



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Rutland

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"The impact that local Healthwatch have is vitally important. Healthwatch are empowering their communities to share their experiences. They're changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people's views are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our Chair

I am proud to present our annual report which showcases the hard work of staff and volunteers as they reach out to all Rutland communities and individuals.

Throughout the year we have continued to build recognition of the health inequalities experienced in our rural county where people tell us that accessing healthcare in the surrounding areas can be difficult and costly.

Your needs and experiences have been shared with partners in our health and care system at all levels and have had a powerful impact on how our care is delivered here in Rutland.

But, change can take time. Several years ago our community hospital was threatened with closure. Now, thanks to public feedback, we are looking forward to improvements to the building and a new, combined minor injuries and minor illness service to serve our urgent care needs.

This year we secured a new contract with Rutland County Council allowing us to continue to drive change until 2027. I am so very grateful to our advisory board members, who 'stepped down' at the end of the old contract and welcome the new board members who have 'stepped up'.

Our volunteers are the lifeblood of Healthwatch Rutland. Their skills and dedication help us to extend our reach as they seek to improve health and care services for their families, neighbours and communities. I thank them and our staff for their hard work.



"We face much change in terms of local government reorganisation, the reshaping of Integrated Care Boards and the merger of NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care. In this time of uncertainty it has never been more important for people to talk to us."

[Dr Janet Underwood, Chair, Healthwatch Rutland]

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

We've supported more than 2466 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 2 part time staff and our work is supported by 9 volunteers.

Reaching out:



1255 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1210 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as accessing urgent care and finding an NHS dentist.

Championing your voice:



We published 9 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas such as NHS communication and administration and children's emergency care.

Our most popular report was the [Oakham Minor Injuries Enter and View report](#) highlighting people's confusion over what urgent care services are on offer and when.

Statutory funding:



We are funded by Rutland County Council. In 2024/25 we received **£76,230** which is 5% higher 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. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

The publication of our Enter and View report for the Oakham Minor Injuries Unit completed a rolling programme of visits to the Urgent Care and Minor Injuries facilities used by Rutland patients. Following our recommendations the service provider implemented customer care training to improve patient experience at the Reception.



Summer

Our review of the Quality Accounts of Leicestershire Partnership Trust, and North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust included our assessment of the quality of their services, patient safety, effectiveness of treatment and the use of patient feedback to improve services.



Autumn

Our evidence of public experiences of poor access to NHS dentistry was presented to the Rutland Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October. The patient experiences and their stories were discussed by the Committee and representatives of the Integrated Care Board, leading to a resolution to escalate the situation to the Department of Health and Social Care.



Winter

Our Authorised Representatives joined with volunteers from Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire to visit the Leicester Ophthalmology Department. Our report called for extending clinic hours, improving signage and communication, upgrading waiting facilities, and addressing accessibility - particularly for vulnerable patients and children.

The insight we gathered on proposals to change urgent care services in Rutland highlighted concerns that the new service would not allow walk-in access. Reduced hours of service and reliance on NHS111 and GP practices as the main triage routes were also concerns.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Rutland are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Integrated Care Board.

We have worked closely with Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire where we feel that the patient voice from across LLR can help drive change. We collaborate on work plans, conduct joint Enter and View visits to services and meet regularly with health and care service providers and each other. This year we've worked together to achieve the following:

Children's Mental Health Services



Following our visit to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) – The Beacon Unit, key concerns around food quality, staffing consistency and underused spaces were highlighted. As a result, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust acknowledged the report, agreed its accuracy and began implementing improvements. These include reviewing food provision, increasing staff recruitment and exploring better use of classrooms during holidays.

Spotlight on NHS dental access



In April, we presented to the federation of Leicestershire and Rutland Women's Institutes on the National Dental Recovery Plan, clarifying its anticipated impact on residents. Attendees, by highlighting confusion, reinforced the need for clearer communication. This session strengthened our ongoing work to represent patients' voices and emphasised the ongoing challenges LLR residents face accessing NHS dentistry.

Right Care, right place, right time



Our joint Enter and View work has highlighted that people often use emergency departments because they cannot access urgent care in the community. Our ongoing work has helped to shape the new pre-hospital model of care that will provide consistent community access to urgent care for all, through a single triage process and new response pathways.

