



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Shropshire annual report 2025/26

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Acting Chief Executive
Chris McCann

“

The NHS plays a vital role in our lives, and we know it faces real challenges. Listening to people’s thoughts about their care is one of the best ways to improve services. Every comment, concern, and compliment helps health and care professionals see what works and what needs to change, so care can be safer and better for everyone.

“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.”

A message from our chair

2025–26 has been a year of immense change for Healthwatch Shropshire.

In 2023 the Board made the strategic decision to ally ourselves with another organisation which shares our focus on serving the people of Shropshire, and supporting them to tell us of their experiences of health and social care services provided by the NHS, Shropshire Council and the local voluntary and charity sector.

In 2025 this came to fruition with Community Resource as our new host.

The Health Bill, currently going through Parliament, will undoubtedly bring further change, but Healthwatch Shropshire and Community Resource will continue to advocate for an independent organisation to enable the voice of Shropshire residents and patients to be heard.

Throughout all these changes, the loyalty and commitment of our small staff team, and band of volunteers never wavered. You will find details of the wide range of activities we have undertaken in this report.



Chair
Vanessa Barrett



“I am so proud of the whole team’s continued focus and commitment to champion the voice of patients and the public during a turbulent year.”

About us

Healthwatch Shropshire 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 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 19,000 people to have their say, get information about their care or access our reports. We employed 5 staff and our work was supported by 24 volunteers.



Reaching out:

Our website received over 17.5K views, our email subscribers list was over 1000 and 693 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

81 people came to us for one-to-one advice and information on topics such as raising a concern about care and treatment and finding a service provider (including advocacy, complaints and finding an NHS dentist.)



Championing your voice:

We published 5 engagement reports and will be publishing an additional 7 project reports in 2026 about people's experiences of health and social care services, including people with spinal injuries and those experiencing rough sleeping.

Our most popular report was into where students went first for mental health support, highlighting young peoples' understanding and experiences of our mental health services.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by Shropshire Council. In 2025/26 we received £156,573 to deliver Healthwatch services, which is an increase from last year.

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 Shropshire. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We met with an LGBT+ Older and Old group to hear their perspectives of accessing healthcare.

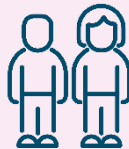


The team attended the See, Hear & Dementia Exhibition to let these communities know that their experience matters.



Summer

The month of August was spent meeting with armed forces veterans, being present at 9 outreach sessions and talking with 25 individuals.



During college induction week events we spent 3 days speaking to a total of 455 students about where they go first for mental health support.



Autumn

Our volunteers completed an Enter & View visit to the Midlands Centre for Spinal Injuries at RHAH and we followed-up with a hot topic supported by the Spinal Injuries Association.



Our staff and volunteers assisted with 4 PLACE assessments at RJAH, The Nuffield, and Ludlow and Bishops Castle Community Hospitals.



Winter

Our Share for Better Care 2026 campaign included visits to all 43 GP surgeries across Shropshire, covering all 5 primary care networks.. Resulting in a 400% increase in comments.



We launched our new hot topic on virtual wards in partnership with Shropshire Community Health Trust to hear directly from people with lived experience.



Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here are some examples of our work in Shropshire this year:



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.

When someone shares an experience with us, we include direct quotes in our reports and may ask them to provide a case study. We also gather feedback face to face in groups and spaces where people feel comfortable, e.g. Age UK groups, college open days, hearing loss hubs and Armed Forces outreach sessions. We then share these experiences with service providers and those responsible for local services.



Getting services to involve the public

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

For the Share for Better Care campaign this year we visited 43 GP practices in Shropshire. We made sure they had up to date posters and leaflets about our service and shared digital assets for waiting room screens. Raising awareness of Healthwatch in this way empowers more people to share their feedback with us as their independent champion so we can highlight any gaps in services or where improvements can be made in each neighbourhood.



Improving care over time

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

This year we launched a joint online survey with Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust to find out from patients how well the new Virtual Ward model has been working in Shropshire.

Our volunteers completed an Enter & View visit to the Midlands Centre for Spinal Injuries. We then worked with the Spinal Injuries Association to shine a light on the experiences of people living with a spinal injury in Shropshire when accessing health and care services. We engaged with people through a social media campaign and by attending Spinal Injury Association community group meetings in person.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from across our community. Arranging face to face meetings with hard-to-reach groups like the homeless and prison communities.

We also joined the 'Share for Better Care' campaign organised nationally by the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England which aims to encourage more people to share their feedback.

