

Annual report

Amplifying the voices of communities
across Westmorland and Furness

2024 – 2025

www.healthwatchwestfurn.co.uk



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Message from our CEO

Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness's second year has been an impactful one, driven by our ambition to reach even more people and connect with diverse communities across Westmorland and Furness. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has shared their views and experiences with us.

The people of Westmorland and Furness are our eyes and ears. Your stories shape our priorities and help us focus on what really matters. We've worked hard to champion the voices of those who use health and social care services making sure their needs are heard, understood and acted upon.

This coming year we will remain wholeheartedly committed to being the voice of Westmorland and Furness residents on all matters related to health and care.

We will continue to put people's views at the heart of the services we all rely on, especially at the moments when they matter most.



David Blacklock – CEO

Message from our Chair

As a resident of Westmorland and Furness, it's a pleasure to share this year's Healthwatch Annual Report with you. Over the last year, we've listened to people from across our area, in towns, villages or more rural communities, talk about their experiences of health and care services.

These stories are incredibly important. They help us understand what's working well and just as importantly, what needs to improve. Behind every piece of feedback is someone trying to get the support they need, often during a difficult time and our job is to make sure their voice is heard.

Some of the common concerns we've heard this year include the lack of neurology services in South Cumbria, difficulties for patients using mobility scooters at a Barrow health centre, what matters most to women about their health care, as well as access to GP appointments and NHS dentistry. Our flagship project focused on the experiences of adults seeking a diagnosis of autism, and heard powerful and emotional stories, both positive and negative.

We've taken these concerns directly to the people who plan and run services to make sure local experiences are being taken seriously. One thing I'm especially proud of is how our team, both staff and volunteers, have been out and about, meeting people where they are.

From community events to listening sessions in libraries and village halls, we've made it easier for people to share what matters to them. We want everyone to feel their voice counts, no matter who they are or where they live.

I also want to say thank you to our partners across the NHS, Westmorland and Furness Council and the local voluntary sector. Working together is the only way we can make real improvements and we're grateful for their support and willingness to listen.

Looking ahead, we'll keep doing what we do best—listening to local people and making sure their views help shape better health and care services for everyone.

Thank you for your continued support.

Mark Pannone – Board of Trustees Chair





About us

Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness is an independent champion of the views of patients and people who use health and social care. We make sure NHS decision-makers, services, the local authority and Adult Social Care hear what patients and public are saying and use it to improve what they provide. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Our team



David Blacklock,
CEO



Lindsay Graham,
Director



Kerry Prescott
Head of Healthwatch



Kate Rees,
Manager



Lisa Forster, Senior
Engagement
Officer



Leila Platt,
Engagement Officer



Sophie Alexander,
Communications &
Administrative Coordinator

Message from our manager, Kate Rees

This year has been one of growth, connection, and impact. As we complete our second full year, I'm proud of the way our team has continued to listen and turn people's experiences into real change.

While projects such as Adult Autism Pathways and women's health have helped to influence both the NHS and local authority's future delivery, we have proactively responded to stories shared with us to raise issues with providers and get patients better care. We have also provided vital advice and signposting, helping people navigate complex systems. These are everyday interactions that often lead to long-term improvements.

However we know the health and care system is under pressure. We have heard from many people who are struggling to access timely, appropriate care. These challenges make our role more important than ever.

Despite this, our work has influenced service redesigns, improved communication between providers and patients, and helped shape priorities, ensuring that decision-makers hear directly from the people affected.

We have also grown our volunteer network and strengthened our partnerships with the NHS, local authority, and voluntary sector.

