

Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Halton
Annual Report 2021–22



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Message from our Chair



Kath Parker
Healthwatch Halton Chair

I am delighted to present to you our Annual Report for 2021–22.

The last twelve months have yet again been eventful and challenging for all of us involved at Healthwatch Halton. The Pandemic continues to be an influencing factor on the work we have been undertaking albeit from the perspective of “getting back to normal” and doing our very best to influence the development of the Public Voice in the new Integrated Care System now under development.

Much of the last year has been dealing with your comments around access to Primary Care, Dental and other services as we begin to see services returning to 'normal'. Almost a quarter of calls we received were about access to NHS dentistry. These concerns and the results from our online 'Big Dental Check-up' survey were presented to the Halton Health & Wellbeing Board and raised with the NHS England Regional Commissioning Team for Dental Services. This has resulted in a commitment from Halton Health and Wellbeing Board to continue to closely monitor access to Dental Care and ensure that your experiences are acted upon in any developments going forward.

The challenges will continue as Health Services attempt to deal with the backlog of work and so Healthwatch Halton have been closely involved in the Development of the structures for Integrated Care Systems.

We have established good relationships with the local Integrated Care Board and have a place in that structure to make sure local views form an integral part of the future. Our place within the Integrated Care System is now clear and local voices will be heard at the highest level. We also remain closely involved with our local acute providers of healthcare so that your issues and experiences are clear to them.

Despite the challenges of the Pandemic, the staff team have continued to be involved in engagement with local groups, and the public, online and more recently have restarted some face-to-face engagement. They have attended local meetings organised for older people and made contact using technology with other local groups.

We have continued to embrace social media across various platforms, helping raise awareness while also working in partnership with many community organisations.

The voice of Halton Residents has been so valuable in feeding back experiences of accessing General Practice in recent months and we will continue to feed these views to commissioners to ensure that the direction of GP care meets the needs of the public.

During the coming year we will continue to do our best to ensure that we understand and

communicate your views and I want to convey my thanks to all the staff and volunteers at Healthwatch Halton for the extremely important work they continue to do on your behalf.

I hope you enjoy reading more about our work during the past year in this Annual Report. I would like to thank to our staff team, Advisory Board members, volunteers and everyone that has supported us this year, for ensuring that people's voices continue to be at the heart of planning and decision-making in Halton.

Many thanks



Kath Parker

Healthwatch Advisory Board Chair



“Healthwatch are an active member of NHS Halton CCG, its Quality Committee and Governing Body, offering an insightful and meaningful view about the needs and experience of local health and social care services, from the people of Halton who use them. Healthwatch have made these views known to those involved in the commissioning and scrutiny of care services, and indeed have actively sought views where there have been concerns raised in regard to the quality, safety or patient experience of those services, in order to support improvement.

I have always regarded their reports and recommendations about how those services could or should be improved to be informative, balanced and clearly articulate and enable the reader to hear the views, opinions and experiences of the people of Halton within them. Promoting and supporting the involvement of people in the monitoring, commissioning and provision of local health and social care services is a key strength of Healthwatch Halton. When developing, redesigning or changing services, Healthwatch have actively provided information and advice to the public about accessing health and social care services and the options available to them or any changes to those options.

The time, energy and commitment of the Healthwatch Halton staff and volunteers is to be commended. The organisation demonstrates a positive culture, committed to improving the lives of the people of Halton and this is to be commended.

I wish them continued success”.

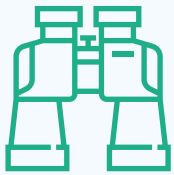
Michelle Creed, Chief Nurse, NHS Halton CCG



About us

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Halton is your local health and social care champion. From Appleton to Windmill Hill and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other 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

Our vision is a society where the voice of the local people is listened to and all we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission

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



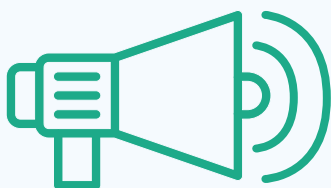
Our values

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't 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 advocate.

Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

Reaching out



862 people

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

65,339 people

accessed information and advice online or contacted us for clear advice and information about topics **such as mental health, COVID-19 and dentistry**

Making a difference to care



We published

4 reports

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

Our report that attracted the most attention was

The Big Dental Check-up

which highlighted the struggles people have **accessing NHS Dental Services.**

Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

10 volunteers

who gave up **30 days** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received

£122,977

We also employ

4 staff (1 F/T and 3 P/T)

who help us carry out this work.

