

# **Healthwatch Halton**

## **Workplan**

### **2025 – 2026**

April 2025 – March 2026

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## The eight main statutory functions of a Local Healthwatch

- 1.** Promoting and supporting the involvement of local people in the commissioning, the provision and scrutiny of local care services.
- 2.** Enabling local people to monitor the standard of provision of local care services and whether and how local care services could and ought to be improved.
- 3.** Obtaining the views of local people regarding their needs for, and experiences of, local care services and importantly to make these views known.
- 4.** Making reports and recommendations about how local care services could or ought to be improved within an overall framework that recognises financial constraints. These should be directed to commissioners and providers of care services, and people responsible for managing or scrutinising local care services and shared with Healthwatch England.
- 5.** Providing advice and information about access to local care services so choices can be made about local care services.
- 6.** Formulating views on the standard of provision and whether and how the local care services could and ought to be improved; and sharing these views with Healthwatch England.
- 7.** Making recommendations to Healthwatch England to advise the Care Quality Commission to conduct special reviews or investigations (or, where the circumstances justify doing so, making such recommendations direct to the CQC); and to make recommendations to Healthwatch England to publish reports about particular issues.
- 8.** Providing Healthwatch England with the intelligence and insight it needs to enable it to perform effectively.

# Introduction

## About us

Healthwatch Halton is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in the borough of Halton. Our role is to ensure that the voices of local people are heard by those who commission, deliver, and regulate health and social care services. We listen to experiences—positive or negative—and use that feedback to help drive improvements across local services.

Local Healthwatch organisations were established in 2013 as part of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, replacing previous patient and public involvement structures. Since then, we have worked to strengthen the voice of the public in shaping care.

We also provide **signposting, information, and support** to help people make informed choices about their health and social care needs.

Healthwatch Halton is delivered by **Engaging Communities Solutions CIC**, a not-for-profit community interest company dedicated to involving people in the design and delivery of public services. See here for further details: [www.weareecs.co.uk](http://www.weareecs.co.uk)

As part of the national Healthwatch network, Healthwatch Halton also works closely with Healthwatch England to ensure that local views can inform national policy and change.

## Our responsibilities

All local Healthwatch are required to:

- Gather and represent the views and experiences of people who use health and social care services.
- Ensure the diverse communities they serve have a voice in how services are designed and delivered.
- Share people's experiences with those who have the power to make services better, including NHS bodies, local authorities, and service providers.
- Provide people with information about local health and social care services to help them make informed choices.
- Recommend improvements to services based on what people tell them.

- Report concerns about the quality of care to Healthwatch England or relevant regulatory bodies, such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC), where appropriate.
- Work collaboratively with other local organisations, including voluntary groups and patient representative bodies.

Local Healthwatch benefit from having Healthwatch England as their national body. It gives local Healthwatch a stronger voice by providing a route to escalate serious or ongoing concerns to national decision-makers, such as NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care. This ensures that the views and experiences of local communities can help influence change at a national level.

Healthwatch England also offers essential support to local Healthwatch through training and practical resources etc. See here for details: [www.healthwatch.co.uk](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk)

## We will meet our responsibilities by:

Listening to people from all communities in Halton; helping to involve people in decisions about their care and how it is delivered, giving people information to make choices about their health and care and working in partnership to make change happen.

As Healthwatch Halton, we will give critical challenge to highlight where improvements can be made, be the voice of the public, show the impact our work can make and work hard to listen to people throughout the borough.

## Our Aims

This year, our strategic focus will be to:

- **Make every voice count:** Encourage more people across Halton to share their experiences of health and care services, making sure everyone feels heard—especially those whose voices often go unnoticed.
- **Raise awareness of Healthwatch Halton:** Help more local people understand who we are, what we do, and how they can get involved to shape the services they use.
- **Work together for better services:** Strengthen partnerships with the NHS, care providers, and community organisations to make real improvements based on what local people tell us.

- **Champion fair and equal access:** Highlight issues that prevent people from getting the care they need, and work with services to tackle these barriers.
- **Use what we hear to drive change:** Collect and share people's stories and feedback to influence how services are planned and delivered in Halton.

## Priority areas from April 2025 to March 2026

These priorities have been shaped through extensive community engagement and direct feedback from Halton residents, as well as insights drawn from local PLACE plans and the strategic concerns of Halton Borough Council. This approach ensures our focus aligns with what matters most to people locally and is responsive to broader system-level issues identified in local health and care planning.

### Access to Primary Care services: (Quarters 1–4)

This has been a long-standing priority for Healthwatch. Work has already been taking place during 2024 to look at access to GP services.

A joint report on access to GP services across Cheshire & Merseyside is due for publication in Q1, (April to June 2025). A Halton focussed report will also be produced.

**Focus:** Improving access to GP services and reducing appointment delays.

- Gather feedback on GP availability, appointment systems, and out-of-hours access.
- Advocate for better booking systems and weekend/evening appointments.
- Assess impact of digital consultations on vulnerable groups.
- Promote patient awareness of available services and self-care resources.

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### Access to Women's services : Maternity Services and Women's Health

**Focus:** Supporting safe, personalised care before, during, and after pregnancy.

- Review maternity service availability and continuity of care.
- Investigate access to perinatal mental health and postnatal support.
- Address inequalities in maternity outcomes for young, disabled, or marginalised women.

