



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Kent

Contents

A message from our Chair	2
About us	3
Our year in numbers	4
A year of making a difference	5
Working together for change	6
Making a difference in the community	7
Listening to your experiences	8
Hearing from all communities	11
Information and signposting	13
Showcasing volunteer impact	15
Finance and future priorities	17
Statutory statements	19



"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

In a year that has seen major announcements for both the NHS and Local Government our focus has been:

- Achieving outcomes and change which bring best value to our partners, stakeholders and community. An example of this is our work with West Kent which evaluated the development of ANIMA as a Digital Front Door tool.
- We continue to recruit volunteers from across the community and this year once again we have welcomed some into new office-based roles to support and enrich the work of our staff. We've also supported placements for university students and NHS graduates.
- Recognising how partners across Kent have overcome challenge and positive change to the community through our annual impact awards. It was a joy to see so many new faces this year.
- Improving our understanding of data evidencing health inequalities to drive project work within the community and with our stakeholders to inform policy making. This once again highlights the benefits of independent public voice.
- Maintaining relationships with the ICB, the ICP and KCC in an ever-changing landscape to enhance health and social care outcomes for the people of Kent.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers and staff who support us in our mission and wish those who have left us good luck in their new positions and to extend a welcome to those who have joined us. I would also like to thank our host organisation EK360 for their ongoing behind the scenes support.



"The report gives insight to some of our achievements over the past twelve months. I trust you find this interesting and do contact us if you would like to join us on our journey."

Libby Lines, Healthwatch Kent steering group chair

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.



About us

Healthwatch Kent 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 and advice.



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 social 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 supported more than 5,000 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 8.8 staff and, our work is supported by 17 volunteers.

Reaching out:



2733 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

7863 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as mental health support and finding an NHS dentist.

Championing your voice:



We published **9** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like Co-occurring conditions, Digital Systems to access GP appointments and pharmacy

Our most popular report was the co-occurring conditions report highlighting people's struggles in accessing mental health support with an existing substance misuse issue.

Statutory funding:



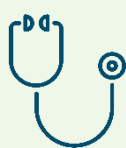
We're funded by Kent County Council. In 2024/25 we received, £503,261.28 which is the same as last year.

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 Kent. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We shared insights about Ear Nose and Throat care which helped inform the Kent and Medway Acute Services Review



We published pathway 3 discharge animated videos which were used for training across teams in East Kent.



Summer

We shared young people's experiences of mental health services to inform mental health commissioning by Kent and Medway ICB.



We shared feedback on mental health emergency care and sectioning to inform the Right Care, Right Person model for Kent and Medway.



Autumn

Along with members of the KCC People's Panel our representatives helped design training for social workers on co-production. The training has also been delivered.

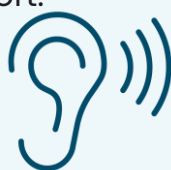


We published our pharmacy report with Healthwatch Medway. These findings were shared as part of Healthwatch England's evidence sessions. We also supported the Kent Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment.



Winter

We started our engagement with Veterans to understand their unique challenges to getting the right support.



We shared feedback for inclusion in the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy which highlighted the link between housing and mental health..



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Kent are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services across Kent and Medway.

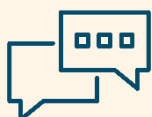
This year, we've worked with Healthwatch Medway and our sister projects within our host organisation, to achieve the following:

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Working with Healthwatch Medway and Mental Health Voice we produced a thematic report on experiences about community mental health. As well as sharing this locally with the Integrated Care Board and feeding into the Care Quality Commission we also submitted it to the Parliamentary Health and Social Care Select Committee review. It also informed the Kent and Medway Mental Health Needs Assessment.

The big conversation:



Working with Healthwatch Medway and other partners we contributed to the increased knowledge and awareness of self harm relating to Children and Young people in Swale and Medway. The output included designing an online resource pack and a leaflet for residents and professionals. A reduction in self Harm admissions since October 2024 has been noticed with longer term review measures in place.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



Alongside Healthwatch Medway we hosted the annual Healthwatch Recognition Awards. This celebrated the work of organisations and individuals contributing to positive change in Health and Care. We had over a 100 nominations from professionals and residents using these services. We were able to give them the platform to get the recognition they deserved and share best practice across the system.

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 health, social care professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

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

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



Working with Healthwatch Medway and our sister project Mental Health Voice we noticed that we were hearing an increasing number of experiences about Mental Health Crisis support. We held a meeting with Kent and Medway ICB. As a result:

- We agreed communications urging services to review their crisis support offer and promote opening times.
- We created Christmas crisis social media infographic which was used for all newsletters across system partners.
- The Safe Havens also worked to increase awareness of their service and improve the pathway for their co-located sites.

Getting services to involve the public



In 2024/2025, Healthwatch Kent and Healthwatch Medway worked with the Adult Safeguarding Board to ensure people's voices shaped discussions and decisions. With a standing agenda item, we regularly present reports and insights to keep community perspectives at the heart of safeguarding strategies. This has included insights on housing and homelessness, access to services, responsibility for those experiencing mental health crisis, and people being discharged from hospital.

