



Making every voice count

Healthwatch Surrey Annual report 2025/26

Contents

A message from our co-chairs	3
About us	4
Our year in numbers	5
A year of making a difference	6
Working together for change	7
Making a difference in the community	8
Listening to your experiences	9
Hearing from all communities	12
Information and signposting	14
Showcasing volunteer impact	16
Finance and future priorities	18
Statutory statements	20

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Sam Botsford
Healthwatch Surrey
Contract Manager

“Despite a year dominated by the uncertainty of change for the NHS, local authority and the voluntary sector, we are proud to present this annual report demonstrating the importance of sharing real life experiences to influence change. It is vital that we contribute to a society where everyone’s voice is heard, so we all receive the support we need for our wellbeing.

We couldn’t have achieved the impact described in this report without the people of Surrey who have trusted us with their experiences – thank you to everyone who has taken the time to talk with us. Thank you also to the health and social care staff who have listened and committed to acting on what we have shared.”

A message from our co-chairs

Prevention has been a defining theme of 2025–26 for Healthwatch Surrey. Our research projects have explored how community based services can help address loneliness and isolation among men, as well as preventative health behaviours among people who may need health interventions in the future.

Our highly skilled and empathetic engagement staff have continued to build trust and credibility across Surrey. They have supported individuals to share their often deeply personal and emotional experiences of services. We are particularly proud of how effective we've been in bringing to light issues that might otherwise have remained hidden, including the experiences of domestic abuse survivors.

Throughout our work we have used our unique, impartial, and independent position to focus on improving these experiences for people in the future. Our commitment to listening to and valuing the lived experiences of Surrey residents has remained constant amid an uncertain NHS and local government landscape. This annual report is a celebration of that continued commitment, of which we are extremely proud.



Deborah Mechaneck
Co-chair of Luminus
Board and Local
Healthwatch Advisory
Group member



Jason Davies
Co-chair of Luminus
Board
(Luminus, home of
Healthwatch Surrey)



“The task of championing the voice of people using services across the whole of the NHS and Adult Social Care in Surrey is vast, but we truly value every story shared with us. We do our utmost to ensure those in a position to make things better do so from a place of understanding how people experience health and care services.”

About us

Healthwatch Surrey is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS and social care 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.



About us

Healthwatch Surrey champions the voice of local people to shape, improve and get the best from NHS health and social care services. We are an independent, trusted and impartial service for local people, and have statutory powers to make sure decision makers listen to the experiences they share with us.



We passionately believe that listening and responding to local people's experiences is vital to create health and social care services that meet the needs of people in Surrey. We seek out people's experiences of health and care services, particularly from people whose voices are seldom heard, who might be at risk of health inequalities and whose needs are not met by current services. We share our findings publicly and with service providers and commissioners – often connecting Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations, local authorities, health services and communities – to build more integrated and inclusive services and to influence and challenge current provision and future plans.



We also provide reliable and trustworthy information and signposting about local health and social care services to help people get the support they need.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/26 we supported more than **3,000** people to have their say and to get information about their care. We employed **8.5** full time equivalent staff and our work was supported by **41** volunteers.

Reaching out:



2,428 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

421 people came to our Helpdesk for clear advice on a diverse range of topics – such as how to **make a complaint about an NHS or social care service** or how **to access a local GP practice** – as well as looking for support when they had **serious concerns about their care**.

Championing your voice:



We published **48** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **sight tests, reasonable adjustments and digital access**. These reports, based on real people's lived experiences of health and social care services, were all made publicly available – published on our website, on social media, sent to over 1000 subscribers of our Insight bulletin.

The reports most viewed on our website were '[What we're hearing about Glenlyn Medical Practice](#)', highlighting people's experiences of their local GP practice and making recommendations for improvements, and '[Sight on Equity](#)', understanding the barriers faced by black and Asian minoritised communities when accessing sight tests.

Engaging with our communities:



In 2025/26 we donated **£3,250** to some of the local organisations we work with via our Community Cash Fund. This money helped them continue their valuable work to enhance community wellbeing, promote health, and address social issues.

