

The value of listening



healthwatch
Walsall

Annual Report 2023-2024

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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 – Ross Nicklin



In looking back on 2023/2024, it's pleasing to report another successful year for your local Healthwatch in Walsall.

We have managed to engage with more people, both face to face and via all other mediums, at the same time signposting more of them to access services.

The varied programme of work we undertook throughout the year allowed us to listen to and include people from all across the Borough.

For example, our work on Black & Asian women's experiences of Maternity services, enabled us to hear directly from these service users. Some of our recommendations have been considered and discussed between the commissioner and provider and have been included in the Maternity Action Plan.



In addition, we have acted on feedback that you, the public have given us, regarding health and social care services. After our survey of patients visiting the new Urgent and Emergency Care Centre at the hospital, our ensuing report brought about changes which the public wanted to see, such as clearer signage.

We have also worked collaboratively with key stakeholders within the integrated health and care system. We have done this not only locally with the Hospital Trust and Walsall Council, but also with other Healthwatch at Black Country level when meeting with the Integrated Care Board.

In all instances, we have ensured that your voice has been heard, especially as some services are being reorganised and as a consequence patient pathways changed.

Despite the widely publicised constant pressure on finances, things can always be improved, even if this is in a small way. Indeed, it is only by working together in partnership that meaningful changes can be effectively brought about.

Considering this, our work plan for the year 2024/2025 will include projects that look at key services that directly impact on Walsall people.

Specifically, we will be looking at both **Cancer and Urology Services** and we will also be examining the impact of **unmet Social Care needs for young carers**.

We will also be continuing our **Enter & View** work, looking at service user experience of using health and care settings such as Care Homes and GP surgeries.

Undoubtedly, as the year unfolds, there will be other important topics that the people of Walsall will bring to our attention.

On this note, you will be able to access us in person, out and about across the Borough, whether this is through the Community Outreach team or in our public meetings. Naturally, we are also available for your comments across all the major social media platforms.

However, you choose to reach out to us, be assured that your individual and collective voices about the services you use will have impact.

About us

Healthwatch Walsall is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

We are completely independent and impartial and anything you say is confidential. Our service is free, simple to use and can make a real difference to people in Walsall.

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.



Year in review

Reaching out



5,880 people

were engaged with face to face across our communities, meetings or virtually on our themed online public events.

29,528 people

were engaged with via surveys, Enter and View visits, newsletters, social media posts, updates, meetings, emails receiving updates and information and more over the year.

1,693 people

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

3,631 people

were given advice, information and were signposted to support or services to help meet their health or social care needs.

Making a difference to care



We published

35 reports

from our projects for the year, including the issues, themes and possible improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Health and care that works for you



We are lucky to have been supported by

16 volunteers

outstanding volunteers who have given their valuable time to make care better for our community.

We are funded by our Local Authority. In 2023-2024 we received






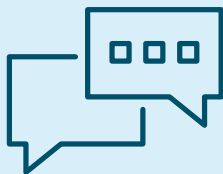


£190,450

which is the same as the previous year.