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:

Involving the public in service change

By involving local people Healthwatch enables commissioners and providers of care to understand patients' needs at the earliest stages of service design.



In 2022 the local NHS approached Healthwatch Rutland with proposals to change the way urgent care services would be delivered in Rutland. At the very earliest stages of discussions, we argued for the retention of a facility in the county, open for 7 days a week. Following this we visited all the urgent care and minor injuries facilities used by Rutland residents both inside and outside the county. We shared the evidence of peoples' confusion over how to access urgent care and the problems they encounter with transport to distant facilities with the Integrated Care Board.

As a result a new model was proposed combining urgent care and minor injuries into a single clinic in Oakham. The public consultation ran from January to March this year and will inform the business case for change.

Improving care over time

Change takes time. We work behind the scenes to consistently raise issues and bring about change.



In 2021, we gathered feedback from across the county to understand what people needed from health and care services in Rutland. We engaged particularly with more vulnerable groups of people who don't always have their voices heard. Thanks to what people shared at that time, we were able to influence the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and delivery plan (2022-2027), to shape how care is delivered in the county.

At the halfway point of the strategy, great strides have been made in improving services including strengthened health support through neighbourhood café's; more evening and Saturday general practice appointments are available; weekly dementia clinics are delivered at Rutland Memorial Hospital with wraparound support during and after the diagnosis process; and the women's hub and the family hub have been mobilised. We continue to bring your insight to many of the working groups that oversee the planned improvements.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't be improved if the providers 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.



Listening to your experiences

Exploring self-funder's experiences of organising social care in Rutland

People who pay for their own social care in Rutland (also called 'self-funders') highlight the strengths of current services and the need for better support during what can be a complex and emotional journey.

Commissioned by Rutland County Council, our independent research engaged 129 local residents through interviews, focus groups and a survey.

Key themes we heard:

- **Examples of good support:** participants praised one-to-one help from trusted professionals and valued practical advice and guidance. 39% of survey respondents told us the most useful sources of online information and guidance are the websites of charities such as Age UK.
- **Gaps in awareness:** many were unaware of the support available through the council, including free needs, financial and carer assessments. 68% of survey respondents did not approach the council for help, largely because they didn't know they could.
- **Emotional toll on carers:** some described the process as isolating and stressful, especially during major transitions such as moving a loved one into residential care.
- **Desire for clarity and guidance:** Respondents want more personalised help, simple checklists and reliable information in formats they can easily use, whether online, print, or face-to-face.



"It was a terrible time emotionally and such big decisions to take. I felt very unsupported and ill-informed generally. I didn't even know who could help or how."

Read the report: [Self-funding social care: Experiences of navigating the system in Rutland](#)

Listening to your experiences

Exploring self-funder's experiences of organising social care in Rutland continued..

Key recommendations included:

- Increasing public awareness of social care options and financial responsibilities through a targeted campaign.
- Improve local authority information resources by creating:
 - A streamlined information hub which collects all information and guidance together.
 - A checklist for self-funders that charts the journey of making decisions about social care and the options.
- Provide all information in all media – online, print and in-person.
- Establish a care navigation role to offer a dedicated point of contact for self-funders' information and support.
- Improve information and help about funding thresholds, care costs, depletion of funds and Continuing Health Care awards.

What difference will it make?

Rutland County Council has outlined plans for addressing the issues raised by self-funders' experiences:

"We acknowledge the recommendations outlined in this report and Jane's personal reflections of the journey of a self-funder. We will be taking the necessary actions to address them and several of the recommendations, including the development of our information, advice and guidance offer and overall accessibility of information, are already being addressed through our quality assurance activity. The learning from this report will help us to tailor the work further and provides us with valuable insights into different peoples' lived experience when making decisions about care and support.

We will create an action plan following this report which will hold us accountable and track our progression against the recommendations made."

Kim Sorsky

Director of Adults and Health, Rutland County Council

Listening to your experiences

Highlighting the urgent need for improved NHS communication and administration

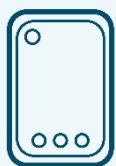
Rutland residents told us that they want change: better co-ordination between NHS services, simple appointment processes and improved management of test results and medications.

