



# Listening Tour area report

**Lewes and the Havens:**

**September to December 2024**

Published: March 2025

# Listening Tour – Lewes and the Havens

Healthwatch East Sussex has previously undertaken an annual Listening Tour to a single part of East Sussex to intensively engage local people on their experiences of health and care. For 2024 we have adapted our approach to the Listening Tour and are visiting three areas to increase our reach and understand the priorities of a range of local communities.

Our Listening Tour uses a variety of activities to hear people's experiences of accessing and using health and care services. We do this through surveys, discussion groups, and listening events. We use the feedback received to make recommendations to health and care partners to support positive changes to local services. This report relates to what we heard in our Listening Tour in Lewes and the Havens between September and December 2024.

## What we did:

The Lewes District Integrated Community Team Population Profile Pack states:

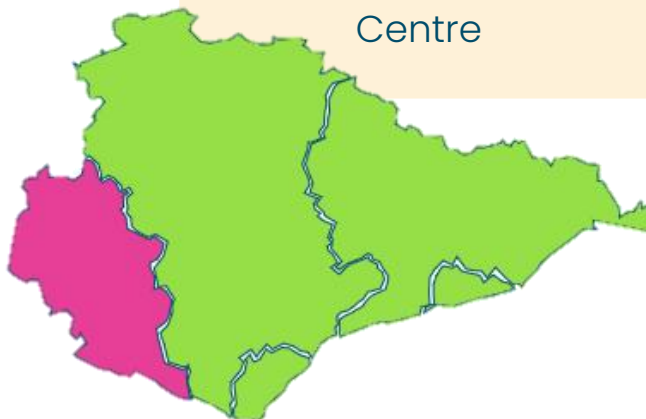
- Lewes and the Havens has an older age profile, fewer 20-40 year-olds, and more older people living alone than the national average.
- Lewes is less ethnically diverse, but has more LGBTQ+ people, more disabled people, more veterans.
- There are 2 Core20 neighbourhoods in Lewes Town and Newhaven.
- There are high rates of self-harm admissions, drug related deaths, under 5's admissions for accidents and injuries.
- There are high levels of anxiety and depression.

During the Lewes and the Havens section of the tour, we visited 6 local groups:

- **Lewes**
  - Lewes Men's Shed
  - Lewes House of Friendship
  - Fitzjohn's Foodbank
  - Foundry Health Care Reference Group
- **Newhaven**
  - Our Songs, Our Stories
  - Baptist Church Foodbank

We also held a **Listening Event** at:

- Denton Island Community Centre



# Lewes and the Havens Individual Surveys

During our tour we used a simple feedback form that captured:

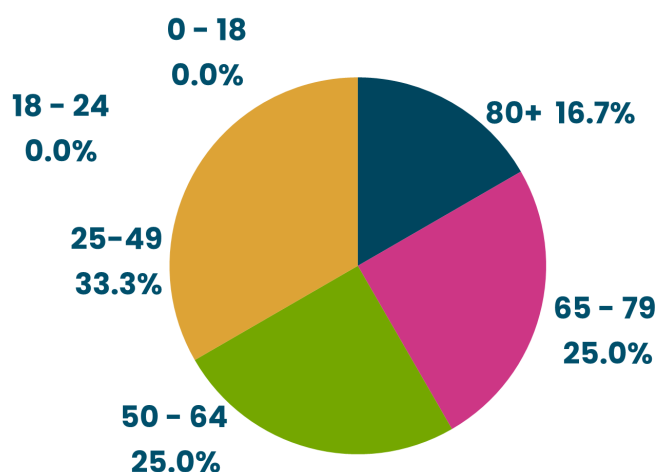
- Impacts on people's health and wellbeing
- Views and experiences of primary care
- The impact of social isolation
- Views on the social determinants of health
- Demographic details of survey respondents

We engaged **64** people on our tour, of which **13** completed individual surveys.

## Who completed individual surveys:

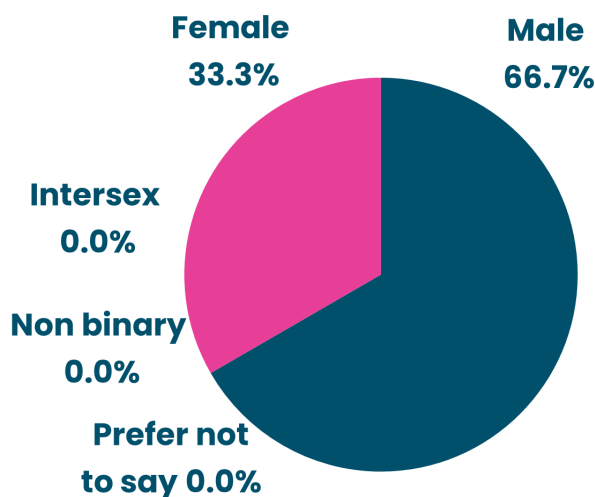
### Age:

We spoke to a range of people across the life course.



