



Together
we're making health
and social care better

Annual Report 2022–23

healthwatch
Islington

Contents

Message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Highlights from our year	5
Listening to your experiences	8
Hearing from all communities	13
Advice and information	15
Volunteers	17
Finances and future priorities	19
Statutory statements	20



“

In the last ten years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of our staff, volunteers and partners continues. We're working hard to make sure we hear from a broad range of residents and that the experiences you share with us are heard, and used to make NHS and social care more equitable.”

Emma Whitby, Healthwatch Islington Chief Executive

Message from our Chair

It gives me great pleasure to introduce our annual report for 2022-23. It's been a great year of growth for Healthwatch Islington.

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across North Central London to promote the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Talking to residents about the dangers of high blood pressure (which affects as many as one in five of us in Islington and can lead to stroke and heart attack), we reached around 800 residents through stalls at Chapel Market, events with local community partners and targeted work with our Diverse Communities Health Voice (DCHV) partners.

We worked with these same partners and with Mind to promote Motivational Interviewing (a form of counselling that helps people to make positive behaviour change). In addition, through our Mental Health Partnerships Coordinator, we linked DCHV partners with Population Health Nurses to offer health checks to 100 residents in local community settings. This developed into more focussed mental health themed workshops covering topics including sleeplessness, drug use and depression. These sessions have been very much welcomed by residents.

Together with statutory partners (Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust, Whittington Health, our local GP lead for mental health, and Islington Council) and voluntary sector colleagues (Diverse Communities Health Voice partners, Maya Centre, Nafsiyat and Mind) we have produced a guide to promoting diversity and inclusion. Commissioners are asking potential providers of local services to reference this guide when bidding to deliver services in the borough.

We've extended our digital inclusion work, to include supporting four organisations



Ralph Hughes
Healthwatch Islington Chair

to support residents in a wider range of languages, and we've secured £17,000 worth of free or subsidised equipment to support residents for whom finances are one of the barriers. We also piloted a scheme to support 50 residents in North 1 Primary Care Network to get online.

We continued our community engagement raising around £150,000 to diversify our reach by sub-contracting community partners. We investigated primary care access, awareness of cancer screening and lung disease in a range of ethnic minority communities and experiences of residents who identify as LGBTQI+. We'll be following up on the findings in the coming year.

Finally, two of our trustees moved on from Healthwatch Islington. Jana Witt had been with Healthwatch since it started and made a wonderful contribution to our culture and achievements. Angelica Larkin joined us in the pandemic, only meeting colleagues in person two years into her term, but she showed a real passion for supporting our staff team. We wish them both all the best. It is an honour to step into the Chair at Healthwatch Islington, and I'll be supported by Vice Chair Chloe Wright and our committed and knowledgeable Board.

About us

Healthwatch Islington 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

Improved health and social care outcomes for local residents.



Our mission

- **To collect knowledge** that reflects the diversity of needs and experiences within the borough and encourage people to feedback their honest views on services.
- **To use the evidence** we gather to influence service delivery, provision and commissioning for the benefit of local people to improve their experience.
- To reach out to **empower our local community** to be informed about and involved in local services and exercise choice in taking up services.
- **To support the independent assessment and audit of local services.**

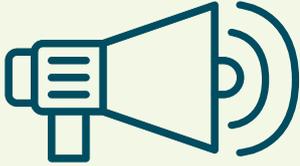


Our values

- We want to engage communities on issues that matter to them, in ways that are accessible and meaningful to them.
- We don't ask people to give us their opinions or feedback on services without offering them information or support in return.

Year in review

Reaching out



1,133 people

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

390 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost of living crisis. There were 4,945 visits to the advice pages on our website.

Making a difference to care

We published

7 reports

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

Our most popular report was

Mystery shopping pharmacies

which investigated how accessible local pharmacies were for residents with wheelchairs, baby buggies, or limited mobility.



Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

49

outstanding volunteers who gave up 135 days to make care better for our community.

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

£156,100

which is the same as the previous year.