How we've made a difference throughout the year

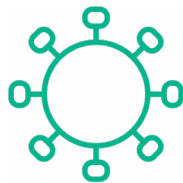
Spring & Summer



We ran a series of 8 online 'Tuesday Chat' sessions highlighting the work of local NHS and voluntary services, informing the public how they could access them.



We engaged with almost 500 residents to get their experiences of local vaccination services. This work helped influence communication messages encouraging vaccine uptake.



We provided advice and information on COVID-19 vaccinations and shared information on how and where local residents could get their booster jabs.



We supported the Healthwatch #BecauseWeAllCare campaign which saw 54,000 people come forward to tell us about issues they faced with services.

Autumn & Winter



People told us about long delays for routine NHS dental treatment and a lack of dentists accepting new NHS patients.

Our dental report, based on the views of 174 people was presented to the Halton Health & Wellbeing Board which will have a focus on NHS dental services in the coming year.

Our work also supported Healthwatch England's national campaign to #FixNHSDentistry



We distributed hundreds of 'GP Access' cards to local organisations and venues to raise awareness of the rights of people who have no fixed address or identification to register with a GP practice.



Our volunteers reviewed the accessibility and the ease of use of local GP practice websites and we shared the report with NHS Halton CCG who commission GP practices.

Listening to your experiences

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



Highlighting a shortage of NHS dental care

Thanks to people sharing their experiences of local NHS dental services we have been able to highlight the issue with the Halton Health & Wellbeing Board and NHS England.

Almost 1 in 4 of the enquiries we've dealt with during 2021–2022 have been about NHS Dental Services.

During July and August 2021, we contacted all local dental practices to get an accurate picture of appointment availability and waiting times. None were taking on new NHS patients; with one practice telling us they had a waiting list of more than 500 people and wouldn't be expecting to see any of those until late 2022.

We ran a short online questionnaire to get feedback on NHS dental services for Halton. 176 people took and told us about:

- A lack of local dental practices accepting new NHS patients.
- Out of date and inaccurate information on the **'find a dentist'** page on the NHS website.
- being removed from their existing dental practice list as an NHS patient.
- Issues with the Cheshire & Merseyside Dental Helpline.



43% of people

we heard from had been unable to book a routine appointment in the last 12 months.

Our Big Dental Check-up report was shared with NHS England and presented to the Halton Health and Wellbeing Board.

Recommendations in the report included a request for oral health to be adopted as a priority by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

What difference did this make

Our public feedback and reports were sent to Healthwatch England to help build up a national picture. In October 2021 it called for reform of NHS dentistry, co-signing a letter, with the British Dental Association, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for NHS dentistry to be accessible and affordable for everyone, quoting public feedback gathered from local Healthwatch across the country.

We have joined our neighbouring Healthwatch in meeting with the NHS England dentistry team in the North West, to raise our concerns. NHS England have explained why some of the issues have occurred, helping us to better understand the system. NHS England are currently working towards resolving these issues and dental contracts are being reviewed. We will continue to work together using regular meetings and contact to raise concerns and provide feedback.

Three ways we have made a difference for the community

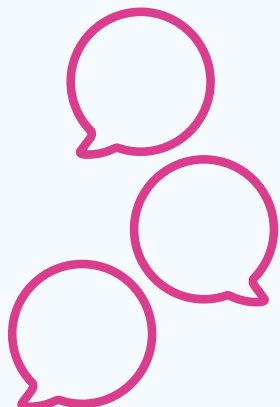
Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.



Getting to the heart of the issue

It's important for the NHS and social care to hear experiences people have with their local services as this provides a deeper understanding than using data alone.

We received feedback that St Helen's & Knowsley NHS Teaching Hospital's phlebotomy appointment booking system was hard to find on the Trust website. The Trust added a button to the home page of the website to improve patient experience.



Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

We gave information to local NHS Trusts about Halton Sensory Services to enable them to distribute it through the audiology departments so patients could be aware of the community and practical help available after diagnosis.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.

Last year we published our report highlighting that some young people's expectations of mental health support aren't always met and there can be barriers faced to access services.

We are continuing to work with service commissioners to ensure young people have easy access to help and support when needed, with the report recommendations forming part of the action plan for the Halton Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Partnership Board for the next 3 years.