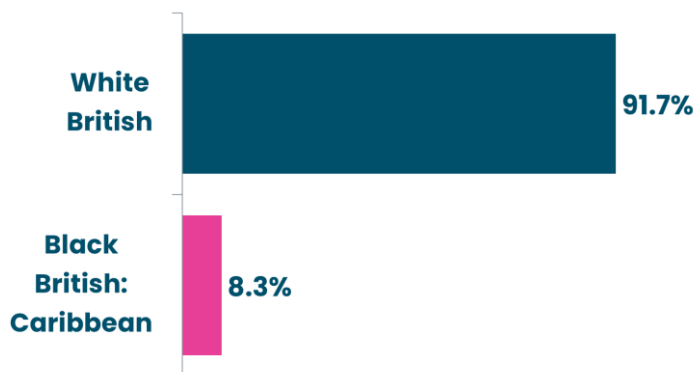
### Gender:

A majority of those we surveyed were male.



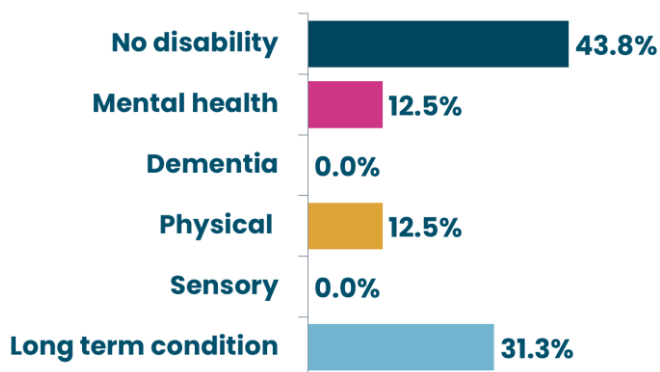
### Ethnicity :

The majority of those surveyed identified as White British.



### Disability :

Survey respondents reported a range of disabilities and long-term conditions



These percentages are drawn from the 13 people who completed individual surveys during outreach to community groups in Lewes and the Havens. We also engaged people in group discussions during our outreach activity.

# Lewes and the Havens Outreach: What we heard

We  
engaged  
**32** people  
in group  
discussion

## Health and Wellbeing

- Transport to and from acute hospitals is a significant issue, including for hospital discharge. Voluntary organisations like Nevill Good Neighbours can make a difference if people know how to find them.
- The cost of transport around the district is a barrier to some people accessing social activities that would support health and wellbeing. The older person's bus pass is vital to support people getting out and about.
- It was recognised that keeping physically active, including getting outside and taking the dog for a walk is linked to mental and physical wellbeing.
- There was interest in accessible and themed walks on local history or nature. The label of a 'wellbeing walk' to tackle loneliness is unhelpful.

## Primary Care

- There is higher use of online booking and consultation in the Lewes area following introduction of the Anima system by Foundry Healthcare. Patients are also able to phone or make appointments face to face.
- Some people find online communication more convenient. Not everyone is confident communicating online or by phone and some people (particularly some men) prefer face to face appointments.
- People using online booking and consultation are of all ages and tend to better understand they are being triaged when contacting the GP.
- There is anxiety about the sharing of personal data for the purposes of triage. There is frustration about sharing the same information repeatedly and not being able to make online enquiries out of hours.
- There were questions about whether GPs are triaging enquiries. There were some reports of patients visiting A&E or the UTC at Lewes Victoria Hospital because they could not access a GP appointment.
- There was positive feedback on the 111 service because this can facilitate access to GP appointments out of hours.
- There was positive feedback on the role of pharmacies in primary care but reports of vaccine shortages and a lack of local NHS dentistry.



# Lewes and the Havens

## Outreach: What we heard

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### Social Isolation

- People felt connected to their community through their social activity but many were aware of more isolated people who felt less confident accessing groups.
- Social prescribers in GP practices can play an important role in referring people to community organisations, such as Lewes Men's Shed and Care for the Carers, particularly where people are less confident.
- The Holiday and Food (HAF) programme supports the social inclusion of children who receive benefits-related free school meals.
- Many people really value the social dimension of community groups in supporting wellbeing. They provide a social space for adults to do things and chat. Sharing food is very effective in bringing people together.
- People want to do activities for fun without the purpose of improving health and wellbeing.

