



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Islington annual report
2025/26

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Chief Executive
Laura Saksena



“This has been a strong year for Healthwatch Islington. We have consolidated our partnership-based model of delivery, strengthened the visibility of our work and continued to bring residents’ experiences into local decision-making.”

“As the wider system changes, we are playing an active role in shaping what comes next: protecting the legacy of Healthwatch Islington’s work and keeping resident voice at the heart of health and care in the borough.”

A message from our Chair

For Healthwatch Islington, this has been a year of strong delivery, deepening partnerships and important planning for the future.

We are proud to have reached over 5000 residents this year. Across our work, we have continued to focus on the issues that matter most for local people, particularly those whose voices are too often least heard in decisions about health and care.

We have strengthened our commitment to tackling health inequalities through targeted programmes ranging from cancer screening to childhood immunisations. A highlight of this work was Closing the Gap: Tackling Inequality in North Central London which we convened in February 2026. The event brought together over 90 professionals from across the system, demonstrating the convening role Healthwatch Islington plays in creating space for practical discussion and shared commitment to more accessible and equitable services.

We have continued to build strong partnerships across the borough. Through our work with the Diverse Communities Health Voice network, our contribution to borough level decision-making forums and our relationships with voluntary and community sector partners, we have helped ensure that resident voice remains visible in a changing health and social care landscape.

As we look ahead, the Board has been focused on securing the future of Healthwatch Islington's work in the context of national changes to the Healthwatch network. Our priority is to protect the organisation's legacy and impact, retain the strength of our local relationships and ensure that residents in Islington continue to have an independent voice in health and care.

On behalf of the Board, I want to thank the Healthwatch Islington team, trustees, volunteers and partners for their skill, commitment and care throughout the year.

Board Chair

Ewan MacLeod

About us

Healthwatch Islington 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

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

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.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported almost 6000 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 10 staff and, our work was supported by **15** volunteers.



Reaching out:

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

5578 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 4 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like cervical screening, community research, and home care.

Our most impactful report was Community Research and Support Programme, highlighting people's experiences of health inequality.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by Islington Council. In 2025/26 we received £170,258.00, 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 Islington. Here are a few highlights.

Mental Health

We gathered community insight on mental health services, helping ensure lived experience informed future planning.



We helped develop the [Carers, Family and Friends Strategy](#), strengthening recognition of carers' needs.



Cancer

We [supported women](#) to share feedback with NHS England on HPV self-sampling, helping highlight views on instructions, access and promotion.



We shared [community feedback](#) on cancer screening barriers, helping NHS partners better understand concerns about access and participation.



Childhood Immunisations

We co-hosted childhood [immunisation workshops](#) with local GPs, focusing on communities where vaccine uptake is lower.



After a rise in [measles cases](#) locally, we worked with Public Health and NCL ICB to support trusted vaccination conversations.



Advancing Equality

The [Progressing Equality](#) event we held in November, brought partners together to share learning on accessibility, inclusion and practical system change.



Our [Closing the Gap](#) event brought colleagues from over 50 organisations across North Central London together to strengthen action on health inequalities.



Working together for change

We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, and Islington influence decisions made about services at North Central London Integrated Care Board (ICB) level.

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



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

Through the North Central London Healthwatch network, Healthwatch Islington contributed local insight into Primary Care Committee discussions during a period of major system change. Shared representation helped strengthen challenge around primary care, safeguarding and neighbourhood working.



A big conversation:

During a period of significant organisational change, including the planned merger of North Central London and North West London ICBs, the five local Healthwatch in North Central London met regularly with ICB representatives. This helped us keep up to date with planned changes and discuss more broadly what the role of local Healthwatch should be as new arrangements develop.



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

As the wider system changes, there are likely to be fewer committees covering a larger area. The five local Healthwatch are working together to maintain strong relationships locally and across North Central London and to make a clear case for equitable structures for resident voice across the new system.

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 Islington this year:



Lung cancer screening and shisha recording

Community insight can reveal hidden barriers that services may not see through routine data alone.

Our Community Research project found low awareness of the health risks linked to shisha smoking. This raised a wider question for the Lung Screening Service about whether GPs are consistently recording shisha use on patient records. The project resulted in the service now looking at the issue nationally, highlighting a potential gap in those invited for lung cancer screening.



Pharmaceutical needs assessment

By sharing what residents tell us, we help public health partners understand what people need from local pharmacy services.

We contributed residents' views to Islington's Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, helping Public Health understand local pharmacy needs. We also began exploring public conversations around Pharmacy First, so more residents understand how pharmacies can support them when they need care.



Connecting mental health care with everyday support

Mental health recovery often depends on more than clinical treatment.

Healthwatch Islington's Mental Health Partnerships team worked alongside North London NHS Foundation Trust's Core Teams to connect residents with community-based support. Over the year, the team provided meaningful links for 260 queries, including support around activity, exercise, social connection and digital access.

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.