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 Surrey. Here are a few of our highlights.

Spring

We listened to the concerns the [prison population](#) had around ADHD medication, and, via local contacts, escalated to the NHS England specialised commissioning team.



Surrey residents told us they were confused about complaints routes and advocacy services, so we worked with providers to identify improvements which could be made to the information on their websites.

Summer

People told us about the complexities they faced accessing Continuing Healthcare so we created a [guide and video](#) to help. We also created a video to help system partners understand it from the perspective of those using the service.

Thanks in part to our [research](#), self-funders, carers and care arrangers in Surrey were able to access a practical new tool to help them better understand the long-term costs of care.



Autumn

Our [report amplifying the voice of those needing reasonable adjustments](#) highlighted the importance of services addressing people's needs and the importance of the Accessible Information Standard.



We spoke to Surrey residents with [low vision](#) to support the work of the Local Optical Committee (LOC) as they worked to ensure that all Surrey residents with low vision receive the support they need.

Winter

We [shone a light on men's mental health](#), working with a neighbourhood team to identify what could be done at a local level to address loneliness and isolation, and bringing partners together to do it.

Our engagement team were busy this winter, engaging with over 600 people in over 30 different venues across Surrey!



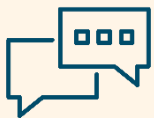
Working together for change

We know that impactful, genuine change requires collaborative working. This year we've partnered with our local VCSE organisations, fed in to national bodies, and connected organisations to help bring about positive change for our residents.



Ensuring patient experience forms part of national strategy:

We were invited to contribute to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) 5 year plan strategy workshop. By sharing the experiences of Surrey residents who have actually been through the PHSO process, we were able to ensure that lived experience guided their plans and strategies, with the ultimate aim of improving this experience for those using it. We were also able to advise on accessibility to support the drive for a more accessible service.



Making every contact count – connecting partners to support residents:

Whilst visiting a local college to talk to students about sexual health, we were able to introduce the college to our contacts at Central and North West London Foundation Trust who run sexual health services across Surrey. Thanks to our introduction, this service is now talking to the young people and providing them consistent, accurate and reliable information about sexual health.



Working together to achieve more:

In collaboration with our VCSE partners – Surrey Coalition for Disabled People and Sensory Services by Sight for Surrey – we submitted a formal request to Surrey MPs and to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to consider the lack of hearing loops in local pharmacies. Local MPs have expressed surprise and concern about how those who are hard of hearing or hearing impaired access pharmacies. They are raising the issue with the Department of Health and Social Care and the Health Minister, as well as the General Pharmaceutical Council, to try to address this issue.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to health and 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 Surrey this year:

Bringing experiences to life to elicit change



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

We were asked by NHS Surrey Heartlands to gather patient insights about using the NHS non-emergency patient transport service. The provider developed an action plan in response to our recommendations and the commissioners have been pleased with their progress. We're delighted that the insight we gathered will help to improve and shape future non-emergency transport services.

Ensuring needs are met



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

The latest Sexual Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Surrey highlighted a need to improve engagement and understanding of sexual health & contraception needs in younger people. Against this backdrop we wanted to amplify the voice of under 25s in relation to sexual health services in Surrey. We engaged with 9 colleges and a total of 594 young people shared their thoughts on this sensitive topic with us. In response to our [findings](#), Surrey County Council (SCC) provided information and signposting to directly address some of the questions, concerns and misconceptions raised.

Improving care over time



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

In 2024 we contributed to a national study looking at experiences of cervical screening. This year we were pleased to learn that NHS England's new "ping and book" service will support one of the report recommendations – improved access to cervical screening via a variety of invitation reminder and booking methods. In early 2025 we contributed to another national survey, this time looking at eye care. We have been continuing to share both national and local statistics from this study, which has led to the Frimley Pharmacy Optometry Dentistry Board looking to create direct referral systems and more patient information on self-care for minor eye complaints.

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 sought 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.



