



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Cornwall Annual Report 2025/26

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**Board Chair,
Healthwatch Cornwall**
Dr Keith Judkins



This has been a significant year for Healthwatch Cornwall and I am proud of the difference the organisation continues to make for people and communities across Cornwall.

Throughout the year, we have ensured that local people's experiences have informed discussions on issues including NHS dentistry, GP access, adult social care workforce pressures and mental health services. Through our reports, Enter & View programme, Listening Hubs and Partnership Boards, we have continued to bring community experiences into decision-making and support improvements across health and social care. I would like to thank everyone who has shared their experiences with us. Your feedback helps us understand what is working well, where improvements are needed and how services can better meet people's needs.

I am also incredibly proud of our CEO, staff, volunteers and Board members whose commitment, professionalism and passion continue to make a positive difference. Together, we remain committed to ensuring that local voices are heard, valued and reflected in decisions that affect communities across Cornwall.

A message from our CEO

I am incredibly proud of what Healthwatch Cornwall has achieved this year. Every report, recommendation, conversation, challenge and success contained within this Annual Report reflects the dedication, professionalism and determination of a team committed to ensuring the voices of Cornwall's residents are heard, valued and acted upon.

Throughout 2025-2026, we have listened to thousands of people sharing their experiences of health and social care services. Those experiences have informed major investigations into GP access, mental health services and the challenges facing people working in the care sector for adults in Cornwall, helping decision-makers better understand the challenges facing local communities and the impact these challenges have on people's lives.

Our work has extended far beyond gathering feedback. Through our Listening Hubs, Partnership Boards, Enter & View programme, safeguarding contributions, quality assurance activity and system leadership forums, we have provided independent insight, constructive challenge and evidence-based recommendations to support service improvement across Cornwall. We have ensured that lived experience remains visible within discussions about strategy, commissioning, quality and future service development.

This year has taken place against a backdrop of significant change and increasing pressure across health and social care. Yet throughout this period, our purpose has remained unchanged: to champion the voice of local people and ensure their experiences help shape better, safer and more responsive services.

The achievements highlighted throughout this report are not simply measures of activity. They demonstrate the difference that independent engagement, scrutiny and challenge can make when communities are placed at the heart of decision-making.

CEO
Debbie Gilbert

"Against a backdrop of significant change across health and social care, our focus has remained unwavering: listening to people, understanding their experiences, and ensuring their voices influence the decisions, services and support that affect their lives."



About us

Healthwatch Cornwall 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, Healthwatch Cornwall heard from more than 3,200 people, provided independent advice and information, and used local experiences to influence decisions about health and social care services across Cornwall.



Reaching out:

3,239 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, providing vital intelligence on what is working well and where improvements are needed.

294 people contacted us for independent information, advice and signposting, helping them better understand services, navigate complex systems and access the support they needed.



Championing your voice:

We published three major issue reports examining GP access, mental health services and pressures facing Cornwall's adult care workforce. Together, these reports amplified the experiences of local people and staff, informed system discussions, and supported greater accountability across health and care services.

Our most widely read report, *Cornish Communities in Focus: Evolving Voices in Mental Health*, highlighted significant challenges facing people seeking mental health support and helped ensure these experiences remained visible within strategic planning and service improvement discussions.



Statutory funding:

We receive statutory Government funding, administered by Cornwall Council, to act as the independent champion for people using health and care services.

In 2025/26 we received £433,011 to gather community insight, provide independent representation across key health and care decision-making forums.

Turning Experiences into Action

- 28 Enter & View visits completed resulting in 95+ recommendations made to improve services
- 5 Partnership Boards bringing lived experience into decision-making
- 3 major issue reports influencing local discussions on health and care
- Independent representation across safeguarding, scrutiny and quality assurance forums

A year of making a difference

Every conversation, piece of feedback and lived experience shared with Healthwatch Cornwall contributes to a bigger picture. Throughout 2025–2026, community insight helped identify emerging issues, influence local priorities, support accountability and strengthen understanding of the issues affecting people using health and care services across Cornwall.

Spring

Community insight highlighted the growing impact of the cost-of-living crisis on people's ability to access health and care services, ensuring barriers such as transport, affordability and social isolation remained visible within local planning and decision-making.



