

HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
9 SEPTEMBER 2026

REPORT OF HEALTHWATCH LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE
ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26 AND FORWARD PLAN 2026-27

Purpose of report

1. This report presents the Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire (HWLL) Annual Report 2025-26 for consideration by the Committee.
2. The report provides an overview of Healthwatch activity during 2025-26, including public engagement, information and signposting services, Enter and View activity, and the impact of Healthwatch recommendations on local health and social care services.
3. The report also outlines key priorities and areas of focus for 2026-27.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

4. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced statutory duties on local authorities to deliver effective local Healthwatch services. Healthwatch England is a statutory committee and regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Local Healthwatch (Leicester and Leicestershire) is equally a statutory function and funded by and accountable to local authorities.
5. HWLL is the local independent statutory consumer champion for health and social care. Its role is to ensure that the views, experiences and concerns of patients/residents/service users/carers and local communities inform the planning, commissioning, delivery and scrutiny of health and social care services.
6. To fulfil its statutory duties, HWLL maintains strong relationships across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and is represented on a range of strategic boards, partnerships and stakeholder groups. This includes representation on the Health and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
7. To note the future of HWLL arrangements beyond 2027 remains subject to Government decisions regarding the proposed abolition of Healthwatch, implications for local delivery, commissioning, future governance arrangements are still unknown. HWLL will adapt services to respond to the evolving context.

Background

8. Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire is the statutory consumer champion for health and social care established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.
9. The Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire contract is jointly commissioned by Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council and awarded in 2023 to Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) for delivery.
10. HWLL statutory duties include:
 - Gathering views and experiences of local people on health and social care services;
 - Influencing commissioning, redesign and scrutiny of service delivery;
 - Assessing local services/provision and making recommendations for improvement;
 - Providing information and signposting;
 - Has powers to enter health and social care premises to undertake Enter and View visits;
 - Representing local public and patient voice by using data and insight at Health and Wellbeing Boards, Scrutiny meetings and wider partnership structures.

Annual Report 2025-26 and Business Plan 2025-26

11. The annual report outlines HWLL statutory activities undertaken and the impact of its independent role on service commissioning, planning and delivery. As the independent public voice for people across Leicester and Leicestershire HWLL brings together the experiences, views and insights of local people to help shape and improve health and social care services.
12. The report provides examples of HWLL work undertaken with statutory partners demonstrating how HWLL has used the experiences of local people to identify issues, highlight gaps and opportunities for improvement. It also illustrates the HWLL role in supporting the public to access clear, independent information about health and social care services, enabling the public to better understand their choices and have a voice in decisions affecting their wellbeing.
13. The HWLL Annual Business Plan sets out the strategic focus and direction and the steps HWLL will undertake to support delivery of its statutory duties and contract. The HWLL Business Plan is reviewed annually, the 2026-27 plan has been approved, and the 2025-26 plan has been formally signed off. The plan is reviewed quarterly in line with the Key Performance Indicators and Outcome Indicators at pre-arranged contractual meetings between commissioners, VAL and HWLL.
14. The full Annual Report 2025-2026 can be found here: [Front and Centre: Unlocking the power of people-driven care](#)

15. The purpose of this report is to present Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire's Annual Report for 2025-26, summarising delivery of its statutory functions and demonstrating the impact of Healthwatch activity across Leicester and Leicestershire.

HWLL Key achievements during 2025/26

16. Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire continued to strengthen its reach and impact during 2025-26.
17. Key achievements include:
- Engagement with 46,590 people across Leicester and Leicestershire.
 - 15,046 residents shared experiences of health and social care services.
 - 31,544 people received information, advice and signposting.
 - Publication of 19 reports based on public insight and evidence.
 - Delivery of an extensive Enter and View programme across health and care services including 38 visits and 15 published reports.
 - Continued representation across strategic health and social care boards and partnerships including City and County Health and Wellbeing Board, Neighbourhood Health Programme Board, LLR Safeguarding Adults Board, Oral Health Promotion Board, Leicester and Leicestershire Integrated Care Board. A full list of meetings attended by HWLL is available on request.
 - 160 events through partnerships and HWLL #SpeakUp events across Leicestershire including breast cancer awareness and referral pathways.
18. To deliver our statutory obligations HWLL maintains links with key stakeholders, including departmental links within the local authorities, Public Health, Adult Social Care and providers such as Leicestershire Partnership Trust, University Hospitals of Leicester. HWLL collaborates with Healthwatch Rutland and has a Memorandum of Understanding with local Healthwatch across Northamptonshire as part of the ICB cluster arrangements. During this arrangement we have agreed a singled shared non-voting seat at the joint ICB attended by our HWLL Chair. We continue to hold quarterly meetings with our partners outside of the key strategic meetings ensuring that we contribute to plans and decisions around health and social care services.

Impact/Outcomes

19. Neighbourhood Mental Health Cafes

HWLL visited 24 Neighbourhood Mental Health Cafes across both Leicester and Leicestershire to gather feedback through engagement sessions with service users, volunteers and staff. Healthwatch found that the cafes were mostly rooted within the local community based within VCSE organisations. The cafes were helpful in providing early non-clinical community based mental health support for residents before they reach crisis point, helped with reducing isolation, welcoming and supportive in improving mental health and wellbeing. Areas of improvement included consistency in support, access and referral pathways. Recommendations from Healthwatch highlighted the importance of the intervention but also incorporated

recommendations to enhance access through clearer referral routes, visibility and strengthening the awareness of the intervention so that communities can find and access support at the right time when it is needed.