What did we do?

130 people shared their experiences of moving between NHS services and along care pathways. Their stories reveal significant communication gaps that impact patient wellbeing and satisfaction, and in some cases, safety.

Read the full report [*Patient experiences of NHS communications and administration*](#)

Key things we heard from survey respondents:



37%

told us that they were satisfied with the communication they received from the NHS whilst 43% said they were dissatisfied.

38%

said they had to chase up communications that they had been told to expect such as test results, medications advice and therapy. Further to this, nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) reported having to intervene to ensure that the results of tests taken in one location were available to clinicians in another facility.



[At the hospital] "I asked, 'What about a repeat prescription?' and they said there would be a letter [to the GP]. Nothing was done, so I called the surgery. They said they had not had a letter, so it wasn't their problem and ring the consultant. You can never get through to anyone I called the hospital pharmacy and they said it's the consultant's problem."

Listening to your experiences

Highlighting the urgent need for improved NHS communication and administration continued..

Key themes we heard:

- Patients waiting for hospital treatment talked of receiving few or no updates about their status, leading to anxiety and frustration.
- Issues with appointment scheduling, lost referrals and test results not being shared in a timely manner.
- Delays in communicating medication requirements between hospitals and GP practices and pharmacies create risks for patient safety.
- Patients experience challenges communicating with their GP practice with long wait times and limited appointment availability. There is a lack of awareness or confidence in using online consultation systems.
- People reported issues with urgent and emergency care such as problems locating loved ones admitted to hospital via ambulance.
- People with disabilities experience additional barriers, such as inaccessible formats and a lack of support when navigating NHS services.



"I live in Oakham. If you are a Peterborough Hospital patient and need a blood test, we have to travel all the way to Stamford to do this – I can't go to Oakham Medical Practice. I have to pay for a taxi because I don't drive. The systems don't talk to each other. It's ridiculous."

Listening to your experiences

Highlighting the urgent need for improved NHS communication and administration continued...

Key areas for improvement:

- Offer choice in how patients receive healthcare communication.
- Promote awareness and increase usability of online consultation platforms.
- Enhance urgent and emergency care communication with clear guidance for accessing the services.
- Update patients on hospital waiting lists and give contact numbers to patients for queries about appointments and care.
- Improve communication between hospitals and primary care with timely notification of hospital-led medication changes and test results.
- Support patients with disabilities by offering communication in their preferred format.

What difference will it make?

The implementation of practical solutions such as, improving coordination of medications between hospital and General Practice and ensuring timely access to test results can make a significant difference in patient satisfaction and safety.



Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Rutland. 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 focused our community outreach on children, young people and families.
- We attended family stay and play sessions at military sites.
- We visited independent living communities to talk with residents about their health and care.



Hearing from all communities

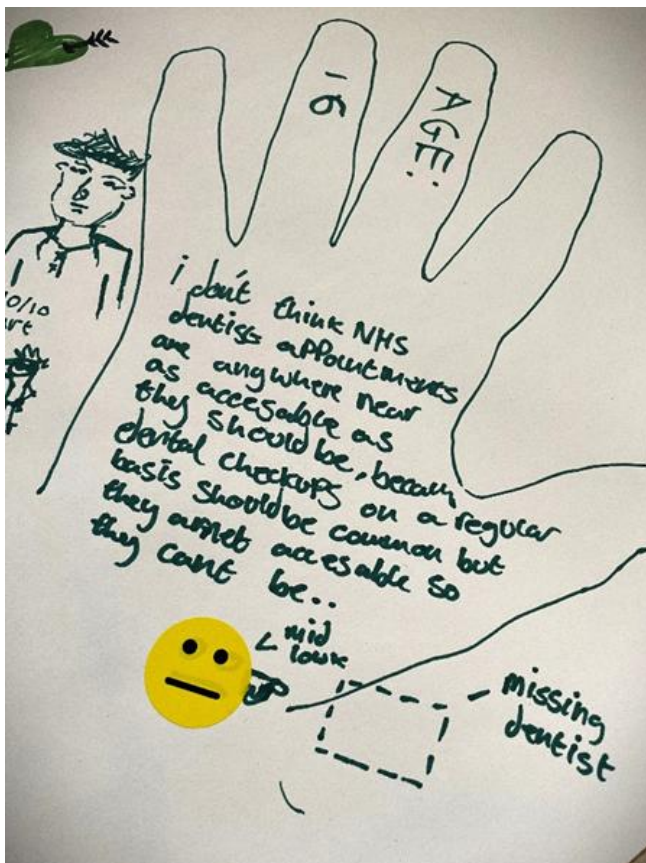
Understanding family perspectives on access to NHS dentistry

