



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Birmingham

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"The impact that local Healthwatch have is vitally important. Healthwatch are empowering their communities to share their experiences. They're changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people's views are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our Chair

At Healthwatch Birmingham, our priority remains clear: to listen to the people of Birmingham and ensure their voices influence the health and social care services they rely on.

Over the past year, we have supported individuals and families through our information and signposting services, helping them understand their rights and navigate complex care pathways. From phone calls to face-to-face information giving, our team has provided guidance that has made a tangible difference to people's lives.

Through in-depth investigations, we've explored how well people feel involved in their hospital discharge and what it's like to receive care at home. These reports highlight the real-life experiences of service users and carers, and our evidence is driving improvements in these crucial areas. We've also worked to improve access to NHS services — including pharmacy provision, mental health support, GP referrals, and the assessment pathway for ADHD and ASD.

Our evidence-based reports have helped influence decision-making at the highest levels. Many of our recommendations have become part of ongoing quality improvement processes within the Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System. But we also know there is a lot more to do. So, we continue to press for change where it matters to ensure that no one is left behind. Our collaboration with other local Healthwatch has strengthened our voice and amplified the issues that matter most to communities.

None of this would be possible without the tireless commitment of our staff and volunteers. On behalf of the Board, I thank them for ensuring that the people of Birmingham are truly heard.



“Health and care work best when shaped by the people they serve.”

Richard Burden, Chair, Healthwatch Birmingham

About us

Healthwatch Birmingham is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information.



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

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



Our values are:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

We've heard and supported more than eleven thousand people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 11 staff, and our work is supported by 68 volunteers.

Reaching out:



11,333 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1,980 people came to us for personalised clear information on topics such as mental health support and finding an NHS dentist.

Championing your voice:



We published three investigation reports about the improvements people would like to see in the referral process from general practice to secondary care, pharmacy and neurodevelopmental assessments. And four impact reports in pharmacy, community mental health, the NHS prostate cancer pathway and reducing inequalities through travel support.

Our biggest impact came from the Transport Support at Birmingham Children's Hospital report — it showed clear, wide-reaching results in helping reduce health inequalities and making it easier for those most in need to get to their appointments.

Statutory funding:



We're funded by Birmingham City Council. In 2024/2025 we received £436,105, which is at the same level as last year.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Birmingham. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We helped reduce missed children's appointments by our report enabling travel support for families living in Birmingham's most deprived communities.



Our findings led UHB to improve prostate cancer care with more support workers, holistic assessments, and clearer post-treatment guidance.



Summer

We highlighted long waits for autism diagnoses, prompting new school pilots, family resources, and improved assessment coordination.



We escalated recurring issues from inquiries to the ICB, PALS, and advocacy teams, helping drive service improvements and changes to health and care processes.



Autumn

We helped reduce mental health wait times, improve personalised care plans, and expand access to talking therapies and community support.



We raised wheelchair access concerns at Heartlands Hospital, leading to 21 new wheelchairs, and plans for more, improving mobility support for elderly patients.



Winter

Our work supported the Pharmacy First rollout to 96% of pharmacies, boosting uptake, referrals, and access through targeted outreach and staff training



We influenced Birmingham City Council's residential care changes by reviewing the health impact assessment, helping ensure proposed service changes consider real patient needs and outcomes.



Working together for change

We've worked closely with the NHS Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board (ICB) to make sure people's experiences of care are heard and acted on at system level.

This year, our partnership with the ICB has helped drive meaningful changes across the health and social care system to improve services for local people.

Working together for change:



Our relationship with the ICB is key to improving local health services. As an independent member, we bring a strong patient voice to decision-making. We don't just share feedback—we work to make sure change happens. By working closely with the ICB, we've used their role in bringing the system together to increase our impact.

