



Together

we're making health
and social care better

Annual Report 2022–23

healthwatch
Tower Hamlets

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"In the last ten years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of local Healthwatch hasn't. Your local Healthwatch has worked tirelessly to make sure the views of local people are heard, and NHS and social care leaders use your feedback to make care better."

Louise Ansari, Healthwatch National Director

Message from Tim Spilsbury

I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce the inaugural annual report for Healthwatch Tower Hamlets under Your Voice in Health and Social Care (YVHSC) and to reflect on what has been a successful year.



Tim Spilsbury
YVHSC CEO

During this time, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets have continued their statutory responsibility to obtain the views of people about their needs and experience of local health and social care services, make those views known to those involved in the commissioning and scrutiny of care services, provide reports and make recommendations about how those services could or should be improved, and promote and support the involvement of people in the monitoring, commissioning and provision of local health and social care services.

This year, working with our partners in health and social care, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets launched 18 separate reports of which the Maternity Equity and Equality focused on the experiences of inequality in maternity provision. Our Healthy Neighbourhoods work looked at what services are important to the people of Tower Hamlets and what changes they would like to see. The opinions of those we talked to shed light on the difficulties and disparities faced within the community. By engaging with their stories, we provide ourselves with a constructive base from which to improve their quality of care.

This year we gathered patient experience feedback from 2857 reviews to help us raise awareness of issues and improve care. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Healthwatch Tower Hamlets staff, committee members, volunteers and work placement students who have continued to work with dedication to ensure a responsive and vital service continues to support the local community.

About us

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets is your local health and social care champion.

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



Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission

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

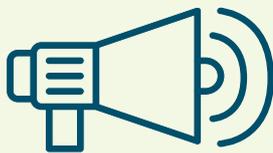


Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with health and care providers, local Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

Year in review

Reaching out



2,857 people

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

108 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as GP appointments and access to dental care.

Making a difference to care

We published

18 reports

reports about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Maternity Equity and Equality



Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

48

outstanding volunteers who gave up **30 hours** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2022-23 we received

£149,000

We currently employ

5 staff

who help us carry out our work.

How we've made a difference this year

Spring



Engaged with maternity service users, to better understand their experiences so NHS leaders could make improvements



Carried out interviews with Care Home staff on levels of GP service provision (Direct Enhanced Services).

Summer



We asked NHS leaders to review booking processes for appointments at GP practices due to issues people experience at GP practices in Tower Hamlets



Worked with 8 North East London Healthwatch to build an Insights System that's improving health and care services more quickly with over 90,000 comments from local residents

Autumn



Worked with the local authority to enable Tower Hamlets residents to provide feedback about their local area to improve their health and wellbeing.



Analysed comments from ethnic minority communities relating to mental health care which was presented to council leaders.

Winter



Teaming up with other Healthwatch in London, we supported the London Ambulance Service to gather patient views for their 2023/24 strategy.



We engaged with people expecting a child or who had a recent birthing experience, to support the development of an NHS maternity equity and equality strategy, aimed at ensuring all babies born and cared for have the best possible start in life.



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.

Positive changes to local neighbourhoods

Healthy Neighbourhoods are a new way of shaping how communities work. It is based on the concept of '15-minute neighbourhoods' where everyone has easy access to things that support them to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

These services include things like food shops, parks, health services, gyms, schools, places of worship and theatres.

We collected feedback from residents in Tower Hamlets to find out what services are important to them, and how well they currently support local people. We also asked residents to tell us what changes they would like to see within the borough. We spoke with over 350 local residents.

Our report recommendations:

1. Increased police presence in areas where crime and anti-social behaviour generally take place.
2. A public consultation on general traffic calming measures, and education around potential consequences of speeding.
3. A review of the current park maintenance routine, and waste collection and street cleaning services to identify areas for improvement.
4. Linking with existing volunteer groups to help with gardening, litter picking, and planting trees and flowers.
5. Introduction of fresh food shops that sell 'wonky' vegetables as well as free gym equipment in local parks.
6. Review the current offer of adult education courses, to create more affordable courses.
7. Introduction of more services and activities for young people, LGBT+ focused spaces, and accessible spaces for disabled people to socialise and take part in leisure activities.

What difference will this make?

The report of our findings will be presented to the Local Authority and will go towards formulating a plan to support the development of local neighbourhoods to improve people's health and well-being.

When implemented, these will ensure residents have better access to services without the need to travel, and Tower Hamlets will become a healthier, more equal, and safer borough where everyone is able to meet their needs within their own neighbourhoods.



"More accessible prices for gyms and more shops in the local area that do not sell processed food but instead healthy food."
Female resident in Tower Hamlets

Improving Maternity services in North-East London

Black and ethnic minority women and women living in deprived areas of the country are more likely to experience poor health outcomes when accessing maternity services compared to those from White ethnic backgrounds and women living in affluent areas.

