



Healthwatch Cumberland **Annual report** **2025–2026**

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



healthwatch
Cumberland

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Healthwatch is the public voice for health and social care.

We exist to make services work for the people who use them.





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“We want to say a heartfelt thanks to all the local people who have taken the time to share their experiences, and to the health and social care professionals who have listened and acted on that feedback. Your commitment has helped make a real difference for our community.”

**Chris McCann, Healthwatch
England Acting Chief Executive.**



About us

Healthwatch is your local independent health and social care champion. Through public engagement we hear your voice and make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your feedback and use this to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



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.

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 and stay true to our role as an independent, trusted voice.

5

Truth – We're honest and speak up when change is needed.

6

Impact – We're here to make a real difference. We're ambitious, accountable, and driven to help others create change.

Our team



David Blacklock
CEO



Lindsay Graham
Director



Kerry Prescott
Head of Healthwatch



Kate Rees
Assistant Head of
Healthwatch



Chloe Wallace
Engagement Manager
for Cumbria and
Lancashire



Steve Walmsley
Operations Manager
for Cumbria and
Lancashire



Caitlin Graham
Research and Data
Officer



Suzannah Brookes
Communications and
Administration
Coordinator



**Clandon
Armstrong**
Engagement Officer

Putting people first

We are hosted by People First Independent Advocacy, a charity that spans both community voice and individual advocacy. As part of People First we believe in the following values:

Fairness Rights Belonging Courage Kindness Love

People First is proud to deliver five local Healthwatch across the north of England. They are Healthwatch Cumberland, County Durham Lancashire, Stockton-on-Tees, and Westmorland and Furness.

Being part of a local Healthwatch community helps us to work collaboratively, share great practice and learning and, most of all, speak up louder on behalf of patients, people who use social care services, and under-served communities across Cumbria, the North West and two integrated care boards.

Over this challenging year since the announcement of [the Government's intention to close Healthwatch](#), this relationship has helped us to keep delivering our functions, meeting targets, and supporting each other

in practical ways as well as emotionally. It also brings economies of scale and supports us to see the bigger picture on issues.

As part of People First, we work alongside those with lived experience and bring that knowledge and understanding into our projects. People First's work includes statutory advocacy, carers' support, education, training and supported employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities and autistic people, as well as a range of peer advocacy.

Healthwatch provides a distinct but complimentary role. While Individual advocacy ensure people are heard in decisions about their own lives, our community-level advocacy means services are shaped by the experiences of people who use them.



Members of
the North
West teams

Message from our Chair – Mark Pannone

This year has been defined by both dedication and uncertainty. In July 2025 the Dash Review announced the Government's intention to end Healthwatch's role as the independent champion of patient and social care service user experience. With very little information to go on until the introduction of the NHS Modernisation Bill in June 2026, our teams have faced a future without clarity.

This has been a deeply unsettling time, resulting in the loss of talented colleagues seeking security elsewhere. Despite these challenges, I am immensely proud of how our Healthwatch teams have responded: by doubling down on their statutory responsibilities, innovating in how they engage, and ensuring people's voices continued to reach those shaping health and social care.

Among the uncertainty and challenges in the last year, Healthwatch Cumberland has continued to produce work of real depth, sensitivity and influence through their well-established relationships across the county. Through projects including Ageing Well, Safeguarding Voices and Parental Wellbeing – which involved engaging with local fathers – the organisation has amplified voices that are often overlooked. Most notably, their Trans Voices project reached a marginalised and frequently unheard community, generating powerful evidence and practical recommendations while demonstrating the confidence and trust local people have towards Healthwatch Cumberland to tell their stories authentically.

Looking ahead, while uncertainty remains around its future, what cannot be denied is the lasting legacy of Healthwatch across our communities. In a challenging time, they did not step back. They stepped up. We put people's experiences at the heart of decision-making, and we will carry that commitment forward for as long as we are able to serve.

Mark Pannone



Our year in review



Spring

In Spring 2025, we concluded our Paternal Wellbeing project and prepared to launch our Trans Voices project.

We held an initial pilot focus group for our Trans Voices project.

Summer

We launched our Trans Voices project with the release of our survey.

We attended Whitehaven Pride in August and shared information about Trans Voices.

We held an ADHD awareness event in Whitehaven, in partnership with a Sellafield ADHD support group.