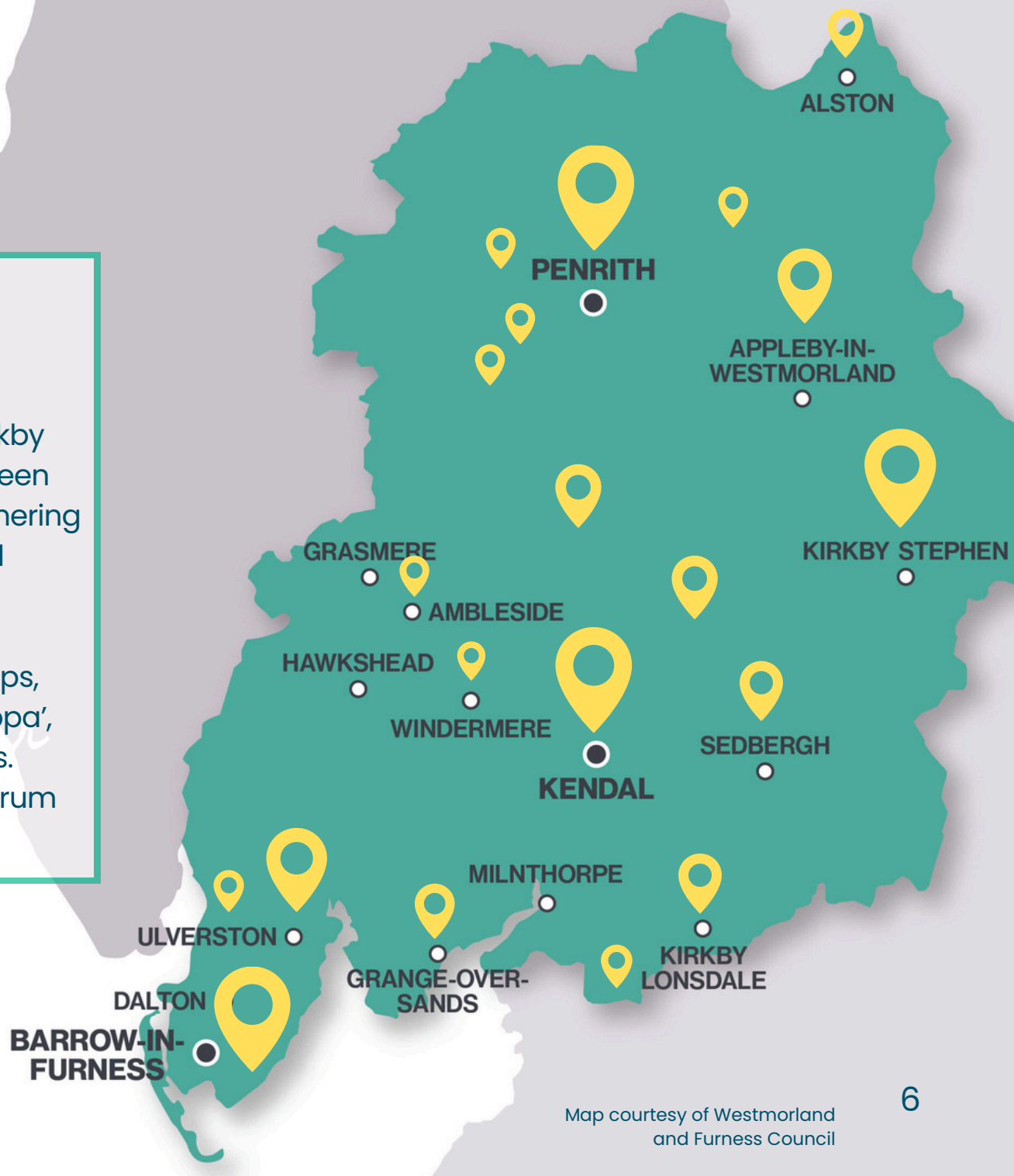
Thank you to everyone who has shared their story, volunteered their time, or worked alongside us this year. Together, we are making health and care better for everyone in Westmorland and Furness.



Our patch

From Alston Moor to Walney Island and Kirkby Lonsdale, our team and volunteers have been out across Westmorland and Furness, gathering feedback from people in rural, coastal and under-represented communities.

We connect with people at hospital pop-ups, drop-ins such as 'Conversation and a Cuppa', events held with other community services. We're also growing our own community forum in Penrith.





Our five fantastic volunteers have given 148 hours (six days) to support our work.

Their dedication has helped us better understand what's working — and what needs improving — across local health and care services.

This year, our volunteers have:

- Taken part in Enter and View visits to improve services.
- Reached out to communities and promoted our work.
- Listened to local voices and helped people share their experiences.

Our volunteers



Eddy, HWW&F Volunteer

“Volunteering with Healthwatch has opened my eyes to the challenges some people face. I love being part of something that makes a real difference — and the team always makes me feel appreciated.”

As well as supporting us at public-facing events, and being part of our Enter and View team, our volunteers also attend team and work planning meetings and contribute to project planning.

They bring a wealth of insight and experience as well as local knowledge to the team, letting us know what's happening in their patch.

We also have 20 valued Community Champions, who are our 'eyes and ears' in communities of geography and identity across Westmorland and Furness.



Alex, HWW&F Volunteer

"One of my favourite moments was visiting a local service and seeing staff genuinely take our feedback onboard. It's rewarding to know we're helping shape better care."



