



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Lincolnshire annual report
2025-2026

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Acting Chief Executive
Chris McCann

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“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

Healthwatch Lincolnshire is here to ensure that the voices of people across Lincolnshire are heard, valued, and acted upon. Guided by the Healthwatch Steering Group, we remain committed to listening to local communities, using their experiences to help shape better health and social care services.

This year has been another busy and impactful one. Through our research projects, community engagement activities, information and signposting service, and ongoing conversations with residents, we have gathered thousands of experiences from people using health and care services across the county. These insights have helped identify barriers to access, highlight good practice, and influence decisions that affect local communities.

Our dedicated team of staff and volunteers continue to play a vital role in ensuring that the voices of local people are represented. Whether supporting individuals to navigate complex services, engaging with communities whose voices are often less heard, or providing evidence to decision-makers, their work helps create meaningful change.

We have continued to work closely with partners across the health and care system; these relationships enable us to ensure that the experiences people share with us are not only heard but used to drive improvements.



**Healthwatch
Lincolnshire Steering
Group Chair**
Liz Ball



I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to share their experiences with us this year. I would also like to thank our staff, volunteers, Steering Group members, and partners for their continued dedication and support. Together, we are helping to ensure that health and social care services in Lincolnshire are shaped by the people who use them.

We have spaces available on the Healthwatch Steering Group, and we welcome enquiries from anyone interested in helping to guide the future direction of Healthwatch Lincolnshire.

About us

Healthwatch Lincolnshire 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 **5,000** people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ nine staff and our work is supported by 27 volunteers



Reaching out:

5,033 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

3,961 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as mental health support and finding an NHS dentist.



Championing your voice:

We published 8 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like neurological care, GP services, and mental health support for farmers, veterans, and new fathers.

Our reports ranged across social care, general practice, and mental health, from a variety of engagement, surveys, focus groups across Lincolnshire.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by Lincolnshire County Council.

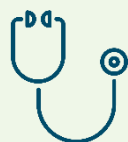
In 2025–2026, we received **£309,498**

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 Lincolnshire. Here are a few highlights:

Spring

Providing Information and signposting support across the county as part of our outreach program.



We supported cancer patients access NHS dental care.



Summer

With the ICB, we conducted an Enter and View of local Emergency departments with a focus on corridor care.



Our influencing resulted in a leg ulcer clinic being relocated to a more centralized location, facilitating attendance, minimizing travel cost and time.



Autumn

Our carers project resulted in us being invited to give evidence to our quality risk review board to improve services.



Our insight on access to GP services marked a new way of working with the ICB and helped shape GP services in Lincolnshire.



Winter

The findings from our sensory loss engagement influenced ICB and council service design and commissioning.



With input from system partners, we launched our county-wide survey to explore the state of health and care in Lincolnshire.



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 Lincolnshire 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.

Many residents with sensory loss told us about the barriers they face when accessing services. More than 120 people highlighted difficulties in securing a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, and concerns about misconceptions that Deaf BSL users can easily understand written or spoken English. These findings informed the Engaging Sensory Impaired Communities in Lincolnshire Joint Engagement and Involvement Plan, a partnership between HWLincs, Lincolnshire County Council, and NHS Lincolnshire ICB, which helped shape the recommissioning of the Lincolnshire Sensory Service to better meet service users' needs.



Improving care over time

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

As part of our carers project, we also wanted to explore the experiences of care home managers; 57 managers shared what is working well, such as the Clinical Assessment Service (CAS), and current challenges including access to dental, mental health, and physiotherapy care.

As a result, the county council outlined a commitment to escalating themes around NHS commissioned services to the ICB, working with system partners to improve hospital discharge and providing additional workforce training on identified areas. These changes may take time but are likely to improve both managers and residents' experiences.

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.



What is it like being an unpaid carer in Lincolnshire?

Last year, we spoke to carers about their needs and experiences, leading to better promotion of local carers services.

Through our information and signposting service, we regularly heard from carers about the challenges they face, which we wanted to explore further.

What did we do

We launched a survey to better understand carers experiences of accessing support for themselves as a carer, and social care for the person they care for. We also attended carers groups throughout Lincolnshire to gather their views.

Key things we heard:



78%

of carers had struggled over the past 12 months.

72%

did not feel supported as carer.

70%

appeared unaware of local carers services.

Our work highlighted the low awareness of the support available, difficulties navigating systems, and the impact caring has on a carers health. Conversely, those aware and accessing local carers services praised the support received.

