

Healthwatch is your
patient and social
campaigner.

NHS leaders and other
professionals hear your voice and
work back to improve care.

healthwatchhalton.co.uk



u3a

Halton
Runcorn & Widnes
district.u3asite.uk/halton

u3a is a national movement of over
1,000 local u3a clubs.

Membership is open to anyone who is
retired or semi-retired no longer in
full-time employment. Come and join a
group of active older people by engaging
in a range of activities.

Halton u3a members are able to...

- expand their knowledge
- learn new skills
- share their expertise with others
- make new friends
- keep mentally and physically active



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Halton annual report 2025/26

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Chief Officer
Dave Wilson with Lydia Hughes, ISAB Chair on his retirement



Chair's acknowledgement of the Chief Officer

I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks to our Chief Officer, Dave Wilson, who has now retired after 17 years of outstanding commitment to Healthwatch Halton and LiNK. Dave's leadership, dedication and passion for ensuring the voices of local people are heard have been instrumental in shaping our work and strengthening our impact across the borough.

On behalf of the Board, staff, volunteers and the community we serve, I would like to thank Dave for his hard work and wish him a very happy and well deserved retirement. We look forward to Dave joining our ISAB Board in the future.

A message from our chair

“Over the past year, I have been proud to see Healthwatch Halton continue to stand up for local people and ensure their voices are heard where it matters most. At a time when health and care services face ongoing pressures, the role of an independent organisation that listens, represents and influences has never been more important.

From April 2025 to March 2026, we have heard from thousands of residents across Halton. Their experiences—both positive and challenging—have shaped our work and helped us highlight the issues that matter most to our community. Whether it is access to GP services, communication within hospitals, or barriers caused by digital exclusion, local people have been at the heart of every conversation we have had with decision-makers.

I am particularly encouraged by the tangible difference this feedback has made. Through our engagement work, Enter and View visits, and collaboration with partners, we have supported improvements in areas such as children’s emergency care, care home environments and patient communication. This demonstrates the power of sharing experiences and the real impact that listening can have on improving services.

We have also worked hard to reach communities whose voices are often less heard. By engaging with a wide range of people—including carers, people experiencing deprivation, and those facing digital barriers—we have ensured that our work reflects the diversity of Halton and helps reduce inequalities in access to care.

Our partnerships across Cheshire and Merseyside have strengthened our influence, ensuring that the views of Halton residents contribute to decisions made at a wider system level. This collaborative approach enables us to champion local priorities while helping shape the future of health and care services across the region.



ISAB Chair
Lydia Hughes

“

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our dedicated staff, volunteers and partners. Their commitment, insight and compassion are the foundation of our success, and their work continues to make a meaningful difference to people’s lives.

As Chair, I remain committed to ensuring that Healthwatch Halton continues to be a strong, independent voice for the community. Looking ahead, we will build on our achievements, continue to challenge constructively, and work with partners to ensure that every person in Halton can access high-quality, compassionate care.

About us

Healthwatch Halton 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 12,600 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed 3 staff (2.5 FTE) and, our work was supported by 10 volunteers.



Reaching out:

1,992 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

10,614 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as finding a GP and making an NHS complaint.



Championing your voice:

We published 35 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like GP's, Children's Accident and Emergency, care homes and hospital trusts.

Our most popular report was on GP access, highlighting people's struggles with phone queues, online systems and the 8 am appointment rush.



Statutory funding:

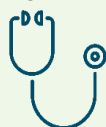
We're funded by Halton Borough Council. In 2025/26 we received £137,430, which is 4.71% more than last year.

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 Halton. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

529 people shared GP experiences across Runcorn and Widnes, helping shape discussions to improve primary care access across Cheshire and Merseyside.



Supported a carer to understand her daughter's gynaecological condition, patient rights and access NHS Complaints Advocacy to raise concerns about previous care.



Summer

Our outreach at St Helens Hospital gave patients more opportunities to share experiences, helping shape service improvements and future patient experience plans.

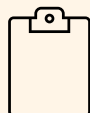


Our Enter and View visit to St Luke's Care Home improved dementia-friendly features, health and safety, and created a more welcoming environment.



