

# The value of listening

Healthwatch in Devon,  
Plymouth and Torbay  
**Annual Report 2023–2024**



**healthwatch**  
in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

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**"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."**

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



# Message from our Chair

## “Welcome to our 2023–24 Healthwatch Annual Report.

This report describes the wide range of engagement, representation and impact undertaken by Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay over the past year – a particularly challenging one for health and care services dealing with issues such as a waiting list backlog and industrial action. It is a testament to the hard work and commitment by Healthwatch volunteers and staff and highlights the importance of listening to patients’ voices.

Healthwatch continues to play a vital role in gathering information and feedback on services in order to capture what is working well and what may need to be improved. We further recognise the potential of true co-design and co-delivery of services alongside our diverse communities. We have worked closely with our local voluntary, community and statutory partners to ensure that residents’ voices, including the most vulnerable and marginalised, is considered in service design by our commissioners.

The 2022 Health and Care Act has been such a key change that is impacting all aspects of the way health and social care is delivered locally. It introduced new legislative measures that aim to make it easier for health and care organisations to deliver joined-up care for people who rely on multiple different services, building on earlier recommendations by NHS England and NHS Improvement.

The main purpose of the Health and Care Act is to establish a legislative framework that supports collaboration and partnership-working to integrate services for patients. Among a wide range of other measures, the Act also includes targeted changes to public health, social care and the oversight of quality and safety.

This year was also the first full year working with our new integrated care board (ICB), following their transition from NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in July 2022. A difficult year for all of us to work through, as NHS England moved the ICB and its member trusts into the ‘recovery support programme’ – formerly known as special measures. We continue to play a vital role in gathering information and feedback on services as we support NHS Devon ICB’s journey of recovery.

With these key changes to healthcare affecting us all, we therefore welcome the progress made by ‘One Devon’, our Integrated Care System, and much appreciate the openness of its officers and system leads. Our common objective is the wellbeing of our communities.

Relationships between local organisations are consequently robust, and we look forward to our partnerships continuing and strengthening.”



**“I would like to thank all those that have supported Healthwatch in our mission to monitor and improve health and social care, particularly members of the public from our local communities. It is very important continue to feedback on the services they use so that we can all make a real difference.”**

**Dr Kevin Dixon**  
**Chair of Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth & Torbay**



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# Our Mission

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## Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay is your local health and social care champion.

We're here to speak up for the 1.2 million people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, making sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear their voices and use their feedback to improve care. We can also help them find reliable, trustworthy information and advice.

We offer dedicated walk-in centres in Torbay and Plymouth, and in wider Devon 'Healthwatch Champions' are located at Citizens Advice offices based throughout the county to carry out Healthwatch core functions. Healthwatch Champions have offices based in East Devon, North & West Devon, Exeter, South Hams, Torridge & Mid Devon and Teignbridge.

### Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



### Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



### Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.



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# Who we are

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## Why do we exist?

Healthwatch was established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf. Healthwatch exist on a national and local level, working towards the same goal of enabling people to have a voice about their health and social care systems.

## Healthwatch England

Healthwatch England (HWE) are a statutory committee of the independent regulator the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Their main statutory functions are to:



- Provide leadership, guidance, support and advice to local Healthwatch organisations.
- Escalate concerns about health and social care services which have been raised by local Healthwatch to CQC. CQC are required to respond to advice from the Healthwatch England Committee.
- Provide advice to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, NHS England and English local authorities, especially where we are of the view that the quality of services provided are not adequate. Bodies to whom advice is given are required to respond in writing. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is also required to consult Healthwatch England on the NHS mandate, which sets the objectives for the NHS.

## Local Healthwatch

There are 152 local Healthwatch set up across each local authority in England. Their main statutory functions are to:

- Obtain the views of people about their needs and experience of local health and social care services. Local Healthwatch make these views known to those involved in the commissioning and scrutiny of care services.
- Make reports and make recommendations about how those services could or should be improved.
- Promote and support the involvement of people in the monitoring, commissioning and provision of local health and social care services.
- Provide information and advice to the public about accessing health and social care services and the options available to them.
- Make the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England, helping us to carry out our role as national champion.
- Make recommendations to Healthwatch England to advise the CQC to carry out special reviews or investigations into areas of concern.

## One Healthwatch

Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch work together to share information, expertise and learning to improve health and social care services in England.



# How it works locally

## How it works in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

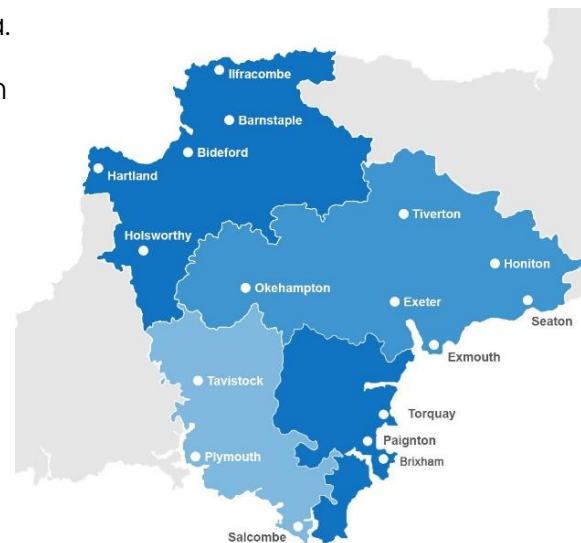
Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council jointly commission local Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. Although these three services are jointly commissioned, each local authority area retains the distinct identities of their own local Healthwatch.

Healthwatch Devon, Healthwatch Plymouth and Healthwatch Torbay are delivered by a collaborative partnership of Colebrook (SW) Ltd, Engaging Communities South West and Citizens Advice Devon.