What difference did this make?

As a result, the County Council are going to co-produce communications about services available, strengthen the visibility of the Carers Service, and support staff to identify and support carers sooner. They also outlined their commitment to an ongoing partnership with Healthwatch Lincolnshire to ensure public voice is embedded in service design and delivery.

Access to GP services

Access to GP services varies considerably throughout Lincolnshire, with the “8am scramble” being a key barrier.

1,255 people throughout Lincolnshire shared their experience of accessing GP services, highlighting what is working well and where improvements may be needed.

Key things we heard:



64%

found it difficult to get an appointment but this varied considerably by primary care network.

16%

felt the biggest barrier to access was the “8am scramble”.



“I absolutely dread the 8am call, where I call on the dot of 8am but am already 37 in the queue and then have to go to work, still on hold for 20–30 minutes not able to leave my phone, which as a teacher is impractical. I then get through to no appointments left, or someone will ring me but no idea when.”

What difference did this make?

This project marked a new way of working with partners to ensure our findings are heard and acted on. Throughout the report there are 'you said, we did' sections which highlight what the public told us, followed by a response from partners (ICB) on how these findings have or will be acted upon. The findings were also considered in relation to the planning of local GP services.

Enter & View and Outcomes

Enter and view

Enter and View Authorised Representatives

Oonagh M Quinn Engagement Officer

Maria Bright (limited availability during this period)

Alison Cadman

Wendy Cottam (inactive during this period due to personal circumstances)

Julie Emmott (inactive during this period due to personal circumstances)

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Emergency Department – Pilgrim Hospital, Boston	Joint quality visit with Lincolnshire NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) and United Lincolnshire Teaching Hospital NHS Trust (ULHT), looking at corridor care as part of the national campaign.	Observations and recommendations shared with stakeholders to support ongoing improvements in emergency care across Lincolnshire. Healthwatch Lincolnshire report produced, and contribution provided to report produced by the trust.

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Mental Health	Resulted in additional funding for HWLincs to produce and distribute a resource to better support serving personnel, their families, and veterans. Resource used within NHS staff training and factsheet and shared with wider stakeholders. This project then secured HWLincs funding to employ a Military and Veteran Engagement Officer to provide tailored support to this community.
Neurological Health	Invited to join and present the findings at the Functional Neurological Disorder working group, ensuring patient voice is at the heart of service development.

Outcomes

2025 – 2026 Outcomes (continued)

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Access to GP services	<p>Facilitated better collaboration and a new way of working with ICB colleagues to promote services and highlight how the system uses and acts on patient voice, reducing apathy.</p> <p>Findings were considered in the planning of local GP services, ensuring services reflect the needs of the community.</p>
Sensory Loss	<p>Findings contributed to the Joint Engagement Plan between LCC, ICB and HWLinCs, influencing the focus of future engagement to better understand and improve experiences of health and care for those with sensory loss.</p> <p>Evidence gathered supported the recommissioning of a service, ensuring it better meets the needs of its beneficiaries, improving outcomes and reducing inequalities.</p> <p>Led to conversations with partners about how our independence and experience in public engagement could be implemented into future projects.</p>

2025 – 2026 Outcomes (continued)

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
<p>Carers Project – Part 1 – Unpaid Carers</p>	<p>Invited to join the Carers Steering Group and Innovation and Improvement Workshop, ensuring patient voice is at the heart of decision making.</p> <p>Supported LCC in understanding awareness of local carers services.</p> <p>As a result, LCC are going to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the visibility of the carers service. • Co-produce information with carers for GP surgeries. • Improve frontline staff prompts to identify carers early • Promote involvement of the carers service in supporting hospital discharge. <p>Evidence used by the wider system in their personalisation work, again improving experiences for carers.</p> <p>Resulted in additional funding for HWLincs to co-produce and disseminate resources to better support carers living with, or caring for, someone with cancer.</p>
<p>Carers Project – Part 2 – Care Home Managers</p>	<p>Strengthened collaboration with ICB colleagues and provided them with intelligence on services to shape future plans.</p> <p>Invited to be the first external speaker at the Quality Risk Review Board, highlighting issues to decision makers.</p> <p>As a result, LCC are going to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escalate access issues to relevant ICB quality and operational forums. • Work with system partners to address the issues around hospital discharge. • Shape workforce development programmes to cover identified training gaps.

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 anything relating to Health or Social Care – we're your first port of call.

