of activities to ensure young people's views were heard and represented.

Paediatric focus group:

In April, we held an arts-based focus group for children aged between 7–11 to hear about their experiences of paediatric care in hospital. Positive staff interactions, having activities for young people (or encouraging families to bring them to hospital with them), and knowing what to expect when going into hospital were all highlighted as particularly important. We shared this with our local hospital Trust.

“I wouldn't want to be in hospital for a long time, you don't know much about it if you don't have to go”
Participant, aged 11

Independent Youth Panel:

We continued to work with NHS Sussex and their Youth Consultants to further develop their Independent Youth Panel for young people in Sussex. Our Healthwatch volunteers supported the design of a variety of polls and surveys which were shared via the panel, to enable young people to share their views and experiences of healthcare services and help commissioners and providers understand their perspectives. As part of our involvement with the Youth Panel, our volunteers also fed back to NHS Sussex to support the development of a new online health and wellbeing tool.

Nicotine pouches:

In September, we visited three colleges in East Sussex as part of their 'freshers fairs' for new students, speaking to young people about their experiences of health and care services, as well as undertaking some initial factfinding on their awareness of different products which contain nicotine.

Our volunteers subsequently supported the development of our online poll for children and young people about their experiences of nicotine pouches which was used to gather young people's views. We shared what we heard with public health colleagues to help increase local insight on why young people use nicotine pouches.

Gaps identified for patients in information provided by GP websites

Late 2025 saw '[You and Your General Practice](#)' (YYGP) introduced to improve consistency in services provided by GPs, including public-facing information.

The three Sussex Healthwatch reviewed 163 GP practice websites to identify, if as required by YYGP, GP communication channels (face-to-face visits; phone calls and digital platforms) were operating during the required times (8am to 6.30pm, Mon-Fri). We shared our findings with NHS Sussex (Sussex Integrated Care Board) who commission GP services in Sussex.

Key things we found:



38%

of GP websites did not have information on face-to-face access between 8am and 6.30pm

22%

of GP websites did not have information on phone access between 8am and 6.30pm

33%

of GP websites did not have information on digital access between 8am and 6.30pm

Most GP websites provided accessible information in line with YYGP guidance. However, others presented unclear, confusing and contradictory information. This does little to support consistent patient understanding of how and when they can contact their GP and may not reduce pressures on GP communication channels.

"NHS Sussex welcomes the findings of Healthwatch's countywide review of GP practice websites and the implementation of the You and Your General Practice (YYGP) requirements. 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."

What difference did this make?

[Our findings](#) helped NHS Sussex to identify GP practices that need the most support to meet YYGP standards; supported ongoing work with practices and website providers to make information clearer, more consistent, and easier for patients to understand; and identified a commitment to work with Healthwatch and Patient Participation Groups to regularly review and improve website content moving forwards.

Improving patient experience of Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service

Patients told us the new Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS) needs to improve. NEPTS supports people whose condition means they need support to travel to and from hospital and medical appointments.

Healthwatch in Sussex undertook our fifth joint review of NEPTS. We used patient feedback from our 2020 review to shape the re-commissioning of the service, leading to contractual requirements to improve communications, provide clearer eligibility, and improve signposting. This work earned us the Healthwatch England Impact Award in 2025 – we were the first joint winners.

What did we do

We launched a survey to understand patient experiences of NEPTS since the 1st April 2025, when the EMED group took over the delivery of the Sussex contract. We went into local hospitals to speak with patients and staff. We heard from 151 people.

Key things we heard:

62%

of respondents were satisfied with the service, a drop from 78.5% in 2020.

68%

of respondents would recommend the service, a drop from 86% in 2020.

only 27%

of respondents had not experienced any delays or problems.

We also heard about issues patients had with being taken or collected in a taxi rather than a specific patient transport service. Hospital staff also told us they felt the service had declined.



“I have had mixed experiences... I am really grateful for the service, but they are often late picking me up and dropping me home.”

“... in the last 3 months the company is beginning to understand the difficulties .. and are beginning to overcome the problems.”

Improving patient experience of Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service

What difference did this make?

Our report was shared with commissioners of the service at NHS Sussex, as well as EMED, and we met with them to discuss our findings.

Our recommendations were accepted in full and details of the steps EMED were taking to address our concerns were shared with us (you can read about this in [our report](#)).

These included:

- Focusing on reducing delayed hospital pickups
- Strengthening communication and escalation pathways
- Reviewing services provided by subcontracted companies
- Reviewing the use of private hire taxis
- Improving and promoting the Patient Zone (an online portal for patients)



- Delivering a more consistent service across the whole of Sussex

NHS Sussex commissioners and EMED are actively tracking our recommendations as part of formal operational and contractual meetings, to ensure changes are implemented and service improvement is progressed.