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, help on how to make a complaint or choosing a care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This last year we've helped and supported people with:

- Information on COVID-19 and accessing vaccinations in the community and for the housebound
- Accessing NHS Dentistry and emergency treatment
- Helping people to access the services they need
- Registering with a GP practice
- Requests for social care assessment support
- Referrals to voluntary sector organisations for support for carers, mental health, dementia, benefits and cancer
- Requests for NHS complaints advocacy support
- Care Home concerns



Support for carer to get second vaccination

During the Covid-19 lockdown we were contacted by a man who had come over from Australia to act as a carer for his elderly parents. He had received one covid vaccination in Australia prior to arriving in the UK but would require the second vaccination before he returned to Australia. He had struggled to find a GP practice that would let him register as a patient. This raised the issue of how he would be able to complete the two required doses.

We contacted the patient inclusion team at Whiston Hospital who were able to assist very quickly, without the need for the patient to be registered at a GP. They arranged a date for the second vaccination dose, based on the first dose criteria in Australia.

Following the call we were also able to provide the caller with a 'GP access' card which they will be able to use to access GP services for the remainder of their stay in the UK. We also signposted the caller to a number of other local agencies to support the whole family as a result of this one call: AGE UK Mid Mersey, Alzheimer's Society, Halton Carers Centre and Widnes and Runcorn Cancer Support Centre.



Sorting out access to a GP

We were contacted by a man in his 70's who lived alone. He had an operation on his ankle several months ago and was suffering pain, swelling and redness. He was struggling to do everyday tasks and to walk. He had stopped going out and relied on a neighbour to shop for him. He tried for a few weeks to get a GP appointment but always missed them, despite calling early. Contacting his GP practice later on in the day they advised he call NHS 111 for help.

He rang 111 and explained his symptoms. He received a call back from an NHS 111 doctor at 3am the following day. The doctor appeared not to have read his notes and diagnosed arthritis and told him to contact his GP. This left him unsure what to do as the reason he called 111 was because he could not get a GP appointment. He rang us for support.

We gave the patient details of e-consult and the local Urgent Treatment Centre, but he worried how he would get to it and really wanted to speak to a GP. We completed an e-consult form with him over the phone, as he did not use computers or smart phones at all. We also found the form far from straight forward to complete, as it did attempt to return us back to NHS 111, but with some additional notes to the GP we were able to send the request and the patient then received a call back from his GP. We were also able to contact the hospital on behalf of the patient and arrange for an earlier appointment with his consultant, as he was still struggling to walk.



Advocacy Hub support

The Advocacy Hub service sits alongside Healthwatch Halton and referrals to it are often received via Healthwatch Halton, and similarly, information and signposting advice is given to advocacy clients through Healthwatch Halton, providing a holistic service to every person who contacts the service.

Healthwatch Halton provides the NHS Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) for Halton. The advocacy service helps people to understand how the NHS complaints process works, and supports them where needed.



NHS Independent Complaints Advisory Service (ICAS)

ICAS offers telephone, online, and face-to-face support to help the people of Halton to progress complaints in relation to any NHS service provision provided at hospitals, GP Practices, dentists, pharmacies, opticians, and nursing homes.

During the past year:

973 people accessed information about the Healthwatch Halton Advocacy Hub on our website, with 241 accessing information on ICAS. The Advocacy Self Help Information Pack was downloaded 117 times.

85 people contacted Healthwatch for information on raising a concern or making a formal complaint about their treatment or care. These were provided with information to progress their complaint themselves, or signposted for further support.

24 people required practical support from our ICAS Advocate to help them through the NHS complaints process, an increase of 50% on the previous year.

Statutory Advocacy Services

In addition to ICAS, the Advocacy Hub provides statutory advocacy services for Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA), RPR/DoLS Statutory Advocacy, Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) and Care Act Advocacy.

The advocacy service supports clients with Acquired Brain Injury, Mental Health Conditions, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Dementia, Learning Disability or having substantial difficulty and deemed to have no one appropriate or un-befriended. Where non statutory advocacy referrals are received the advocacy service will provide information and signposting to other sources of support for individuals where relevant and appropriate, encouraging service users to self-advocate wherever possible.

Over the last year, the service has seen a large increase in most areas of service provision.

There has been an increase in complex cases as well as new cases, have an ongoing caseload, meaning the Advocacy team has had a very busy and challenging year.

- 75 RPR cases (2021= 64) = 17% increase in case numbers
- 22 DoLS referrals (2021= 8)= 175% increase in case numbers
- 59 Care Act referrals (2021= 52) = 13% increase in case numbers
- 63 IMCA referrals (2021 = 64)= 1.5% decrease in case numbers
- 153 IMHA (2021= 184) = 15% decrease in case numbers

Healthwatch Halton Advocacy Hub holds the Advocacy Quality Performance Mark (QPM) Award.