Autumn

612 local people shared their experiences with us, providing evidence that informed health and care discussions across Halton.



Visits to hospitals, GP practices and care homes identified improvement opportunities and supported better experiences for patients and residents across Halton.



Winter

1,149 residents shared their views, helping ensure local voices shaped decisions about health and care.



Highlighted barriers to accessing care while recognising frontline staff, helping identify opportunities to improve services and patient experiences.



Working together for change

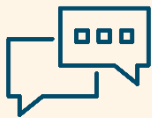
We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Halton are heard at Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS) level, helping influence decisions about local health services.

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside to achieve the following:



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

Working alongside eight neighbouring Healthwatch organisations, we heard from 768 Halton residents about their experiences of GP services. Their feedback highlighted barriers to appointments, communication and digital access. Combining local insight across Cheshire and Merseyside, we helped influence discussions on how primary care services can better meet the needs of local communities.



A big conversation:

Throughout the year, more than 2,800 people shared their experiences of health and care services with us through outreach, surveys, listening events and community engagement. Their feedback highlighted what matters most to local people and helped inform discussions on access, communication, waiting times and service quality. Local voices helped keep patient experiences at the heart of decision-making.



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

Working alongside NHS providers, Halton Borough Council, voluntary organisations and Cheshire & Merseyside ICB, we ensured local people's experiences informed discussions on GP access, patient communication, mental health and service improvement.

Further outcomes achieved this year are summarised in the Statutory Statements section 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 Halton this year:



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

When a patient told us they felt judged because of their history of addiction, we shared their experience with hospital leaders. Their story highlighted how stigma can affect confidence, wellbeing and access to care.

In response, local addiction support organisation Change Grow Live (CGL) was invited to deliver lived-experience training, helping staff better understand the challenges people face and improving the experience of patients accessing services.



Getting services to involve the public

Following our listening event at Whiston Hospital's Children's A&E department, we ensured parents, children and families could share their experiences directly with service leaders. Feedback highlighted concerns around communication, waiting times and family facilities.

In response, the Trust responded with an action plan including improved waiting-time information, enhanced signage, better feedback mechanisms and the creation of quiet and sensory-friendly spaces, ensuring patient experiences directly informed service improvements.



Improving care over time

Our Enter and View visits helped drive improvements in care across Halton.

Following our recommendations, providers introduced dementia-friendly environments, sensory spaces, improved care planning, enhanced maintenance arrangements and clearer information for residents and families.

Listening to your experiences

Your experiences help identify what works well and where health and care services can improve.

This year, local people shared their experiences of health and social care services, helping highlight what works well and where improvements are needed.

Their feedback informed our reports, recommendations and discussions with decision-makers, helping to improve services across Halton.



Improving children's emergency care

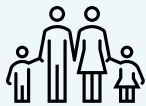
Following concerns raised by families using Whiston Hospital's Children's A&E department, we carried out a listening event to understand their experiences and identify opportunities for improvement.

We shared their feedback directly with service leaders, ensuring the voices of children, parents and carers helped shape future developments.

"What people told us"

We spoke directly with parents, carers and children using the department, gathered detailed feedback and presented our findings to senior hospital leaders alongside practical recommendations for improvement.

Key things we heard:



- **Parents reported concerns about communication during waiting times.**
- **Families wanted clearer information about what would happen next.**
- **Children and carers highlighted the need for more suitable family facilities.**

The feedback highlighted that clear communication, timely information and supportive environments make a significant difference to children and families during hospital visits.

What difference did this make?

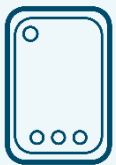
The Trust developed an action plan including improved waiting-time information, enhanced signage, better feedback methods and plans for quiet and sensory-friendly spaces.

Breaking down digital barriers to healthcare

Residents told us that a lack of internet access and mobile connectivity was creating barriers to healthcare, information and support.

Working with the National Databank, we helped around 800 people across Halton access free mobile connectivity, enabling them to attend virtual appointments, access online services, stay connected with support networks and obtain trusted health information.

Key things we heard:



- **Digital exclusion remains a barrier to accessing healthcare and support services.**
- **Residents told us that connectivity is essential for appointments, information and wellbeing.**
- **Around 800 people a year benefit from free mobile connectivity through our National Databank partnership.**



"I had a phone but no credit, so I couldn't access healthcare information or stay in touch with support services."

