



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets 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

I am delighted to welcome you to the fourth annual report from Healthwatch Tower Hamlets, which has a statutory responsibility to residents.

In addition to acting in our local area, publishing independent reports and making constructive recommendations we aim to make sure that local views reach the national level through the Healthwatch network which covers other parts of England.

Together with North East London Healthwatch partners, this year we:

- Identified 655,165 issues from the experiences of 162,365 people in the area.
- Generated 1040 reports and 317 dashboards of GP and hospital services alone which will greatly facilitate monitoring of developments.

Each year, we select two topics for scrutiny based on issues that residents have told us about and that may align broadly with the strategic priorities and commissioning plans of service providers.

Our topics this year were:

- The experiences and barriers to perimenopause and menopause support in Tower Hamlets.
- The experiences of health and social care services for older people from the Somali, Chinese, Jewish and Vietnamese communities.

To conclude, this year we thank patients and families for reviews on health and care services which greatly exceeded our target of 4800 reviews and are helping us to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

Catherine Moody – Acting Chair



About us

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets 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 **11,923** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **4** staff and, our work was supported by **50** volunteers.



Reaching out:

8,252 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

3,671 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as **mental health support** and **checking hospital test results online**.



Championing your voice:

We published **26** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **special educational needs**, **cardiovascular disease** and **pharmacies**.

Our most popular report was **Experiences and Barriers to Perimenopause and Menopause support in Tower Hamlets**, highlighting people's struggles in **understanding their symptoms and support that may be available**.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by **Tower Hamlets Council**. In 2025/26 we received **£149,000**, which is the **same** as 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 Tower Hamlets. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We attended various health fairs to speak to men over 65 to understand how health and care services could better support them in the community with cardiovascular disease.



Our 2024 survey on the 'Barriers to accessing Mental Health services' was shared with residents of a new pilot neighbourhood mental health centre to help the NHS improve services for residents of the centre.



Summer

We presented our Information and Signposting Services to Public Health Community Navigators and explored ways we could collaborate and improve advice and information services for local people.



Our feedback from users of local maternity and neonatal services supported improvements to services for people who are on maternity journeys.



Autumn

We observed a shift with the Physician Response Unit, based at the Royal London Hospital, attending consultations with vulnerable patients at home, thereby reducing unnecessary hospital visits.



Our insights on young people with SEND transitioning to adulthood were shared with the council leaders at the Safeguarding Adults Board conference.



Winter

We spoke to residents at a Health, Wellbeing and Disability Expo who told us of the difficulties they faced when seeking employment or training due to their health conditions.



We arranged for a menopause specialist from Barts Health NHS Trust to hold an information session about perimenopause and menopause with local carers.



Working together for change

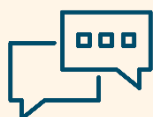
We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in East London are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at North East London ICS.

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across **North East London** to achieve the following:



Working together for Change

Collaboration between Local Healthwatch organisations, whether within a region or across different parts of the country, strengthens local voices, enables shared learning and supports change at a wider level. By working together, Healthwatch can identify common challenges, compare effective approaches and build a stronger evidence base to inform service improvement at both regional and national levels.



Using insight to drive change:

In North East London, this partnership is delivered through the Community Insights Programme with the Integrated Care Board. It brings together the experiences of 193,448 local people (up from 163,340 last year) and has identified 655,165 issues, concerns and examples of good practice (previously 540,000). Using the Community Insights System, the eight Healthwatch organisations have produced 1,040 reports and 396 dashboards on GP and hospital services alone (previously 822 reports and 317 dashboards). This provides Healthwatch and system partners with a strong source of evidence to spot trends, understand variation between communities and inform planning, commissioning and service improvement.



Improving access to GP services:

Across North East London, we worked with Healthwatch partners to review the GP registration process for people who may not have formal identification. This included understanding how many local practices had signed up to the Safe Surgeries commitment, created by Doctors of the World, and exploring how accessible registration was for people facing barriers to care. The work strengthened collaboration across the region and helped highlight where services can become more inclusive, accessible and responsive.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

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 Tower Hamlets this year:

Young people transitioning to adulthood – SEND

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



We presented the views of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) transitioning to adulthood to the stakeholders and residents at the Tower Hamlets Council Safeguarding Adults board conference and Adults Safeguarding Residents event.

This helped raise awareness of the need for an earlier start to the transition process to allow enough time for planning and the need for more training and employment opportunities for young people to ensure a financially secure future.



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 Tower Hamlets this year:



Co-production and Engagement Delivery review

Helping shape the future engagement with residents regarding health and care services in the local community.

With Healthwatch set to be abolished in 2027 as part of the NHS Modernisation Bill, the government is planning to transfer the local Healthwatch organisations' statutory duties to local councils and the NHS.

To ensure our future commitment to continue our work to advocate for the patient voice in health and social care, we carried out a Co-Production and Engagement Consultation by speaking to residents, volunteers, community groups, carers, and local partners to help us understand and shape the future of health and care once Healthwatch services are abolished.