The QPM is a quality assurance assessment for providers of independent advocacy in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Advocacy Quality Performance Mark (QPM) is only awarded to organisations who can demonstrate that they provide excellent services in line with QPM standards and the advocacy charter.

Volunteers

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

This year our volunteers:

- Assisted in a review of local GP websites – checking on the information they provide and assessing their accessibility.
- Have taken part in training opportunities including Enter & View, suicide awareness, GDPR, Equality and Diversity, and Cyber Security.
- Continued to help with the local volunteering efforts supporting those who were self-isolating.
- Offered feedback on the Quality Accounts and Equality and Diversity Assessments of local NHS Trusts.
- Given their comments on a number of consultation documents including the Halton SEND Strategy.





Owen

“Volunteering with Healthwatch is a great way to bolster my CV and job opportunities but most of all I genuinely enjoy helping out and seeing what I do make a difference”.



Maureen

“I have found volunteering for Healthwatch Halton has given me an opportunity to learn more about what impacts the lives of those around me, and to be able to contribute to making a positive difference”.



Smita

“Helping to improve to improve people's experiences of health and care is very close to my heart, as I had problems couple of years ago and wish I knew about Healthwatch then. Volunteering with Healthwatch I feel content that we are looking after people like us who want their experiences listened to and acted on”.



Do you feel inspired?

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



www.healthwatchhalton.co.uk/volunteer



0300 777 6543



volunteer@healthwatchhalton.co.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.

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£122,977	Staff costs	£93,253
Additional funding	£4,700	Operational costs	£6,399
balance b/f from 2020/21	4,350	Support and administration	£23,708
Total income	£132,027	Total expenditure	£123,360

Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. 'Return to normal' – Access to primary care services, backlogs for treatment, health inequalities.
2. A review of the SEND provision for Halton
3. Accessible Information Standard – A review of local NHS services

Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that's because of where you live, income or race.

Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Halton,
Suite 5 Foundry House, Widnes Business Park, Waterside Lane, Widnes WA8 8GT

Engaging Community Solutions CIC (ECS),
Blakenall Village Centre, 79 Thames Rd, Walsall WS3 1LZ

Healthwatch Halton 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 six members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2021/22 the board met six times and made decisions on matters such as governance, approving our priorities for 2022/23 and agreeing that Healthwatch Halton raise the issues faced by local people trying to access NHS dental care with the Health & Wellbeing Board.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by acting on the issues the public are raising with us, for example our work this year on dentistry. Each year we also run a public priorities survey and our Advisory Board review the priorities from feedback we have received.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience.

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a web form on our website, provided an online Feedback Centre, attended virtual and physical meetings of community groups and forums, engaged with people face to face at outreach sessions and events, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our [website](#), share it with health and care service providers and commissioners, local councillors and MPs, voluntary and community groups.

Responses to recommendations and requests

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

2021–2022 Outcomes

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
Vaccine attitudes	Our report on people's attitudes to the Covid-19 vaccine and how the vaccination programme was being run locally helped Halton CCG in the planning of the vaccine roll-out.
Influencing the One Halton Place Plan	Healthwatch Halton's reports have been used in the development of the One Halton Place plan, putting the views of people at the centre of decision making and planning.
Children & Young People's Mental Health	Recommendations from Healthwatch Halton's young people's report in 2021 now form part of the action plan for the Halton CYB Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Partnership Board for the next 3 years.
Long Waiters quality principles	NHS organisations joined forces to develop a set of "Quality Principles" which have been adopted for use across Cheshire and Merseyside. A total of 11 quality principles have been developed, based on learning to date from staff and patient experiences. Cheshire and Merseyside local Healthwatch, including Healthwatch Halton, have been key partners in the development of the quality principles, contributing valuable patient feedback and experiences around the impact of long waits for treatment.
Specialist Children's Services	Bridgewater NHS Community Healthcare NHS Trust continue to engage with Healthwatch to improve patient quality, satisfaction and experience of families accessing Children's Specialist Services.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Halton is represented on the Halton Health and Wellbeing Board by Kath Parker, our Healthwatch Advisory Board Chair.

During 2021/2 our representative has effectively carried out this role by presenting findings from our reports and sharing public feedback with the board, including our report about access to NHS dentistry.

"Healthwatch is an extremely important and much valued partner in Halton, they are the voice of the people in relation to Health and Social Care services and we work closely together with them to ensure people's concerns are raised and discussed at every level.

They bring to the table real issues that concern our residents and together we can make a difference".

Cllr Marie Wright - Chair, Halton Health & Wellbeing Board

healthwatch

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