Improving care over time



For the last 3 years we have made proactive steps to gather insights about Care Homes. Firstly, gathering multiple perspectives related to Enhanced Health in Care Homes and more recently speaking to Care Home managers. We've presented findings to the Kent and Medway Ageing Well Board, Kent County Council, Health and Care Partnership committees and 2 Acute Trusts. This information has been used to shape the commissioning specification and prioritise training/support on areas such as dementia, wound care and palliative care. We are currently doing the same process in East Kent.

Listening to your experiences

People being supported at home

In September and October 2024, we worked with Kent Community Health Foundation Trust (KCHFT) and Kent County Council (KCC) to understand what people using the East Kent Home First Service and the staff working within it were experiencing.

What did we do?

We worked with the Home First Team to get consent from people to contact them once their time with the Home First team had finished. We spoke with 15 people either those that directly experienced the service or family members on their behalf. There were also 21 staff members who responded to a survey about working within the team.

Key things we heard:



86 %

Of people felt that the service helped maximise their abilities.

90 %

Of staff spoken to rated collaboration and problem solving as excellent within the team

60%

People, did not feel linked in with services that will support them once their time in Home First ended

What difference did this make?

- Home First have reviewed the training and induction processes and are using staff feedback to make improvements.
- The Home First team are reviewing information being given about support when the service ends. They are also now making some direct referrals into VCSE organisations. This was also discussed at a patient flow VCSE sector event facilitated by the East Kent Health and Care Partnership
- They are reviewing their link worker role needs and will be offering the opportunity to staff to upskill in their interested link worker areas.

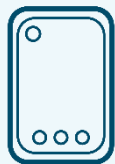
Listening to your experiences

Action on digital appointment systems

People In West Kent had their say on using a digital system to access appointments at their GP surgery

In February 2024 we worked with West Kent Health and Care Partnership and Tunbridge wells Primary care Network to help understand how the implementation of a digital front door system (ANIMA) would impact the experience of patients and staff. We talked to 109 people and then another 100 in May 2024 after implementation. We also got feedback from 27 staff.

Key things we heard:



36%

increase in the number of same day appointments in phase 2 compared with phase 1

47 %

of people reported positive and 33% shared poor experiences of using ANIMA

19%

of staff felt Anima had made a positive change to their stress and workload. 19% also felt it had a negative impact on their stress and workload



"ANIMA has made it easier, you are not hanging on the phone waiting for long, hoping someone picks up your call."

"The questions aren't always straightforward, mostly irrelevant to me."

We shared our report with the West Kent Health and Care Partnership, Integrated Neighborhood working group and wider Kent and Medway ICB.

What difference did this make?

- Feedback from staff told us that better integration with EMIS was needed. Work has taken place to enable all of the data from EMIS to be linked.
- ANIMA access through the NHS app is progressing as people we talked to had suggested. There will be a phased rollout in July 2025.
- People suggested a screen reader option and so the 'Annie Voice Agent' is on the ANIMA development pathway.
- We recommended people be involved in future ANIMA developments. A Kent & Medway wide digital working group has been set up but their area is around social license. There are now conversations happening about setting up a West Kent group for digital working.
- We also worked with the ICB to send comms to practices reminding them to clearly advertise other methods of making an appointment for those who didn't want to use the digital system.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Kent. 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, we have reached different communities by:

- Visiting Veteran breakfasts to listen to their experiences and support needs
- Improving our analysis of demographic information to evidence and better understand intersectionality linked to inequalities. This in turn has informed our engagement activities.
- Recommendations from our previous Trans and Non-Binary report was presented to the ICB Board by a community organisation, an example of how we empower communities.



Hearing from all communities

We highlighted the needs of those with co-occurring conditions

We investigated the support that people with Mental Health and Substance Misuse issues were able to access.

People told us about being turned away from Mental Health services because of their drug and alcohol use, even when the individual was making attempts to cut down. Some people told us peer support groups had helped them.

What difference did this make?

- We presented at the Kent Alcohol Related Brain Injury Conference and shared the report with Dame Carol Black.
- The report was used to develop co-occurring conditions guidance used in Kent
- The findings were used as evidence for a substance misuse intervention within the Kent and Medway community mental health model.
- Feedback was included in the Kent and Medway Mental Health Needs Assessment

Highlighting inequalities in Mental Health

Negative feedback about mental health care from people of mixed or multiple, Black or Asian ethnicities contained a greater proportion of feedback illustrating health inequalities, and feedback from people of Black ethnicities had the greatest proportion of negative sentiment. This included people facing intersectional issues with physical disability, migration, and experience of the criminal justice system.

What difference did this make?

- We shared this for inclusion in the Kent and Medway Mental Health Needs Assessment with a recommendation to specifically focus on building trust, raising awareness and improving the access to support for this cohort of residents.
- The findings were also submitted as part of our contribution to a Parliamentary committee looking at community mental health.

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 7863 people have reached out to us for information, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Sorting an admin headache for a single parent

Through facilitating the right follow by the ICB we were able to help someone progress their employment.