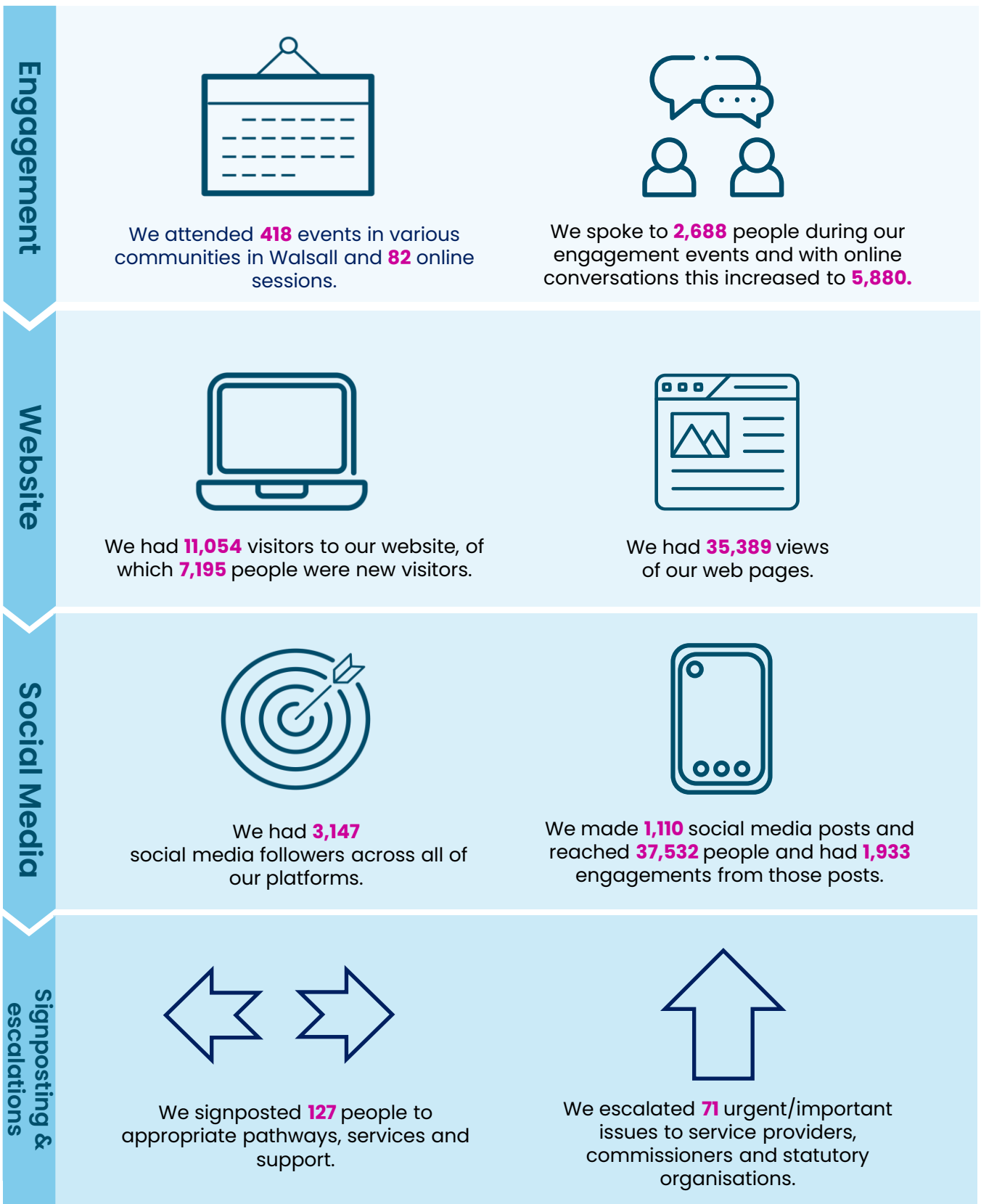
We employed

6 staff

How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We continued to inform the public about Extra GP Appointments when they were unable to get an appointment with their own GP.</p>	 <p>We published our Young Persons communication report which highlighted issues they were facing when accessing health and social care services.</p>
Summer	 <p>Healthwatch Walsall looked at patient experiences of accessing NHS dentistry to understand the impact on people in Walsall.</p>	 <p>We continued to be out and about in the Walsall communities offering information, advice and signposting people to support they needed.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We continued our Enter and View visits to social and nursing care homes and GP services. We listened to service users and their relatives about their experiences of care and health services.</p>	 <p>We presented our 2022/2023 work projects at our Annual General Meeting with guest speakers and over 13 support organisations present to assist members of the public.</p>
Winter	 <p>We published Black and Asian Women's experiences of maternity services in Walsall report.</p>	 <p>We highlighted the issues faced by homeless and rough sleepers when trying to obtain urgent and routine medical care.</p>

How we've reached people this year





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.

The Maternity Experience of Black and Asian Women in Walsall

Last year, analysis of maternal deaths, stillbirths and neonatal deaths, showed mothers and babies from Black/Black British and Asian/Asian British ethnic groups have poorer outcomes than that of their white counterparts.

The UK has one of the lowest maternal mortality ratios in the world. There are, however, glaring and persistent disparities in outcomes for women depending on their ethnicity. Maternal mortality for black women was almost four times higher than for white women. Similar disparities also exist for women of Asian and mixed ethnicity. These disparities have existed and been documented for at least 20 years, but only received mainstream attention and Government action since around 2018.

Walsall is a culturally diverse town with minority ethnic groups accounting for 32.6% (1 in 3) of Walsall's population. In 2021 40.7% of live births recorded were of ethnic minority.

Healthwatch Walsall wanted explore how Black and Asian women in Walsall truly felt during their maternity journey. Did women feel as though they are listened to and valued as individuals? Did women feel they were treated with respect and compassion.

These are major factors in the quality of treatment a patient feels they have received. Furthermore, we wanted to ask women if they felt their ethnic background influenced the treatment and care they received. Gathering such patient experiences helps to give a small insight into the maternity journey for Black and Asian women in Walsall.

Cultural Consideration

Our findings highlighted positive aspects of cultural consideration and support during maternity journeys. We found there was inclusive care and comments received expressing positive experiences, with mentions of receiving food from 'home' or being given preferred cultural foods whilst on the ward. We saw comments emphasize the positive interactions with staff, describing them as 'lovely.'



While there is no evidence of discrimination based on ethnic background at Walsall Manor Hospital (WMH), it is noteworthy that a few women communicated a perception of different treatment. Acknowledging these concerns, even if expressed by a minority, is important for addressing potential issues. These were noted in the recommendations in our report.

What difference did this make?

- Our report was discussed at the Clinical Quality Review meeting between the commissioner and the service provider and our recommendations have been included in the maternity action plan.

Why representation matters in healthcare

We were supported in our project by Equality and Diversity Lead midwife, Carol King-Stevens. During our project engagement we produced a video interview to talk about what Walsall Manor Hospital are currently doing to address inequalities, how they will ensure this work will continue and the importance of representation in healthcare.

We discussed the importance of representation in healthcare and talked about how this can build a trust between patients and staff. On one visit where we attended the maternity department, we observed there were few pictures displaying cultural parents and children. When we raised this, we were advised this is something the department are working on and are working with parents to acquire more material for such displays. The staff also had made cultural displays using graphics to be more inclusive. The department also offers Word 360, which is an interpreter service, with iPads available for non-English speaking service users which enables them to have face-to-face translators when in hospital or at appointments. This can also be used for service users who need BSL.

To see the full conversation with Carole King-Stephens click this link: <https://tinyurl.com/53p75x7j>



How will Walsall Manor Hospital ensure these initiatives will carry on and be taken forward.

We were advised *“This will be done using the recommendations of Healthwatch we will have a guidance. It is not something that can be done overnight, we cannot take our foot off this pedal, once we see improvement we must keep on. There are many surveys but we are not getting the voice of every single body”.*

Following our interview, we visited Primrose Ward at WMH on numerous occasions and we were given positive feedback from all but 2 women. They said the staff were kind, caring and helpful. The women painted a truly great picture of the team on Primrose Ward, and we believe this is something that should be shared in our report. Even on the busiest days, with limited staff and a high number of patients, the women expressed 100% satisfaction with their treatment and care.

