



Listening Tour Area Report

Rother

August to November 2025

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healthwatch
East Sussex

Listening Tour – Rother

Healthwatch East Sussex has previously undertaken an annual Listening Tour to a single part of East Sussex to engage local people on their experiences of health and care. In 2024/25 we adapted our approach to the Listening Tour, visiting three areas to increase our reach and understand the priorities of a range of local communities. In 2025/26 we chose to continue with this new approach to our Listening Tours, focusing our most recent tour In Rother.

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, listening events and our information and signposting mechanisms. 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 Rother in 2025.

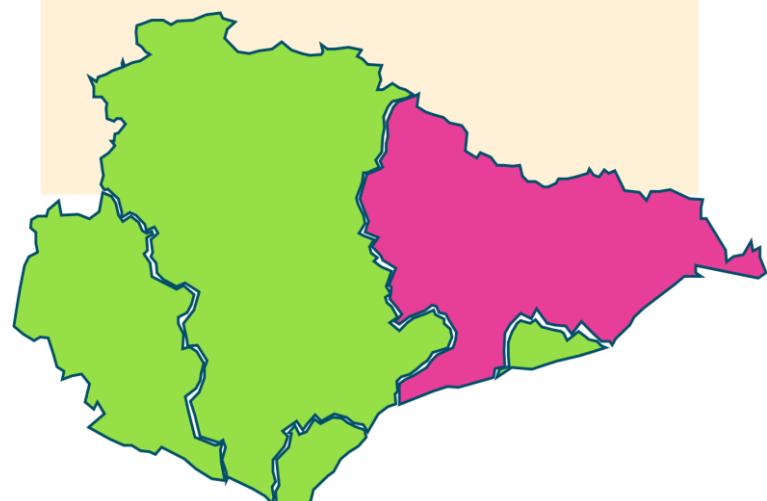
The Rother District Integrated Community Team (ICT) Population Profile Pack states:

- Rother has an older age profile, with fewer people under the age of 50 than the national average
- More people live with a disability than the national average
- High levels of hospital admissions for fall injuries for older people
- Lowest diagnosis rate for dementia in Sussex



Some of the groups visited as part of the Rother Listening Tour included:

- Amaze Parent and Carer Group
- Bexhill Foodbank
- Battle Foodbank
- Staplecross Lunch Club
- **Listening tour event at Pebsham Community Hub**



What we heard in Rother

We heard from 137 people, with 87 sharing feedback through public engagement

Primary care

- Patients shared mixed experiences of accessing support at their GP practice. Some shared positive experiences of receiving good, timely support (particularly in the Rye and Robertsbridge areas) while others shared issues around difficulties booking appointments and having to book multiple appointments for the same undiagnosed medical issue.
- Patients raised concerns around how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being used within GP practices. Some patients shared feedback that responses from their GP through online enquiry systems seemed to be automatically generated, suggesting that practice staff may not be looking at their enquiry.
- Feedback that multiple GP practices across Rother are currently considering moving to a new location, with some of these practices undertaking engagement with their patients to understand the potential impacts of a move.
- Positive experiences were shared of dental services in the Bexhill area, with patients sharing that they felt well supported by their dental practice.
- Many people shared positive feedback around pharmacy services across Rother. However, there are issues for those living in more rural parts of the district who must travel longer distances to get to their nearest pharmacy. This issue can be exacerbated during holidays and weekends, where pharmacy opening hours can vary, resulting in some people needing to travel even further to access these services.

Secondary care

- People shared positive experiences of interactions with paramedics and staff working in A&E, although waiting times particularly within A&E are an issue. People shared concerns around the amount of time people have to wait in waiting rooms which are often busy and sometimes noisy when they are in pain and/or unwell. These concerns were echoed by those with mental health needs, and those who are neurodivergent.
- Those who had used NHS 111 services shared stories of being told by 111 to access different health services that were either unavailable at the time of need or inappropriate for the person's need, with this causing confusion and frustration for patients.

