



Speaking up for better care

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**Chief Executive,
Connected Together
CIC**

Kate Holt

“

“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

This year has brought uncertainty and changes, including cost-reduction plans for NHS health commissioners, the early stages of Local Government Reorganisation and the Government's plans to abolish Healthwatch.

These all signal significant shifts ahead in how our health and care services are delivered and how Rutland voices are represented. This means that the independent collection and representation of public and patient feedback to leaders across the health and care landscape has become ever more important.

Much of our work this last year has focused on access: to primary care; to information and guidance; to women's health services; to same-day healthcare; and to clear information about how the system is changing. We have listened to people through surveys, outreach events and one-to-one conversations. Their experiences, positive, negative and everything in between, have shaped our priorities and informed our discussions with system leaders.

The emphasis on "neighbourhoods" within the 2025 NHS 10-year Health Plan has raised important questions about what this means in practice for our rural county. We will keep pressing for clarity, transparency and genuine local benefit for Rutland people.

Alongside this, we have continued our commitment to amplifying the voices of people who are often unheard. As ever, we are grateful to everyone who has shared their experiences with us - your feedback and trust underpin everything we do.

As I write this, the NHS Reform and Modernisation Bill currently being reviewed in parliament, proposes that from April 2027 there will no longer be an independent Healthwatch for anyone in Rutland, or indeed country wide. The Secretary of State seeks to dissolve all 153 local Healthwatch, along with Healthwatch England.

Continues....

A message from our chair

continued

We do not know the detail of local and national plans to ensure that the independent voice of the public is heard and acted upon in the future, but we will continue to publicise any information we get, to the public, to partners and to health and care service commissioners and providers.

I thank our staff and volunteers for their fantastic work throughout the year. Healthwatch Rutland continues to be a strong, independent advocate for local people. We remain focused on ensuring that the needs of Rutland residents are recognised, respected and acted upon.



Chair
Dr Janet Underwood
PhD



“Amid a year of change, the honesty of those who shared their experiences with us has shaped our work and strengthened our challenge to system leaders. With independent patient voice under threat, we remain committed to Rutland residents and those too often unheard.”

About us

Healthwatch Rutland 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



Healthwatch Rutland is a strong and independent community champion. We give local people a voice and work in partnership to influence the design and quality of health and social care provision so that you can get the care you need



Our mission

To make sure the experiences of Rutland people help to make health and care better



Our values

We will:

- be accessible and visible
- remain independent and objective
- be open, honest and transparent in everything we do
- be inclusive, embracing diversity and equality
- listen to the experiences of all people in Rutland, especially if they don't always have their voices heard
- speak up for local people and enable people to speak for themselves
- seek out and use evidence from local people to drive change and make health and care better

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 1457 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed 1 member of staff and, our work was supported by 8 volunteers.



Reaching out:

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

1065 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as how to get support to make a formal complaint to the NHS, finding an NHS dentist, where to find support and practical information after a bereavement and details of local seasonal vaccination programmes.



Championing your voice:

We produced 3 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like the NHS app and local urgent care services.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by Rutland County Council. In 2025/26 we received £95,000 which is 25% more than 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 Rutland, as well as ensuring we continue to be the best we can be.

Spring

We ensured residents' voices were heard throughout the consultation on same-day healthcare at the end of the previous year in 2024-25, reaching people across a wide range of groups. In April 2025 after the consultation had closed, we raised concerns that changes to opening hours had not been clearly communicated and that essential detail sat within a separate Business Case that was difficult to access online and not included in the printed consultation booklet.



Summer

Across our in-person engagement throughout the year, residents told us they value the NHS App for convenient access to prescriptions, records and test results, but feel it still falls short of its promise as a true digital "front door". The most common concerns were the inability to book GP appointments and limited hospital integration, with some reporting inaccurate referral times. These insights highlight the improvements needed to ensure digital tools genuinely support people's care.



Autumn

At the Healthwatch Rutland Annual Meeting in October, as well as presenting our work, we hosted guests from the local NHS and Rutland County Council to discuss the Government's 10-year Health Plan, changes to NHS commissioning and the development of neighbourhood health and care in Rutland. Following public questions, we published a comprehensive list of clinics at Rutland Memorial Hospital, addressing a clear gap in accessible information highlighted by attendees.



