



Experiences of NHS Community Audiology Services in East Sussex

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healthwatch
East Sussex

Introduction

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

This report summarises findings from a recent digital poll undertaken by Healthwatch East Sussex to explore people's recent experiences of NHS community audiology services in East Sussex.

It outlines people's experiences of the three community audiology providers in East Sussex commissioned to deliver services by the NHS, with a particular focus on the period since April 2026 when these providers started delivery of these services.

Background to our project

NHS community audiology services provide support and treatment to improve people's hearing health. They deliver hearing assessments, as well as hearing aid provision, maintenance, and supplies for age-related hearing loss to people aged 55 and over.

On the 1st April 2026, these services moved from East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT) and are now provided on behalf of the NHS locally by Scrivens, The Hearing People, and Specsavers.

Our project

We have heard mixed feedback about people's experiences of community audiology services since the changes took place.

To explore this further, we developed a short digital poll to gather recent experiences from those using these services.

Aims and objectives

Aim: To gather experiences of community audiology services in East Sussex since April 2026

Objectives:

1. Identify people's recent satisfaction with community audiology services
2. Explore whether people's needs are being met
3. Share people's preferences for development/change with commissioners and providers



What we did

During June and July 2026, we ran a short digital poll asking people about their experiences of NHS community audiology services in East Sussex in the last 12 months.

This was posted on our website and distributed in our newsletter and via our networks, including local authority, NHS and voluntary sector partners.

We used the responses received to explore three specific areas:

1. **Which NHS community audiology providers people had used**
2. **The quality of different aspects of NHS community audiology provision from a user perspective**
3. **What changes people felt may improve NHS community audiology services**

Limitations

- Our review is reliant on the information provided by poll respondents, which reflect their responses and views.
- We recognise our snapshot is only accurate as of June/July 2026 and subsequent updates or changes may have occurred since.



We asked people about wait times, quality of care, professionalism, and provision of equipment.



We asked people what changes to community audiology would improve services for them.

Key findings: Experiences since April 2026

Experiences since April 2026

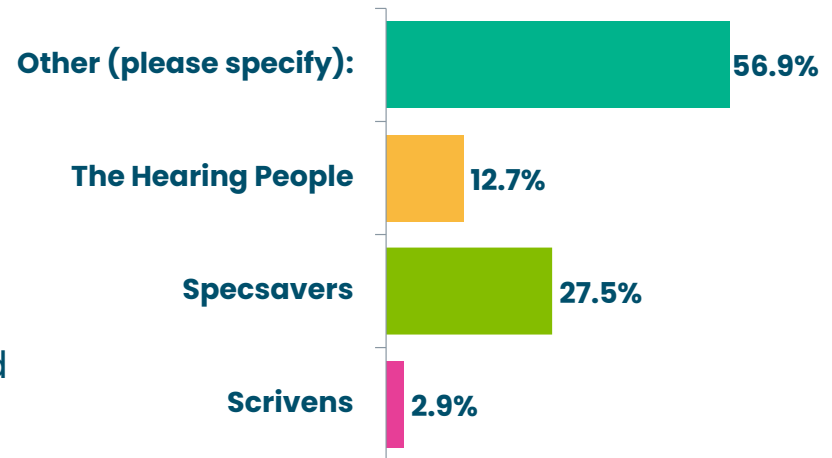
224 people completed our poll. Of these 102 indicated they had used an audiology or linked service in East Sussex since April 2026.

44 of the 102 indicated they had used one of the three commissioned providers of NHS community audiology services: Specsavers (28), The Hearing People (13), and Scrivens (3).

The remaining 58 respondents told us they had used a range of different services for audiology support, including GPs, private or community providers, outreach clinics and acute settings.

The following slides provide a breakdown of the 44 responses received about the three commissioned providers of NHS community audiology services only. *Percentages show responses as a proportion of the respondents identified as using each of these services – see above.*

Which community audiology provider did you last use?



Key findings: Experiences since April 2026

The 44 users of the three commissioned providers of NHS community audiology services (The Hearing People, Specsavers and Scrivens) were asked to rate different aspects of using these services.

Waiting times

All three providers received high levels of positive rating, each having three-quarters or more of service users rating them as Excellent/Good. All respondents using Scrivens rated them as Excellent/Good.

