

The value of listening

Healthwatch Dudley

Annual Report 2023-2024



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"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



Note: Names and identifying details of people have been changed throughout this report.

Message from our Chief Officer

Over the last 12 months, we've witnessed increasing pressures on health and social care services. The cost of living crisis has impacted local people's wellbeing and we have seen how financial pressures have contributed to making health inequalities worse.

People's experiences must continue to shape the direction of health and social care services so that services work for the community.

The feedback the local community shares can be an invaluable opportunity to improve services. After 1049 people shared their views on access to GP services, the Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB), which is responsible for developing a plan for meeting the health needs of the local area, plans to use these views to support their five-year primary care plan. The feedback from patients we spoke to during visits to six GP practices has been listened to and the practices have committed to implementing changes.

We listen to people who find it difficult for their voices to be heard. This can be seen through our work where we heard from young Black and Mixed-race males involved with the Youth Justice System (YJS). We have been encouraged by the commitment from a range of services to come together, to tackle the over-representation of ethnic minority youth in the YJS. This is a complex, long-standing issue and we hope changes will improve outcomes for young Black and Mixed-race boys in Dudley borough.

Our work this year has shown the changes that can be made when local people share their experiences. We look forward to monitoring these changes and hope to show real improvements for the people of Dudley borough.

I'd like to thank our staff, volunteers, our Steering Group and partners for their ongoing commitment to ensuring local people's voices are listened to and acted on.

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Jason Griffiths, Chief Officer Healthwatch Dudley

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"I'd like to thank the people of Dudley borough for sharing their views and insight to help improve local services."



About us

Healthwatch Dudley is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS and social care leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and services that can support you.

Our vision

A world 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.



Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation especially those who don't always have their voices heard.
- Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.



Our team

Healthwatch Dudley is your local health and social care champion.

Linzi and Ruksana - Listening and Signposting Officers

Linzi and Ruksana listen to people to find out their views on health and social care services. Stories are also captured by engaging with local groups and communities. They signpost people to services that can help people get the care and support they need.





Carly - Outcomes and Impact Officer / Volunteer Co-ordinator

Carly supports volunteers to ensure they serve the community to the best of their ability. As the Outcomes and Impact Officer, she analyses the data we collect and demonstrates the impact we have on local services.

Katie - Digital Engagement and Communications Lead

Katie shares our work with the local community online through social media campaigns and our website.



From the data we collect Katie helps write and distribute reports to share our findings and achievements.



Jason - Chief Officer

Jason is responsible for maintaining and developing a cohesive and effective organisation. This includes operations and business planning, as well as ensuring that Healthwatch Dudley follows the Healthwatch England principles and objectives to improve health and social care services in the Dudley borough.

Special Goodbye - Deb Attwood

Deb worked for Healthwatch Dudley for nine years. In that time she has made great contributions to supporting the local community to have their voices heard. Deb's experience and knowledge of local health and social care have been invaluable to the work of Heathwatch Dudley. Deb retired in April 2024, we are pleased that she has chosen to continue supporting us as a volunteer.



Year in review

Reaching out:

2224 people

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



406 people

came to us for clear information and support about topics such as child mental health services, carer support and the cost of living crisis.

Making a difference to care:

We published:

12 reports

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was:

Exploring access to GP services in Dudley borough

which highlighted people's experiences of accessing appointments and services at their GP practice. We explored potential solutions to the issues raised by the local community.

Health and social care that works for you:

We currently employ

5 staff

who help us carry out our work.

We're lucky to have

12 volunteers

who support our work.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2023 -24 we received:

£218,360

which is 6% more than the previous year.





Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority.

Out and about

We went to 107 community activities and events in 2023-2024.



Living Well, Feeling Safe

We have attended events that support people to stay safe, healthy and independent in their homes.



Visiting care homes

We visited Amberley Care Home to find out what residents thought of living there. We have committed to visit more care homes next year.



Supporting carers

We met with carers across the borough and signposted them to much-needed support. Throughout the year we have joined 'Carers walks' to listen more informally.



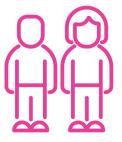
Exploring wellbeing in Brockmoor and Pensnett

We published a report, in conjunction with Public Health and the NHS, to highlight the views of people living in Brockmoor and Pensnett.



Listening to stroke survivors

We visited a Dudley Stroke Association Group to hear about their experiences and focused on how stroke survivors access GP services.



Out and about

We visited Brierley Hill Market, Merry Hill Shopping Centre and Churchill Shopping Centre. We connected with people in the borough and listened to their stories.

