



# Public engagement events and forums

April 2025 – March 2026



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to quality



**healthwatch**  
Brighton and Hove

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# Introduction

Between April 2025 and March 2026, Healthwatch Brighton and Hove (HWBH) staff and volunteers attended a range of different public events and forums. We did this to speak directly with people and hear their views about health and care services, and to raise awareness of our work and projects. A selection of the nine different events and forums we attended are described in this paper.

Over the last twelve months, we estimate that we have engaged with 140 people at these events and forums. Some of these people completed our engagement survey to share their experiences of health and care services.

## 1. Events attended

### Age UK Walk-in Hub drop-in session, April 2025

**The Age UK Older People's Walk-in Hub opened in the centre of Brighton in 2024. The Hub provides information, advice, and support on a range of topics for older adults, including cost-of-living support, help at home and care planning, benefits etc.**

Jo (Project Support Officer), Kate (Project Coordinator) and Katy (Project Coordinator) attended the Hub, offering a drop-in session for members of the local community with an emphasis on talking about health experiences, sharing concerns about care, and learning about local health & care volunteering. This was also an opportunity share the current Healthwatch in Sussex poll at the time – NHS Satisfaction 2025.

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We meaningfully engaged five people. Their key concerns included improving waiting times at A&E, and older people's experience of health and care.

A service user described an atmosphere of "doom and gloom" in media representation of the NHS, with little coverage of positive news.

Another service user gave positive feedback about NHS 111, stating that they were helpful and efficient, but this was only after not being able to contact their GP for help.

They also described an instance with their GP where they requested a scan and were told, "I've told you once, I won't tell you again. There isn't going to be any scan." They added that their GP then abruptly put the phone down.

According to this service user, the experience really knocked their confidence.

A member of the public came to the Hub specifically to talk to Healthwatch. They described concerns with communication, data handling, and digital exclusion for older adults within the NHS. They were previously hospitalised with a UTI which resulted in an operation and the need of a catheter. They experienced side effects which their doctor, "had no interest in".

They further detailed wanting more information and choice about their treatment options, and that all they received was a six-month follow up call which didn't meet their needs.

This person also referenced receiving cataract treatment even though they were confused as to why they required this and requested more information. They shared that their specialist stated that they didn't need to know why the procedure was taking place. This lack of communication resulted in unhappiness with the course of treatment and further confusion for the patient.



We recorded all feedback and offered attendees support from our Helpline team if they felt the need for further assistance. Overall, this was a welcome chance to speak to people, in person, in a new community space in the heart of Brighton.

# University of Brighton consultancy project, April 2025

**Healthwatch partnered with the University of Brighton Business School to support a group of four final-year International Tourism Management with Marketing students on a live consultancy project.**

The students – Amy, Sumi, Sasha and Nicola – supported by Jo (Project Support Officer), undertook research to assess our marketing channels and design a tailored promotional plan. This included a month-long social media takeover of Healthwatch Brighton and Hove accounts.

The project spanned eight weeks and involved an in-person planning session with the students and Jo at the Healthwatch office. Three student volunteers were present, and they worked together to create promotional materials for the public via our social media channels. These materials focused on health and wellbeing, with an emphasis on mental health, and increased engagement on our channels and our reach into a younger online audience.



## **Reflecting on the experience, student volunteer, Amy, shared the following feedback:**

"I was drawn to Healthwatch because of its community-focused mission and the opportunity to make a real difference in people's lives. Coming as a beginner in marketing, I was excited by the chance to apply my skills in a meaningful way and support a cause that prioritises people's voices, especially those who are often underrepresented in health and care.

"I also wanted to gain insight into the voluntary and charity sector as it's a space where communication and engagement can have a powerful impact."

"It's been a really valuable and hands-on experience. I've helped shape and schedule content for Instagram (and other channels), focusing on raising awareness of Healthwatch's work and encouraging people to get involved. I also worked on improving the visual branding using Canva and made sure our posts were informative yet accessible."

"Taking over the social media for the month has given me insight into audience engagement, how to maintain a consistent tone, and the importance of adapting content for different platforms. I've really enjoyed being part of a small, passionate team where my ideas were welcomed and put into action."



## MSK Community Appointment Day, June 2025

**The musculoskeletal (MSK) community appointment day at Brighton Racecourse was a chance to meet members of the community as they consulted a variety of clinicians in one space for issues related to their condition.**

Jo (Project Support Officer) and Kate (Project Coordinator) attended. We engaged six people at this event, and the key areas of concern included: making it easier to get a GP appointment and reducing hospital waiting times.