Our values

- 1 Equity** – We listen with compassion, value every voice, and include those often left out.
- 2 Empowerment** – We create a safe, inclusive space where people feel respected, supported and confident to speak up and shape meaningful change.
- 3 Collaboration** – We work openly with others to share learning, build trust and make a greater impact together.
- 4 Independence** – We stand up for what matters to the public. We work alongside decision-makers but stay true to our role as an independent, trusted voice.
- 5 Truth** – We're honest and speak up when change is needed – making sure those in power hear it, even when it's hard.
- 6 Impact** – We're here to make a real difference. We're ambitious, accountable, and driven to help others create change.



From peer support groups for autistic people, to women with hidden conditions, every voice is heard

76
seldom
heard groups

£142,516
Income received
from local
authority

Core funding from
our commissioner,
Westmorland and
Furness Council

Equivalent
to 6 days

148
Hours gifted
by volunteers

1,261
People
signposted

Reliable
information on
local support
services

25
incredible
volunteers

Including events
and community
champions

3,951
people
engaged

Online and in person,
sharing experiences
and learning about
local services

39
Recommendations
actioned

From eight project and
Enter and View reports

Our year in numbers

Our workplan 2024 – 2025

Autism Pathways

Listening to the experiences of adults diagnosed with autism and investigating local care pathways post-diagnosis.



Disability Voices/ Accessibility follow-up

Revisit the projects to deliver next steps and push for positive change based on recommendations. This involves going back to original participants and groups to identify priority recommendations and practical steps.



Women's Project

Specific topic will be chosen by the public. We will undertake creative engagement to get involvement and obtain views in different formats.



Dentistry

In March 2024 we delivered a survey in Eden as part of the North East North Cumbria Healthwatch network. We will be building on that work across Westmorland and Furness and look to assess the impact of Patient Premium measures.



Target = 4 Enter & Views

A year of making a difference

Spring

The contract for our host charity, People First Independent Advocacy, to deliver HWW&F was renewed.

We celebrated our first birthday with a drop-in at our Barrow-in-Furness office.

Summer

We launched regular hospital drop-ins to hear patients' experiences, not just of outpatient and in-patient care, but also dentistry and other issues.

We supported Healthwatch Cumberland at their Try Dry July in Carlisle city centre. It was great to work alongside our Cumbrian Healthwatch colleagues.

Autumn

We were one of only eight local Healthwatch nationwide to be invited to be part of an NHS Confederation focus group on the future of primary care.

We presented findings from our MNVP maternity unit Enter and View visits as well as drop-ins with mum-and-baby groups to UHMBT's Women's Health Quality Board .

Winter

We developed our monthly You Told Us reports to make more use of the data and feedback we receive, so that we can better understand issues and themes.

We shared festive spirit at our Christmas pop-ups in Kendal, Penrith and Barrow, with crafts an, decorating our Christmas tree with 'health hopes for 2025'.



Working together for change

Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness is part of Healthwatch Together, a collaboration of five local Healthwatch organisations that ensure community voices shape healthcare decisions across Lancashire and South Cumbria.

We represent residents at strategic meetings, such as the Integrated Care Board, and Quality Committee, ensuring local experiences influence service improvements.



Healthwatch
Together

Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Cumberland, Lancashire and Westmorland and Furness working in partnership

Maternity and Neonatal Care

Listening to families

Through our Healthwatch Together partnership we have worked closely with our Local Maternity and Neonatal System. In September 2024, we published our report Maternity and Neonatal Matters.

The report highlights the experiences of people accessing maternity and neonatal services across four hospital Trusts.



**Read the full
report here**



Partnered with Local Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnerships (MNVPs) to improve services.



Worked with the Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) to standardise feedback collection.



Attended the LMNS Insight, Co-production, and Engagement (ICE) group to ensure patient voices drive improvements.

ICB Community Transformation event

Along with colleagues and volunteers from Healthwatch Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen, and Blackpool we spoke up on behalf of patients at LSC ICB and NHS Impact's Transforming Community Care event, which brought together leaders from across the NHS, as well as local authorities and Adult Social Care.

Our 'Patient journey to great community care' presentation brought patient voices to the event, through videos of those with lived experience, quotes from carers, and from our volunteers.

Tony McDonald, LSC ICB, Director of Community Transformation, said of our input to the day: "Your opinion, your voice and your input is truly invaluable and provides the foundation for this fantastic opportunity to transform community services in Lancashire and South Cumbria.

"Your voice is absolutely essential in guiding us towards a more person-centred approach to care."



