

# Together

# healthwatch

Thurrock

we're making health  
and social care better

Annual Report 2022–23



# Contents

---

Message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Highlights from our year	5
Listening to your experiences	9
Advice and information	15
Volunteers	17
Finances and future priorities	19
Statutory statements	20



“

*"In the last ten years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of local Healthwatch hasn't. Your local Healthwatch has worked tirelessly to make sure the views of local people are heard, and NHS and social care leaders use your feedback to make care better."*

*Louise Ansari, Healthwatch National Director*

# Message from our Chair

---

Healthwatch Thurrock promotes and supports the involvement of local people in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of local care services.

Our staff identify what matters most to people by

- Visiting services to see how they work
- Running surveys and focus groups
- Going out in the community and working closely with other groups

This year with the relaxation of Covid 19 restrictions we have been able to undertake more face to face engagement which has in turn allowed us to connect with some more seldom heard communities such as young people, refugees / asylum seekers and carers.

We have been successful in gathering a wealth of information covering a vast variety of different issues each group faces in regards to health and social care. This year has also seen hand in hand engagement with our NHS ICB and other commissioners on a local level which has really enabled the voices of Thurrock to be strategically built into decisions in the provision of new services to come.



**Kevin Brice**  
**Healthwatch Thurrock**  
**Chair**

“Effective Health and Social Care services are critical services for the community. Healthwatch Thurrock is the independent people’s champion for the people of Thurrock. By talking directly with people in the community about their own experiences, and from surveys, visits and focus groups, our staff and volunteers compile the evidence to influence Health and Social Care service commissioners and providers. ”

**Kevin Brice, Chair of Healthwatch Thurrock Advisory Group**

# About us

---

## *Healthwatch Thurrock is your local health and social care champion.*

From Grays to Corringham 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**

*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.*



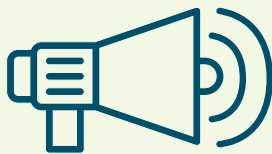
### **Our values are:**

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who 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.

# Year in review

---

## Reaching out



**2,595 people**

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

**1,068**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost of living crisis.

## Making a difference to care

We published

**2 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**GP Experience Report; Accessing Primary Care Since the Pandemic**

which highlighted the challenges in access to primary care in a post pandemic world.



## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**17**

outstanding volunteers who gave up **44 days** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2022-23 we received

**[£131,987.24]**

which is **[4% more]** than the previous year.

We currently employ

**3 staff**

who help us carry out our work.



# How we've made a difference this year

Spring



We continued to signpost residents to where they could get their Covid 19 boosters.



We held our 'In Conversation with Carers' series as part of our engagement for our unpaid carers work.

Summer



We held a listening event where people expressed their difficulties in accessing primary care post pandemic.



We engaged with schools around the borough to collate data around their experiences of health and social care.

Autumn



Working with MSE NHS, we undertook extensive engagements within local hospitals regarding a new Community Diagnostic Centre.



We held our first Young Healthwatch event where young people discussed projects they would like to do.

Winter



After an increase in people struggling to access dental care, we created a new up to date database of those taking NHS patients for our residents.



We held a series of roadshows across the borough to make sure we were engaging with all corners of our community.

# 10 years of improving care

*This year marks a special milestone for Healthwatch. Over the last ten years, people have shared their experiences, good and bad, to help improve health and social care. A big thank you to all our Healthwatch Heroes that have stepped up and inspired change. Here are a few of our highlights:*

## How have we made care better, together?

### PD Service Commissioning

Our engagement with people who live with Personality Disorders in Thurrock led to a new service being commissioned across Mid and South Essex.



### NHS admin

We highlighted the negative impact poor NHS admin can have and recommended five principles for services to improve people's experiences.



### Unpaid Carers Strategy Refresh

Our engagement work with unpaid carers was chosen to be the basis of Thurrock Council's all age carers strategy refresh.



### Waiting list support

After we and other organisations called for an urgent response to hospital waiting lists, and better interim communication and support, the NHS set out a recovery plan to address the backlog.



### NHS dentistry

We continued to voice public concerns that improvements to NHS dentistry are too slow, leaving thousands of people in pain.