While we know that adults continue to struggle to access NHS dentistry in Rutland, we investigated the experiences of children, young people and families.

Three quarters of the parents we spoke to said their child had received free dental care in the last 12 months. Some had to be persistent in finding NHS appointments for children and others had not managed to access it at all.

The majority of children (75%) indicated that they are happy to go to the dentist, showing that they have no fear of the experience.

Young people's opinions were mixed. One young person aged 13 said that they had wanted to be a dentist when they grow up since they were 6 years old. Another young person aged 16 commented on accessibility of appointments:



What difference did this make?

We shared this feedback with commissioners and councillors.

The Integrated Care Board has created a 3-year plan to increase the number of NHS dental appointments in Rutland and work is underway to improve oral health in the county following publication of the Oral Health Needs Assessment.

Information and signposting

Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint, or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us. This year 87 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

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



Understanding how to get urgent care in Oakham

A member of the public who works with children wanted to know where she could find definitive information about how to access urgent care services if needed for her job.

"Is there a single place that shows what is offered at Rutland Memorial Hospital ...minor injuries, minor illness, X-ray days etc? ... What services are available and on what days? Online information is very contradictory and confusing. Where does it say [what is] open and if it's walk in etc?"

We explained the services and linked her to the most up-to-date information from the Integrated Care Board on urgent care services in Rutland.



"We use these services often in our role and it can be a little tricky signposting. You are very helpful! Thanks so much!"

Getting help with costs of travelling to NHS appointments

A patient was having planned surgery at a hospital in Nottingham and finding the costs of travelling there and back for consultations and pre-operative appointments very expensive.

They wanted to know if there was any kind of NHS financial support or mileage claim scheme available to pensioners of limited means.

We signposted them to the NHS Low Income Scheme and HC1 form and the new NHS Business Service Authority 'check if you are eligible for help' pages.



"We just can't afford that sort of money for taxis"

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 1219 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 Community Champions collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Our Authorised Representatives carried out Enter and View visits to local services to help them improve
- Our volunteers engaged people at events and community groups to offer information and signposting and promote our work



Showcasing volunteer impact

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.

David joined us as an Authorised Representative, visiting settings of health and care to listen to the feedback of service users and staff and to observe how care is delivered.

"I have needed to use my GP Practice several times and had mostly positive experiences. However, I have spoken to others who have struggled to access the care they need. This made me realise people need somewhere to be able to express their views on the service they have received and to inform the providers of the service, so they can improve.

Healthwatch organisations were established to act as a local consumer voice for people using health and social care services so that all local people have an opportunity for an improved quality of life. I hope that in some small way I can help in this aim."



Elizabeth is a Community Healthwatch Champion who helps us to engage with people living in the retirement communities in which she works. Elizabeth listens to residents' experiences, signposts them to local services and promotes Healthwatch.

"My background is in customer service, mainly retail. I have a passion for delivering the best we can and that can mean individually or as a team. To help and be a volunteer with Rutland Healthwatch is a great way of doing this. Being in the community, now working in a different field, really supports my day-to-day job and it is a way of giving feedback to improve all sorts of things related to health and social care, which helps us all."



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.healthwatchrutland.co.uk



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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	
Local Authority core funding	£76,230	Expenditure on pay	£96,574
Additional income	£12,356	Non-pay expenditure	£22,627
Total income	£88,586	Total Expenditure	£119,201

The Healthwatch Rutland contract made a loss of £42,971 this year, against its core funding from Rutland County Council.