Listening at Russells Hall Hospital

Russells Hall Hospital sees around 500,000 outpatients each year and more people receive inpatient treatment. We champion the voices of patients and visitors to the hospital.



We maintain a strong relationship with the Patient Experience team and we take part in engagement across the hospital.

- We accompanied the Patient Trolley which visits patients on wards. We listened to the experiences of patients and signposted them to additional support out of the hospital.
- We visited the Health Hub to speak to patients and visitors We listened to experiences and signposted to services.
- We took part in the national PLACE* assessment. We visited wards and departments around the hospital, assessed the care environment from the patient perspective and provided feedback.
- We joined Patient Experience Group meetings to share the feedback we hear.



16,500 steps

walked during the national PLACE assessment.



139 people shared their views with us.



22 meals tasted

Staff and volunteers tasted food being served to patients at the PLACE assessment. Volunteers also joined the team at Russells Hall Hospital to taste meals for the new menu and make recommendations.



"I was admitted yesterday and I slept in a cubicle before I was transferred for an assessment. My daughter told me there was a shortage of beds and 60 people had been waiting."

-Sarah, patient

^{*}The Patient Led Assessment of the Care Environment (PLACE) is where volunteers visit the hospital and provide feedback on the hospital environment from the patient's perspective.



How we've made a difference this year

We have taken your feedback to the people that have the power to make change. The stories we heard from the community have led to positive changes to services.

Changes being made to improve access to GP services

Over 1000 people across Dudley shared their experiences of accessing GP services with us. The voices of the public are leading to change at all levels of care.

The stories highlighted how not everyone's needs are being met when visiting their GP practice. We used the stories shared with us to identify changes that could be made to improve access to GP services.

A new charter is being considered to ensure local GP services meet the accessibility needs of all patients - making it easier for you to get an appointment.

What you told us:

- 46% of people experienced challenges when accessing healthcare online or through an app.
- 61% of people booked their last appointment by phone for some people it was their preferred method.
- People appreciated flexibility in booking systems.
- Some patients resorted to attending emergency departments when they were unable to get a GP appointment.

What will change:

- All six GP practices visited as part of our research have committed to making changes that will improve access (see page 26).
- We developed recommendations that will be considered in a new charter, developed in conjunction with local NHS bodies, to ensure local GP services meet accessibility needs.

Making an appointment when you can't read or write

Paul previously had cancer, he was experiencing concerning symptoms and wanted to see his GP. When Paul attempted to make an appointment at his GP surgery he was directed to their website to complete a form. However, Paul struggles to read and write.

"They just said I had to go online. I walked out as they didn't offer me any help."

Despite informing the receptionist of his difficulty with reading and writing, Paul received no assistance in completing the form.

Paul resorted to asking a friend to contact the surgery on his behalf, but this could compromise his right to confidentiality.

Dudley has a low literacy rate compared to the rest of the country, we heard from people who struggled to access services because they struggle to read or write.

New steering group established to improve equality in the Youth Justice System

Despite Black and Mixed-race boys making up 11% of the Dudley youth population, they make up 28% of the young people in the YJS.

We teamed up with One Love Community Music and Arts CIC (One Love) to discover the experiences of young boys involved in the YJS. These conversations explored their experiences with the YJS, social care, education and mental health support. All of the boys told us they had experienced racism from teachers and other students at school. This, along with stop and searches from the police, led to a mistrust in services. They also spoke about a lack of support and opportunities and a need to "survive".

The experiences of the boys were explored in a focus group with professionals from a Black or Mixed-race background. They identified systemic issues and opportunities for change.

These insightful and passionate discussions led to the creation of recommendations that could help improve racial equality amongst services. Recognising the needs of people from minority ethnic backgrounds could help decrease the over-representation in the YJS.

What happened

- A steering group was formed with members from education, the voluntary sector, social care, healthcare and the YJS.
- Members from the steering group are working with One Love to develop a pilot scheme that could provide mental health support to at risk youth.
- Funding has been allocated to One Love, to train men from the minority ethnic community. These men will be mentors that can support young boys at risk of entering the YJS.

Teaming up with One Love to help us approach this sensitive topic, the community researcher, Richard, allowed the boys to feel comfortable and enabled them to share their experiences. Richard has taken the feedback from the boys and is developing a mentoring scheme to support at risk youth.

"Commissioning us to carry out this culturally sensitive piece of work showed remarkable insight and integrity from Healthwatch Dudley.

Talking to a person of colour, who represented their cultural lifestyle, allowed the participants to give an honest reflection of their experiences.

Let's hope from small acorns a mighty oak can grow."