This year, 3,961 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.
- Supporting 1,474 people with individual bespoke support.
- Sending out 750 individual provider reports during this period, so the providers know what people are saying about their services.



Access to services they need

A resident living with vascular dementia contacted us after struggling to access the support they needed following a move to a different local authority area.

They told us they were unable to secure a GP home visit despite being housebound, and they were concerned that care services they had previously received free of charge were now being offered at a cost of more than £150 per week. As a result, they had arranged and paid for support privately.

We listened to their concerns and provided information about requesting an Adult Social Care Assessment, which can help determine eligibility for care and support. We also explained how to register with their GP practice as a housebound patient, to help ensure appropriate access to primary care services.

By helping the resident understand the support available and the processes involved, we enabled them to take steps towards accessing the care and assistance to which they are entitled.

Supporting people to look after their health

A resident contacted us after experiencing significant challenges accessing appropriate mental health support.

They had been living with mental health difficulties for more than five years and had diagnoses of autism, ADHD, trauma and PTSD following several assaults.

They explained that they had repeatedly informed mental health services that they needed to be seen by a female practitioner, due to their past experiences. Despite these requests being recorded and discussed with services, they continued to be offered appointments with male professionals, leaving them unable to attend and access the support they needed.

We listened to their concerns and provided information about alternative sources of support, including the Lincoln Trauma Centre, SHINE, local Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs, and the Volunteer Car Scheme, to help reduce barriers to accessing services.

By ensuring the resident was aware of the wider range of support available, we helped them identify additional avenues for specialist help while they continued to seek appropriate mental health care that met their individual needs and circumstances.

What people told us about our service

At Healthwatch Lincolnshire, we are committed to ensuring that every person who contacts us feels listened to, supported and informed. Whether someone is sharing a concern, seeking information, or looking for help to navigate health and social care services, our team works hard to provide a responsive, compassionate and person-centred service.

The feedback we receive helps us understand the difference our work makes. We are grateful to everyone who takes the time to share their experiences of using our service. Here are just a few of the comments we received during the year:



"I have had really timely responses and helpful information from Healthwatch. I was actually shocked when I got a reply, as I am now used to getting either no response or having to repeatedly ask for a response from the NHS."

"I was extremely impressed at how well Healthwatch Lincolnshire listened to the issue I had. They summarised perfectly and explained exactly what they were going to do next and how they would report back to me."



"Julie was so helpful and knowledgeable. Helped and guided us through a difficult situation with my sister, and kept in contact throughout. We cannot praise her enough for her consideration, common sense and empathy."

"The Healthwatch representative was very encouraging and very informative and understanding. She is a lovely person who made it easy for me to talk to her."



These comments reflect the values that underpin our work: listening to people, treating them with respect and empathy, and helping them find the information and support they need. We are proud of the positive impact our team has on individuals across Lincolnshire, and we will continue to use feedback to improve and strengthen the service we provide.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 1077 hours to support our work in over 197 different types of activities.

Activities have included: Board of Trustee activities, Healthwatch Steering Group, administration support, Reader Panel, newshound, and a variety of community-based engagement activities.

Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we have a better understanding of what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited the community experiencing sensory loss, to listen to their experiences accessing services highlighting their concerns around access to translators.
- Collected experiences from a wide range of people within our semi-rural and coastal communities.
- Supported colleagues in our Mental Health Trust, Lincolnshire Partnership Foundation Trust (LPFT), promoting access to information and services on the How Are You (H.A.Y) Roadshow.
- Developing an ongoing relationship with communities through our support, via the local library service and their 'Connect with a Cuppa' offer.



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.



Carol

Carol has been a Community Champion with Healthwatch Lincolnshire for more than 10 years and is still as enthusiastic as she was on day one! She also is part of the Reader Panel and is our Newshound.

Following an initial invitation to the Connect to a Cuppa, Carol was offered an opportunity to attend a monthly coffee morning at the library. This has given Healthwatch Lincolnshire regular access to listen to people's concerns, and an opportunity for providing signposting and advice.

Many of the people attending are vulnerable (unemployed, homeless, on low-income, and living in semi-rural areas with poor public transport support) and would not normally engage with feedback, but through our building up trust with the community, they have provided us with valuable insight into their experiences of accessing health and care.