We employ (as of 31 March 2023)

9 staff

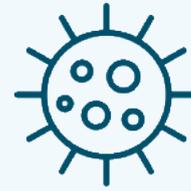
who help us carry out our work. Some staff work part-time so this is equivalent to 6.4 full-time staff.

How we've made a difference this year

Spring



We visited 40 local pharmacies to ensure they were accessible for people in wheelchairs or with limited mobility.



Our feedback helped improve access to Long Covid support for patients who lived in one borough but used services in another.

Summer



We gave free blood pressure checks to well over 600 residents at Chapel Market and CallyFest to raise awareness of the dangers of high blood pressure.



Our Inequalities Toolkit inspired 8 organisations to each pledge 3 actions to become more inclusive. Commissioners will ask new providers to make pledges.

Autumn



Our volunteers rang GP practices as though booking an appointment to find out how much recorded information they had to listen to and whether it was up to date.



We gathered feedback on support to stop smoking and pulmonary rehabilitation services from almost 100 residents that didn't have English as a first language.

Winter



We brought residents and practices together to look at GP websites and how they could be made easier to navigate for less digitally confident patients.



We shared our report on cancer screening services with commissioners, stressing that the provision of clear information to patients was vital.

10 years of improving care

This year marks a special milestone for Healthwatch. Over the last ten years, people have shared their experiences, good and bad, to help improve health and social care. A big thank you to everyone that has shared their experiences and inspired change. Here are a few of our highlights:

How have we made care better, together?

Interpreting services

We drew attention to failures by services to consistently offer interpreting support and worked with commissioners to bring change.



Mental health

We spoke to 50 young adults from vulnerable backgrounds to learn which mental health support services they would find most useful. This helped shape future provision.

Social workers' phones

We told Islington Council it was difficult to get through to the social work team. They made the changes we recommended and now far fewer calls go unanswered.



Patient transport

We told commissioners that more needed to be done to make the service accessible, and that eligibility criteria needed to be clearer so patients could appeal when transport wasn't offered.

NHS dentistry

We warned decision-makers that unregistered patients had less access to NHS treatment, irrespective of their level of need. We also helped many people in pain to find a dentist.





Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Improving the messaging on GP phone lines and websites

GP websites can be hard to navigate and present many barriers to patients who are not confident online. This year, Healthwatch digital champions, digital learners, and research volunteers have come together to identify ways to improve how information is presented on GP websites and on GP phone systems. Based on this feedback, commissioners are producing template resources that will make it easier for individual practices to provide key information in more accessible ways.

Staff and digital champions ran one-to-one and group sessions with residents who wanted to improve their confidence online. Participants included patients belonging to a group of seven practices in North Islington. We also ran website audit workshops for practices in Central Islington. As well as learning the skills they needed to interact in the digital space, learners were invited to give feedback on the experience of finding their way round the GP websites.

Healthwatch volunteers rang all Islington practices to see how long recorded messages were, whether the information was up to date, and note what information was included. Another research volunteer analysed the feedback on GP websites and reported back to commissioners. Observations included:



- Extended access/out of hours appointments were easier for people to find on GP websites when listed under headers that used more patient-focussed language such as 'What to do when the practice is closed'.
- Although there were some good examples, it wasn't always possible for patients to easily learn when they could see a healthcare professional face-to-face. Sites should ensure these appointments are clearly advertised with easily followed routes to book.
- Some practices used recorded messages to let patients know that it was possible to self-refer to services such as physiotherapy, podiatry and NHS talking therapies without needing to wait for a GP appointment. More practices should do this.

What was the impact of our work?

Decision-makers responsible for GP services have worked with us to produce 'Getting the best out of your practice website and phoneline' a resource being distributed across general practice in Islington to support providers to improve their messaging.



"This piece of work from Healthwatch has been really valuable. We can use it to work with providers to improve access."

**Sarah Pallis, Primary Care Development Officer, Islington Directorate
NHS North Central London integrated Care Board**

Helping increase uptake of cancer screening services

In Islington, participation in bowel, breast, and cervical cancer screening programmes is below the national and the London average. Health professionals responsible for screening services wanted to understand why participation rates were low and how they could make screening services easier for people to use. They asked Healthwatch for help.