We wanted to understand how future services could work more closely with communities, focus on local needs, include groups who are often left out, and demonstrate impact in improved ways.

Residents who use health and care services, especially those who are seldom heard, have important ideas that should guide local plans, reviews and decisions.

Residents should continue to have the opportunities to share and voice their experiences once Healthwatch is abolished.

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 all areas of our community. 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.



Supporting women experiencing perimenopause/menopause

Last year, people told us that more needs to be done to raise awareness and understanding of the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause.

What did we do

We launched a survey and spoke to 113 women about their experiences and barriers to support for perimenopause and menopause in Tower Hamlets.

Key things we heard:



27%

told us that a lack of knowledge of perimenopause and menopause had prevented them from accessing support.

35%

told us that having access to more information and educational resources would help them.

51%

had positive experiences with healthcare professionals who provided effective and person-centred support and treatment.

Our research showed that more work needs to be done to raise awareness of perimenopause and menopause, to understand the symptoms and how people can access the right support they need.

What difference did this make?

Our findings and recommendations will be shared with NHS senior leaders and local stakeholders to help develop improvements.

Understanding People's Experiences of the NHS App in Tower Hamlets

Insights from residents about their awareness, experiences, and use of the NHS App.

We spoke to 68 residents and 51 staff working in primary care services to identify barriers that prevent residents from using the NHS App, including digital skills, registration or login issues, language barriers, access to devices, and confidence using technology.

Key things we heard:



38%

of residents told us they had never used the NHS App before.

19%

of respondents said they had difficulties booking appointments which created a barrier for them using the app.

Our research showed that some residents had negative experiences using the NHS App and struggled due to limited or a lack of digital skills and language barriers.

Staff members within the local primary care networks told us that older residents, migrant communities and people with language barriers struggled the most in navigating the NHS App.

What difference did this make?

We will produce a report and share the findings and recommendations with NHS senior leaders, primary care network leads and staff.

Listening to your experiences

Patient Experience in Tower Hamlets

In 2025–26, we spoke to 7,830 residents about their experiences of health and social care services within Tower Hamlets.

What did we do?

We completed 102 health care visits to speak to residents about their health and care services. Most visits during this year took place at local GP practices across the borough and at the Royal London Hospital.

Key things we heard:



24%

of respondents did not find it easy to get an appointment with their GP.

28%

of respondents thought communication between their GP and hospital was good.

36%

of respondents rated the quality of care and treatment received from their GP as good.

Appointment availability and waiting times upon arrival were highlighted as areas of ongoing concern for patients throughout the year.

Feedback relating to staff attitudes and the quality of treatment provided for patients was generally positive during 2025–26.

What difference did this make?

We were able to present our findings and recommendations from our patient experience engagement to the Tower Hamlets Primary Care Transformation Group and the Royal London Hospital Patient Experience Committee meetings.

We shared data and insights with some GP practices who contacted us to get a better understanding of what their patients were feeding back to us to help support improvements to their individual practices or health centres.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Tower Hamlets. 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:

- Continuing our work experience programme for local secondary school students to gain experience working in a professional environment and helping to improve their confidence and communication skills.
- Attending meetings with women at the Bengali Women's Online Peer Support Group for women who are isolated or unable to leave home, The Carers Centre, The Wild Women Collective, and Oceans Women's Association coffee morning to increase awareness of our work and provide information and signposting.
- Speaking with older people from the Jewish, Somali, Vietnamese and Chinese communities to understand their experiences of health and care services.



Listening to Older people from the Jewish, Somali, Vietnamese and Chinese Communities

We investigated access to health and care services for these community groups.

Tower Hamlets is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in the UK, with a growing population of older adults, many of whom experience long-term conditions, social isolation, and barriers to health and social care

What difference did this make?

We will gather insights and identify barriers that may prevent older adults from these specific ethnic backgrounds from accessing support.

We will capture perceptions of existing services, including what has worked well and what needs improvement.

Heard about the barriers faced by the deaf and hard-of-hearing community

We attended a workshop facilitated by Deafplus to hear of the challenges and barriers faced by residents who are deaf or hard of hearing.

We were taken through the support available for the NHS App, 999 BSL App and navigating NHS 111.

Participants also discussed some limitations of the online health services specifically when accessing emergency services.

What difference did this make?

We want to engage further with residents who are deaf or hard of hearing to gather their insights and experiences of health and care services and share these with senior leaders within health and care services.

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 **3,671** people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help 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
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Information and signposting

Helping to Establish Patient Participation Group

A resident contacted us for advice on establishing a Patient Participation Group (PPG) at their GP practice.

They were keen to learn from people already involved in successful PPGs and wanted to understand the best approaches to setting up a new group. We connected the resident with a member of an established PPG in the local area, who agreed to share their experience and provide support and guidance as they worked towards setting up a new PPG at their practice.

Providing information on perimenopause and menopause

As part of our menopause research project, our team attended meetings with local women's groups and community organisations to listen to residents' experiences and raise awareness of menopause-related support.