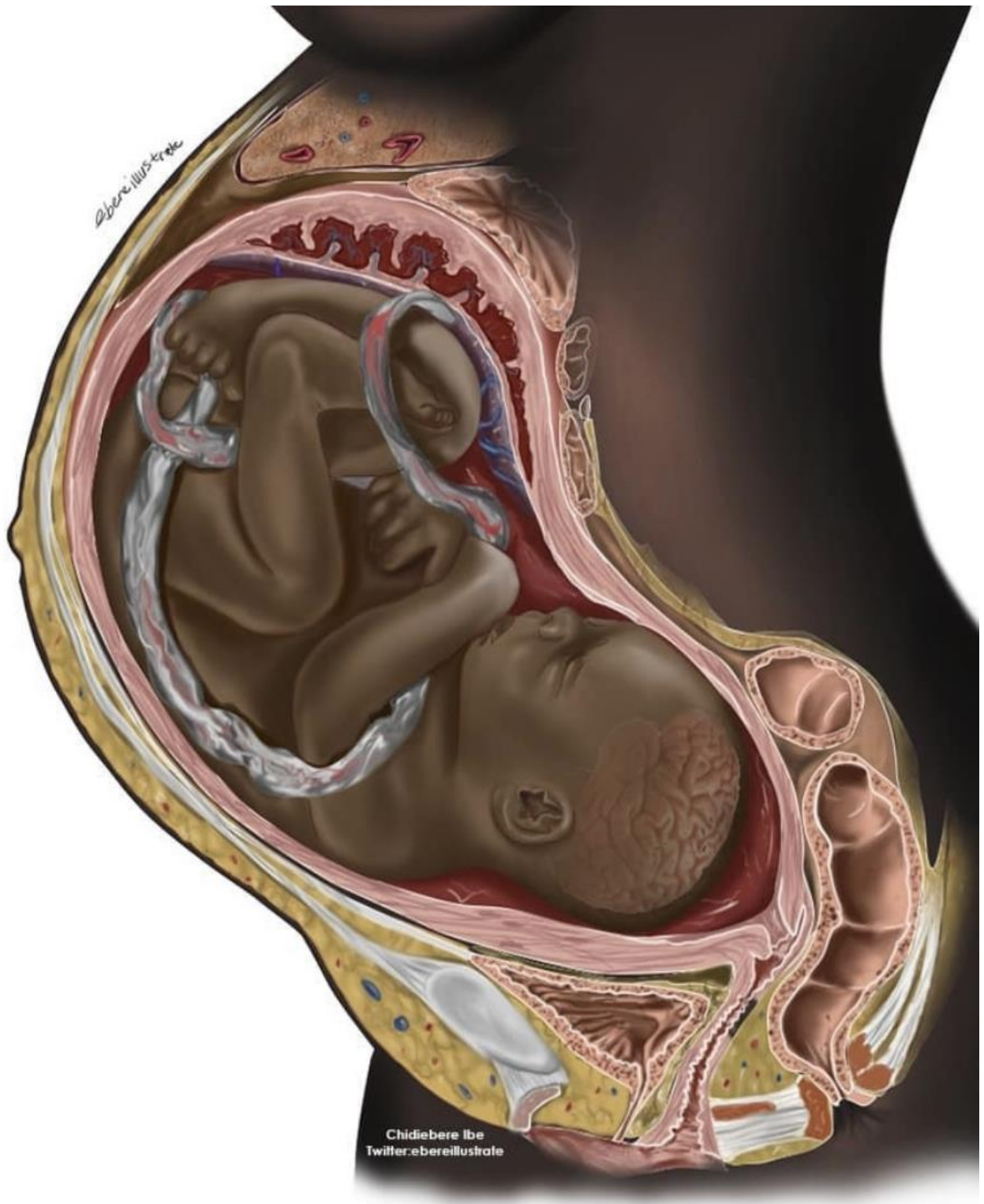
We heard from Carol King-Stephens 5 months after our report was published and she told us – *“The hospital are now working on the recommendations made by Healthwatch Walsall. The findings from the report have staff raised awareness, which we are now using to make improvements”*

To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/3t439ft5>

Shades by Chidiebere Ibe – Medical Illustrator

We read a sentence by Chidiebere that said *“You don’t know something is missing until you see it”*. Representation in healthcare matters and we wanted to use a piece of art that was not only impactful but also timeless. Shades by Chidiebere Ibe is the first medical illustration of a black pregnant woman and foetus.

Our project lead approached Chidiebere and asked permission to use the wonderful illustration ‘Shades’ for our maternity project. We were absolutely thrilled to be given permission to use this artwork which you can see below.



NHS 111 Project

Healthwatch Walsall carried out a project that looked at people's experiences of using the NHS 111 service following the change of provider from West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) to DHU Healthcare.

We explored how using NHS 111 related to providing assistance for service users. We also wanted to look at whether the advice given by NHS 111 was impacting on attendance at the Urgent and Emergency Care Centre.

We asked about communication issues with the NHS 111 service operator

- 66% of respondents had no communication issues with the operator.
- 30% of respondents had communication issues with the operator.
- 4% of respondents had some communication issues with the operator.



We asked service users to rate their experience of using NHS 111

- 44% of participants reported finding NHS 111 service to be very good.
- 38% rated the service as good.
- 18% rated the service as mixed, poor or very poor.

This suggests that a majority of users are satisfied with their experience, offering a positive perspective on the service.

We explored how easy people found it to speak to the NHS 111 service

- 77% of respondents found it very easy or easy.
- 13% of respondents found it very difficult or difficult.
- 9% of respondents found it neither easy or difficult.
- 1% of respondents chose not to answer this question.



To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/fpt6kbcj>

What Long Covid Support is there in Walsall?

An estimated 1.9 million people living in private households in the UK (2.9% of the population) were experiencing self-reported Long Covid (symptoms continuing for more than four weeks after the first confirmed or suspected coronavirus (Covid-19) infection that were not explained by something else) as of 5 March 2023.

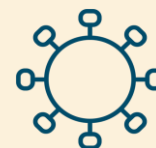
Long Covid symptoms adversely affected the day-to-day activities of 1.5 million people (79% of those with self-reported Long Covid), with 381,000 (20%) reporting that their ability to undertake their day-to-day activities had been "limited a lot". Long Covid is an emerging phenomenon that is not yet fully understood.

Healthwatch Walsall wanted to look at the local vs national situation with regard to the level of support given to people with Long Covid in the Borough. We wanted to explore if there was sufficient support in primary care, secondary care, social care and employment. From a local perspective, the Long Covid Support Team have had circa 1360 referrals into their service since January 2021.

What did you tell us Long Covid support in Walsall

- There needs to be better testing and diagnosis for Long Covid to improve referral to services.
- There are long wait times to access to GP appointments to be referred to covid support services.
- Information given to people needs to be more accurate, clear and in ways that it is more understandable and accessible to all.
- More support is needed for those people in work.

55% of respondents said they felt more could be done for Long Covid sufferers.



What difference did this make?

- It shows that a greater awareness of Long Covid is needed by both the general public and medical professionals, as people may not be aware that they are/may be suffering from Long Covid.
- It highlighted that due to a lack of GP access, there is an impact on referrals into the support services.
- It highlighted that the affects of Long Covid is varied and diverse across individuals and has long lasting effects on peoples health, care and life in general.
- It highlighted that there is a need for 'Wrap Around' services to address the varied and long journey that Long Covid sufferers endure to address individual needs.

To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/4ssf7tfs>

Following the publication of the report, it was pleasing to note that the NHS Black Country ICB Long Covid toolkit was shared with GP practices and system staff.

For Long COVID support visit the Black Country Integrated Care Board, [Click Here](#)

Accessible Information Standard

Guidance from NHS England states: 'From 1 August 2016 onwards, all organisations that provide NHS care and/or publicly-funded adult social care are legally required to follow the Accessible Information Standard.'

The Standard sets out a specific, consistent approach to identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting the information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents with a disability, impairment or sensory loss.

Healthwatch Walsall wanted to find out how people in our diverse communities are communicated with. To see what methods, formats and styles that services use to enable people to feel involved and informed in their health and social care services.

Those communities included: the hard of hearing/Deaf, Visually impaired/Blind and people with Learning Disabilities and or complex needs.

We had a survey online, paper copy and an Easy Read version so that people could take part. We organised three focus groups and visited them and discussed how services communicate with them.