The partnership provides the vision, infrastructure, staffing and overall governance, ensuring delivery of the contract as the hosted organisation. As Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay are independent services driven by local people, independent steering groups – led by local lay people – have been set up, alongside a Healthwatch Assist Network.

The role of each steering group is to support the delivery of its local workplan, priorities and statutory functions, working in partnership with the staff team to create a successful local Healthwatch to deliver the vision for the service. Our Steering Groups meet quarterly and use local insight to decide on engagement priorities for their area.

Our staff work in key specific areas to ensure the Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay service delivers its workplan, meets its statutory functions and achieves its set targets.



**healthwatch**  
in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

### Who funds us?

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) fund the work of Healthwatch nationally. DHSC gives money to local councils so they can commission an effective independent local Healthwatch service.

This money is essential to ensuring each local Healthwatch has the resources to provide a high-quality service for you. Although local Healthwatch are funded by and accountable to local authorities, they are completely independent.

# Year in Review

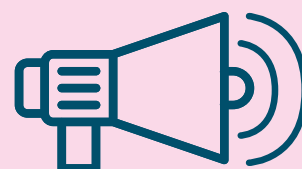
## Reaching out:

**3395 people**

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

**620 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as dental services and GP appointments.



## Making a difference to care:

We published

**10 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

**Emergency Departments in Devon**

which highlighted the experiences of **over 500** people.



## Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

**26**

outstanding volunteers who gave up their valuable time to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

**£560,000**

which is the same as the previous year.


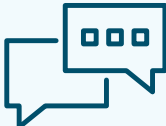

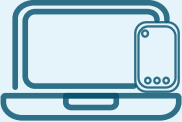




We currently employ

**15 staff**

who help us carry out our work.



# Some of the ways we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We collected feedback from men of all ages who access healthcare services in Torbay and South Devon, to help Health Trusts understand what matters to men and how they can be better informed about their health and wellbeing.</p>	 <p>We facilitated a series of focus groups to enable them to find out about people's experiences of acute medical services across Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly – including what went well and what could have been better.</p>
Summer	 <p>We visited Emergency Departments across Devon's four Acute Hospital sites to speak to over 500 patients to better understand what informed and influenced their decision to attend the emergency department that day.</p>	 <p>We ran a social media campaign and online survey to find out if the cost of living was having an impact on people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay and if so, in what way.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We gathered feedback on what patients and their relatives have told us about their experiences of pharmacy services and shared a report of these findings with NHS stakeholders in Devon and made key recommendations for them.</p>	 <p>We shared experiences relating to difficulties accessing dental services with Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Boards, NHS Leaders in Devon to produce joint communications to raise awareness of and promote access to dental provision.</p>
Winter	 <p>We gathered feedback from 224 people on the impact of providing unpaid care at home on Carers' wellbeing and feelings of isolation. The information gathered will be used anonymously to help us and Carers groups in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.</p>	 <p>We co-designed research to get feedback on issues relating to accessibility, lack of public transport, inadequate signage, written communications and visual impairment related to the new Royal Eye Infirmary building in Plymouth.</p>



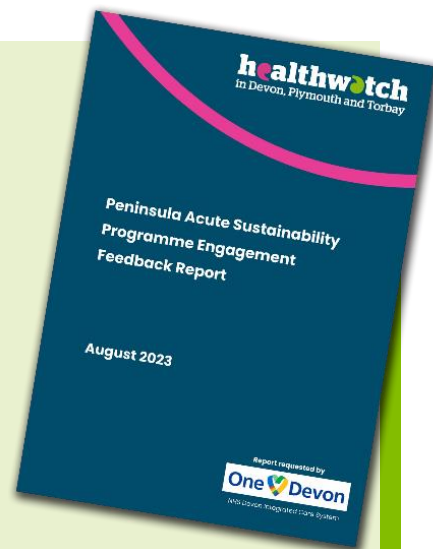
# Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborate with other local Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay influence decisions made about services at Integrated Care System level across the South West region. This year we've worked with Healthwatch across the South West to find out more about people's experiences of acute medical services.

As part of a Peninsula wide (Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly) NHS Acute Sustainability Programme, the NHS are looking at ways to improve the way that acute hospital services are delivered.

To help them to do this, NHS Devon asked Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay (HWDPT) to facilitate a series of focus groups to enable them to find out about people's experiences of acute medical services across Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly – including what went well and what could have been better. At the same time, NHS leaders in Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly listened to the experiences and ideas of ten patients and family members through a series of online focus groups and ran a peninsular wide online survey and reached out for feedback through social media.

The collective feedback of 335 people was anonymized, independently analysed and collated by us at Healthwatch to form the body of our detailed consultation report. The key findings of which were then reported back to the NHS in Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly.



*"NHS Devon and NHS Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly would like to thank Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay and Healthwatch Cornwall for their commitment, support, and flexibility to such an important piece of involvement and producing such valuable insight through this report..."*

*The depth and quality of the feedback shows that by taking a system approach with the blend of involvement approaches through the focus groups, individual conversations, the online survey, and social media campaign, we were able to get a wide and diverse range of views.*

*The feedback contained within the report will influence our early discussions on how we can improve the way acute hospital services are delivered in the future. As this work progresses there will be further opportunities for involvement and for the people of Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly to be able to share their experiences.*

**Statement from Devon Integrated Care System**



## Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

### Reading our Annual Report Online?

If you click this image on the right within this report it will take you directly to the corresponding report on our websites.