### Social Determinants and Equality

- Some adults with communication challenges (dyslexia) or visual impairments find it difficult to use online systems.
- Availability of appointments, including NHS dental care, has the biggest impact on health. This is compounded by transport challenges for disabled people, or people without access to a car.
- Some older people, including those living with dementia, need a lot of encouragement to access healthcare, and their needs are not always met appropriately in acute hospital settings.
- There was anxiety about the loss of the Winter Fuel Payment for low-income people not eligible for Pension Credit.
- Some people accessing foodbanks found it difficult to connect with others due to the cost of living. People valued the social connection and empowering model of the foodbanks in Lewes and Newhaven.
- More public benches could support mobility-impaired people along walking routes. Lewes Men's Shed could help provide benches.

# Lewes and the Havens Listening Event : What we heard

We engaged  
**19** people  
in our  
Listening  
Event

## Accessing Primary Care

- There is a risk that online access systems could potentially disadvantage people who would otherwise contact the surgery in more traditional ways, potentially resulting in unnecessary admissions to hospital.
- Havens Health is still a predominantly telephone-based appointment system. They feel they get more accurate information if they speak to patients to triage their needs.
- There is an NHS dentist in Peacehaven, but people are fearful about missing appointments and losing this service. The difficulty accessing NHS dentistry is about lists being closed to new patients.
- There was positive feedback from carers on the NHS app with managing prescriptions. The NHS app is more convenient and can be used to view the hospital appointment system.
- There is a huge variation between how each GP practice works, so it is impossible for other health practitioners to know what each one does.

## Social Isolation

- Men are more likely to be socially isolated. They tend to have fewer friends but are also less likely to go to groups or reach out for support.
- Carers need regular respite, particularly with the closure of The Phoenix Centre in Lewes. Sit-in services are good, but don't last long and then the carer is left on their own again.
- There are social groups in Lewes and the Havens, including 'Soup and Social' at Denton Island Community Centre. Some people don't want to attend groups activities that are labelled for their 'wellbeing'.
- There are limited things for young people to do, particularly in Peacehaven where the Joff Youth Hub is currently closed.

## Social Determinants of Health and Wellbeing

- Non-emergency patient transport is very limited. Some people struggle to get to appointments, and there are limited transport links to the Havens.
- The CTLA Community Transport service is expensive. Havens Cars is a voluntary service for local people, but they are low on drivers.
- There are significant socioeconomic differences between Lewes and the Havens. There are also issues with digital exclusion, partly associated with poverty, but also because not everyone is confident with digital systems.
- The welfare benefits system is complex, and there is a culture of pride in the Newhaven area that means some benefits may not be claimed.

# Lewes and the Havens Quotes:

## What we heard

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*"Men's Sheds treat people the same, whatever their abilities, but we are not social workers."*

*The Lewes House of Friendship is "better than the doctor's! "*

*"It has been a lifeline after losing my wife, providing friendship and company."*

*"Once you go private, you can't go back to an NHS dentist."*

*"My son was not allowed to use his phone during work hours, and this made it impossible to contact Anima during the week. He ended up in A&E as a result."*

*"There is a difference between digital access and unlimited access, and digital access does not manage the unlimited demand from patients."*

*"The cost of living can make it difficult to get to important appointments."*

*"If you put more benches there, people will sit on them! "*

# Listening Tour – Lewes and the Havens: What happens now?

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1. Healthwatch will feed back to NHS Sussex on the pros and cons of digital access to primary care, including the issues of limited capacity, out of hours, and concerns about which healthcare professionals are triaging digital enquiries.
2. Healthwatch will continue to highlight the role of social prescribing in the development of local Integrated Community Teams, and the potential to help people less confident in accessing social groups and activities.
3. Healthwatch will highlight access to patient transport for people in Lewes and the Havens with EMED, the new provider of non-emergency patient transport services (NEPTS). Healthwatch will undertake a project to review people's experiences of NEPTS in our work programme for 2025-26.
4. Healthwatch will raise the issue of seating for mobility-impaired people along walking routes at the East Sussex Disability Rights Reference Group, highlighted the work of Men's Sheds in building benches.
5. Healthwatch will incorporate the learning from this listening activity into a wider report on the Listening Tour of East Sussex, which will be shared later in 2025.







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