

Healthwatch Sheffield at the Social Cafe at SOAR

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



On Friday 23rd January 2026, we visited the **Social Cafe at SOAR in Parson Cross**, designed to offer local people time to get together, meet others, chat and play games in a safe and welcoming space. The cafe runs fortnightly groups in Parson Cross (The Learning Zone) and Shiregreen

(Shiregreen Community Centre). At our visit, we met with 21 people and spoke with them about their experiences with **health and social care services** in Sheffield. We also provided people with information and advice on dental access, as well as other support services.

The group, including the staff, were incredibly welcoming – warmly inviting us to join their activities, such as a bingo game and a birthday celebration for one of their members – while enthusiastically sharing their experiences of health and social care services with us.

Here's a summary of what we learnt:

What was good about the NHS and social care services that you have used:



Many attendees spoke positively about the standard of care they received from GPs, dentists and opticians, describing staff as respectful, thorough and reassuring during appointments.



Hospital-based treatment was described as high quality once accessed, with clinical staff seen as supportive and attentive.



Several people felt that doctors took time to listen carefully and respond appropriately, including reviewing and adjusting medication which led to noticeable improvements in health.

-  Where ongoing relationships with a particular GP were possible, this continuity was highly valued and helped people feel understood and supported.
-  Some individuals reported consistent follow-up, clear signposting to specialist services, and proactive monitoring of long-term conditions.
-  Social care support, including carers and support workers, was described as beneficial, particularly following hospital discharge or during periods of poor physical health.
-  Positive examples were shared of coordinated care, where people knew who to contact and felt reassured that professionals were communicating effectively.
-  In urgent situations, emergency responses and hospital interventions were described as essential and, in one of the cases, lifesaving.

What was bad about the NHS and social care services:

-  Access to GP appointments was the most significant issue raised. Participants described long telephone queues, limited same-day appointments, and difficulty securing timely reviews even when symptoms were worsening.
-  Many felt that administrative systems acted as a barrier, particularly when trying to book follow-up appointments requested by a clinician.
-  Seeing a different clinician at each visit created frustration, especially for those managing complex or ongoing physical and mental health conditions.
-  The increasing reliance on digital platforms for booking appointments and requesting prescriptions was described as challenging for people who are not confident online, leaving some feeling excluded from services.
-  Communication concerns were highlighted, including unclear text messages asking patients to make contact without explanation, and instances where reception staff could not clarify the reason.

-  Delays in information sharing between services were reported, including late action on diagnoses and treatment plans.
-  Long waits in emergency departments were a common experience, with some people waiting for as long as 14 hours before being seen or admitted.
-  A small number of attendees felt discharge decisions were rushed or that their concerns were not initially taken seriously.
-  Inconsistent pharmacy stock and repeated trips to collect medication added further frustration.
-  Some individuals reported a reduction in mental health support and contact despite worsening symptoms, and others felt crisis or respite services did not fully meet their needs.
-  One of the attendees shared concerns about being asked to agree to a Do Not Resuscitate decision without fully understanding it and not having any family there at the time, highlighting the need for sensitive and supported discussions around advance care planning.
-  Feelings of isolation, anxiety and low mood were commonly linked to gaps or delays in accessing appropriate care.

While we were there, we also heard some very positive feedback about the social cafe:

-  One long-standing attendee explained that being signposted to the Social Cafe by their GP “Saved my life”. At a time when they were struggling with their health and feeling disconnected, attending the cafe gave them routine, purpose and a welcoming space where they felt accepted. They described the environment as warm and inclusive, with staff who are approachable and supportive if any concerns arise. Over time, they have built meaningful friendships and now describe their life as feeling fuller and more positive because of their involvement.



Another attendee spoke about how the cafe helps to ease feelings of loneliness and isolation. Living alone and managing ongoing health conditions had left them feeling withdrawn, but the regular opportunity to meet others in a relaxed and friendly setting has improved their confidence and wellbeing. They described the Social Cafe as more than just a place to have a drink or conversation – it is a place where people look out for one another, feel valued, and regain a sense of belonging.

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 using the details below.

Healthwatch Sheffield

- Call: 0114 253 6688 between the hours of 09:00 – 16:30 Monday to Friday.
- Post: Healthwatch Sheffield, The Circle, 33 Rockingham Lane, Sheffield, S1 4FW
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Thank you to SOAR and everyone at the social cafe who shared their feedback 😊