## Emergency Departments in Devon

**In the Spring of 2023 we were commissioned by NHS Devon to visit Emergency Departments (EDs) across Devon's four Acute Hospital sites to speak to patients to better understand what informed and influenced their decision to attend the Emergency Department (ED). 511 people conversed with us during 34 visits at various times and days, which included daytime, evenings and weekends.**

This work follows an initial piece of engagement work with people attending EDs in Devon undertaken in 2021 that started NHS Devon's look into patients journeys. A brief summary of themes gathered from patients by us and included in the final report we produced are below:

- **Awareness** – patients had very high levels of awareness of the other NHS services available.
- **GP services** – many patients indicated they would have preferred to be seen by their GP rather than ED but were unable to book an appointment.
- **Multiple services** – the majority of patients tried to access their GP first before being referred to ED by other services such as NHS 111 or MIU/UTC.
- **Emergency Departments** – the majority of patients felt that ED was the correct choice for their treatment.
- **NHS 111** – the majority of patients that used NHS 111 were referred to ED.
- **Delays** – there was no clear indication that the delays in waiting times for ongoing treatment or surgery is significantly impacting ED numbers.
- **Minor Injury Unit /Urgent Treatment Centre** – more than half of those accessing a Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) or Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) were referred to ED because the services needed were not available in the community (e.g. CT scan, x-ray, blood tests, etc.).
- **Location** – the majority of patients accessed the ED closest to their home.
- **Access** – some patients highlighted the issues of accessing services, and ED, in rural areas.
- **Information screens** – there is evidence to suggest inconsistent information in EDs about other services and waiting times between sites.
- **Waiting Rooms** – waiting rooms appeared busier due to large numbers of those accompanying the patient (e.g. relatives, children, friends).

Following the report's release, we were asked to jointly present its findings with NHS Devon at the South West Clinical Senate Conference in Exeter. **Ajike Alli Ameh, Head of the South West Clinical Senate thanked us for our presentation, saying:**

*"On behalf of the South West Clinical Senate, I write to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to speak at our Senate Assembly conference "Reimagining the NHS... the next 75 years". It is much appreciated and contributed to the success of the conference. Feedback received on the day was that the conference topic is timely and thought-provoking particularly, given the challenges and pressures faced by the NHS over the last couple of years."*



### What difference did this make?

NHS Devon welcomed the findings of the report and shared it with our trusts and Urgent and Emergency Care Boards. The report has also been presented at the NHS Devon Primary Care Commissioning Committee and the South West Clinical Senate to help them to make the best possible decisions about health and care provision in the South West.





## Patient Experiences of Pharmacy Services

Following a report released by Healthwatch England earlier in the year which found that people are experiencing serious issues when trying to get their repeat prescriptions, we decided to perform a deeper dive into the Devon area to find out more.

We gathered feedback on what patients and their relatives have told us about their experiences of pharmacy services and shared a report of these findings with NHS stakeholders in Devon and made key recommendations for them.

Our report on Patient Experiences of Pharmacy Services, detailed a total of 141 experiences about Pharmacy Services across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay during an 18-month period. Issues raised by those surveyed include medication delays and supply problems that affect the prescription/repeat prescription service, patients not knowing when their medications are ready for collection, and phone calls going unanswered.

### What we did

We escalated your concerns and our recommendations around pharmacy services and particularly the potential effect on Community Pharmacy Services to NHS Devon, specifically to The Primary Care Commissioning Committee, Quality and Patient Experience Committee and to The System Quality & Performance Group. We have raised the same concerns with the Devon Local Pharmaceutical Committee at an online meeting. Additional discussions continue to take place with NHS England Southwest and NHS Devon around our concerns and actions that are taking place to mitigate some of the issues affecting patients described in this report.

109 experiences shared with us (77%) were negative in sentiment and of those 82 experiences (75%) recorded related to pharmacy services in Plymouth. This prompted us to make a recommendation for University Hospital Plymouth NHS Trust to work with Healthwatch Plymouth in monitoring patient experience feedback once proposed changes to the Outpatient Pharmacy service are fully implemented. **Devon Local Pharmaceutical Committee responded to the report by saying:**

*“Community Pharmacy Devon would like to thank Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay for their commitment to ensuring patient experience in relation to pharmacy service is heard. The report highlights many of the issues faced by pharmacies across Devon and how they have a direct impact on patient’s experiences. Community Pharmacy Devon will review all recommendations made by the report and ensure that they are considered in full as part of processes for developing and improving pharmacy services, with the providers and the commissioners in Devon.”*

### What difference did this make?

Following the release of our report, University Hospital Plymouth NHS Trust concluded the procurement of a new outpatient Pharmacy and promised that by April 2024, they will have moved their outpatient pharmacy to a new on-site location that will be more than triple the size of the current premises. In February 2024 they announced a new community partnership with Boots to launch a bigger, modern, and welcoming new outpatient pharmacy in Spring 2024.

NHS Devon have said it will use the outputs of this report to directly inform the development of its Pharmacy strategy, which is currently in development, enabling them to show how the experiences of patients in Devon have been used to develop and improve services for patients.

Community Pharmacy Devon have said they will review all recommendations made by the report and ensure that they are considered in full as part of processes for developing and improving pharmacy services, with the providers and the commissioners in Devon.



## Experiences of Adult Social Care

The new duty on the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to assess local authorities' delivery of their Adult Social Care duties came into effect in April 2023. Healthwatch Torbay has been working closely with Torbay Council and Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust to ensure service user voices are heard and represented in their new Adult Social Care Strategy.

In addition to promoting a survey to Carers, members of the public, all the local members of the Healthwatch Assist Network and the wider Voluntary Sector network in Torbay, we organised six independent focus groups with 70 local residents who provided their feedback and experiences on the local Adult Social Care landscape, detailed in a full consultation report we produced.