More than 1,000 experiences of NHS dentistry highlighted the scale of the access crisis facing Cornwall, helping ensure the issue remained a priority for local decision-makers and contributing to discussions about future dental provision.



Summer

Feedback on GP access highlighted significant inequalities in how people access and navigate services, ensuring barriers relating to communication, triage and accessibility remained visible within local discussions about primary care improvement.



Community insight provided an early warning of emerging pressures affecting local people, ensuring decision-makers had access to timely feedback to inform planning and service improvement discussions.



Autumn

Community insight highlighted significant barriers to accessing mental health support, including long waiting times, rural inequalities and challenges navigating services, helping ensure these issues remained a priority within local discussions about service improvement and future provision.



Launched the Mental Health Partnership Board, ensuring people with lived experience have an ongoing voice in shaping local mental health priorities, influencing decision-makers and informing future service development.



Winter

The Carers Partnership Board helped shape the development of Cornwall's Carers Strategy, ensuring the experiences and priorities of unpaid carers directly influenced future planning and strategic priorities.



Evidence gathered from the workforce in care services for adults and providers brought workforce pressures into sharper focus, helping inform discussions about sustainability, recruitment, retention and the future delivery of care services in Cornwall.



Working together for change

Our Partnership Boards provide a direct route for lived experience to influence decision-making. By bringing together communities, professionals and system leaders, they help ensure that services, strategies and future priorities are informed by the people they affect most.

This year, we've worked with our Partnership Boards across Cornwall to achieve the following:



A collaborative network of Healthwatch Partnership Boards:

Healthwatch Cornwall's five Partnership Boards: Ageing Well, Autism, Carers, Learning Disability and Mental Health—provide a direct route for lived experience to influence local decision-making.

This year, Board members helped shape priorities, inform work programmes and ensure that the issues affecting local communities remained visible within strategic discussions across health and social care.



A big conversation:

Our Mental Health Partnership Board created a direct route for people with lived experience to influence local discussions about mental health prevention.

By bringing together residents, professionals, charities and decision-makers, the Board helped ensure community insight informed conversations about future prevention priorities and service development across Cornwall.



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

The Carers Partnership Board helped shape the development of Cornwall's Carers Strategy, ensuring the experiences, priorities and challenges of unpaid carers directly influenced future planning.

By bringing together carers and system partners, the Board strengthened the role of lived experience in decision-making and helped ensure future services better reflect the needs of carers across Cornwall.

Working together for change

Healthwatch Cornwall has continued to strengthen its role within system engagement activity. This includes partnership working with the Integrated Care Board and feeding lived experience into local authority strategies.

This year, our work has ensured that community insight is embedded within wider strategic approaches to engagement and service development.



Neighbourhood health engagement:

Healthwatch Cornwall worked in partnership with system colleagues during the summer to support Neighbourhood Health Engagement activity. This included collaboration with the Integrated Care Board to strengthen engagement with local communities and ensure that lived experience was reflected within emerging neighbourhood discussions. This partnership approach enabled Healthwatch Cornwall to both contribute its expertise and extend the reach of community engagement, supporting a more joined-up understanding of local need.



Caring Where It Matters strategy:

Healthwatch Cornwall facilitated the contribution of its Partnership Boards to the *Caring Where It Matters* strategy, ensuring that lived experience from carers, people with disabilities and other communities was directly reflected within its development. This approach strengthened the quality and relevance of the strategy by grounding it in real experiences of care, supporting a more informed and person-centred framework for future delivery.



Involving People & Communities Strategy:

Healthwatch Cornwall is now part of system-level *Involving people and Communities* discussions, contributing an independent perspective on how engagement is designed and delivered across the health and care system. This ensures that the voice of local people is considered not only in individual projects, but within the overall approach to engagement, strengthening consistency, inclusivity and impact.

Making a difference in the community

Every piece of feedback tells a story. By turning lived experience into evidence, insight and action, Healthwatch Cornwall helps improve understanding, strengthen accountability and ensure that the voices of local people help shape health and care services across Cornwall.



Accountability through Enter & View

Strengthening accountability through independent scrutiny.

