

# Young People's Experiences of Oral Health in Northamptonshire



**March**  
**2025**



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# Contents

**Contents..... 1**

**Summary and Background.....2**

**Recommendation ..... 3**

**Response from North Northamptonshire Council and West  
Northamptonshire Council Public Health ..... 4**

**Response from Northamptonshire’s Integrated Care Board ..... 5**

**Method .....7**

**Limitations .....7**

**What people told us ..... 8**

**Acknowledgements ..... 18**

**About Healthwatch West and North Northamptonshire ..... 19**

**About Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire ..... 20**

**About Connected Together CIC..... 21**

**Contact us .....22**

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# Summary and Background

**Good mouth and dental health allows you to speak, eat, breathe and smile confidently without pain, discomfort or embarrassment. Most dental problems are preventable and can be treated in their early stages by following a good dental health routine. Tooth decay is the most common dental disease affecting toddlers, children and young people in England. Every child who has teeth is at risk of tooth decay.<sup>1</sup>**

**In England there are currently issues for people accessing NHS dentists.**

People lost their right to register with an NHS dentist in 2006 when a new NHS dental contract was introduced to pay dentists per 'unit of dental activity' rather than getting paid per person registered on a list of permanent patients, combined with set fees for each treatment delivered.

The contract means a dentist has no long-term obligation to see patients on the NHS unless they are undergoing active treatment or dental work already carried out is under guarantee.

The contract is unpopular with dentists, with many **cutting back NHS work** and leaving people without NHS appointments, often with little warning.

Last year, Healthwatch England supported the call by MPs on the Health and Social Care Committee to reintroduce permanent registration rights for patients.<sup>2</sup>

To complete this work focus group questions were devised by Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire and Public Health in North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire. To support this message Public Health provided Healthwatch with age-appropriate oral health advice in the form of a leaflet and a toothbrush and toothpaste for every young person who took part.

In December 2024, two focus groups were held. One in the West at Kingsthorpe College and one in the North at Kingswood Secondary Academy. There was a total of 35 young people took part in this work.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/keeping-healthy/dental-health>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/news/2024-11-20/publics-confusion-over-right-register-nhs-dentist>

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# Recommendation

- Although most children and young people that were spoken to across both focus groups had a positive experience it is still concerning that knowledge about oral hygiene and access to services is inconsistent and that some young people have reported being in pain for quite awhile before getting access to services.

Therefore, Healthwatch North and West Northamptonshire recommends that we continue to work with commissioners, service providers and Public Health to raise awareness of and campaign for better access to dentistry for all.

- As there are national issues with access to dentistry for all ages there is potential to carry out a more in-depth survey with children, young people and families across the whole of Northamptonshire, which we would very much welcome to be a part of.



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# Response from North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council Public Health

**We would like to thank Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire for sharing this report with us which will contribute to our understanding of oral health in Northamptonshire. Special thanks to the young people involved, we value their insights and will feed their views into our communications, especially those aimed at young people.**

Preventing poor oral health is a public health priority. Tooth decay remains the most common reason for hospital admissions in children aged between 6 and 10 years and poor oral health is associated with school absence ([Hospital tooth extractions in 0 to 19 year olds 2022 - GOV.UK](#)). North and West Northamptonshire Council Public Health colleagues chair the Northamptonshire Oral Health Alliance which provides strategic direction to the oral health agenda locally and sets local priorities. We work with partners to improve the oral health of people of all ages, based on evidence of what works and the recommendations from the recent Northamptonshire Oral Health Needs Assessment. Our local oral health promotion services are an important part of our offer to people who are more likely to experience poor oral health.

For more information about how to look after your teeth visit

<https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/keeping-healthy/dental-health>

National Resources

[Better Health Start for Life Top Tips For Teeth | Campaigns | Campaign Resource Centre](#)

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# Response from Northamptonshire's Integrated Care Board

**'Integrated Care Boards (ICB) are now the responsible commissioners for Dental services. It is recognised that access to NHS dental care in Northamptonshire has been challenged over recent years. Northamptonshire ICB are committed to ensuring that patients have access to NHS dental services in the county and determined to do all we can to ensure easier access to high-quality dental care for our patients.'**

In May 2024, NHS England published guidance around the implementation of a Dental Recruitment Incentive Scheme (also known as a Golden Hello). This has been used in various parts of the NHS to aid recruitment in areas of the country that has previously had difficulty in recruiting staff. The aim is to support practices that are struggling with recruitment through the usual channels to offer a financial incentive. This scheme aims to encourage relocation to areas with workforce challenges, attract new workforce into the NHS, and to retain those who might have otherwise moved into private practice, and 4 places were awarded to providers across Northamptonshire.