The opportunity to be involved in this important work with Torbay Council provided valuable insight about people's experiences and knowledge. The flexibility in approach taken by Torbay Council has also enabled participants to engage in a meaningful way, ensuring that they have felt listened to. The Adult Social Care Strategy identified the following key aims:

- Helping people to live well and independently
- Helping people to regain their independence
- Helping people with care and support needs to live independently, safely, and with choice and control



### What difference did this make?

The report and our suggestions were used to further develop the Council's Adult Social Care strategy ensuring it was reflective of what people think is important and was approved by the Council in Autumn 2023.



*"I would like to thank Healthwatch for their support during the Torbay Council's consultation in relation to the Adult Social Care Strategy. Healthwatch were a great organisation to work with and pulled the events together in a very professional way and they added an element of independence to the process which the Council greatly appreciated. By working together in partnership, we were able to maximise the benefits of the client feedback we received for both health and social care. The work will be used to further develop the Council's Adult Social Care strategy ensuring it is reflective of what people think is important."*

**Cathy Williams – Strategic Lead for ASC Quality & Assurance in Torbay**

### Follow up consultation on digital information



Following this successful Adult Social Care consultation and our work championing digital inclusion in Torbay, we were invited to join a Torbay Adult Social Care Webpages workstream group with the aim of finding out what service users thought about the website.

We joined representatives from Torquay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, Torbay Council, Age UK the Torbay Community Helpline and users of the Torbay adult social care webpages. The group produced a survey and held two online focus groups with members of the public and one was face to face with local learning disabilities ambassadors.

These allowed us to explore views about the webpages in more detail and produce a report containing several key recommendations for Torbay Council to take forward to make positive user-led improvements to their online provision.

# Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

## Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

**It's important for services to see the bigger picture. Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.**



In 2023 Healthwatch England published their findings and a set of immediate actions for the Government and the NHS, in relation to the cost of living and the detrimental impact it is having on people's decisions about their own health and wellbeing.

Their national research found that if you are disabled, on means-tested benefits or aged 18-24, you're more likely to avoid vital health services due to the fear of extra costs.

In light of these findings, we wanted to find out if the cost of living was having an impact on people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay and if so, in what way.

To do this we ran a social media campaign to try and find out what steps people were taking locally in response to the rising cost of living.

### Key Findings

- More than two thirds of respondents (68%) described their current financial situations as either not very or not at all comfortable.
- Most respondents (92%) said their financial situation had worsened over the last six months.
- Almost three quarters of respondents (72%) said their physical health and mental health had worsened over the last two months.
- Almost half of respondents (46%) said they have avoided going to the dentist because of the cost of check-ups or treatment and almost a quarter (22%) said they are anticipating this.
- Almost a third of respondents (32%) have cut down or stopped support from services that they pay privately for, such as physiotherapy, earwax removal or counselling.
- Half of respondents (50%) said that changes they have made because of the cost of living have negatively impacted on their ability to manage an existing long-term condition.
- Almost three quarters of respondents (73%) said the changes they have had to make due to the cost of living have negatively impacted on their levels of stress and anxiety.

**The final report was shared with key stakeholders and Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay will continue to monitor patient and public feedback and report the findings to those who plan and deliver health and social care services in Devon to inform service delivery and change.**





# Three ways we have made a difference in the community

## Getting services to involve the public

**Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.**



The first report we released this financial year was centered on men's health following a report by UK Parliament states that Suicide in England and Wales is three times more common among men than among women. In Devon this is even higher, with male and female suicide rates 19.0 and 5.3 respectively – male rates are 3.6 times higher than the female rate (2018–20), according to the 2022–23 DCC Suicide Prevention Statement and Action Plan.

Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust approached Healthwatch in Torbay and Devon to support them in collecting feedback from men of all ages who access healthcare services in Torbay and South Devon, to help them to understand what matters to men and how they can be better informed about their health and wellbeing.

This report forms part of a wider engagement project by Torbay and South Devon NHS Trust, who are looking at how local health services can be developed and improved to ensure men are better informed about the health issues that affect them now and in the future. We created and distributed a survey in Torbay and Devon, of which 132 men responded, and then independently analysed the feedback to produce a report of its findings for the Health Trust.

**A statement from the Trust's Chief Executive Liz Davenport and Health and Care Strategy Director Joanne Watson said:**

*"We are very grateful to Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay for carrying out this valuable men's health survey amongst our local people. The results give detailed insights into how men approach their health and what matters to them specifically.*

*We are provided with a wide range of data which we will be taking into consideration as we focus on better health and care for all for the people of Torbay and South Devon. Mental health comes to the fore with the survey results and the suicide statistic is so stark, with men reporting that this area of health is difficult for them to talk about.*



**Liz Davenport**

*There is clearly much to do to improve the situation here and this endorses the active focus on mental health in Devon, in particular on developing a suicide prevention plan. We will continue to support this work as strongly as we can and look forward to a time when our concerted, joined up efforts will make things much better for everyone.*

*Finally, a powerful aspect of this report is the voices of men themselves. Their words explain so much about men's health behaviours and concerns, and clearly show us how we can provide more (and better) support and guidance. We would like to thank the men who have taken the time to express their views when given this opportunity."*

**This report was shared with Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, NHS Devon and Torbay and Devon Public Health Intelligence Teams. Healthwatch in Torbay and Devon will continue to work with and support Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust's work focussing on men's health to ensure the local voice is at the heart of any service change or development.**



# Three ways we have made a difference in the community

## Improving care over time

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



Through our engagement with Carers groups in local communities during the summer, we started to hear that some Carers are experiencing difficulties trying to arrange replacement care for the person they care for, to enable them to take a break from their caring role. We have started to raise the issues surrounding these experiences with the local authorities in Devon and Torbay to try and understand how Healthwatch can work with them, as well as local Carers services and other relevant stakeholders, to help improve access to information, advice and support for people who need to arrange replacement care, particularly if they are approaching crisis point.

