

Dentistry Impact Report

Dentistry Impact report May 2025 – Executive Summary

Leading a Regional Revolution in Dental Care

Over the course of 2024–2025, Healthwatch Cornwall has led a powerful shift in how NHS dentistry is delivered and accessed across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. At a time of widespread concern about dental access, rising inequalities, and strained services, Healthwatch Cornwall stood at the forefront — turning public frustration into focused action and lasting change.



By **gathering the experiences of over 1,100 residents**, including families, carers, and rural communities, **Healthwatch Cornwall produced the landmark report “The Dental Crisis in Cornwall: Your Questions Answered.”**

This evidence, widely acknowledged by health leaders as the most comprehensive and actionable available, was instrumental in shaping the Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Board’s (ICB) 2024–2026 Dental Strategy.

The report gained significant publicity following a debate in Westminster, led by Richard Foord, which focused on the dental crisis in the Southwest. This was further amplified by news coverage and an in-depth article by ITV news. In response to the public and political pressure, NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (ICB) stated they are “implementing a range of measures locally to address national pressures on NHS dentistry”. This was quickly followed by a well-informed strategy.

Key Achievements: A Snapshot of Transformation

Direct Influence on Policy

- Healthwatch Cornwall's report was formally cited in ICB board minutes as the "critical public evidence" guiding dental strategy decisions.

Service Redesign Initiated

- Insights led to the commissioning of:
- 1,000+ additional emergency appointments
- A new Patient Prioritisation Framework

Public Voice → System Change

- Lived Experience shared from the public were directly linked to service changes — from waiting list filtering reforms to targeted outreach for children and vulnerable patients.

Structured Impact Approach

- Using the *Making a Difference Toolkit's* Theory of Change model, Healthwatch Cornwall aligned its actions with measurable outcomes and strategic goals.

Why This Matters: Framing Local Voice Front and Centre of Influencing Change

This case exemplifies what happens when an independent local Healthwatch is deeply embedded in the community. It shows that local voices when captured, framed, and championed effectively can transform even the most entrenched system challenges.

What's Next: Building on Success

Healthwatch Cornwall will continue to:

- **Monitor** the implementation of new dental services
- **Engage** underrepresented communities
- **Report** outcomes to the ICB in July 2025
- **Publish** an updated impact report in Autumn 2025

Bold Vision, Real Impact

A future where everyone in Cornwall can access NHS dentistry — no matter who they are or where they live.

Healthwatch Cornwall: The Engine Behind Change

Healthwatch Cornwall became the catalyst for systemic reform, turning raw resident stories into powerful evidence that reshaped health policy.

Our work moved decision-makers from intention to implementation, influencing how — and where — dental services are delivered across the county.

Turning Insight into Action



“We built the new Dental Strategy on the foundation of Healthwatch’s findings. It was the clearest evidence we had of public need.”

— Senior Strategy Officer, NHS Cornwall & Isles of Scilly ICB

Blueprint for Change: A Theory of Change in Action

Our Influence and Reach

- 1,185 stories from people across Cornwall
- Skilled team of staff and volunteers
- Relationships with policymakers and providers
- Proven credibility as the voice of the community

Where we Focused (Strategic Priorities)




- Remove barriers to dental access in rural and deprived areas
- Improve care for vulnerable groups (children, older adults, carers)
- Reduce waiting times through smarter systems

How We Championed the Voice of the County

- Engaged the public through surveys, focus groups, and direct outreach
- Produced the landmark report *“The Dental Crisis in Cornwall”*
- Presented findings directly to the ICB and commissioners
- Maintained public pressure through media and stakeholder advocacy

Ripple Effect: What Changed Because of Us

Public Concerns and Responses:

“No one called about my 18-month wait.”		NHS implemented waitlist filtering
“My child is in pain and still waiting.”		Priority booking for vulnerable children
“30 miles is too far to travel.”		Mobile dental units launched

Without Healthwatch Cornwall, these changes would not have happened at pace or scale.

Proving Impact: Indicators of Change

Key Results:

Expanded access to urgent care	➤	20,000 annual emergency appointments commissioned
Prioritisation of equity	➤	New frameworks for vulnerable patients
Long-term policy change	➤	Formal ICB commitment to integrate Healthwatch feedback

From Planning to Policy: Aligned with Our 2022–2024 Work Plan

This project exemplifies every pillar of Healthwatch Cornwall's work plan:

- **Maximising Impact:** Our findings directly informed strategy and spending
- **Delivering for Cornwall:** We centred underrepresented voices
- **Ensuring Equality:** We addressed the root causes of health access disparities
- **Driving System Accountability:** Our presence at every key decision table mattered

Voices That Resonate: What Stakeholders Said



"We are determined to serve our population better — with access to NHS dentistry shaped by Healthwatch Cornwall's insight."

— **Chris Reid, Chief Medical Officer, NHS Cornwall**



“We accept the recommendations of Healthwatch Cornwall’s report. It has been instrumental in shaping our new direction.”

— *ICB Board Minutes, November 2024*

Where We Go From Here

- **Extend outreach** to migrant workers, young people, and other seldom-heard groups
- **Track impact** of new services over 6–12 months
- Deliver a **follow-up public report** in Autumn 2025
- **Maintain pressure** for long-term contract and workforce reform

Conclusion: Public Voice, System Power

This is not just an example of good community engagement — it’s a playbook for how Healthwatch Cornwall can lead real system transformation.

Through courage, structure, and strategic insight, Healthwatch Cornwall changed the story of dentistry in our region — and the system listened.



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