## Healthwatch Hero



Kevin and Graham are Healthwatch Hero's for sharing their experiences with us and the wider community regarding their experience of having a stroke. They have actively created change so that there is extra support in place for stroke survivors in Thurrock.

After their strokes, both Kevin and Graham went on to run the Thurrock Stroke Project, providing a space for other stroke survivors to come together and support each other. Here stroke survivors can chat over a coffee, partake in activities such as bowls and take part in day trips out to places like Eastbourne and Brighton.

We support Kevin and Graham by providing office space to attend funding fairs, help set up the space occasionally for the group and attend the group sessions to hear how stroke survivors can be better supported in the area. Graham also sits on our Healthwatch Advisory Board.

Thanks to Kevin and Graham being such an active advocates for stroke survivors, we now have the knowledge in order to better support stroke survivors.





# 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 feed this back to services to help them improve.*

# Listening to unpaid adult and young carers

---

Healthwatch Thurrock were commissioned by Thurrock Council to speak to unpaid carers of all ages in Thurrock. The engagement work undertaken by Healthwatch Thurrock, and Healthwatch Thurrock's report and recommendations is to be the basis of Thurrock Council's Carers Strategy Refresh. This was a decision taken by Thurrock's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing board after presentation of the report and findings. This will set out a plan for how unpaid carers in Thurrock can be supported in the next five years.

We explored themes such as the challenges of being a working age carer, a young carer, time constraints, communication between services, levels of support, accessing support and challenges the pandemic brought.

## Some of our report highlights :

- 50% of unpaid carers rated the support they received as 5 or less out of 10.
- 25% of carers said that they had found support harder to access since the pandemic.

## Some of our recommendations :

- Better explanation of Carers Assessment Process.
- Increase staff availability so that respite time agreed in assessments can be met.

You can read the report in full here :

<https://www.healthwatchthurrock.org/report/2023-05-24/unpaid-carers-report>

## What difference will this make?

"The voice of Thurrock carers was so strong and was captured so successfully that it was agreed by the Health and Wellbeing board that Healthwatch's engagement work and report would form the main basis of our future all – age carers strategy. The engagement findings will be our main body. Through Healthwatch's action planning event that took place following the report, professionals and statutory partners were able to fully understand what wasn't working for carers. Actions were proposed at the event that need to take place for change to happen. When the strategy is finalised it is hoped that the carers who shaped the document will also be the ones overseeing its implementation i.e making sure it happens. Ultimately we will look to the experiences of carers and whether there has been a positive difference to their life as the measurement of whether the strategy has been successful" –

**Sarah Turner : Commissioning Manager for Adults, Housing and Health for Thurrock Council**

# Primary Care Access in a Post Pandemic World

---

**It's important for the NHS and local services to step back and see the bigger picture by hearing stories of local people and how they have found accessing health care and support. This helps to create empathy and can have a bigger impact than using data alone.**

During quarter 2 and 3 we spoke to residents regarding their experience of accessing primary care in a post pandemic world. We looked at themes such as communication, administration and the system of securing appointments. We spoke to young people and the LGBTQ+ community to make sure the barriers they experience in accessing primary care was noted. Our findings were published in our 'GP Experience Report'.

## Our recommendations:

1. Increase the visibility of GPs in surgeries.
2. Provide specific appointment times for over the phone appointments where possible.
3. Clear information made available on systems such as e-consult/the extended primary care team roles etc. These should be made available in accessible formats for those who don't have access to a computer.
4. All practices to endeavour to undertake Pride in Practice training being offered to staff to ensure that communication to the LGBTQ+ community is inclusive and appropriate.

## What difference will this make?

Our report has been presented to commissioning bodies to inform them what is working well and what needs to be improved in the way primary care services are delivered in Thurrock. This comes at a time service delivery is moving away from Clinical Commissioning Groups and towards Integrated Care Boards and changes are being made to how health services are coordinated and delivered. Our findings and patient feedback will inform any changes that are made to improve patient care and experience.

