

**Healthwatch Brighton and Hove
communications strategy,
April 2024 – March 2026**

About Healthwatch Brighton and Hove

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove (HWBH) is the city's local health and social care champion for anyone accessing health and social care services.

Our vision

Everyone in Brighton & Hove has access to the health and social care services they need, when they need them, to live a healthy life.

Our mission

To ensure that everyone in the city knows about Healthwatch and understands that by sharing their experiences with us they are helping to continually improve health and care services and making a positive difference for all.

We will achieve our mission by:

Listening

- Providing opportunities so that anyone can share their stories with us about what they like and what could be improved about health and social care services.
- Ensuring we reach out to those who often feel as though their voices are not heard.
- Using a range of research methods to hear from as many people as possible.

Taking action

- Sharing residents' experiences with those responsible for delivering and providing services.
- Scrutinising services using our legal powers e.g. to enter and view health and social care services and see them in action.
- Holding health and social care services to account.

Making a positive impact

- Monitoring how those in charge of services are responding to people's feedback.
- Letting people know what differences their feedback has helped to make.
- Providing help, information and advice to residents and signposting them to resources to help them live healthy lives.

Our Values

- **Inclusive:** we make sure that everyone's voices are included when decisions about health and social care services are made.
- **Collaborative:** we work together with other groups and organisations to build strong relationships and make the biggest difference possible.
- **Independent:** we are separate from the NHS, Local Authority and other organisations enabling us to hold services to account and act as a critical friend.
- **Open:** we are clear and transparent about our work, projects and priorities, explaining what we are focusing on and why.
- **Compassionate:** we understand that everyone's experience is different, and we respond with humanity and kindness to each person's story.

In everything we do, we are transparent, non-judgemental, and independent. We aspire to be inclusive, dedicated to co-production, and strive for continual improvement. We adhere to the Nolan Principles, also known as the Seven Principles of Public Life. This means that we conduct our work with selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

The purpose of our communications

This strategy sets out how Healthwatch Brighton and Hove uses communications to achieve its vision and mission and strengthen its approach to achieving them.

This strategy provides a framework for the delivery of effective communications which are clear, appropriate and help the organisation achieve its goals.

The purpose of our effective communications is to:

- Increase awareness of Healthwatch Brighton and Hove and its work, enabling us to hear from more people and engage with the different communities across our city.
- Increase Healthwatch Brighton and Hove's reputation as an independent, professional and credible organisation which listens to people and acts on their feedback.
- Continuously build meaningful two-way communication with the public, patients and carers to ensure they have the knowledge and understanding to share their views with us so that they can influence the shape of health and social care services in Brighton and Hove.
- Ensure that we work closely with seldom heard groups to champion their voices and enable them to be heard.
- Ensure we work closely with commissioners and providers of services so that services are designed around the needs of people in Brighton and Hove.

1. Principles underpinning our approach to communication.

Confidentiality

For the public to trust us, engage with us and support the work we do, it is vital that we convey not just what we do but what we do not do. For example: we will share public feedback with NHS/social care leaders and decision makers, but we will not share personal details without consent. We will treat the stories that people share with us with respect and handle them in line with our published [privacy policy](#).

Accessibility

In our communications, we are committed to using plain English, explaining acronyms, and offering accessible forms of communication in our emails, letters, reports, and publicity materials as far as it is within our means to do so. Where possible, we will offer alternative means of communication e.g., by post, phone, face-to-face and online meetings, with the benefit of a sign language interpreter or other interpreter. We will translate materials into other languages other than English where possible and offer publications in large type where requested.

We will make social media posts and website content accessible using tools such as alt text and image descriptions.

We upgraded our website to make this more accessible. Our [website](#) was upgraded to Drupal 9 in 2023 which brought it in line with [Healthwatch England](#) brand guidelines. The Drupal template has been tested against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (known as WCAG) standard. WCAG are an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility. Our website is currently compliant with the WCAG 2.1 AA Standard (2022). However, we aware that the [WCAG 2.2 standard](#) came into force last autumn (2023) and we know there are some changes that we need to meet in order to comply with this revised standard. We will implement these as they are rolled out by Healthwatch England in the coming months.