Healthwatch Cornwall used its statutory Enter & View powers to independently assess people's experiences of care across health and social care services. Feedback from residents, patients and staff identified opportunities for improvement and led to recommendations for providers. This work supported improvements in areas such as safety, accessibility, information and the care environment, while strengthening transparency, accountability and independent assurance across local services.



Community voice → System influence

Ensuring community voice shapes local decision-making.

Through Listening Hubs, community outreach and ongoing engagement, Healthwatch Cornwall gathered real-time insight into the challenges people face when accessing health and care services. This intelligence informed Partnership Board discussions, strategic planning and system conversations, helping ensure that local priorities reflected the experiences of residents and that decision-makers remained connected to the realities facing communities across Cornwall.



Safeguarding

Supporting safer systems through community insight

Healthwatch Cornwall brought independent community insight into safeguarding discussions, helping ensure that lived experience informed strategic priorities and system oversight. Through our contribution to the Safeguarding Adults Board, we highlighted issues affecting local people, strengthened understanding of emerging risks, and supported a more responsive, person-centred approach to safeguarding across Cornwall.

Listening to your experiences

Services can only improve when they understand people's experiences. The insight shared by local communities helps identify emerging issues, highlight opportunities for improvement and ensure decision-makers remain connected to the realities of using health and care services.

This year, Healthwatch Cornwall expanded its network of Listening Hubs across Cornwall, creating regular opportunities for people to share their experiences and concerns.

The insight gathered provides real-time community intelligence, helping identify emerging issues, inform local discussions and ensure that services are shaped by the experiences of the people who use them.



Shining a light on workforce pressures in care for adults

Healthwatch Cornwall investigated the realities facing the workforce who work in care with adults in Cornwall at a time of growing pressure in the sector, and what this means for safe, high-quality care for our residents.

What did we do

Healthwatch Cornwall gathered evidence from the workforce in care for adults and providers to understand the challenges affecting them. Their experiences highlighted growing pressures around recruitment, retention and workload, raising important questions about workforce sustainability, staff wellbeing and the future delivery of high-quality care across Cornwall.

Key things we heard:



55%

of staff reported frequent work-related stress.

32%

said they rarely or never have enough time to provide quality care.

69%

reported that care needs have become significantly more complex in the last 1-2 years.

These experiences highlighted the human impact of workforce pressures, helping ensure that discussions about recruitment, retention and service sustainability were informed by the realities faced by those delivering care every day.

What difference did this make?

Our findings helped bring workforce pressures into the spotlight, ensuring that the experiences of staff and providers informed local discussions about recruitment, retention, sustainability and the future of the care for adults. This independent evidence helped ensure workforce challenges remained a visible and important consideration within commissioning and service planning.

Highlighting access challenges in NHS dentistry

Access to NHS dentistry remained a significant concern for residents across Cornwall.

Through nearly 1,200 experiences shared with Healthwatch Cornwall, people described long waiting times, limited availability and the need to travel considerable distances for care. This evidence helped highlight the scale of the challenge facing local communities and ensured access to NHS dentistry remained a visible priority within local and national discussions.

Key things we heard:



82%

of residents seeking routine NHS dental care were unable to get an appointment.

53%

of people using private dentistry said they could not afford it but felt they had no option but to pay.



“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

The experiences shared with Healthwatch Cornwall provided compelling evidence of the scale and impact of dental access challenges across Cornwall.

By bringing together nearly 1,200 experiences, we ensured that the realities facing residents remained visible within local and national discussions about access to NHS dentistry.

What difference did this make?

Our findings helped bring national attention to the challenges people face accessing NHS dentistry in Cornwall. Following a Westminster debate led by Richard Foord MP, alongside extensive media coverage, the issue received increased public and political scrutiny.

In response, NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Board (ICB) outlined actions to address access pressures and subsequently published a dental strategy aimed at improving provision across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Hearing from all communities

Everyone's experience matters. Throughout the year, Healthwatch Cornwall worked to ensure that people from rural, under-represented and seldom-heard communities had opportunities to share their experiences and influence discussions about health and care services.

To ensure that the voices of people from rural, underrepresented and seldom-heard communities are included in local decision-making, Healthwatch Cornwall established a network of Listening Hubs across Cornwall, including Bugle, St Dennis, St Just, Bude and Mullion.

