

# The value of listening

Healthwatch Solihull  
Annual Report 2023–2024



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**"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."**

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



# Message from our Chair

**Healthwatch Solihull is here to listen to everybody's experiences of health and social care. This year we're proud to have heard from over 4,000 local residents from diverse communities. Thanks to everyone who has shared feedback with us, as this is vital to our work to combat health inequalities.**

We do more than just listen. Our responsibility as the voice of the public is extremely important, particularly as the NHS struggles with ever greater pressures, and vulnerable people struggle with the cost of living. By reporting what we hear to services, and working with them to ensure the changes they make are what people have told us they want, Healthwatch Solihull puts service users at the heart of decisions about local health and social care.

Our growing influence is demonstrated by our role in uncovering serious problems at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB), and we are continuing to press for accountability and to support improvement. We have also helped to drive important changes within Urgent Care. Our reports are now a recognised part of the quality monitoring process across the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System (BSOL ICS), showing how seriously our work is taken by health and social care leaders.

That we can undertake such a range of work on such a tight budget is testament to the dedication of our staff and volunteers. I would like to thank them on behalf of the entire Healthwatch Board, and also extend our gratitude to everyone who has supported us in our mission to ensure that everyone in Solihull can get the right care for them.

**"By reporting what we hear to services, and working with them to ensure the changes they make are what people have told us they want, Healthwatch Solihull puts service users at the heart of decisions about local health and social care."**

Richard Burden – Chair of Healthwatch Solihull



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# About us

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## Healthwatch Solihull is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and 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.

### Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



### Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



### Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who do not always have their voice heard
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change
- **Partnering** with care providers, government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent champion.



# Year in review

## Reaching out:

**4500 people**

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

**Over 300 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and access to services.

**And over 550 people** received signposting via our website.



## Making a difference to care:

We published

**4 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most recent report explored:

**Peoples experiences of the NHS prostate cancer pathway**



## Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

**13** outstanding volunteers who gave up their time to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.  
In 2023 - 24 we received

**£163,645.55**

We currently employ

**8 staff**

who help us carry out our work.





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# Your voice heard at a wider level

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**We collaborate with our partners at Healthwatch Birmingham to ensure the experiences of people in Solihull influence decisions made about services at **Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS)** level.**

This year we've worked across **Birmingham and Solihull** to achieve:



We investigated how the cost-of-living crisis was affecting people's physical and mental health in Birmingham and Solihull. Over 300 local residents told us about problems paying for healthcare costs like prescriptions and travel to appointments. We shared their experiences in a report to the local authorities and NHS, who committed to raising awareness of financial support available.

We played an important role in tackling problems with staff culture and patient safety at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB). Alongside making regular media appearances to raise issues people had told us about, we were core members of the scrutiny group for three independent reviews which have resulted in important changes to management and governance at UHB.



We heard concerns from users of NHS prostate cancer services in Birmingham and Solihull, who told us about lack of information about treatment options, slow pace of treatment and limited support after discharge. Following our report into these issues, UHB has now introduced a number of improvements including improving access to appointments, more holistic needs assessments and recruiting additional staff to support patients.



# Listening to your experiences

**Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why we make listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.**

# Experiences of the NHS prostate cancer pathway in Birmingham and Solihull

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull sought to understand people's experiences of using NHS prostate cancer services in Birmingham and Solihull by listening to their views of using screening services, care and treatment, and support services.

## Improvements people want to be made to prostate cancer services

- Increase education and early testing
- Support people waiting for diagnosis and/or treatment
- Improve access to appointments and reduce waiting times
- Better information on treatment options
- Improve psychological support and information/post treatment support
- Improve continuity and coordination of care, including NHS and private providers.
- Improve communication, empathy, and compassion
- Better information about treatments
- Involve more health care professionals in support groups.

## Key concerns with the treatment pathway were:

- Lack of information about treatment options and content of information leaving some people unprepared for the post treatment effects
- Timing of information making it difficult for some people to make informed decisions
- Slow pace of treatment, which meant that at the time of treatment for some people the stage of the cancer had changed, which can potentially impact outcomes
- Lack of post treatment support, especially after discharge
- Delays in follow-up appointments.
- Lack of information about side effects following treatment
- Lack of parity with other cancer services

Following the publication of this report we will publish a follow-up report highlighting evidence of actions that have been committed to by the commissioner and the provider of prostate cancer services across Birmingham and Solihull. We will require them to provide evidence to demonstrate that those changes have been made.