We are committed to using accessible venues for events and meetings.

We will endeavour to record online meetings where possible and where we have consent to do so and we email a summary of what has been discussed.

Equality and diversity

As an organisation we are committed to being inclusive, fair and equitable to all and will apply those principles to our communications output. Equality and Diversity is about:

- How we engage, communicate with, and respond to people.
- How we communicate, listen to, treat and engage with our staff and volunteers; and
- How we hold providers to account to ensure services are personal, fair and diverse.

The Equality Act 2010 introduced Public Sector Equality Duties for nine protected characteristics, often referred to as equality groups, or protected groups. The protected characteristics are, Race, Sex, Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Religion or belief, Sexual orientation, Pregnancy and Maternity, Marriage and civil partnership. In addition to the groups protected by the Equality Act 2010 we will also proactively consider other vulnerable and seldom heard groups.

These values underpin not only how we reach and communicate with people but how we collect their feedback and what we do with this. We apply an Equality and Diversity approach when:

- Collecting demographic information and comparing this with historic data to identify any trends.
- Using this information to target our work on the groups/areas that we hear from least.
- Collaborating with organisations and community/voluntary groups.
- Working to reach those who are digitally excluded and offering face-to-face workshops offering the opportunity to develop key digital skills.

2. Communication mechanisms: where we are now.

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove consists of a small team of six staff members. The whole team is actively involved in how we plan our communications with our audience and collectively, we decide our approach. We also work with our dedicated team of volunteers who deliver many of our face-to-face or in-person communications.

We have mapped the skills of our staff team and volunteers and utilise those skills to help us with our communications. For example, our skills include:

- Presenting at public events.

- Hosting focus groups, one-to-one interviews (online, by phone and in person).
- Designing images to support our communications, using tools such as [Canva](#).
- Writing interesting and detailed reports of our projects.
- Writing attention-grabbing press releases.
- Technical skills which mean we can use [Mailchimp](#) (a marketing platform) to write interesting newsletters and bulletins and [Smart Survey](#) to design and deliver patients polls and surveys.
- Connections with external companies to help us e.g. using local design and print companies to produce our leaflets, posters, postcards and other marketing materials.

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove use a wide range of communication methods in our work, and each has a distinct use and function for our organisation.

1. Social media

We currently have accounts delivering messages across several digital platforms including 'X' (formerly Twitter), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and we have a [YouTube](#) account. We have a [LinkedIn](#) account which is used to publicise Healthwatch.

Our social media fulfils six main objectives:

1. To collect feedback by directing people to our website's '[Have your say](#)' form.
2. To disseminate our research and engagement work.
3. To share information about upcoming engagement events.
4. To involve the public in our workplan projects and commissioned work.
5. To communicate public health messages or health and social care news, including changes to services.
6. To advertise opportunities to volunteer or work for us.

Content is posted on Facebook and 'X' every week. Some content is created and adapted to reflect the unique needs of the people we are trying to reach or engage. Which communications we issue are discussed in a weekly team meeting.

Each social media platform serves a different purpose, and content is adapted to fit this. For example, Facebook and 'X' connects us with members of the public, other organisations, the media and those responsible for making decisions about health and care. We use LinkedIn for recruitment and wider promotion. Instagram has helped link us to a younger age group.

We will routinely monitor the social media platforms we use to ensure they promote equity, inclusivity and fairness. We will remove our presence in appropriate circumstances and under advice from Healthwatch England.

2. Websites

We have a [Healthwatch Brighton and Hove website](#) and we update the content multiple times each month. The website is where we share:

- Publications, such as our reports, including our Annual Reports.
- Details of our project work.
- Information that we must share with the public, such as our Board meeting and policies.
- Content from other organisations that will be of interest to the local Population.
- News articles.
- Advice and information.
- Press releases.
- Equality Impact Assessments.
- Performance reports.
- Workplans.

