



Listening Tour area report

Wealden District May – August 2024

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healthwatch
East Sussex

Listening Tour – Wealden District

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 the Wealden District between May and August 2024.

What we did:

To kick off our new approach to the Listening Tour we decided to start our activity in the Wealden District. The Wealden Integrated Community Team Population Profile Pack states:

- Wealden has an older age profile than the rest of Sussex, with more older people living alone.
- Wealden has high admissions for falls injuries for older people.
- Wealden has more attendances for same day urgent care and at Accident and Emergency.
- Fewer carers report having enough social contact.
- Housing costs are high relative to earnings in Wealden.
- Wealden has four Core20 deprived neighbourhoods.

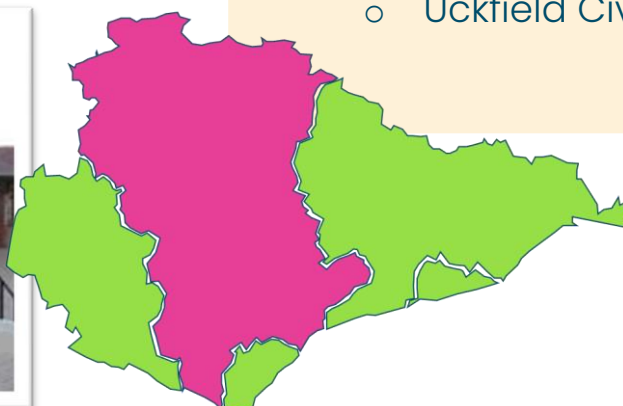


During the Wealden section of the tour, we visited local groups:

- **Crowborough**
 - Community Cafe
- **Polegate**
 - Memory Cafe
- **Uckfield**
 - Sussex Support Service
 - Saturday Social
 - Carers O'Clock

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

- Uckfield Civic Centre



Listening Tour – Wealden District Individual Surveys

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

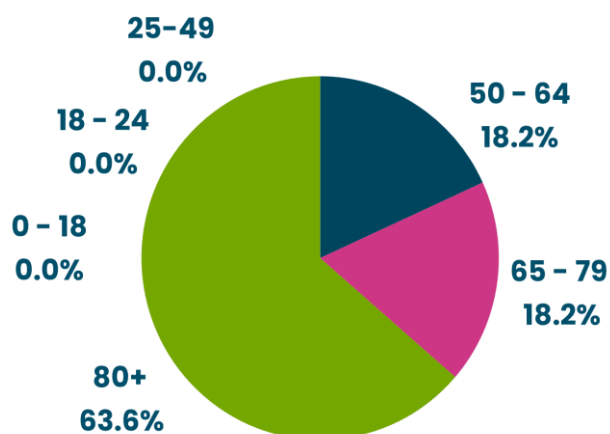
- Impacts on people's health and wellbeing
- Views and experiences of primary care
- The impact of social isolation
- Views on the social determinants of health
- Demographic details of survey respondents

We engaged **43** people on our tour, of which **13** completed individual surveys.

Who completed individual surveys:

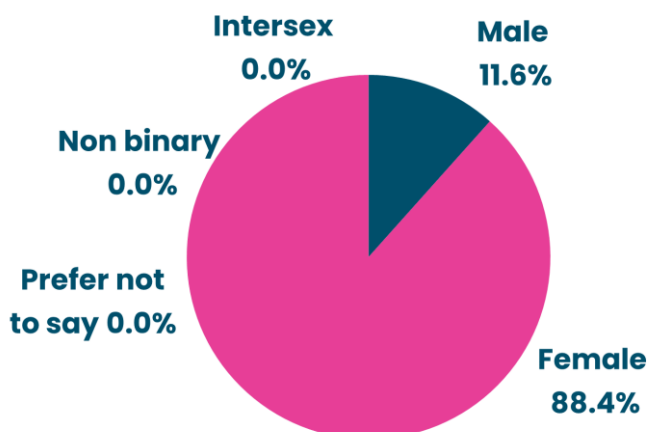
Age:

A majority of those we surveyed were over 80 years of age.



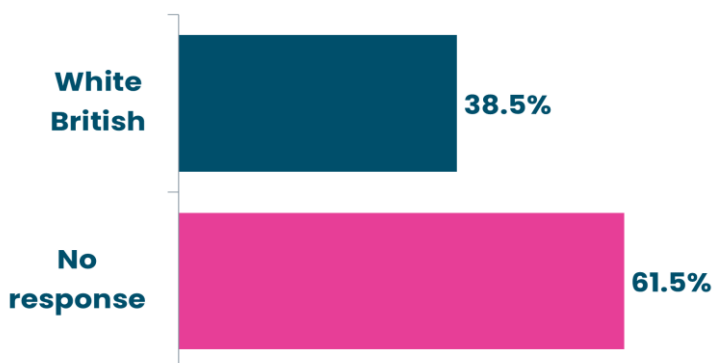
Gender:

A majority of those we surveyed were female.



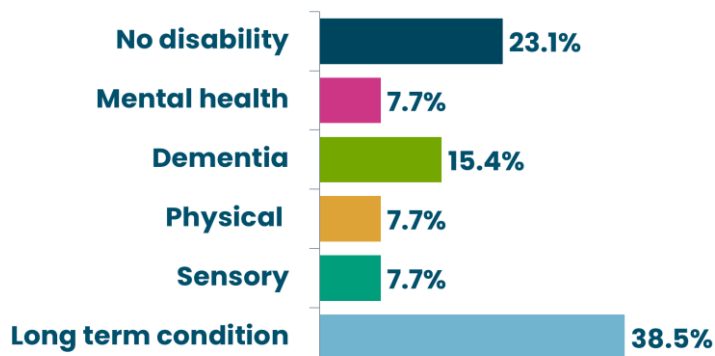
Ethnicity :

Everyone we surveyed identified their ethnicity 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 Wealden. We also engaged people in group discussions during our outreach activity.