## Other issues to consider for 2025 – 2026

### Treatment Room Services

**Focus:** Reviewing patient experience and access to Treatment Room services in Halton.

- Gather patient feedback on waiting times, service consistency, and ease of access.
  - Work with Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS FT to identify areas for improvement.
  - Ensure that treatment room services are accessible, efficient, and meet the needs of local people.
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### Access to Urgent and Emergency Care

**Focus:** Understanding local experience and barriers in accessing urgent and emergency care.

Residents have also shared concerns around inconsistent access to local urgent treatment centres. Healthwatch Halton will investigate how well these services meet the needs of our population, and where improvements are needed to ensure safe, accessible care during urgent situations.

NHS data also shows that across the North West, many urgent and emergency care services continue to miss the targets for A&E treatment, with rising attendance rates and pressures on staff and resources

- Review access to Urgent Treatment Centres in Runcorn and Widnes.
- Collect resident feedback on A&E services at Whiston Hospital and Warrington Hospital.
- Explore barriers to timely, appropriate urgent care and promote public understanding of service options.
- Promote patient transport and accessibility improvements.

## Access to NHS Dentistry

**Focus:** Tackling dental inequalities for children, families, and low-income adults.

- **Map dental deserts** — areas of Halton where no Dental practices are taking on new NHS patients.
  - **Gather local stories** from people forced to go private or go without due to lack of NHS availability.
  - **Highlight the financial strain** of dental costs for low-income households, including working families not eligible for free treatment.
  - **Raise awareness** of who qualifies for free or reduced-cost NHS dental care — many eligible adults and children aren't aware of their rights.
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## Digital Inclusion in Health Services

**Focus:** Ensuring digital health solutions do not widen inequalities.

- Assess usability of NHS apps, portals, and virtual appointments.
  - Identify gaps in digital access and skills across age groups.
  - Advocate for hybrid service models offering both online and face-to-face care.
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## Mental Health Services

**Focus:** Expanding timely, inclusive, and accessible mental health support.

- Evaluate access to CAMHS and adult mental health services.
- Highlight service gaps and advocate for local investment.



# Measuring Impact

Through our activity plan, we have set clear aims and objectives as our delivery targets to achieve throughout the year to ensure we maximise the impact we have, in addition to our priority project work.

Activity	Aims and objectives
<b>Enter and View Programme</b>	<p>The annual programme is determined by intelligence received, follow-up actions from previous Enter and View visits and our standard programme of work.</p> <p>The focus on the Enter and View Programme for 2025-2026 will be care homes and other local health services.</p> <p><b>Aim:</b> To carry out ten Enter and View visits from April 2025 to March 2026.</p> <p>We will aim to publish our reports and recommendations on the Healthwatch Halton website 40 days after the visit has taken place.</p>
<b>Public Feedback</b>	<p>We will continue to encourage the public to feedback their experiences of using local health and social care services.</p> <p>This feedback will form part of our regular reports to the Healthwatch Independent Strategic Advisory Board (ISAB) and be used to identify themes and trends in local services.</p> <p>This feedback will also form part of regular reports sent to service providers, commissioners, and stakeholders.</p> <p><b>Aim:</b> To collect the experiences of 1,200 people between April 2025 and March 2026.</p>

<b>Reporting</b>	<p>Healthwatch Halton will conduct independent reviews on various health and social care services. Reports will be published based on the intelligence we receive from members of the public and sent to the relevant Boards, commissioners, and contract monitoring officers.</p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> To publish intelligence/insight reports on a quarterly basis.</p>
<b>Promotion</b>	<p>We will ensure our services are widely available and promoted in a range of formats.</p> <p>Our website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms will provide live updates on engagement topics, service delivery changes and enable networking with other organisations.</p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> To see an increase in engagement numbers through our social media platforms</p> <p>To ensure that our website is updated regularly with relevant topics and issues.</p>
<b>Strategic Influencing</b>	<p>Healthwatch Halton is represented on a wide range of Strategic Boards that oversee health and social care including the Health and Wellbeing Board, Health Policy and Performance Board and Halton Quality &amp; Performance Group. We will work with these partnerships to ensure the voice of the public, patients, service users and carers are heard, and to provide guidance, and assurance on how to achieve this.</p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> To ensure Healthwatch Halton remains a strong public voice in strategic decision making.</p>

<b>Healthwatch Independent Strategic Advisory Board (ISAB)</b>	Develop a well-balanced ISAB with a complementary skill set and culture that allows collaborative working to enable effective decision making, and a platform in which the ISAB will formally agree and implement a plan of work.	<b>Aim:</b> To grow the number of ISAB members and to ensure the ISAB receives necessary training and support to fulfil its role during the year.
<b>Volunteers</b>	Volunteers play an essential role in the delivery of Healthwatch Halton. They add value and support us to achieve our mission and strategic objectives. By having an effective volunteer programme, Healthwatch Halton will provide opportunities for social inclusion, skills and confidence development and support routes into employment.	<b>Aim:</b> To develop a wider range of opportunities for people to volunteer with Healthwatch Halton, including work experience placements for students and young volunteers.
<b>Additional funded projects</b>	Healthwatch Halton will look at opportunities to take on additional funded projects or pieces of work that are aligned with our mission and values.	<b>Aim:</b> To generate additional income of 10% of the contract value to help sustain the current contract delivery and enhance the delivery offer.

<b>Community Engagement</b>	<p><b>Face-to-face:</b> Our staff and volunteers will visit a range of community groups and outreach events to seek patient and public opinions and views. We will ensure our engagement activities focus on all communities in Halton and continue to earn their respect.</p> <p>We will also continue to seek the views of people, who in the past, have been in the minority in intelligence gathering.</p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> Face-to-face: To undertake at least 120 outreach activities from April 2025 to March 2026.</p>
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## One Halton priorities

Through our day-to-day work and our 2025-2026 priorities we will aim to contribute to the current One Halton priority areas.



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