

**Want to  
make health and  
care services better in Sutton?**

# Join our board of trustees



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*Staff and volunteers at an outreach event*

# About Healthwatch Sutton

## What we do

Healthwatch Sutton is a small charity based in the London Borough of Sutton. Our mission is to make sure that people's experiences make health and care services better. We do this by listening to the views of local people about their experience of these services, and liaising with colleagues in the local NHS, Sutton Council and the voluntary sector. Often this work takes the form of research projects, which can involve surveys, focus groups, discussion with patient groups etc.

Healthwatch Sutton was established in 2013 as part of a national network, Healthwatch England, which provides a broader context for our work. While we normally seek to work in a collaborative way with NHS colleagues, we also have statutory powers to enter NHS facilities, and to receive a response within a fixed time period.

Healthwatch Sutton currently employs four staff who work specifically with Sutton people, and two more staff who work across six boroughs in South West London – Croydon, Sutton, Merton, Kingston, Richmond and Wandsworth. We also depend on a team of volunteers, who support us with admin work, quality assurance visits to care facilities and other tasks. Our trustees, who play a vital and valued role in the organisation, are also volunteers.

We receive funding from both the London Borough of Sutton and from the NHS.

# Examples of our recent work

## Projects

### Dentistry

We circulated a survey and received 98 responses about local people's experience of dental services. More than 1 in 5 people told us they wanted to register with a dentist as an NHS patient, but had to register as a private patient instead. Many people had long waits for routine appointments and some were unable to book emergency appointments. This reflects serious national problems with NHS dentistry – many people are unable to access care. We continue to encourage local NHS commissioners to take action to improve services, for example by setting up bodies which can employ dentists directly, as some other ICBs have done.



### Long Covid

We spoke to 79 local people, NHS staff and members of a patients' self-help group. People with Long Covid told us that the condition was having a very significant impact on their ability to work, their finances, relationships, social lives, and mental health. Over a third of those who had had symptoms for over a year had not had a diagnosis – this was particularly true of older people. Many people found it hard to access support. Most of those who did access treatment found it beneficial, though different treatments helped different patients. We called for increased recognition of Long Covid among the general public, employers and health and care workers. We also called for more access to peer support, and for the continued provision of a range of different support, for both physical and emotional issues.

“My breathlessness is not improving. I'm still finding difficulty doing simple things i.e. walking, stairs, housework.”

### Cost of Living

In August 2022, we spoke to 108 people at Carshalton Eco Fair. Many told us they were cutting back on both heating and food spending, and expected things to get worse during the coming winter. Cost of living issues were affecting people's mental health – 1 in 3 had experienced stress about bills and 1 in 4 said they went out less with friends and family. We invited the Chief Exec of Sutton Citizens' Advice to our AGM to talk about links between health and debt, and published his talk as a briefing.



## Mental wellbeing of primary school children

We surveyed over 1,000 Sutton children aged 9 to 11 in spring 2023 about their mental wellbeing. We compared the results with a similar survey completed just before the pandemic. We found that their mental health was worse – over half of the children had had trouble sleeping or felt lonely, higher levels than in 2020. Girls had more problems than boys, and many children used social media platforms with a minimum age of 13. We have presented the report to various key bodies, have planned a day for parents and carers to give feedback, and are seeking funding for new support services. Louise Ansari, the Chief Executive of Healthwatch England, has discussed the report with Andrea Leadsom MP, the minister with responsibility for children’s health.



## Other work

### St Helier Hospital

St Helier, the main hospital used by people in Sutton, opened during the Second World War and now has serious problems with disrepair. Some wards have had to be closed because they are unsafe, rain gets into parts of the building and the basement floods regularly in winter. After alarming media reports in May 2023 we gained assurances from the hospital’s Managing Director that patient safety was not affected – but the hospital does need to spend money keeping the building running which should be spent on patient care. The government is committed to building a new hospital by 2030, but reports from the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee have raised concerns about this completion date. We continue to monitor the situation.



