

Patient Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE)

January 2026

Annually, Healthwatch East Sussex (HWES) volunteers and staff participate in Patient Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE). This document outlines what is involved in PLACE and the activity our volunteers and staff took part in during October and November 2025.

What is PLACE?

PLACE assessments focus on the environment in which NHS funded care is delivered and is undertaken at hospitals of all sizes (including mental health hospitals). It helps organisations understand how well they are meeting the needs of their patients and identify where improvements can be made. PLACE focuses exclusively on the environment in which care is delivered but does not cover the treatment people receive.

The assessments involve local people (known as patient assessors) going into hospitals or care settings as part of teams to assess how suitable the space is for patients to receive the care they need. This includes:

- How well the space protects patient privacy and dignity.
- The quality and availability of food (tasting, evaluating). Are menus varied and adapted to meet patient needs; is food tasty; are people supported to eat their meals.
- How clean the space is.
- The condition and appearance of the space, both outside and inside buildings.
- How well the building meets the needs of those who use it, for example through storage, signs and car parking facilities.
- How well the space supports people with dementia.
- How well the space support people with a disability.

To assess all the above areas, the assessment teams are provided with forms, which are set nationally and [available here](#), to help them complete a thorough review.

Once the assessments are complete, all the results are submitted to NHS England and analysed. These are published so patients can see them and help drive improvements in the care environment. Reports from previous years can be found online [here](#).

Our 2025 activity

During October and November 2025, Healthwatch staff and volunteers visited 13 locations across East Sussex to conduct PLACE assessments. This included visits to:

- Lewes Victoria Hospital
- Uckfield Community Hospital
- Crowborough War Memorial Hospital
- St Wilfrid's Hospice
- Eastbourne District General Hospital
- Bexhill Hospital
- Rye & Winchelsea Memorial Hospital
- Conquest Hospital
- Woodlands Centre
- Beechwood Ward at Uckfield Hospital
- Hellingly Centre
- Department of Psychiatry Eastbourne
- St Raphael's Ward at the St Anne's Centre



During the visits, positive observations included:

- As several patient assessors have taken part in PLACE activity annually, they fed back that most sites had taken action on feedback provided during visits in previous years.
- Across a number of sites, we observed improvements to signage, making wayfinding across sites easier for patients and visitors.
- At the majority of visits, the food tasted was received positively.

Observations for improvements at the sites visited included:

- At a few of the sites, storage space was observed as being limited and not always enough for the services requirements.
- Some outside areas, including pathways, were observed as being tired, with work needed to level paving slabs, update decor, repair damage, manage green spaces etc.
- Flooring could also be an issue inside some sites, with shiny floors observed that may be unsuitable for patients with dementia.

Moving forward

- HWES intend to take part in PLACE assessments next year (2026) to continue to see how the feedback is being used to make improvements to the sites.

Feedback from NHS Trusts we visited

East Sussex Healthcare Trust “For the 2025 PLACE inspections, the trust was pleased to welcome back our familiar assessors who have a long history of reviewing our services. Their input helped us identify improvements and confirm resolutions to concerns raised in previous years. This year the assessors supported by health watch administrators our facilities team management and trust observers were joined for the first time by external trust observers.

This diverse mix of perspectives enabled thoughtful discussion and debate each day about our services and opportunities for improvement.

Looking ahead – future inspections will aim to include external trust validators and allow plenty of time for general discussion.

We gained significant value from conversations that go beyond the place remit so our scheduling will continue to provide time for reflective dialogue.

We fully recognize the important role Healthwatch plays not only in supporting PLACE but also in regular audits and inspections and we look forward to working collaboratively next year”

Sussex Community Foundation Trust - “The support of Healthwatch each year is hugely appreciated and incredibly valuable to us as an organisation. Each year we complete our annual PLACE audit and this is supported by Healthwatch. It gives us an opportunity to scrutinise our environment in a structured way with people who, as they are not connected to the site, are able to offer an impartial perspective.

Given we have worked with East Sussex Healthwatch for many years, we have built up a relationship of trust and respect, and we know that anything highlighted to us during an inspection comes from a place of wanting to improve the environment, and at the end of the day anything we can do to improve patient care is a win!”

To find out more about PLACE or how to get involved in future visits please get in touch:

Call: 0333 101 4007 **Email:** enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk