



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent annual report
2025/26

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Clare Trenchard
Chief Executive
Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent

“

“I would like to say a heartfelt 'thank you' to everyone who has trusted me with their stories since joining Healthwatch in December.

“I have done my best to represent these faithfully, when meeting with those making decisions about health and social care services.

“I am most proud of our work around ADHD and Autism and I look forward to seeing improvements made.”



A message from our chair

Welcome to our annual report for the year 2025-2026.

You will read about the difference we've made and the partnerships we've built.

I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to the staff team, to our volunteers and to everyone who has provided feedback on both health and social care services. We could not suggest improvements or hold leaders to account, without residents telling us about their experiences.

While the Health Bill, which proposes the abolition of Healthwatch, travels through Parliament, we will continue to operate as the independent voice of people who use health and social care services.

We will continue to seek the support of local MPs and Local Authorities to seek to get clause 65 of the Health Bill removed, which is set to abolish local Healthwatch.

And, personally, I will continue to champion the voice of residents, patients, and service users to ensure it remains at the centre of decisions made about health and social care services.



Lloyd Cooke
Chair
Independent Strategic
Advisory Board
Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent



"I will continue to champion the voice of residents, patients, and service users, to ensure it remains at the centre of decisions made about health and social care services."

About us

Healthwatch **Stoke-on-Trent** is your local health and social care champion.

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



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

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



Our values are:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 3,500 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed 1 FTE staff and, our work was supported by 16 volunteers.



Reaching out

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

3,145 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as referrals and your right to choose.



Championing your voice

We published a report capturing parent and carer experience of Children and Young People's Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Special Educational Needs & Disability services.

We also heard from adults who are Autistic or have ADHD and will be publishing their case studies in the coming year.



Statutory funding

We're funded by Stoke-on-Trent Council. In 2025/26 we received £90,312.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Stoke-on-Trent. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

A new Cervical Screening Lead had been appointed after requests for representation were made from ourselves and other colleagues within cancer screening.



We launched our refreshed monthly 'Insight and Impact', now in report format and available on our website. The new approach offers more intelligence than before.



Summer

As part of our priority project on children and young people's Autism and ADHD assessments, we attended many Parent Engagement Group in Stoke-on-Trent (PEGiS) activities.



We contributed to various programmes of work, such as the Stoke-on-Trent Council's 'Preventing and Managing Frailty'



Autumn

We partnered with University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust (UHNM) to support the delivery of public involvement in their new Commercial Research Delivery Centre (CRDC).



Stoke-on-Trent continued its centenary celebrations through a range of local community events; we attended one hosted by Staffordshire Sight Loss Association (SSLA).



Winter

Through our UHNM CRDC partnership, we delivered 3 workshops, inviting community representatives and community members to contribute their thoughts on the delivery of the CRDC.



We hosted a total of 15 focus groups and drop-in sessions, both online and in-person, at different times and venues across the , to capture the voices of local people.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Stoke-on-Trent are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services.

A collaborative approach to capturing experiences of Stroke:



The four Healthwatch in the area covered by the Integrated Care System (Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin) have been meeting monthly for most of 2026.

All four Healthwatch sought feedback on Stroke services, using material designed by Healthwatch Shropshire.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent remains a member of the Integrated Care Board and the four Healthwatch agree who will attend the meetings.

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is an active member of the system quality group and the communications & engagement network.

We have also taken up our seat on the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Listening to your experiences

Your feedback shapes the work of Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent

This year, you told us about long waits for children and young people to be assessed for Autism and/or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). So, we decided to look into it further.



“If you start with kind, you’ve won”

Last year, we received significant feedback about delays in assessing children and young people for Autism and ADHD, as well as issues within Special Educational Needs and Disability services. So, we asked parents and carers across the to share their experiences.

What did we do

We offered a number of opportunities for parents and carers to tell us their stories. This included online surveys, focus groups, 1:1 conversations and written testimonies. To accommodate work and caring responsibilities, we set up sessions between 9am and 5pm, as well as evenings. We also went to different locations across the .

Key statistics

98

The number of weeks waiting for an Autism assessment, which doesn't count the years waiting to get on the list

541

In 2025, 541 children and young people were referred for an Autism assessment more than once

108

Children and young people aged 5–25 years, with an Education Health and Care Plan were not in school.

Parents and carers told us they felt they were being blamed for the challenges being faced by their children and that poor communication and a lack of transparency added to the distress they were already experiencing.

Bringing people together

The rising demand for assessments is overwhelming an under-funded service. Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is working in partnership with Steve Mitchell and actors from Access4All, an inclusive theatre group, to bring people together. The aspiration is that, together, the of Stoke-on-Trent solves some of these wicked issues. Follow us on Eventbrite to keep-up-to-date with events.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Stoke-on-Trent. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Attending a range of existing community groups, events, and activities across the ; continuing to build and foster relationships with both organisations and their members.
- Hosting focus groups both online and in-person, at a range of venues over the and at different times of the day, to ensure access for all.



Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

This year 3,145 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Call-out for podiatry experiences

Recent feedback highlighted how delays and changes to podiatry had made the service increasingly less accessible.

Without the right care and treatment, people living with conditions that affect their feet may face difficulties with walking which can in turn affect other day-to-day activities.

Due to the demand for the service, time between appointments is getting longer and patients are being offered appointments at clinics requiring further travel. Patients were informed that these issues would improve with more recruitment, but they are yet to see any changes to improve their care.



“It is never ever the staff; it is always the system. And it is the system that is failing those in need.”

Reflecting on delayed recognition

We received a testimony via email that set out the long-term and cumulative impact of delays in recognising neurodevelopmental conditions across multiple generations.

Three members of the same family have been engaged in multiple and repeated referrals for Autism and ADHD. Despite being under the care of children’s mental health services, their neurodevelopment difficulties were not recognised when they were younger.

Having secured a diagnosis from independent providers as adults, they still didn’t get the support they needed from the NHS.



“Education, employment, mental health, physical health, family relationships, financial stability, confidence, trust in services and participation within society can all be affected when underlying difficulties remain unidentified for many years.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have supported our work throughout this year. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

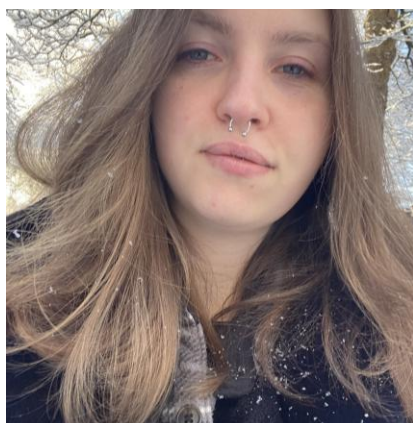
This year, our volunteers:

- Took part in training relevant to their roles and to develop and expand their skill sets
- Supported the team at local activities and public events.



At the heart of what we do

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



Roma
Research Volunteer

"... being able to volunteer with Healthwatch has been an amazing ... experience that will stay with me throughout my future career. Everyone on the team is kind, welcoming and willing to help you gain heightened confidence and transferable skills..."

I have especially enjoyed taking a part in the engagement and outreach events! Not only do you get to connect with the community and health service providers, to help amplify patient voices in a meaningful way; but every interaction and experience is new and insightful. No day is the same, and everyone has something to give, even if it's just them needing to get something off their chest.

The work that Healthwatch is a part of and produces I believe is truly important. By volunteering, I am able to help their ambitions to improve a field I am deeply passionate about."

"Being on placement with Healthwatch gave me valuable insight into the importance of an independent patient voice in healthcare and social care settings.

I saw the significant impact a small, dedicated team can have through gathering patient feedback, publishing reports, and engaging with communities on issues ranging from CAMHS to social care.

The placement strengthened my appreciation for empathetic listening, patient advocacy, and the importance of using lived experience to drive meaningful improvements in healthcare services."



Placement Student
Keele University

Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatchstoke.co.uk



03303 130 247



info@healthwatchstoke.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from **Stoke-on-Trent Council** under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Local Authority	£90,312	Expenditure on pay	£77,068
Additional income	£0	Non-pay expenditure	£10,451
		Office and management fee	£9,619
Total income	£90,312	Total Expenditure	£97,138

Finance and future priorities

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top priorities for the next year are:

1. Working in partnership with key stakeholders to design a focussed engagement project around Dementia
2. Leaving a legacy of patient and public involvement and experience (PPIE) by looking at existing groups, forums and strategies to identify the challenges that both the public and organisations face in making PPIE successful and meaningful.

Statutory statements

The contract for Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is held by Engaging Communities Solutions CIC. The registered address is Gibson House, Hurricane Court, Hurricane Close, Stafford, Staffordshire, ST16 1GZ

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

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

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

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

Throughout 2025/26, the ISAB met three times and made decisions on matters such as the priority projects and work programme of the staff team. These were shaped by feedback received as well as the priorities of our key stakeholders.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2025/26, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We didn't have any providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Healthwatch representatives

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us.

Since December 2025, Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent has been represented on the Stoke-on-Trent Health and Wellbeing Board by Clare Trenchard, Chief Executive Officer. Prior to that, it was Simon Fogell, Chief Executive Officer.


During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by actively contributing to agenda items and reflecting the voices of residents in key policy discussions.

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is represented on the Integrated Care Board by Clare Trenchard, Chief Executive Officer. Between April 2025 and November 2025, it was Simon Fogell, Chief Executive Officer.

Our Chief Executive Officer is also a member of the Adult Social Care, Health Integration and Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee; the System Quality Group; the Urgent and Emergency Care Delivery & Transformation Board, and the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board.

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