What people told us



"Electronic patient check in system no good to a blind person"

"No audio at GP, have to rely on names being called out on TV screen"

"No support, have to use a chaperone"

"But not consistent"

"GP records not checked"

As a result, what we have recommended

From the initial survey we were able to suggest some recommendations as noted below:

- Service providers should assess if they are currently communicating effectively with their service users to meet their needs.
- The need for verbal or face-to-face communication is important for service users. Therefore, providers should be able to readily access interpreters.
- Providers should have suitable formats and technology to communicate with all service users in a way that is required and that these are working and readily available.

Healthwatch Walsall have formed valuable links to these communities and strive to include their voices and views in all aspects of its work.

Some of these communities were also invited to contribute in the design/development of the new Urgent and Emergency Care Centre and aspects of communication and signage was discussed in meetings with the Architect and the Trust representative.

NHS England – What you can expect from services link to video: <http://tinyurl.com/mrxsk28j>

To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/bdh5htex>

Walsall Urgent and Emergency Care Centre

The former A&E department at Walsall Manor Hospital was relocated and renamed the Urgent and Emergency Care Centre, integrating both emergency care and the Urgent Treatment Centre in one place. This is a purpose built facility incorporating departments and new machinery all in one place, We wanted to find out how its working for people.

Last year Healthwatch Walsall was pleased to have been contacted by Walsall Manor Hospital Trust to invite cohorts of service users from our sensory loss and disability groups to visit the new department during the latter stages of its construction.

The purpose of this was for the Trust to hear first hand the views of these groups with regards to the suitability of the facilities. Following on from this and six months after the opening of the new Urgent and Emergency Care Centre, Healthwatch Walsall wanted to hear from patients directly to find out about how the new facilities and services were working for them.

What people told us

*"A new building but service levels are still unacceptable"
"You are failing in duty of care for your customers"*

" Would be great to have a water fountain and a tea and coffee machine. Also, somewhere to buy sandwiches"

"Arrange food and drink, 14 hours with no sleep, lack of proper food and water supply"

"Larger with more seats"

"Cleaner than the previous centre"

"Same old, same old"



As a result, what we have recommended

From the initial survey we were able to suggest some recommendations as noted below:

- Patients found signage confusing on arrival at the Emergency Department.
- Despite a new facility, difficulties are still prevalent with waiting times, especially around communication.
- Information is provided to the public about the departments in the new Centre and what services it offers.
- Trust gives consideration to microphones being available at reception areas to improved audibility.
- Waiting time information for both areas of the Centre are displayed in waiting rooms on installed TV screens.
- There is no TV screen in the parent and children area.

What difference did this make?

- Our report was discussed between the commissioner and the service providers and our recommendations have been included in the action plan. It was pleasing to note that signage has been made clearer.

To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/3bckt3fn>

Access to NHS dental care in Walsall

Nationally access to NHS dental care has been recognised as a growing issue. Challenges with access existed before the pandemic but have deteriorated progressively since then. Healthwatch England found in 2022/2023 that dentistry was 'the second most common issue' reported to Healthwatch with access being the most frequent reason for the feedback.

Many Walsall people shared the already worrying National trend of not being able to access NHS dental care.

The impact of Covid 19 had already meant that people had not received treatments or regular preventive care appointments. Those who were NHS registered patients were now faced with needing to access emergency or general treatment care. With the rising costs of NHS dental pricing and the combination of the 'Cost Of Living Crisis' it seemed an uphill struggle for people to secure the affordable and timely care they needed.

44% of respondents said they were not given information on how to get NHS Dental care.



People said:

"Help should be available for people on low incomes who are working and don't claim benefits"

"Perhaps all dentists should be required to take a percentage of NHS patients"

What did you tell us about NHS dental care access?

- 43% of respondents had been removed from their original NHS dentist patient register.
- Most respondents commented that they would self-medicate using over the counter 'painkillers' such as 'ibuprofen' or 'co-codamol'. Some would try to access their GP for medication.
- 40% of respondents said it had an affect on their health.

What difference did this make?

- The report highlighted the problems that some, not all, people face getting NHS dental care in Walsall.
- It highlighted that NHS dental charges was an issue amongst some employed and retired people and most people who were unemployed.
- It also highlighted that people may already or may have to consider travelling further to an identified NHS dentist and this of course may impact people on lower or strained incomes.
- We were able to signpost patients to NHS Dentists that were still registering NHS patients.
- It showed how other services may be affected if patients seek pain relief and do not access dental care readily.

To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/365pkpfa>

For more information about NHS Dentistry [Click Here](#)

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

Throughout our engagement during our Maternity Project, we gathered various patient experiences and comments, yet one we heard stood out prominently, leaving a lasting impact on the parent involved. This woman had a C-Section procedure and did not receive satisfactory treatment and care following her surgery. We were able to capture this story and share it with Walsall Manor Hospital to ensure they are aware and can take the necessary precautions to avoid this happening again. We also included this in our recommendations.



Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of listening to people to help provide a new and improved service.

Walsall Manor Hospital recently had built a new large Urgent and Emergency Care Centre. Prior to the build Healthwatch Walsall was able to organise community representatives from the hard of hearing/Deaf, visually impaired/Blind and the Learning Disabilities groups to input any previous experiences around access treatment and care in the older facility.

Those voices were listened to by the Architect and Walsall Trust representatives so that it could help shape the new facility. This year we asked people how the new facility was meeting Walsall peoples needs a public report is available on our website.