The National Databank supports care home residents, adults with learning disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and asylum seekers and refugees who may otherwise struggle to access healthcare and vital online services.

What difference did this make?

Through our National Databank partnership, around 800 people each year can access free mobile connectivity.

This helps care home residents, adults with learning disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, asylum seekers and refugees stay connected to healthcare, trusted information, support networks and essential services, helping reduce digital exclusion across Halton.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for everyone in Halton. Over the past year, we've worked to reach communities whose voices are too often 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:

- Engaging with Gypsy and Traveller communities, veterans, carers, adults with learning disabilities, asylum seekers, refugees and socially isolated older people.
- Supporting people experiencing financial hardship and digital exclusion through our National Databank partnership, helping around 800 residents access healthcare, information and support services.
- Working with NHS leaders, Cheshire and Merseyside ICB and partner organisations to ensure local experiences influence future health and care services.



Keeping essential medication on track

When a local Gypsy resident was at risk of losing access to essential medication after their pharmacy stopped providing blister packs, we stepped in to work with local pharmacies and healthcare professionals to secure an alternative provider.

This ensured there was no interruption to their medication and reduced unnecessary stress during a period of change.

What difference did this make?

Our intervention ensured the resident continued receiving their medication safely and without interruption. The case demonstrated the importance of flexible, person-centred support for communities that can face additional barriers to accessing healthcare.

By working collaboratively with local providers, we helped prevent a gap in treatment and ensured the resident's healthcare needs remained a priority.

Helping new communities access healthcare

We supported asylum seekers and refugees who were struggling to register with GP practices and access NHS dental services.

Working alongside local partners, we helped people understand how to access healthcare, overcome barriers and receive the treatment and support they needed.

What difference did this make?

Our support enabled people to register with GP practices, access NHS dental care and receive essential healthcare more quickly.

By working with local healthcare providers and community organisations, we helped reduce barriers and improve access for newly arrived communities.

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 10,874 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:

- **1,973 people accessed our online advice and information resources in one quarter.**
- **Up to 80% of outreach sessions included information and signposting support.**
- **Around 20% of direct feedback comes through information and signposting conversations.**



Children's A and E visit at Whiston Hospital

We conducted a listening event at Whiston Hospital's Children's Accident and Emergency department, having previously visited a year earlier. We spoke to parents, children and staff in the department and published a report in October 2025.

We found a number of issues were still affecting families care, such as poor communication on wait times, and fed this back to the A and E department lead and the Patient Experience team.

The trust responded to our report by producing an action plan.



"The report has provided the senior team with an additional method of feedback. Following the report the team have created an action plan to improve family facilities, including quiet and sensory-friendly spaces, improving feedback methods, waiting time information and reception signage."

Restoring access to vital NHS dental care

After cancer treatment left a resident unable to eat properly, difficulties accessing an NHS dentist threatened both their health and recovery.

A Halton resident recovering from cancer contacted us after months of struggling to access NHS dental care. The lack of treatment affected their ability to eat, caused significant weight loss and increased anxiety.

We raised the case with Cheshire and Merseyside Dental Commissioning, who acted immediately.

The resident was contacted the same day and offered an NHS dental appointment, ensuring they received the care they urgently needed.



"One conversation changed everything. By listening and acting quickly, we helped remove barriers to essential dental care when it mattered most."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 26 days 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 communities to promote our work and signpost to support and information
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve
- Supported our reader panel for local trusts and also provided support in our office.



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.



Ali

"I volunteer with Healthwatch Halton because I enjoy giving back to the community and helping people have their voices heard regarding health and social care services."

"Volunteering has allowed me to meet new people, develop my communication skills and gain valuable experience working with a diverse range of individuals. I have particularly enjoyed being part of a team that works to make a positive difference in people's lives and improve local services."

I particularly enjoyed the Mental Health Event at Runcorn. Gave me a greater awareness of Mental Health facilities in Halton. Took part in some of the workshops, i.e., Masking, never heard of this, excellent workshop which gave me a greater understanding of this.