You can find the full original report on our website [here](#)

You can sign up to receive our newsletter [here](#) and receive our reports as they come out straight to your inbox



# How has the cost-of-living crisis affected the health and wellbeing of people in Birmingham and Solihull?

Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull investigated if the cost-of-living crisis was having a negative effect on physical and mental health, and whether some local residents were more negatively impacted than others.

## Key findings

The cost-of-living crisis has impacted the health and wellbeing of many residents; through inability to afford, for example, healthy food, transport to NHS appointments, the cost of prescriptions and dental treatment.

Our examination of the experiences of 314 Birmingham and Solihull residents, who completed an online questionnaire between December 2022 and June 2023, revealed that:

- a far higher proportion of people, than in a national poll, were avoiding the associated costs of NHS treatment and appointments
- for those people on disability benefits, a higher proportion than found nationally were avoiding taking up prescriptions, avoiding booking appointments due to the associated costs, avoiding the cost of dental treatment or paying for over-the-counter medications
- a third of our respondents were using Warm Spaces or anticipating doing so.

## Recommendations

In consideration of these findings, we called on:

1. Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (NHS BSOL) to:

- work with trusts to increase awareness of how to claim back the cost of transport to appointments, and increase office opening times to allow patients to claim these costs out of hours or at the weekend
- increase awareness of exemption from prescription charges and support for individuals
- communicate with GPs around understanding the affordability of over-the-counter medication and multiple prescriptions.

2. Local Authorities to continue to provide Warm Spaces in the Winter of 23/24.



“The Healthwatch Solihull report demonstrates the ongoing impact of the cost-of-living crisis for Solihull people. Our response last winter focused on supporting those most at risk through warm spaces and providing relevant information and support through Here2help.

As we prepare for next winter the findings of this report will be used to shape our local response through our Health and Wellbeing Strategy and our Prevention Strategy. We will continue to build on what we did last year, working with key partners to tackle the key areas highlighted in the report around isolation, warmth, food and mental health”

**Ruth Tennant, Director of Public Health, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council**

# How we have made a difference in the community

## Improving ICB complaints

**It is important people are well informed and feel like they are being listened to when they decide to make a complaint.**

We worked with Healthwatch Birmingham to raise issues that people were having when contacting Birmingham and Solihull ICB complaints team. People had reported poor communication and confusion about how the process worked.

We worked closely with the team at the ICB to feedback concerns and improve experiences for people who were contacting them, and we were quickly able to see the improvements made.

The ICB shared with us their complaints process and we were able to relay this to callers who were concerned, we were also able to chase up cases that had been missed. We also flagged that improvements could be made to their voicemail message, to ensure people were informed and not left confused. The ICB made these changes the same day. As a result, both Healthwatch Solihull and Healthwatch Birmingham have seen a decline in the amount of people reaching out to us about the ICB complaints process.



## Urgent Care in Solihull

**As a result of our report, and the actions the ICB have implemented, patients and the public should experience the following improvements:**

- Improved communication and engagement following the implementation of a comprehensive stakeholder engagement programme to ensure that patients voices inform the development of the urgent treatment centre strategy
- Improved continuation of care and communication between providers, following a communications plan being developed
- Improved signposting for alternative access to avoid unnecessary attendance to A&E or other parts of the urgent care pathways following work undertaken via Locality Hubs and integrated same day urgent care
- Improved awareness of Solihull Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) following ongoing collaboration with UHB
- In our original report, patients reported concerns around distance of services and the costs of travel. The ICB have committed to a 'Joint Forward Plan' over the next five years which will 'radically shift the way health and care is delivered – focusing on preventing ill-health while integrating services so that healthcare is provided as close to people's homes as possible'



# Hearing from all communities

**Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.**

**This year we have reached different communities by:**

- Attending job centres and education settings
- Attending support groups embedded within areas of deprivation
- Visiting residential care homes and supported living settings

## Increasing feedback relating to maternity care

To increase feedback heard relating to maternity care in Solihull, we liaised directly with the Director of Midwifery at UHB and arranged visits to the antenatal clinic at Solihull Hospital.