Helping to improve care over time

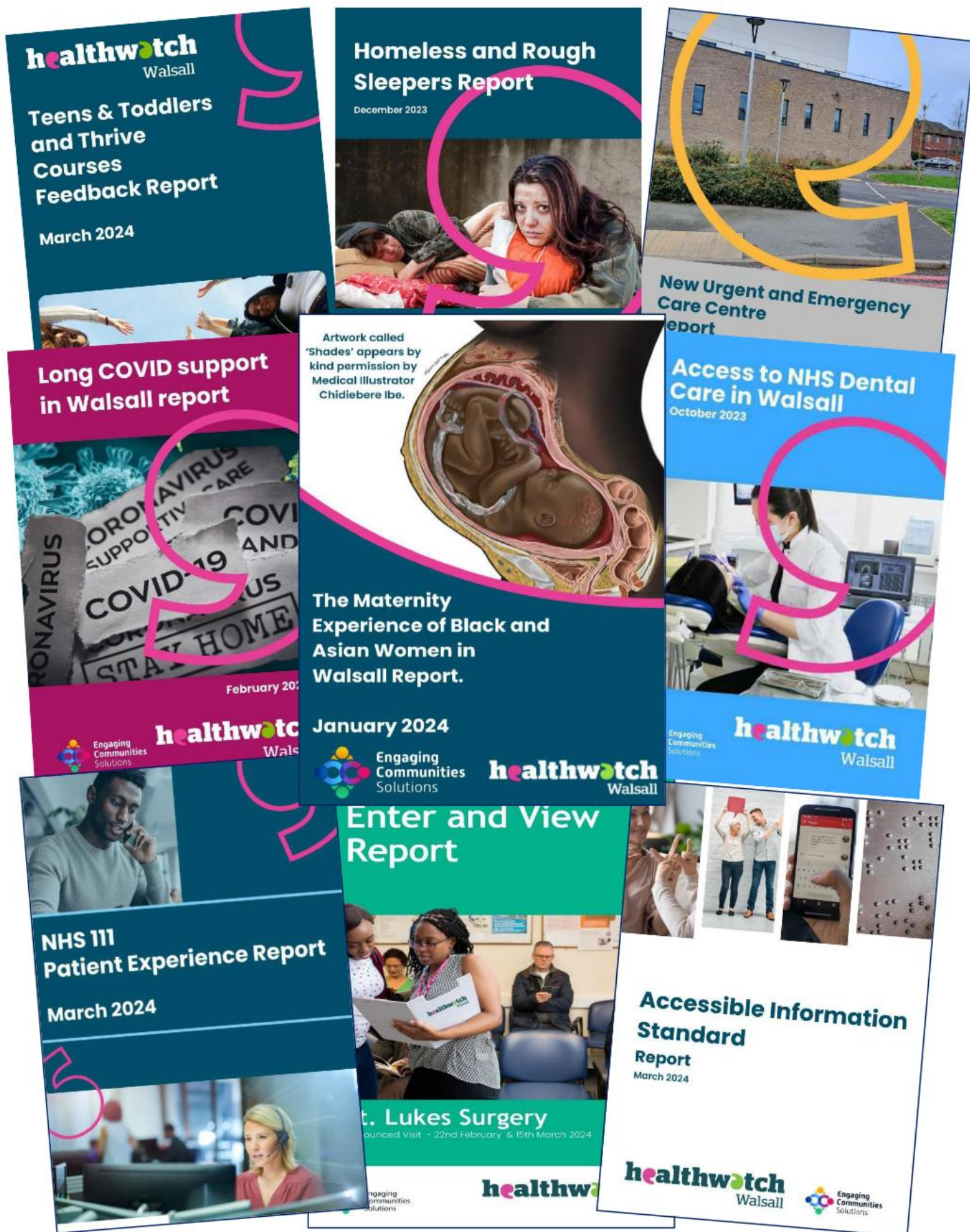
It is important to remember those voices that are rarely heard, who are cared for in residential and or Nursing home settings. Enter and View visits allow us to listen to them.

We have maintained an ongoing schedule to visit a range of services and venues across Walsall. There is an emphasis of visiting care and nursing homes to speak with cared for and relatives experiences of the service and care they receive. We are able to share feedback with the service provider. During a visit a resident shared with us their wish to have steak on the menu. Overhearing this, other residents shared this same view. This issue was raised with the home Manager and very shortly afterwards steak was added to the menu choice.



To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/mr2ukcuc>

Our reports for the year



To read or download any of these reports, visit our website: <https://tinyurl.com/5n6zyxwd>



Hearing from all communities

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

This year we have reached many local communities by:

- We undertook our Accessible Information Standards project for people with sensory impairments.
- We continue to share information about food banks, debt management and signposted those suffering during the cost of living crisis to support organisations in their local community.
- We visited a local Mosque to speak to the women there about their maternity experiences at Walsall Manor Hospital.
- We had a regular slot at NASHDOM Community Hub in Palfrey Walsall.
- We visited a number of groups and day care centres meeting people from Deaf/hard of hearing, Blind/visually impaired and Learning Disability groups.
- We visit the local Migrant & Refugee and Homeless Centres support centre on a regular basis to speak to people about access to services to meet their needs.
- We continue to engage with young people.

Listening to the maternity stories of Black and Asian women in Walsall

When listening to the patient experiences of Black and Asian women in Walsall, it was important to reach every corner of the community.

We were lucky to secure a regular engagement slot at NASHDOM Community Hub in Palfrey Walsall, where a diverse range of people live. At NASHDOM we spoke with women who attended post-natal clinics, support groups and drop ins. This gave us chance to speak to women who had the most recent experiences at Walsall Manor Hospital. We also received the support from Councillor Ali who promoted the work within his constituent area.



We heard the patient experiences of 82 women in total during our engagement and all these experiences were shared with us face-to-face.

When listening to women we ensured we were in a private space and allowed adequate time for them to express their opinions, thoughts, issues and concerns. This allowed women to give us a whole picture rather than a snapshot of a journey.

Creating person-centred, culturally competent maternity care

Our recommendations were made from our service user engagement in order to gain maximum impact for Black and Asian women during their maternity journey.

Not only did we visit community groups, but we also held a focus group at a Mosque in Walsall. (We are choosing not to name this Mosque to ensure the anonymity of the women who attend). We also attended baby groups, Walsall Midwifery Led Unit and Primrose Ward. This was to get a clear picture from as many different groups and areas as possible.

From listening to all the women we engaged with, we found there were issues around treatment and care, barriers and communication. We used recent experiences to highlight changes that need to be made by WMH to ensure their patients believe they are treated equitably and fairly.

A snapshot of our recommendations is below.

- **Treatment and Care** – The Trust to review their policies and procedure on treatment and care for patients following C section surgery and increase support and individualised care where needed.
- **Ethnicity** – The Trust to ensure its staff continue to tackle ethnic and racial inequalities during a patient's maternity journey.
- **Communication** – The Trust should review its communication (including its use of interpreters and translation) policies and procedures within 6 months so as to improve the experience of users from ethnic diverse backgrounds.

To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/3t439ft5>

Teens and Toddlers

The second part of the year saw us engage with young people in Walsall who attend courses to help them improve their well-being and school engagement in order to succeed at school and in life.

We visited these young people at their place of education or where the course was being facilitated. We held open discussions allowing the young people to share their feelings about the courses they are attending. We asked questions to encourage conversation and sharing.

The young people told us they felt more confident in the presence of their peers and course facilitators within the group, highlighting a supportive atmosphere. One young person shared how the group assisted a classmate with dyslexia during a moment of concern about spelling, showcasing a collaborative and encouraging environment.

Giving young people an environment to thrive in

The main thing that stood out to us is how happy, confident and inspired the young people are who attend these courses. Showing motivation to support their team, experiencing personal growth to develop positive learning and working relationships and a positive impact on concentration and learning.

"Oh wow this is fantastic feedback. I always rave about how good the programmes are, but this is more meaningful coming from an independent source, thank you I can't wait to share it with staff, young people and the wider partnership in Walsall."