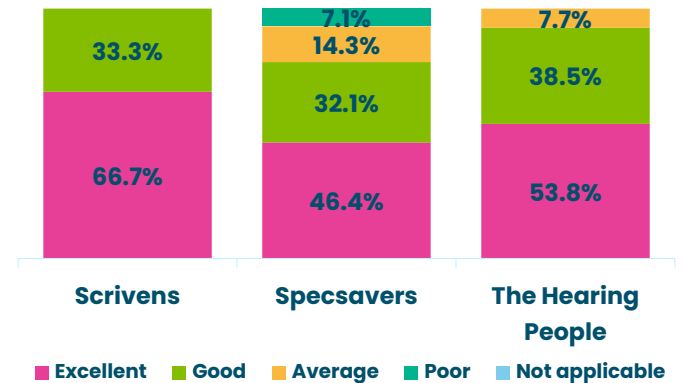
Only Specsavers received any ratings as 'Poor'.

Quality of hearing assessments

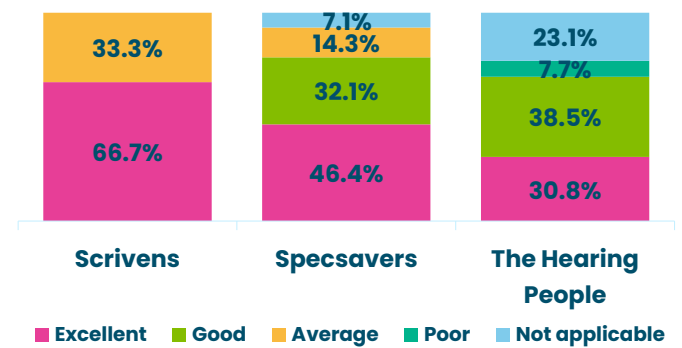
The quality of hearing assessments were generally positive overall. Three-quarters of service users rated Specsavers as Excellent/Good, and two-thirds for Scrivens and The Hearing People.

Only The Hearing People received any ratings as 'Poor'.

Experiences of community audiology providers: waiting times



Experiences of community audiology providers: quality of hearing assessments



Key findings: Experiences since April 2026

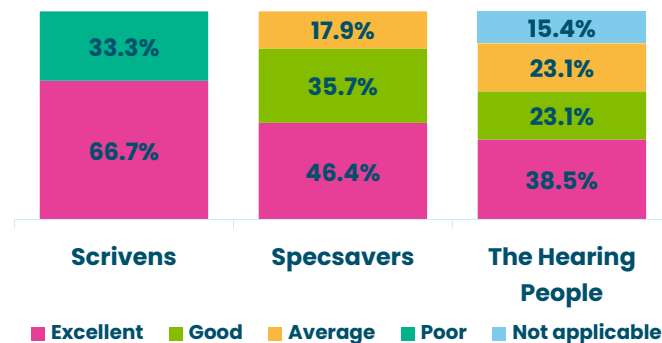
Communication and clarity of information

Scrivens were rated as Excellent by two-thirds of respondents using their services, and Poor by one-third.

Most users of Specsavers rated them as Excellent/Good, but approximately one-in-five rated them as Average.

Most users of The Hearing People rated them as Excellent/Good, but approximately one-in-four rated them as Average.

Experiences of community audiology providers: communication and clarity of information



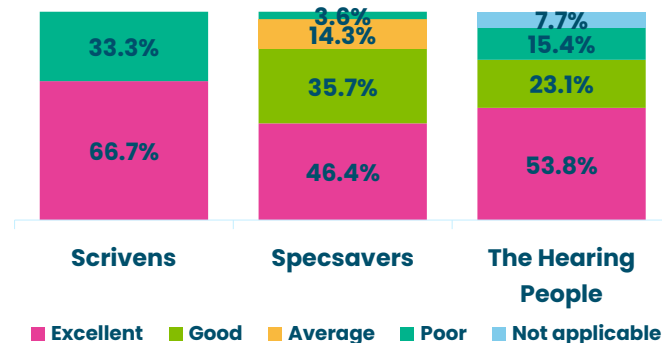
Staff professionalism and care

Scrivens were rated as Excellent by two-thirds of respondents using their services, and Poor by one-third.