-Richard Clark, Community Researcher and Director **One Love**



How your feedback can make a difference

Your feedback can highlight issues and lead to real change in services. The feedback we receive can improve services for other people in the community.

Rachel's story inspires investigation into GP access

Rachel told us her concerns about her GP practice's capacity, staffing levels, and the impact on her long-term health condition.

"I have a long-term chronic health condition. I no longer feel that the practice is able to offer a reliable and safe level of care."

Rachel raised her concerns with the GP practice, and whilst they responded positively to one issue, they did not address the difficulties Rachel was having when booking appointments.

Rachel's feedback contributed to our understanding of GP services. We took her experience and that of others who shared their views and decided to dig deeper. We conducted research into GP services which has led to real change (page 10).



Wheelchairs for visitors to the Health Hub

Sally told us she saw people struggling to walk to the Health Hub in Russells Hall Hospital.

She raised the issue with reception who told her there were no wheelchairs available across the hospital site. We brought the issue to the hospital's

Patient Experience Group meeting. Russells Hall Hospital informed us that 20 wheelchairs had been ordered

and they would monitor the need going forward.

Thanks to Sally's feedback, we became aware of the issue and can monitor the accessibility of the Health Hub.





Visiting all communities

We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently, to gather their feedback and make sure their voices are heard, and services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Visiting people who struggle to have their voices heard.
- Collaborating with One Love to explore experiences of minority-ethnic youth.
- Working with Public Health, Dudley Integrated Health and Care NHS Trust and other partners to explore the needs of people living in Brockmoor and Pensnett.

Listening to a local community

The Brockmoor and Pensnett area has a significant number of people with long-term health conditions. The community also face barriers accessing services that could help.

Partners from Public Health, the council and voluntary services came together to create a plan to improve the health outcomes of the community.

We spoke to 65 people to look beyond the data and find out more about life in Brockmoor and Pensnett.

People said:

- There is a real sense of community.
- People want more activities and "places to go".
- People want a GP practice that is easier to travel to.
- Some people enjoyed local green spaces, whilst others felt they weren't safe.

Next steps

- · A Community Engagement Officer will be appointed to listen to and involve the community.
- · Services will work on new ways to share information with the community.
- Services are looking to create opportunities for community members to come together and share updates, resources and skills.



Following up

More support for vulnerably housed people

In 2022 we set up a breakfast club at a supported living residence.

The residents shared their experiences of being homeless and what changes could help them. We followed up in December 2023 to see what changes had been made.

Since people provided feedback:

- Leaflets are now posted through everyone's door so they all receive useful information about the residence and services.
- 1-2-1 budgeting and finance sessions are now available.
- There is now a sensory room for residents to relax.
- The on-site gym has been reopened to allow residents to exercise.

We were happy to see the breakfast club is still going and has grown. What began with six people now has 15 residents regularly attending.

The voices of vulnerably housed people have been listened to and more support is in place for people staying at Saltbrook Place.

Giving local people a voice

The People's Panel was created so NHS partners in the Black Country could understand local people's needs and views of services.

It is powered by members and representatives of the diverse community in Dudley. At the request of the public, there is always a handful of health and care leaders and decisionmakers in attendance.



We have taken part in discussions and seen how local people have been given a chance to speak directly to people in charge of NHS services.

A benefit of the People's Panels is the connections that have formed between services, these connections have led to collaborative working that can improve services for local people.

What has happened

- Active Black Country was enlisted to support More Mascots Please CIC (MMP). MMP work to make a difference to the lives of disabled, disadvantaged and terminally ill children, based in the Black Country and Birmingham.
- The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is creating links with football clubs. They are aiming to create pathways that connect mental health support to physical activity within communities.

"Following this People Panel, I attended a focus group on urgent, emergency & planned care. I am also planning to link with the Care Workers Charity in the new year." -Mandy Brownhill, Home Instead

Working with the Deaf Community

The Dudley Deaf Focus Group (DDFG) have shared their experiences of accessing GP services and their feedback has led to recommendations for change.

Improving access

- We created posters and screens to inform Deaf patients of their rights when visiting their GP practice.
- We developed information for practices on how to communicate with Deaf patients
- Feedback has contributed to recommendations for improving access to GP services.

We have worked closely with the DDFG for nine years, and their openness and feedback has led to real change in services, including the introduction of vibrating pagers in emergency departments at Russells Hall Hospital.

The voices of the local Deaf community continue to advocate for their rights and we are committed to supporting them in improving services.



Supporting Carers

Carers across the borough regularly contact us looking for support. There are a range of services available across the Dudley borough, however, carers do not often know where to turn.