Comment from Carol Williams, Teenage Pregnancy Operational Lead

Some comments from the students are below

"Everyone here is just nice to each other, we don't get shouted at, we have rules, and we all stick to them so it's nice for everyone."

"We get spoken to with respect here, not just treated like a stupid kid in school."

"I used to think I would never pass my GCSE's, I think I will do ok though."

"I remember when I wanted to do a different job because I thought I wouldn't be able to work in a nursery, but now I know I could do that."

"I really want to be a teacher, I never said it before, but I do."

"I don't get anxiety like before, it's different here, you don't get angry."

"I feel empowered, I feel like I can choose what job I would like to do."

"I like writing, my dream job would be an author, I will do that."

To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/5697zjup>

Homeless and Rough Sleepers

Healthwatch Walsall was successful in a bid for a micro grant from the Black Country ICB to undertake engagement with the homeless and rough sleepers in the Borough of Walsall. The aim of the work was to understand the issues faced around planned and urgent care.

Healthwatch Walsall visited homeless people to find out their patient experiences of accessing healthcare, what's important to them when they are unwell and the barriers they face when trying to get the help they need to keep them healthy.

Waiting times are important to homeless people when they are accessing the care they need, but feeling listened to, understood and not being scared to speak up are important aspects as a patient when feeling unwell. Being treated with respect, not facing discrimination, feeling secure and having understanding from staff was valued highly.

Access to the right care for homeless people

Accessing healthcare when you have no means of transport, no mobile phone, no registered GP or address can be hard.

Homeless people told us how they have struggled to get the medication they need as they do not have a GP and cannot get a prescription. Transport issues, particularly getting back from hospital were a common problem.

For homeless individuals with a history of drug problems, accessing care was even more difficult due to perceived judgement and the necessity to address their mental health and substance misuse first.

Identifying barriers to healthcare

Homeless people told us to make accessing healthcare easier there needs to be less barriers around language and the way staff communicate and NHS ensures equal access for all their patients.

We are now regularly visiting the homeless shelter in Walsall and offering an advice, information and signposting service to try and help the service users access the care they need.

Healthwatch Walsall would like to thank The Glebe Centre for their support in promoting the focus group, to hosting the event on 14 December 2023 and for their hospitality and welcome. And a huge thanks go to the service users who gave up their time to share their views with us.



To read or download the full report, click on the link: <https://tinyurl.com/mva7xjve>



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Walsall 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 on services available to them, including food banks for people struggling during the cost of living crisis, emotional and wellbeing support and how to make a formal complaint.
- Helping people access the services they need such as NHS Dentistry, Primary Care or Extra GP Appointments.

Impact stories

Just some examples of how we helped people when they contacted us.

Patient attending hospital appointment, arrived but told cancelled but had received no notification of the cancellation which had happened on two previous occasions. They had mobility issues and paid for a taxi as they feared falling on public transport.

Healthwatch Walsall contacted the hospital Patients Liaison Service (PALS) and with patient permission passed on details for them to look into. PALS issued an apology to the patient and re-imbursed the patients travel costs and another appointment was booked.

A Walsall resident was admitted to Birmingham Hospital, but their relative did not receive any progress updates about the patient.

Healthwatch Walsall contacted the hospital Patients Liaison Service (PALS) and shared the relatives concern. After this the relative received regular patient progress updates direct from the ward Doctor.

Resident at Nursing Home received Covid booster vaccination in spite of expressly not consenting for vaccination.

This issue was escalated to the Quality In Care Team who looked into the incident and the re-enforcement of vaccination protocol and checks was recommended and communicated to ALL staff in delivering the vaccination process in care and nursing homes.



An update from a patient we spoke with.

“Hi. Don't know if you remember me but I had the all-clear call from my consultant last week.

Thanks for offering a friendly ear”.

Young adult no longer under care of Child And Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) nor being picked up by Adult Mental Health Services required medication check and other intervention care.

This issue was escalated to CAMHS and Dorothy Pattison Hospital to identify who and what should be done for the person in service transition. Patient now being offered support and an appointment with Adult Services to support.



Information and change we were able to get for patients.

“Following your email regarding difficulties some patients were having when trying to contact the POD service, please see below”.

The provider has confirmed:

- The answering machine message has been uploaded and is functional detailing the closure/new timings and alternatives to ordering a repeat prescription.
- The POD phonenumber is being answered Monday to Friday 10-2 until the end of May.

Supporting young people to get the mental health support they need

Healthwatch Walsall hear on numerous occasions that the mental health support in Walsall does not meet needs. We have been helping people who call us by getting them the support they need.

We were contacted by the parent of a young person who needed a follow up appointment regarding their mental health and medication. Unfortunately, the service they were under was not able to help as the patient was now over 18. Adult mental health was also unable to help as they had not yet received any information on the patient and could not prescribe the medication they needed.

Healthwatch Walsall contacted adult services and explained the severity of the patients condition. We were given the contact details of an on duty nurse who could help. We contacted them and they said they would now call the parent and organise an appointment. The patient was moved up the list and got the help they needed

Making a difference to a couple who needed help

A married couple each with a range of conditions and needs tried to access their GP services but found getting in touch a big problem.

After trying for almost a week they called Healthwatch Walsall and told us how they had both been trying to get an appointment and their several health queries answered. A Healthwatch Walsall team member listened to their situation and with their permission contacted the GP practice. After discussing the issues with a senior member of staff, a same day appointment was found.

Healthwatch Walsall listen to Walsall peoples experiences and when we can we can take direct action.

A range of help was organised from just one call.

- Relevant referrals to the necessary clinical teams were made.
- Contact with a Consultant was enabled for potential surgical intervention.

Getting a test that was needed but not authorised

A patient with a uncommon condition required a special blood test, which was not being carried out by the laboratory at the local hospital.

After contacting Healthwatch Walsall, and discussing the need and barriers that may be affecting their treatment, the service user was signposted to 'Time2Talk' the customer service arm of the Black Country Integrated Care Board.

Time2Talk liaised with the hospital laboratory and it was agreed that the patient's GP could now contact the laboratory directly to advise of the test that was required to be carried out. This test was undertaken and will also be carried out in the future.

What our working partners say about us

During each year Healthwatch Walsall meet with a range of services representatives and commissioners....

CLlr Gary Flint, Chair of Health & Wellbeing Board, Walsall Local Authority

Healthwatch Walsall is a key statutory partner on the Walsall Health and Wellbeing Board and a key member of the Walsall Together Partnership Board. They have undertaken some excellent work this year scrutinising the work of our teenage pregnancy service, understanding the maternity experience of Black and Asian women, and seeking the views of residents with regard to access to dental care.

