Engaging Communities South West

ANNUAL REPORT

April 2024 – March 25

"An inclusive, innovative and independent champion for the aspirations of local people."

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Welcome from the Chair

"This report outlines the wide range of engagement, representation, and impact undertaken by Engaging Communities South West (ECSW) over the past year. This period has been one of both achievement and significant change, as we navigate a complex landscape of health and social care.

Our teams and volunteers have continued their hard work to support our communities and empower them to have a voice. A key focus has been the future of our Healthwatch contract, as well as our continued efforts to improve our organisational sustainability and strategic direction.

We have also welcomed new team members and adapted to new ways of working, ensuring our services remain person-centred and responsive.

We're proud to have made some real impact locally, including co-designing a new hospital complaints process and seeing our Carers Report used in a Parliamentary House of Commons Inquiry. Of particular note is how people in Torbay have improved access to low-level healthcare support after we led on a collaborative Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) prevention project offering free blood pressure and health checks in the local community.

I hope you enjoy reading about our key projects and the outcomes we have achieved."

ECSW Chair Dr Kevin Dixon

About Us

Engaging Communities South West (ECSW) is a not-for-profit organisation offering a range of services, including community voice, facilitation of engagement events, data capture and analysis, report writing, communications support, co-production, training and service/project evaluation and review. We provide these services to advance three key areas: **Community Voice, Access & Empowerment**, and **Strategic Support**.

Community Voice

We deliver projects that help people and communities to make their voices heard. This includes managing the contract for award-winning independent health & social care community champion Healthwatch Torbay and Paignton Community Hub.

Access & Empowerment

We deliver projects that empower people to have more control over their own lives, and improve access to the services and support that they need to live well. This includes another award-winning project supported by the NHS in Devon - Digital Health Devon. This e-learning project offers free public digital training on how to access local online healthcare and wellbeing services.

Strategic Support

We support organisations in planning, communicating, evaluating and improving projects and services through a person-centred, community-responsive, and evidence-based approach. We are currently supporting the coordination of the delivery of the new digital inclusion strategy for Torbay alongside partners in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

ECSW grew in response to increasing demand for our expertise within Torbay and the wider South West region.

We work to help communities transform the way local services are designed and delivered, by offering engagement, evaluation, communications support, digital support, training and advice to the statutory, voluntary and private sectors.

We also manage the contract for award-winning independent health & social care community champion Healthwatch Torbay, and run a number of different projects in the community. The following pages in this report highlights updates from some of these projects over the past 12 months.

Our Services

Engagement & Co-Production

- Run focus groups, co-design workshops and advisory panels, and gather relevant attendees
- Gather case studies & feedback from real people, including mystery shoppers
- Engage with service users and the voluntary sector to deliver specific focus groups
- Deliver effective, independent consultations with all stakeholders
- Set up & host bespoke engagement events in the community
- Utilise our community champion network to gather feedback
- Liaise with volunteers to help with projects or offer health and wellbeing support.

An information event we hosted for the NHS Business Services Authority this year to talk with professionals about the services they provide that support NHS priorities and our local communities

Evaluation

- Design, host, run and market bespoke surveys and quality checks
- Research and analyse local data, information and markets
- Deliver effective, independent consultations with all stakeholders
- Write detailed reports on trends, issues and findings
- Evaluate impacts, outcomes and evidence-based recommendations.
- Evaluate projects and perform 360 degree peer reviews of your organisation.

Communication

- Plan effective marketing and communication, tailor-made to your needs
- Help set up and manage social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter
- Help with public relations – create key messages, press releases and media statements
- Support you to market your organisation effectively by creating posters, leaflets, newsletters, and other material that meets current information standards.

Digital Support

- Use our unique online rate & review feedback centre to provide real public feedback
- Provide you with a feedback 'widget' tool for your website, to encourage transparency and openness
- Support you with setting up and managing social media accounts, including Facebook and X
- Design, host, and market bespoke online surveys via our premium, secure feedback tools
- Deliver experienced focus groups to test and feedback on your website or digital tools
- Create bespoke online e-learning training module packages for you to share with your workforce remotely.

Training

- Create bespoke online digital e-learning resources to deliver remotely
- Offer training on how to speak to clients, gather feedback and involve
- local people, including with co-production and design
- Show and advise on how to run an effective stakeholder consultation and meet your strategic community engagement commitments
- Provide you with the skills to carry out an efficient evaluation.

Innovative Community Projects

Paignton Community Hub

Paignton Community Hub (PCH) is based at Paignton library, where Torbay residents looking for information on where to access local support can have their queries answered face-to-face.