The big conversation:



We've agreed with the ICB that our reports will feed into their quality structures—ensuring action is taken when people share their experiences. As a member of the ICB's Quality Committee and System Quality Group (SQG), we help shape priorities and improvements. This means the ICB can support joined-up conversations, hold services to account, and track progress that we can share back with local communities.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



Our partnership with the ICB has grown into a powerful driver for change. A key example is our discharge report, which brought Trusts, NHS England, and the CQC in a single conversation led by the ICB SQG to agree clear actions—like better discharge planning, improved coordination between services, and tackling inequalities. With the ICB leading this work through the SQG, we're ensuring progress is tracked and real improvements are made for local people.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

Here are some examples of our work in Birmingham this year:

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



Hearing personal experiences and their impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

Men in Birmingham on the NHS prostate cancer pathway now receive better support. After we shared experiences from men who felt unprepared and lacked post-treatment care, University Hospitals Birmingham introduced holistic needs assessments, recruited support workers, and improved access to specialist nurses. These changes help more people understand their treatment options and feel supported.

Getting services to involve the public



By involving local people, services help improve care for all.

We worked with NHS Birmingham and Solihull to make sure families were directly involved in shaping autism and ADHD services. After parents told us they felt unheard during long waits for support, the NHS listened, improved communication, and co-designed changes with families—ensuring services better reflect the needs and voices of the community.

Improving care over time



Change takes time. We work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.

Since 2022, we've worked to improve the GP referral process by sharing people's experiences of delays and poor communication. Our 2024 report shaped ongoing conversations with NHS Birmingham and Solihull ICB, hospital trusts, and GP networks. While change is slow, we're seeing gradual improvements to referral tracking and communication. We continue to push for clearer updates and better coordination, so people aren't left in the dark while waiting for care.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Listening to your experiences

Tackling gaps in prostate cancer care

Last year, we gathered feedback from people using the NHS prostate cancer pathway in Birmingham and Solihull.

While many described receiving good care, others raised concerns about delays in diagnosis, limited information about treatment options, and a lack of post-treatment support.

What did we do?

We gathered feedback from 93 people through surveys and interviews. We shared our findings with University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB) and Birmingham and Solihull ICB.

UHB responded by outlining actions to address key issues, including improving access to diagnosis, increasing the number of Holistic Needs Assessments, and enhancing post-treatment support. We requested evidence of implementation and impact.

Key things we heard:



68%

were not offered support for side effects

8%

received a Holistic Needs Assessment

48%

said healthcare professionals involved them in making treatment decisions

What difference did this make?

UHB reported actions including increased diagnostic capacity, recruitment of specialist staff, more holistic assessments, and improved support services. They also introduced processes to encourage patients to raise concerns and access information. While some feedback suggests further improvement is needed, these changes are intended to enhance care across the prostate cancer pathway

Listening to your experiences

Improving access to community pharmacies for minor health needs

Last year, we gathered feedback from people using NHS community pharmacies in Birmingham and Solihull.

Most were satisfied, but some raised concerns about privacy, awareness of services, and a preference for GP referrals over those from receptionists.

What did we do?

In early 2024, we gathered feedback from over 460 people about their experiences with NHS community pharmacies in Birmingham and Solihull. While most were satisfied, others raised concerns about privacy, awareness of services, pharmacist expertise, and consultation room availability. We published a report highlighting these barriers and shared it with the ICB.

In response, the ICB committed to action. In February 2025, we published a follow-up report to assess progress on Pharmacy First uptake, staff training, translation services, and public awareness campaigns.

Key things we heard:



17%

were aware that pharmacists can prescribe some medicines independently

42%

preferred a GP appointment over using a pharmacy for clinical advice

35%

cited lack of private spaces as a barrier to using pharmacies

What difference did this make?

Public awareness has improved through leaflets, radio ads, school outreach and social media. Pharmacies now have greater access to translation services, and the ICB has committed to ongoing communication and integration efforts

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Birmingham. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, our community engagement officers have reached different communities by:

- Reaching asylum seekers at a local drop-in centre.
- Holding listening events in food banks and warm spaces.
- Reaching people through cancer awareness events in partnership with the ICB.



