



# Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Swindon annual report 2025/26

# Contents

A message from our CEO	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

# A message from our CEO

## This year we have:

- Engaged LGBTQIA+ people, Afghan women, young people, people experiencing food insecurity, and survivors of trafficking.
- Analysed experiences of vaping, substance use, hypertension, trauma, food insecurity and healthcare inequalities.
- Shared evidence with system leaders, helping shape vaping cessation plans, trauma-informed practice and service improvements.
- Amplified lived experience to improve support, reduce inequalities and strengthen person-centred care across services.
- Presented community insight to BSW decision-makers, ensuring public experiences informed strategic priorities and planning.
- Worked with Healthwatch Bath & North East Somerset and Wiltshire to influence BSW-wide decisions and improvements.



**CEO, TCF**  
Kevin Peltonen-  
Messenger



This year has been marked by uncertainty following proposals to close Local Healthwatch services and remove independent patient voice from health and care. Despite this, we have continued to amplify the experiences of local people, particularly those facing health inequalities and barriers to care.

Through the dedication of our staff, volunteers, students and the wider Healthwatch network, we have influenced local strategies, strengthened trauma-informed practice, improved understanding of community needs, and ensured local voices remain central to decision-making.

# About us

Healthwatch Swindon 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 8170 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed 3 staff and, our work was supported by 8 volunteers.



## Reaching out:

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

7989 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as where to seek help for their anxiety and accessing help for veterans.



## Championing your voice:

We published 8 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like hypertension, vaping cessation and young people, and LGBTQIA+ access to healthcare.

Our most popular report was '[I can't make them accept help](#)', highlighting people's struggles when someone they are caring for refuses to accept help that could benefit them.



## Statutory funding:

We're funded by Swindon Borough Council. In 2025/26 we received £109,870, which is 1.2% less than last year.

# 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 Swindon. Here are a few highlights.

## Spring

Invited people to help co-create technology tackling loneliness, aiming to better understand experiences, reduce isolation, and develop user-led digital solutions improving wellbeing and connection.

Medaille Trust welcomed us into their safe houses, to offer survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery the opportunity to share their experiences of accessing health and care.

## Summer

We ran workshops to enable members of the Asian community and people living in deprived areas to share their thoughts on the hypertension pathway.

We attended Swindon Pride and engaged over 100 LGBTQIA+ people, gathering lived experiences to understand healthcare barriers, safety concerns, and inclusion needs.

## Autumn

We hosted a culturally tailored event for Afghan women, to improve awareness of health services, hypertension, and support options, and to hear about barriers to accessing care.

We visited the Platform Project to host a workshop with some of their students to find out how the NHS can better engage with young people and their preferred methods of sharing their experiences.

## Winter

Working with CGL, we held workshops with people who use drugs to explore their experiences of being discharged from hospitals and the pathway with community services.

We presented findings on women with multiple unmet needs, securing Health and Wellbeing Board commitment to embed lived experience evidence within ongoing system accountability.

# Working together for change

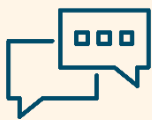
We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in **Swindon** are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at **B&NES, Swindon & Wiltshire (BSW) ICB level**

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



## A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

Working across the BSW area, local Healthwatch teams led engagement on hypertension, focusing on understanding barriers to testing and awareness within priority communities. Through targeted outreach and partnership with system leaders, shared insight identified cultural, practical and attitudinal challenges. This collective approach is enabling coordinated action to improve access, communication and early prevention across diverse populations and communities.



## A big conversation:

Through our Unpaid Carers project, we engaged people via surveys, interviews and attendance at local support groups, creating safe spaces to share their experiences. This activity highlighted the emotional and practical pressures carers face, particularly where support is refused, alongside gaps in accessible services. These insights helped co-produce recommendations to improve flexibility, awareness and tailored support for carers locally.



## Building strong relationships to achieve more:

Through our Bridging the Gap work, we strengthened relationships with partners and people with lived experience, including Change Grow Live and The Nelson Trust, to co-produce solutions for safer hospital discharge. Workshops and engagement created open dialogue, built trust and shared understanding, enabling jointly developed recommendations that promote coordinated care, improved communication and compassionate, person-centred support beyond discharge locally together.

# 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 Swindon 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.**

By attending community fridge sessions, we hear first-hand accounts of food insecurity, stigma and access barriers. These real experiences help decision makers better understand daily challenges. Direct conversations reveal how poverty, health and wellbeing intersect, ensuring decisions reflect lived realities and strengthen more inclusive and impactful service delivery.