"How can I be expected to excuse myself from a meeting when I am told that the doctor will phone at any time during a day? We were able to be given specific appointment times when we were seeing the doctors face to face. I don't know why we can't now. If I miss the phone call because I am working I have to start the whole thing again of phoning at 8am to make an appointment. The system doesn't make sense."

# 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.*

## Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



*It's important for services to see the bigger picture. Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.*

Healthwatch Thurrock were hearing from local residents about their difficulties in acquiring prescriptions prescribed in a hospital setting. The calls we received were enough to recognise these delays were becoming detrimental to residents wellbeing. Residents described how some of them had resorted to buying these prescriptions online on the black market in desperation. This issue was dealt with and resolved, and feedback to the commissioning bodies.

## Getting services to involve the public



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

Healthwatch Thurrock have worked closely with schools in the area. We visited lots of school assemblies and took with us tops and pants. On the tops children wrote what they thought was 'tops' about health and social care and 'pants' about health and social care. This is a resourceful wealth of information we have collated which has fed into other focus groups and health and wellbeing boards. Our relations with schools continue to grow.

## Improving care over time



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

Over the years, Healthwatch Thurrock have engaged with addicts and their carers. It has been brought to our attention that addicts are not classed as experts by experience within their journey. Healthwatch Thurrock want to continue this proactive engagement with addicts and their carers to make sure they are viewed by professionals as experts in their own journey and that stigmas around addiction continue to be broken down.





# 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 voices are heard and services meet their needs.*

*This year we have reached different communities by:*

- Attending community cafes specifically set up for asylum seekers and refugees
- Holding roadshows in every area of the borough in community based hubs and libraries
- Attending and setting up meetings with GP practices to understand how their translation services work
- Undertaking extensive engagement with unpaid adult and young carers through reports, surveys and video series to make sure their needs are heard

## Supporting asylum seekers and refugees

Healthwatch Thurrock has been engaging with organisations who support the local asylum seeker and refugee communities. We have been able to talk to people about their difficulties accessing GP surgeries and hospital treatment. Most of the people cannot speak English or speak very little, so they often rely on volunteers and staff from the supporting organisation. One of the most common issues this community faces, is not having support with them when they have to call practices at 8am to translate their needs. This is a problem as most GP surgeries across Thurrock require patients to call at 8am as a first step to accessing primary care services. Healthwatch Thurrock have liaised with GP surgeries across all four PCN areas to find a solution for these problems. At present Thurrock surgeries are unable to offer a specific service but are now happy to work with organisations who support this community and Healthwatch Thurrock.



## The power of phones for young carers in schools

Through Healthwatch Thurrock's work with schools, we were able to find a number of young carers either already identified by the school, or ones who had not been picked up. From this we then re visited the schools working specifically with groups of young carers. Through our conversations, we heard that many schools have introduced a zero tolerance policy towards mobile phones. This created a lot of anxiety for young carers as they needed their phones to ensure that their loved ones that they care for are okay, to remind them of appointments or to take their medication. This was highlighted to the young carers lead for schools and from these conversations, change was made.

“Being at school worries me as we can't even have our phones with us. I need to have my phone with me to remind my mum to take her medication.”

**Local young carer**





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

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

- Signposting and referring people into the services they need
- Helping people resolve issues with healthcare access or advising them on the relevant complaints process where necessary
- Helping people access relevant NHS advocacy services
- Supporting young people to have a voice within their health and social care needs

## Help to find dental care in Thurrock

*Healthwatch Thurrock had 118 people contact them for advice and information on dental services. The public reported to us that most practices were not taking on new patients. Some had even been told they would be registered after someone had either moved or passed away making room on their lists.*

The impact of delayed treatment has resulted in people living with considerable pain, developing medical resistance and dental conditions worsening.

“I have tried to pull my own teeth out, when all I really need is fillings.”

**Louise\*, Thurrock resident**

Healthwatch Thurrock’s advice and information has meant people who need urgent treatment know their options and have clear information.

“Healthwatch Thurrock helped me find a dentist for my teenage daughter who could then refer her for the orthodontic treatment she needed.”

**Charlie\* Thurrock resident**

Healthwatch Thurrock have met regularly and shared information with the Mid and South Essex NHS England dental commissioning team and the British Dental Association. They also presented findings to a Scrutiny Board workshop.