### Monthly newsletter

We publish a monthly email newsletter, including news about our work and public health messages. 400 people receive the newsletter, of whom over 40 percent open it. We aim to increase circulation of the newsletter, which has become a key tool for reaching the public and local stakeholders. We also produce a paper newsletter several times a year for people without email.

### Commissioned work

We regularly carry out pieces of work commissioned by public sector bodies. For example we recently carried out an online survey of local mental health service users about the care they had received.

# Planned areas of work

## Primary care

We continue to hear more concerns about access to GPs than any other issue with the NHS. Patients tell us that they are asked to ring for appointments at 8am and may have to do this on several days, or that they may get a phone appointment when they wanted a face-to-face one. Increased use of digital services prompts concerns about exclusion from some patients, especially older people. GP practices are now employing professionals in a range of roles, such as physiotherapists, pharmacists and nurse practitioners – patients often do not understand these arrangements, expect to “see a doctor” and feel “fobbed off” with anything else. Patients are unclear about the role of receptionists and are concerned about what information they are asked to share with them. The NHS also now provides a range of primary care services, including NHS 111 online and by phone, out-of-hours services and urgent treatment centres. Patients can find this confusing when GPs were for decades the initial point of access to almost all NHS services.

## Maternity services

Figures from the Care Quality Commission in autumn 2023 suggested that 10 percent of services are inadequate and 39 percent require improvement. One issue is staff shortages, which can lead to remaining staff experiencing burnout. National statistics show that child mortality rates are higher in deprived areas, while black babies are three times more likely to die than white ones. We also hear accounts of cost of living issues impacting on maternity care, since pregnant women on zero-hours contracts don't feel able to take time off work to attend ante-natal appointments.

## Domiciliary care

About a million people in the UK receive domiciliary care – care provided in their own home by someone paid to do so. An ageing population means these numbers have increased and will carry on increasing. Domiciliary care is vital, for example, in allowing people to stay in their own homes rather than going to hospital, and to return to their homes after a stay in hospital. It's crucial that care meets the diverse needs of service users as regards issues such as their culture, diet, religious practices and medical needs. We'll talk to service users about their experience of care – both what goes well and what needs improving.

# About being a trustee

## The role of trustee

Healthwatch Sutton has several trustees, who together form the organisation's board.

- **Trustees** have responsibility for the long-term strategy of the organisation. They need to ensure that Healthwatch sticks to the rules laid down in its "governing document", acts within charity law and has a plan about how best to do its work. Trustees also have final responsibility for the organisation's finances. Trustees are volunteers – they can claim expenses such as travel costs, but they aren't paid. Board members receive an initial induction to help them understand their obligations.
- **Paid staff** carry out the strategic decisions of the trustees, and run Healthwatch Sutton from day to day.
- **Volunteers** – other than board members – support the paid staff, for example by doing outreach work, helping with quality assurance visits and doing admin tasks.

Healthwatch Sutton trustees must either live or work in the London Borough of Sutton.

Some people are not eligible to be a trustee – for example, you can't be a trustee if you are disqualified as a company director, have an unspent conviction for an offence involving dishonesty or deception, or you are an undischarged bankrupt. You can't be a trustee if you are on the Sex Offenders Register, and we require all trustees to have a current DBS check. You can find out more information about being the trustee of a charity on the [Charity Commission website](#).

### Benefits of volunteering

As a volunteer, you will support Healthwatch Sutton in fulfilling our mission. You will make a difference by connecting with people in your local community, including those whose voice is seldom heard so their experiences can help make health and care better.