We spoke to 362 residents from communities experiencing health inequalities about their experiences of cancer screening services. We also gathered views from 74 residents via an online survey and at community events. We shared what we learned with key decision makers.

Some of our findings:

1. Feedback on breast and cervical screening demonstrated the importance of a warm, friendly welcome from practice staff and the provision of clear information about the screening process and its benefits. This was particularly important if the patient was feeling nervous or anxious and was a significant factor in defining the patient experience.
2. Lack of information provision was sometimes due to a failure to offer interpreting.
3. Patients valued being shown how to check for breast masses.
4. People who were sent a home testing kit for bowel cancer but didn't use it either found the testing process distasteful, found it impractical, didn't get enough information, or did not understand what the home testing kit was.
5. Some residents needed language support from either a community organisation or a family member to use the home testing kit. Those without recourse to this support may struggle to use the kit or to understand the benefits of doing so.

What difference will this make?

Colleagues working for Public Health found our report on cancer screening services very helpful. They've drilled down further into data about uptake and are developing a model of 'call and recall'. This means they will be proactively phoning non-attenders to provide clear information whilst talking through the benefits of attending.



"Modesty is so much a part of my culture and I find it hard to overcome years of conditioning about certain things being kept for myself or for my marriage. I realise it's important to attend but it's hard to reconcile those conflicting thoughts."

Somali resident reflects on barriers to attending screening appointment

Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather feedback on services. We also strive to improve access by sharing information about available support.

Bringing mental health services out into the community

Statutory services sometimes need help to engage with residents. Our mental health partnership coordinators bring clinical staff together with local people from diverse communities.



iCope provide Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for patients with moderate depression, anxiety, and sleep issues. We arranged for the iCope team to deliver a session on managing sleep at Islington Bangladesh Association for a group of 24 women. They explained how CBT can help look at triggers that may affect someone's sleep pattern. They discussed sleep hygiene and ways to improve sleep. Everyone found the information helpful and came away knowing more about the mental health support available in the borough.

Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people in decision making.



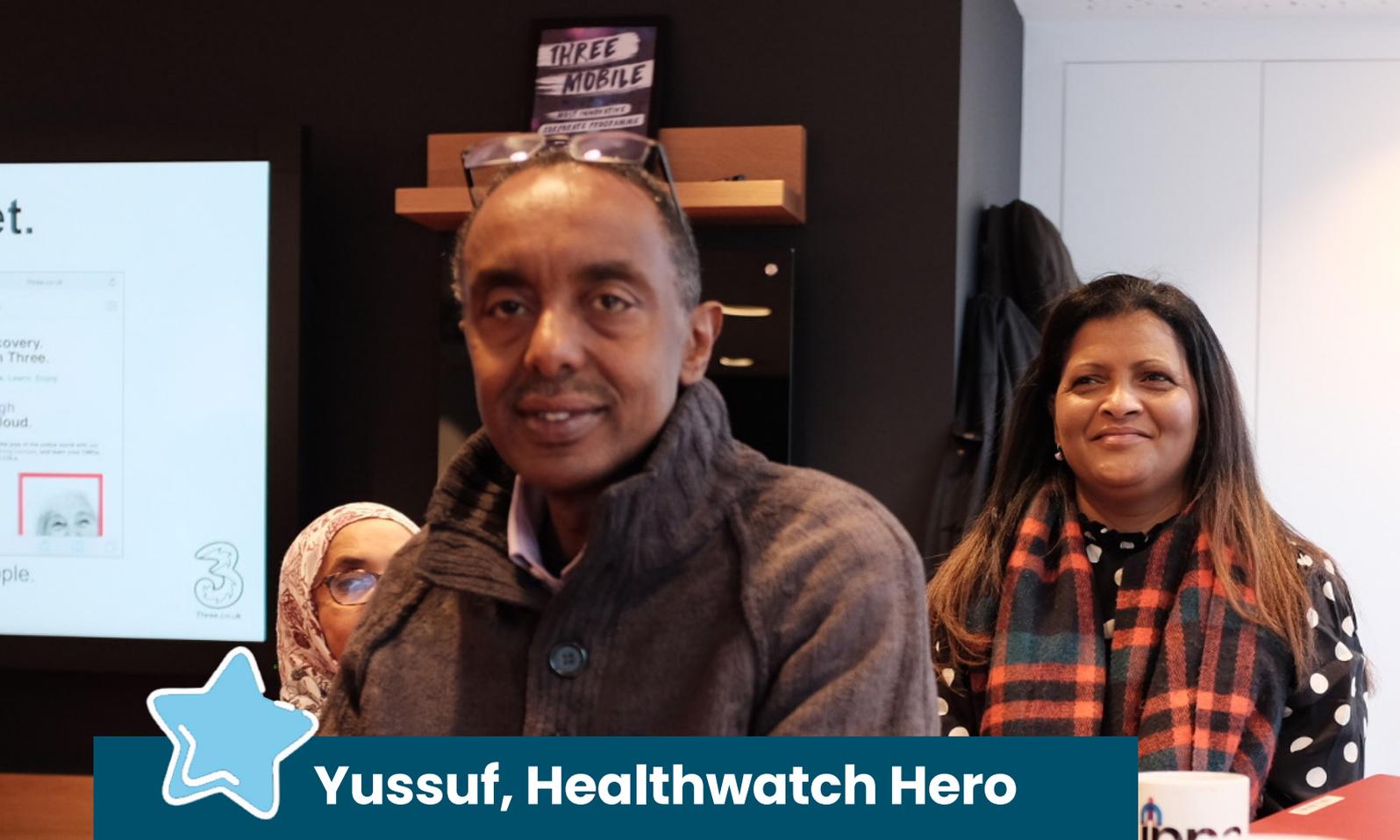
Evidence Islington is a new partnership between Islington Council, Healthwatch, local community groups, and two local universities. Its purpose is to support the council to use feedback from residents more effectively when decisions about services are being made. This year we successfully recruited 8 residents to the Evidence Islington co-design group. They will help develop the resident engagement plan for the full five year project, as more members of the public get involved.