What we heard in Rother

Secondary care

- Parents shared difficulties in accessing support for children with Avoidant-Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID). Parents shared that as there is no treatment pathway for ARFID, their children receive little to no support for the condition. One parent shared that their child had been treated for malnourishment but had received no support for the underlying need.
- People shared that services are often not designed for those who are neurodivergent and/or have mental health needs. As well as issues around busy and noisy waiting areas, people also shared that being asked to book and attend appointments via phone presents barriers for those who find this form of communication difficult.
- Positive feedback was shared around people's experiences of both the Community Diagnostics Centre (CDC) in Bexhill and Bexhill hospital. People shared positive experiences of being seen for ophthalmology at Bexhill hospital, as well as of efficient blood tests and scans at the CDC.

Social determinants

- People shared that the cost of living negatively impacts their ability to go out and socialise, increasing social isolation.
- Working age people shared the difficulties of getting medical appointments at a time that fits around their working hours. Some people shared that they find it difficult to get the time off to go to appointments during working hours, meaning they end up leaving issues to become worse.
- Individuals find their local social activities very important to their wellbeing. In some areas there is a strong sense of community and a variety of clubs and social activities. However, some people shared having a lack of knowledge of what is available in their local area, both in terms of support for their health and more general social activities. Some shared that they didn't know where to look or what to search for to find the right support or activities to take part in.
- Having green spaces was shared as being particularly important for wellbeing, with these spaces also serving as third spaces for people to socialise with others without having to spend money.

Rother: Information & Signposting Service and Feedback Centre

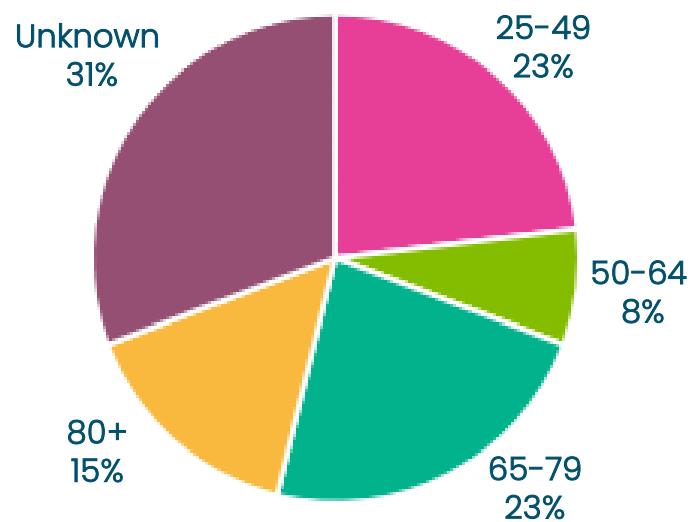
Healthwatch East Sussex offers an online Feedback Centre, allowing people in East Sussex to leave feedback about their experiences of health and care services. We also offer an Information and Signposting (I&S) service, which provides information to support people to navigate health and care services.

During our listening tour timeframe, we received 13 enquiries and pieces of feedback through our I&S service and Feedback Centre.

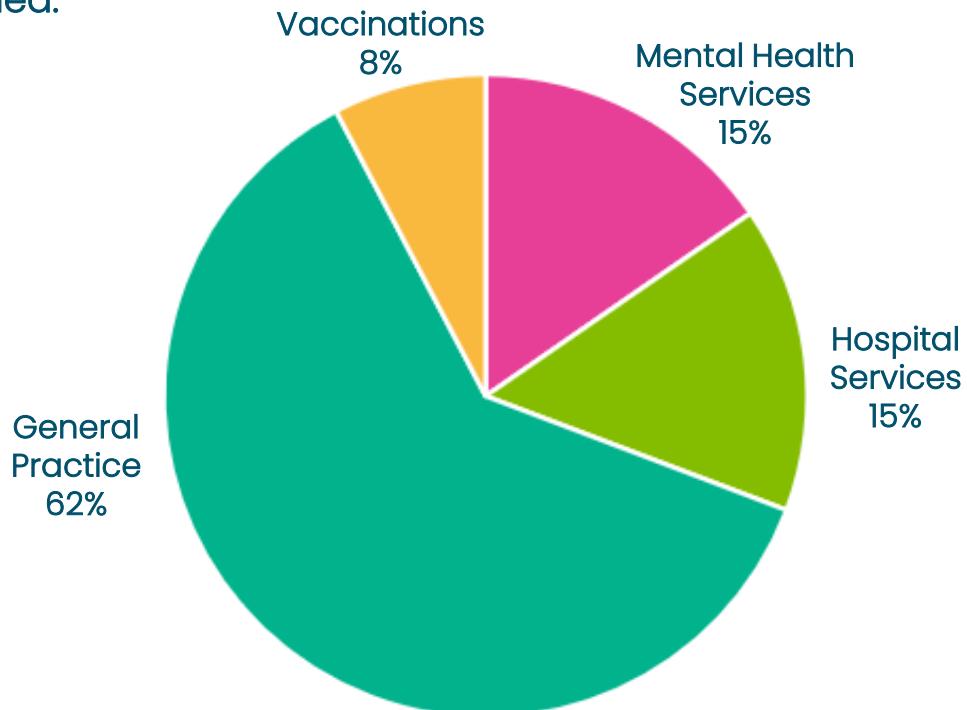
I&S and Feedback Centre Demographics:

Those leaving feedback were of a range of ages, with all those leaving feedback being adults aged 25 and over.

69% of those who contacted us via our information and signposting service were women.



Those contacting our I&S service or completing a feedback form contacted us about a range of healthcare services. The most common service mentioned in feedback was GP services. A range of hospital services, as well as mental health and vaccination services were also mentioned.



Rother: Individual Surveys

During our tour we used an online survey asked people to share their views and experiences on the healthcare services they had used over the last 12 months, including what worked well and what needed to be improved. Those completing the survey were also asked to share some of the things that impact their overall wellbeing.

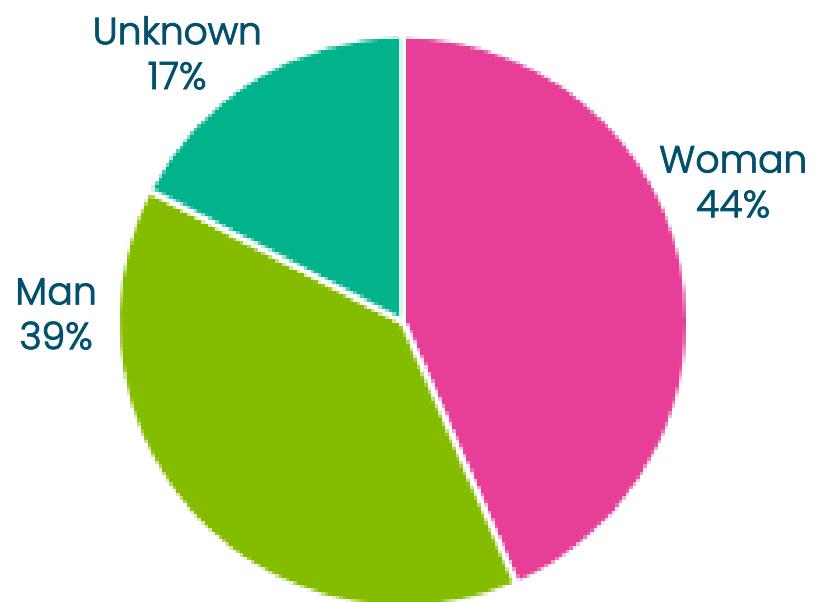
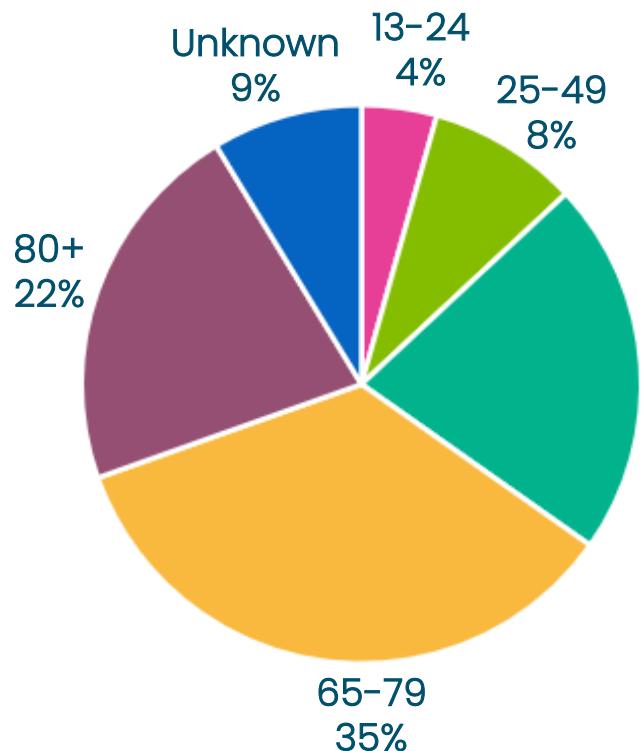
Who completed individual surveys:

Ethnicity :

Most respondents to our survey were White British, with the remainder preferring not to say.

Gender:

The majority of those completing the survey were women



Age:

The majority of those completing the survey were between 65-79 years old

These figures are drawn from the 23 individuals who completed our online listening tour survey. We also engaged people in group discussions during our outreach activity but did not ask equalities monitoring questions as part of outreach activity.

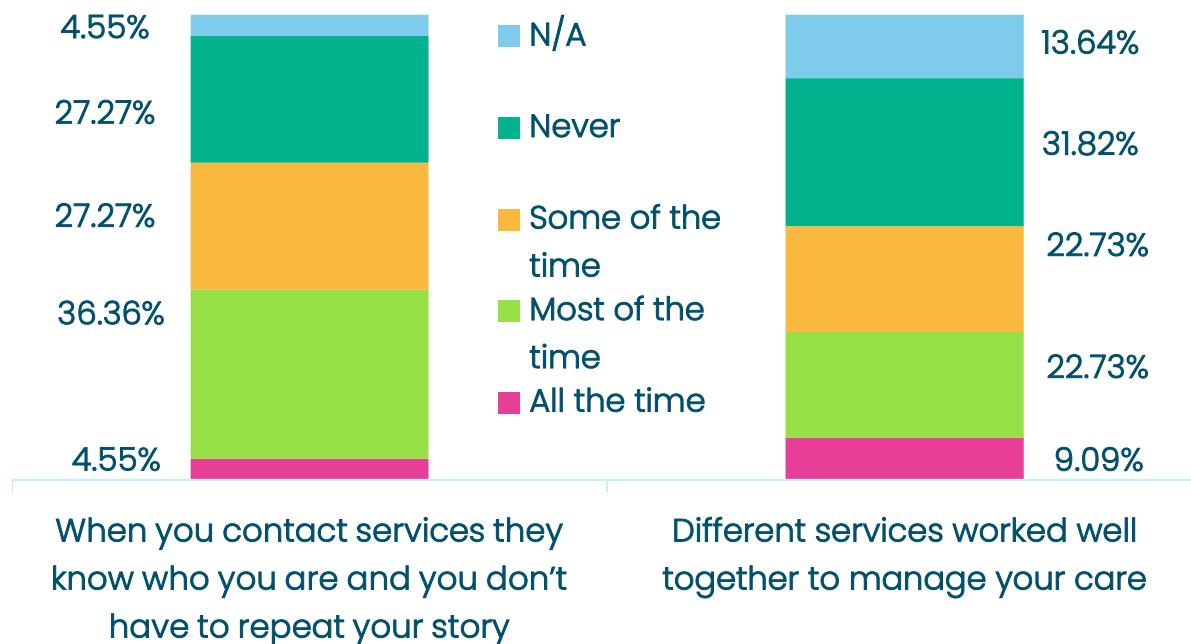
We engaged 137 people on our tour, of which 23 completed individual surveys

Rother: Individual Surveys

23 individuals completed individual surveys

Our online survey asked individuals a range of questions relating to health and care services, as well as questions about their overall wellbeing. 23 people completed our survey in full.

