

Healthwatch Quarterly Impact & Activity Report

Quarter 1: April – June 2026

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About Healthwatch

We are the independent health and social care champion for people across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

We listen to your experiences, help you find trustworthy information and make sure NHS and social care decision-makers hear what is working – and what needs to improve.

This report covers April to June 2026. It shares the main things people told us, how we used that evidence and the changes or further action that followed.





Quarter at a glance

We released
2 new reports,
including on
digital health
care access,
available online by [clicking here](#)



We made **12**
formal
submissions
or requests to
NHS, council,
hospice, commissioning and
regulatory organisations.



We recorded
247 pieces of
health and
social care
feedback



We escalated
or referred
105 of your
complaints or
concerns to
relevant organisations



Our Quarter in Brief

A snapshot of some of our main activities during the past 3 months

- Between April and June, we continued to listen to people and champion public voice at meetings, events and outreach sessions across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay. We also helped people find support and took concerns to the organisations able to act.
- We published two major reports, contributed public evidence to six organisations' Quality Accounts, responded to requests from regulators, commissioners, NHS providers and scrutiny committees, and raised specific concerns about access to services.
- We also prepared a five-area public engagement programme for NHS Devon's future plans and continued work on hospital accessibility, care-home visiting, mental health services and adult social care.

3 key things we focused on



1. Publishing our Annual Report

This quarter we published our 2025–26 Annual Report: Speaking up for better care, showing the scale and impact of our work across the year.

- 1,664 people shared their experiences.
- 1,208 people received information or support.
- 457 concerns were referred or escalated.
- Staff and volunteers attended 122 outreach events, talks and meetings.

Public experience helped influence work on digital healthcare, vaccination, reasonable adjustments, hospital accessibility, long-term conditions and care-home visiting.

[Click here to read our report](#)



2. Preparing people to shape NHS Devon's future plans

We helped NHS Devon design accessible public engagement for its One Plan for Devon – a five-year plan for how local NHS services will be planned and delivered.

We secured proposed venues in Plymouth, Barnstaple, Exeter, Paignton and Ivybridge and developed plans for public events, community outreach, surveys and paper postcards. Separate sessions were planned for the public, patient groups and GP practice representatives.

The main events were later moved from July to September to allow more time for people to take part and avoid the school holidays. Our focus remains on reaching people who may not normally respond to an online consultation.

3. Turning digital-access evidence into action

Our Digital Healthcare Access report showed how multiple apps, online portals, texts, emails and letters can make accessing care confusing – particularly when different NHS services use different systems.

During this quarter, we shared the findings with NHS and wider system partners, calling for clearer digital routes, better communication, continued non-digital options and support for people at risk of exclusion. **[Click here for more information.](#)**



The report and our new digital pod at Paignton Community Hub were also recognised in Torbay Public Health's local digital inclusion work. We'll share more about the pod in our next report.

What people told us



A brief summary of what we found out from your feedback last quarter

GPs, dentists and other primary care services accounted for **45.3%** of the feedback recorded during the quarter, followed by hospital services at **25.5%**. Social care accounted for **11.3%** and mental health services for **7.3%**. Themes included:

- **Getting timely care – Across all 3 areas – mainly GP & hospital services**

Plymouth feedback focused particularly on obtaining GP appointments, using online systems and being directed to different surgery sites. Devon and Torbay feedback included waits for tests, surgery, results and hospital follow-up.

- **Communication & responsibility – Across all 3 areas – mainly GP & hospital**

People described missing results, calls or follow-up that did not happen and uncertainty about who was responsible for progressing their care. Examples included a Plymouth patient waiting six months for the outcome of a heart scan and Devon patients having to chase referrals.

- **Quality & continuity of care – Across all 3 areas – GP, hospital, NHS 111 & discharge**

People reported perceived misdiagnosis, unexplained medication changes, unmanaged pain, cancelled treatment and concerns about discharge. Some people using NHS 111 felt they were not listened to or were directed towards services they could not access.

- **Finding affordable NHS dentistry – Most prominent in Devon & Torbay**

People described being unable to find an NHS dentist, inaccurate information about practices accepting patients and difficulty obtaining urgent care. One Torbay family reported paying more than £500 privately after being unable to find NHS treatment for an 87-year-old relative.

- **Accessible & inclusive services – Most prominent in Devon – including housing, transport & access to healthcare**

Feedback highlighted inaccessible technology, transport limitations and assumptions that everyone can use online services or travel independently. One blind wheelchair user reported that a new touchscreen entry system at their supported housing prevented them from independently admitting visitors, including a visiting GP.

- **Maternity & mental health – Lower-volume feedback, but potentially serious**

One bereaved parent continued receiving scan and midwife invitations after pregnancy loss because records had not been updated. Other feedback highlighted uncertainty about accessing specialist mental health support during and after pregnancy.

National Context: The local picture reflects national concerns. Our national partner Healthwatch England's 2026 report, based on 390,000 experiences, also highlights problems with access, waiting, inequalities, digital exclusion and administrative or communication failures. [Click here for more from them.](#)

What we did with your views



Selected examples of how your feedback made a positive difference

Clearer information about earwax treatment

You told us: NHS routes for earwax treatment were unclear and some people felt they were being directed towards private treatment.