People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Highlighting people's experiences of accessing medication

This year we investigated people's experience of accessing medication in Shropshire

This work was undertaken in response to comments received following the withdrawal of the Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) service, alongside feedback from Shropshire Councillors highlighting the challenges individuals have faced in accessing medication from their local pharmacy.

What we did

We put a call out for people across the county to get in touch to help us understand how easy it is for people in Shropshire to access their medication. We collected feedback via:

- Online and social media engagement
- In person conversations at community events and outreach visits

Key things we heard:



40%

of respondents reported problems that caused stress or inconvenience when trying to obtain medication

20%

of users said that delays were the biggest issue faced when needing a new prescription

10%

stated system inefficiencies as an issue due to services not being joined up and the process confusing

A number of people shared their concerns over the impact of increased use of digital systems such as the NHS app on elderly and vulnerable people, including those with long term conditions and/or requiring a large number of medications.



"My son and his wife have to organise all my medications as I find it so confusing, what and when to take it..."

What difference did this make?

In response to this report, NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin said: 'Following recent government changes, we are currently in a period of development, innovation, and quality improvement. With neighbourhood health now at the forefront of our work, this report comes at an opportune time to help us drive forward improvements, and to continue working closely with our partners to ensure we are doing so in a collaborative and coordinated way for the benefit of our patients and residents'

Championing the voice of young people in need of mental health support

Students say more education and information is needed to highlight the mental health services currently available to them.

Following up on our work last year to understand where young people go for medical information, we spoke with 455 local students during their college induction week about where they would go if they needed mental health support. Their feedback highlighted a need for more awareness of the services available to them and in some cases a reliance on family and the internet for information and emotional and wellbeing support.

Key things we heard:



44%

of students said that they would go to family members for support and advice.

7%

of students said that they would use Chat GPT, AI or the internet for mental health support.



“Chat GPT because it’s unbiased, confidential and convenient” Student

“I wouldn’t go to my parents because they worry too much, so I would go to the internet and find out as much as I could first” Student

“I find BeeU helpful, it’s not as helpful as I hoped it would be, but I like having someone to talk to regularly” Student

What difference did this make?

Our report included the details of the local mental health services available to young people with the aim of this information being shared with students by the college. It was also presented at Shropshire Council and NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin meetings to inform their ongoing work on shaping and promoting mental health services for this age group to ensure they can access the right support at the right time, including the recommissioning of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service – previously known as BeeU.

On 1st December 2025 a free, confidential 24/7 mental health text support service **for all ages** in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, was launched. This is delivered by qualified mental health professionals through SHOUT on behalf of Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT).

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Shropshire. 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 meetings to speak to members of the Armed Forces Community about their experiences with Healthcare.
- Attending a local Homeless Day Centre to speak to people experiencing rough sleeping about how they access healthcare with no fixed abode.
- Visiting HMP Stoke Heath to speak to the peer led Health and Well being Champions (HAWCs) about how prisoners are accessing healthcare in their prison.



Understanding the experiences of veterans in Shropshire

As a signatory of The Armed Forces Covenant we wanted to bring the voice of veterans to the forefront, highlighting some of the challenges they experience when returning to civilian life and the support they need to navigate and use health and care services.

The latest census data shows that in 2021 there were 14,800 veterans living in Shropshire, current figures are likely to be higher.

What we did

Working in partnership with Shropshire Council's Armed Forces Outreach Team we attended their Armed Forces Outreach sessions throughout July and August 2025. We heard directly from 25 veterans, male and female, aged 40 to 80+, who were willing to share their experiences with us

Key things we heard:



Veterans value local mental health services but are concerned about repeating traumatic experiences and gaps in information sharing between the armed forces and the NHS



There is a lack of understanding among people of why they should identify as a 'veteran' when accessing NHS services and what they can expect under the Covenant



The particular challenges people can experience at the time when they are leaving the armed forces and need NHS services



Experiences of poor communication between professionals and lack of information regarding the person's veteran status, medical background and service-related conditions impacting on care and outcomes



"I did identify myself as a veteran and it has seemed to have worked for me... I think it helped the ball get rolling a bit smoother." Veteran

What difference did this make?

In response to this report, NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin said they would continue to ensure hospital trusts are Veteran Aware and GP practices are Veteran Friendly and **'this accreditation is not just a tick-box'** but that they take responsibility for identifying veterans, their service-related needs, what support is available to them and supporting them to access it.

Highlighting the healthcare barriers faced by people experiencing rough sleeping

We investigated how people living on the streets in Shrewsbury were accessing healthcare.