Helping domestic abuse survivors get support from general practice

Those working in GP practices are often in a position to help people disclose that they are experiencing domestic abuse and help them get the support they need. Through working with survivors of domestic abuse, we explored what improvements could be made to better meet people's needs.

What did we do?

We worked with the Surrey Domestic Abuse Partnership, DA SEEN (formerly the Surrey Survivor Steering Group), the Surrey wide designated GP for safeguarding children and adults and the Surrey wide designated Safeguarding Nurse to co-produce our research methodology. We spoke to **64** domestic abuse survivors via a survey, focus groups and individual interviews. We also engaged with **8** GP practices.

What did we hear?

Our findings explored all stages of a survivor's general practice journey, from the barriers to disclosing domestic abuse which exist, to experiences following disclosure, and signposting and referrals.

68%

said they were not signposted to specialist help from an independent domestic abuse and violence service once they had shared their domestic abuse experience with their GP.

67%

of those who chose not to disclose their experience of domestic abuse at the time they were asked, said that they didn't feel safe to do so.

We brought together an influential group of 21 key stakeholders, including system partners, GPs and groups representing survivors, for a workshop to review the [findings of our research](#) and **to work collaboratively to develop pragmatic and practical solutions to improve access to support and the experience of survivors.**

What difference did this make?

There was a commitment from everyone at the workshop to implement one change each, these included an update to the domestic abuse page on GP websites to make information easier to find, and outreach worker time to GP practices to train staff to better identify and support survivors. Nationally, our research is also supporting the work of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Office and the policy lead for Violence against Women and Girls at the Department of Health and Social Care as they debate the roll out of a new Government initiative looking at a specialist referral service that GPs can refer into.

Addressing loneliness, mental health and men's access to support

The Dorking Neighbourhood Area Committee pilot had identified loneliness and isolation as one of the most prevalent issues in the area. Partnering with the committee we worked at a neighbourhood level to identify what impact this has on men's mental health specifically, and to explore the importance, availability and awareness of community ties and local groups to support them.

What did we do?

We co-designed a survey with men accessing the most local Andy's Man Club to build a picture of what men, already taking measures to support their emotional wellbeing and mental health, felt the barriers were to access and what community means to them. This provided invaluable context to guide our survey and engagement activity. **125** men completed our survey, either with us face to face or online.

What did we find?

Men who do not feel part of a community are more likely to experience poorer mental health and reduced overall wellbeing. Greater support is needed for those who struggle to feel included to prevent more serious mental health challenges developing over time. Support should be easy to reach and designed without barriers or expectations that may discourage men from engaging.



"I wish there were services specifically for men like me – not just general mental health support, but somewhere to talk about my relationship and mental health. I need a place where it's safe to say I'm struggling without feeling guilty or weak. Peer groups, drop-in sessions, or even one to one support would make a huge difference."

What difference did this make?

The [insights](#) we provided, along with our ability to bring local organisations together, are supporting and enabling the provision of new men's groups in the area, offering a vital lifeline for local men struggling with loneliness and mental health.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Surrey. 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 communities who may not otherwise have their voices heard by:

- Visiting a prison to talk to men about their access to healthcare whilst in prison, and their concerns about how this might alter on release.
- Holding an engagement event at a local mosque to get the views of the Muslim community on digital access to GP practices.
- Attending a carers event at a hospice to talk to patients and carers about home based healthcare.
- Other places we've been include food banks, libraries, college freshers' fairs, GP practices, Minor Injuries Units, Multiple Sclerosis (MS) society group, Macular Society meetings and support groups for those with learning disabilities.



Addressing barriers to access to sight tests for those from black or Asian minoritised communities

Working in partnership with the Surrey Local Optical Committee (LOC), Surrey Heartlands ICB and a number of VCSE partners, we engaged with over 200 people to understand what may prevent those from black or Asian minoritised communities from accessing sight (eye) tests. Our community engagement reflected the ethnic, age and geographic diversity of Surrey's black and Asian communities, with specific sessions tailored to community identified needs.

What difference did this make?