In December 2023 Healthwatch Torbay, in partnership with Engaging Communities South West, were commissioned by Torbay Carers' Service to help shape the new Torbay Carers' Strategy by independently analysing extensive survey data from Carers and producing a report on its findings.

377 Carers responded to the survey. Some of the issues included replacement care and mental health support for both adults and children. We have raised those issues with Torbay Council and Adult Social Care and will work with them to prioritise these. Torbay Carers have stated that all the key issues in the report will be translated into the Carers Strategy action plan which will be signed off in June 2024.



This feedback has prompted us to work further with Carers in wider Devon. At the time of writing this report, Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay has analysed feedback from 224 people who took part in focused engagement activities that we helped to independently facilitate. These included guided conversations on the impact of providing unpaid care at home on Carers' wellbeing and feelings of isolation. The information gathered will be used anonymously to help us and Carers groups in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay explore the links between:

- Carers mental/physical health and wellbeing and number of hours unpaid care provided.
- How long a Carer had been providing this role (longevity).
- Type of care role provided e.g. physical caring, supportive caring, dementia/cognition caring or mixture.

A full report on this will be produced in the next financial year to highlight unpaid Carers' needs and to influence a wider Devon Carers' strategy and complement our ongoing work supporting Carers in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

**The information we are gathering from Carers in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay will allow leading Carers Services providers to develop support for Carers, develop a risk scale for Carers to help medical professionals identify when a Carer may be reaching a tipping point, to identify gaps in service provisions and communications and to identify gaps in knowledge for future engagement and research.**



## Hearing from all communities

**Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.**

**This year we have reached different communities by:**

- Reaching out to unpaid carers, their families and their loved ones in Devon.
- Talking with new patients of the new Royal Eye Infirmary (REI) building in Plymouth.
- Listening to the voices and experiences of children, young people and their families in Torbay.

## Supporting communities to have their say in Devon



### Independently chairing and collating feedback from a stakeholder group on the possible future use of the Teignmouth Hospital site.

In late 2022 Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust submitted a full planning application to Teignbridge District Council of a new health and wellbeing centre for Teignmouth – a proposal which we formally consulted with the public about in 2020 and produced an extensive report for commissioners. In 2023 we were commissioned to independently chair and collate feedback from a series of stakeholder panel meetings. The panel was created to discuss future plans for the Teignmouth Hospital site, listen and respond to the concerns of the Teignmouth community and surrounding areas and to share updates from the Trust and other stakeholders.

Devon County Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee will use this feedback to look into the possible impact of proposals before taking a view on whether the Teignmouth Hospital closure should be re-referred to the Secretary of State for review. This work has continued into 2024, with decisions regarding potential funding delayed until after the General Election in July.

## Engaging with new patients in Plymouth

### Making sure patient experiences are used to ensure that a new Plymouth service is performing and meeting patient needs.



Our most recent piece of engagement work involved Healthwatch Plymouth and the Patient Experience team at University Hospitals Plymouth (UHP) co-designed piece of conversational research using a short survey, in order to get feedback on issues relating to accessibility (issues raised by patients since opening of the building; lack of public transport, inadequate signage, written communications and making the building easier for people with visual impairment to navigate) of the new Royal Eye Infirmary (REI) building in Plymouth.

Four of our volunteers attended the REI over 2 weeks to have informal conversations with patients about their experience of using this new service and were able to capture 35 conversations with people as they sat in the waiting areas. Healthwatch Plymouth will feedback to UHP Patient services and to the team at the REI, along with a brief report of what patients have told us.

## Helping children and young people access support in Torbay



### Using the voices and experiences of young people and their families to improve Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

We were called to give evidence at a recent spotlight review into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and emotional wellbeing support, by Torbay Council. We shared concerns on behalf of parents, families and representatives of local community groups about the long waiting times for mental health support for children and young people and we emphasised the importance of the voices and experiences of young people and their families being embedded in the process for measuring impact.

After listening to young people sharing their stories and hearing from service leaders responding to concerns, the review concluded with a list of recommendations, which rely on a multi-agency approach to making improvements to communication, signposting and access to services to support children and young people in Torbay. The review also recommended the development of a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. This data will be used to inform the design of services and to enable progress monitoring of the delivery and improvement of the services going forward.



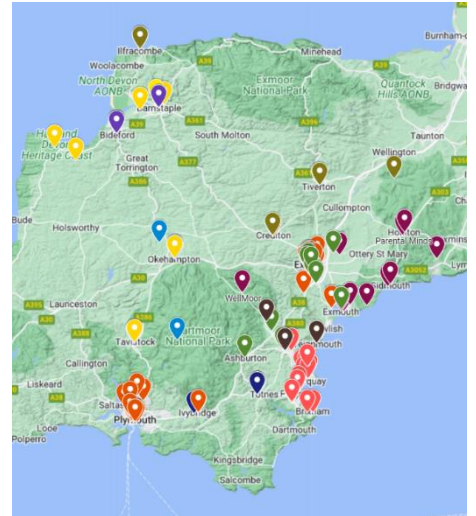


# Healthwatch Assist Network

**Our Healthwatch Assist Network allows us to build links with communities in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay so we can gather information about the health and care services they use.**

This information is fed back into the community and shared with key healthcare decision makers who can learn from good practice and make improvements to local services.

We currently have 150 Healthwatch Assist Network members, including local support groups, school councils, parent groups, committees and sports groups.