We regularly visited The Shrewsbury Ark day centre for people experiencing homelessness or rough sleeping to speak to people about their experiences.

People told us about difficulties accessing GP services, challenges managing medication, poor hospital discharge experiences and mental health and addiction issues amongst other challenges.

What difference did this make?

The report and the response from local organisations working with this group will be shared with Shropshire Health and Wellbeing Board in 2026 where they will be asked to support our recommendations including:

Recognising the service provided by local GPs and other agencies coming into The Ark to see people as an example of good practice and multi-agency working to reduce health inequalities. This is a model for the future of neighbourhood working in Shropshire under the Government's 10 Year Health Plan.

Understanding the experiences of people who have a spinal injury throughout their patient journey

In November 2025, our Enter & View volunteers visited the Midlands Centre for Spinal Injuries at The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital and spoke to patients, families and staff.

Following this we decided to dig a little deeper and reach out to people living with a spinal injury to share their experiences of care from diagnosis through to discharge and ongoing care in the community.

We spoke to local spinal injuries charities and met with the representative of the Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) to gain their support.

What difference did this make?

SIA promoted our call for people to share their experiences with us through a joint press release, and we attended their meetings to build trust and encourage people to be open about what works well and any issues with access to services and specialist care when having additional long-term conditions. The report will be published in 2026.

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 over 19,000 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services in-person, by phone, on-line or through our website. Speaking to people directly helps 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, including our own reports
- Helping people access the services they need through partnership working
- Supporting people to look after their health by promoting health campaigns
- Signposting people to additional support services such as Dementia care
- Providing the Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service for Shropshire



Helping people to raise concerns

A caller was struggling to access medication despite being on a Shared Care agreement between the hospital and their GP practice

The service user needed regular medication to ensure their condition was managed effectively. The GP practice would not provide the prescription needed as they believed this was the responsibility of the hospital. This was an ongoing issue that was causing frustration and concern for the patient.

Information and support from Healthwatch Shropshire enabled the caller to raise their concerns formally and the issue has now been resolved.

Healthwatch Shropshire continue to raise concerns about Shared Care Agreements with NHS organisations and the impact on patients and their families.



“The right medication is now on repeat. I couldn't have done it without your help.” HWS Caller

Improving care for those from seldom heard communities

Healthwatch Shropshire were contacted by a friend of a person in HMP Stoke Heath to raise concerns about access to Healthcare and ongoing appointments

The caller felt that despite raising requests to find out what was happening with their healthcare the person was not being informed of the next steps or how long they might wait and was very anxious that they would be forgotten.

Healthwatch Shropshire's Chief Officer spoke to caller and agreed to contact the Trust directly.

The Trust were able to confirm that appointments were planned and ensured that someone would contact the person within the prison setting about their healthcare, listen to their concerns and provide an update.



“Our relationship with service providers and leaders across the NHS and social care mean that sometimes we can help improve communication with the public and improve their experiences. It is great when we can help.” Chief Officer, Healthwatch Shropshire

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given **184 hours** to support our work. 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:

- Visited local communities to raise awareness of our work, including representing us at veteran events, engagement stands and meeting community groups.
- Listened to people's experiences and supported them to share their views, helping us to ensure their voices are heard and used to improve services.
- Joined Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) visits to community hospitals in Shropshire to help guide improvements to the environment and services by sharing their views and offering suggestions.
- Contributed to our work through active participation in the new Community Voice Panel led by Healthwatch Shropshire and our host Community Resource.
- Represented us at system meetings, focus groups and committees, making sure people's views and experiences were heard and considered in decision-making.
- Carried out Enter and View visits to local services, speaking to people about their experiences and reporting their findings to help improve care.



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.



Jenny

“Being a volunteer for Healthwatch has allowed me to be part of a worthwhile organisation whilst learning new skills and meeting interesting people from all walks of life. The staff are supportive and they provide training to give us volunteers the confidence to engage with the public.”

“I wanted to give something back to the community and decided to volunteer with Healthwatch Shropshire as they champion the voice of people using health and social care services. I also wanted to volunteer with a reputable organisation that value and support volunteers well, so that I can help make a difference to people’s lives.”



Kate

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.

We have a range of volunteer roles from public facing to behind the scenes.



www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk



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enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

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

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual Healthwatch grant from Government	£156,573	Expenditure on pay	£133,770
Annual IHCAS Grant from Local Government	£19,572	Non-pay expenditure	£16,421
		Office and management fee	£18,250
Total income	£176,145	Total Expenditure	£168,441

Additional income

Healthwatch Shropshire Received no additional funding in 2025-26.