Hearing from all communities

Reaching isolated communities through warm spaces

We worked with the Refugee and Migrant Centre to plan a dedicated engagement event for these communities.

What difference did this make?

These visits allowed us to hear directly from people facing financial hardship or isolation and offer information and signposting to services they may not otherwise access.

Breaking language barriers in primary care

We engaged with communities at Saathi House and Sparkhill Medical Centre where many people do not speak English as their first language.

What difference did this make?

By listening to their experiences, we helped raise awareness of the communication challenges they face. This insight is supporting more inclusive engagement approaches.

Listening to young people with additional needs

We visited universities and Queen Alexandra College, where we spoke with students including a class of 30 young people with additional needs.

What difference did this make?

This created a space for underrepresented young people to share their views on health and care. It also enabled us to provide tailored information and support, helping ensure their voices are reflected in local services.

Information and signposting

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 1,980 people have reached out to us for information, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Giving tailored information through phone, online, and in person.
- Helping people understand their care rights.
- Supporting access to NHS and urgent services.



Helping a resident access NHS dental care

A local resident contacted us after being removed from their NHS dentist's list due to missed appointments during a long recovery from COVID and a new diagnosis of ME/CFS.

They were struggling to find a new NHS dentist and had contacted multiple practices without success. We provided clear information on how to find local NHS dental services and where to get urgent care if needed.

As a result, they felt more confident navigating the system and appreciated the support they received.

Supporting a parent through the ADHD/ASD assessment process

A parent contacted us for help understanding the ADHD/ASD assessment process. Her son was already on a waiting list via school, but she wasn't sure which pathway he was on or what to expect.

We explained the different local routes for neurodevelopmental assessments and provided information on who to contact to confirm her son's referral status.

As a result, she felt better equipped to navigate the process and take next steps with confidence.

Providing safeguarding information for a family member in a care home

A caller contacted us with concerns about her brother, who had recently been moved from home care into a care home without her knowledge while she was away. Since the move, he had been hospitalised several times; unlike when he was being cared for at home.

We provided information on how to raise safeguarding concerns and how to access independent advocacy support.

As a result, she now feels more informed about her rights and how to take steps to ensure her brother's wellbeing.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 1,056 hours to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Collected experiences, and supported their communities to share their views, at 165 Birmingham community events.
- Contributed to consultation responses, supported research surveys, and attended an equality scoring panel meeting.
- Assisted the local ICB by analysing and providing feedback on their new web pages.



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to raising awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care – while also gaining skills and experience to support their own development

“Volunteering with Healthwatch Birmingham & Solihull has been a rewarding experience. It’s given me the opportunity to listen to diverse voices, contribute to improving health and social care services, and feel more connected to my community. I’m proud to be part of a team that values inclusion, impact, and real change.”

Watch Matilda share her experience of volunteering with us in [this short video](#).



Matilda

“Volunteering with Healthwatch Birmingham & Solihull has been one of the best decisions I’ve made in rebuilding my career. It’s expanded my experience, developed essential skills, and deepened my understanding of the public’s role in healthcare. Despite initial apprehension after moving from another country, the experience has boosted my confidence and helped me grow personally and professionally. The training and support from Healthwatch staff has been invaluable, fostering a sense of inclusion and making this a truly transformative experience.”

Find out what Sonia gained from volunteering with us in [this short video](#).



Sonia

Be part of the change.

If you’ve felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk



0800 652 5278



volunteering@healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk

Showcasing volunteer impact

More stories from those making a difference

Further quotes that shine a light on how volunteering strengthens our community—and supports personal growth too

"My volunteering with Healthwatch Birmingham & Solihull has been incredibly valuable, offering insights into healthcare from the care receiver's perspective. It provided networking opportunities and broadened my understanding of the sector, while also fuelling my passion for improving healthcare outcomes. This experience has been enriching and will support my future career in healthcare".