*Pictured above, the map shows some of the locations of our Healthwatch Assist Network members across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay*



Our Healthwatch Assist Network's in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay have been integral in gathering feedback and supporting our next focussed engagement on the impact of providing unpaid care at home. We are working in collaboration with Devon Carers, Caring for Carers Plymouth, and Torbay Carers services. This is a follow up to an earlier report we did in 2022 and will focus on the impacts on carers, especially around their wellbeing and feelings of isolation.

The Healthwatch Torbay Assist Network met up with volunteers and staff to discuss the work of Healthwatch, how we can help support local people and to raise any issues they or the people they support had experienced locally. They were joined by Guest speaker Karen Button, who spoke about the new community pharmacy strategy. Assists had chance to feedback about health and social care issues they're picking up from their respective service users, as well as ask questions on changes happening with community pharmacies.



The Healthwatch Devon Assist Network met up to discuss the ongoing work of Healthwatch, how we can help support local people and to raise any issues they or the people they support had experienced locally. Some members shared health and social care concerns for the people they support around:

- Access to mental health services
- Access to information
- Waiting lists for services
- Access to specialised services
- Accessing social care assessments
- Impact of rurality
- Access to GP services
- Delays in care reviews
- Digital Exclusion

All the feedback gathered is shared with key healthcare decision makers who can learn from good practice and make improvements to local services.



## Advice and Information

**If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.**

**This year we've helped people by:**

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Helping people access NHS dentistry
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost-of-living crisis



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## Promoting key messages around access to dental care



**People need reassuring that the information and support they need are available. This means better communication so they know what to do if urgent dental care is required.**

Experiences relating to difficulties accessing dental services in Torbay and wider Devon were shared by Healthwatch to Torbay Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board in November. We also asked how Healthwatch could further help to promote key messages to the public around access to dental services.

Healthwatch Torbay provided evidence which highlighted that between April and November 2023, 109 people contacted local Healthwatch because they could not access an NHS dentist. Where possible we were able to contact 77 of them to signpost them to Access Dental – NHS Devon Dental Helpline.

As a result of discussions, NHS Leaders in Devon were recommended to produce joint communications to raise awareness of and promote access to dental provision, how to maintain good oral health and what to do if urgent dental care is required.

They were also requested to develop communication resources for use by frontline services and supporting web content to raise awareness of how to maintain good oral health, how to access routine dentistry and what to do if urgent dental care is required within Torbay.

We continue to regularly contribute feedback to the Local South West Regional Dental Network and the local Primary Care Committee.

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## Triggering important communications changes

**It's essential that people have clear, accurate communication about their care.**



Thanks to the efforts of Healthwatch Torbay, Torbay Hospital Cardiology Department have reviewed the way they dictate letters to patients to make sure they avoid harmful miscommunications. They'll more closely scrutinise all letters, and double-check them across departments.

Healthwatch Torbay were made aware of potential issues after John\*, who has a heart condition, was advised to "stop" taking his medication. He checked in with healthcare professionals, who realised the word "stop" should be a full-stop. The mistake, which was due to a misunderstanding during the letter's dictation, could have proved very serious if John hadn't questioned it.

John shared the incident with Healthwatch Torbay, who raised his concerns with Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust. They asked about what measures were in place to ensure the accuracy of patient communications, leading to a discussion and review that will make patient communications safer for the future.

*\*Name changed*

# How we share advice and information to the community

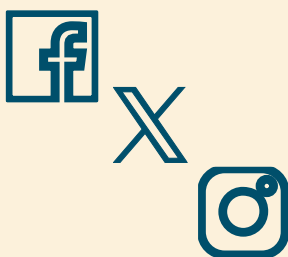
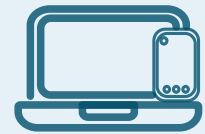
Here are just some of the ways we helped people access information in the last 12 months.



Over a thousand people were provided with information, advice or signposted to other services who could help via our contact centre - a dedicated, phone, email and online service. The online live webchat service is available via our three websites for people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay to find out more information. You can call the contact centre free on **0800 520 0640**.

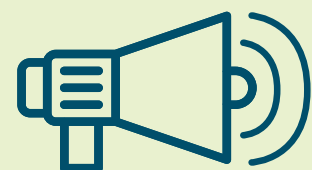
Hundreds of thousands of people visited our three websites where they can view local services and rate their experiences with them anonymously. You can visit via our websites via:

**[www.healthwatchdevon.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchdevon.co.uk), [www.healthwatchplymouth.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchplymouth.co.uk), and [www.healthwatchtorbay.org.uk](http://www.healthwatchtorbay.org.uk).**



Last year tens of thousands people followed us on social media via our three separate Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts for Healthwatch Devon, Healthwatch Plymouth and Healthwatch Torbay, where we received hundreds of thousands engagements to our posts last year overall! Join our online community today!

Over **3000** people now subscribe to our Email Bulletins where we share the latest updates from Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth & Torbay and the health, care and voluntary sector locally every week. You can subscribe via any of our websites.





# Volunteering

**We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.**

## **This year our volunteers:**

- Visited communities to promote their local Healthwatch and what we have to offer.
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Helped us decide on our priorities for the year by being part of our Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Steering Groups.

# Our volunteers have been taking our information stands out into the community and attended events in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, capturing experiences of local health and social care along the way.



HW Champion Kim Murray (left) with HW Devon Service Coordinator Georgina McKenzie at an MS Society event in Dawlish



The HW Plymouth volunteer engagement team attending 'Wellbeing Wednesday' at University of Plymouth



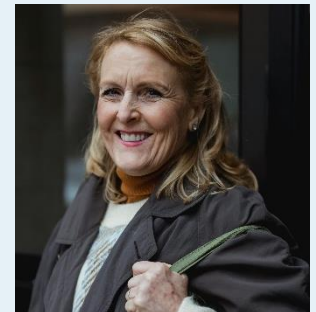
Healthwatch Torbay volunteers at the Winter Wellbeing Event at Paignton Library



"I have had various volunteering roles with Healthwatch this year.