## Getting services to involve the public

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

We gathered insights from nearly 500 people on their experience of hypertension support and treatment, highlighting low awareness, inequalities and barriers. Findings show services must engage communities, use trusted local networks, and provide clear, culturally relevant information to build understanding, confidence and proactive testing, especially among underrepresented groups.



## Improving care over time

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

Through regular attendance of the Combating Drugs Partnership, we are able to share lived experiences and emerging issues with partners, influencing priorities and service design over time. By building relationships and maintaining a steady presence, we ensure insights are not lost, helping services respond to changing needs, and embed improvements. This sustained engagement strengthens accountability and supports long-term, system-wide change in care quality and access.

# 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.



# Improving outcomes for women with multiple unmet needs

## Improving health outcomes for women with multiple unmet needs

This project was designed to put women who have been affected by trauma and disproportionate social challenges at the forefront. Ensuring their challenges and difficulties when accessing health and social care, are understood and alleviated

### What did we do

Working with The Nelson Trust and their service users, we captured information about the variety of services they use, their experiences and their needs. Establishing a base line and identifying the key barriers to accessing health and care.

### Key things we heard:

**Quality of Care** – inconsistent provision and a lack of trauma informed practice prevents the women from building trust with health and social care providers.

**Access to Services** – problems with the accessibility of health and social care services prevents women from feeling heard. Often resulting in multiple referrals before any progress is actioned and a feeling of being supported is achieved.

**Health Impact** – women left feeling unheard and not enough support being provided until they hit crisis point.

Our work showed women with multiple unmet needs experience barriers, stigma and fragmented care, requiring coordinated, trauma-informed, person-centred services to improve outcomes.

### What difference did this make?

After sharing the report, key partners including the local authority and hospital, committed to adopting trauma-informed approaches for women with unmet needs. Healthwatch Swindon continues to champion this work, supporting partners to turn commitment into practice.

# Listening to young people to strengthen responses to vaping

## Insights in to Vaping

We worked with Public Health Swindon to increase understanding of the issues that lie behind the increase in vaping amongst young people and how responses in the area can be strengthened.

### Key things we heard:

- Many young people vape to cope with stress, anxiety and social pressures, including navigating social situations
- Support is currently seen as inaccessible or stigmatising, especially in school settings, where fear of judgement is a barrier
- Schools are a key access point but are currently more focused on punishment than supportive engagement



“I know It isn’t good for me, but it helps me relax in anxious situations”

We worked with young people to understand why they vape and what support they need to stop, highlighting links to stress, anxiety and social pressures, alongside gaps in accessible, youth-friendly support and awareness of effective quitting options.

### What difference did this make?

Following our report, vaping cessation plans have been updated to support youth mental health services in Swindon, with training available and education sessions reaching all schools. Illicit tobacco/vape reporting will be strengthened through school-based messaging, including risks of contaminated vapes, encouraging community intelligence and increased quit attempts.

# Hearing from all communities

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

- hosting a dedicated hypertension awareness event for Afghan women
- Spending time at local Community Cafes, listening to people experiencing food insecurity
- Running workshops with young people to find out how the NHS can better engage them



## Hypertension – Asian and deprived

**We explored people’s understanding of and access to blood pressure testing, focusing on Asian communities and people living in deprived areas.**

People told us about low awareness, limited understanding of results, and difficulties accessing clear, trusted information. Barriers included a lack of culturally relevant information, language needs, and limited confidence to engage with services, alongside missed opportunities for testing and follow-up.

### What difference did this make?

We shared what we learned with the ICB’s Hypertension Steering Group and Prevention Strategy Group, and this is being used to improve future plans and tackle inequalities.. This will support better engagement with the Asian community and people living in the most deprived areas, enabling blood pressure-related health issues to be identified much earlier.

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## Healthcare needs of LGBTQIA+ community

**We explored the healthcare needs and experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community.**

People told us about concerns around feeling judged, difficulties disclosing their identity, and a lack of understanding from healthcare professionals. Other issues included inconsistent inclusive practices, limited confidence in services, and environments that did not always feel safe or welcoming.

### What difference did this make?

Our findings were shared as part of the NHS LGBT+ Healthcare Review, helping shape wider understanding of specific health needs and inequalities faced by LGBTQIA+ people.