Improving care over time

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



Back in 2020 residents from migrant communities told us that mental health support services didn't meet their needs. We raised this many times and now, thanks to the launch of our Inequalities Toolkit, commissioners will ask potential providers to better consider issues of inclusion when bidding to deliver services in the borough.



Yussuf, Healthwatch Hero

Celebrating our work with diverse communities.

"I would like to express our utmost appreciation for the outstanding collaboration Islington Somali Community has had with Healthwatch Islington over the past few years, which is still ongoing. Through health projects on cancer awareness, GP and pharmacy services, smoking cessation, and COVID-19 vaccine awareness, our clients and service users have benefitted immensely. Your dedication and expertise in these areas have made a significant positive impact on our community, and we are incredibly grateful for your understanding and invaluable contributions to the lives of our community. All of your support and services in raising awareness within our community of health issues, including accessibility of health services and supporting clients to understand their choices and rights, were beneficial and had a great impact on people's wellbeing.

The questionnaire provided by Healthwatch Islington in the areas of GP and pharmacy services has been invaluable. Conducting these surveys has led to discussions and feedback leading to identifying gaps in service provision and advocating for improvements, ensuring the possibility that our community members receive quality and accessible healthcare. The collaborative sessions conducted by Healthwatch Islington have empowered individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate the healthcare system effectively, and to make informed decisions about their health which will result in enhanced patient experiences and improved health outcomes."

Yussuf Ahmed, Co-ordinator at Islington Somali Community



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:

- Working with Islington Mind and Outcome to hear the views of LGBTQI+ residents on healthcare, social care, and mental health support.
- Engaging with communities that are less able to get their voices heard through our Diverse Communities Health Voice partnership.
- Bringing those partners together with health commissioners to discuss the findings of our research and agree an action plan for improving equity of access.

Residents rate pharmacy services highly

We gathered views on pharmacy from almost 150 people from communities experiencing health inequalities as part of this year's community research. People rated pharmacy services highly. They reported good experiences and positive relationships with pharmacy staff.

Many people wanted to see pharmacies offering more preventative and diagnostic services. Health checks, blood tests, and cholesterol tests were services people said they could access more easily at a pharmacy.