This has increased our feedback related to maternity services in hospitals and within primary care settings. Examples of what people told us include:

### What have people told us about maternity care?

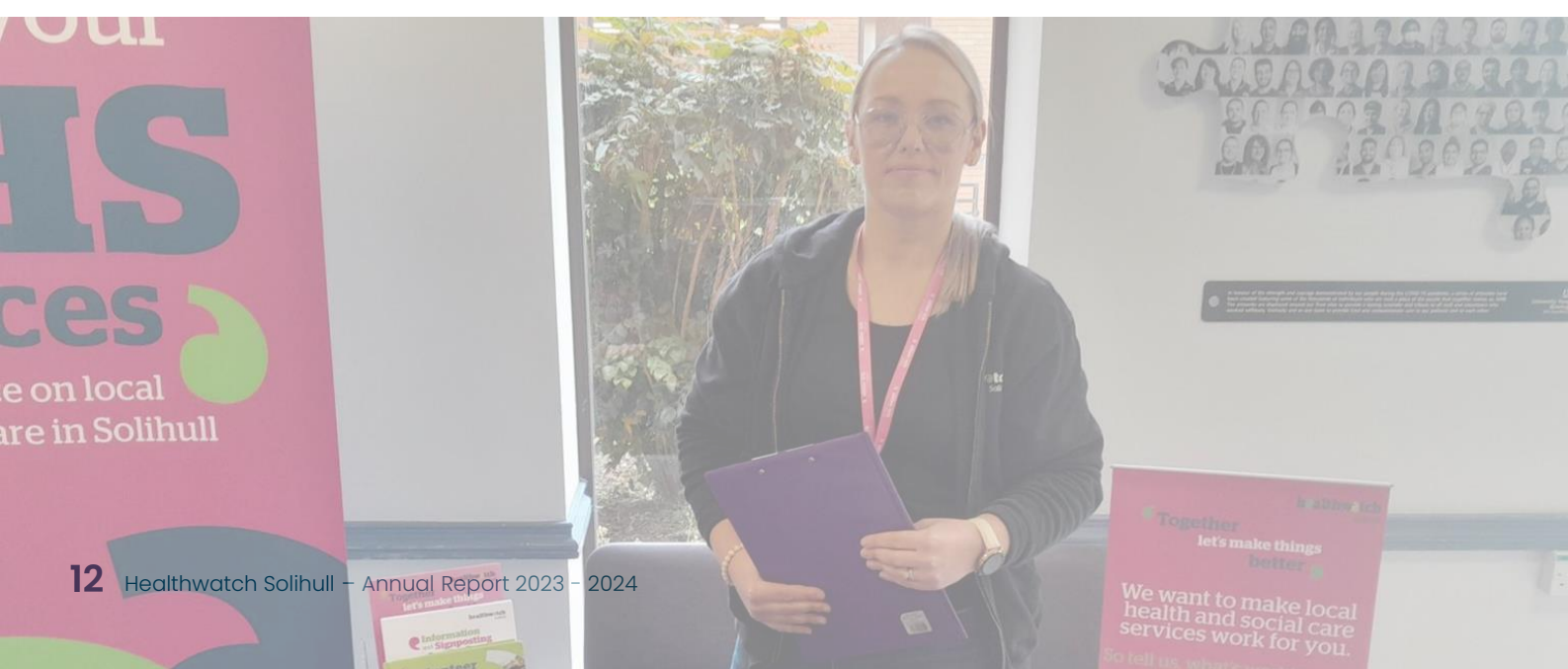
- "I received good maternity care from the staff at Solihull Hospital."
- "The communication was not great; I never met the midwife due to these issues."
- "Wait times are long but midwives are lovely."
- "I lost my baby; I was left on a ward with mothers and their new babies and sent home the same day."

## Giving people in supported living a voice

We recognised that people living in residential care homes, supported living and nursing homes may have less access to our feedback platforms. This year we built several relationships which has allowed us to go into settings and give people the option to have their say.

To ensure that we hear from all communities in Solihull we worked with supported living accommodation providers across the borough visiting supported living sites in Chelmsley Wood, Olton and Shirley.

We have established good relationships with service providers including Solihull Community Housing, Josiah Mason Trust and Sunhaven Care Home. We have attended resident's meetings, community events they host and most recently a summer garden party. We have been able to hear the experiences of people who we are less likely to meet out in the community by bringing our services directly to them.







## Advice and information

**If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.**

**This year we've helped people by:**

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Helping people access NHS dentistry
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost-of-living crisis



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# How we've been able to help people get the care they need

It's essential that people have clear, accurate communication about their care. Our team are able to have an impact daily, by offering people information and signposting over the phone, online and face to face.