Most of the speakers had been on their own mental health so their talks were very informative and personal to them. This is just one workshop I have spoken about, but have gained valuable knowledge from all the speakers on the day"



Anne

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.healthwatchhaltonco.uk



0300 777 6543



enquiries@healthwatchhalton.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Halton Borough Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from Local Authority	£137,430	Expenditure on pay	£86,613
Additional income	£12,548	Non-pay expenditure	£27,608
		Office and management fee	£18,021
Total income	£149,978	Total Expenditure	£132,241

Additional income is broken down into:

- £12,548 received from the Bridgewater Community Healthcare and Warrington and Halton Teaching Hospitals to support the Better Care Together programme in delivering the Patient and Public Reference Group (PPRG).

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. Work with the integration of Bridgewater Trust and WHH Trust, to facilitate on going changes that affect patients, and to continue to recruit panel members to feed in lived experience.
2. Hospital Trusts - outreach to continue to improve patient feedback.
3. Focused outreach to areas of the community we don't currently hear from.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Halton, A.R.T.Centre, Tan House Lane , Widnes WA8 0RR is delivered by Engaging Communities Solutions CIC (ECS), Meeting Point House, Southwater Square, Telford, TF3 4HS.

Healthwatch Halton 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 Independent Strategic Advisory Board (ISAB) consists of 7 members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

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

Throughout 2025/26, the ISAB met in June, October and December and made decisions on matters such as deciding the annual work programme and approving reports and the recommendations within. 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 and circulating around the health and care system.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers that 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 Halton Health and Wellbeing Board and the Halton Health and Social Care Policy and Performance Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System (ICS). For example, we share with Health and Wellbeing Board, Quality and Performance Board, Primary Care Place Board as well as the local trusts' Patient Engagement Committee and Bridgewater Trust and MerseyCare to share our intelligence. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Halton is represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board by Lydia Hughes, Healthwatch Halton ISAB Chair.

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing public feedback with the board and presenting findings from our reports.

Healthwatch Halton is represented on the One Halton Partnership board and Integrated Care Boards by Dave Wilson, Chief Officer.

Statutory statements

Partnership working in action

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The work of the 9 Healthwatch organisations across C&M has been instrumental in helping us ensure that patient experience is understood and acted upon across our commissioned services.

I have found the work done on Emergency department waits and corridor care particularly insightful. This is a priority area for the ICB to improve for our population, and the Healthwatch work has strengthened the ICB's UEC improvement plan.

The contribution that Healthwatch colleagues make to our committee and board meetings is invaluable in bringing the voice of the public and patients into the room and undoubtedly improves the decision-making processes in the ICB.



Fiona Lemmens
Executive Clinical
Director Cheshire
and Merseyside
Integrated
Care Board



Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
St. Luke's Care Home	Part of Healthwatch Halton's statutory Enter & View programme	<p>Wrote a report and made recommendations. Improvements made include Prioritising repairs to the conservatory. Updating menus daily. Adding more artwork and dementia-friendly features. Auditing and improving signage, pull cords, and tap label. Reminding staff to lock storage areas and adjusting signage where appropriate. Exploring personalised door designs to enhance a sense of homeliness.</p>
Oak Meadow Enter & View	Part of Healthwatch Halton's statutory Enter & View programme	<p>Wrote a report and made recommendations. Improvements made. These included appointing a regular maintenance person one day a week, upgrading furniture in the garden, installing a new nurse aid system, and improving how dietary and care needs are recorded.</p>