These accessible, face-to-face opportunities enabled residents to share their experiences and concerns closer to home, helping us gather insight from communities that may otherwise be less likely to engage. The intelligence gathered strengthened understanding of issues such as access to services, transport, isolation and inequality, ensuring these experiences informed wider discussions about health and care services across Cornwall.



Information and signposting

Whether you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for information about social care, or need help understanding how to raise a concern, Healthwatch Cornwall is here to help. We provide free, independent information and signposting, helping people find the right support and navigate complex health and care systems.

This year, almost 300 people contacted Healthwatch Cornwall for information, advice and support, helping them navigate services, understand their options and access the care they needed.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing trusted, independent information
- Helping people navigate health and care services
- Supporting people to access the care and support they need
- Connecting people with additional sources of help and advice



Helping an autistic adult access the right support

A Mother's concerns highlighted the importance of joined-up, disability-aware support when autism, mental health and community safety issues overlap.

Jackie contacted Healthwatch Cornwall when escalating neighbour disputes were causing significant distress for her autistic adult child.

We helped the family access support from Adult Social Care, advocacy and community safety services, while highlighting the need for reasonable adjustments and police awareness.

As a result, mediation was arranged and agencies were better equipped to respond appropriately, helping reduce distress and improve support for the family.



Healthwatch Cornwall's signposting helped not only an adult with autism to be supported, but also police in understanding his situation.

Helping navigate hospital discharges with confidence

Clear Independent advice helped Colin understand his options and advocate for the care and support his father-in-law needed.

Colin contacted Healthwatch Cornwall when he became concerned about plans to discharge his father-in-law from hospital. With Parkinson's, dementia and increasing care needs, the family felt returning home may not be safe.

We provided information about available options and signposted Colin to advocacy and NHS services, giving him the confidence to challenge assumptions, ask informed questions and secure care arrangements that better reflected his father-in-law's needs.



"Thank you so much... we would have been totally lost without your guidance."

Finance and future priorities

Healthwatch Cornwall is funded through statutory Government funding provided under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and administered locally by Cornwall Council. This arrangement enables Healthwatch Cornwall to operate independently while carrying out its statutory functions on behalf of local people.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£433,011	Expenditure on pay	£260,000
Additional income	£0	Non-pay expenditure	£50,120
		Office and management fee	£99,104
Total income	£433,011	Total Expenditure	£409,224

Healthwatch Cornwall did not receive any additional external funding during 2025/2026. All income received was through contractual funding arrangements and agreed commissioned activity.

Finance and future priorities

Over the next year, Healthwatch Cornwall will continue to champion the voices of local people, ensuring that community experiences inform decision-making, highlight emerging issues and influence improvements across health and care services.

Particular focus will be given to reducing inequalities and hearing from communities whose voices are less often heard.

We will continue working alongside communities, partners and the Integrated Care System to ensure that people's experiences help inform decisions, drive improvement and strengthen the delivery of health and care services across Cornwall.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Reducing health inequalities by investigating barriers to accessing care, delays in diagnosis and treatment, and challenges navigating health and care services.
2. Exploring how wider factors such as housing, transport, income and social support affect people's ability to access and engage with health and care services.
3. Expanding our Listening Hub network to strengthen engagement with rural, remote and seldom-heard communities across Cornwall.



“When people are listened to, services improve. When their experiences are understood, decisions become better informed. The continued value of an independent organisation such as Healthwatch Cornwall lies in its ability to bridge the gap between people's everyday experiences and the decisions that shape health and care services”.

Debbie Gilbert, CEO/Executive Director

Statutory statements

Working together for change

Healthwatch Cornwall plays an active role within key system governance forums, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, Committee in Common, and the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HASCOSC).

Through this, we bring independent, evidence-based insight into decision-making spaces, ensuring that the lived experience of local people is considered alongside performance and operational data.

We also work closely with organisations including the Care Quality Commission (CQC), The Advocacy People, Safeguarding Adults Board partners, NHS Trusts and quality assurance forums across

Through these relationships, we bring independent community insight into discussions about safeguarding, quality, patient experience and service improvement, helping ensure that people's experiences contribute to system oversight, accountability and learning.

This role strengthens system accountability, supports constructive challenge, and helps ensure that services remain accountable and responsive to the communities they serve.