"I haven't seen a Dentist in almost 4 years, I've been too afraid since Covid happened and I recently found out I am no longer registered at my Dental practice and they won't see me anyway. I need to go for a check-up and so does my son, can you help me to register? I don't know what I'm doing anymore."

We were able to reassure this lady of the registration process and that they could be seen at any practice taking on new NHS patients. We took the time to talk her through the process of using the NHS Find a Dentist website and informed her that if they need urgent dental care they can contact NHS 111.

The lady was relieved and very grateful that this would be an easy thing for her to sort out and later told us:

*"Thank you so much you have really eased my anxiety and I feel so much better what a wonderful service."*

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## Supporting people to advocate for themselves and understand complaints processes

Health and social care services all have their own internal complaints procedures, but people often come to us unsure on the first steps they need to take, and how these procedures work.

People often contact us with ongoing issues that are not being rectified, and these issues are often delaying care as well as affecting individuals' health and wellbeing. Often, the right step is to make a formal complaint, but we have been told this can be confusing and people struggle to advocate for themselves without feeling fully informed.

When people need extra support, we will often talk people through the steps, and where possible we will be clear on what they should expect next. We have called on services to make their complaints processes clearer and more readily available.

### Testimonials

"Thank you so much for reassuring me so I felt confident to make a complaint. I spoke to the practice manager and was able to list my concerns, this also lead to me getting the correct appointment I needed."

"I just want to say thank you so much, I had no idea I could contact another medical professional at 111 or my Pharmacy to push through a referral. I now have a date to be seen at the eye hospital and I owe it to Healthwatch."



# Volunteering

**We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.**

## **This year our volunteers:**

- Visited communities to promote Healthwatch Solihull and what we have to offer
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Signposted people to services and provided information



**“Volunteering for Healthwatch Solihull has helped me to build my confidence, meet new people and develop empathy for those using healthcare services.**

**The team at Healthwatch have always been understanding, listened to me and made me feel safe at every stage of my volunteering journey. I have felt I can openly speak to Georgina about any struggles I may have.”**

*Healthwatch Solihull Volunteer*

**We would like to say a big thank you to all the volunteers who gave their time over the last year. Volunteers attended almost 50 events with us across the whole borough this year and helped us to reach more Solihull residents than ever before. We are always looking for more volunteers to join our lovely volunteering team. To find out more please see details below.**

## Do you want to help to improve health and social care services?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.



[www.healthwatchsolihull.org.uk](http://www.healthwatchsolihull.org.uk)



**0808 196 3912**



[enquiries@healthwatchsolihull.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchsolihull.org.uk)





# Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

## Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£163,645.55	Expenditure on pay	£126,613.81
Additional income	0	Non-pay expenditure	£7,060.63
		Office and management fees	£25,672.64
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£163,645.55</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£159,347.08</b>

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## Next steps

**Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.**

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

**Our top three priorities for the next year are to:**

1. ensure the Mental Health, Community and Acute Provider Collaboratives use patient feedback in all aspects of service development.
2. increase our work with communities who experience the biggest inequalities.
3. hear more from Solihull residents about their experience of social care and use this to help improve services.





## Statutory statements

**Healthwatch Solihull, Enterprise Centre, 1 Hedingham Grove,  
Solihull, B37 7TP**

**Healthwatch Solihull uses the Healthwatch Trademark when  
undertaking our statutory activities as covered by  
the licence agreement.**

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# The way we work

## **Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making**

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 11 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the board met formally four times and held discussions on important health and social care issues.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

## **Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences**

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. It will be published on our website and distributed to our mailing list and stakeholders.

## **Taking people's experiences to decision-makers**

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to several boards and committees. These include Solihull Place Committee, Solihull Health and Wellbeing Board and Solihull Safeguarding Adults Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System. For example, we share collated information from Healthwatch Solihull and Healthwatch Birmingham at the Integrated Care Board and Integrated Care Partnership and highlight patient insight and experience at their Quality Committee. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

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## Enter and view

This year, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

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## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Solihull is represented on the Solihull Health and Wellbeing Board by Andy Cave, Chief Executive. During 2023/24 he has effectively carried out this role by championing the involvement of local people in decisions and supporting the board to understand citizens' experiences.


Healthwatch Solihull is represented in the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System by:

- Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Partnership – Richard Burden (Chair)
- Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board – Andy Cave (CEO)
- Solihull Place Committee – Andy Cave (CEO).

Healthwatch Solihull

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