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One service user described their experience of tearing their ACL in December 2023. It took until April 2025 to get surgery. The shared that they had to wait two months to get a phone call about their MRI results:



"As a police officer, when I got the call there was an emergency shout, so I missed it. I then had to wait a whole month just for another call".



Another service user praised their "brilliant" experience of Accident & Emergency services at Royal Sussex County Hospital. They had fractured their ankle in two places and, while having to wait a long time for an x-ray, were given exercises to aid recovery following seeing a clinician. They were also posted a hard copy version of these exercises.

The service user lives alone so received follow-up care and help with scheduling appointments at the Fracture Clinic. Of the experience, they said, "They were all wonderful and I felt that they all really cared about me. Thank you to all the staff that supported me".

**One conversation was outstanding due to its positive impact on the service users' wellbeing, and our being able to direct this person to our Helpline for continued support.**

The person (JN) had previously attended an appointment at a memory assessment service but had received no further direction or support over a two-year period. At this initial appointment, JN shared short-term memory issues pertaining to dementia. These issues are compounded by difficulties with hearing and the need for hearing aids. JN stated the need for assistance in booking a follow-up appointment, and the lack of guidance provided by the service.

JN became emotional during our conversation and shared experiences of social isolation and negatively impacted wellbeing due to this ongoing issue.



According to JN, sharing the experience with us alleviated some of this stress, and they were glad to be connected with our Helpline team to resolve the practical challenge of booking a new appointment and getting further support from the memory assessment service.

After assessing their case, our Helpline volunteer, referred JN to the Age UK team in Brighton for additional assistance.

We were glad to attend this event with other VCSE groups including Trust for Developing Communities, Brighton & Hove Healthy Lifestyles, and Together Co. An environment for sharing resources and information was created, and members of the community were able to access various kinds of support in once place.

# Hangleton and Knoll Project community health drop-in, January 2026

**The community health drop-in is part of a project called Rethinking Our Health which is a partnership with the Hangleton and Knoll Project, Portslade Health Centre, and Here – a social enterprise which delivers Sussex MSK Health along with other local providers.**

The partnership team spoke to the local community about barriers to living healthy or healthier lives with multiple long-term conditions. People most commonly mentioned Pain and access to the right information and advice as barriers, which resulted in the emphasis on muscle, bone or joint pain (MSK) for these events.

These free drop-in sessions are offered as a pilot project. A clinician is available in-person every Wednesday at St Richards Community Centre to talk to the public about their MSK concerns. Jo (Project Support Officer) attended a drop-in session to learn more about what was being made available to the public, and to better understand the benefits of offering support within the community as opposed to traditional settings like a GP surgery etc.

Jo spoke with a clinician who advised on self-led pain management via tools like the NHS getUBetter app; she also sat down with volunteers from A Touch of Gentleness – a community project offering hand massage as a way of creating social connection and improving wellbeing.

A social prescriber from Together Co was present, offering support with social, practical and emotional issues by signposting to local schemes and resources.

We engaged seven people at this event which highlighted the benefits of an accessible and holistic approach to MSK support for local people.



# Share for Better Care Week drop-in at Jubilee Library, March 2026

**Share for Better Care Week is a national campaign coordinated by the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England. Healthwatch teams across the country promote the campaign which encourages people to share their experiences of health and care services to impact better care for everyone.**

In recognition of the campaign, we hosted a stall at Jubilee Library in the centre of Brighton. Jo (Project Support Officer), Will (Project Coordinator) and two volunteers – Bharti and Lynne – chatted with members of the public about their experiences of health and care, as well as providing local health resources and printed materials. We spoke with 53 people throughout the day.

Visitors to our stall discussed a variety of issues, sharing both positive and negative feedback. Key themes raised were access to GP appointments, the gains and challenges of using digital platforms, corridor care in A&E, and the need for improved mental health support in Brighton and Hove.

One person told us about their experience of using NHS 111 as a disabled person living alone, and how it takes too long. Another shared that they became homeless after a prolonged period of acting as an unpaid carer for their mother, and stressed the inequalities faced by people of no fixed abode. These personal stories are incredibly valuable and highlight the importance of going out into the community to hear from local people in-person.