Ensuring the voice of residents is heard is a critical part of what we do as a health and care partnership, and Healthwatch Walsall play an important role in this work. We look forward to what opportunities the year ahead will bring in terms of our ongoing collaboration with Healthwatch and our wider partners, as we continue our focus as a Health and Wellbeing Board on children and young people, mental health and wellbeing, our digital approach and a prevention focus for older people.

Shelley Price, Head of Quality & Safety – Walsall Place, System Portfolio Lead: Health Protection & Prevention NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board

The Black Country Integrated Care Board (BC ICB) is extremely grateful for the professional and valued work that Healthwatch undertakes on behalf of Walsall in ensuring the populations voice is heard and acted upon in order to improve care, services and patient experience.

Healthwatch play a key role in a number of BC ICB meetings to share intelligence, data and provide insight into areas that require improvement or support. The comprehensive reports such as the 'Enter and View' for Care Homes, the recent Emergency and Urgent Care Department and experiences of Black and Asian women in Walsall enabled us to use this intelligence to gain assurance around our commissioned services within Walsall.

The BC ICB have a strong working relationship with Healthwatch who appropriately escalate any patient safety or experience concerns so they can be investigated and themed for potential future intelligence. We hope to continue to work closely and collaborate with Healthwatch colleagues to ensure we have the highest quality care, services and experience for the population of Walsall.

Garry Perry Associate Director Patient Voice (Experience) Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust & The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust

'As local NHS leaders, we greatly value the vital role that Healthwatch Walsall plays in ensuring the Patient Voice is heard and appreciated. Their comprehensive feedback reports, such as the review of the new Emergency and Urgent Care Department and the detailed examination of the maternity experiences of Black and Asian women in Walsall, provide essential insights that help us identify and address areas for improvement.

Healthwatch Walsall's dedication to raising awareness about the support and advice they offer is equally important. Their accessibility and active participation in community events alongside healthcare providers cement their reputation as a trusted advocate for the residents of Walsall. We deeply appreciate their commitment to enhancing healthcare services through patient-centred feedback and collaboration.'



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 in peoples health and social care services.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote Healthwatch Walsall and what we do.
- Help collecting experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve.

Throughout the year we have worked with our volunteers to help deliver our work projects and our Enter and View visits. We are delighted to have new volunteers joining us from the Core Connector 20+ work. These volunteers will bring their experience and enthusiasm to help people in all the work they get involved in.



Toyin – Volunteer

Joining Healthwatch in 2023 as one of the Core 20 connect (core20 plus) volunteer was based on interest and the strategic vision of Healthwatch and with great passion to contribute my little part by make a difference in my community. Understanding some of the challenges immigrants faced in the UK, such as not been able to access the health and social services, can be a barrier towards their well-being.

My passion for helping and supporting people gave me the ability to volunteer by listening to people in my community about their health and social care issues when they access those services, their experiences and stories about inequality to accessing the facilities brings attention towards amplifying their voice for better improvement to health and social care services.

Volunteering provides opportunities for learning, building capacity and networking, I am hoping to gain more valuable knowledge and confidence by giving my very best to the Healthwatch vision.



Gabriel – Volunteer

I started off with Healthwatch Walsall as a Volunteer under the Core20Plus where I had the role of a Community Connector. I have the passion to help people to access the right information and services and Healthwatch Walsall created that platform for me.

This gave me the opportunity to reach out to individuals helping them know that their voice counts. Listening to their story, experiences with public health services and their views about how better they think things can be handled, gave me a sense of fulfilment.

These to me are incredible moments helping the community have a voice and a say in the way things are done without facing prejudice as an ethnic minority, sexual orientation, social and economic status amongst many other things.

Moving further to being a trained Enter and View Volunteer opened me up to a wider horizon of possibilities. First, an opportunity to actually see the processes that lead to surveys and reports and an action by the necessary authorities were required. Secondly, I get to be exposed to a great learning curve and gain experience being a natural advocate for fairness and justice.

So, whether I am in the field for Enter and View or behind the computer putting together reports or any other responsibilities, I am enjoying every step of the way as a volunteer at Healthwatch Walsall.





Deborah - Volunteer

I joined Healthwatch Walsall to contribute my own quota to the community and it has been an interesting experience all the way.



Do you feel inspired to volunteer?



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



www.healthwatchwalsall.co.uk/

0800 470 1660

Email: info@healthwatchwalsall.co.uk

Our Walsall College Work Placements

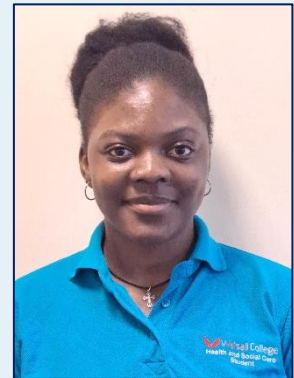
From November 2023 we were pleased to have been supporting work placement opportunities for two Walsall College students Uti and Freya. They carried out work with us on our public outreach sessions at Walsall Manor Hospital and in the wider Walsall communities. They supported our work projects engaging with members of the public and undertaking surveys. They talked to and encouraged service users to get involved and 'Have Their Say'. We would like to thank Uti and Freya for their work that they have done with us and work they have agreed to support in the near future.



Uti - Walsall College Student

Gaining work experience at Healthwatch Walsall has been so rewarding. I have gained skills that has enriched my personal and professional life. As an aspiring Midwife there was certain crucial skills I was lacking. Such as, improving my communication skills. They have improved during my time by taking directly to members of the public. I have also improved my team work and problem solving abilities. These are transferable skills I will apply to other areas of my work and life.

Participating in the research and surveys has helped me learn about the diverse needs of the people of Walsall. It has been such a rewarding experience I have no regrets.



Freya - Walsall College Student

When I first joined Healthwatch Walsall, I was looking to boost my confidence and skills. Communication was a key thing for me to focus on. I feel that my confidence has grown whilst working with the team. Improving my communication skills immensely.

When looking at my future job, I hope to be a Cancer Nurse specialising in family grief. It was important to me that I shadowed real time professionals to gain extra knowledge on how to be professional, when I enter the world of work. With Healthwatch Walsall I feel I have achieved this.





Finance and future priorities

The funding we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 is shown below.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£190,450	Expenditure on pay	£180,630
Additional income	£36,208	Non-pay expenditure	£21,851
		Office and management fees	£43,208
Total income	£226,658	Total expenditure	£245,689

Additional income is broken down by:

- £300 received in the form of a micro grant from the Black Country ICB to work with homeless and rough sleepers to understand their experience of accessing care services.
 - £34,008 for 7 months of the Core Connector 20+ project.
 - £1,500 from Healthwatch England to help with the migration of Central Records Management (CRM).
-

Next Steps

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 continue our work in tackling inequalities that exist and work to reduce barriers when accessing care, regardless of where someone lives, ethnicity or income backgrounds.