## Providing advice and guidance

Mrs Fitzgerald\* contacted Healthwatch Thurrock in seeking advice and guidance for her son who lives with Autism and Asperger's. Mrs Fitzgerald could see her son's mental health declining, being unable to get himself into a routine and needed some extra support.

Mrs Fitzgerald spoke about how there is not enough support for those over 25 who live with these conditions. Her son had only received his diagnosis in 2018 and throughout his life had felt a lack of support from educational settings which had made things much harder for him. The recent lockdowns had not helped her son and he continued to feel isolated from the community.

Healthwatch Thurrock staff were able to ensure help was provided to both Mrs Fitzgerald and her son. We signposted Mrs Fitzgerald herself to the Thurrock Carers Service so she could access the right support for herself even though she didn't recognise herself as a carer. Healthwatch Thurrock staff were also able to refer her son to a Local Area Coordinator to help him integrate back into the community after the lockdowns and speak to the services he was under to request a new needs assessment.

\*Names have been changed to protect anonymity



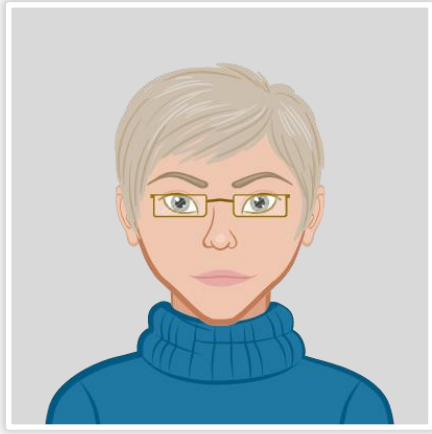


# Volunteering

*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.*

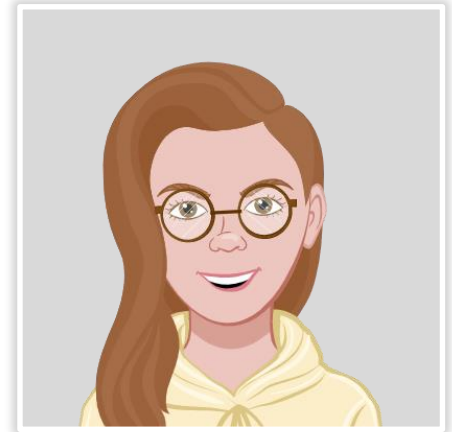
## *This year our volunteers:*

- Carried out research to ensure our database of local groups, organisations and professionals remains up to date
- Provided assistance at our community engagement events
- Came up with ideas for pieces of research they would like to see carried out that within their volunteering role, they could assist or lead on
- Acting as ambassadors they continue to raise awareness in the community of Healthwatch Thurrock and the role we play



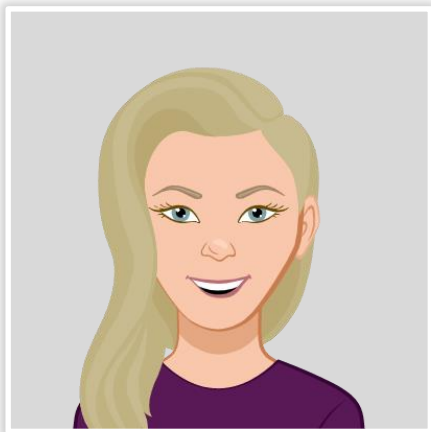
## Betty

"Having recently been given a few hours a week respite from my caring role I decided to volunteer for Healthwatch Thurrock. Health and social care services are facing huge challenges in the difficult times we are living in, so my hope is to become an asset to the team as they continue to develop the role that they play now and in the future. I believe that I will also benefit health wise by taking on a new challenge where I can put my experiences as a carer to good use to help others."



## Dolce

"I started volunteering to get experience for my Health and Social Care course. I enjoy visiting the children's centres and engaging with the mums and dads at them. I want to go on to be a midwife so really enjoy listening to their experiences. I have learnt a lot about the needs of my local community through my volunteering role and it has exposed me to issues I may not have thought to be a problem before I started volunteering".