NENC HW Network

The goal of the North East North Cumbria (NENC) Healthwatch Network is to make sure people's experiences with health and care services are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level and help influence decisions made about health and care services.

Our network of 14 local Healthwatch is funded by NENC Integrated Care Board (ICB), which has helped us build strong, meaningful relationships and add value to the design of health and care services.

We have representatives from our network on local and regional strategic boards. These boards have robust reporting structures that support coordinated and effective engagement with our communities.

Our collaborative approach is recognised nationally as great practice.



Together we have worked on...

The Big Conversation

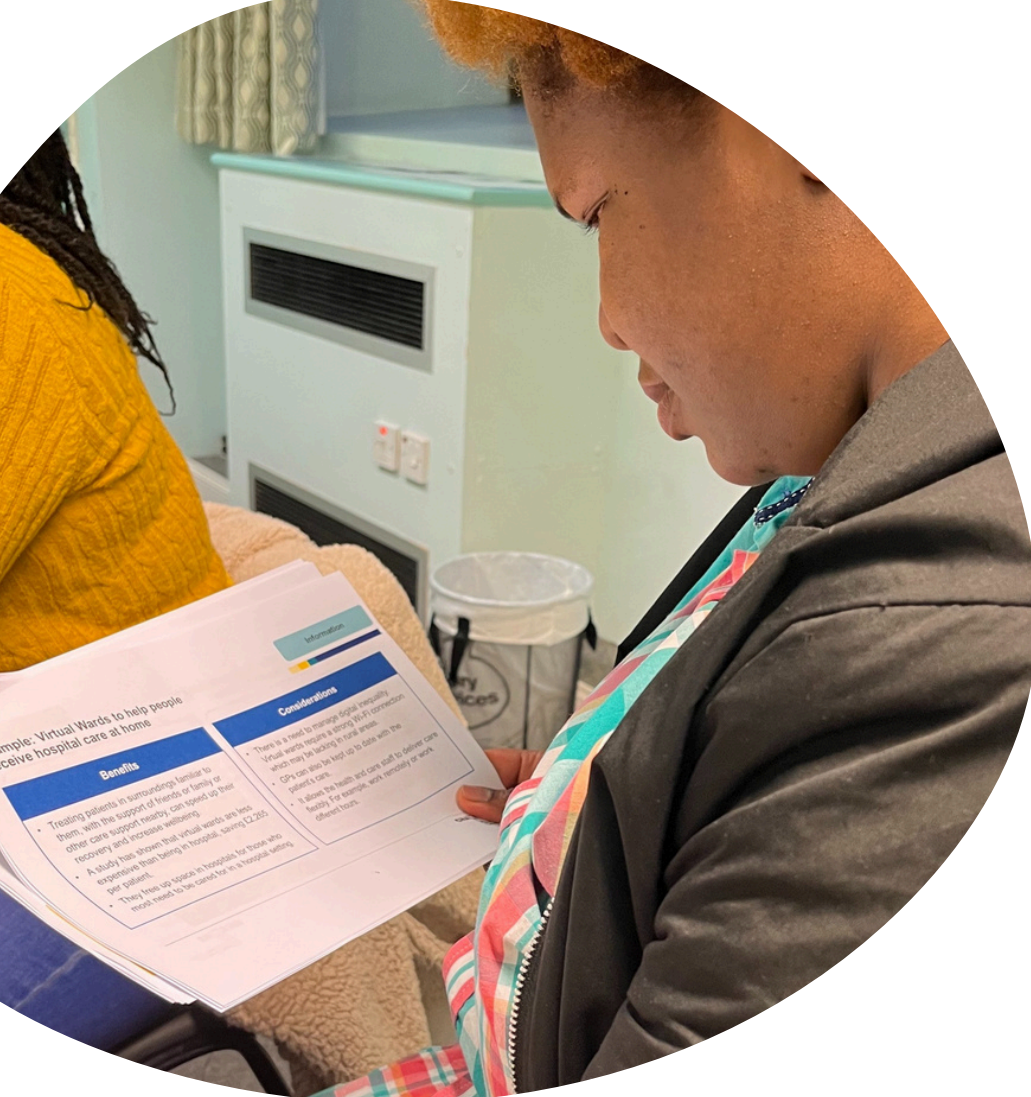
NENC ICB commissioned the network to deliver a survey asking women and girls across the region about what matters most to them about women's health services. HWW&F also held a focus group with women with experience of adverse maternal mental health.