An individual had requested a medical summary from their GP surgery to be able to start a new job. Despite paying the fee required, after 4 months they still hadn't received what they needed. This individual was a single parent, and being unable to work for this period was causing significant distress, worry and frustration to them.

We contacted the ICB quality team who contacted the practice and resolved the issue. The practice also implemented training for the whole admin team.



"Thank you so much for your help and coordination, much appreciated."

Helping people access the care they need

We were able to help someone overcome transport barriers so they could access the mental health care they needed.

A wheelchair user, needing 2 carers because of a medical condition had been offered 3 days a week at a specialist community therapeutic unit as part of ongoing treatment. They couldn't use public transport, and the patient transport provider wasn't able to take them due to it not being a routine type of hospital appointment. The cost of getting a taxi was prohibitive to them attending the appointments and therefore the individual felt inadvertently discriminated against because of their disability.

We were able to pick this up with the adult mental health trust who agreed to investigate and support the individual with transport to attend their treatment.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given over 2000 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:

- Visited communities to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Helped input experiences into our database and code them ready for analysis
- Represented us at meetings



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.

"I really enjoyed my placement with Healthwatch – the team were so supportive and welcoming. I felt valued, trusted and included, which allowed me to contribute to the great work ongoing within the organisation.

My experience was so varied and has helped me build confidence and develop new skills that I have taken forward into new roles".

Leanne

"I've been a volunteer with EK360 and Healthwatch for two and a half years doing office-based work. I've loved my time here and really feel a part of the team. Volunteering has helped me gain confidence and taught me new skills".

Nic

"I have been volunteering for Healthwatch approximately one year now. I enjoy it immensely. I have transferable skills now for looking for a job in the community. I work on spreadsheets, outlook, engagement forms to be entered into our databases. I work three days per week part time. My confidence has really come along now and so have my social skills".

Suzie

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.healthwatchkent.co.uk/volunteer



0808 801 0102



volunteer@healthwatchkent.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Kent County 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	£503,261.28	Expenditure on pay	£390,260.35
Additional income (including VAT)	£15,000	Non-pay expenditure	£14,507.83
		Office and management fee	£154,555.55
Total income	£518,261.28	Total Expenditure	£559,323.73

Additional income is broken down into:

- £15,000 received from Kent Community Health Foundation Trust for animated pathway 3 videos.

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

We didn't receive any funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS)

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. Learning Disabilities
2. Mental Health Crisis
3. Veterans

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Kent, The Old Court House, 8 Tufton Street, Ashford. TN23 1QN

Our host organisation hold the contract, EK360 (Engaging Kent CIC), The Stables, Little Coldharbour Farm, Tong Lane, Lamberhurst, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 8AD

Healthwatch Kent 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 Steering Group consists of 4 members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our steering group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local communities.

Throughout 2024/25, the steering group met 8 times and made decisions on matters such as our stakeholder engagement plan and agreement of priorities on our workplan. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by checking they are rooted in either existing views or where we have a gap in our public insights on a topic.

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, text 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 send a physical copy to anyone who requests it.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to 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.

In Kent, for example, we take information to the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board, Trust Patient Experience committees, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Steering Group, The Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, plus our regular catch ups and meetings with key stakeholders in the system .

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Kent and Medway. For example, we work with Healthwatch Medway to share the experiences we've heard at the Kent and Medway Quality Group as well as the Integrated Care Partnership. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level. We're currently developing our connections with the Care Quality Commission to ensure your experiences help inform the regulation of local services.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Kent is represented on the Kent Health and Wellbeing Board by Robbie Goatham, Healthwatch Kent Manager and also, on the Integrated Care Partnership. During 2024/25, this has allowed us to contribute to the strategic direction of Health and Care across Kent and Medway including input into the Housing and Work and Health strategies.

We also attend a number of other key decision-making meetings

- 3 Health and Care Partnership Boards
- Kent and Medway Primary Care Oversight Group
- Kent and Medway System Quality Group
- Inequalities and Prevention Integrated Care Partnership subgroups

Statutory statements

Enter and view

We didn't do any Enter and View visits this year

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

	Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Interview Panels	We've been part of interview panels that include ICB executive members, the people and communities ICB board member and KCC social workers	People have been appointed to roles.
Making a complaint	We themed our local feedback about the experiences people had when making a complaint to supplement Healthwatch England's findings.	We've been working with the ICB about response times and they now have a local system complaints model in place.
Care Home residents attending hospital appointments	Dartford and Gravesham were insisting a care home resident had carers accompany them to appointments despite having capacity and not exhibiting any challenging behaviour. This was proving difficult to arrange and they were missing appointments.	We spoke to the hospital trust who confirmed that this wasn't a blanket policy for care home residents. They reminded this to staff and are involving homes in the development of their updated transport policy.
Comments from members of the public	"Thank you so much for today and making it so easy to talk to you. It was so good to be able to talk to you and to be open and have time."	
	"Thank you so much for calling me back. It is reassuring to know that I am within my rights to get my own information."	
	"Thank you for talking to me and explaining the process. I now have a better understanding."	
	"Thank you for helping me and telling me who I need to speak with."	

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