We heard praise from people about their GPs, with one discussing their care as professional, personal, and built on expertise in trans healthcare. They had considered moving outside of Brighton but decided not to due to the quality of care they currently receive with their GP.





“I had a hot fleck of metal ping into my eye - minor work accident. It was like a sharp grain of sand stuck to the white of my right eye. It made my eye lid swell and I realised I needed attention, so I went to the walk-in eye clinic at the RSHospital [Royal Sussex County Hospital] and had a WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE.

“The nurse could see what was wrong. Put me in a special stabilising head clamp and removed the fleck. INSTANT RELIEF/FIXED! Thank you.”



Overall, we found that this event demonstrated the great benefits of utilising a well-used community setting like Jubilee Library to engage the public, and we hope to host more drop-in stalls like this in the future.

## 2. Forums attended

### Older People's Council, July 2025

**A member of our volunteer team, Bharti, attended the Older People's Council (OPC).**

Member of our Board of Directors, Dr Khalid Ali, also presented research, acting as Chief Investigator in his role as Associate Professor in Geriatrics at Brighton and Sussex Medical School.

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Bharti reported on three key areas of discussion and noted that outstanding themes included access to services, administration, written guidance, hospital discharge, health inequality, medication, prescriptions and dispensing, and quality of treatment.

#### **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

Chris Brown (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, Brighton and Hove City Council) led this discussion, covering process review and future development. The process detailed considers discrimination against nine protected characteristics, and how this can be prevented/reduced.

Their process also considers and plans to reduce barriers for those with multiple, intersectional protected characteristics. Data, consultation, and stakeholder engagement is crucial to this process.

#### **Key Challenges:**

- Availability and accessibility of data to inform EIA.
- Policies informing EIA should specify older adults as this group is often missed e.g. loss of dementia care beds and outsourcing. This point was also discussed at the previous OPC meeting.
- Engagement with the right people is difficult. To ensure relevant groups are consulted, they must reach out to a wider network including OPC who were not consulted in the EIA for Dementia Services.
- Capacity issues means that EIAs are carried out on request and sometimes deemed unnecessary at scoping stage. There is a need to generate a decision chart to add to future toolkits to ensure that EIAs aren't missed where necessary.

## **Medication research update**

Led by Dr Khalid Ali, this research addresses medication management and adherence for those aged 65+ post hospital discharge. An initial study demonstrated that about a third of patients experience medication related harm which seriously affected 80% of people in this study group. Nearly half of this damage could be prevented if prior information on harm and severity was provided to the patient.

Those found to be at higher risk are older adults, females, those on glucose lowering medications, those living alone, and those with multiple medications.

The next step is to apply for a research grant spanning over five years. The study aims to work with Integrated Care Boards, trained pharmacists, and to include potential home visits to high-risk patients. Questions included in the study. Responses expected by 17th September 2025.

## **Government reorganisation and devolution**

Led by Tim Rowkins, Deputy Council Leader. He discussed bringing power and decisions closer to those that understand their needs on a local level during the government reorganisation and devolution.

Mayoral elections were planned for May 2026, and unitary authority election in May 2027. Public consultation starts 25th July 2025.

The mayoral authority model is the objective, taking learnings from London and Manchester's systems, but adapting these to local needs. Brighton & Hove City Council will still exist but a unitary authority that will encompass East and West Sussex will be established, with a possibility of boundary changes, but also a more collaborative, innovative approach.

Concerns were raised by OPC members about this model, stating that equality and access will suffer. Areas addressed include:

- Transport
- Housing
- Health
- Economic growth.



# Possability People's Get Involved Group, July 2025

**Our volunteer, Mazzie Sharp attended Possability People's 'Get Involved Group' (GIG) meeting. Approximately 10 people were in attendance.**

The group reviewed the Council's [Local Transport Plan 2035 draft](#). Transport availability and how accessible this is can have direct impacts on people's health and wellbeing. The ability to afford travel costs can also prevent some people from attending appointments.

