



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Medway annual report 2025/26

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Acting Chief Executive
Chris McCann

“

The NHS plays a vital role in our lives, and we know it faces real challenges. Listening to people’s thoughts about their care is one of the best ways to improve services. Every comment, concern, and compliment helps health and care professionals see what works and what needs to change, so care can be safer and better for everyone.

“We want to say a heartfelt thanks to all the local people who have taken the time to share their experiences, and to the health and social care professionals who have listened and acted on that feedback. Your commitment has helped make a real difference for our community.”

A message from our chair

This year has been one defined by outstanding work in the community, underpinned by a moment of uncertainty for our organisation and the wider Healthwatch movement.

I am so proud of what our small but dedicated team has achieved this year. Our report on the experiences of carers found compelling evidence that being a carer can widen health inequalities, particularly for women, and create barriers to accessing support and maintaining employment. Our work on language and communication in GP care highlighted the persistent challenges faced by D/deaf residents and Nepalese communities across Kent and Medway – a reminder that the improvements we championed in our Deaf Spotlight Report must continue to be embedded, not treated as a box ticked.

And yet, this year's report is written against uncertain backdrop. Following the Dash Review, the Government has accepted recommendations to abolish Healthwatch England and Local Healthwatch in their current form, with a new patient experience directorate within DHSC intended to bring the patient voice 'in house.' It's important to me to be clear about what this means. It does not diminish the value of what has been done, or the trust that the people of Medway have placed in us. Our commitment to the people of Medway remains. We will continue to listen and to report with the same independence, the same honesty, and the same determination that has always defined this organisation.

The strength of our impact lies not just in what we say, but in our independence, and the trust that our community places in us to tell the truth of their experiences.

Thank you for your continued support.

Katharine Bishop
Healthwatch Medway Steering Group Chair

69 The strength of our impact lies not just in what we say, but in our independence, and the trust that our community places in us to tell the truth of their experiences.

About us

Healthwatch Medway 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 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

In 2025/2026 we supported more than **[x]** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **2** staff and, our work was supported by **11** volunteers.



Reaching out:

1559 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

2965 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as **mental health, dentistry** and **GP services**.



Championing your voice:

We published **20** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **mental health, services for carers** and **in their local community**.

Our most popular report was **Young Minds, Hidden Struggles**, highlighting young people's perceptions of **mental health and self-harm**.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by **Medway Council**. In 2025/26 we received £138,441.00.

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 **Medway**. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We explored people's experiences of using pharmacy services and found that reasons for accessing pharmacies differed by gender.

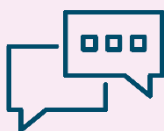


As part of our place-based engagement, we engaged with residents in Halling and Cuxton.

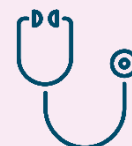


Summer

Our research into the experiences of young people and their mental health highlighted key recommendations for self-harm prevention.



We engaged with Veterans living in Kent and Medway to understand their experiences of accessing health and social care services.



Autumn

We gathered 170 Medway residents' views on crime, anti-social behaviour and personal safety in the area.



As part of our place-based engagement, we heard from residents across the Hoo Peninsula, who told us about how their area affects health and wellbeing.



Winter

We published our report exploring how the sleep routines of Medway residents impacts their health and wellbeing.



Our report on the experience of carers in Medway was published, alongside a comprehensive response from Medway Council's adult social care transformation and improvement team.



Working together for change

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

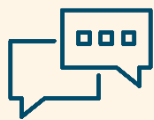
This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across **Medway** to achieve the following:



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

In March 2026, Healthwatch Kent and Healthwatch Medway proudly hosted the **Annual Healthwatch Recognition Awards**, celebrating outstanding contributions to health and social care across the region.

A total of **63** individuals, services and collaborations were nominated for their **commitment to delivering excellent care** for residents in Kent and Medway.



A big conversation:

From September 2024, we started to receive more feedback on people's experiences of mental health crisis support. To look into this issue in more detail we identified and analysed 489 related experiences. The ICB, Safe Havens and the Mental Health Trust responded with a range of actions. These included making improvements to waiting times and crisis support, coordination and continuity of care, as well as increasing Safe Haven access.



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

In 2025/2026, Healthwatch Medway strengthened our relationship with **Medway Maritime Hospital**. As an active member of the Trust's **Patient Experience Group**, Healthwatch plays a vital role in ensuring people's voices shape discussions and decisions. With a standing agenda item, we regularly present reports and insights to key decision-makers to ensure community perspectives are central to discussions.

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

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here are some examples of our work in **Medway** this year:



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

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

Healthwatch Medway's report on public perceptions of Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour and Personal Safety, which found 170 individuals who raised concerns was used as part of Medway Council's response to the Licensing Reforms Programme, as part of the call for evidence consultation.