Bringing community voice into strategic decisions

Healthwatch Cornwall ensures that the experiences of local people are represented within the highest levels of health and care decision-making across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Through our relationships with the Integrated Care System (ICS), representation on the Health and Wellbeing Board, HASCOSC, Committee in Common and other strategic forums, we bring independent community insight directly into discussions about policy, quality, performance and future service development.

This role helps ensure that decisions are informed not only by data and operational pressures, but also by the lived experiences of the people who rely on health and care services every day. By providing an independent route for community voice into strategic discussions, Healthwatch Cornwall supports transparency, constructive challenge and accountability across the wider health and care system.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	Response to our report and recommendations
Harbour House Care Home	Part of rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and actions identified to improve patient experience and access.
Jhoots Pharmacy Truro	Response to feedback about access to services.	No response received.
Mullion Pharmacy	Response to feedback about access to services.	Recommendations acknowledged.
Boots Pharmacy Bodmin	Part of rolling programme of visits.	Pharmacy installed seating while reviewing how to reduce delays.
Boots Pharmacy Launceston	Part of rolling programme of visits.	Pharmacy explored options for seating for waiting customers.
Narrowcliff Surgery	Part of rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and addressed, improving patient wellbeing and safety.
Newquay Minor Injuries Unit	Part of rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and action plan agreed.
Philiphaugh Manor Care Home	Part of rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and a programme of maintenance works underway.
Probus Surgery Dispensary	Part of rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and many actions in place to reduce waiting times and improve patient experience.
Royal Cornwall Hospital ED	Part of rolling programme of visits.	No response received.
St Michael's Hospital Orthopaedic Department	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and being reviewed, including giving better discharge information.

Statutory statements

Enter and view (continued)

Location	Reason for visit	Response to our report and recommendations
Tamar House Nursing Home	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged.
Tanglewood Residential Care Home	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and acted upon, including purchase of an access ramp for visitors.
Averlea Residential Home	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and a new programme of activities being planned.
Bodriggy Surgery	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged.
Camelford Medical Centre	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and implemented.
Day Lewis Pharmacy, Wadebridge	Part of rolling programme of visits.	No response received.
Rendle House Residential Care Home	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations implemented, including undertaking maintenance and providing a map to visitors.
St Austell Hospital, Harold White & Heligan Wards	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged.
Trewartha Residential & Nursing Home	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged.
West Cornwall Hospital Urgent Treatment Centre	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	No response received.
Gunnislake Health Centre	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and steps taken for implementation.
Hillcrest House Nursing Home	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged.
Penbownder House Care Home	Part of a rolling programme of visits.	Recommendations acknowledged and followed up, improving resident wellbeing and safety.

Statutory statements

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Carers Partnership Board	Lived experience from carers directly informed the development of Cornwall's Carers Strategy, helping shape future priorities and support for unpaid carers.
Mental Health Partnership Board	Established new Board to provide structured route for mental health lived experience into system discussions.
Rural Listening Hubs	Brought the experiences of rural and seldom-heard communities into local decision-making, highlighting barriers relating to access, transport and isolation.
Neighbourhood health Engagement (ICB)	Supported neighbourhood engagement activity, helping ensure community experiences informed local planning and service development.
Caring Where It Matters Strategy	Ensured the experiences of Partnership Board members informed the development of the Caring Where It Matters Strategy and future service priorities.
Involving People and Communities Strategy	Helped shape future approaches to community engagement, ensuring lived experience remains central to how services involve and listen to local people.

2025–2026 Outcomes cont.

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Safeguarding	Community insight informed safeguarding discussions and strengthened understanding of emerging risks.
Quality Assurance/Patient Experience	Independent community feedback informed quality improvement and patient experience discussions across NHS Trusts.
Mental Health Prevention	Lived experience informed prevention discussions and future planning through the Mental Health Partnership Board.
CQC/System Intelligence	Community insight was shared with partners to support service oversight and improvement.
Health and Care Scrutiny (HASCOSC)	Healthwatch intelligence increasingly informed scrutiny discussions, with members requesting follow-up on findings and recommendations.
Community Voice and Inclusion	Expanded opportunities for seldom-heard communities to influence local health and care discussions and future service planning.

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