Our impact

The HW Network reached 4,497 women and girls with the survey, and their responses will shape NENC ICB's women's health priorities. Following this, HWW&F carried out the same survey in South Cumbria and our findings are helping to shape Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB's women's health priorities.



[Read the full
report here](#)



NHS 10 Year Plan

We supported engagement for the NHS 10 Year Strategy, delivering two focus groups, one in person in Penrith, and one online.

Our impact

Westmorland and Furness residents contributed to the national conversation on the future of the NHS.

Network event

To showcase the work carried out by the network, all 14 local Healthwatch came together in Newcastle in March. Guest speaker Claire Riley, NENC ICB Chief Corporate Services Officer, emphasised that our efforts have ensured that citizen voices are embedded in the ICB at every level of decision-making.

Message from Healthwatch England National Director, Louise Ansari

"The feedback local Healthwatch hear in their communities and share with us at Healthwatch England is invaluable, building a picture of what it's like to use health and care services nationwide."

"Local people's experiences help us understand where we – and decision makers – must focus, and highlight issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. We can then make recommendations that will change care for the better, both locally and across the nation."



healthwatch



Making a difference in the community

Every year, our work is guided by what people tell us matters most.

Whether it's access to GPs, support for unpaid carers, or the challenges of navigating mental health services, we turn community voices into action.

Better support for autism diagnosis

This project explored the real-life experiences of autistic adults seeking a diagnosis. In partnership with the National Autistic Society and Team Autism, we spoke to 22 people across Westmorland and Furness. They shared challenges such as long waits, lack of support, and feeling dismissed – while also describing the relief and clarity a diagnosis can bring.

By focusing on lived experience, we aim to improve understanding of the adult autism pathway and drive meaningful change.

“We fully endorse [HWW&F’s] findings and feel that [their] approach to co-production provides a model for other agencies seeking to implement their proposals to improve access to diagnosis and support for autistic adults across the county.”

**Mike Stanton, Treasurer, National Autistic Society
Furness branch**



[Read our report](#)



What happened next?

We gave 22 people the chance to share their story – many for the first time. Some told us it helped them feel heard and better understand their own experience.

Westmorland and Furness Council is using this report and the findings from our Disability Voices Project to audit accessibility, and the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Partnership is working to implement our recommendations across their priorities. Our report is now a key tool in local efforts to improve autism pathways and disability inclusion.

The project has encouraged others to speak up too. Through storytelling and advocacy, we're building a clearer, more inclusive picture of the support autistic and disabled adults need.

“The report has been so helpful in showing the reality of how fragmented the process still is.”

Member of the EDI Partnership



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.



Improving accessibility

Alfred Barrow Health Centre

After hearing from a local resident, Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness looked into accessibility concerns at Alfred Barrow Health Centre, in Barrow-in-Furness. Patients using mobility scooters were unable to access first-floor services, including GP practices and specialist clinics, due to restrictions on lift use.

We raised these concerns directly with service providers, emphasising the need for reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010. As a result, providers reviewed their policies and committed to clearer communication and improved support for patients with mobility needs.

Our impact

This advocacy led to genuine improvements for patients with mobility issues and raised awareness of inclusive service design. It's a powerful example of how local voices can drive action, understanding and change.



What we heard

South Lakes Birth Centre

Distances to hospital care can be difficult in Cumbria, with poor transport infrastructure and long distances.

When we made an Enter and View visit to South Lakes Birth Centre, at Furness General Hospital in March, we spoke with a new mum and dad who had travelled around 200 miles, at night, in stormy weather, over three trips to the unit, on the night of their baby's birth. It was only on the last time that they were told they could stay.

Our impact

In May 2024, we recommended that patient circumstances (e.g. distance, poor weather, night-time travel) be considered before discharge. Now, dynamic risk assessments are carried out for all triage and SLBC discharges, and all patients receive ward contact details with encouragement to get in touch anytime.

healthwatch
Westmorland
and Furness

South Lakes Birth Centre, Barrow

Enter and View Report

Thursday 14th March 2024
12:00pm–4:00pm



Disclaimer: This report relates only to the service viewed at the time of the visit and is only representative of the views of the staff, visitors and residents who met members of the Enter and View team on that date.