With some of the most diverse and deprived areas in England located in North-East London, the seven local Healthwatch organisations conducted a project into ante- and post-natal services in North-East London to find out how they could be improved.

The study found some differences in how people from different backgrounds experience services, with Black women more likely to have commented on the services negatively.

The feedback also highlighted differences in experiences for those who are digitally excluded, as well as the need to address issues around language and cultural barriers.

Our findings were used to develop the North-East London Local Maternity and Neonatal System Equity and Equality Strategy and Action Plan, which includes the following changes to be implemented locally.

Changes to Maternity Services in NEL

- Work with Maternity Voice Partnership (MVP) Chairs, voluntary organisations and Healthwatch to establish further engagement and co-production working on areas around patient experience.
- Focus groups for communities from Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnic backgrounds and those from deprived areas, to ensure opportunities for feedback and to be involved in service development, to happen in an environment familiar and accessible to them.
- Scope training for staff regarding fluency vs. comprehension when assessing English proficiency to ensure pregnant women understand what is being shared and asked of them.
- Scope cultural competency training specific to maternity settings.



What difference will this make?

This announcement showed the power of people's feedback – with decision makers listening to women's voices and taking action as a result.



You were able to reach communities we never would have been able to reach on our own, and with that it meant the engagement was genuine, sensitive and considered. Utilising your existing relationships and establishing new contacts meant you collectively engaged with over 1,500 maternity stakeholders across the two projects and provided such in depth analysis far beyond what we were expecting.

Sarah Coulthard, Senior Communications & Campaigns Manager, NHS

Representing your views

During our first year of delivery, we have spent time building relationships and attending key meetings. We attended over **70** key strategic and operational meetings where we represented the voices of Tower Hamlets residents, encouraged public involvement and shared our intelligence.

Examples of meetings where we have championed local voices, engagement and presented our findings:

- Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB)
- Tower Hamlets Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee (HASSC)
- Tower Hamlets Engagement Leads
- Tower Hamlets Together Board
- Tower Hamlets Promoting Independence Board
- Tower Hamlets Living Well workstream
- Tower Hamlets Winter Comms and Engagement
- Healthwatch North-East London Community Insights Steering Group
- NHS North-East London (ICB/Healthwatch) Group
- North-East London Maternity Equity and Equality Group
- North-East London Care Homes Working Group
- Tower Hamlets Integrated Commissioning
- Tower Hamlets Co-production workshop – Task and Finish Group
- North-East London Cost of living workshop
- Tower Hamlets Health, Adults and Community, Department Leadership Team
- North-East London Digital Community Services Engagement Session
- NHS North-East London Integrated Care Partnership (full committee)
- Royal London Hospital Patient Experience Committee
- Royal London Hospital Executive Board



Patient Experience Programme

At Healthwatch Tower Hamlets we operate a comprehensive Patient Experience data collection programme as part of our duty around gathering and representing the views of patients and service users in the borough.

The implementation of the data collection programme will normally yield 4,800 patient experiences per annum all of which will be presented as they are received and considered as valid community opinion.

Our Patient Experience Programme

Our Patient Experience Programme gathers experiences of health and care services each quarter. This face-to-face engagement with the community is a cornerstone of our work, enabling us to understand the real time challenges local people experience when accessing health and care services.



Through a mixed methods approach to patient engagement, we collected 2,264 experiences from Tower Hamlets residents throughout 2022/2023. We restarted our face-to-face engagement in GPs and hospitals ensuring the safety of all staff and patients remain a priority, while also utilising phone calls and online reviews.

In their feedback, patients highlight areas of good practice alongside recommendations for further improvements of the service. From this we produce quarterly reports outlining key themes and trends of areas of service delivery that are worth celebrating as well as those that can be further developed.

“When seeing doctors, they listen to issues and do follow-ups.” **GP Patient**

“Getting an appointment is very difficult – a month late. Lots of private appointments but not NHS.” **Dental patient**

“More customer service training for the receptionist, they should not be asking patients personal questions in front of other patients.” **GP Patient**

“The staff were nice especially midwives were lovely. Communicated well and treated me properly in labour.” **Royal London Hospital patient**

“Clean and easy to access from my surgery as it is next door. Answer my phone calls.” **Pharmacy service user**

“Waiting time is 6 hours – even with children. More communication is needed when you're waiting.” **Royal London Hospital patient**

Three ways we have developed our Patient Experience Programme

Throughout our work we gather feedback from local people about their experiences of health and care services. This year we reviewed and improved how we do this.

Launching a new website



It's important for local people to be able to share their experience of services back to Healthwatch and access clear and up to date information and signposting about health and care services.