This past year we have taken part in activities and events to promote the support available for carers and listen to their concerns.

"I hope the feedback I gave can help others in the future. I'm so glad I found your service, I will pass on your info to other carers who might need it."

-Julie, Carer

We regularly join the local carers walk to talk informally with carers and signpost them to places that can help.

Empowering Sarah with information

Sarah contacted us to say she was struggling to find accurate information about financial support for carers. She cares for her daughter and said that the additional financial pressures were making things difficult for her family to cope.

We signposted her to Just Straight Talk and her GP practice for wellbeing support as well as financial advice services.

Carers week 2023

We attended three events to support National Carers Week in 2023.

64 people spoke to us at the following National Carers Week events:

- We Love Carers marketplace event
- Russells Hall Health Hub
- White House Cancer Support carers' picnic

We provided people with information and heard about their experiences as a carer in Dudley.

"I am pleased with care [at Russells Hall Hospital] and also the advances in medical science which will help my partner in the future."

-John, Carer





Information and signposting

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Dudley is here for you. In times of worry or confusion, we can provide confidential guidance and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need.

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 we have helped people by:

- Sign-posting 876 people to services that can help.
- Providing trustworthy information to 406 people.
- Supporting people to access NHS dentistry in care homes.

Dental care for a woman with dementia

Claudia's mum lives in a care home. She told us how she had been struggling to get a dentist to visit her mum. She told us she was "going round in circles" ringing through a list of dentists to find who would do a home visit.

"Healthwatch Dudley are the only ones who have done anything to stop me going round in circles."

We found NHS 111 was directing people to a list of dentists who they then had to call individually to find out if they would do a home visit.

As a result of our involvement, our Chief Officer now sits on the Local Dental Network to ensure voices like Claudia's are heard and addressed.

Thanks to feedback from Claudia, the complicated process of arranging a dentist to visit a care home has been highlighted.

The Black Country ICB, the Local Dental Network and NHS 111 are now aware and are discussing potential solutions.

We will be exploring access to dental services next year, to research the concerns raised by Claudia and other members of the public.

Improving delivery of oxygen for Ben

Ben relies on oxygen, which he gets delivered to his home in Dudley. He called us when he had problems with oxygen not being delivered. He had tried to complain to the delivery company, but with no luck.

"The deliveries have been the worst they have ever been, leaving me without any cylinders at all at one point. When I complained I was told to call 999."

We contacted the NHS commissioner for the service and informed them of Ben's issue. They worked with the head of the delivery service to address Ben's concerns. It was found that there was an issue with logistics, this has now been rectified.

The website for the service has been updated to make the complaints procedure more accessible after we raised that it was not clear. It will be easier for people to make a complaint in the future.

We directed Ben to services so he can submit a complaint and knows where to turn if there are problems in the future.

Ben sharing his experience has led to a major improvement in a vital service.

"I was so scared of running out."





Volunteering

Volunteers play a vital role in helping people have their say on health and social care.

Volunteering with Healthwatch Dudley can help you develop skills, gain experience and make a difference to your community.



"As a volunteer, I have always felt valued by the staff."

-Healthwatch Dudley volunteer

Volunteering

We're supported by a team of 12 amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year volunteers:

- Listened to people in the community at events.
- Entered survey data to support our research into GP surgery access.
- Assessed the hospital environment at Russells Hall Hospital in the national PLACE assessment.
- Proofread our reports to ensure public accessibility.
- · Attended community groups and the People's Panel.
- · Provided feedback on the usability of GP practice websites.
- Three volunteers trained as Enter & View Authorised Representatives and captured the views of people in GP surgeries.
- Three volunteers sit on our Steering Group and provide direction and oversight.





of Healthwatch Dudley volunteers feel extremely valued and would recommend volunteering at Healthwatch Dudley.



Our volunteer, Nick, won a spotlight award for his contributions to Healthwatch Dudley at the Dudley **Council for Voluntary Services (Dudley** CVS) Volunteer awards.



Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. Get in touch to find out more.



www.healthwatchdudley.co.uk



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Small actions for big impact

We created our micro-volunteering challenge to allow people in the community to complete small challenges to help improve health and social care.

Developed in 2023-2024, the micro-volunteering challenge is open from June 2024.

The micro-volunteering challenge is open to people living in Dudley, who are aged 16 and above. It is an opportunity for people who want to help the local community have their say on health and social care services.

Some of the micro-tasks include:

- Sharing our posts on social media.
- Handing out postcards.
- Providing feedback on our reports.
- · Testing the usability of service websites.