- Of those who responded to the survey, **43.48%** of people shared that they found getting an appointment for the service they needed either difficult or very difficult
- **39.13%** said they felt their overall experience of healthcare had worsened over the last 12 months
- 7 people felt that different services never worked well together to support their care



Experiences of health and care services:

Individuals who completed our online survey were asked to rate their experience of the health and care services they had used in the last 12 months:

- 26% rated their GP services as **excellent**, 34.8% rated their GP services as **good**, and 30.4% rated their GP services as **poor**
- 63.6% rated their experience of dentistry as either **excellent** or **good**
- 82% rated pharmacies as **good** or **excellent**, with the remainder saying they had not used a pharmacy in the last 12 months
- 26% rated NHS 111 services as **poor**
- 69.5% of respondents had not used voluntary or charity services to support their health or wellbeing in the last 12 months

Rother Listening Workshop

We engaged
14 individuals
as part of our
workshop

In September, we held a Listening Tour workshop in Pebsham with professionals and members of the public to hear about their experiences of health and care services. We presented on what we had heard through our work so far (a visual of this is shown on page 10) and held two discussion groups focusing on the following questions:

- What are your experiences of health and care in Rother?
- The NHS has released its 10-year plan, outlining their priorities for the year ahead. What do you think the NHS should focus on?



The responses to these questions are summarised below.

Experiences of Health and Care

- There are a lack of pharmacies in the Rother area, with many having limited opening hours. This can make it harder for people to access medication. Concerns were also raised around Pharmacy First putting further pressure on already stretched pharmacy services in the area.
- Parts of Rother have limited broadband and phone coverage, making online services more difficult to access, causing particular issues for those trying to contact their GP practice.
- A lack of flexible appointments causes issues for working age people, particularly when they are working in jobs (e.g., teaching) where getting time off for an appointment or answering a phone call is very challenging.
- Concerns were raised around patients being able to access medical results before these results had been viewed by a medical professional. This leads to increased anxiety for patients who have concerns about their results and what they mean.
- A lack of joined up working between different NHS Trusts is causing delays and confusion for patients.

Rother Listening Workshop

What do you think the NHS should focus on?

- Participants highlighted the need for services to focus on communication and continuity of care. While digital systems (such as apps and online booking systems) are good, they cannot solve everything, and patients value being able to speak to professionals face to face.
- Different organisations, departments and NHS Trusts need to communicate better together to allow for positive patient outcomes.
- There are a wide range of people who are digitally excluded including older people, those with sensory needs and disabilities, people on low incomes and more. How to ensure that these groups can continue to access and engage with healthcare needs to be considered.
- In Rother, many GP practices are in older, inaccessible buildings. Practices will need the resources to ensure they can modify their facilities or move to more suitable accommodation.
- Changes to services such as adult social care and housing services need to happen in parallel to changes to the NHS to help reduce pressures on healthcare services.
- How schools could play a role in preventing ill health should be considered, for example through healthy eating schemes run with pupils.
- Countryside workers are expected to travel to services, which is often not realistic. It is important to consider how relationships can be built and information better shared with these communities.
- There is a lack of clarity about the role of Integrated Community Teams, including what their make up is and how they will be implemented in Rother.

Jan 25 – **Cost of living** survey and engagement. Many respondents expect their financial situation to get worse in the next 12 months and highlighted impacts on their physical and mental health.

Aug 25 – **PPG Mapping** found variation in the amount and accessibility of information about PPG's across practices in Rother.

May 25 – Survey into **Women's and girls' experiences** of health and care. Lower proportion felt listened to, and transport was a bigger barrier in Rother than in other areas of East Sussex.

Continuity of care impacted when patients move into Rother from other counties.

Concerns around not seeing the same medical professional twice at GP practices.

Concerns around a lack of access to health and care services for those who are **digitally excluded**.

GP patient survey

Variation in results across practices in Rother for things such as **access**, ability to **contact** and overall **experience**.

Rural Rother PCN scored highly across many categories.

Feedback Centre

Issues arising when patients are asked to **travel** to one of their GP practices other sites when this is further away from them.

Positive feedback about **caring staff** at Conquest and Bexhill Hospital.

Concerns around **access to blood tests**, with some GP practices no longer offering these.

Recent Healthwatch East Sussex Projects

Information and Signposting

Rother Listening Tour

Positive experiences of care from staff at the Conquest **Hospital**.

Rye Listening Tour '23

Care home residents struggling to access **dentistry**.

Rural areas, having limited local services and having to travel long distances.

Transport, particularly limited public transport impacted peoples' ability to access healthcare, employment and social connections.