We will continue to collect feedback from everyone in our local communities to give them a voice to help services improve.

We will also continue to engage with partners, the Walsall Safeguarding Board, Health Overview & Scrutiny, Health and Wellbeing Board, Walsall Place ICB and Walsall Together Partnership Board. Healthwatch Walsall has a seat on the Black Country ICB on behalf of the 4 BC Healthwatch. We will continue to work with our 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. Patient experience of cancer services at Walsall Manor Hospital.
2. Patient experience of urology services at Walsall Manor Hospital.
3. Unmet social care needs for young carers.



Statutory statements

Engaging Communities Solutions CIC holds the contract to deliver Healthwatch Walsall.

Healthwatch Walsall is based at Blakenall Village Centre, 79 Thames Road, Blakenall, Walsall WS3 1LZ.

Healthwatch Walsall uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.



**Engaging
Communities
Solutions**

To visit Engaging Communities Solutions website:
<https://www.weareecs.co.uk/>

The way we work

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

For 2023/2024 the Healthwatch Advisory Board was made up of 5 members who worked on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. The Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/2024, the Board met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as the approval of our project reports, schedule of Enter and View visits and the 2024/2025 work programme.

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 2023/2024, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community events, groups and forums. As well as have our own out and about engagement schedule.

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, distribute to our network of subscribers, partner organisations and all of our social media platforms.

Link to our last Annual Reports: <https://tinyurl.com/mwbbv9uw>

Responses to recommendations

We had 10 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.

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.

In our Local Authority area, for example, we take information to the Health and Wellbeing Board, Safeguarding Performance Quality & Assurance Committee, Walsall Together Partnership Board and Team Walsall. This is not an exhaustive list.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Walsall Place Based Partnership where we provide regular patient experiences of Walsall primary care and Hospital services on a regular basis. This offers the commissioner of these services a service user experience and view of how these services are or are not meeting peoples needs. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Enter and view

This year, we made 10 Enter and View visits. We made 56 recommendations as a result of this activity. To read any of the reports and see the findings, recommendations and provider feedback visit our website: <https://tinyurl.com/82fkxtuf>

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Swan House	Insight of resident/relative service experience.	Report and recommendations shared with provider and published. This report formed part of the evidence of a Walsall Place table top review.
Selwyn Court	Insight of resident/relative service experience.	Report and recommendations shared with provider and published.
Pleck Health Centre	Insight of patient experiences when using GP services.	Report and recommendations shared with provider and published.
Cedar Falls	Insight of resident/relative service experience.	Report and recommendations shared with provider and published. Impact for service users regarding additional menu choice.
Gorway House	Insight of resident/relative service experience.	Report and recommendations shared with provider and published.
The Willows Nursing Home	Insight of resident/relative service experience.	Report and recommendations shared with provider and published.
Palfrey Health Centre	Insight of patient experiences when using GP services.	Practice Manager actioned several points from report findings.
Highgate Lodge	Insight of resident/relative service experience.	Report and recommendations shared with provider and published.
St. Lukes Surgery	Insight of patient experiences when using GP services.	Practice Manager outlined a number of steps to be taken in response.
Lockstown Practice	Insight of patient experiences when using GP services.	Practice Manager outlined a number of steps to be taken in response.

Feedback from a Practice Manager after our Enter and View visit

“Thanks again to the Healthwatch Team for undertaking the Enter and View visit. The team was accommodating prior to the visit and also attentive to details during conversations with the practice team during the visit. It was beneficial to gain the insights and experience of the Healthwatch Team from the visit and the resulting report. I would also like to thank them advice and guidance”.

Healthwatch Representatives

Healthwatch Walsall is represented on the Walsall Health and Wellbeing Board by Ross Nicklin, Chair of the Healthwatch Advisory Board.

During 2023/2024 our representative has effectively carried out this role by presenting an update on last year's Annual Report and mid-term update along with providing regular updates on how Healthwatch Walsall supports the HWBB strategic priorities.

Healthwatch Walsall is represented on Black Country Integrated Care Board by Aileen Farrer, Manager of Healthwatch Walsall. This representation is on behalf of the 4 Black Country Healthwatch for which there is a Memorandum of Understanding in place.

2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
NHS 111 – Patient experience	Public report issued and shared with providers, service commissioner, stakeholders and Walsall public.
Urgent & Emergency Care – Patient experience	Report discussed between commissioner and provider and a recommendation about clearer signage has been addressed.
Accessible Information Standards – Services users experiences	Public report issued and shared with providers, service commissioner, stakeholders and Walsall public.
Walsall NHS Dentistry services – Services users experiences	Public report issued and shared with providers, service commissioner, stakeholders and Walsall public.
Long Covid Support in Walsall	Black Country Integrated Care Board Long Covid toolkit shared with GPs and staff.
Teens and Toddlers and Thrive Courses Feedback	Public report issued and shared with providers, service commissioner, stakeholders and Walsall public.
The Maternity Experience of Black and Asian Women In Walsall	Report discussed between commissioner and provider and Healthwatch Walsall recommendations will form part of the Maternity Action Plan.
Homeless and rough sleepers report	Public report issued and shared with providers, service commissioner, stakeholders and Walsall public.
2022/2023 Annual Report	Public report issued and shared with providers, service commissioner, stakeholders and Walsall public.

Healthwatch Walsall is delivered by Engaging Communities Solutions CIC (ECS), a Community Interest Company with the vision to inspire change and improve outcomes. At ECS, our mission is to be the voice of the public in the design and delivery of public services. Across England, we deliver seven Healthwatch services, two advocacy services and offer bespoke research, consultation and engagement services. Each year, we look back and reflect at the collective impact our local Healthwatch have had. Here are our highlights in numbers for 2023/24:

ECS in Numbers 2023/24

ECS are the providers of 7 local Healthwatch services and this shows the overall reach across the whole business.

35,736 people signposted by local Healthwatch.



180,446 website views.



16,238 people engaged with in person.

28,628 Social Media Followers.



200 people took part in additional research projects.



14,872 people engaged with online.

82 Volunteers provided 1111 hours of support.




**Engaging
Communities
Solutions**

healthwatch Walsall

How to contact us

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 YouTube: Healthwatch Walsall 2020



**Engaging
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Healthwatch Walsall is a hosted Healthwatch, delivered by:
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