After completing the challenge participants will receive:

- Participation certificate.
- Voucher for participating local businesses.
- Personalised recognition letter.
- Explore further volunteering opportunities.





"The micro-volunteering challenge is an exciting project that allows the community to get involved."

-Carly Houghton, Volunteer Co-ordinator



Do you feel inspired?



Register your interest for the micro-volunteering challenge.



www.healthwatchdudley.co.uk/how-can-i-volunteer



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Statutory statements

Healthwatch Dudley, 7 Albion Street, Brierley Hill, DY5 3EE. Healthwatch Dudley is hosted by Dudley Council for Voluntary Services. Charity number: 517766.

Healthwatch Dudley 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 Steering Group currently consists of three members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction and oversight. Full scrutiny is provided by the Dudley CVS Board.

Dudley CVS are our host organisation and contract holder. Their Board advises us on local priorities to help inform the direction of our work. Our Steering Group takes this advice and ensures our priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023-2024, the Steering Group met four times and advised on the direction of our GP access work. They also supported the recruitment of new staff.

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 2023-2024, we have been available by phone, email, and a contact form on our website. We have also been listening to people through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website, share across social media, our email subscription and will make physical copies available throughout the community.

Responses to recommendations

We are grateful for how receptive staff across health and social care have been to our recommendations. There were no issues of recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.



The way we work

Taking people's experiences to decision makers

We ensure that people who make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences we gather. We do this by regularly attending meetings including the Health and Wellbeing Board, Dudley Health and Care Partnership Board, Dudley Quality Partnership, DIHC Board, Local Dental Network and Health Select Committee. Additional subgroups and partnership meetings provide a further opportunity to build relationships and share intelligence.

We share and present our reports with system partners to highlight the public's voice on health and social care issues.

We share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level. We work with other local Healthwatch and the Care Quality Commission regarding issues facing Dudley and the wider Black Country.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Dudley is represented on the Dudley Health & Wellbeing Board and the Health and Care Partnership Board by Jason Griffiths, Chief Officer. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by playing an important part in shaping the potential of these boards moving forward.

These boards are made up of representatives from different organisations. This includes NHS, Safeguarding, Care services, charity organisations and public groups.

Finance

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	218,360	Expenditure on pay	153,002
		Non-pay expenditure	22,966
		Office and management fees	21,792
Total income	£218,360	Total expenditure	£197,760

Enter & view

We have a legal power to visit health and social care services and see them in action. This power to Enter & View services offers a way for us to identify what is working well with services and where improvements could be made.

Enter & View is an opportunity to:

- See and hear how health and social care services are provided.
- Collect the views of service users, carers/relatives and staff.
- Observe services.
- Report back findings and make recommendations.
- Get an action plan from managers to address recommendations.

This year, we made six Enter & View visits; we published the reports and recommendations on our website.

Location	Reason for visit	Outcomes
Wordsley Green Surgery	Randomly selected as part of our GP services access research.	The practice has now displayed posters about how to book an appointment, updated notice boards and online services are being promoted to patients.
Ridgeway Surgery	We were invited to visit the practice as part of our GP services access research.	The practice is promoting online services to patients and has updated and themed notice boards.
Quarry Bank Medical Practice	Randomly selected as part of our GP services access research.	The practice has updated its website and is displaying posters with information about the wider healthcare team. They are working with their Patient Participation Group to look at digital education.
Eve Hill Medical Centre	We were invited to visit the practice as part of our GP services access research.	The practice is holding an information session around using digital services. A text message has been sent to patients informing them about online services. An article on how to book an appointment has been included in the practice newsletter.
Limes Medical Practice	Randomly selected as part of our GP services access research.	The practice is currently updating its telephone system. They have made more online appointments available. New posters will be displayed in the surgery.
Lapal Medical Practice	Randomly selected as part of our GP services access research.	The practice is updating its notice boards and grouping posters to make patient information more accessible.

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people who are seldom heard, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

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

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

- Exploring access to dentistry services.
- Visiting residential homes to discover the experiences of people living in Care homes and Nursing homes.
- Exploring what it is like for people who go through the Safeguarding process.

Have your say

If you have had an experience with health or social care, good or bad, we want to hear from you.

By sharing your story you can help to bring about positive change to local services.

Share your story with our team:



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www.healthwatchdudley.co.uk/have-your-say



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If you would like this report in another language or format please contact us.

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Healthwatch Dudley is committed to providing a quality service, from how we collect data, to the information we provide. Every three years we perform an in-depth audit, in conjunction with Healthwatch England, to ensure we meet this high standard.