Few people had heard of the scheme that helps residents on low incomes to afford over the counter medicines. We told commissioners that it needed to be better promoted.



“The head pharmacist is so helpful. He not only gives advice on any issues I have, from skin conditions to diabetes, but he always tries to get me the cheapest medication with the best result.”

Eritrean woman, aged 65+



Hearing from the LGBTQI+ community

Outcome is a community mental health space run by and for LGBTQI+ people. We gathered feedback on health services from 22 people using the space. The issue of visibility, of being recognised and welcomed as an LGBTQI+ person, was important across all the services discussed.

It was felt that asking about orientation/ gender identity when people register for services was the easiest way to pass on this information. Visual cues that services will treat people equally, such as leaflets and signage about LGBTQI+ support were ways of letting people know they were in a welcoming space.

We heard views on a wide range of services and shared the insight with commissioners.



“I am openly LGBTQI+ and feel seen. The GP refers to my partner with the right gender...The receptionists are very nice and know that I am LGBTQI+ I feel very comfortable there.”

LGBTQI+ resident



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:

- Supporting vulnerable patients to overcome barriers to care
- Helping digitally excluded residents to book GP appointments
- Helping people access NHS dentistry
- Supporting people to look after their mental health during the cost of living crisis

Raising awareness of the dangers of high blood pressure

We gave blood pressure checks to over 800 residents whilst sharing advice and information about the dangers of hypertension.

Salty and fatty foods, lack of exercise and smoking and drinking alcohol all contribute to the risk of high blood pressure, and residents from poorer households and from African, Caribbean, and South Asian backgrounds are more likely to be impacted. Left untreated, high blood pressure can lead to stroke and heart attack. You won't know you've got it unless you have a blood pressure check.

In July, we hosted a week-long stall at Chapel Market and gave checks to over 600 people. The market is generally used by residents on lower income brackets. We gave out information leaflets and advised on lifestyle changes that could lower risk. We also worked with our partner organisations to carry out targeted engagement with communities at higher risk.



"I suspected I had high blood pressure, and now I know for sure. I will go to my GP."

80+ year old Somali man

We advised residents with high blood pressure readings to visit their GP or a local pharmacy to get tested again by a medical professional.

Going the extra mile for more vulnerable residents

We give advice and information to people who are struggling to access health and care services. Armed with that information, most people are able to take the next steps themselves. However, some residents face barriers that are difficult for them to overcome on their own. We give them the extra support they need.

For example, Paul was an older resident with limited mobility and many other health issues. He lived alone in a flat owned by a registered social landlord. Paul was known to Islington Social Services, who had agreed to install a Telecare system so he could get help in case of a fall. They needed a key fob to carry out the work and would not install the system without one. But Paul had lost his key fob and had been waiting for a replacement. He made a payment for this to his housing provider but he still didn't receive one. He was referred to Healthwatch by the Help on Your Doorstep service.

Once we were made aware of the situation, our advice and information worker wrote nearly 30 emails and made over 40 calls on Paul's behalf to get him the support to which he was entitled. In the end, we were forced to make a formal complaint. As a result, a new fob was hand-delivered and Social Services were able to book an appointment to go ahead and install the Telecare system.



Volunteering

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.

This year our volunteers:

- Phoned practices to evaluate the quality of the prerecorded information given to patients while they wait to get through to the GP
- Took blood pressure readings, shared information, and gathered views on services at a range of community events
- Provided face to face and online support to residents who wanted to improve their digital skills
- Reviewed GP websites to assess their accessibility and shared that feedback with commissioners

Julia - Health Champion and Digital Champion

"I feel good. I like helping people, learning from them and teaching. It's a positive experience.

Everything is going online, and a lot of people struggle with digital. I just feel like helping people, making things better for everyone. I can help someone. Not everyone is capable of knowing everything. I really enjoy it.

There are many challenges. One of the biggest challenges is remembering passwords. Also, there are many apps. In terms of learning how to use apps, it's about repetition. In this role, communication and interaction with people from different backgrounds is very important. In the future, I'm going to communicate with different people and I need to behave professionally, so volunteering at Healthwatch Islington helps me to prepare for my career."