## Laura

"Being a volunteer on Healthwatch Thurrock's Advisory Group allows me the opportunity to act as the eyes and ears for Healthwatch Thurrock, representing the voices of those affected by dementia and ensuring that the plans for engagement are inclusive as possible. I am extremely honoured to be in a position to influence positive change to services and help meet the health and social care needs of local people affected by dementia".



### Do you feel inspired?

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



[www.healthwatchthurrock.org](http://www.healthwatchthurrock.org)



01375 389883



[admin@healthwatchthurrock.org](mailto:admin@healthwatchthurrock.org)

# 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	£126,844	Expenditure on pay	£68,104.70
Additional income	£12,000	Non-pay expenditure	£3121.80
		Office and management fee	£3,720.00
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£138,844</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£74,946</b>

Additional income is broken down by:

- **£12,000 funding** received from Thurrock Council for engagement work for a strategy refresh

## Next steps

In the ten years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in helping the health and care system understand what is working, spot issues and think about how things can be better in the future.

Services are currently facing unprecedented challenges and tackling the backlog needs to be a key priority for the NHS to ensure everyone gets the care they need. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving them a voice to help shape improvements to services.

We will also continue our work to tackling inequalities that exist and work to reduce the barriers you face when accessing care, regardless whether that is because of where you live, income or race.

## Top three priorities for 2023-24

1. Mental health and dementia work
2. Health inequalities across the borough
3. Working with addicts





# Statutory statements

*Healthwatch Thurrock, The Beehive Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP is a project of Thurrock CVS, The Beehive Resource Centre, West Street, Grays, RM17 6XP.*

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



# The way we work

---

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

Our Healthwatch Advisory Group consists of 9 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Advisory Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Throughout 2022/23 the Board met regularly and made decisions on matters such as public engagement plans in relation to our work with MSE NHS and for our Accessing Primary Care report.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We have created an 'Ideas Register' in which our Advisory Groups can feed back themes from what they hear from the public. We undertook the 'Access to Primary Care in a Post Pandemic World' in response to residents feedback around the difficulty in accessing primary care.

## 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 have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of using services. During 2022/23 we have been available by phone, email, provided a webform on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums. We also created a 'We want to hear from you' QR poster which was distributed within the community. This QR code took residents to a contact form via our database system, Airtable, that they could fill in within their own time which would then automatically be sent to us.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and social care decision makers. This year we have done this by ensuring engagement with seldom heard communities has regularly taken place and that face to face engagement continues for those who struggle with digital access.

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, via social media channels and make hard copies available in the volunteer centres and local libraries.

## Responses to recommendations

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

---

## 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.

## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Thurrock is represented on the Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board by Kim James, Chief Operating Officer. During 2022/23 our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing a case study or experience for whichever topic is on the agenda, so as to represent the voice of the public.

Healthwatch Thurrock is represented on Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Partnerships by Kim James, Chief Operating Officer.

## 2022–2023 Outcomes

<b>Project/ activity</b>	<b>Changes made to services</b>
Betty's Blue Badge Project	Our volunteer Betty has been undertaking research into blue badge accessibility within Thurrock. This research will be collated into a report for the year 2023-2024.
Community Diagnostics Centre and Integrated Medical Wellbeing Centre	Healthwatch Thurrock worked with NHS MSE on a very local level to ensure that active engagement was undertaken with residents in regards to a new Community Diagnostics Centre being built following the planned closure of a local community hospital.
Long term conditions	We engaged with residents regarding provisions for long term conditions. This engagement will extend into the latter half of 2023 and be fed back to commissioners.



*Healthwatch Thurrock  
The Beehive Resource Centre  
West Street  
Grays  
RM7 6XP*

*[www.healthwatchthurrock.org](http://www.healthwatchthurrock.org)*

*t: 01375 389883*

*e: [admin@healthwatchthurrock.org](mailto:admin@healthwatchthurrock.org)*

 *[@HealthwatchThrk](https://twitter.com/HealthwatchThrk)*

 *[Facebook.com/HealthwatchThrk](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchThrk)*