Winter

In January we achieved the Investing in Volunteers accreditation, having been awarded the quality mark for a further three years. Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for good practice in volunteer management. The standard aims to improve the quality of the volunteering experience for all volunteers and demonstrates that organisations value the enormous contribution made by their volunteers.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care across the Leicester, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland cluster are heard at the Integrated Care System level and influence decisions about services.

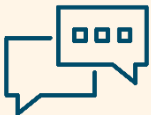
This year, we've worked closely with Healthwatch across the Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland Integrated Care Board (ICB) cluster:

Joining forces to improve care



In late 2025 we met with ICB decision-makers to agree how we would work together in the year ahead. Local Healthwatch across Leicester, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland are now coordinating a single, shared, non-voting seat on the Joint ICB Board and key subcommittees, ensuring our communities' voices are heard. We look forward to continuing this collaboration to improve care.

Every woman's health matters



With support from the Women's Health Team, we engaged more than 2,700 women and girls across LLR to understand their health priorities. Their experiences are helping shape local plans, including access to services, community-based clinics, specialist training and greater awareness of women's health issues. This work feeds into the LLR ICB Women and Girls' Health Programme, ensuring local insight informs future service development.

Better care in Ophthalmology



Following our joint enter and view visit with Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire to the Leicester Royal Infirmary Ophthalmology department, the hospital has made several improvements. These include increasing capacity, using text message reminders and telephone calls to improve communication, reviewing signage for visually impaired patients, progressing an electronic calling system and improving patient comfort through refreshments, water provision, volunteer support and help with navigation while waiting.

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 Rutland this year:



Ensuring emergency information is accessible for deaf and deafblind residents

In December 2025, a Rutland resident contacted Healthwatch with serious concerns about the accessibility of local "Right Care, Right Place" information on how to best access urgent healthcare support.

They highlighted that campaign materials and linked webpages did not explain how deaf or deafblind people, many of whom use British Sign Language (BSL), should access urgent or emergency help. The omission meant that key guidance failed to meet the Accessible Information Standard and left parts of the community without vital, life-saving information.

Following our escalation, the Integrated Care Board reviewed and updated its website. New paragraphs now clearly explain how people with hearing loss, or who use BSL, can access NHS 111 via textphone or the BSL interpreter service and how to use Emergency SMS for 999. The ICB further committed to updating the PDF guide in the next edition.

[Go to the improved Right Care, Right Place pages](#)



Fair access to repeat prescriptions

When a local GP practice began encouraging patients to order repeat prescriptions online, we helped explain the benefits for those able to use digital tools.

But when our volunteers and patient feedback revealed that some people were finding this difficult, we worked with the practice to make sure everyone could still access their prescriptions, including through paper requests where needed.

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.



Keeping same-day care in Rutland local: a four-year journey of local impact

When plans emerged in 2022 to overhaul urgent care across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland leaving Oakham without any same-day provision, Healthwatch Rutland stepped in to protect local access.

What did we do

Over 2023–2024, volunteers undertook a comprehensive Enter and View programme across Corby Urgent Care, Oakham Urgent Care, Oakham Minor Injuries and Stamford Minor Injuries Units, gathering first-hand evidence of quality, access and patient experience.

Throughout 2024, this insight was brought directly into planning discussions, ensuring that new models for same-day access included maintaining a facility in Oakham.

During the formal consultation in 2025, Healthwatch Rutland amplified local voices by promoting the consultation widely and collecting independent feedback to strengthen the case for accessible, reliable local services.

Key things we heard during the consultation:



We spoke to 50 residents who welcomed the plan to merge the Minor Injuries and Urgent Care into a single, clearer service but raised strong concerns about reduced opening hours, loss of walk-in access and restricted X-ray availability.



“It’s not acceptable to have to drive to Melton or Stamford or Leicester or Leicestershire for an Xray”

What difference did this make?

This sustained effort over several years delivered tangible results. On 1 April 2026, a new combined Minor Illness and Injury service opened in Oakham, offering bookable and walk-in appointments, seven-day access and enhanced X-ray provision, safeguarding local urgent care for Rutland residents.

From lived experience to system change for self-funders

Understanding how people in Rutland organise and pay for their own social care gave us vital insight that has driven real improvements over the past year.

Many residents are self-funders, often arranging care at moments of stress, crisis or rapid change. Their experiences offered important insight into what information and support is working and where improvements are needed. Our independent research in 2024-25, commissioned by Rutland County Council, engaged 129 people through interviews, focus groups and a survey.