Autumn

We held an event for World Mental Health Day to raise awareness of support available.

At the Baton of Hope Tour in September, we supported those participating in the tour, and listened to people's experiences.

We collected feedback as part of our Safeguarding Voices project.

Winter

We launched a series of Wellbeing Drop-ins at Restore in Carlisle.

We held some more focus groups for our Trans Voices project, visiting peer support groups in Carlisle and West Cumbria.

A year of making a difference

Working together to make change



healthwatch North East and North Cumbria

We are part of a pioneering network of 14 local Healthwatch formed to improve health and care services both regionally and nationally. The network is funded by the North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Board. This funding has helped us build strong, meaningful relationships within this network.

Healthwatch Together is a collaboration of five local Healthwatch organisations that ensure community voices shape healthcare decisions across Lancashire and South Cumbria. We work together to ensure the voices of local residents are heard through neighbourhood and Place, and represented at the ICB.



Healthwatch **Together**

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

Collaborative campaigns



We worked alongside other local teams within the North East North Cumbria Healthwatch Network on the following campaigns:



Primary Care Access

This campaign involved promotion of Modern General Practice Access (MGPA) through pop ups, flyers and socials. It is now easier than ever to find support for a healthcare concern, whether this is at a pharmacy, at an appointment time that works with your schedule, or through the NHS app.



Palliative Care

This piece of work involved finding out people's thoughts on end of life and palliative care. This involved a survey and some pop-ups. As part of this work, the HWC team carried out a focus group with the LGBTQ+ Community.



Winter Care

We gathered feedback from the public about NHS health campaigns to find out if they were clear and accessible. This supported North East North Cumbria ICB to find out what campaign messaging was successful, and how content could be improved for future campaigns.



Work Well

As part of a North Cumbria pilot, we engaged people balancing health and work to shape the WorkWell service, capturing insights on barriers such as caring responsibilities, stigma and travel. This directly influenced service design, helping create a more inclusive, responsive service that better supports people to stay well and remain in or return to work.

Making a difference in the community



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life:

Hearing personal experiences and their impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

The stories gathered during our Paternal Wellbeing project capture the raw emotions and experiences of new dads. Through sharing these stories with services, it is our hope that dads will no longer be forgotten about and support will be made available, without stigma.



Getting services to involve the public:

By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.

We encourage services to use Lived Experience to shape the future of their services. We conducted a series of working groups with local d/Deaf people to find out about the barriers they face when accessing healthcare services. Our work complimented our local NHS trust's Lived Experience meetings.



Improving care over time:

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

Our Ageing Well Project, in partnership with Cumberland Council, aimed to capture the wishes and opinions of local people on care provisions for the elderly, to help shape future services.

Listening to your experiences



Ageing Well

Discovering what provision and support people feel they would need to age well.



Paternal Wellbeing

Hearing dads' experiences of becoming a parent.



Trans Voices

Finding out what trans and gender diverse people think about health and social care.



Safeguarding Voices

Joint project investigating how person-centred safeguarding is in Cumbria.





Ageing Well

During our 'Ageing Well' project, we engaged with 676 people across Cumberland with an online survey, 9 focus groups and 3 case studies. We also reached 12 seldom heard groups.



[For more information, visit our website](#)

Our 'Ageing Well' project focused on investigating the views of residents of Cumberland in order to understand what is in place to 'age well' in their community. This project encompassed views of the present and future older generation in relation to their current experiences, barriers they have faced and what changes they would hope to see to improve their quality of 'ageing well' in Cumberland

What difference did we make?

Using what we heard from our community, we developed 14 recommendations for relevant stakeholders to improve ageing well in Cumberland. We have presented our findings to Cumberland Council and distributed this report via email, social media and through word-of-mouth.

Paternal Wellbeing



Our Paternal Wellbeing Project was carried out to listen to paternal experiences of local dads, with an aim to reduce stigma around support, and to raise awareness of the struggles new dads face.



For more information,
[visit our website](#)

35% of dads we spoke to said they had experienced thoughts of ending their life as a result of their paternal experience.

Throughout this project, we gathered feedback and experiences via case studies, a survey and engagement. This allowed us to identify some key themes and recommendations for improved support from services including healthcare professionals and Cumberland Council.

What difference did we make?

Our project has inspired a phase 2 campaign, which is expected to take place in 2026-2027.