ICT Data sets

Rother tour activity as of Sept '25

Older age profile, with highest number of older people living alone (1 in 5) in Sussex.

Six Core20 neighbourhoods in Sidley, Central Bexhill and Eastern Rother.

Long waits for **mental health** support for children and young people, and for adults.

Positive feedback on **pharmacy** services, particularly in the Bexhill area.

Feedback that services (particularly **NHS 111**) don't feel joined up with other services.

Increased rates of depression, anxiety, and self-harm compared with England.

Concerns around being triaged over the phone at **GP practices** and concerns around who is deciding if they need an appointment.

Rother Quotes: What we Heard

"When I request a doctors appointment I have already explored all areas I can to elevate my problem. Why then do I constantly feel like I am a nuisance?"

"My pharmacy is excellent, even when there are issues with stock or accessing prescriptions from the GP they have great communication which keeps you in the loop"

"Better communication to understand CAMHS pathways is very much needed"

"999 excellent. Paramedics all first class"

"Digital methods help with booking appointments as you are able to do this more flexibly but then a lot of the only available appointments are during the working day, so you have to take time off work"

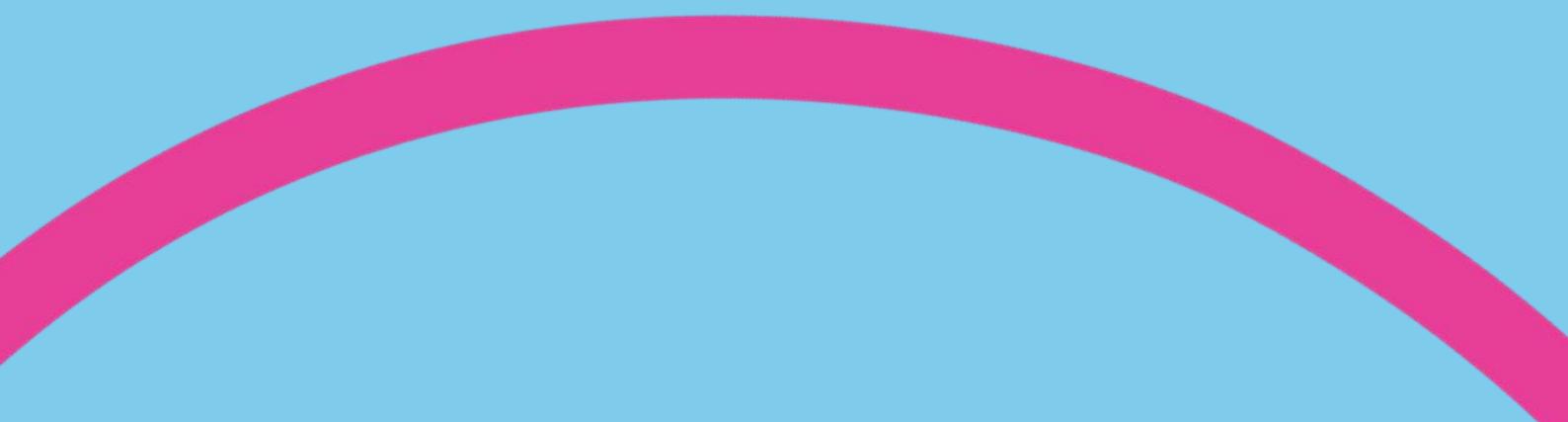
"Feeling unworthy of being heard and seen by a person face to face. So many things are missed by not being seen"

"From my own experience this year, NHS 111 doesn't seem very joined up to other services."

Listening Tour Rother: What happens now?

1. Healthwatch will feed back to NHS Sussex on the pros and cons of digital access to primary care, including the issues of reduced broadband coverage, out of hours provisions, and concerns around how digital enquiries are triaged
2. Healthwatch will work with statutory and voluntary services to share information about what services are available to local people
3. Healthwatch will raise with NHS Sussex and SPFT the lack of treatment options for children, young people and adults with ARFID and the difficulties this is causing families and individuals
4. Healthwatch will work with services to raise awareness of the need to ensure waiting areas are suitable for people with a range of needs, including those with sensory needs and those who are neurodiverse
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 2026





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