The Hub works with key partners from the Torbay Health and Wellbeing VCSE Network, including the Torbay Community Helpline, run by Torbay Community Development Trust, Age UK, Citizen's Advice Torbay, Healthwatch Torbay, and many others. The service has been funded by a contribution from Torbay Council's Adult Social Care precept.

The hub is open every weekday from 9.30am – 1.30pm, and has partners delivering regular drop in services, including local healthcare services such as a weekly Diabetic Eye Screening clinic. PCH continues to be a central point for our community work.

Key achievements this year include:

- People in Torbay have improved access to low-level healthcare support after we led on a collaborative Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) prevention project offering free blood pressure and health checks in the local community. More information on this impactful project is in the case study on the next page.
- PCH held a 'Beat the Freeze' winter wellbeing event to provide support and information on heating options and local funding schemes in response to the cut in winter fuel payments. During the day, nearly one hundred local residents had the opportunity to find out about health, care and wellbeing support available, Government and financial support for rising energy costs, help with pension credit applications and benefits, energy advice and other support on offer.
- Providing Digital Drop-in Sessions, which are crucial for bridging the digital divide, especially for hard-to-reach groups like the elderly who may be housebound. As part of our digital support offer we are also providing free SIM cards for those within our community that need data for use in a smartphone or tablet.

Sarah Reeves from ECOE, PCH's Claire Ball and Claire Bithell and Chaz Singh from Ara Recovery for All at the 'Beat The Freeze' event at Paignton Library.

ECSW Chair Dr Kevin Dixon, PCH Manager Claire Bithell, Steve Darling MP for Torbay (and Jennie his guide dog), ECSW CEO Pat Harris, Leader of the Liberal Democrats Ed Davey and Torbay Councillor Swithin Long at PCH.

Hub Enquiry Statistics in the past 12 months

Over 1500 local residents have been supported with healthcare and wellbeing queries. On average:

- 62% of these were resolved at the hub itself;
- 25% were signposted to other services;
- 10% were referred for Housing, Finance, general info and advice;
- 3% were not able to be resolved within the hub.

Reducing barriers to accessing appointments

People in Torbay have improved access to low-level healthcare support after we led on a collaborative Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) prevention project offering free blood pressure and health checks in the local community via Paignton Community Hub (PCH).

Dr John McGuinness of Corner Place Surgery overseeing a blood pressure check.

We were approached by Primary Care and Public Health to ask if we could trial 'Building Healthy Heart Communities', as PCH is based in central Torbay. This followed research which stated that you're six times more likely to die from heart disease in Torbay, with 1 in 6 of these from preventable CVD. Feedback from this suggested that barriers accessing GP Appointments to have blood pressure and health checks were contributing to the increase in CVD in our local area.

We therefore worked with key statutory and voluntary organisations to re-purpose a front-facing part of the Library to be a focal point for local communities to access low-level healthcare support. This included free blood pressure and health checks in partnership with a local GP Surgery.

Key Project Outcomes

- **359** blood pressure readings have been administered, with 131 of these identified as raised or high.

Further Impact

Early detection of high blood pressure and access to blood pressure monitors allows patients to feed data back to their GP without the need for an appointment, so they can identify and treat them for early CVD. Several patients identified with raised readings have since returned for follow-up monitoring after being prescribed anti-hypertensive medication. This has helped reduce barriers accessing GP Appointments and address the increase in CVD locally.

We presented these findings directly to decision makers via our local Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board, who stated that our work evidences *"the impact of providing support in the community to enable this to be rolled out wider."*

Moving forward we are therefore looking to develop PCH into a new Torbay Community Health and Wellbeing Centre.

Torbay Health and Wellbeing VCSE Network

TORBAY HEALTH & WELLBEING A VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORK working with TORBAY COUNCIL

Torbay Health & Wellbeing Voluntary Sector (VCSE Network was created so Torbay's voluntary sector could come together and work collaboratively with the aim of providing more support for those in our communities.

We are proud to now run the Network, which has had a significant year of progress. Our involvement with the VCSE sector has increased, and we have arranged various network meetings to foster stronger relationships and a more cohesive approach to health and wellbeing support across Torbay. The network's priorities and progress for 2024-2025 include:

1. **Supporting those in financial hardship and at risk of homelessness**: Providing crucial advice and support.
2. **Promoting mental health**: Helping communities to maintain good mental health and prevent loneliness.
3. **Supporting Digital Access**: Ensuring everyone has the skills and tools they need to engage in a digital world.
4. **Promoting the Voluntary Sector**: Highlighting the sector as a brilliant place to work and volunteer.
5. **Addressing Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse**: Working to raise awareness and provide support.