20. *Women and Girl's Health Programme*

The Department of Health and Social Care released the Women's Health Strategy in 2022 and as a result the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board (LLR ICB) created the Women's Health Transformation Programme, developing the Women's Health Need Assessment. HWLL worked jointly with the LLR ICB team to develop a better understanding of women and girl's experiences of local health and social care. HWLL engaged with 2,802 women and girls across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to understand their health priorities. Highlights included access to specialist support, better continuity of care, improved awareness of women's health among professionals and greater access to information, appointments and joined up pathways that include community-based support. The report will be launched on the 14th October 2026 and findings will help the development of specialist hubs, training and signposting around women's health and ensure local insight informs future service development.

21. *Supported Living Review for Leicestershire*

HWLL in partnership with Adult Social Care at Leicestershire County Council developed an engagement approach to gather lived experiences of those accessing supporting living provision, including residents, carers and providers across both Leicester and Leicestershire. This review enabled people and their carers a direct route to share experiences. Supported Living providers vary in the way support is provided depending on care needs therefore the review focused on a small cohort in order to explore more closely their experiences. Whilst the number of people (32 individuals and 19 carers) involved in the review appear modest to other HWLL activity the work provided valuable insight into the experiences of a population that is vulnerable and often underrepresented in consultation and engagement activity. The review highlighted issues around communication, inclusion, housing suitability, social isolation and support planning. Findings have been shared with the local authorities and providers as part of the future development and review of supported living services.

22. *Hospital discharge*

HWLL worked in partnership with the NHS, providers and local authorities to undertake extensive research to identify good practice and areas where discharge processes could be improved. The review focused on resident experiences of moving back from hospital to community care. Through surveys, visits to wards and conversations with parent/carers and the local community HWLL gathered insight into challenges people face when leaving hospital around decision-making, medication, follow-up support, discharge planning and communication. The review has contributed to quality improvement discussions across the health and social care system. This will work inform ongoing work around readmissions and improving patient outcomes.

23. *A review into the Deaf and hard of hearing People's access to healthcare*

HWLL undertook this review ten years after its original investigation into the experiences of Deaf and hard of hearing people accessing health and care services. providing an opportunity to assess what progress had been made and identify where challenges remained. To make this more accessible for the community we held an event 'Your day, Your say' at the Leicester Deaf Centre open to all Deaf and hard of hearing residents across Leicester and Leicestershire. In addition to this we launched a survey to gather responses. The review found that, despite improvements in some areas, many Deaf residents continued to experience barriers when accessing healthcare, particularly in relation to booking appointments, accessing British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters, receiving information in accessible formats and communicating effectively with healthcare professionals. The findings highlighted that communication barriers can have a significant impact on patient experience, understanding of treatment, confidence in services and, ultimately, health outcomes. The recommendations have focused on improving awareness of reasonable adjustment requirements, strengthening access to interpreting services, improving the accessibility of appointment systems and ensuring communication needs are identified and met consistently across services. By revisiting the original review, the deaf community can continue to influence local health and care planning ensuring services are inclusive and person-centred.

Forward Plan 2026-27

24. HWLL priorities for 2026-27 are shaped by extensive public engagement, including online surveys, consultation and targeted outreach. These are approved by the Healthwatch Advisory Board and signed off by commissioners. All themes for the year will have a split between County and City planned activities to enable a distinction between urban and rural issues. Twenty Enter and View visits are planned to include a mix of care homes, primary and services with five follow up visits from previous years within this contract.
25. The key three themes identified were:
 1. Pharmacy First: To understand public awareness, accessibility and experience of the Pharmacy First programme. This work will help improve awareness, access and the quality of care provided through community pharmacies.
 2. Digital access to NHS services: the 10-year Health Plan emphasises a shift from analogue to digital. Digital access in primary care is one of the issues we hear most often. We will work with our ICB colleagues to explore the impact of increasing use of digital systems and ensure services remain accessible to all communities.
26. Tackling Health Inequalities: we will strengthen our partnership work with local authorities and stakeholders to ensure services better meet the needs of all communities locally. Our first project will look at a survey for young people, exploring their lived experience into healthy weight and lifestyle.
27. Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire will continue to deliver its statutory functions throughout 2026-27 while engaging with national developments.

Resource Implications

28. We are funded by Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council.
29. This grant £299,428 pa is jointly awarded to Healthwatch by Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City Council.
30. The grant is funded through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to local authorities to support the delivery of the local Healthwatch functions. The grant is provided for this purpose and is not discretionary general funding for local authorities. The funding therefore must be used to secure provision of local Healthwatch services in line with the County Council's statutory duties under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.
31. The current grant is funded until March 2027.
32. Nationally the future of local Healthwatch is subject to change following Government legislative proposals relating to the abolition of Healthwatch and public voice functions moving to local authorities and Integrated Care Boards. The detail of future arrangements remains subject to further national guidance and parliamentary process. There are concerns from Healthwatch England on the impact and the need to protect independent voice arrangements in health and social care.
33. We employ 7 staff and 24 volunteers

Recommendation

34. The Committee is recommended to:
 - (a) Note the contents of the Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire Annual Report 2025-26.
 - (b) Note Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire's priorities for 2026-27.

Background papers

35. Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire Annual Report 2025-26 [Front and Centre: Unlocking the power of people-driven care](#)

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

36. none

Equality Implications

37. There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
38. VAL's work actively supports inclusion, community cohesion and reducing health inequalities across diverse communities.
39. VAL is committed to promoting equality and welcomes diversity in all aspects of its service delivery. We operate in a diverse community, and our aim is to harness the talent within the community to help improve our service provision further. We

understand that our services have to be delivered in a different way to meet the legitimate needs of different communities. We operate an Equality and Diversity Policy in service delivery and employment.

Human Rights Implications

40. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

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