People told us that personalised, one-to-one support from trusted professionals makes a real difference. Practical advice, clear explanations and reassurance were highly valued, and many relied on charities such as Age UK for accessible information. However, awareness of council support was low: 68% of survey respondents had not approached the council, often because they did not know they were entitled to free needs assessments, financial assessments or carer support. This lack of visibility left many navigating the system alone.

The emotional impact of arranging care was clear. Carers described the process as isolating and overwhelming, especially during major changes in a loved one's health. People consistently asked for clearer guidance, simple checklists and reliable information in formats that suit different needs.



“I don't know what I don't know.”

What difference did this make?

In response to our recommendations, Rutland County Council produced an action plan to improve support for self-funders and strengthen access to clear information and guidance.

A year on, Rutland County Council has made strong progress in delivering against the action plan, responding directly to the issues raised through our research. The work has centred on improving the visibility and quality of information and ensuring that people who fund their own care can navigate the system with greater confidence.

A major area of improvement has been public information. The Council has redesigned its Adult Social Care webpages, co-produced clearer guidance with experts by experience and launched a new Adult Social Care awareness video. These changes form part of a wider communications effort to ensure that self-funders can more easily understand their options, rights and available support.

From lived experience to system change for self-funders ... continued

What has changed as a result?

Strengthening information quality

A comprehensive review of public-facing information, alongside an internal audit of the Rutland Information Service (RIS) and JOY platform, identified several areas for improvement.

- Audit actions are now monitored through the Council's quality assurance systems.
- Work to integrate RIS and JOY is underway, with the aim of creating a single, streamlined information hub by August 2026.

Supporting people through the care journey

The Council has also focused on practical tools that help people manage key stages of arranging care.

- "Waiting Well" packs, co-designed across the East Midlands, are now in use.
- A new carers strategy has been developed through co-production with local carers.
- Care directories are being restructured to separate guidance from advertising and will be accessible via the ASC website.

Navigation and financial information

Navigation support is now available through the RISE Team and social prescribers, ensuring self-funders can access help when needed.

Financial information on costs, thresholds and Continuing Healthcare has been strengthened, with further improvements, such as a self-funding toolkit and updated online financial assessment pages, currently in progress.

Finally, new guidance for arranging care outside the local area is now in place, offering clearer support for people facing complex arrangements for loved ones outside of Rutland.

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.

Our information and signposting service supports people by providing advice, helping people to find the wellbeing support they need or help finding health and social care 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



Information and signposting

Local physiotherapy for a resident without their own transport

Our advice helped a patient who was unable to drive and worried that they would have to travel a long way to access the physiotherapy they needed.

We explained about self-referral methods or that they could contact their GP practice for an appointment with a first contact physiotherapist.

After a short wait, they were seen by a knowledgeable local physiotherapist who examined them, listened carefully to their concerns and provided exercises to build strength safely without causing further damage.

They were reassured that they could continue seeing the same physiotherapist after planned surgery and they were impressed by the clear communication, including helpful text reminders and links to their exercise programme.



“Excellent communication.”

Helping a Rutland resident get temporary GP care for their grandson

When their grandson was visiting a Rutland family, he needed to see a doctor but was already registered elsewhere in the country.

The resident came to us to seek advice about how to go about getting the care he needed.

We advised that he could register temporarily for up to 3 months with any of the practices here in Rutland, by providing his name, date of birth and address and filling in a temporary services form at the practice of his choice. We also signposted to the NHS website section on registering as a temporary patient.



“Many thanks for this very useful information, which will be passed to grandson.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 471 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:

- Were out at community events, listening to residents, gathering insight and raising awareness of Healthwatch.
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Produced newsletters and updates for their community to keep them informed of health and care matters locally.



At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our Board volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care, ensuring that this insight continues to guide our strategic priorities.



Alan
Vice Chair

A Rutlander born and bred, Alan joined Healthwatch Rutland as a board member with a strong understanding of the local health and care landscape from his previous involvement with local Health and Wellbeing and Safeguarding Boards.

“After seeing the issues faced by young people during my time as a foster carer, I developed a strong interest in health equality, especially in a rural setting. Following experience of emergency care I am also keen to encourage better, more timely access to acute care locally, and a more joined-up, fully-informed journey for everyone navigating their way through the complexities of the health and care systems.”