Most users of Specsavers rated them as Excellent/Good, but approximately one-in-five rated them as Average/Poor.

Most users of The Hearing People rated them as Excellent/Good, but approximately one-in-six rated them as Poor.

Experiences of community audiology providers: staff professionalism and care



Key findings: Experiences since April 2026

Availability of hearing aids or parts

Scrivens were rated as Excellent/Good by all respondents using their services.

Most users of Specsavers rated them as Excellent/Good, but approximately one-in-ten rated them as Average/Poor.

Most users of The Hearing People rated them as Excellent/Good, but approximately one-in-twelve rated them as Average.

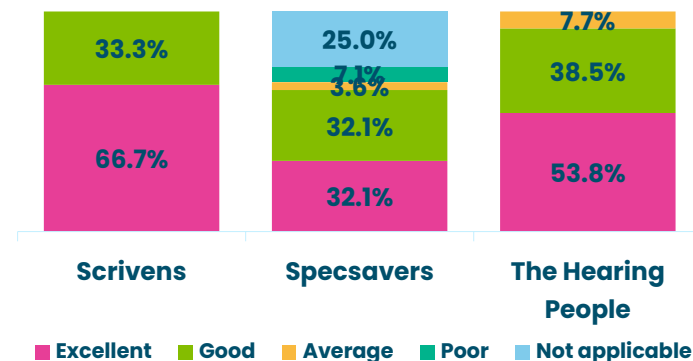
Access to follow-up support or repairs

Scrivens were rated as Excellent by two-thirds and Average by one third of respondents using their services.

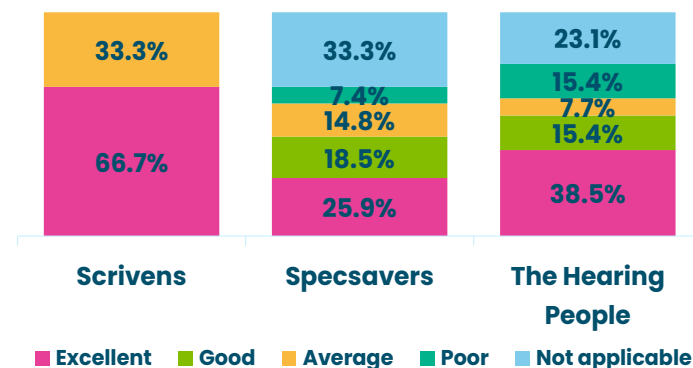
Approximately half of Specsavers users rated them as Excellent/Good, one-in-six as Average, and one-in-twelve as Poor.

Approximately half of The Hearing People users rated them as Excellent/Good, one-in-twelve as Average, and one-in-six as Poor.

Experiences of community audiology providers: availability of hearing aids or parts



Experiences of community audiology providers: access to follow-up support or repairs



Preferences for the future

We asked poll respondents 'What one change would improve NHS community audiology services for you?'

All 44 users of the three commissioned NHS community audiology providers (since April 2026) responded and a summary of the themes in their comments is outlined below.

Five respondents indicated services required no changes and should continue 'as is'.

"100% satisfied"

"It is fine how it is thanks"

Five respondents felt improvements could be made in terms of access to the services.

"Have a system whereby I don't have to go to multiple agencies to obtain replacement hearing aids – and shorter waiting times."

"The service in Heathfield is based on the technician visiting one day a week and her equipment is necessarily limited to what she can reasonably carry. In that case it would be a considerable improvement in the range and quality of service if the fine tuning equipment as used in Eastbourne could also be available with the new providers. Of course it is hardly portable for one young woman to carry with her so perhaps one of the other new service providers with consulting room facilities (e.g. Specsavers) could provide an audio quality test facility booked through the local agent."

Preferences for the future

Five respondents commented on the intervals between hearing tests for new hearing aids, feeling five years is too long to wait.

"I have had to wait almost 5 years for this review. Going back to three-yearly tests will help a great deal."

"Perhaps qualifying for hearing tests more than once every 5 years."

Four respondents commented on the availability of equipment, replacements and spares, highlighting this can be challenging to access.