Removing barriers to getting active in trusted spaces

Older men from Horn of Africa communities told us they were more likely to take part in physical activity when it was offered in familiar community settings and designed around their needs.

Mainstream physical activity programmes can feel less accessible, especially for people living with long term conditions, including cancer.

What did we do

We worked with Islington Somali Community, Eritrean Community in the UK, Active Spaces and local clinicians to deliver two health information workshops and two free gentle exercise programmes for men aged 55 and over. Sessions were held in trusted community spaces and shaped around what residents said would make them easier to attend.

Impact at a glance:



100%

of the participants attended regularly.

84%

reported a big increase in physical activity.

97%

reported feeling more mobile after taking part.

The project showed that physical activity is easier to access when it is local, trusted, culturally appropriate and designed around people's daily lives.

What difference did this make?

The project reached 43 exercise participants, including 16 people living with or beyond cancer. Participants reported improved mobility, reduced stress and greater confidence to keep active.

The Andover class will continue with funding from Active Spaces from April 2026 to March 2027.

Understanding care at home through residents' experiences

People receiving homecare are not always able to share their experiences through standard engagement routes.

We wanted to understand what homecare feels like for residents and family members, including what works well, where communication breaks down, and how care affects people's independence, confidence and daily life.

What we did

We carried out **26** in-depth interviews with residents and family members and brought this together with survey findings. We also held a focus group with home care providers, attended by **13** representatives from local agencies, so resident experiences could be understood alongside the realities of delivering care.

What residents and carers told us:



46%

of interviewees had made a complaint or had one made on their behalf.

27%

of interviewees said they did not have a care plan.

65%

of family carers said care agency support rarely or never gave them a break from caring.

What difference did this make?

Residents' experiences are now part of a wider conversation about how homecare is arranged and delivered in Islington. The study brought together feedback from people receiving care, family members and providers, creating a baseline for future improvement. The findings were shared with the Council in March 2026 and will inform the next phase of engagement with hospital discharge teams, adult social care and paid carers.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Islington. 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:

- Working through trusted partners ([Diverse Communities Health Voices](#))
- Meeting residents in everyday community spaces
- Working in partnership with Arsenal FC to engage people with mental health issues.



Reaching asylum seekers in temporary accommodation

People newly arrived in the UK can face practical, language and confidence barriers when trying to understand and access NHS care.

In October, we attended a health outreach event at a hotel used as accommodation for asylum seekers in EC1. Healthwatch Islington staff supported residents to understand health, mental health and well-being services, and engaged with 23 residents.

What difference did this make?

Residents were able to ask questions about local health services in a familiar setting, rather than having to navigate the system alone. The outreach also helped highlight where newly arrived residents may need clearer information about GP registration, appointment booking and language support.

Rights and Entitlement workshops

Residents and community partners told us people needed clearer information about accessing services and advocating for themselves.

We developed and piloted a Rights and Entitlements workshop model with KMEWO, Jannaty and IMECE Women's Centre, reaching 47 residents. The workshops focused on healthcare rights, complaints routes, accessing support and knowing where to go when something goes wrong.

What difference did this make?

The workshops helped residents feel better equipped to speak up and access support. 38 participants reported greater awareness of their rights and entitlements, and 42 reported greater confidence asserting their rights and accessing help. One participant said, "I have more information about my rights to healthcare and how to complain when something goes wrong."

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 5578 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



Helping asylum seekers register with a GP

Practical support helped two newly arrived asylum seekers access local primary care after arriving in the UK.

Two recently arrived asylum seekers from Ethiopia had not yet been registered with a GP, leaving them without access to local primary care.

Our Advice and Information Officer helped them find a local GP, understand their options and complete the online registration form. Interpreter support and peer translation helped overcome language barriers, and their communication needs were included in the registration.

Both were successfully registered with a local GP. These communication needs were noted in the registration process to ensure ongoing support. The process highlighted gaps in the initial information provided by the hotel staff, suggesting a need for updating staff training.

Restoring comfort and dignity for disabled resident

This case highlighted how poor communication between services can delay essential support.

A disabled resident had been left without a working bariatric recliner chair for more than three months, causing pain and distress.

She had already tried to resolve the issue through the equipment provider, her GP and Adult Social Services, but the chair had not been repaired or replaced. After the issue was raised with us through Help on Your Doorstep, our Advice and Information Officer contacted the relevant services, submitted a referral on her behalf and followed up when promised action did not happen.

When the equipment contract changed provider, we escalated the case again to make sure it was not lost during the transition.

A new chair was finally delivered on 9 October 2025. The case highlighted how poor communication between services can leave residents without essential equipment, and how independent follow-up can help get things moving.



“Nothing else has been done until I contacted you. You brought to the core, and thanks to your intervention, I’ve got a response. Thank you so much!”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 77 hours to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited community centres, libraries, and public spaces to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Participated in research projects investigating home care, cancer awareness, and health impacts of housing.



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.



Hawa

“I volunteer with Healthwatch Islington because I enjoy engaging with diverse communities and contributing to initiatives that make a positive difference.”