Jane has enjoyed a long and fulfilling career in primary education, including eight years as Headteacher of a village school. Now, working part-time allows her to bring that same commitment to health and care as an Advisory Board Member.

“I am passionate about health and social care and feel that everyone deserves access to a high-quality national health service. The NHS is an amazing service which we are incredibly fortunate to have access to. Being even a very small part of helping within it, as a Healthwatch volunteer, feels genuinely worthwhile.”



Jane
Board member



Samantha
Board member

Samantha has spent the past decade working in care homes, community home-care and the NHS, supporting older people and gaining a deep understanding of their needs. She now brings this insight to her role on the Healthwatch Rutland Advisory Board.

“As a mother of three young(ish) children, I also see healthcare from another angle, which helps me notice where support can sometimes fall short. My passion for high-quality care keeps growing, and working with Healthwatch Rutland allows me to use both perspectives to help improve people’s experiences of health and social care.”

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Rutland 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 Rutland County Council	£95,000	Expenditure on pay	£90,230
		Non-pay expenditure	£14,843
Total income	£95,000	Total Expenditure	£105,073

The deficit of £10,073 was covered by additional income from other projects conducted by Connected Together CIC.

Over the next year, we'll carry on reaching into every part of our community, ensuring that the stories and experiences of all Rutland residents reach the people who make the decisions.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Gathering insights into public awareness and patient experience of Pharmacy First service in Rutland.
2. Defibrillators in Rutland - examining public awareness and accessibility, the quality of available information, maintenance processes, and any associated risks or gaps in local provision.
3. Enter and view visit to explore patient experiences of the transition from acute hospital discharge to community hospital step-down care at Rutland Memorial Hospital.

Statutory statements

Connected Together Community Interest Company is the legal entity and governing body for Healthwatch Rutland: Moulton Park Business Centre, Redhouse Road, Northampton, NN3 6AQ

Healthwatch Rutland 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 Advisory Board consists of 4 members, three of whom 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 four times and made decisions on matters such as:

- Writing to Alicia Kearns, MP for Rutland and Stamford, to share local concerns about the Government's plans to replace independent Healthwatch bodies with new structures that risk weakening the public's independent voice in health and care.
- Working with a local GP practice to ensure patients can use all methods to order repeat prescriptions, including paper forms for those without access to, or confidence in, online systems.

Development of our annual work priorities is driven by our volunteers coming together in planning meetings early in the calendar year. Using the public feedback and insight we received throughout the year, enables us to understand which health and care themes mean the most to local people and shaped our plan of work going forward.

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.

Statutory statements

During 2025/26, we have been available by phone and email, provided comments and enquiries forms on our website and through social media and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We take additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds, including those who are often not heard by health and care decision-makers. This year we have done this by, for example, attending community fridges and soup kitchens, carers groups and coffee mornings with people living in assisted living accommodation

We ensure that this annual report is made available as widely as possible by publishing it on our website, by email to newsletter membership, stakeholders and partners, via social media and directly to the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England.

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not 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 take information to all the sub-groups of the Health and Wellbeing Board including the Children and Young People's Partnership, Neighbourhood Strategic Commissioning Group, Staying Healthy Partnership and Mental Health Neighbourhood Group. We also liaise with the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee and various lived experience and participation groups.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Rutland is represented on the Rutland Health and Wellbeing Board by Dr Janet Underwood, Chair of the advisory board.

During 2025/26, Janet effectively carried out this role by regularly attending Health and Wellbeing Board meetings and taking an active part in all discussions, representing public feedback about their experiences. Janet has represented the Rutland voice in debates such as local dentistry commissioning and neighbourhood health plans.

We share residents' insights and experiences with decision-makers through the joint Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland Integrated Care Board. Since the cluster arrangement was introduced in 2025, we have worked with the four other Healthwatch organisations in our cluster area (Leicester, Leicestershire, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire) to coordinate representation at ICB meetings and sub-committees which now have 1 seat for Healthwatch. This is through a nominated representative and deputy who bring the public voice to the ICB Board, Commissioning Strategy Committee, and Quality, Performance and Outcomes Committee. Janet Underwood is the cluster lead on the Commissioning Strategy Committee.

Healthwatch Rutland was represented by Janet on the LLR Integrated Care Partnership and the LLR Integrated Care Board until they were disbanded in 2025 when the cluster arrangement with Northamptonshire was formed.

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

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