"A consistent local place to obtain batteries & tubes & communication to users when any changes take place. At the moment, it seems a bit haphazard!"

"To know that there is somewhere I can go for regular hearing aid maintenance, i.e. re-tubing, batteries and general help with hearing aids when needed."

"To be able to contact Provider for follow up, support, battery provision, cleaning, servicing and repairs to aids when needed, and not just the time limited appointments, and basic telephone check after 6 weeks of provision of aids."

Preferences for the future

Four respondents commented on the relationships between services provided by the NHS commissioned services and others providing audiology services locally.

"It is a pity that Specsavers Audiology do not interact with East Sussex Hearing who offer hearing aid maintenance across East Sussex in particular to more rural communities who do not have a regular public transport service. The service East Sussex Hearing offer is invaluable to these patients. This charity is NOT funded by the NHS but it should be!"

"Only possible to book an appointment with The Hearing People via a generic/call service; and then only in Eastbourne limited days. It would be a vast improvement if East Sussex Hearing were able to continue their support, advice and tubing changes. No need to book appointments far ahead and can turn up on the day. Invaluable service particularly for the vulnerable and elderly."

Other comments highlighted a range of preferences, including:

- Prompt responses to requests for appointments and shorter wait times.
- Improved information outlining the community audiology service being provided to patients before they use services, so they are clear what to expect.
- Greater clarity on the differences between community audiology and hospital audiology services.
- Improved support with digital apps and learning to use hearing aid devices.
- More experienced and more comprehensively trained community audiology staff.

Conclusion

Based on the responses to our short poll, satisfaction with NHS community audiology services in East Sussex appear to be relatively high and consistent between providers.

Approximately half to two-thirds of the responding users rated each provider as Excellent/Good across all the different aspects of their services, and some respondents commented that the services were working effectively and meeting their needs.

However, satisfaction rates were lowest and most mixed between providers in relation to the quality of hearing assessments, communication, and staff professionalism and care. We heard some people experienced challenges contacting providers, it wasn't always easy to get to the limited delivery locations, and communication about what to expect when using community audiology (rather than other audiology services) could be clearer.

The two service areas where respondent's satisfaction rates were lowest overall were the availability of hearing aids or parts, and access to follow-up support or repairs. We heard that respondents would appreciate greater clarity on the support available with replacement aids, parts and maintenance (from the three providers and others), more flexible access to servicing, and more support to learn to use and maintain hearing aids.

It is positive to hear the positive experiences of community audiology services since April 2026. However, commissioners and providers should consider how ongoing support and maintenance may be evolved to improve their effectiveness and patient satisfaction.

Recommendations

Surrey and Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB)

1. Work with NHS community audiology providers to co-produce clear, uniform and accessible information explaining community audiology services, hospital audiology services, referral pathways and available support for users, the public and services.
2. Collaborate with community audiology providers and other services to explore how access to maintenance, spares and repairs may be improved for users of hearing aids.
3. Consider a review of hearing test/reassessment criteria and intervals, including patient outcome data and stakeholder feedback, with the aim of ensuring all eligible patients can access reassessment within clinically appropriate timeframes.

NHS Community Audiology Providers

4. Work with the ICB and other services to regularly capture feedback and experiences from community audiology service users to identify key learning and priorities for improvement, change and further development.

Healthwatch East Sussex

5. Continue to monitor feedback from users of local NHS Community Audiology services and share insight with providers, NHS commissioners, Healthwatch England and the East Sussex Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Response from NHS Surrey and Sussex

Surrey and Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB) who commission NHS community audiology services locally, responded to our findings and recommendations in October 2026:

"The Surrey and Sussex Integrated Care Board welcomes this report from Healthwatch East Sussex and would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their experiences of community audiology services.

The feedback and insights provided are invaluable in helping us understand what is working well for patients and where further improvements may be needed. We recognise the importance of ensuring that people can access high-quality, responsive audiology services, with clear information, effective communication, and ongoing support for hearing aid maintenance and repairs.

The ICB is currently establishing an Audiology Reference Group, bringing together patients, providers, and key stakeholders to support the continued development of audiology services across Sussex.

We will use the findings and recommendations in this report to inform that group's work and help shape future service improvements, ensuring that the voices and experiences of local people remain central to service design and delivery."

For more information

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