Getting services to involve the public

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

In 2025/2026, Healthwatch Medway and Healthwatch Kent 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 veterans, carers, self-harm, Live in Care, Co-occurring conditions and Frailty.



Improving care over time

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

In 2025 we submitted evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee looking into Community Mental Health Services. The report from the 4th session Community Mental Health Services references our submission, utilising insight across EK360, a total of 9 times. We expect the committee to conclude it's review in 2026.

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.



Championing community feedback through engagement with young people

Last year, we championed the voices of young people living in Medway to enhance system-wide understanding of self-harm in children and young people.

What did we do

We spoke to 323 individuals to understand the causes of self-harm and perceptions of self-harm among children and young people, communities and professionals.

Key things we heard:



100%

of the public and professionals we spoke to considered 'cutting yourself' as a form of self-harm. Less participants considered addictive behaviours such as gambling or gaming as a form of self-harm.

50%

of children and young people we spoke to did not know of any mental health support services.

43%

of the general public we spoke to felt that improvements made to services' accessibility, availability and effectiveness were critical for children and young people.

Our work revealed the complexity and multifaceted nature of how self-harm is shaped by a range of personal, social and systemic factors. Participants agreed that improvements in service accessibility, awareness and multi-agency collaboration are essential to supporting children and young people to stop self-harming.

What difference did this make?

Our insights have been shared with a wide range of system partners including the **ICB, Medway Council** and **Medway Maritime Hospital**. One key finding highlighted limited awareness of lesser-known forms of self-harm, such as addictive behaviours. In response, **Medway and Swale Health and Care Partnership** organised workshops to raise awareness of this form of self-harm, and a local charity organisation supporting people with this issue.

Supporting the system to improve the lives of carers

Between June and October 2025, we heard from 45 carers living in Medway.

We wanted to know more about carers' needs, the challenges they face, the impact of caring responsibilities on their health and wellbeing, and what support is needed to improve their lives.

Key things we heard:



75%

Of carers we spoke to who were providing over 50 hours of care per week were not employed, and less than half of those who were employed were working part-time.

94%

Of carers reporting a negative impact on their physical health were providing over 50 hours of care per week, and 81% were unable to take a break from caring in the last six months.



“Emotionally it’s very hard. **I am an emotional eater and because of that I am now pre-diabetic.** You neglect yourself.

What difference did this make?

We shared our report with **Medway Council’s Transformation and Improvement team**, who provided a response that was included in the full report, highlighting some of the key actions they are taking to improve the experience of carers in Medway, including:

- Establishing a Medway Carers panel to embed carers’ voices and lived experience into service design and decision making.
- Redesigning all carers’ webpages to ensure they are clear, accessible and comprehensive.
- Enhancing partnership working with Carers First.
- Ongoing engagement through Community Involvement Groups.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of **Medway**. 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:

- Making connections with AMAT and Pathways to Independence to engage with people in the homeless community and those accessing housing services.
- Engaging with unpaid carers living in Medway.
- Engaging with residents from rural communities to understand how their environment impacts their health and wellbeing.



Understanding the experience of those who are homeless or accessing housing services

We explored issues linked to housing and homelessness.

People told us about a lack of mental health support, the impact of anti-social behaviour from neighbours or flat mates and issues with conditions of housing.

What difference did this make?

The report was shared with the Kent Housing Group, who incorporated a number of our recommendations into the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy for 2025–2030.

Increasing awareness of mental health support for children and young people

Public and professionals told us about a lack of awareness of support services for young people's mental health.

To help, we created a resource pack containing information about local support services and groups, which we shared as a printed leaflet and online resource. Medway and Swale Health and Care Partnership also organised workshops to increase awareness of gambling/gaming as a form of self-harm and to raise awareness of the support organisation, YGAM.

What difference did this make?

A reduction in A&E attendance for self-harm in young people was observed since October 2024.

Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

This year **2965** 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.

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



Support with GP registration

A housebound resident received support when they were unexpectedly removed from their GP surgery list.

The individual had been registered with their surgery for 19 years, but they received a letter telling them they had been removed from the practice list because they were out of the catchment area, despite living at the same address throughout their registration.

Healthwatch Medway raised this with the Primary Care team at the ICB who confirmed that although the resident was out of the catchment area, the practice had continued to provide care, so they were not within their rights to remove the patient. The practice later apologised to the patient about how the removal had been handled. The individual chose to register at another surgery where they had been accepted as a patient.



“I would just like to say thank you so very much for your wonderful service and support from Healthwatch and all the assistance you have given me, it is very much appreciated.”