Key Network Achievements this year:

- Torbay Community Helpline/Hub: This initiative continued to provide vital support and information to the community.
- Data Sharing: We facilitated Advice & Information (A&I) meetings to enable effective data sharing among partners.
- Collaborative Planning: Our work led to the development of Torbay's Community Response Strategy, a collaborative plan to tackle sexual violence and domestic abuse from 2025-2030.
- Increased Engagement with Torbay Council: We have significantly increased our engagement with the local council, ensuring the VCSE sector's voice is heard at a strategic level. This collaborative approach, driven by the network and supported by ECSW, is a testament to our commitment to strengthening the entire sector.

Pictured right: Chair for the Torbay Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Community Forum Angie Manning, Network Coordinator Claire Bithell, Director for Adult and Community Service Torbay Anna Coles, and CEO of Torbay and Devon NHS Foundation Trust Joe Teape at a Network Event at South Devon College.

Macmillan Torbay Community Engagement Project

In partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support and Torbay Communities, we completed a co-produced project to enhance cancer support in the Torbay area. The project's main aims were to:

- Identify and engage with underserved communities and individuals with a cancer diagnosis who were not accessing existing support services.
- Work collaboratively with these individuals to co-design and co-produce new support materials.

Turning Heads CIC Learning Disability Group posing for their co-produced calendar as part of the Macmillan project

The project directly engaged with 385 local people. This included those affected by cancer in Torbay and additionally four specific target communities known to experience health inequalities: adults with a learning disability, LGBTQ+, ethnic minority groups (including the Ukrainian Refugee Community), and those living in a socio-economically deprived area.

Through our extensive engagement, we found a lack of cancer-specific community-based support in Torbay. Many people felt a "conveyor belt" approach during their hospital treatment, followed by a sudden drop in support when it ended. We also learned that support for those with specific communication needs or from diverse backgrounds was lacking.

Key outcomes of the project include the co-production of new materials to help people, especially those with learning disabilities, understand cancer symptoms and navigate their care.

This co-produced material included learning disability posters, which have been used by Devon Partnership Trust at key events and also by Torbay South Devon NHS Foundation Trust – where they have a set of all the material available on every Torbay Hospital ward.

We have completed the final report for the project, which can be read in full by clicking here.

Di Charlton, Macmillan Engagement Lead for Devon, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly said:

"We're incredibly grateful to our local partners Engaging Communities South West and Torbay Communities. Such an insightful report wouldn't have been possible without their skill and extensive local knowledge. Hearing directly from community members and those with lived experience about the challenges they face is incredibly powerful, and co-creating solutions alongside them is critical to ensuring that action taken is both meaningful and impactful.

We understand well the huge challenges facing our colleagues in healthcare, but we're committed to continuing to work in partnership to consider and act wherever possible on the report's recommendations, and to address the unacceptable inequalities in cancer care and support"

Digital Health Devon

ECSW's e-learning project, Digital Health Devon (DHD), is an award-winning, NHS-supported e-learning tool created to show people how to access local health, social care and wellbeing services using the internet, including video consultations, e-referrals and prescriptions.