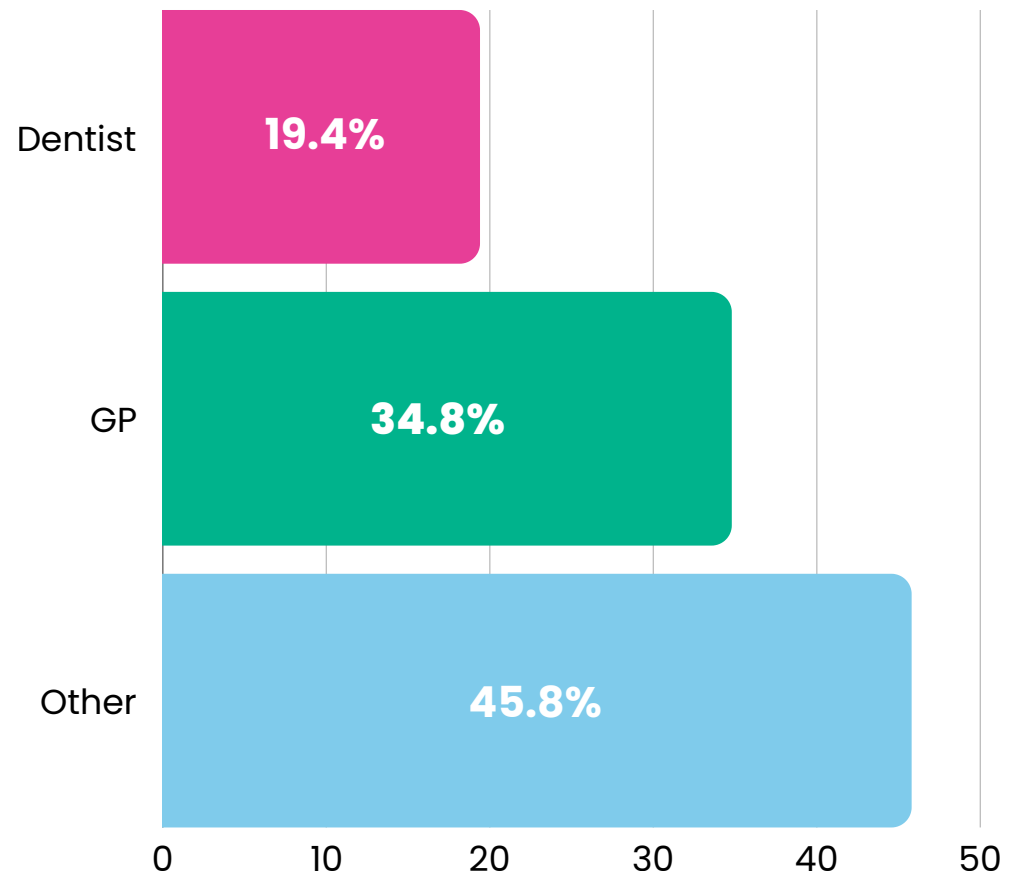
[Read our report](#)

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.

Throughout 2024-2025 the services we heard most from patients and members of the public were GPs and NHS dentistry.

For both, the 'themes' we heard most about were access to services (GPs 30.9%; dentists 71.4%) and quality of treatment (GPs 19%; dentists 9.5%). The sentiment expressed to us about access to services was 50% negative, while 66.7% of people who we engaged with were positive about the quality of treatment received.





We share information such as this with Lancashire and South Cumbria, and North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), and at our community forum and through monthly reports.

As well as informing services of poor patient experience we also share positive feedback.

In 2025-26 we will have campaigns on both GP and dentistry access, as well as highlighting and sharing great practise.

Hearing from all communities

We co-designed a patient survey with NWAS to evaluate the Alston Emergency Community First Response Vehicle pilot.

Designed in 2023, the survey was delivered until April 2024, with the report published in November 2024. It received a 33.7% response rate and provided rich insights into patient experience in rural emergency care, as well as demonstrating the value of local response models.

Our impact

We led the Alston Moor Working Group, uniting NWAS, local councillors, and residents to shape service planning in a remote community. This partnership model highlighted the importance of timely, respectful and reassuring care; showing how listening to communities leads to real change.