Digital Champion (who loves volunteering but prefers to remain anonymous)

"I am a Digital Champion for Healthwatch Islington and find it both challenging and rewarding. I enjoy the variety of questions, big and small, which learners bring to sessions. Some want to focus on one topic for the whole session, others have a million questions and some have a specific problem they want to try and solve, all of which keeps me on my toes! I also enjoy being able to demystify things which learners find daunting and giving them the confidence to try new things safely online. Delivering remote sessions has added to my own skills and confidence so it's win-win!"



Do you feel inspired?

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

 www.healthwatchislington.co.uk/volunteer

 info@healthwatchislington.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

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£156k	Staff costs	£242k
Additional income	£341k	Partners project costs	£157k
		Other project costs	£5k
		Other operating costs	£24k
Total income	£497k	Total expenditure	£428k

Additional income comes largely from statutory bodies and from Trusts. For example:

- **£133k** received from the Integrated Care Board for community research
- **£72k** received from Trusts and Primary Care Networks to support digital inclusion
- **£44k** received from Islington Council for mental health partnership work
- **£22k** received from the Integrated Care Board for hypertension work

From 2020 to 2023 our income increased by over 90% from £255k to £497k and staff costs increased by 45% (from £167k to £242k). The trustees remain comfortable with our solvency as a result of the track record of operating surpluses over the last three years and cash balance at our bank of £206k as at 31st March 2023.

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.

Top three priorities for 2023-24

1. Continuing our work to improve access to GP services.
2. Gathering feedback on home care services.
3. Working together with statutory providers and communities experiencing health inequalities to improve access to mental health services.



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Islington, 6-9 Manor Gardens, N7 6LA

Healthwatch Islington 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 seven members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Throughout 2022/23 the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as our recruitment strategy and our strategic plan.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain peoples 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, a webform on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums. Our partnership work allows us to greatly extend our reach. We ensure that this annual report is made available on our website.

Responses to recommendations

There were no providers who failed to respond to requests for information or 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.

We invited commissioners to a meeting to discuss our research findings for the current year and then presented these to the Integrated Care Board. Senior Management teams are now following up and will update us on how residents voices captured through our work are influencing in the year ahead. Work discussed includes GP website accessibility, GP phonelines, awareness of the primary care offer and our rights to access, Long Covid support, the council's employment offer, and NHS dentistry.

This year we formally launched our Challenging Inequalities toolkit. This work is based on feedback from residents several years ago and we are using those findings to influence the commissioning and provision of more inclusive services.

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

Enter and view

We made no Enter and View visits the year. Other methodologies better suited our work. For hypertension and community research we had a focus on reaching out in to the community, and for primary care we had a focus on viewing websites. We did mystery shop pharmacy and GP phone lines.

In the year to come, we'll be thinking about the best ways to ensure our primary care recommendations are taken up as well as focusing on gathering views on home care. We don't expect these themes to require Enter and View methodology. We anticipate online focus groups or phone interviews being the best way to hear from people.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Islington is represented on the Islington Health and Wellbeing Board by our Chief Executive, Emma Whitby. During 2022/23 the Board met on two occasions and Emma shared information about local priorities and residents' concerns.

Healthwatch Islington is represented at meetings of the North Central London Integrated Care Partnership and North Central London Integrated Care Board by our Chief Executive, Emma Whitby.

Thanks for your support

In 2023/24 we will be continuing our work, with primary care, home care, mental health, hypertension and childhood immunisations identified as priorities.

If this report has found you, get in touch and tell us about your experience, ask about our digital learning, or come and volunteer.

healthwatch Islington

6-9 Manor Gardens
London
N7 6LA

www.healthwatchislington.co.uk

e: info@healthwatchislington.co.uk

 [@HWIslington](https://twitter.com/HWIslington)

 [Facebook.com/HWIslington](https://www.facebook.com/HWIslington)

 [Instagram.com/hwislington](https://www.instagram.com/hwislington)

 [linkedin.com/company/healthwatch-islington](https://www.linkedin.com/company/healthwatch-islington)