Our reports

We collate feedback after our engagement activities and regularly author reports which set out evidence-based recommendations for services and commissioners.

Our reports are shared via our website, often with a concise summary of our research and findings and the option of downloading the full report. Our reports include responses from key stakeholders such as local hospital trusts, and the local council. Reports are shared with partners to increase awareness of our work and findings such as the [Care Quality Commission](#), [NHS England](#), voluntary (VCSE) sector, and [Healthwatch England](#).

We track the status of any recommendations we make using our Impact Tracker and report back to the public where their experiences have had a direct impact on improving local services. We post this information to our website and social media and include in our newsletters.

3. Email newsletters.

We send out a monthly newsletter using Mailchimp to our 1400+ subscribers. Our email newsletters help us stay connected and share news and information with

the public, our volunteers, staff, and Board, local councillors and MPs, media and local organisations.

We encourage all people we contact to sign up for our newsletters. We also ask our partners to promote this option. This is done to increase our audience and ensure we attract signups from the public as well as professionals and organisations.

Our newsletters typically contain:

- Calls to action for people to share their feedback with us e.g. surveys, polls, how to join focus groups, etc.
- Details of other surveys not being delivered by Healthwatch on health and care issues which people can take part in.
- Details of our latest research, or project work.
- Our impact.
- Details of joint work conducted by Healthwatch in Sussex (which is where the three Healthwatch teams in Sussex work together).
- Details of reports produced by Healthwatch England.
- Advice about how people can get involved in our work.
- News and events going on in the local area that people may be interested in.
- We also include a spotlight feature to promote another local voluntary and community groups.

4. Promotion materials

We are committed to helping our city reach net zero and have therefore limited the amount of hard copy materials that we use. Where we have these, our publications include branded posters, leaflets, postcards, t-shirts, marketing stands, tablecloths and pens.

Where possible, we make posters, leaflets, postcards available in digital and printed formats. Digital publications are hosted on our websites, often for dissemination through social media.

Our printed publications are used to raise awareness of Healthwatch Brighton and Hove and during face-to-face engagement. Most of our publications are designed inhouse, using templates provided by Healthwatch England and free image resources such as Canva. Hard copy promotional materials are printed by local Brighton-based companies.

5. External newsletters and websites

We provide updates on our work and content for inclusion in a wide range of

external newsletters, such as those sent out by NHS Sussex and Brighton and Hove City Council and local VCSE organisations. We also provide key information about Healthwatch.

Our staff team regularly connects with other Communications Leads in our local area and we attend meetings with other VCSE groups to learn what they are doing and what events are coming up that we might support or take part in, and we also promote these. This ensures we know which messages about service changes Healthwatch can help to disseminate.

4. Internal communications

The staff team discuss the communications plan for the month ahead to determine how our various partners can be kept updated around engagement, research and projects, and any other activities.

This is also an opportunity to discuss ongoing project and research work and share examples of best practice.

Our Volunteer Coordinator sends regular emails directly to our volunteers containing information and opportunities that they may be interested in. We also have a WhatsApp group for our volunteers to keep them updated.

Several times a year, we issue a dedicated Volunteer newsletter and hold Volunteer Connect meetings. All volunteers, including Board members, are invited to attend these. The Volunteer Connect meeting is an opportunity for all volunteers, Board members and staff to come together, either face to face or online, to socialise, build knowledge, and discuss our current work.

5. Media and press releases

Media organisations regularly contact us for comment and to provide case studies which we do by gaining the consent from people who have left feedback. Their stories highlight key issues in health and social care.

Local media outlets also invite us to speak about our work and share our expertise on topical issues.

A press release is written to go alongside major reports that we publish and distributed to local media. We routinely update our lists of local media and press contacts and ensure our own contact details are well publicised and freely available. Looking to the future, we are keen to work with media outlets to achieve more support around our project work and surveys.

3. Our future goals: Looking ahead – April 2024 – March 2026

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove has built a strong and credible presence with providers and the public, but we recognise there is more we can achieve, especially in the rapidly changing landscape of health and social care.