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets updated its website in 2022/23, reviewing and refreshing content and benefitting from the most up to date knowledge on design and accessibility. Our new website contains health advice and guidance on changes across the system, as well as practical information like how to register with a GP when you have no fixed address. You can find all our news and reports on the website, feedback your experience of care and more!

Refreshing our patient feedback form



Our Patient Experience Programme gathers 1200 experiences of health and care services each quarter. It is a cornerstone of our work enabling us to understand the real time challenges local people experience when accessing health and care services.

During 2022/23 we revamped our feedback form, updating it with questions that really matter to patients and service users. We aligned some questions with the national GP Patient Survey so in future we will be able to do direct comparisons of results. We have also ensured our data can link easily to Healthwatch England's national database, enabling the voice of people from Tower Hamlets to have a stronger profile in their national work.

New Patient Experience Report



Our quarterly Patient Experience Report provides a vital overview of the themes and trends in access and care experienced at GP surgeries, our local Hospital and other health and care services.

Our report has been redesigned this year, making it more accessible and easier to use. What was once a 50+ page document with charts and detailed narrative has now been broken down into snapshot data and key overview information. Trends from quarter to quarter are clearly highlighted and service specific recommendations will help our staff and committee members champion the changes needed across the system, in the many meetings they attend!



Hearing from all communities

Over the past year we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently, to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard and services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Attending community/voluntary group meetings with visual impaired service users, a Somali women's group and an LGBT group to understand their experiences of health and care services in the borough and what improvements could be made to help them feel less isolated as individual communities.
- Sharing feedback and insights from service users with NHS North-East London ICB to help them improve their services.
- Engaged with residents about their local neighbourhoods and what improvements they would like to see which would improve their health and wellbeing.

LGBT+

Our Healthier Neighbourhoods Study included an 'inclusivity' focus enabling us to hear from seldom heard groups.

Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (LGBT+) respondents highlighted the need for more inclusivity and the integration of different communities within Tower Hamlets. Some comments related to suggestions on more LGBT+ spaces, events, and services. One respondent commented on a lack of visibility of the LGBT+ community in the local newspaper.

Residents told us that making the borough more inclusive would increase their feeling of safety and make accessing different services easier due to not being afraid.



41% of LGBT+ residents told us they do not feel safe in their local area compared to 23% of Heterosexual people."



Bangladeshi community

Through our Healthier Neighbourhoods Study we sought to engage with different ethnic groups that live in the borough.

We found that the Bangladeshi community was particularly hesitant to take part in our survey due to a belief that it will not result in any changes.. Despite the lower than hoped for response rate, we found that:

- People of Bangladeshi ethnicity would like to see an improvement in services and activities for children and young people
- The community rated having a bus station as the most important service to have near their home.
- The community rated having a place of worship near home as important but less than 2 out of 3 people told us that they had one within 15 minutes from home.



““We are fortunate to have a few local tube stations and bus stops within walking distance. However, this is not the case for all of Tower Hamlets.” Female, 25-34, Bangladeshi

Female, 25-34, Bangladeshi ethnic group



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Providing up to date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Helping people access NHS dentistry
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost of living crisis

Help with accessing mental health services

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets were contacted for advice and information on mental health support.

The impact of delayed access to mental health support resulted in a local resident contacting us as a last resort.

“I raised the alarm and asked for help but felt like I was being dismissed until Healthwatch Tower Hamlets gave me some advice”

Tower Hamlets resident

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets advice and information has meant people who need information on mental health services know their options and have clear information.

In addition to providing vital advice and information to residents, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets shared information with the local Adult Safeguarding Team and presented a report on Ethnic Minority Communities Access to Mental Health services to the local Health and Adult Sub Scrutiny Committee.

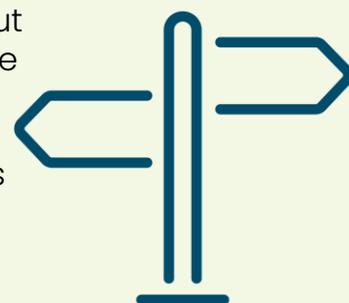
Helping residents in the cost-of-living crisis

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets worked with the local authority and local community/voluntary organisations on the boroughs Winter Communications and Engagement Plan Project. Across the partnership they helped residents with information to support them during the winter cost of living crisis, as well as providing information in a wide range of community languages.

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets received a call from a resident who had been absent from work due to health issues and contacted us about local food banks. This resident was experiencing financial difficulties due to the rising cost of living, as the statutory sick pay, they received was insufficient to cover their monthly expenses.

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets provided them with information about nearby food banks and advised them to check if they were eligible for any additional welfare benefits.

Consequently, the resident was able to access the Tower Hamlets resident support scheme and receive further assistance.





Volunteers and Work Placements

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

We also provide a number of paid work placement opportunities to those of working age and those with learning disabilities, supporting people to learn new skills and develop their experience.