Interpreter support for dental appointments

After being told that interpreters were no longer available for NHS dental appointments, a resident contacted Healthwatch Medway for support.

Healthwatch Medway raised the concern with the Integrated Care Board, and the Pharmacy Optometry and Dentistry (POD) Commissioning team confirmed that interpreter services are still funded by the ICB. They also clarified the process for dental practices to book appropriate support.

This information helped the family to understand their entitlement to interpretation services, and the POD team shared this information with the dental practice to confirm they can continue to access approved interpreter providers for patients who need them.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given **516.5 hours** to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Supported us with project research and data processing.
- Participated as key members of the Steering Group ensuring our areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of the local community.



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 feel extremely lucky to have gotten the opportunity to do my placement year under Healthwatch Kent and Medway. Through my time here I have met so many lovely people and learnt more about the county I've lived in all my life. Being here has allowed be to develop new and existing transferable skills that I will utilise in my future career. This unique placement got me involved with all areas of project development and qualitative research."

Charlotte

"I have only been working with Healthwatch for a short while, 7 months in the office, and have found it very interesting and worthwhile and have learnt about the good work they do. Everyone here is very helpful and support me whilst learning and I appreciate the friendliness and from them all."

Pat

"My time spent as a volunteer has been the most rewarding experience in my life. I have developed multiple different skills and become a valued member of the team. I have developed both as a worker and as a person. The team is so inviting and supportive allowing me to grow and gain confidence, I can never thank them enough. I mainly do data input and theming, and while it may not sound very interesting, the diverse experiences of people always makes for a varied workload which keeps me from getting bored."

Nic

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.healthwatchmedway.com



0800 136 656



enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from **Medway 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	£138,441.00	Expenditure on pay	£82,940.30
Additional income	£0	Non-pay expenditure	£4,577.25
		Office and management fee	£51,400.12
Total income	£138,441.00	Total Expenditure	£138,917.67

Finance and future priorities

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. To increase feedback from people from non-white ethnic backgrounds.
2. To increase social care feedback through generic engagement.
3. To further explore how people's experiences contribute to health inequalities.

Statutory statements

**Healthwatch Medway, Old Court House, 8 Tufton Street,
Ashford, Kent, TN23 1QN
EK360 is our host organisation.**

Healthwatch Medway 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 **6** members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met **6** times and made decisions on matters such as **reviewing our progress against the 2025/26 workplan, and agreement of the priorities for 2026/27**. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2025/26, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website www.healthwatchmedway.com.

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.

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to Medway Health and Wellbeing Board, Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board, Trust Patient Experience Committees, plus our regular catch ups with key stakeholders in the system.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Kent and Medway. For example, we work closely with Healthwatch Kent to share the experiences we've heard ensuring feedback triangulation on a system level, in turn supporting Kent and Medway Integrated Care Partnership with strategic priorities. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch **Medway** was represented on the **Kent and Medway** Health and Wellbeing Board by **Adrian Flaherty**.

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by consistently attending Board meetings and bringing lived experience to the forefront of discussions and decision-making.

Healthwatch **Medway** is represented on **Kent and Medway** Integrated Care Partnerships by **Leanne Trotter, Healthwatch Medway Manager** and **Kent and Medway** Integrated Care Boards by **Leanne Trotter, Healthwatch Medway Manager**. Healthwatch Medway is also represented by **Leanne Trotter** at Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board, Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Statutory statements

Enter and view

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

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

	Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
	Feedback was received that a community support service for people with Arthritis was closed with little notice and this was not communicated with the patients or GPs, leaving patients confused.	After raising this with the ICB, they ensured all patients and GPs were notified of the service change.
	Waking up to sleep: Exploring how Medway sleeps	Our report on sleep indicated that better education on sleep hygiene could improve quality of sleep for Medway residents. As a result, The Recovery College ran a 'Sleep Well' course to educate members of the public on how to improve sleep quality.
	Bringing Care Online: People's Experiences of Digital Services in Health and Care	Our report was sent to the Department of Health and Social Care as part of their consultation on the creation of the NHS Online Trust.
Comments from members of the public	"This is information that you kindly sent to me so promptly has proved exceedingly useful. Your reply was particularly helpful to support my presentation for the need of improvement even though there are not legal obligations relating to the issue in our practice"	
	"Thank you for giving me the details for Megan and Libra."	
	"Thank you for this. I am grateful for your interest and will certainly use the several routes you suggest, should it be necessary to raise this issue again."	

Healthwatch Medway
Old Court House, Tufton Street,
Ashford, Kent
TN23 1QN



healthwatch.medway.com



0800 136 656



enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com



@healthwatchmedway



@HWMedway



@healthwatchmedway



@healthwatch-medway