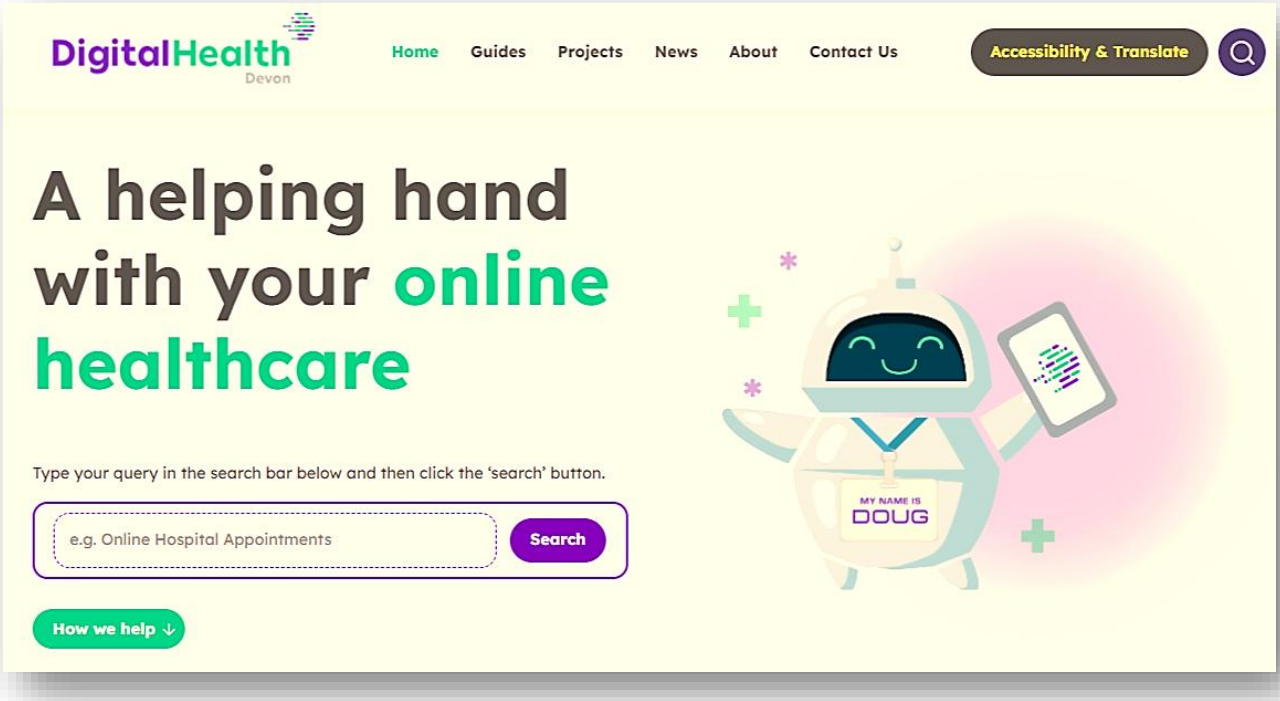
This year we complemented the launch of our revamped DHD website at the start of 2024 (pictured in the screenshot below) with the return of our popular community digital drop in sessions in Torbay, after we were successful in securing some community funding from the National Lottery.

A digital drop in session at Paignton Library

We struck up a partnership with local community organisation Eat That Frog to offer weekly digital support sessions in each of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

We encouraged members of the public with any digital queries to bring their device along for receive free, informal, non-judgmental support from skilled project workers with using devices, laptops, phones and tablets; accessing online services; using the NHS App and other online healthcare tools; How to apply for benefits or housing online and much more.

Our Digital Health Devon project continues to evolve, focusing on providing remote online support to our communities via www.digitalhealthdevon.co.uk. We are actively working to address the digital divide and ensure everyone has access to the support they need.



Services that deliver change

Healthwatch and NHS Devon colleagues work together on the NHS 10 Year Plan engagement

Healthwatch

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay (HWDPT) are your local health and social care champions and ECSW are one of its delivery partners.

From Ilfracombe to Salcombe, we exist to speak up for the 1.2 million people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, making sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear their voices and use their feedback to improve care. We can also help them to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

In addition to our dedicated walk-in centres in Torbay and Plymouth, in wider Devon 'Healthwatch Champions' provide Healthwatch functions. Part of Citizens Advice, the Healthwatch Champions have offices based in East Devon, North & West Devon, Exeter, South Hams, Torridge & Mid Devon and Teignbridge.

This year at Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay:

- **1502 people** shared their experiences of health and social care services with us.
- **762 people** came to us for clear advice and information.
- **3500 pieces of local feedback** collected about the new 10 Year NHS Health Plan.
- **Our 18 staff and 22 volunteers** empowered voices across our communities.
- **We published 11 reports** about healthcare improvements people would like to see.

Some key Healthwatch updates from the past year are on the next page but you can read their latest Annual Report online via the brand new HWDPT website by clicking here.

Working Together for Change

In 2024 the NHS in Devon launched local engagement around the 10 Year Health Plan. NHS Devon Integrated Care Board asked us for help gathering local feedback.

In response, we independently chaired five engagement days in Paignton, Exeter, Barnstaple, Ivybridge and Plymouth, and held 42 smaller drop in events.

We also helped people unable to submit their feedback online to do it free over the phone and even created promotional videos of the engagement. **Click here** to view it online.

This led to 3,500 pieces of local feedback being shared with NHS Devon to directly inform the Government's Plan and the local plans for Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

Improving Patient Experience

Working with University Hospital Plymouth NHS Trust (UHP) we independently interviewed patients who had been through the complaints process.