Currently, work is underway nationally to transform the NHS Dental contract with the aim of ensuring patients most in need can access NHS dentistry. Following the first reforms to the dental contract announced in July 2022, a joint NHS and Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) plan to recover and reform NHS dentistry has been published. This plan is an important next step in improving patient access to NHS dental care and supporting dental services to return to pre-pandemic levels of activity.

Measures include:

- NHS dentists will be given a 'new patient' payment of between £15-£50 (depending on treatment need) to treat patients who have not seen an NHS dentist in two years or more. This began in March 2024 due to cease at the end of the 2024/2025 financial year.
- a further increase in the minimum indicative UDA value from the £23 announced in July 2022 to £28 from April 2024

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In addition to these activities, the plan announces a range of government-delivered public health initiatives to improve the oral health of children and re-commits to the workforce growth and development outlined in the Long-Term Workforce Plan, and providers across Northamptonshire were offered the opportunity to perform up to 110% of their agreed contract for this financial year. Additional support has also been provided to the community dental service who provide dental treatment to individuals unable to access routine care, with funding to support an additional support practice able to treat additional patients from this cohort.

A key focus for the team for the foreseeable future, is to deliver the Government's manifesto commitment of securing additional urgent dental care appointments per year for the duration of this parliament. Our task is to commission additional urgent care appointments across Northamptonshire from the beginning of the 25/26 financial year.

We acknowledge that these are initial steps, but we are working hard to support the transformation of NHS dental services.'

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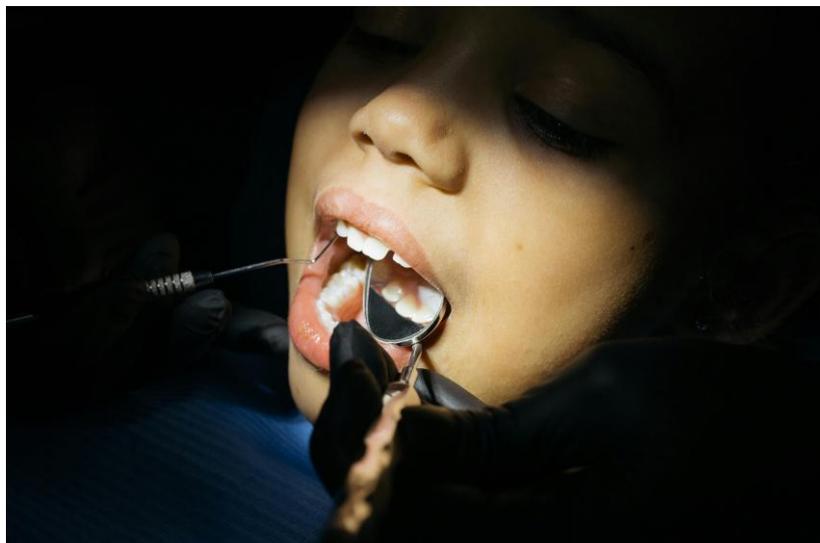
# Method

## Focus groups

We held two focus groups in mainstream secondary schools in Northamptonshire, one in North Northamptonshire and one in West Northamptonshire. The questions that we asked at the focus groups were designed by Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire at their meeting in October 2024. Public Health in North and West Northamptonshire asked us to ask some additional questions that would help the work that is planned in this area. The questions were combined and asked at the same time. We spoke to a total of 35 young people.

## Limitations

The limitations of this project included a short time scale, this work was done in a quicker time period than the usual projects the Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire would usually carry out. This is due to the work being driven by Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire and not a major project that was part of our original work plan for the year.



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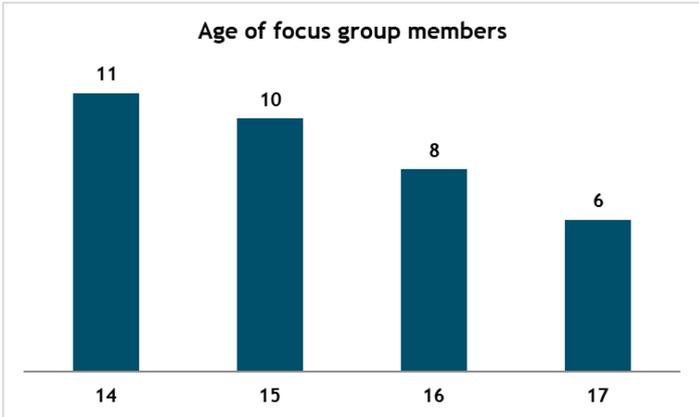
# What people told us

## Demographics

At the beginning of both sessions young people were handed a slip which asked them for some key demographic information. Age, Postcode, If they were in care and to self describe their ethnicity. These were collected at the end of each session.

