



## SHROPSHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD Report

<b>Meeting Date</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> November 2023			
<b>Title of report</b>	NHS and Social Care Complaints – A report into people’s experiences of making formal complaints about NHS treatment or social care			
<b>This report is for</b> (You will have been advised which applies)	Discussion and agreement of recommendations	X	Approval of recommendations (With discussion by exception)	Information only (No recommendations)
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<b>Which Joint Health &amp; Wellbeing Strategy priorities does this report address? Please tick all that apply</b>	Children & Young People		Joined up working	X
	Mental Health		Improving Population Health	X
	Healthy Weight & Physical Activity		Working with and building strong and vibrant communities	X
	Workforce	X	Reduce inequalities (see below)	X
<b>What inequalities does this report address?</b>				

**Report content - Please expand content under these headings or attach your report ensuring the three headings are included.**

### 1. Executive Summary

Complaints about health and social care services must be handled in accordance with The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.<sup>1</sup> The NHS Complaint Standards, published in December 2022, aimed to set out a single vision for what should happen when a member of the public makes a complaint about NHS services (see p.11). Nationally, there has been a push towards making complaints processes easier with some areas of the country moving towards one complaints procedure across the entire Integrated Care System (ICS). For information about our local ICS, including its membership, visit <https://www.shropshiretelfordandwrekin.ics.nhs.uk/>

In addition to delivering local Healthwatch Services, Healthwatch Shropshire has been providing the Independent Health Complaints Advocacy service (IHCAS) since 2016. This means we often hear directly about people’s experiences of making a complaint. Some people have described the process as being confusing and disappointing, sometimes resulting in people deciding not to complain at all.

As the ICS includes Shropshire Council we decided to ask people to share their experiences and views of complaints handling across our health and social care services in the last two years.

### Key Findings

1. People told us that they **didn’t feel that they were taken seriously** or given proper attention, they described feeling ignored, ‘fobbed off’ or that their complaint was not taken seriously by those investigating it.

<sup>1</sup> [The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints \(England\) Regulations 2009 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2009/1226/contents/made)

“Very upset as nobody even took my complaint seriously [...] Problem is nobody really believes the the patient.”

2. People commented on the feeling that **organisations were defensive** in their approach to their complaint, mentioning a feeling of being ‘lied to’ or just apologised to without explanations.  
“It was a clear denial. [...] Nothing was addressed or acknowledged as it should have been.”
3. People told us about their experiences of using the complaints process and that they felt it was **difficult to navigate or confusing**.
4. **Delays** were a key theme which many people told us they were concerned about.
5. People told us about their **dissatisfaction with the response** they received to their complaint.  
“It did not cover all aspects of my complaint... I wanted to know why this happened to me. The response didn’t say. I wanted an apology, which I got.” [RSH]
6. People told us they **did not feel confident that things would change** or services would improve as a result of their complaint.  
“I wasn’t left feeling any confidence that these issues wouldn’t happen again in the future... doesn’t make you feel as though ... the treatment of patients will be better next time.” [PRH]

## 2. Recommendations

### Recommendations to providers

These are taken from what the public told us would improve the experience of complaining about health and social care services.

1. **Ensure people feel they are taken seriously and have been heard**
2. **Respond openly and honestly to complaints in a language that people can easily understand**
3. **Simplify the complaints procedure.**
4. **Provide a single point of contact**
5. **Minimise delays.**
6. **Improve communication and be responsive to the individual needs of people making a complaint**

### Recommendations to the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care System (ICS)

1. Add public information to the ICS website<sup>2</sup> about complaints, people’s rights within the process and what they can expect, ensuring it is clear and easy to understand following the NHS Accessible Information Standard<sup>3</sup>. Include the necessary contact details of service providers and the local Independent Health Complaints Advocacy services.
2. All organisations in the ICS to commit to working in partnership to meet the expectations laid out in the NHS Complaint Standards and create an ‘effective complaint handling system’ by:
  - Promoting a learning culture
  - Welcoming complaints in a positive way
  - Being thorough and fair
  - Giving fair and accountable responses

<sup>2</sup> [Home - STWICS](#)

<sup>3</sup> [NHS England » Accessible Information Standard](#)

3. Involve people who have used the complaints process to develop an integrated system across the ICS.
4. Publicly report on the complaints received across the ICS, learning and actions taken to prevent similar experiences to build public trust in the effectiveness of the process and value of feedback.

3. **Report** – see Appendix A

**Risk assessment and opportunities appraisal**

(NB This will include the following: Risk Management, Human Rights, Equalities, Community, Environmental consequences and other Consultation)

**Financial implications**

(Any financial implications of note)

**Climate Change Appraisal as applicable**

**Where else has the paper been presented?**

System Partnership Boards

Voluntary Sector

Other

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)** Portfolio holders can be found [here](#) or your organisational lead e.g., Exec lead or Non-Exec/Clinical Lead

**Appendices**

Appendix A – NHS & Social Care Complaints, Healthwatch Shropshire Report