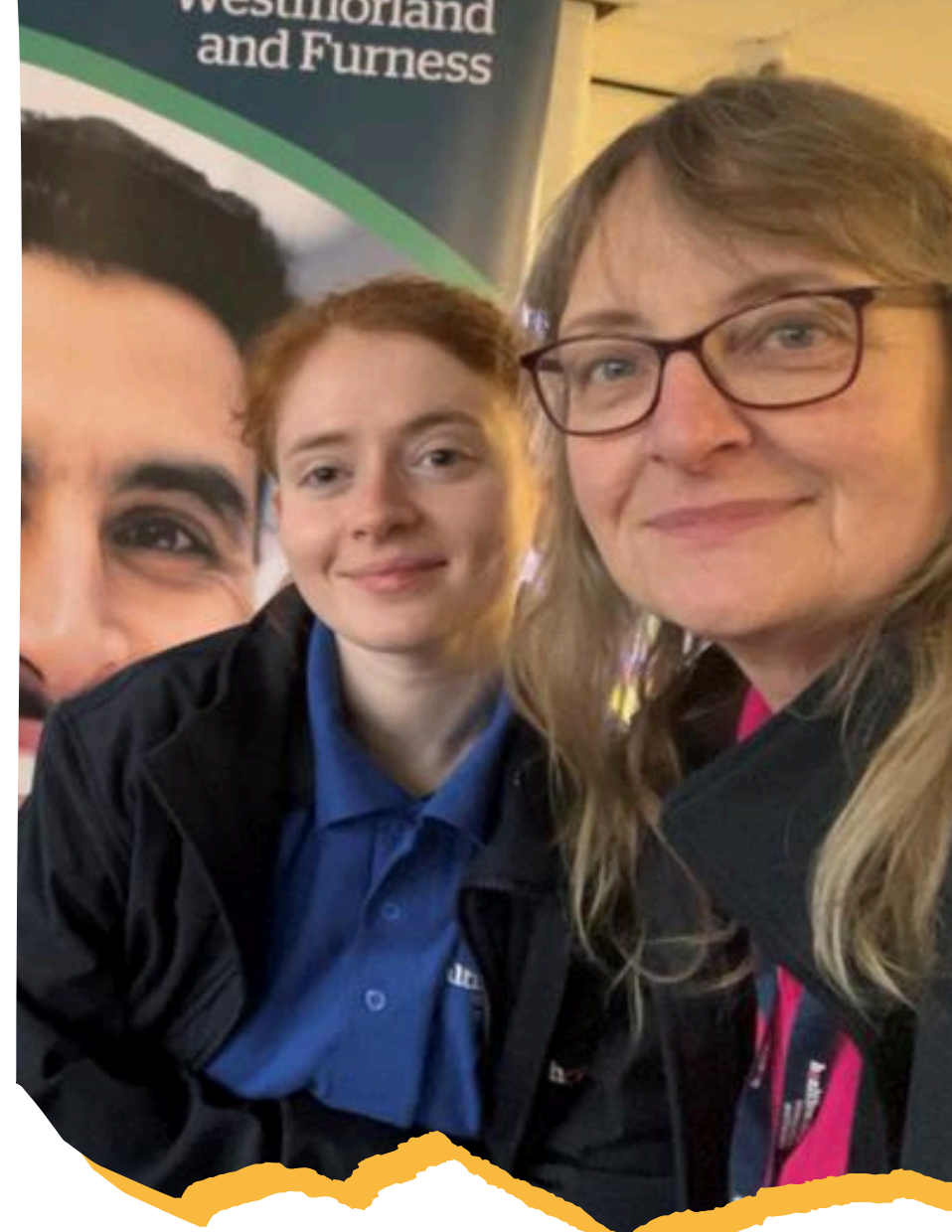


UHMBT Learning Disability Listening Events

Our support in facilitating these events helped ensure that the voices of people with learning disabilities and their carers were heard. We are encouraged to see that feedback from these sessions led to tangible improvements, such as the promotion of the Learning Disability Passport and the reintroduction of pagers in ED.

Community Forums

Themed community forums focused on on issues such as women's health, access to services and ageing well. A broad line-up of speakers and guests from charities and peer support groups, the NHS and local authority spoke about the empowering work being done across North Cumbria Place, gave interactive presentations, showed videos, prompted lots of discussion (and laughs), were grilled by members of the public, and connections and ideas for co-working were made.





Information & signposting

This year **3,753** people turned to us for trusted advice, support, and help accessing health and care services. We've supported people by:

- Providing clear, up-to-date information they can trust
- Helping them access the right services
- Signposting them to additional support options

Personal story

‘John’ had just received his “all clear” from kidney cancer.

He was obviously relieved to receive such good news but wanted to highlight some concerns with follow-up treatment and the adverse impact it had on his mental health. He was also concerned that he could have been diagnosed earlier, as a mass was seen on his kidney several years before but he had not been told about it.

Despite the relief he felt isolated.



John was signposted to the following services:

NHS Complaints Advocacy Service

An independent organisation that supports people through the NHS complaints process. John wanted to understand why he hadn't been informed about the results of a previous scan, and whether this may have affected his treatment.