- I took minutes at an operation follow up meeting, which included patients.
- I "manned" promotional stalls and visited local care homes for assessment and rating purposes – chatting to residents and getting their views.
- I also visited local Hospitals for similar research with patient surveys.

I have enjoyed these roles and I hope to be of use in the future."



Quote from a Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Volunteer



"Volunteering with Healthwatch is a wonderful way to make use of your skills and to learn new ones, from, in my case over the last ten years or so:

- presenting a radio show
- writing a weekly news column
- editing newsletters and website information
- promoting volunteering itself by visiting local groups, organisations and schools."



Quote from a Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Volunteer



## Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.



[www.healthwatchdevon.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchdevon.co.uk)  
[www.healthwatchplymouth.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchplymouth.co.uk)  
[www.healthwatchtorbay.org.uk](http://www.healthwatchtorbay.org.uk)



Freephone 0800 520 0640



[Info@hwdevon-plymouth-torbay.org](mailto:Info@hwdevon-plymouth-torbay.org)





## Recognition

**The National Healthwatch Impact Awards recognises outstanding examples of where the views of local people have been used to make positive changes to local NHS and social care services.**

**This year our Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay team have:**

- Represented Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay at various national Healthwatch England meetings and their national leadership conference.
- Achieved a commended award at the National Healthwatch Impact Awards, after submitting a nomination for each of Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. This year the Awards reflected on local Healthwatch's work over the past ten years to recognise the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Healthwatch.
- Shared numerous stakeholder briefings of the work of the wider Healthwatch Network, including Healthwatch England reports, publications and responses to national health and social care stories.

## This year Healthwatch Torbay were commended in the annual National Healthwatch Impact Awards, recognising outstanding work over the last 10 years that used local people's views to improve health and care support.

In the running against 18 other shortlisted projects, the team was commended for their work on helping to improve care for local people in Torbay and South Devon.

The National Healthwatch Impact Awards recognises outstanding examples of where the views of local people have been used to make positive changes to local NHS and social care services.

This year, to recognise the ten year anniversary of Healthwatch, the award reflected on an improvement to people's care that has resulted from a local Healthwatch's work at any point over the past ten years, and work that still benefits people today. The team at Healthwatch Torbay were commended for their work highlighting concerns about local domiciliary care, which led in 2017 to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) placing the care organisation into special measures until improvements were made.

At the time Healthwatch Torbay were invited to raise their social care concerns and offer key recommendations nationally during an accountability hearing with the CQC and the Government's Health Select Committee. They now have regular meetings with the local authority, commissioners and local CQC lead inspectors and continue to work with key service users to monitor improvements to ensure the voice of local people is listened to.



Dr Kevin Dixon, Chair for HWDPT with Strategic Lead Pat Harris receiving a National Healthwatch Award in 2017

### Joanna Williams, Director of Adult and Community Services in Torbay said:



*"This is fantastic news and a real testament to the joint working relationship between Healthwatch and local social care providers and commissioners, it's a relationship we are committed to and very grateful for. At the time Healthwatch Torbay's input was invaluable and allowed us to re-commission new services for local people based on the learning that they provided. They continue to be a key part of service user co-production and involvement so that we don't get back to that situation again. I congratulate them on winning this nationally commended award."*

### Commenting on the award, Louise Ansari, Chief Executive of Healthwatch England said:



*"The team should feel really proud. Our awards recognise outstanding work that makes a real difference to local people, and the competition this year from across England was very high. Being recognised is also a testament to all the local people who were prepared to speak up and the health professionals who listened. It just shows what can be achieved when we work together to improve care."*

In September our Strategic & Operational Leads Pat Harris & Sarah Lonton joined leaders from the Healthwatch network at the Healthwatch England Leadership Conference in London to share ideas on the future role of Healthwatch in helping to improve local health & social care services. Pat took the opportunity to talk on stage about the importance of local Healthwatch gathering patient feedback at the national Conference, which began with a speech from newly appointed Healthwatch England Chair Professor David Croisdale-Appleby. Representatives from across the country discussed Healthwatch's role in improving access to services and the next steps in Primary Care.





# Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. This year we received:

## Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Local Authority Funding	£560,000	Expenditure on pay (staffing)	£433,421.69
(Devon)	(£348,573)	Non-pay expenditure (operational)	£43,261.42
(Plymouth)	(£115,427)	Office and management fees (support)	£90,228.14
(Torbay)	(£96,000)		
Additional income	£236.50		
Carry in	£25,165.11		
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£585,401.61</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£566,911.25</b>

## Additional income is broken down by:

- £236.50 received from Healthwatch Birmingham for work supporting a data project.

# Our Priorities for 2024/25

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 focus on how we can improve the issues that concern local people the most, including GP access, waiting times, women's health, and social care.

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.

To help us carry out our work our volunteer Steering groups have agreed on the following engagement priorities for each of Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth & Torbay's local service:

**Digital Health:** Use of digital technology to support access to services and monitoring services at home.

**healthwatch**  
Devon

**Social Care:** Accessing Social Care Services and residential and home support services.

**Children & Young People:** Development and integration of Children & Young People services.

**Equality:** Equitable access to health services for all patients including those with learning disabilities/language barriers/sight impairment/hearing loss/young people.