### Age

Most people that we spoke to were 14 years old (11 people), 10 people were 15 years old, 8 were 16 years old and 6 people that we spoke to were 17 years old.

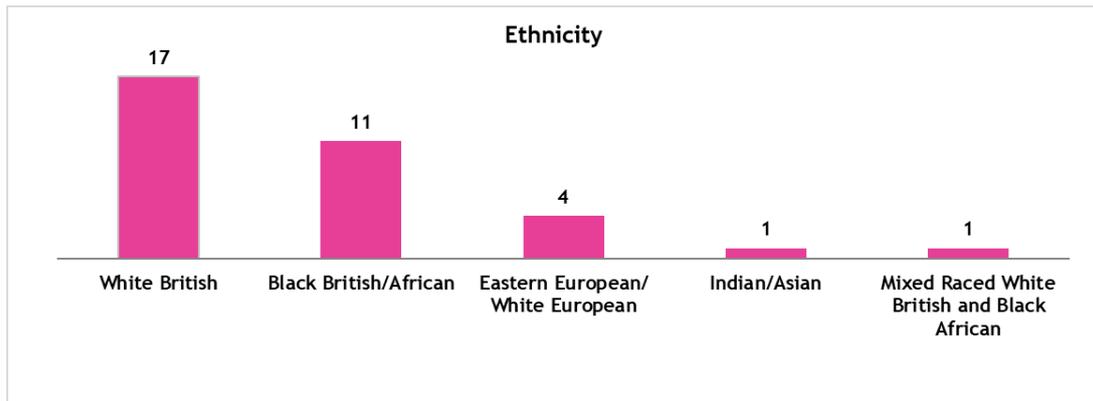


### Location

The young people that we spoke to lived in areas relative to the schools that we visited. 22 young people lived in West Northamptonshire and 14 lived in North Northamptonshire.

### Ethnicity

The majority of young people that we spoke to self identified as White British. 11 people identified as Black British or Black African. 4 identified as Eastern European or White European. One identified as Indian/Asian and one identified as Mixed Race.



## Focus Group Questions

We asked a total of 10 questions to the focus groups. At the beginning of the focus group everyone was given post it notes and pens, this is because we were aware that talking about personal health and hygiene can be difficult for people. All young people in the focus groups were told that they could write the answers to the questions down, if they did not feel comfortable speaking in front of the group.

### *What is important in order to keep your mouth and teeth healthy?*

There was a good knowledge of maintaining good oral health from the young people that we spoke to

- Brushing your teeth twice a day
- Using mouthwash
- Cutting down sugar
- Not eating excessive amounts of sugar
- Going to the dentist every 6 months
- Drinking Water
- Not drinking alcohol
- Chewing dental gum or any sugar free gum could keep things clean.
- Change your toothbrush every 3 months
- Brushing your teeth

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Be aware of sugar intake

Be aware of your diet

Avoid fizzy drinks

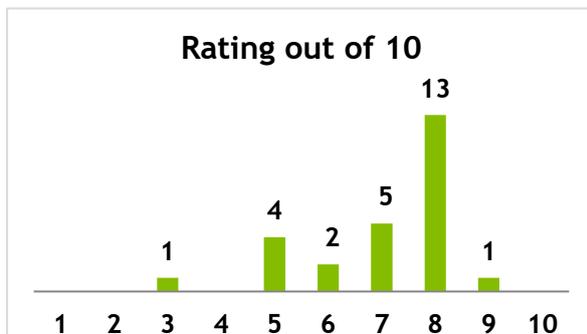
Not smoking or vaping

Regular dentist visits

Getting the right toothbrush and flossing

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***How would you rate your overall oral health out of 10 and why?***



Most young people rated their own oral health as 8/10 (13 young people). Only one person that answered the question rated their oral health at anything less than a five. There were ten young people that did not respond to this question.