In the course of our engagement we were able to offer real time advice and information on the importance of regular sight tests and to book or signpost where appropriate. In total we helped 19 people to sign up for a sight test and a further 6 people to find specialist help for their specific eye conditions. Our [Sight on equity report](#) and recommendations were shared widely with our system partners to guide their communication with this community and ensure eye health messages really resonate with them.

Making mental health inclusive: supporting people with learning disabilities

Figures show that people with learning disabilities are twice as likely to have mental health issues as those without.

We obtained the views of those with a learning disability at a series of focus groups, as well as their families and carers via a survey. Our report and recommendations were shared widely with our system partners at Surrey Heartlands ICB, Frimley ICB and Surrey County Council (SCC).

What difference did this make?

In light of our [findings](#) the Learning Disabilities and Autism commissioning team reviewed the Annual Health Check template for people with learning disabilities to ensure it better identifies emotional support needs. The Surrey County Council website was also reviewed and the information on the learning disabilities pages updated to include more information about mental health in an accessible format.

This year we also conducted a series of Enter & View visits to residential care homes for those with a learning disability, to offer an independent assessment of the care environment.

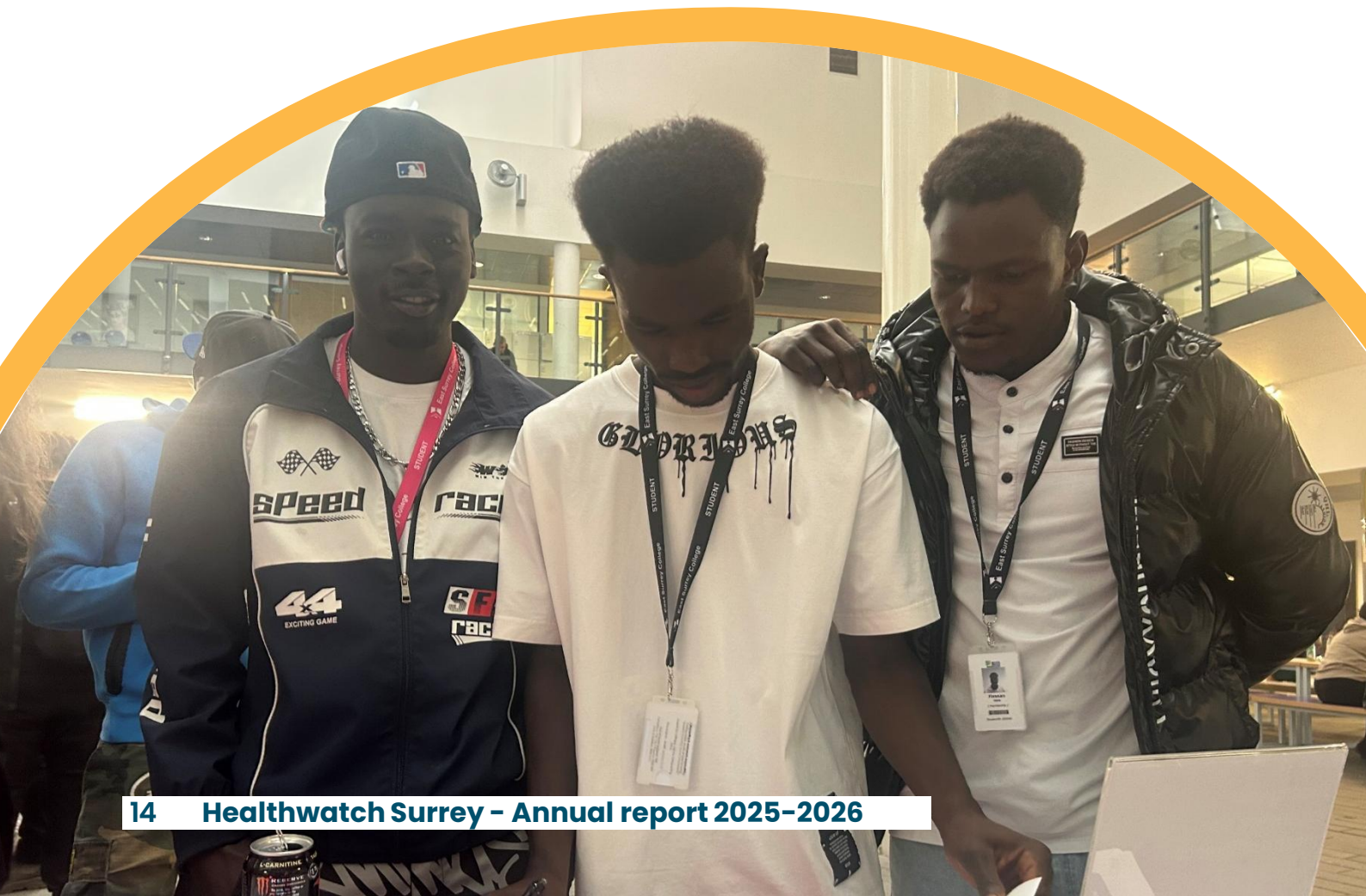
Information and signposting

We recognise how challenging and confusing the health and social care system can be, with people often finding themselves lost. We provide a supportive and sympathetic ear and can signpost people to the most appropriate place in the system to access what they need or to make their voice heard.

This year **421** people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better, in order to support the system to learn and make changes for the benefit of others moving forwards.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Directing people to appropriate complaints routes and advocacy services
- 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.



Improving access to advocacy services

Stephen* contacted the Helpdesk concerned that he was unable to get a referral from his social worker for Care Act Advocacy.

Our Helpdesk team recognised that Stephen was eligible and also noted he was struggling to communicate with the provider of the service. We were able to go directly to the commissioners of the service on Stephen's behalf – they reviewed his case and took steps to ensure access.

Raising our concerns also prompted a review of how calls are taken by the advocacy service and whether anything can be done to ensure better communication for people trying to access it. The review led to the implementation of a new phone system, to enable them to respond to queries in a more efficient and timely manner.

Addressing confusion around audiology pathways