Work Placements



Work Placements at Healthwatch Tower Hamlets

During our first year of serving the borough and shining a light on health and social care issues, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets also had the pleasure of offering four local resident's paid work placement opportunities.

Two of the placements were offered to local people with learning disabilities and two for people who had been out of work for a long period.

The placements gave the candidates an invaluable opportunity to take part in a range of Healthwatch activities including creating promotional materials for the website and social media channels, attending community events, engaging with local people to find out about their experiences of using local health and social care services, and attending meetings with local authority and NHS leaders.

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets believe these work placements are great way to support local people in the community who may have struggled to gain opportunities in the past or were not given a fair chance due to difficulties they may encounter.

We believe the placements provide a good platform for local people that will increase their confidence, gain experience of working in an office environment, to be creative and learn new skills at their own pace.

“As a small busy service it can be challenging and resource intensive to accommodate work placements and provide them with individualised support. The team has really come together to offer a varied and personalised work plan for each of our work placements and it has been a pleasure to watch them grow and gain confidence over their two-week period with us. We look forward to supporting them further in their employment journey”

Matthew Adrien, Service Director, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets



Amina

"I first came across Healthwatch a few months ago through friends who had used the services. And when an opportunity to complete a placement arose, I was very happy and looking forward to start."

"My time here at Healthwatch has really solidified my passion for wanting to work in the local community to improve health and social care."



Shreya

"I was recommended the Healthwatch work placement programme by my work coach at the job centre. It was an appealing opportunity for getting into the admin side of the healthcare field."

"I was able to improve my confidence in communication and my knowledge of health and social care issues. It was fascinating to see what measures are taken so that the issues can be addressed".



Ebba

"Working at Healthwatch Tower Hamlets was amazing. I absolutely enjoyed being in an office space doing all types of fun tasks. It was brilliant, I can't wait to do more!"

I have interacted with my co-workers in a professional manner as well as getting some feedback with the stuff from the posters I have done. The best thing about the placement was that I could be creative with a lot of posters and flyers"



Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers and work placements, so please get in touch today.



www.healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk



00800 145 5343



info@healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

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 (unaudited)

| Income | | Expenditure | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Income from Local Authority | £149,000 | Expenditure on pay | £119,000 |
| Additional income | £10,000 | Non-pay expenditure | £16,000 |
| | | Office and management fee | £24,000 |
| Total income | £159,000 | Total expenditure | £159,000 |

Additional income is broken down by:

- **£5,000 funding** received from London Ambulance Service
- **£5,000 funding** received from NHS North East London

Next steps

In the ten years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in helping the health and care system understand what is working, spot issues and think about how things can be better in the future.

Services are currently facing unprecedented challenges and tackling the backlog needs to be a key priority for the NHS to ensure everyone gets the care they need. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving them a voice to help shape improvements to services.

We will also continue our work to tackling inequalities that exist and work to reduce the barriers you face when accessing care, regardless whether that is because of where you live, income or race.

Top three priorities for 2023-24

1. Cancer Screening
2. Mental Health (digital health, older people and access to mental health services)
3. Oral Health for residents within Care Homes.



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets, Pill Box, 115 Coventry Road
Unit 104, London

The contract holder is Your Voice in Health and Social
Care, 45 St. Marys Road, Ealing, W5 5RG

Healthwatch **Tower Hamlets** uses the Healthwatch
Trademark when undertaking our statutory
activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Local Advisory Committee consists of 6 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Committee ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Throughout 2022/23 the Board met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as approving any recommendations to be shared with local authority/NHS leaders on our maternity reports and setting future priority areas for our Enter and View visits.

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 have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of using services. During 2022/23 we have been available by phone, email, provided a webform on our website and through social media, as well as attending 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 [take copies to engagement events, publish a monthly newsletter, social media posts, and share it via link or email with relevant stakeholders.](#)

Responses to recommendations

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so 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 insight and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area for example we take information to the Health and Adults Sub Scrutiny Committee, Tower Hamlets Together Board and Tower Hamlets Promoting Independence Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision makers at [North-East London \(NEL\) integrated Care System](#). For example, we [meet with our 8 other Healthwatch at the NEL level and discuss local issues, current projects and insights with the NEL ICS engagement team and feed our reports into the NEL community insight system.](#)

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

Enter and view

No Enter and Views were carried out in 2022/23.

2022–2023 Outcomes

| Project/ activity | Changes made to services |
|--|---|
| Care Homes Direct Enhanced Service (DES) project | Partners used the feedback locally to bring key partners together for a wider discussion on the Direct Enhanced Service in Tower Hamlets. |
| London Ambulance Service | Improving patient education to reduce the number of unnecessary calls to 999 services and directing people to call 111 instead. |

healthwatch

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