Additional funding from other work secured an extra £12,356 during the year to partially offset this loss. Connected Together CIC therefore subsidised the Healthwatch Rutland contract by a total of £30,615.

Additional income is broken down into:

- £8,156 received from the local authority for the self-funders of social care project
- £4,200 received from the local authority for the provision of independent customer service calls to users of social care services.

Finance and future priorities

Next steps:

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in rural areas, so that commissioners and service providers hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop a culture of care where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients and users of their services, to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year:

1. Investigate people's experiences of hospital discharge, including: delays in discharge; the risks of discharge before patients are ready; problems with medications at discharge and communications across services in the discharge pathways.
2. Explore the experiences of people who formally identify as unpaid carers and those who informally provide care for others. This will include the impact of caregiving on mental and physical health and look at barriers to accessing support.
3. Develop our outreach programme to engage with young people to explore how constant online connectivity affects their mental and emotional wellbeing.

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 four 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 2024/25, the Board met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as:

- Creating a response to the national Dental Recovery Plan to local dental commissioners calling for a place-based action plan to improve access in Rutland.
- Following up our stakeholder perceptions survey with a short “What is Healthwatch” explainer to help stakeholders and the public understand our role, how we operate, and our relationships to local and national NHS and Healthwatch organisations.

Development of our annual work priorities is driven by our volunteers coming together in planning meetings each Spring. We also invited wider public involvement through a survey inviting public feedback on ‘your priorities for health and care services’. This, along with the public feedback we received over the year, enabled us to hear which health and care themes mean the most to local people and shaped our plan of work going forward.

Statutory statements

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 2024/25, we have been available by phone, email and social media, provided comments and enquiries forms on our website 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 support networks for people with sight impairment, groups for people living with dementia and their carers and coffee mornings with people living in sheltered 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 and stakeholders, via social media and directly to the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England.

Responses to recommendations

Throughout the year all providers responded to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, therefore 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, Integrated Delivery 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 2022/23 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 the suicide prevention strategy and proposals to change same-day healthcare clinics. She has championed the need to improve access to NHS dentistry in the county and contributed to a Health and Wellbeing Board development workshop on this subject.

We also take insight and experiences to decision makers in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care System through the Integrated Care Board, Health Equity Committee, System Quality Group, Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership, the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, quarterly meetings with local trusts and providers, and several NHS design groups and collaboratives.

A full list of the boards and meetings we attend can be found in our annual plan.

We collaborate with colleagues at Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire to ensure that between us, Healthwatch is present at all major system decision making forums. We also routinely share our research and feedback data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Statutory statements

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Ensuring that reporting on achievements in health and care integration at place is easy to find and understandable by the public.	New pages have been set up on local authority website describing the service improvements made by health and care partners against the Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan.
Challenging the lack of availability of face-to-face Talking Therapies support in Rutland.	The Service Provider has committed to delivering in-person support when patients require it.
Bringing the patient voice to improving management of Transferring Care Safely issues.	Healthwatch Rutland now has a seat on the board to represent patients.
Highlighting the necessity to ensure diverse and inclusive representation in Carers' Delivery planning in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.	New Carers Strategy work was co-produced from the start with people with lived experience.
Championing carers' requirement to continue to receive Admiral Nurse support after a loved one has been admitted to a care home.	Admiral Nurses are now piloting regular visits to care homes to engage with family members of residents with dementia.
Production of briefing calling on the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to develop a place-based plan to improve NHS dental access in Rutland.	3-year dental plan has been produced by ICB with specific focus on increasing the number of units of dental activity commissioned for people in Rutland.

Statutory statements

Enter and View

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service – The Beacon Unit.	Part of focused work on services for children, young people and families.	We produced a report and recommendations. These were accepted by the service provider which will review food choices for inpatients.
Leicester Royal Infirmary Children's Emergency Department.	Part of ongoing programme of visits to urgent and emergency care facilities used by Rutland residents.	We worked with the service provider to agree an action plan to address our recommendations.
Leicester Royal Infirmary Ophthalmology Department	Inconsistency in public feedback prompted a deeper look at the clinics to understand the wide variation of patient experiences.	We created a report and the recommendations are awaiting comment from the service provider.

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