**Mental Health:** Accessing Mental Health services under the Community Mental Health Framework.

**Health:** Accessing Primary Care, Secondary Care and Mental Health services.

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Plymouth

**Social Care:** Accessing Social Care Services and residential and home support service.

**Children & Young People:** Development and integration of Children & Young People services.

**Mental Health:** Accessing Mental Health services under the Community Mental Health Framework.

**Digital Health:** Use of digital technology to support access to services and monitoring services at home.

**Health:** Accessing Primary Care, Secondary Care and Mental Health services.

**healthwatch**  
Torbay

**Mental Health:** Accessing Mental Health services under the Community Mental Health Framework.

**Social Care:** Accessing Social Care Services and residential and home support services.

**Children & Young People:** Development and integration of Children & Young People services.

**Wellbeing:** Impact of cost of living on individual/family health & wellbeing.



## Statutory Statements

**Healthwatch Devon, Healthwatch Plymouth and Healthwatch Torbay are provided by Colebrook Southwest in partnership with Engaging Communities South West and Citizen’s Advice Devon, William Sutton Memorial Hall, 6 Shelley Way, St Budeaux, Plymouth, PL5 1QF.**

**Healthwatch Devon, Healthwatch Plymouth and Healthwatch Torbay use the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the license agreement.**

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# The way we work

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## Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

As Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay are independent services, driven by the voice of local people, an independent steering group has been set up in each locality in Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay – led by lay people. The role of each steering group is to support the delivery of its local workplan, priorities and statutory functions, working in partnership with the staff team to create a successful local Healthwatch to deliver the vision for the service. Our Steering Groups meet quarterly and use local insight from public information and signposting enquiries to decide on engagement priorities for their area. These priorities are detailed on the next page of this report.

## Methods and systems used to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of using services. During 2023/24 we have been available by phone, email, provided a webform on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums, both face-to-face and virtually. 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 each of our websites – [www.healthwatchdevon.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchdevon.co.uk), [www.healthwatchplymouth.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchplymouth.co.uk), and [www.healthwatchtorbay.org.uk](http://www.healthwatchtorbay.org.uk).

## Responses to recommendations or requests for information

We made 26 Requests for Further Information (RFIs) to stakeholders based on public feedback. There were no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations. In addition, we responded to all 13 requests from external stakeholders for further evidence from Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay about various health and social care related topics.

As part of the annual statutory Quality Account process for NHS Trusts and specific service providers, we also provided responses to all the relevant reports in 2023/24.

## Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us. Healthwatch Devon, Healthwatch Plymouth and Healthwatch Torbay are also represented on numerous different relevant meetings locally, regionally and nationally. This year for example in our local authority areas we have taken information to each of the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Health & Wellbeing Boards, Health & Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Boards, Safeguarding Adults Partnerships, Local Outbreak Engagement Boards and Local Care Partnerships.

As well as being on the Devon Integrated Care Partnership Board, we also take insight and experiences to other decision makers in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. For example, this year we have shared the public voice on the Learning Disability Partnership Board in Devon, the Carers Strategic Partnership Board in Plymouth and have been a key founding member of the voluntary, community or social enterprise (VCSE) Health & Wellbeing Network in Torbay.

We also share our data with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Healthwatch England (HWE) to help address health and care issues at a national level and are part of the regional HWE South West Network with our neighbouring local Healthwatch.



# Final Message from One Devon Devon Integrated Care Service

"2023/24 marked our first full year as an integrated care board (ICB), following our transition from NHS Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in July 2022. As a new organisation we have needed to make adjustments to how we work in the face of different responsibilities and with many of our services facing significant pressures. Our challenges are not unique in England, but our starting position was one of the most difficult and, while we are beginning to see some signs of an encouraging turnaround, they remain critical priorities to be addressed without losing sight of our need to go further on health prevention and inequalities. **Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay provides a patient voice which is vital for the delivery of NHS services locally.**

Healthwatch is a valued board member of the One Devon Partnership, a committee that includes a range of organisations and groups who can influence people's health, wellbeing and care. The committee's primary aim is drive integration by producing a strategy to join-up services, reduce inequalities, and improve people's wellbeing, outcomes and experiences.

Healthwatch continues to provide important feedback from patients, on big themes and small, so that as we redesign services we can better tailor them to meet the expectations of our local population. Our mission at NHS Devon is to provide equal chances for everyone to live happy, healthy lives, and we need 'critical friends' such as Healthwatch to help achieve this.

As an example, Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay led a significant piece of engagement for the ICB speaking to people in Devon's four Emergency Departments (ED) to better understand the patient journey through the health system to ED. The findings showed that 98% of people are aware of the NHS services available to them, 68% had accessed their GP practice prior to attending ED,

and 86% of people who accessed ED as a first choice, felt it was the right place for them. Presenting this work together with Healthwatch at the 2024 Clinical Senate was a real demonstration of our commitment of working together to ensure the voices of the people of Devon are instrumental in the development of our services.

People using health services do often experience real inequality, and the information that Healthwatch collated will contribute on our future design of urgent and emergency care services across the county.

We look forward to another year of close working with our partners in Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay."

**Steve Moore - Chief Executive Officer for NHS Devon**



**Devon & Cornwall Police and Crime Commissioner Alison Hernandez**

"Health and social care organisations play a critical role in building the types of communities in which people can thrive, leading healthy and productive lives. I've worked with Healthwatch to assure me that patients who have come to the awareness of the police are being managed well in our community. They know who to approach and the right questions to ask to ensure services meet required standards.

"In the same way I am there to represent the voice of the people in policing, Healthwatch is there to be that 'critical friend' to some of the most vital services our communities will ever need.

People can turn to them and get actively involved or seek guidance on what steps to take. It is an invaluable organisation."



# healthwatch

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## Torbay

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