Through these conversations, we found that the terms perimenopause and menopause were still unfamiliar to many people, with limited understanding of the symptoms and the support available. In response, we shared information about perimenopause and menopause, explained common symptoms, and signposted residents to local services, helping to improve awareness and understanding.

We also found that many residents were unaware of the Women's Health Hub at Mile End Hospital. Our team provided information about the range of services available through the Hub and explained how residents could access them through the referral process.

Refreshing our Information and Signposting materials

Our volunteers and staff decided to refresh and update our Information and Signposting materials following resident feedback at community engagement events and from phone call enquiries.

Our volunteers co-produced new leaflets that group relevant services together. This will make it much easier to provide guidance to the community so that they can navigate between disability support and safeguarding, for example.

We have also produced a Healthwatch Tower Hamlets-branded Information and Signposting Guide that contains information on support organisations in Tower Hamlets in one place, making it easier to signpost residents to the appropriate services.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given **over 200 days** 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 services, such as Idea Stores, events and community centres to promote Healthwatch and our work.
- Designed leaflets and posters to promote our services on social media.
- Supported building partnerships by contacting local organisations to promote our research projects.
- Carried out Enter & View visits to Pharmacies, dental practices and co-produced reports to help improve these services for patients and staff.



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.



Isabella

"Throughout my time volunteering at Healthwatch, I have gained a lot of confidence in my creative communication, health-related writing skills and ability to effectively communicate the organisation's message to the community.

Volunteering at Healthwatch has highlighted the importance of community engagement in shaping and improving healthcare services. It has also emphasised the vital role that local health and social care organisations, such as Healthwatch, play in supporting the health and wellbeing of underserved communities."

"I joined Healthwatch Tower Hamlets to gain UK experience and to upskill myself. From the beginning, it has been a very valuable learning experience. I had the chance to speak with a wide range of people living in Tower Hamlets and listen to their experiences with NHS healthcare services.

Healthwatch gave me the opportunity to work on a mini research project about the NHS App, which helped me understand the challenges people face when using digital health services. I also worked independently on the NHS Safe Surgeries initiative.



Darshana

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.



www.healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk



0800 145 5343



info@healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk

co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Tower Hamlets 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	£149,965.20	Expenditure on pay	£110,018.36
Additional income	£1,500	Non-pay expenditure	£124,456
		Office and management fee	£28,990.84
Total income	£151,465.20	Total Expenditure	£151,465.20

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across **North East London** also receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Representation on NEL ICS Strategic meetings	£5,000
	0£
	0£

Finance and future priorities

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, 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. Sharing our independent research and reports with leaders within health and social care that have a meaningful impact of local people's health and wellbeing.
2. Co-producing and co-designing of our work with our valued volunteers.
3. Engaging with people who experience loneliness or isolation to hear their views and experiences of health and care services.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets, 21 Old Ford Road, Bethnal Green, E2 9PJ

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 Board consists of **5** 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 diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met **4** times and made decisions on matters such as **setting our priority research topics and approving any recommendations for our Enter and View visits**. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

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, 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, e-newsletter, and social media posts, share copies at engagement events, and with relevant stakeholders.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had 0 providers who did not respond 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 take information to **the Strategic Advisory Group, Primary Care Transformation Group, Tower Hamlets Together board, Safeguarding Adults board, and Mental Health Partnership board, where we share what we have heard with decision-makers on a local authority level.**

We also take insights and experiences to decision-makers in the North-East London Integrated Care System (NEL ICS). For example, we meet with 7 other Healthwatch at the NEL level and discuss local issues, current projects and insights within 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.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets is represented on the **Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Board by Matthew Adrien, Service Director of Healthwatch Tower Hamlets.**

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets is represented on the **NHS North East London Integrated Care Partnerships and the NHS North East London Integrated Care Boards by Matthew Adrien.**

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Fresh Springs Dental Practice	High volume of feedback which were mostly positive.	Produced a report with recommendations for the practice to consider.
The Royal London Dental Hospital	To observe how the dental hospital operates and understand the factors contributing to both positive and negative feedback.	To produce a report with recommendations on areas where the dental hospital could improve services for patients.
Sundial Day care centre	To observe how members view the services provided at the centre.	A report will be produced highlighting the views of users and any recommendations to follow up.

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Young people with SEND transitioning to adulthood	Tower Hamlets Council Transition Board will continue to give transition high priority and be inclusive of those supported by SEND.
Experiences of Perimenopause and Menopause support in Tower Hamlets	Report to be published, shared and presented to key stakeholders and senior leaders.
Experiences of health and care services of older people from the Jewish, Somali, Vietnamese and Chinese communities.	Report to be drafted on completion of the project and shared with key stakeholders.
Safe Surgeries	Results from the mystery shopping exercise to be shared with GP practices and Primary Care Network leads
Views and experiences of the NHS App	Report to be produced and shared with key stakeholders and NHS leaders.

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