The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) contacted us concerned about a number of enquiries they'd had through their helpline from people struggling to access an appointment for a hearing test.

We liaised with the Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board to confirm the situation and passed this information back to RNID.

Thanks to our intervention (and our connections and understanding of the local NHS landscape) the RNID, a national organisation, could share correct, up to date information with their members to reassure them. Our involvement also contributed to additional communications being sent to local GP practices to ensure the correct messaging was reaching patients moving forwards.

Helpdesk user feedback



“Thank you so much for your help today, we would not have been able to get this issue resolved without your support.”

“You are the only people who have sat down with me, talked through everything and looked at the whole picture and given us practical advice.”

* Names have been changed

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given **1,067** 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
- Supported their communities to share their views and feedback with Healthwatch Surrey
- Shared their experiences for videos
- Carried out Enter and View visits to local services to help them improve
- Have been part of our Reading Panel.



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.



Carol



“I have volunteered for Healthwatch Surrey since 2023. I chose to volunteer here as I really believe that what they are doing is helping to change the NHS and healthcare for the better. Most of my volunteer work is on engagement, going out into the community to meet people. This year I was involved in the patient transport project, finding out what local people thought about the NHS non-emergency patient transport service and how it might better meet their needs. As well as this, I will be participating in the Enter and View programme going forward. I enjoy the varied nature of the engagements and the different people you meet while out and about. I’m looking forward to continuing my volunteering over the coming year.”

Carol

It’s been a busy and varied year for our dedicated Healthwatch Surrey volunteers!

At the start of the year, 10 of our Reading Panel (who act as a vital sounding board for our system partners – reviewing reports, strategies and other documents) dedicated over 40 hours to scrutinising the Quality Accounts of 8 different providers, suggesting changes and improvements to ensure clarity and accessibility for all.

In summer one of our volunteers set out to explore students’ understanding and awareness of mental health services. In her qualitative research project, our student volunteer spoke to 6 students at Royal Holloway, University of London. As a student herself she was able to garner the trust required for the students to talk openly about their thoughts and feelings, which were brought together in a [powerful research report](#). The report was presented to Surrey County Council’s Public Health Team who shared it with the Young People Suicide Prevention Lead to guide their activities and communications.

Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) followed in Autumn, with 8 volunteers supporting the Healthwatch team as we undertook PLACE at 5 different settings to assess how the environment supports the provision of clinical care.

Not forgetting our Local Healthwatch Advisory Group, who – throughout the year – have continued to advise on our priorities and strategies, and the volunteers who have represented us in system meetings, often being the only people reminding our partners to consider things from a user perspective.

Finance and future priorities

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

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Local Healthwatch and Independent Health Complaints Advocacy	£585,485	Staffing costs	£381,878
		Direct delivery costs	£54,903
		CIC costs	£51,200
		Health Complaints Advocacy	£97,275
Total income	£585,485	Total expenditure	£585,256



Finance and future priorities

Over the next year we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially those experiencing health inequalities, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Utilise our resources efficiently so that we maintain a high quality service.
2. Navigate a time of change and transition. Ensure that our focus remains on eliciting positive changes to health and social care services for the people of Surrey, whilst protecting the legacy of the important changes we've already helped to bring about.
3. Maximise the impact of our projects – including looking at carers' experience of accessing primary care for those they care for, oral health in care homes, the accessibility of complaints procedures and how our residents experience secondary care services.

Statutory statements

The Healthwatch Surrey service is run by Luminus Insight CIC, a Surrey based, independent, community interest company which exists to empower people to have their voices heard.

Registered office: GF21, Astolat, Coniers Way, Burpham, Surrey, GU4 7HL.

Healthwatch Surrey 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 CIC Board consists of 10 Non Executive Directors who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities. They are supported by a Local Healthwatch Advisory Group which brings some of our Healthwatch volunteers together to advise on Healthwatch priorities and duties. This group helps us ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities, and together with the Board, ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26 the Local Healthwatch Advisory Group met bi-monthly, with additional email updates each month, and the CIC Board met in Public 4 times to provide governance and make decisions on matters such as our annual workplan and policy updates.

Information from the public has shaped our priorities in various ways. For example, insights provided to our Helpdesk Advisors around Continuing Healthcare (CHC) helped to guide the development of two separate information videos. System insights also help to shape our work – when Surrey County Council informed us that uptake of their library independence courses was low for example, we undertook a series of engagements to specifically investigate why this is the case, and what could be done to increase uptake.

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 2025/26, we have been available by phone, text, WhatsApp and email, a website form and through social media. We have also 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, highlight it on our social media, send to key organisations and to our Insight bulletin subscribers.

Statutory statements

Taking people's experiences to decision makers

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

In our local authority area for example, we shared information with the Adult and Health Select Committee, Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board and Surrey County Council Adult Social Care Partner Update meeting.

We also took insight and experiences to decision makers in NHS Surrey Heartlands and Frimley Health. For example, we attended the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Board/Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), Quality and Safety Escalation Group (QSEG), Primary Care Access Board, Prevention and Wider Determinants of Health Board, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Oversight Group and we contributed to the System Quality Groups across both Surrey Heartlands and Frimley Health. This is in addition to a number of patient experience and involvement forums.

We also held regular meetings with Public Health and Adult Social Care.