Our project provided space for dads to let out their feelings about their experience, sometimes for the first time.

54% of dads we spoke to said they had not been asked how they were doing during their parenthood journey.



Trans Voices

Our Trans Voices Project looked at the experiences of local trans and gender diverse people, with a specific focus on health and social care.



For more information,
[visit our website](#)

75% of our survey respondents stated they had experienced thoughts of suicide, the remaining 25% stated they would 'prefer not to say.'

Trans and gender diverse people are often faced with barriers, prejudice and a lack of support when trying to access health and social care services. From painfully long waiting lists for gender dysphoria treatment, to staff not respecting chosen names and pronouns, navigating healthcare services can be quite challenging for the Trans Community.

What difference did we make?

Our project sought to amplify trans people's voices and to discover recommendations to be shared with employers and healthcare staff.

We created a [comic book](#), alongside our report, which will be promoted across the county.

Safeguarding Voices



Safeguarding Voices was a collaborative project with Healthwatch Westmorland & Furness looking at how people, their carers and professionals experienced the safeguarding process. This involved respondents sharing their anonymous feedback and recommendations.

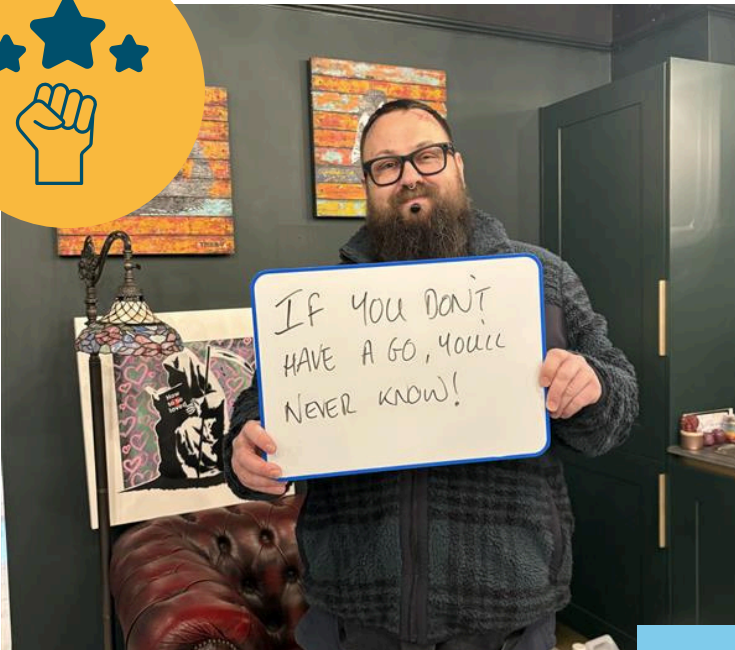


[For more information, visit our website](#)

With the support of Cumbria Safeguarding Adults Board, between December 2024 and December 2025, online surveys were distributed to review the involvement of people within a Section 42 safeguarding enquiry. This project was centered around the experiences of people during a safeguarding enquiry with a focus on how the process felt tailored to them. We heard that, for individuals who were the subject of the safeguarding enquiry and carers, 40% were not given clear explanations of roles or processes, however 60% stated they felt involved in decision-making.

What difference did we make?

Through highlighting challenges experienced by individuals involved in a safeguarding enquiry, it was recommended that the safeguarding process should be made more personal and straightforward, with everyone kept informed throughout. The anonymity of this project allowed for honest opinions to be shared which have revealed strong suggestions for improvements.



R.I.S.E

The R.I.S.E project is an ongoing piece of work that looks at youth mental health, with a specific focus on four elements: resilience, inspiration, self-worth and empowerment.



[For more information,
visit our website](#)

The aim of R.I.S.E is to speak to 11-25 year olds living in Cumberland, to give them an opportunity to share their thoughts on what helps them have resilience, inspiration, self-worth and empowerment, to learn from others and to build skills. We will use their feedback to shape the workshops and ultimately ensure their voices are central to the project. We are gathering feedback on current youth mental health provisions based on their experiences. These young people will leave the workshops with a toolkit for mental wellbeing. We are carrying out R.I.S.E in partnership with local youth group providers and educators.

What difference did we make?

We see R.I.S.E as a long term preventative resource which has been shaped by the young people's feedback and experiences, from the beginning. The end result will be a downloadable 'workshop in a box' that will be available to youth and education providers.