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## **Issues that arose included:**

- Concerns were raised regarding planned Red Routes and rules regarding stopping to allow disabled passengers to alight etc. It seemed unclear and users were anxious about any impacts e.g. wheelchair users and those who are housebound need to be taken as close to their destination as possible.
- Attendees said there needed to be more integrated bus information made available which was capable of showing all providers' timetabling and not just Brighton & Hove buses e.g. Compass travel.
- It was also flagged that signage for the partially sighted needed to be clearer at bus stops.
- People felt that long gaps between bus stops needed to be reviewed e.g. there are no stops between Steine to St Peters Church, which makes it harder for people with disabilities to get to their nearest bus stop and travel easily.
- There was discussion about pavements versus cycle lanes and attendees felt this needed further thought to avoid making it more dangerous for people with disabilities to walk along pavements, or step from buses.
- Pavement culture was also discussed i.e. where tables and chairs are encroaching much more on pavement space. It was felt that this is having impacts on people with a range of disabilities, including those with unseen disabilities and people who are neurodiverse.

Council representatives used the meeting to explain the upcoming park and ride scheme. This will utilise Sussex University parking and drop passengers at the King and Queen pub. The group was disappointed, expressing that this was an example of sharing information after the planning had happened. There were a number of areas that the user reps pointed out would be difficult for people with disabilities.

The Council appeared to listen and took away all the comments, but this last-minute proposal (which appeared to be a trial run) was starting the following weekend.



## **LGBT+ Health Evidence Review Southeast session, October 2025**

**The LGBT+ Health Evidence Review aimed to identify barriers to healthcare access and areas where LGBT+ communities experience poorer healthcare experience and outcomes. It also described best practice approaches and made recommendations for change in line with the commitments and the three shifts in the 10 Year Plan: hospital to community, analogue to digital and sickness to prevention.**

The review was setup by Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to look at barriers to care, access and outcomes rather than social care or young people's gender identities.

The event was attended by Will (Project Coordinator), who shared details from our recent Trans, Non-binary & Intersex (TNBI) Experiences of GPs in Brighton & Hove report. There were about 30 people in attendance, and we spoke to around 10 of them.

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## Summary

The review was looking at existing data, literature reviews, research, etc, as well as engagements. They wanted feedback from organisations that support service users, those 30+, but not NHS staff. In six weeks, they planned to host 40 regional focus sessions across the country/ICB areas, with six sessions on specific topics including: Palliative and End of Life care, Prevention and wellbeing, Alcohol and substance misuse, Adolescents and Young People and Primary Care.

They asked three questions:

- What don't we know?
- Why hasn't it happened / got better?
- What to do to make it better?

## Feedback

Those hosting the reviews noted that money/funding were pressing issues but still rarely mentioned. Also discussed were:

- Current political/hate climate
- NHS not 'bold enough'
- The need to be anti-exclusion (not passively inclusive) to find out who isn't engaging
- More local control and co-production, but with targets/mandates
- Clear guidelines/training for GP staff and other health workers around supporting TNBI patients
- The need for gender markers to be amended to include non-binary as an option, to more accurately reflect the patient's gender identity. And patient records to include a 'body indicator' to reflect the patient's physical anatomy relevant to clinical screening.

## Follow up

There was a chance to follow up by answering an online form for individuals to respond on specific topics including:

- Palliative and End of Life care
- Prevention and wellbeing
- Alcohol and substance misuse
- Adolescent and Young People
- Primary Care.

## Home Care Forum, March 2026

**Hosted by Brighton and Hove City Council, this was a professional conference where home care providers and associated services were able to share updates and resources.**

Project Coordinator for the Homecare Check project, Will, attended with support from Jo (Project Support Officer) and volunteers, Leah and Sue.

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In attendance were home care providers who are funded by the council to support city residents in need, as well as other services including Marie Curie Companion Service, Public Health and their Quit Smoking campaign and Oral Health team, East Sussex Fire & Rescue, and East Sussex Vision Support.

The event was structured by a series of presentations with discussion of support for providers, new resources, the adult social care and wellbeing annual report, housing and its intersection with home care, anti-racist practices, and vaccinations.

Healthwatch was invited to present, and Will shared data from the Homecare Check annual report and highlighted a largely positive experience by those in receipt of services. Healthwatch also received positive feedback from a member of the audience about our ability to adapt to changes and evolve our surveys to match.

There were approximately 40 attendees at the event, and the team were able to network, as well as presenting our work to the audience.

A valuable discussion was had with East Sussex Vision Support about sharing our resources and opportunities to feed back with their partially sighted or blind service users, for whom written materials might be exclusionary. Jo will be in further conversation with their team about how best to facilitate this work.





# Your voice matters



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**Click here** to share your experiences and feedback with us, or if you need help or advice. **Thank you!**

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