To help us as we embed wider change and improvements plans, we will focus over the coming years on improving our communications across all channels and increasing public engagement participation across all work streams.

Moving forward, we will focus on the following:

1. **Making the messages we issue specific and actionable.**
2. **Making it easy for people to act.** We will continually strive to find ways to address the barriers that stop our audiences from interacting with us by asking people what stops them from doing this now?
3. **Creating a consistent experience.** We will continually strive to learn and understand how our audiences interact with us and build trust by using a variety of different communication channels and adapting our messaging and tone as required.
4. **Showing the impact that we help to make, thereby encouraging more people to share their experiences with us.** We will focus on consistently showing the difference our audiences are making to act as a prompt for other people to act and share their stories with us.
5. **Learning and testing.** We will continually adapt our approach to take account of the changing environment.
6. **Widening our partnerships.** We will continue to expand our working relationships with local partners who can help us reach diverse communities, especially those who experience worse health inequalities.
7. **Remembering that people are our brand.** We will use people's voices to build trust and confidence in our brand.
8. **Supporting wider campaigns.** We will monitor campaigns being delivered by key partners such as Healthwatch England, the CQC and NHS Sussex and promote these.

How will achieve this.

1. Using data to determine our priority audiences

We will continue to collect demographic information from our projects and engagement activities, and use wider sources of intelligence, to help us identify the groups we are still hearing less from or wish to focus our efforts on reaching. We will continually explore new ways to engage with these communities using our partnerships to help us. We will describe how we plan

to reach our target audiences by writing an Engagement Plan and publishing this.

To support us, we will explore how to add a new field to our online contact form asking where people heard about us. This data will help us target our efforts at improving our communications, and ensure we are making the most of popular channels and building on those where we have less of a presence. Our options are:

- Social media.
- Google or another search engine.
- Through your GP or local surgery.
- At a hospital.
- In a care home.
- At a dental practice.
- A poster or leaflet.
- Word of mouth.
- Using QR codes.
- Other.

2. Evaluating success

Every twelve months, we will continue to analyse our performance statistics and compare them to the previous period/year to help us understand which of our communications are doing well and where we need to improve. We will monitor:

- For our websites: the number of articles we have published, the number of people who have interacted with these and our top performing articles.
- For our social media: the number of followers we have, the number of posts we have published and what reach and engagement these have achieved and what our top performing posts were.
- Email newsletters: the number of subscribers we have and the 'open rate' for individual articles and what our top performing articles were.

3. Measuring our impact

Measuring impact is a key metric for us. By continuing to monitor our outputs, outcomes and impacts, using a tracker tool that can be accessed by all staff, this will enable us to better understand the impact we make, which in turn can be communicated to the public in a better, clearer way, which, in turn, will encourage more people to engage with us.

For our reports, we will monitor the number and quality of stakeholder responses we receive to our findings, plus the number of recommendations acted on by local services, to indicate the success of our project and commissioned work.

Outputs and outcomes from all our work will be highlighted in our annual

report published on 30th June each year.

4. Exploring new opportunities

Moving forward, we will explore the role of paid promotion, particularly around recruitment (e.g. LinkedIn) and collecting feedback (e.g. via 'X' and Facebook). This may involve optimising content for paid promotion and monitoring the success of paid campaigns.

We will also commence running a series of short 'market-testing' style polls which are easier and quicker for people to answer. This will help us capture high level insight on emerging issues and on topics about which we hear less. We will publish our results each time. We hope that this will stimulate public interest in engaging with Healthwatch as well as helping us to identify new projects or any issues that we need to bring to the attention of decision-makers.

We will identify opportunities to work with trusted partners to reach their service users which will support us in our ambition to widen awareness of who we are and what we do. This will also support our targeted outreach and engagement activities with different communities.

5. Public event

COVID-19 restrictions made it difficult for us to conduct face-to-face engagement. We have now recommenced our public engagement work and will continue to maximise the opportunities for this approach which makes it easier for people to share their feedback – we will go out to the people rather than expecting them to come to us. We will set this out in our Engagement Plan.

Contact us

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