Local men's mental health and peer support groups

To help him connect with others and access support in his area.

A local volunteering organisation

To explore opportunities that could help him build new skills and reduce social isolation, with the flexibility to accommodate his health condition.

Personal story

Language barriers in healthcare: Luiz's experience

Luiz' lives in South Cumbria and speaks Brazilian Portuguese as his first language. With support from his partner Sara, he usually feels well cared for at his GP surgery, where translation services are always pre-arranged. Things changed when he was referred to a specialist clinic in Preston.

Despite asking for an interpreter, none was provided at two separate appointments. Luiz struggled to explain his symptoms, and at one point, a consultant dismissed his attempts to speak. At another appointment, he was nearly turned away from an MRI scan because he couldn't complete a safety form in English – and Sara wasn't allowed to help.

Thankfully, they had spoken to us beforehand.

With advice and signposting support from Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness, Sara was able to advocate for Luiz's rights.

The clinic allowed her to assist, complete the scan, and update Luiz's records to ensure translation support going forward.

Their request for reasonable adjustments was taken seriously, and Luiz's medical records were formally updated.



Workplan 2025-26

Enter and View Programme

Transport

Our 'Patient journeys' project will follow people's use of public transport to get to health appointments and spotlight the challenges through personal stories.



Neurology

We will work with patients, families and carers, as well as service providers to highlight areas of great practise, as well as gaps in provision in South Cumbria, where a new provider has taken over neurology services since 1st April.



Women's health

Building on our work last year, we are bringing women from communities across Westmorland and Furness together with NHS representatives and others to shape women's health services. Our work will be shaped by a peer support group of diverse women.



Safeguarding

How person-centred is the safeguarding referral process? This project will speak with clients as well as professionals making those referrals, in partnership with W&F Council and Cumbria Safeguarding Adults Board.



Awareness-raising: Dentistry, GP access, and Accessible Information Standard

Finance

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

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£144,750	Expenditure on pay	£93,714
Additional Income	£4,640	Non-pay expenditure	£41,010
N/A		Office and management fee	£5,326
Total Income	£149,390	Total expenditure	£140,050

Additional income is broken down by:

- North East North Cumbria ICB (Healthwatch network)
- LSC ICS HW network contribution
- NENC ICB for women's health project
- NHS 10-Year Plan

ICS funding

- NENC ICB core funding and reporting: £3,500

Formal bits

Healthwatch England 2 Redman Place,
Stratford, E20 1JQ.

People First Independent Advocacy People
First Conference Centre, Milbourne Street,
Carlisle CA2 5XB.

HWW&F uses the Healthwatch Trademark
when undertaking our statutory activities as
covered by the licence agreement.

People First Healthwatch

People First is proud to hold the contracts to
deliver five local Healthwatch: County
Durham, Cumberland, Lancashire, Stockton-
on-Tees, and Westmorland and Furness.

HWW&F uses the Healthwatch Trademark
when undertaking our statutory activities as
covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Volunteers and lay people are involved
in our governance and decision-making.
Our Healthwatch Board consists of six
members who work voluntarily to
provide direction, oversight, and
scrutiny of our activities.

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

Throughout 2024/25, the Board met six
times and made decisions on matters
such as endorsing our workplan, and
signing off our annual report. We ensure
wider public involvement in deciding
our work priorities.

We are commissioned by



**Westmorland
& Furness
Council**

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 2024/25, 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, have printed copies at our office and with us at engagement events.

Responses to recommendations

All providers responded 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.

Taking people's experiences to decision- makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear the insights and experiences shared with us. For example, we take information to Westmorland and Furness Council Health and Wellbeing Board, Health Adults Overview and Scrutiny meeting, Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy Steering Group, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment working group, Community Health and Wellbeing Equity Partnerships (CHWEP), and EDI Partnership; UHMBT Patient Experience Group; ICB Women's Health Board; South Cumbria Place-based Partnership.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers at Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), through our Healthwatch Together Network, and North East North Cumbria ICB through our North East North Cumbria Healthwatch Network. **(See pages 14-19.)**

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness is represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board by David Blacklock, CEO.

During 2024/25, David has effectively carried out this role as a critical friend and shared the experiences of patients, public and advocates.

Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness is represented on Lancashire and South Cumbria and North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Partnerships by Lindsay Graham, and Lancashire and South Cumbria and North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Boards by David Blacklock.

**You live it.
We hear it.
Together we change it.**



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