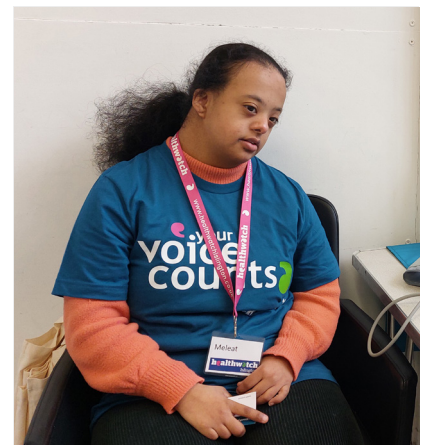
Hawa has contributed to many of our activities in the two years she has been with us, and she particularly enjoys our summer stalls at Chapel Market where we do blood pressure checks and collect feedback on health and social care from the community. Throughout the year our volunteers connect with many local people.

“It was rewarding to know that a simple conversation helped them feel heard and supported.”

Meleat initially joined us on an internship supported by Mencap Training Academy. Following her work with us, she has joined Healthwatch Islington as a volunteer.

She has created a number of posts for our Instagram and Facebook accounts and has helped at information stalls taking blood pressure readings. We were also glad to have her at both of our Challenging Inequality events to support us.

“I’ve liked using Canva to make social media posts the most.”



Meleat

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.healthwatchislington.co.uk



07949 182 687



gulum@healthwatchislington.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Islington 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	£ 170,258	Staff costs	£416,493
Additional income	£407,019	Project costs	£185,217
Total income	£577,277	Total Expenditure	£601,710

Additional income is broken down into:

- £135,000 from North London NHS Foundation Trust to fund the work of our Mental Health Partnerships team.
- £47,000 from the Integrated Care Board to support our childhood immunisations work
- £70,000 from the Integrated Care Board to support Community Research.
- £14,000 from the Integrated Care Board promote our challenging inequalities toolkit to statutory and voluntary sector partners.
- £38,000 from the HDRC via Islington Council to support delivery of the Evidence Islington project

Finance and future priorities

As we move into 2026/27, our focus is on consolidating our financial position while continuing to deliver high-quality work for residents.

In 2025/26, Healthwatch Islington carried a planned deficit, supported by the organisation's reserves position. This reflected a combination of increased employment costs, including the rise in National Insurance contributions, and planned investment in staffing and organisational infrastructure. The investment made this year has strengthened our organisational capacity and leaves us well placed to manage a period of significant change.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Securing the Future of HWI's work

During 2026/27, the Board will focus on securing the best route for Healthwatch Islington's work to continue, protecting the organisation's legacy and impact, retaining the skills and relationships built by the team, and ensuring that resident voice remains part of local decision-making in Islington.

2. Continuing to challenge health inequalities

We will continue delivering targeted programmes focused on areas including cancer screening, childhood immunisations, carers, and community research. We will also continue to work with system partners to ensure that resident insight informs service design, commissioning and delivery, particularly for unheard communities.

3. Strengthening resident voice in the local health and care system

As neighbourhood working develops and wider changes take place across health and social care, we will continue to make sure residents' experiences are heard in the places where decisions are made. We will work with partners across Islington, North Central London and the voluntary and community sector to protect the role of independent resident insight, evidence and challenge within the local health and care system.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Islington, Claremont Building, 24-27 White Lion Street, N1 9PD

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 7 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 7 times and considered how best to preserve the organisation's work, relationships and local impact, and commissioned external support to help inform this process.

The Board has also provided oversight of organisational performance, finance, risk and safeguarding. During the year, trustees made decisions on staff terms and conditions, including improvements to annual leave entitlement and family-friendly policies, and continued to scrutinise the organisation's financial position, delivery priorities and impact for residents.

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 and share it within local strategic networks.

Statutory statements

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 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've consolidated our strategic presence, actively contributing to forums. We've presented our community research findings to the Borough Partnership Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the All-Age Mental Health Partnership Board, where we've helped shape system-level thinking.

We take insight and experiences to decision-makers at the North Central London Integrated Care Board. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives


Healthwatch Islington is represented on the Islington Health and Well-being Board by Laura Saksena, our Chief Executive. Laura also represents us on the borough's Safeguarding Adults, Borough Partnership, and All-Age Mental Health Partnership Boards.

During 2025/26, Laura carried out this role by presenting Healthwatch Islington's programme of work and individual projects across these boards, ensuring that resident insight was shared with local decision-makers. This included contributing to the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment through the Health and Wellbeing Board and taking a leading role in the development of Islington's neighbourhood operating model as Senior Responsible Officer for the co-production workstream through the Borough Partnership.

Healthwatch Islington is represented within the North Central London Integrated Care Partnership and on the North Central London Integrated Care Board by Healthwatch Haringey. This representative role is rotated between local Healthwatch on an annual basis. At monthly regional meetings, Healthwatch Haringey updates the other local Healthwatch and gathers borough level feedback.

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