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*I need to go to the dentist*

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I personally think my oral health is pretty good

I don't always brush twice a day. I'm not very conscious of sugary stuff and all

Good oral health

Not the best

It's not good

I brush my teeth twice a day

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I brush my teeth regularly and I am very cautious and watchful of my oral health

I didn't brush my teeth when I was younger

I forget and am not consistent with brushing before bed

I didn't brush my teeth when I was younger. I vape as well

I have taken away 2 points because I need to change the head more often (on my toothbrush)

I do take care of my teeth but some small improvements could be made e.g. having more dentist visits

I have regular check ups, a good lifestyle and oral maintenance

I brush 3 times a day

I eat sweets

Sometimes I forget to brush my teeth and I eat a lot of sweets

### ***Have you had recent oral pain?***

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*I have an ulcer*

*I sliced the roof of my mouth with a crisp*

*I had pain a couple of months ago but then I received treatment and care*

*A bit of oral pain*

*I have an ulcer*

*Yes, before I went to the dentist I had to wait 5 months for my appointment, so I had to live with the pain*

*Pain in the gum, toothache*

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***Do you have a dentist that you visit regularly?***

19 people told us that they visited a dentist regularly (around every six months).

***Do you visit the same dentist?***

Everyone that visits a dentist regularly told us that they visit the same dentist.

I have a dentist, but they refer me to other places

***When was your last appointment with the dentist?***

Some young people told us that they have seen a dentist within the last twelve months

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*Last month*

*2 Weeks ago*

*Last week but I waited 5 months to see an NHS dentist*

*3 months ago, but it was booked at my last appointment*

*4 Months ago*

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Some young people told us that they had not seen a dentist in a while

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*My 14 year old sister has been waiting for 12 months to see an NHS Dentist*

*Last year sometime*

*2 years ago*

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Some people told us that they have never visited a dentist in the UK or that their regular dentist is not UK based.

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*I have never been to a dentist in the UK*

*Never*

*Never in the UK (over the last 3 years)*

*In 2023 – But that was not in the UK*

*Oral health is hard to get for people who have just come into the country.*

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### ***How close is your dentist? Is it easy to get to?***

Some people told us that their dentist was close to get to. They were able to get there in a short amount of time either, walking, using public transport or driving.

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*Mine is close, like a 10 min drive*

*I could walk there*

*A ten-minute drive away in Kettering.*

*Kettering, I get the bus*

*It's quite close*

*Very close*

*Kettering, it is easy to access*

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While others were having to travel to access the dentist. Some were going to the other side of the county, some driving to other counties and areas in

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the country, with one young person telling us that they travelled abroad for dental care.

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*Mine is in Warwickshire my parents drive me (Lives in Kingsthorpe)*

*My dentist is in Wellingborough my parents drive me there (Lives in Kingsthorpe)*

*I travel to Lithuania to go to the dentist. My family find it cheaper and more trustworthy.*

*My dentist is in London, it has been for 11 years, it is through my parents health insurance*

*Cambridge, it was the only place that was taking on patients. My mum drove me.*

*A 40-minute drive*

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### ***What has your experience of dental care been like?***

There were a mixture of experiences from the young people that we spoke to.

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*Pretty good*

*Relaxing, I like sitting in the chair*

*When I needed 6 teeth out I didn't want surgery, so they worked around me*

*Very good don't mind it*

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*Quite a fun experience. Had braces done- very enjoyable. No bad things to say about the dentist*

*A good experience of the orthodontist overall*

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Some people told us that they had negative experiences of care:

The dentist nearly took out the wrong tooth when I went, now I am scared

The aesthetic was put in the wrong side of my mouth

Some people had had treatment delayed which had impacted them.

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*I was told that I needed a tooth out at 13, they didn't remove it until I was 16. I was in pain.*

*I was supposed to get braces when I was 12 but I didn't get them until I was 16.*

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Communication also came up as an issue for some of the young people that we spoke to:

I don't really know what is happening when it's happening at the dentist, but they are polite

They don't talk to me other than to say hello

I don't get stickers when I go to the dentist anymore

I feel like they think I am overexaggerating

I feel like they delay the treatment as they want more people to come in.

Paranoid anxious

Worse due to not being heard

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***Do you know where to find information about oral health? If so where?***

Young people told us that they would find out information about oral health in a variety of ways. Including the internet and asking a dentist directly.

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*Google*

*I look it up on the internet*

*I would use the NHS website*

*NHS Website*

*Family*

*Healthcare professionals if trusted, such as a dentist*

*Directly to the dentist*

*If I needed help, I would ask the dentist at my dentist appointment*

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***Who do you trust to give you information about your oral health?***

There was an emphasis on being able to trust the health care professional or check the information that they were receiving in some way.