Outreach to Wealden Groups

What we heard

We engaged
15 people
in group
discussion

Health and Wellbeing

- There are quite a lot of activities going on for older people if they know where to find them.
- Carers particularly need a break from their caring roles and describe their wellbeing group as a “lifeline” to maintain care for loved ones.
- Half of older adults surveyed (50%) felt that income affects their health and wellbeing.
- The cost of living and housing impacted most on younger carers and people with disabilities.

Primary Care

- The majority of people surveyed (over 90%) continue to phone GP surgeries in the morning or visit face to face to book appointments.
- Some people (around 18%) are beginning to use online booking systems and the GP callback system.
- Whilst many people express a wish to see their GP face to face, over half of appointments (55%) are with other health professionals, mostly practice nurses or advanced nurse practitioners.
- Some people access Minor Injuries Units or Urgent Treatment Centres outside of Wealden if they can't get a same day or next day appointment.
- There was uniformly positive feedback on Minor Injuries Units and Urgent Treatment Centres.
- There is a lack of communication between health practitioners in Pembury Hospital in Kent and community practitioners in Wealden.
- There was positive feedback from carers on improvements to the 111 service in the last year, including booking GP appointments.
- There was positive feedback from carers on requesting repeat prescriptions online.

Outreach to Wealden Groups

What we heard

Social Isolation

- A quarter of people surveyed (25%) reported that they never or did not often feel connected to people in their community. A further 14% of people reported that they sometimes feel connected.
- The most common reason given for isolation was not feeling confident enough to access social groups. Health problems and lack of transport were also cited as reasons for isolation.
- Carers reported losing contact with friends who do not understand their caring role. Carers noted the difficulty reestablishing social networks when their caring role comes to an end.
- One carer noted that attending social groups enables them to retain their sense of humour and maintain their resilience. Carers made a lot of friends through attending wellbeing groups.
- Some people felt that better communication about community events would help them feel more connected to their community.

Social Determinants and Equality

- Half of older adults surveyed (50%) reported a hearing or sight impairment impacting on their ability to access health appointments.
- About 37% of adults surveyed felt that having a disability impacted their ability to access healthcare.
- The welfare benefit system for working age disabled adults is complex and difficult to negotiate. People need support to understand how to complete the application for Universal Credit and the Personal Independence Payment from a mental health perspective.
- There is a lack of separate space for treating patients with dementia in Accident and Emergency at the Royal Sussex County Hospital.
- Carers reported that they are unable to use the Carer Cards for discounted parking in hospitals outside of East Sussex, despite the NHS being pan-Sussex.

Wealden Listening Event

What we heard

We engaged
15 people
in our
Listening
Event

Accessing Primary Care

- People who are working or have caring responsibilities cannot easily call GP surgeries at 8am to book appointments. Online booking systems are only as good as the capacity to triage requests for appointments.
- There is recognition that triage for primary care is a reality, but it presents another barrier for older people who still want to see a GP face to face.
- It is difficult for parents to request appointments online for teenage children due to Gillick competency and GDPR.
- People are unsure where to go if they cannot book a GP appointment. Some people access Minor Injuries Units in Wealden and further afield as they are easier to travel to than acute hospitals in Sussex.
- There was positive feedback about the 111 service, including the ability to triage people for GP appointments or hospital attendance.

Social Isolation

- There are a lot of activities for older people across Wealden, such as the Newick Lunch Club at St Mary's and U3A in Crowborough. Not all people want to meet with peers with the same long-term condition.
- Not enough men get involved in groups. There is a need for specific services based around activities, such as Men in Sheds and the walking group run by Family Hubs.
- Social prescribing could play an important role in connecting people up with activities that are of interest to them, using targeted social media.
- There are limited social activities for younger people, and cost is a barrier to participation. Intergenerational work through faith communities could help address inconsistent access across rural areas.

Social Determinants of Health and Wellbeing

- The cost of transport is a significant issue for some people living in Wealden. It is difficult for some people to get to health appointments or social activities, which impacts on their overall health and wellbeing.
- There are long waits for some services, such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Some people can afford private treatment, but others cannot afford to pay.
- The digitalization of access to primary care may improve over time, but risks creating additional barriers for people who struggle with technology.
- East Sussex Vision Support is training health professionals on the additional barriers to accessing support for people with visual impairments.

Listening Tour – Wealden District

What we heard

"You have to live for the day!"

"Just like to speak to anybody that would listen."

"More awareness that dementia doesn't only happen to older people"

"The phoning system at 8am is highly problematic. It excludes people who are already at work or have caring responsibilities."

"The Minor Injuries Unit at Crowborough was brilliant – they X-rayed and put a cast on my wrist."

"People are not sure where to go."

"Social contact for people who are supporting families without their own support."

"Carers O'Clock has been a lifeline for carers, meeting others and sharing their experiences."

Listening Tour – Wealden District

What happens now?

1. Healthwatch will report feedback on barriers to accessing primary care to NHS Sussex, including the role of VCSE organizations like East Sussex Vision Support in addressing some of these barriers.
2. Healthwatch will highlight the role of social prescribing in the development of local Integrated Community Teams, and the potential to help people find specific activities that are relevant to them.
3. Healthwatch will highlight access to patient transport for people in rural areas with South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust. Healthwatch will highlight the importance of affordable transport options for the social inclusion of young people, and people on low incomes in Wealden.
4. Healthwatch will raise the portability of the East Sussex Carers Card with NHS Sussex, and explore why other health providers outside of East Sussex cannot offer discounted parking for carers.
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 in 2025.





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