"Thank you for the care Healthwatch in Sussex has taken to capture patients lived experience of NEPTS. We welcome this kind of independent scrutiny, as the feedback helps us continually improve the services to local people. We are proud of the progress the team has made. But we are not complacent. Behind every statistic is a patient who waited longer than they should or struggled to get through to us and that is what drives us to keep improving." **EMED**

"We recognise that while the service is delivering over 23,000 journeys a month there are areas where patient experience must continue to improve.... We remain committed to working in partnership with both Healthwatch and EMED to ensure that the Sussex NEPTS is ...also consistently responsive to the needs of our patient population." **NHS Sussex**



Hearing from all communities

We are here for all residents of East Sussex. That is why, over the past year, we have 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:

- Providing Information & Signposting sessions at food banks across East Sussex.
- Attending community networks, open-mic events, college open-days and visiting lunch clubs, parent-carer groups, men's sheds and other locations.
- Using our website, social media, newsletter, digital polls and e-bulletins to gather feedback on services and issue.



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Improving access to translation services for refugees and asylum seekers

We heard from Sanctuary, an Eastbourne charity for those seeking refuge, about difficulties accessing translation services at NHS dental appointments

We learnt several dental practices had declined to organise interpreters during dental appointments for NHS patients. This resulted in confusion, communication problems, and an inability for patients to understand or provide informed consent about their care.

What difference did we make?

We spoke with commissioners at Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB) who directly liaised with the relevant dental practices and reminded them of their duty under the Equality Act 2010 to provide professional, free-of-charge interpreter services (including British Sign Language) when needed for NHS treatment. Guidance was also provided to the practices about how to book local interpreters, which is a service the NHS provides free-of-charge.

Sharing insights on palliative and end of life care services

We were contacted by East Sussex Public Health colleagues preparing a comprehensive needs assessment of palliative, end of life care and bereavement services, seeking additional intelligence and feedback to understand the needs of the local community.

We compiled and shared the insights, feedback, and enquiries that Healthwatch East Sussex had received relating to palliative and end of life care services since 2023. We also raised key questions and highlighted themes, based on the insight gathered, for consideration as part of the needs assessment.

What difference did this make?

People's experiences will be taken into consideration when reviewing current provision and planning future services.

We were informed that the data and intelligence we provided have been helpful, offered valuable perspectives that have informed the needs assessment, and will support future recommendations.

Information and signposting

When you are 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 are your first port of call.

This year 630 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:

- Publishing guidance on the new GP Charter 'You and Your GP', the Accessible Information Standard, local independent advocacy services, community pharmacy services and NHS dental services and charges.
- Regularly sharing people's feedback with NHS Sussex, Adult Social Care and Health, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust and the Care Quality Commission.
- Delivering outreach sessions across East Sussex at community food banks, parent and carer support groups for SEND families, and at a wellbeing event for the fishing community.



Improving understanding of patient choice

A parent called us for help. They had previously asked the child's school to refer them for an autism assessment. However, due to miscommunication, this had not happened, and the parent wanted to know the quickest way of getting an assessment for their child given the long waiting times for NHS services.

- We explained about the NHS Right to Choose: for autism and ADHD and the options available to them.
- We provided information on the support available from local organisations for families who are waiting for assessment or diagnosis, including the Pre-Autism Pathway Support, to help them in the interim.



"It is reassuring to know we have options."

Improving access to lung screening information

A member of the public eligible for an NHS lung health check had not received an invitation to attend. They informed us the local lung cancer screening website and email address were not working, so were unable to access information about this service.

- We contacted Surrey & Sussex Cancer Alliance and Sussex Integrated Care Board to highlight this issue. They confirmed that lung health checks were being rolled out in phases and eligible patients would receive an invitation letter via the post.
- In addition, they investigated and resolved the technical errors, explaining the relevant website now includes a search function for the public to see when lung health checks will be available in their area.



"Thank you so much for your help."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 552 hours (69 days) to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in East Sussex and its communities.

This year, our volunteers:

- Participated in Patient Led Assessment of the Care Environment (PLACE) audits across 13 hospitals, hospices and NHS sites in East Sussex.
- Gathered feedback from people using patient transport at Bexhill Hospital, community pharmacies in Hastings, and emergency and temporary accommodation in Hastings.
- Mapped access information about GP appointments at surgeries across East Sussex and the contact details for their Patient Participation Groups.



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.

Jo

"With my professional background in education and health, I feel strongly about reducing inequalities in both these fields, particularly in Hastings, my hometown. Healthwatch's commitment to making health services accessible and improving standards is a good fit for me.

I have volunteered in the NEPTS, PLACE and emergency temporary accommodation projects, with excellent support from the Healthwatch team. It is satisfying to know I have played a part in improving the wellbeing of our local population."

Charlotte

"I think involving the patient and the public in health and social care services means you can make them most effective. I have experience of using services and of working in the public sector and wanted to try and make a difference.

I have looked at GP websites to see if they have all the information they should and made changes to a report to make it more accessible for the public to read. I also took part in interviews with people who live in emergency and temporary accommodation."

Julián María

"I started volunteering with Healthwatch to help improve health services and advocate for people who face access barriers when it comes to improving their health.

With Healthwatch, I have provided feedback on the websites and information accessibility of local GPs and care organisations, and I have visited hospitals to aid in PLACE inspections. For me, the best part about volunteering with Healthwatch is contributing to the improvement of health services."