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Ferndale Mews enter and view visit	Part of Healthwatch Halton's statutory Enter & View programme	Wrote a report and made recommendations. Improvements made include handrails and residents' doors being repainted in contrasting colours to support orientation. Menus and noticeboards are now checked daily, and Healthwatch Halton and Advocacy Hub information has been added to communal areas. New lighting and furniture have been ordered, and plans are in place to create two sensory rooms
Beechcroft Care Home	Part of Healthwatch Halton's statutory Enter & View programme	Wrote a report and made recommendations. Improvements made include refurbishment work, improved signage, better communication displays and ongoing maintenance checks.
Trewan House Care Home	Part of Healthwatch Halton's statutory Enter & View programme	Wrote a report and made recommendations.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Beeches Medical Centre Widnes	GP Practice Enter & View to understand patients' experiences of accessing primary care.	Spoke with patients and staff, observed the practice environment and reviewed appointment systems, accessibility and patient information, making recommendations to improve access and communication.
Brookvale Practice Runcorn	GP Practice Enter & View to review patient access and experience.	Gathered patient feedback on appointments, digital access and communication, while observing the environment and identifying opportunities to improve services.
Castlefields Health Centre Runcorn	GP Practice Enter & View to understand patient experience.	Observed facilities, spoke with patients and staff and reviewed access, communication and the patient environment to support service improvements.
Fir Park Medical Centre Widnes	GP Practice Enter & View focusing on patient access and experience.	Listened to patient feedback about appointments, digital systems and communication and made recommendations to improve accessibility and patient information.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Upton Rocks Practice Widnes	GP Practice Enter & View to review the patient journey.	Assessed the practice environment, patient information, appointment systems and accessibility while gathering patient experiences to inform recommendations.
Weaver Vale Practice Runcorn	GP Practice Enter & View to understand patients' experiences of accessing care.	Reviewed the environment, spoke with patients and staff and made recommendations around communication, appointment access and the overall patient experience.
Beaconsfield GP Practice Widnes	GP Practice Enter & View to gather patient feedback and observe service delivery.	Engaged with patients and staff, reviewed the practice environment and identified opportunities to improve appointment access, communication and accessibility.
Grove House Practice Runcorn	GP Practice Enter & View to understand patient experiences following the introduction of digital triage.	Spoke with patients about appointment access, PATCHS, communication and the practice environment. Recommendations focused on digital inclusion, support for carers, communication and accessibility.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Hough Green Health Park Widnes	GP Practice Enter & View to review access and patient experience.	Observed the practice, gathered patient feedback and made recommendations to improve communication, access to appointments and the patient environment.
Peelhouse Medical Plaza Widnes	GP Practice Enter & View to understand how patients access services.	Reviewed facilities, observed the patient journey and gathered feedback to identify opportunities to improve access, communication and the patient experience.
Tower House Practice Runcorn	GP Practice Enter & View to assess patient access and service delivery.	Observed the environment, spoke with patients and staff and made recommendations to improve access, communication and information for patients.
Murdishaw Health Centre Runcorn	GP Practice Enter & View to understand patient experiences and access.	Gathered patient feedback, reviewed the practice environment and identified opportunities to improve appointment access, communication and patient information.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Newtown Surgery Widnes	GP Practice Enter & View to review patient experience within primary care.	Engaged with patients and staff, assessed accessibility and communication and made recommendations to improve access and the overall patient experience.
Oaks Place Surgery Widnes	GP Practice Enter & View to understand patients' experiences of primary care.	Observed the practice, spoke with patients and staff and reviewed appointment systems, communication and accessibility to support continuous improvement.
Warrington Hospital (<i>Joint with Healthwatch Warrington</i>)	Joint Enter & View to gather patient experiences and identify opportunities to improve hospital services.	Worked collaboratively with Healthwatch Warrington to engage with patients and staff, observe the hospital environment and make recommendations to improve communication, patient experience and service delivery.

Statutory statements

Direct to patients

Medium	Reason for partnering	What you did as a result
Radio Halton (Halton General Hospital)	To improve public awareness of local health and social care services, encourage people to share their experiences and help residents access trusted information.	Partnered with Radio Halton to deliver a monthly Healthwatch Halton radio programme featuring interviews with NHS and voluntary sector organisations, health campaigns, special guests and community services. Broadcasts reached patients in Halton Hospital, GP practices, local communities, online listeners across the UK and an international audience, helping raise awareness of health issues, available support and opportunities for people to have their voices heard.

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Improving children's emergency care	Improved waiting-time information, enhanced signage, better feedback methods and plans for quiet and sensory-friendly spaces.
Breaking down digital barriers	Enabled care home residents, adults with learning disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, asylum seekers and refugees to access free data.
Helping new communities access healthcare	We helped reduce barriers and improve access for newly arrived communities.



Healthwatch Halton is a hosted Healthwatch and is delivered by

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Committed
to quality


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