Events



Engagement is a big part of our work, enabling us to connect with local people and find out more about their stories and experiences.

Alongside our general engagement activities, this year we partnered up with local organisations to help bring together some exciting and varied events:

Authentically ADHD

Authentically ADHD in July 2025 was an information session for local people with ADHD. The Healthwatch Cumberland team was there to understand more about local people's experiences of living and working with ADHD, their thoughts on diagnosis and misdiagnosis, and what changes people would like to see in services.

In September 2025, the Healthwatch Cumberland team attended the incredible Baton of Hope Tour, which spanned Cumbria. The tour exists to raise awareness of suicide prevention, and the impact that suicide has on local people. We were there to listen to people's experiences and to support those participating in the tour.

The Baton of Hope



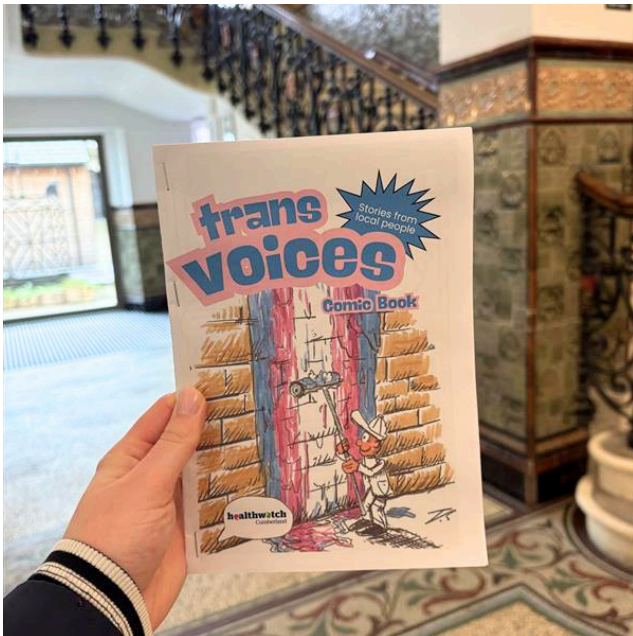
We attended Whitehaven Pride in August 2025 to find out people's thoughts on health and social care services, and to launch our Trans Voices project





Hearing from all communities

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.



Championing diversity: Our Trans Voices project supported local trans and gender diverse people to share their opinions on health and social care services and what changes they would like to see.

Bridging communications: We conducted a project with local d/Deaf people to find out about the barriers they face when accessing or arranging appointments.

Supporting young mums: We worked alongside local mum groups to provide information and a chance to offload at a teen to 25 year old mums event.

Maternity stories: We held a focus group to find out about the maternity experiences of refugee women and women seeking assylum.



Information and signposting

A trans woman contacted us as she was concerned that her treatment pathway was being closed, against her wishes, and she was not being included in her MDT meeting at the NRGDS clinic. The woman was very distressed and expressed feelings of hopelessness.

We signposted to...

HWC contacted the NRGDS clinic to request that they call her on the same day. HWC recommended People First Advocacy, as well as Angel Advocates for further support with general advocacy.

A dental patient wanted to be prescribed anxiety medication before having dental treatment, as the treatment was something that they felt would heighten their anxiety. Their GP and CMHT both told them it was not their responsibility.

We signposted to...

HWC confirmed that both a GP and a CMHT are qualified to prescribe anxiety medication, and that it would be a good idea to make a complaint. During the phone call conversation, it was decided a case study would be an appropriate next step.





HWC were contacted about information and support for patients with syringomyelia, a condition where cysts grow on the spine. This person also asked about support for their mother who is acting as a carer for their dad.

We signposted to...

HWC researched support services and managed to find a charity that provides information for this condition and where to get support. HWC provided contact details for the charity, the Ann Conroy Trust.

A caller asked about who to contact about a safeguarding concern. They had already contacted PALS and Citizens Advice and had been referred to Healthwatch Cumberland after not having a response from PALS.

We signposted to...

HWC provided this individual with the Single Point of Access contact number.

Our most common feedback was around...

Service:

General
Practice
(GP)

Dentistry

Pharmacy

Theme:

Waiting for appointments or treatment; waiting lists

Access to services

Quality of treatment

Volunteering

Interested in volunteering?
We'd love to have you as
part of the team.