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.



www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk



0333 101 4007



enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from East 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	£347,200	Expenditure on pay	£313,252
Additional income (including Independent Health Complaints Advocacy – IHCAS)	£110,600	Non-pay expenditure (including Independent Health Complaints Advocacy – IHCAS)	£87,400
		Office overheads, communications and events	£56,720
Total income	£457,800	Total Expenditure	£457,372

Additional income included:

- £3,200 received from an NHS Sussex Health Inequalities Grants Programme as part of a partnership project exploring men's health and barriers to health services (in collaboration with Compass Arts, Eastbourne).

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across Sussex each receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
To fund Healthwatch East Sussex to: • Gather patient and public experiences Sussex-wide • Collate patient and public experiences Sussex-wide • Share insights at key Sussex-wide boards and meetings	£10,000

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 four priorities for the next year are:

1. Listen and engage with people wherever they are

We will maximise the number of people we engage with virtually via our website feedback centre, online surveys and social media, and use our partnerships and networks to maximise face-to-face engagement with individuals, communities and organisations across East Sussex.

2. Understand the impact of pressures on health and care services

We will use our membership of the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure the impacts of pressures are understood and responses prioritise the needs of the public and patients.

3. Embed a focus on equality and diversity in our projects and increase the voice of less heard communities

We will continue to prioritise our work with 'less heard' communities across our county, placing an emphasis on men and boys, serving military personnel and veterans, and people who do not identify as heterosexual/straight.

4. We will contribute to discussions about the future of public and patient voice

Following the publication of the NHS Modernisation Bill which proposes the closure of Healthwatch in 2027, we will work with our health, care and other system partners to ensure patient and public voice informs local decision-making and, if possible, is championed by an independent body.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch East Sussex is delivered by East Sussex Community Voice CIC, Unit 31, The Old Printworks, 1 Commercial Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN21 3XQ.

Healthwatch East 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 decision-making.

Our Healthwatch Board of five members provides direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities, ensuring decisions reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. We also regularly consult our volunteers.

In 2025/26, our board met five times and made decisions on matters such as:

- Setting our priorities and ensuring they aligned with our statutory functions.
- Determining which projects and activities we dedicated our resources to.

We ensure there is wider public involvement in deciding our priorities by:

- Using insight from our Information & Signposting enquiries and Feedback Centre reviews to inform decisions and guide our activity.
- Gathering input from our multi-agency Healthwatch Advisory Group which meets quarterly.
- Undertaking engagement virtually and face-to-face so we hear from as many voices as possible.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure 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, a web form on our website, via social media, and face-to-face at community networks, health and care events, food banks, migrant drop-ins and other groups.

We publish this annual report on our [website](#) and ensure it is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible, including East Sussex County Council, NHS Sussex and Healthwatch England.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

In 2025/26 no providers failed to 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 decision-makers

We ensure people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us. In East Sussex, we take information to the Health & Wellbeing Board, Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Community Oversight Board and approximately 40 other bodies and fora to support local decisions.

We take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Sussex Integrated Care System (Sussex Health and Care). We are members of the Sussex Health & Care Assembly and alongside other Sussex Healthwatch sit on a range of thematic pan-Sussex boards and groups to champion patients' voices.

We share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch East Sussex is represented on the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board by our Chief Executive. During 2025/26 our representative has championed the voice of the public and patients in the key health and care issues that have come before the board, including:

- Commenting on East Sussex Better Care Fund Plans 2025–2026, national and local NHS reforms, the merger of Surrey and Sussex ICBs, Integrated Community Team development, and the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment.
- Ensuring the Board were aware of the risks of the dissolution of Healthwatch and reinforcing the need to retain an independent voice and representative function.
- Contributing to 'deep dives' exploring: A life course approach; Reducing health inequalities; and Mental health and wellbeing.

Statutory statements

Sussex Health and Care Assembly

Healthwatch East Sussex is represented on the Sussex Integrated Care Partnership (Sussex Health and Care Assembly) by our Chief Executive.

Contributions over the last 12 months included:

- Sharing patient and public feedback on health and care services received by Healthwatch East Sussex and Healthwatch in Sussex.
- Monitoring implementation of the [Improving Lives Together](#) Strategy.
- Ensuring the Assembly is fully informed of the risks associated with removing the Healthwatch function, emphasising the importance of maintaining an independent voice and effective representation for local people.

Alongside the Assembly, we contributed to the Sussex Quality and Patient Experience Committee (QPEC), Quality Governance Improvement Group (QGIG) and Primary Care Commissioning Group (PCCG).

Enter and View

This year, we made no visits to services using Enter and View powers but did undertake other projects in East Sussex not previously mentioned in this report.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Experiences of Community Pharmacy in Hastings	To explore lay experiences of physical accessibility and layouts through visits to 10 community pharmacy sites in Hastings.	Insight/recommendations shared with NHS Sussex and Community Pharmacy Surrey and Sussex to inform potential site improvements.
Women's and girls' experiences of health and care	In April-May 2025, we ran a survey asking women and girls aged 14+ about their experiences of health and care services in East Sussex.	Report/recommendations shared with NHS Sussex to support implementation of women's health hubs in East Sussex.

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