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch Shropshire received no funding from the Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work in 2025-26. This is the same as last year.

Healthwatch Shropshire joins Community Resource

This year, in response to receiving no increase in our funding and rising costs, the Board of the charity 'Healthwatch Shropshire' made the decision to novate the Healthwatch Shropshire contract to Community Resource from 1st July 2025 to ensure we remain financially viable. The Board have remained with us as we formally close the charity and to ensure a smooth transition. We are proud to say that we have continued to provide the same quality of service, engagement and remain independent. This report illustrates our ongoing commitment to championing the public voice, involving communities and providing constructive feedback to services.

Finance and future priorities

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people who are less likely to have their voices heard, 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 three priorities for the next year are:

1. To advocate for Healthwatch and the **continued provision of an independent organisation to champion the voice of people in Shropshire** and ensure their experiences of health and social care services are heard and inform service development and improvement.
2. To **routinely use all methods of engagement to hear from as many people as possible across Shropshire**, particularly those with lived experience, by working with our team of volunteers and partner organisations. Including, using our Enter & View powers to speak to people at the point of receiving services.
3. Conduct activities that will **inform the work of the NHS and Shropshire Council by understanding their priorities while also highlighting the emerging issues** raised with us by the people of Shropshire that might otherwise be missed.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Shropshire, 4 The Creative Quarter, Shrewsbury Business Park, Shrewsbury SY2 6LG until 30th June 2025. Thereafter contract held by Community Resource, 4 The Creative Quarter, Shrewsbury Business Park, Shrewsbury SY2 6LG

Healthwatch Shropshire (Community Resource) use 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.

This year the Healthwatch Shropshire Board consisted of seven members who worked voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensured that decisions about priority areas of work reflected the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met one time to approve our priorities, the forward plan and the novation of the contract to Community Resource. We have continued to ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by involving our volunteers and developing a new Community Voice Panel of interested members of the public with Community Resource. The panel will act as the Healthwatch Decision Making Body and meet formally four times a year.

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, held regular stands in libraries and hospitals and attended meetings of community groups and forums to speak to people directly.

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 and share directly with people signed up to our newsletter.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

All providers approached 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 about the insights and experiences shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, we are a member of the Shropshire Health and Wellbeing Board and co-opted onto the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin (STW) Integrated Care System through regular provider information sharing meetings and committees/groups. For example, both Healthwatch Shropshire and Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin, attend:

- The Quality and Performance Committee for the local system
- The System Quality Group (also attended by NHS England)
- The Urgent and Emergency Care Delivery Group (also attended by NHSE)

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

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Shropshire is represented on the Shropshire Health and Wellbeing Board by Lynn Cawley (Chief Officer), deputised by Trustees or staff members as appropriate.

During 2025/6, our representative has effectively carried out this role by delivering presentations on our engagement reports and providing constructive challenge and sharing feedback from the public about their experiences of local services to inform discussions.

Lynn Cawley (Chief Officer) also represents Healthwatch Shropshire on the Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Partnership and Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Swan Hill House Residential Home - Shrewsbury	To speak to residents about their quality of life in the home; especially choices they could make and their levels of comfort and relationship with staff.	Developed a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these via the following: 1. Senior staff have been allocated to be contacted in the event of the head of care not being available 2. Redesigning and decorating communal areas to meet service users preferences
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital Ward 28 (Frailty)	To assess the effectiveness of the wards efforts to ensure timely discharge from the hospital.	Developed a report with recommendations – the service followed up on these via the following: 1. Development of a monthly written staff briefing to ensure staff are receiving all positive feedback 2. Development of a small social area on the ward with painting of the walls in a dementia friendly colour palette. 3- Regular updates on the Re-conditioning programme for all staff.
Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust – Midlands Centre for Spinal Injuries	To listen to people's experience of inpatient care and rehabilitation and how supported they feel in their recovery and care planning	Developed a report with recommendations – the Trust has followed up on these via the following: 1. The matron will oversee the implementation of a quality improvement project to improve goal setting 2. Provide support to patients with mental ill health to access relevant support services.

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Share for Better Care 2025 (Community Hospitals)	Engagement stands at 3 Community Hospitals heard from 34 people about their experiences of the hospital and local services, highlighted the value of community-based care.. The campaign resulted in an additional 260 comments shared with us by phone or online.
Share for Better Care 2026 (GP Roadshow)	Engagement Officer visited 43 GP practices and promoted the campaign on social media and on the website – increased comments by 400% during the SFBC week and increased HWS visibility within GP practices.

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