Benefits to volunteering as a Healthwatch Sutton trustee include:

- An opportunity to contribute positively to your local community, help people, and make a real difference to their lives
- A chance to learn new skills with training and personal development opportunities
- A useful stepping stone to employment in the health and care field
- An opportunity to meet a diverse range of people and develop connections with people in your local community
- Being part of a great team of volunteers, with dedicated staff to support you

## What will the role involve?

- Developing a clear understanding of the role of Healthwatch Sutton and working with other Healthwatch board members and the staff team to plan, review, evaluate and oversee the organisation
- Promoting Healthwatch Sutton and our role within the local community
- Being accountable for Healthwatch delivery and ensuring the organisation adheres to its purpose, acts in the best interest of the organisation, manages resources appropriately and complies with the organisation's governing document and the law
- Producing an Annual Strategy and Business Plan with other board members and Healthwatch staff
- Upholding Healthwatch values by adopting appropriate behaviour while minimising and mitigating risks to delivery and reputation
- Engaging with appropriate local people within Sutton, to understand the strategy for the delivery of health and care services
- Having a clear understanding of your legal responsibilities as a board member and expectations as an individual member and collectively as a board
- Keeping up to date with governance good practice and implementing this in Healthwatch Sutton

## What skills and experience should a trustee have?

Key skills for all board members include:

- Ability to work as a team with other volunteers and staff
- Effective communication skills and ability to ask questions, listen well and provide challenge when needed and appropriate
- Decision-making skills
- Experience of using Microsoft Office, including Word
- Access to the internet and email
- Comfortable volunteering from home and using online meeting platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams (training can be provided)
- Respect for our stakeholders and ability to maintain confidentiality

Our trustees have various different kinds of abilities – we don't expect everyone to know everything. Collectively, the board's experience and skills include:

- experience of working in the health and care sector
- understanding of how the NHS is structured and how decisions are made
- knowledge of Sutton, local council and voluntary sector services
- knowledge of charity law and finance
- understanding of how health and care issues affect different parts of the local community, such as people with different genders, ethnicities or sexualities



- understanding of how to promote a small charity like Healthwatch Sutton

At the moment, many of our trustees are retired, or close to retirement age – we want to recruit younger trustees so that all age groups are better represented. We are also particularly keen to recruit a trustee with skills around communications and promoting our organisation.

## Your commitment to us and ours to you

### Time commitments

Being a trustee involves the following minimum time commitment. Some roles on the board, such as the Chair or Treasurer, will involve a larger time commitment, and some trustees become involved in particular projects:

- Board meetings: 6 per year, 2 hours each
- Reading papers before each board meeting
- Additional meetings: 6 per year, 2 hours each
- Annual General Meeting: 2 to 3 hours each year, plus other meetings such as an awayday or half-day to plan work for the year ahead
- Many trustees also represent Healthwatch Sutton on various committees and boards

### How long will I remain a trustee?

Our governing document has rules about this. We want to strike a balance: to have a stable board while also having new people join, bringing fresh perspectives. Trustees are initially elected for a term of three years at the most, but can extend that term.

### How we will support you

We will provide you with a copy of the Healthwatch Sutton Volunteer Handbook, which explains what we expect from you as regards issues like health and safety, data protection, and what you can expect from us, for example as regards training or if you have an issue while volunteering. The Handbook also explains how to claim for expenses such as travel and meals.

You will also have regular contact with a member of the Healthwatch team to provide you with support and guidance throughout. You'll receive full training and be part of a team who'll make sure your volunteering experience is positive.

HWS actively welcomes volunteers with disabilities, physical or mental health conditions, and carers. Please outline your abilities or requirements and we will endeavour to provide any required additional support or adjustments to make your volunteering role accessible.

# The application process

## How to apply

- Please contact us to arrange an initial, informal discussion, or if you have any questions about becoming a trustee. You can get in touch with Pete Flavell, our Chief Executive, on 07726 543440 or at [pete@healthwatchsutton.org.uk](mailto:pete@healthwatchsutton.org.uk).
- If you are still interested, we ask you to complete an application form, and to meet with our Chief Executive and an existing trustee for an interview.
- We would then ask you to join the board, subject to a successful DBS check, and to confirmation that no conflicts of interest prevent this.
- We will provide you with an induction session about the work of Healthwatch Sutton and the board of trustees.



# healthwatch Sutton

## Healthwatch Sutton

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