

## Healthwatch Sheffield at Sheffield Voices

**Healthwatch Sheffield** gathers people's views on health and social care in Sheffield and shares them with decision makers, to inform improvements.

On Thursday 18th September 2025, we visited the fantastic **Sheffield Voices** group at a coffee morning at Morrisons community room to hear about people's experiences of using health and social care services in the city.

**Sheffield Voices** is a self-advocacy group for adults with learning disabilities and autistic people but are also a welcoming and inclusive group. It's a space where members feel safe, respected, and supported – many describe it as feeling like one big amazing family. This sense of belonging creates an environment where people feel confident to speak openly about both the good and bad experiences they've had with services, knowing their voices will be heard and taken seriously.

We heard from 9 of their members with a range of experiences and



support needs and a couple of staff members and a support worker, who shared valuable feedback about the care they've received from GPs, dentists, opticians, hospitals, and social care.

**We asked them 3 questions about their experiences, and here's a summary of what we learnt:**

### What is good about the health and social care services that you have used:



Several people shared very positive experiences with their GP practices. **Tramways Medical Centre** was praised for its excellent doctors who go above and beyond. One person said their GP even printed out medical information to take to the hospital, and they never struggle to get an appointment because the practice offers flexibility by also booking patients into their **Middlewood branch** when needed.



The **Green Cross GP Surgery** was highlighted for its improvement in recent years. While it used to have not so good reception service, a new receptionist has made a big difference - described as friendly, polite and helpful. The current nurses are also described as brilliant, welcoming and easy to talk to with one

person saying that he has banter with the nurses when he goes there which is vital for his wellbeing.



There was consistent praise for some GPs and nurses, with people describing them as kind, attentive and easy to engage with.



In terms of optical care, **Martyn Kemp Opticians** received praise for their long-standing, consistent service – with one person having used them for over 30 years. **Asda Opticians** was also highlighted for their customer service and for sending reminders by phone or text, which helps people to prepare and reduces anxiety about appointments.



**Hallamshire Hospital** was mentioned as a place where nurses were described as brilliant, supportive and caring.



The **Sheffield Learning Disability Nurse** was described as lovely and very good at raising awareness on health passports.

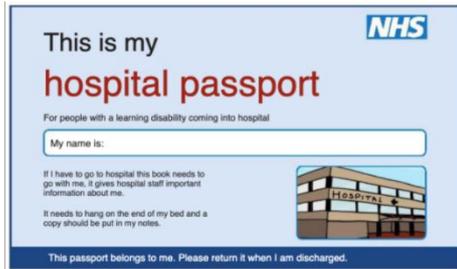
### What is bad about health and social care services that you have used:



For many people with learning disabilities, phoning to make a GP appointment can be very stressful. The attitude of receptionists often sets the tone, and if they're dismissive or unkind, it can make people feel anxious and unwelcome.



Hospital experiences at **Northern General Hospital** were described by some as poor. One person recalled asking a nurse what time their ambulance for transfer to Hallamshire hospital was due and being told, "You're not my patient."



 Others said staff don't look at their **health passports**, even when patients bring them along.

 Some health care professionals do not understand conditions

such as **cerebral palsy**, leading to judgemental attitudes or incorrect assumptions about a person's intelligence or ability. It was noted that one of the members has several university degrees but is often treated as if they don't understand anything, purely based on physical disability.

 There were significant concerns about **dentistry**. Some people said they do not currently have a dentist or do not know how to get one. One person had not seen a dentist in over 6 years, he had been promised a referral to community dentists when his dentists retired, but was never contacted again. Another person had not seen a dentist since childhood attributing it to **government cuts**.

 One person shared that they are still waiting for **teeth filling**, and joked that "all I want for Christmas is a filling."

 An **optician**, based in a **supermarket**, tries to bring people in while they're shopping, which they find to be overwhelming. There were also complaints about rushed appointments, lack of attention, and failure to ask about people's additional needs.

 In **care homes**, some people felt restricted and disempowered. One person described how they were not allowed to do things they were capable of, and another witnessed a carer refusing to let an elderly resident use the toilet, telling her to "wait 10 minutes," even though she was desperate to go.

 In contrast, people spoke positively about **independent living**, where they felt safer and more in control of their lives.

**What would make the services better:**

- There are only **two Learning disabilities nurses in Sheffield** who are responsible for supporting people with **health passports**, which isn't enough - more staff are needed to support this important tool.
- Health passports should be made **electronic and connected to NHS records**, so staff can view them quickly and ahead of time without patients having to repeat themselves. This would also help in emergencies or for people who are non-verbal.
- There should be **mandatory training for all health professionals** on how to work with people with learning disabilities, conditions like cerebral palsy, communication needs and how to use health passports.
- Professionals should take the initiative to **learn about disabilities** from books or training, rather than expecting patients to educate them.
- More independent living opportunities should be made available, allowing people to have control over their lives with carers visiting, instead of living in shared care homes where independence can be limited.
- Services should improve follow-up support and check-ins, especially for people with learning disabilities to make sure people are registered with dentists, opticians and other services.
- Opticians in supermarkets should offer clear contact details and let people book or go to them at their own pace instead of approaching them while shopping because it can be overwhelming.
- More welcoming, understanding, and respectful attitudes from front-line staff - such as receptionists, would make a big difference.

**We will be sharing this feedback with the relevant services that can help improve things. We will also provide information on available dental care at our next visit.**

**If you want information and advice about accessing health or social care services in Sheffield, or want to share feedback about your experiences of using them, please contact us on.**

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