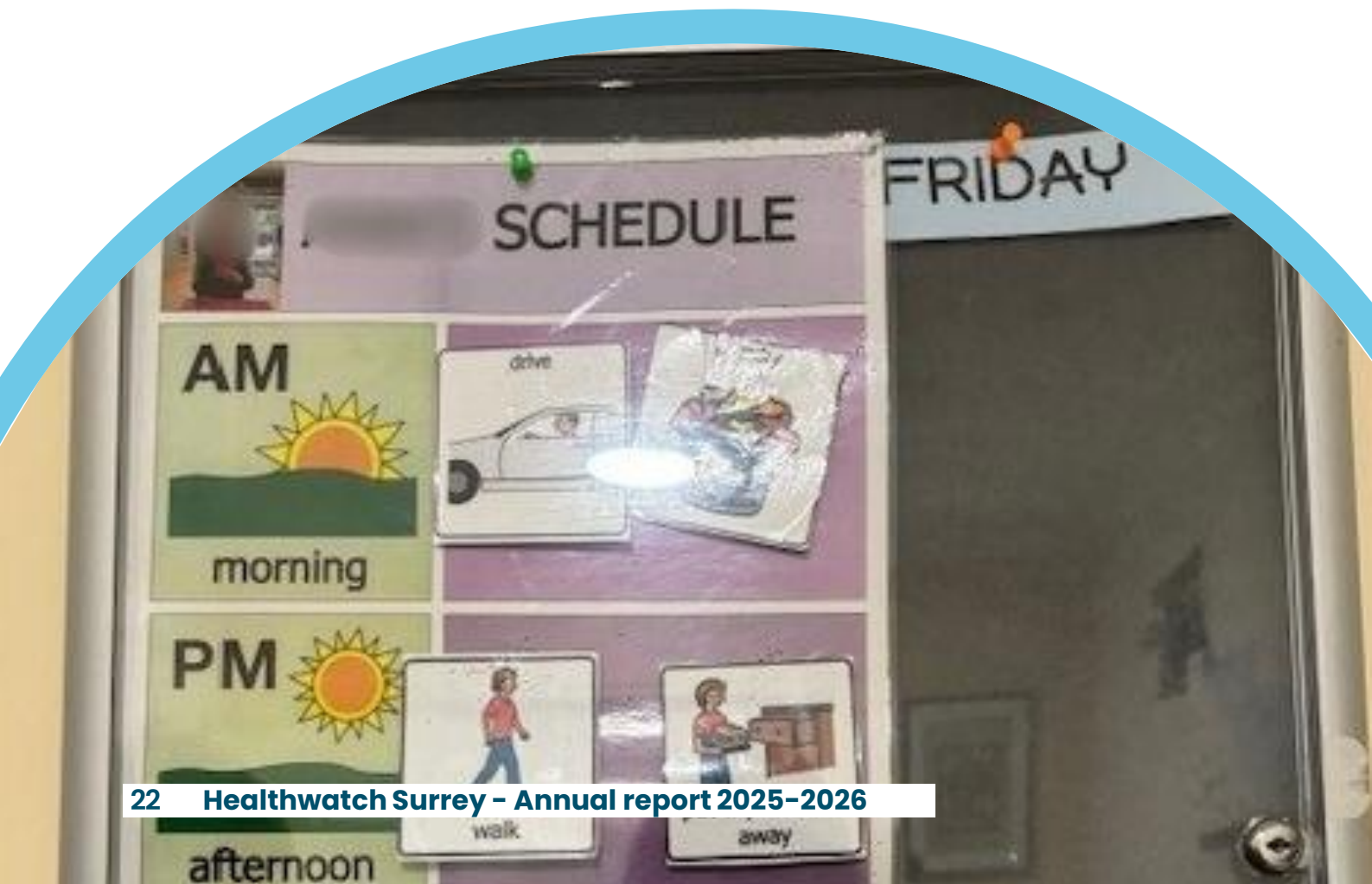
Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Surrey is represented on Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Board by Kate Scribbins, our Luminus Chief Executive. During 2025/26 she has effectively carried out this role by consistently advocating for greater involvement of people in the design of services and raising when services do not appear to be meeting needs. We also submit a quarterly report for the Health and Wellbeing Board Insight report, highlighting pieces of work we have undertaken, often in relation to the specific priorities and/or priority populations of the Health and Wellbeing Board strategy.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What we did as a result
Derby House (a registered care home supporting 6 women who have a learning disability and autism).	Enter and View requested by the learning disability management team at Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SABP).	Derby House report with recommendations published.
Hillcroft (a registered social care home for men and women over the age of 50 with a learning disability and associated needs).	Enter and View requested by the learning disability management team at Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SABP).	Hillcroft report with recommendations published.



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The Healthwatch Surrey service is run by
Luminus Insight CIC, known as Luminus.