Locally, the report equipped NHS providers with clear evidence of lived experiences, supporting more inclusive, responsive services. Amplifying community voices and driving progress towards safer, more equitable care for LGBTQIA+ people in Swindon and Wiltshire.

# 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 7989 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



# Transition of support for a maternity and early pregnancy complaint

## **A mum described dismissed concerns and poor empathy during miscarriages and a traumatic birth.**

The mum's concerns were repeatedly ignored during visits to the early pregnancy team and she subsequently experienced two miscarriages, noting clinical interactions lacked compassion. These events coupled with a traumatic birth, left the mum feeling distressed and with a loss of trust in services.

We provided face to face support, listened carefully, and facilitated a three-way handover to Maternity & Neonatal Voices Partnership, ensuring coordinated care, advocacy, and that her experience informed service improvement.



“Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and listen to me, means the world to me!”

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## Supporting an ignored patient

### **A patient agency's service user was not getting the right level of care from their GP**

The Nelson Trust contacted Healthwatch Swindon on behalf of a service user in urgent need of GP support, as both they and the services concerns were being ignored.

Healthwatch Swindon raised the issue directly with the practice manager, providing evidence from the person's MDT meeting and sharing contact details for SBC Public Health, SBC Safeguarding, the ICB and the CQC due to the seriousness of the case.

We followed up with The Nelson Trust, who confirmed that the service user had been seen by their GP and was now receiving the support they needed. This outcome provided reassurance to both the individual and the supporting service that their concerns had been taken seriously. It also demonstrated the value of Healthwatch acting as an advocate, helping to unblock access to services and ensuring that individuals receive timely and appropriate care when previous attempts to engage had been unsuccessful.

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# Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given **927 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.

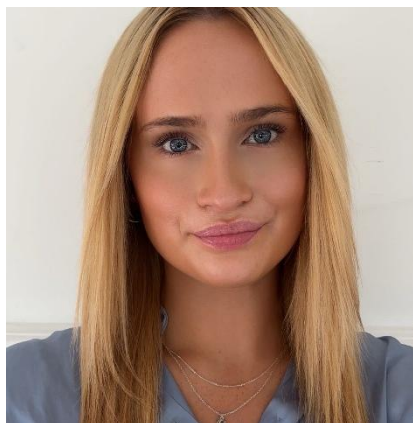
## This year, our volunteers:

- Visited Core20+ communities to gather feedback and share accessible health information
- Ran workshops with young people to amplify their voices for how healthcare can better engage with them
- Promoted Healthwatch and our work to groups and organisations, including Cancer Champions and Swindon Seniors Forum



# At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think, to helping raise awareness, our students and volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.



Immy

“Over the past nine months, I have completed my placement as a Project Research and Engagement Officer with Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire. My expectations have been exceeded: I have gained invaluable skills, stepped outside my comfort zone, and grown in confidence.

I attended a wide range of online and in-person events. A highlight was Healthwatch Swindon’s Afghan Women’s resettlement scheme event, where women of different ages and levels of English proficiency shared their experiences of adjusting to life in England and concerns about accessing prescriptions and primary care. I also visited the Platform Project with Josephine and spoke with young people facing pressures that make staying in full-time education difficult; hearing where they feel they fall

through the gaps helped shape my research project, Beyond Attendance: Parent Carer and Young People’s Experiences of Emotional Barriers to School Attendance in BSW. Alongside this, regular attendance at Swindon’s Youth Voice Steering Group and the Wiltshire and Swindon Youth Work Network kept me connected to local priorities and practice.

I have strengthened my theoretical understanding of research and improved my digital capability, including designing online surveys, analysing data, and communicating effectively online. My confidence has grown through leading focus groups, arranging meetings, and speaking with a wide range of people; presenting, which used to make me anxious, is now something I can do comfortably.

I also supported a range of projects delivered by the Swindon team, which strengthened my ability to plan and progress my own work. Overall, this placement has been extremely valuable and rewarding, and I am grateful for the support and guidance I received across BSW. I will take these learning experiences into the final stage of my degree and my future career.

## 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.healthwatchswindon.org.uk](http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk)



01793 497 777



[info@healthwatchswindon.org.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchswindon.org.uk)

# Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Swindon Borough 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	£109,870	Expenditure on pay	£106,709.67
Additional income	£21,991.67	Non-pay expenditure	£17,298.00
		Office and management fee	£4,313
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£131,861.67</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£128,320.67</b>

## Additional income is broken down into:

£9,000 rolled over income

### Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across BSW received funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Community engagement with Asian and deprived communities to understand barriers to hypertension testing and treatment	£6,666.67
Community engagement activities across BSW to understand public views on new proposals for using patient data to plan local services	£6,325

# 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. Quality of Treatment
2. Access to services
3. Experience of care

Proposals to carry out projects linked to these priorities will be submitted to our Local Advisory Group for authorisation to proceed.