"Just want to thank you for your support of Horncastle Library this year, and how grateful we are for the advice, help and support you have given our library users, and the voice you have given them. Carol is really good at engaging with customers." **Sadie Hirst, Library Manager**



Maria

Maria has been a Community Champion with Healthwatch Lincolnshire for more than 3 years. She is also one of our trained Enter and View Authorised Representatives with knowledge of the adult social care services.

Over the last year, Maria has become a Link Community Champion for our Sensory Loss community. She regularly attends sessions run by the Lincolnshire Sensory Services in Horncastle and Boston.

Through this engagement, Maria has built up trust within the community and supported their feedback; this contributed to the Engaging Sensory Impaired Communities in Lincolnshire Joint Engagement and Involvement Plan.

At the heart of what we do



Janet

Janet has been a Volunteer Administrator for around 10 years and can base her volunteering around her home commitments. She also is part of the Reader Panel and participates on a regular basis with desktop research; not seen by many as a glamorous role, but Janet is invaluable with her insights and spreadsheets.

She has contributed to a number of projects over the years, providing valuable insights into communities. Janet ensures our data is as up-to-date as possible, meaning the HWLincs and Healthwatch Lincolnshire team are always building upon a solid base.

We have also been able to offer her skills as support to our local hospice and other organisations, such as a local charity which did not have the administrative support they needed, to do basic research for projects they were undertaking throughout the year. This has resulted in a better working relationship between the three organisations, by sharing the skills of our volunteer.

These stories highlight the many ways volunteers contribute to the success of Healthwatch Lincolnshire. From engaging directly with local communities and building trusted relationships, to supporting research, administration, and community outreach, volunteers play a vital role in helping us hear from a wider range of people and understand their experiences of health and social care services.

Their commitment, skills, and local knowledge enable us to reach communities that may otherwise go unheard, strengthen our evidence, and increase our impact. We are extremely grateful for the time, energy, and expertise that our volunteers give to support our work and the people of Lincolnshire.

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.healthwatchlincolnshire.co.uk



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Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Lincolnshire County 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	£309,498	Expenditure on pay	£262,143
		Non-pay expenditure	£9,248
		Office and management fee	£38,013
Total income	£309,498	Total Expenditure	£309,404

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. Tackling inequalities:** We will continue to engage with underrepresented communities and support those facing the greatest barriers to have their voices heard and access the support they need.
- 2. Influencing improvements in health and care:** We will work with providers, commissioners, and partners to ensure people's experiences shape decisions and drive service improvements.
- 3. Increasing our reach and impact**
We will raise awareness of Healthwatch Lincolnshire, helping more people access information, share their experiences, and influence change.

Statutory statements

HWLincs, Rooms 33–35, The Len Medlock Centre, St George’s Road, Boston Lincolnshire, PE21 8YB holds the Healthwatch Lincolnshire contract on behalf of Lincolnshire County Council.

Healthwatch Lincolnshire 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 Steering Group consists of 12 people, including staff and members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Steering Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025–2026, the group met four times and made decisions on matters such as the Healthwatch Lincolnshire Workplan 2025–2026 and representational feedback strategies. 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 2025–2026, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website, been active on multiple social media channels, and attended meetings of community groups and forums. We also regularly attend outreach clinics across the county for face-to-face signposting and feedback gathering.

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 www.healthwatchlincolnshire.co.uk

Statutory statements

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Lincolnshire is represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board, Integrated Care Partnerships, and the Integrated Care Board by Navaz Sutton, CEO of HWLincs.

During 2025–2026, our representative has effectively carried out this role by ensuring that public voice and lived experience remain central to strategic discussions and decision making. We have contributed to shaping local health and care priorities, championed the inclusion of under-represented communities, and shared insight from Healthwatch engagement and reports to inform system-wide planning.

Through regular attendance and active participation, we have strengthened the visibility and influence of Healthwatch Lincolnshire within the wider integrated care system, helping ensure that local people's views are reflected at the highest levels.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

Healthwatch Lincolnshire plays an active role in making sure that the experiences and views shared with us by the public reach the people who can make a difference. Each month, we share all patient experience data we receive with providers and commissioners, helping to inform service delivery, planning and improvement.

In addition to this, our team regularly represents the public voice at a wide range of system and provider-level meetings. These include strategic groups such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, Integrated Care Board and Health Scrutiny Committee, as well as operational forums focused on patient experience, quality, primary care, digital inclusion and health inequalities.

Some examples include:

- Health Scrutiny Committee
- Primary Care Co-commissioning group PC3
- Lincolnshire System Quality Group
- System QPEC
- Health Protection Board

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