Soroush



"Volunteering with Healthwatch Birmingham & Solihull during my Masters in Public Health has been an enriching experience, both personally and professionally. It allowed me to engage with diverse communities, gather valuable feedback on health and social care services, and contribute to meaningful change. This role helped me refine my communication and organisation skills and strengthened my commitment to public health. I highly encourage every student to volunteer; it's a great way to give back while gaining valuable career experience."

Vidhya



We are deeply saddened by the loss of Mustak, a long-standing volunteer who gave ten years of dedicated service to Healthwatch Birmingham. Mustak was a highly valued member of our team, and we are incredibly grateful for the time, insight, and compassion he brought to everything he did. His contributions helped shape our work and made a real difference to the communities we serve. We extend our heartfelt thanks and deepest condolences to Mustak's family.



Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Birmingham City Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£436,105	Expenditure on pay	£381,663
Additional income	£20,000	Non-pay expenditure	£30,998
		Office and management fee	£45,778
Total income	£456,105	Total Expenditure	£458,439

Additional income is broken down into:

£20,000 from Birmingham City Council to support our alignment with the developing localities in Birmingham.

Finance and future priorities

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:

1. Tackling health inequalities
2. Improving access to Health and Social Care
3. Amplifying public voices in decision making.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Birmingham, Cobalt Square, Hagley Road, Birmingham, B16 8QG.

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

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of ten members who 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 2024/25, 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 2024/25, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended 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. We will publish it on our website and share with stakeholders.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

All providers responded to our requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

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

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to a number of boards and committees, these include Birmingham Place Committee, Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board and Birmingham 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 Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull at the ICB 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.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Birmingham is represented on the Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board by Andy Cave, Chief Executive. During 2024/25, 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 Birmingham 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)
- Birmingham Place Committee – Andy Cave (CEO)

Statutory statements

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

This table highlights work that may not be featured elsewhere in the annual report. It captures key projects, service improvements, and how people's feedback has shaped care in Birmingham.

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.

Project/activity	Outcomes
Access and Navigation	
GP to Hospital Referrals	Highlighted referral delays; promoted digital system improvements and better primary-secondary care communication.
Urgent Treatment Centres in Birmingham and Solihull	Shared three years of patient feedback to support improved UTC access, better signposting, and public understanding of when and how to use them.
Access to NHS Community Pharmacies	Raised awareness of service barriers; informed the ICB strategy; foundation for Pharmacy First expansion.
Think Pharmacy First (Impact Report)	96% pharmacy sign-up; 107,000+ consultations; new PCN engagement leads; outreach campaigns and translated materials.
Transport Support for Children's Hospital Appointments	More families supported with transport; WNB rate reduced from 22% to 4%; improved appointment attendance in deprived areas.
Diagnosis & Specialist Support	
Neurodevelopmental Assessment and Diagnostic Pathway	PINS school pilot launched; improved diagnostic coordination; new resources to help families "wait well".
Prostate Cancer Pathway (Impact Report)	Holistic needs assessments introduced; recruitment of support staff; improved post-treatment communication and empathy training.
Community Mental Health Services (Impact Report)	Wait times reduced; DIALOG+ personalised care plans introduced; training on learning disabilities.

Statutory statements

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Policy and System Influence	
Healthwatch Birmingham and Solihull NHS Long-Term Plan response	Feedback shaped how the plan addresses prevention, access, and integrated care across Birmingham and Solihull, reflecting public priorities.
Change NHS: The 10-year health plan for England	Highlighted key improvements needed in community-based care, digital access, and personalised support to better reflect Birmingham residents' needs.
UK Parliament's call for evidence regarding COVID-19 lessons	Shared local insights on health inequalities and communication gaps, ensuring Birmingham's experiences helped shape national pandemic response recommendations.
Proposed changes to the guidance on providing advocacy	Emphasised the need for accessible, two-way communication in advocacy, helping ensure people are empowered to speak up and seek support.

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