# Statutory statements

Healthwatch Swindon, Sanford House, Sanford Street, Swindon, SN1 1HE.

Healthwatch Swindon is hosted by The Care Forum, The Vassall Centre, Gill Avenue, Fishponds, Bristol, BS16 2QQ

Healthwatch Swindon 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 Local Advisory Group (LAG) consists of 5 members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

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

Throughout 2025/26, the LAG met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as the priority areas Healthwatch Swindon will focus on and the specific projects to be carried out. 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 as well as sharing with the B&NES Health & Wellbeing Board, BSW ICB and partners who have supported our work throughout the year.

# Statutory statements

## Responses to recommendations

We had 0 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 the Health and Wellbeing Board as well as routinely share feedback with NHS providers to ensure patients voices are heard.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in BSW. For example, along with Healthwatch in Swindon and Wiltshire, we presented insights from the Asian community and people living in deprived communities to the Hypertension Steering Group and Population Health Board.

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Swindon is represented on the Swindon Health and Wellbeing Board by Amritpal Kaur, Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Manager.

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by ensuring public voice is included in all discussions as well as making members aware of the key issues and themes we hear from the public.

Healthwatch Swindon is represented on Integrated Care Partnerships by Amritpal Kaur and BSW Integrated Care Board by Kevin Peltonen-Messenger.

# Statutory statements

## Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
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We did not use our statutory Enter and view powers over 2025/26

## 2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Bridging the Gap - substance use, discharge and what comes next <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2026-05-12/report-bridging-gap-substance-use-discharge">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2026-05-12/report-bridging-gap-substance-use-discharge</a>	Working with hospitals to address the recommendations
Improving health outcomes for women with multiple unmet needs <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-11-11/report-improving-health-outcomes-women-multiple-unmet-needs">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-11-11/report-improving-health-outcomes-women-multiple-unmet-needs</a>	Gaining commitment for SBC and GWH to become trauma-informed
Healthcare needs and experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-10-31/report-healthcare-needs-and-experiences-lgbtqia-community">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-10-31/report-healthcare-needs-and-experiences-lgbtqia-community</a>	Fed into the NHS LGBT+ Healthcare Review, helping shape wider understanding of specific health needs and inequalities
Youth-centred insights into vaping cessation <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-10-22/report-youth-centred-insights-vaping-cessation">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-10-22/report-youth-centred-insights-vaping-cessation</a>	Council vaping cessation plans updated to account for the findings

# Statutory statements

## 2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
<p>What parents told us about childhood vaccinations  <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2026-02-17/report-what-parents-told-us-about-childhood-vaccinations">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2026-02-17/report-what-parents-told-us-about-childhood-vaccinations</a></p>	<p>Shared insights around parental decisions to, or not to, vaccinate children to support local improvement strategies</p>
<p>How should patient data be used?  <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2026-06-18/report-how-should-patient-data-be-used">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2026-06-18/report-how-should-patient-data-be-used</a></p>	<p>Supported the ICB to understand the public's view on using patient data in new ways of planning services</p>
<p>"I eat once a week maybe" – The health impacts of food insecurity  <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-10-22/report-i-eat-once-week-maybe-health-impacts-food-insecurity">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-10-22/report-i-eat-once-week-maybe-health-impacts-food-insecurity</a></p>	<p>Fed into development of local food strategies within BSW</p>
<p>The strain of unpaid caring  <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-08-29/report-strain-unpaid-caring">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-08-29/report-strain-unpaid-caring</a></p>	<p>Amplified the of voices of unpaid carers across BSW</p>
<p>"I can't make them accept help"  <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-08-20/report-i-cant-make-them-accept-help">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-08-20/report-i-cant-make-them-accept-help</a></p>	<p>Increased awareness of carers caring for someone who does not accept help</p>
<p>Empowering the patient – how to increase the understanding and testing of high blood pressure  <a href="http://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-11-25/report-empowering-patient-how-increase-understanding-and-testing-high-blood">www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2025-11-25/report-empowering-patient-how-increase-understanding-and-testing-high-blood</a></p>	<p>Directly informed the ICB of some of the reasons behind inequalities within Asian and deprived communities</p>

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