Based on their feedback and our recommendations, UHP co-designed a new improved complaints process with patient representatives and Healthwatch which will significantly improve patient's experiences of complaining, particularly responsiveness, timeliness and communication. **Click here** to read our report.

This has led to other Devon Health Trusts looking to redevelop their own complaint's processes to replicate this new co-designed model. Royal Devon University NHS Foundation Trust are already redeveloping and enhancing their 'You said, we did' webpages, improving how patients see changes made as a result of their feedback or complaints.

Better training & support for local Carers

New dementia training to support Carers has been developed by Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust after our Carers report of 240 Carers' views was fed into local Carer Support plans.

Healthwatch England submitted it to the Parliamentary House of Commons Health & Social Care Committee Inquiry into Adult Social Care Reform – who have since adopted their recommendation for a calculation of unmet need. **Click here** to download our Carers Report.

Top Healthwatch priorities for the next year

1. **Using technology to help people access services at home.**
2. **Helping people access social care services and care homes.**
3. **Improving and joining up services for children and young people.**
4. **Making sure all patients can access health services equally.**
5. **Helping people access mental health services for conditions like depression.**
6. **Helping people access GP, hospital and mental health services.**
7. **How cost of living affects people's health and wellbeing.**

Funding of Healthwatch

The contract for Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth & Torbay, which began in April 2020, was extended to the end of March 2026. Provided by Local Authorities, the value of this contract is £530k per annum, of which ECSW receives approximately £280k.

The New NHS 10 Year Plan

We have been closely monitoring the findings of the DASH Review, an independent review of patient safety in the healthcare system, as well as the new NHS 10 Year Plan, which aims to modernise the NHS to deliver faster, more personalised, digitally enabled care.

- **Three Strategic Shifts:**
  - Move care *closer to home* through prevention and community services.
  - Shift from *analogue to digital*, with the NHS App central to access and feedback.
  - Focus on *staying well*, not just treating illness.
- **Key Changes:**
  - Creation of a **National Care Platform** to unify digital access.
  - Overhaul of urgent and primary care to reduce pressure on hospitals.
  - Expansion of personalised care and use of data to tailor services.
  - Integration of patient voice into NHS structures, replacing Healthwatch England with a **National Director of Patient Experience**.
  - All NHS providers must routinely use patient feedback to improve care delivery.
  - Increased role for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) in delivering local change.

The plan confirms that Healthwatch will close and proposes bringing the Healthwatch function into the Department of Health and Social Care, under a new National Director of Patient Experience. This new role will absorb the work of Healthwatch England and the Patient Safety Commissioner. Locally, Healthwatch's healthcare role will be merged with NHS engagement teams, while social care functions will shift to local authorities.

"Given our role in shaping the plan and acting as the public champion for the last 12 years, we are, of course, disappointed that the plan confirms that Healthwatch will be closed.

We want to say a heartfelt thank you for the messages of support we've received from people across the NHS, local councils, voluntary organisations, and the public. These messages mean a great deal to our team — including our staff, volunteers, and trustees.

We remain committed to delivering local Healthwatch to the highest standards, including our 2025/26 workplan - shaped by local people and focused on what matters most to them.

While we await further detailed clarity on the government's proposals, it's business as usual for us: listening, signposting, and ensuring the voices of people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay are heard where health and care decisions are made."

Dr Kevin Dixon, Chair of Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

End of Year Accounts

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES for the Year Ended 31 March 2025

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Donations & Legacies	431,020	Charitable Activities	390,059
Other Income	498		
Total Income	**431,518**	**Total Expenditure**	**390,059**

Final Message from our Chief Executive

"We know we are facing many challenges moving forward in the years ahead, things like the rising cost of living, reduced workforce, health inequalities and poor housing which will all impact on people's health and wellbeing.

We are able to influence strategy and progress cultural change for the empowerment and benefit of all local residents, for example, members of the Health & Wellbeing Board and local, regional and national networks.

Looking ahead, we are focused on securing our future and expanding our impact. We are actively working on an application to complete the Trusted Charity Quality Mark, which will assist with future funding and strategic activities. We are also exploring the options for a redesign of our website to better reflect our services.

Our CIO application has been successful, and we are now reviewing the Articles of Association to ensure our governance is robust.

ECSW Trustees are currently looking at the overall ECSW Business Plan to focus on sustainability and income generation to continue the growth of the organisation.

ECSW will continue to empower and support our local communities in the best way we can to get the best outcomes for their health and wellbeing.

I'd like to thank all our staff, volunteers, Trustees and partners for their support the past year."

ECSW CEO Pat Harris

Engaging Communities South West

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