We did: We asked NHS Devon to clarify what support GP practices should provide.

What happened: NHS Devon confirmed that GP practices across Devon, Plymouth and Torbay are commissioned to assess and manage clinically significant earwax, including irrigation where appropriate. Microsuction provision continues to vary.

Why it matters: We can now give people clearer information while continuing to highlight variation in local provision.



Raising travel barriers affecting Plymouth families

You told us: A large Plymouth primary school reported that some families registered at a local GP Surgery were being offered appointments at a different Surgery. For some, this meant two buses and more than an hour's travel each way. The school had helped provide transport.

We did: We asked whether this was a planned approach and whether its effect on children and families had been assessed.

What happened: A response was still outstanding at the end of the quarter, and we are continuing to follow this up.

Improving accessibility at local hospitals

Feedback from 59 Royal Eye Infirmary patients and carers led University Hospitals Plymouth to commit to reviewing patient letters and online information, telephone access, check-in arrangements, volunteer support, signage, lighting and wayfinding. At North Devon District Hospital, our lived-experience walkthrough identified practical improvements to signage, sensory environments, hospital passports and support for carers. The hospital's Learning Disability Team welcomed the findings and identified several recommendations as achievable improvements.

Taking your experiences into formal decision-making

During the quarter, public experiences informed:

- Quality Account responses for six NHS and hospice organisations;
- Care Quality Commission requests supporting inspections and assurance;
- Devon County Council scrutiny review of NHS dentistry;
- Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust's work on corridor care;
- planning meetings, patient-experience groups, local care partnerships and safeguarding forums.

Our work across each area



A snapshot of our key recent activities in Devon, Plymouth & Torbay

Devon



- Continued to follow up accessibility recommendations from North Devon District Hospital.
- Completed engagement and began to develop an insight report about people's experiences of the Royal Devon complaints process.
- Shared public evidence about NHS dentistry with Devon County Council scrutiny.
- Raised concerns about variation in earwax treatment.
- Progressed plans to extend the tested care-home visiting model into West and North Devon.

Plymouth



- Continued independent care-home visiting.
- Followed up improvements arising from the Royal Eye Infirmary report.
- Raised concerns about travel barriers for families offered GP appointments away from their usual surgery.
- Prepared accessible ways for people to take part in NHS Devon's future engagement, including work with schools, food projects and community groups.

Torbay



- Helped shape early engagement and lived-experience involvement for the new 24-hour neighbourhood mental health model.
- Continued monitoring people's experiences during changes to integrated health and adult social care arrangements.
- Contributed evidence to Torbay Public Health's digital inclusion work.
- Planned public engagement through Paignton Library and established voluntary-sector and community networks.

Across all three areas



- Published our Annual Report and Digital Healthcare Access report.
- Responded to six Quality Accounts.
- Shared public evidence with NHS providers, councils, scrutiny committees and the Care Quality Commission.
- Represented public experience in discussions about neighbourhood health hubs and wider service changes.
- Took local evidence directly to MPs and Parliament. (see next page)



Speaking up for independent public voice

Healthwatch is still here for you

The Government has proposed changes to Healthwatch through the Health Bill, but these proposals are not yet law.

For the public, nothing has changed. We remain open, independent and fully operational – listening to your experiences, helping you find information and speaking up for better services.

This quarter we wrote to local MPs and submitted evidence to Parliament, calling for any future approach to remain independent, accessible, properly funded and able to work across both health and social care.

The Bill's next Commons stage is currently scheduled to begin in September, although parliamentary dates may change.



What we are doing next quarter – we will:

- support NHS Devon's public engagement on its five-year plans and neighbourhood health;
- publish our report on people's experiences of the Royal Devon complaints process;
- progress care-home visiting in West and North Devon;
- follow up actions arising from our hospital accessibility, reasonable-adjustment and digital-access work;
- continue involving people with lived experience in Torbay's neighbourhood mental health plans;
- monitor how wider NHS, council and adult social care changes affect local people;
- continue providing independent information, advice and a route for people to share their experiences.

Share your experience

Good or bad, your experience can help improve local services. You can tell us about GP, dental, hospital, mental health, community or social care services. We can also help you find reliable information and explain how to raise a concern.

- **Freephone: 0800 520 0640**
- **Email: info@hwdpt.org**
- **Website: www.hwdpt.org**

What we do with this report

We publicise this report on our website, email bulletin and various social media channels. We share it with key stakeholders, including health and social care providers & commissioners, the NHS Devon Integrated Care Partnership Board, our local authorities, Local Care Partnerships and the voluntary, community or social enterprise sector. We also share this report with the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level. For more information, please contact us using our contact details on the right.

healthwatch Devon

www.hwdpt.org/devon

t: 0800 520 0640

e: info@hwdpt.org

 @healthwatchdevon
 @HwDevon
 @hwdevon

healthwatch Plymouth

www.hwdpt.org/plymouth

t: 0800 520 0640

e: info@hwdpt.org

 @healthwatchplymouth
 @HealthwatchPlym
 @healthwatchplym

healthwatch Torbay

www.hwdpt.org/torbay

t: 0800 520 0640

e: info@hwdpt.org

 @HealthwatchTorbay
 @HWTorbay
 @healthwatchtorbay

healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

Our vision

A place where we can all get the health and care we need.

Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.