157
volunteer
hours



"Volunteering with Healthwatch Cumberland has been amazing. It has made me more confident and comfortable within myself. And more appreciative of the city I live in."

"The team has created a comfortable environment for me and have great patience and understanding when it comes to my coursework. The work is fascinating and makes me optimistic for my working career in health & social care."

Charlotte is a Health & Social Care Student. She volunteers at Healthwatch Cumberland as an Engagement Volunteer.



Enter and View

Throughout the year, Healthwatch Cumberland undertook a series of Enter and View visits to local services.

This year we carried out Enter and View visits at 4 locations.

April 2025

- Dalton Court, Cockermouth

October 2025

- Eden Manor, Carlisle

March 2026

- Gregory House, Workington
- Dalton Court, Cockermouth (Revisit)



The purpose of an Enter and View visit is to collect evidence of what works well and what could be improved to make people's experiences better.

Healthwatch can use this evidence to make recommendations and inform changes both for individual services as well as system-wide.



The formal bits

People First Independent Advocacy

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

Statutory statements

Healthwatch England

2 Redman Place, Stratford, London E20 1JQ.

People First Healthwatch

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

Healthwatch Cumberland (HWC) 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 2025-26, 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
Cumberland Council, who
we would like to thank for
their ongoing support.**



Finance

We receive funding from Cumberland Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.



Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£165,000	Expenditure on pay	£120,849
Additional Income	£17,095	Non-pay expenditure	£6,695
		Office and management fee	£33,702
Total Income	£182,095	Total expenditure	£161,246

Additional income is broken down into:

Healthwatch across [ICS area] also receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

ICS funding	
£4,000	Quarterly NENC HW Network reporting and engagement
£650	Project work carried out through NENC HW Network
£12,444	NENC HW Network North Cumbria Area Coordinator
Total Income: £17,095	

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 visited community groups, held pop-ups and drop-ins, joined health and wellbeing fairs, visited hospital wards, made Enter and View visits, carried out surveys, collected case studies, and been available by phone, email, social media, and website web form.

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 offices and with us at engagement events.

We will send it directly to our local authority, ICBs, Trusts, Health Determinants Research Collaborative (HDRC), and those organisations and services we have worked with most closely over the past year. It will also be uploaded to the North East North Cumbria Community Engagement Library.

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 Cumberland Council Health and Wellbeing Board, Health Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee; South Cumbria Place-based Partnership; Cumbria Health Clinical Governance Committee; Cumbria Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment; Cumberland HDRC. As part of the NENC HW Network our data and information is shared with NENC ICB.

We meet regularly with Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspectors to share soft intelligence. We also attend local authority-led Radar meetings for the same purpose.

We take insight and experiences to decision-makers at North East North Cumbria ICB through our North East North Cumbria Healthwatch Network, and Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board through our Healthwatch Together Network.

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

Healthwatch representatives

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

During 2025-26 David has effectively carried out this role as a critical friend and shared the experiences of patients, public and advocates.

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



Our future priorities



From feedback received over the past year, ICB and local authorities priorities, and the NHS 10-Year Plan. In 2026-27 we will look into:



R.I.S.E

Our R.I.S.E project will look at the elements that young people need to feel confident and have more resilience. This project will mostly be carried out through workshops and pop-ups.



Neonatal Voices

We will be working closely with other local Healthwatch teams in Lancashire and Westmorland and Furness to find out what people think about neonatal services and to map the support available.



Hospital Discharge

Looking at the experiences of Pathway 1 Discharge patients to find out what is working well and how this service could be improved. Spreading more awareness of what each discharge pathway means.



Behind the Addiction Revisit

Coinciding with the recommissioning of drug and alcohol services in Cumberland, we aim to revisit our Behind the Addiction project. Listening to and learning from people's experiences, with a particular focus on parental substance use.



Know your neighbourhood

The NHS 10-Year Plan shifts care from hospitals to community, and the focus from sickness to prevention. This project will visit 'neighbourhoods' and ask communities about where and how they use health services, what they think of as their community, and what they need in the future to stay healthy and well.



We held a Wellbeing Drop-in for International Women's Day. The session provided a space to get creative and find out people's thoughts on women's health, and what support is available to local women





Find us on social media:



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Email: info@healthwatchcumberland.co.uk



<https://wearepeoplefirst.co.uk/healthwatch-cumberland/>