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*From the dentist*

*I would trust a real dentist on social media, if I could check their credentials*

*Healthcare professional*

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*Qualified Dentist*

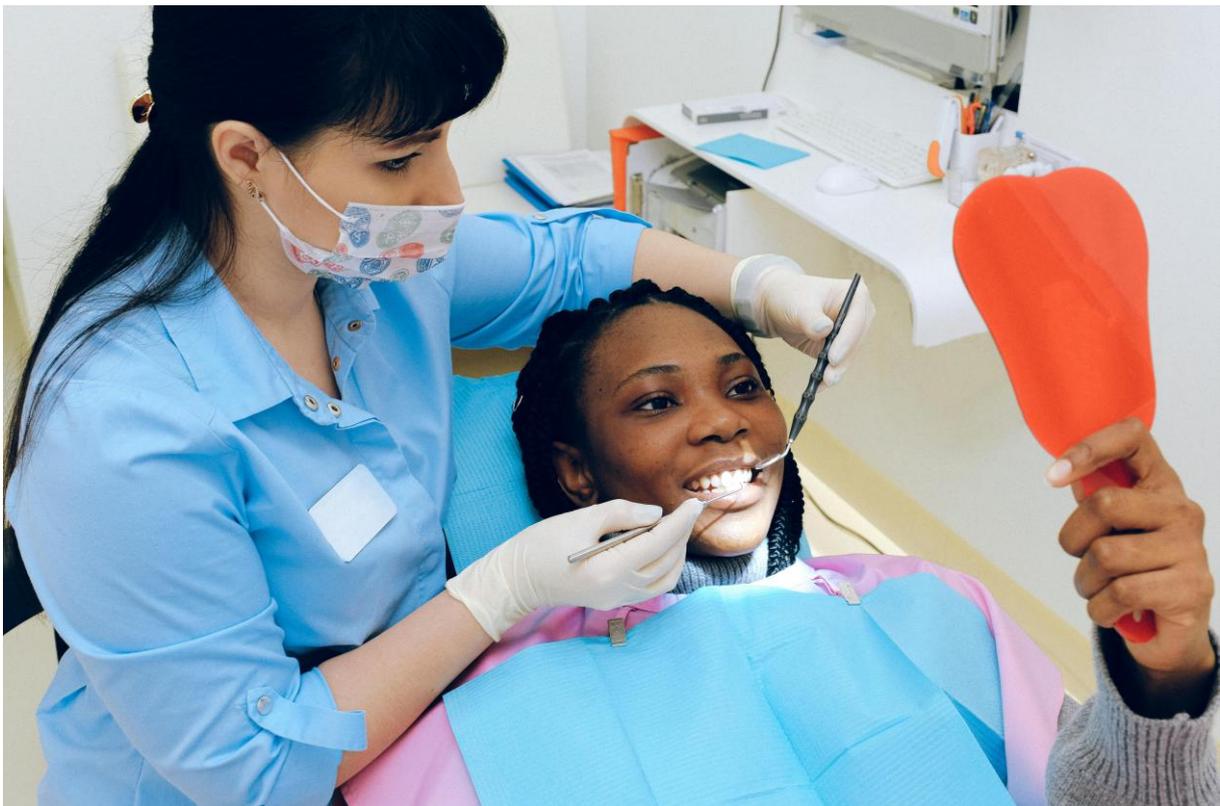
*The NHS website*

*Leaflets work well. It is obvious that they have had more effort put in to them and they are trusted*

*Social media isn't trustworthy*

*My family are in healthcare so I trust them*

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# Acknowledgements

Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire would like to thank:

- **Young people that took part in the focus groups**
- **Kingsthorpe College**
- **Kingswood Secondary Academy**
- **Public Health West and North Northamptonshire**

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# About Healthwatch West and North Northamptonshire

Healthwatch West and North Northamptonshire is the local independent consumer champion for health and social care. We are part of a national network of local Healthwatch organisations. Our central role is to be a voice for local people to influence better health and wellbeing and improve the quality of services to meet people's needs. This involves us visiting local services and talking to people about their views and experiences. We share our reports with the NHS and social care, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (the inspector and regulator for health and social care), with recommendations for improvement, where required.

Our rights and responsibilities include:

- **We have the power to monitor (known as “Enter and View”) health and social care services (with one or two exceptions). Our primary purpose is to find out what patients, service users, carers and the wider public think of health and social care.**
- **We report our findings of local views and experiences to health and social care decision makers and make the case for improved services where we find there is a need for improvement**
- **We strive to be a strong and powerful voice for local people, to influence how services are planned, organised and delivered.**
- **We aim to be an effective voice rooted in the community. To be that voice, we find out what local people think about health and social care. We research patient, user and carer opinions using lots of different ways of finding out views and experiences. We do this to give local people a voice. We provide information and advice about health and social care services.**
- **Where we do not feel the views and voices of Healthwatch Northamptonshire and the people who we strive to speak on behalf of, are being heard, we have the option to escalate our concerns and report our evidence to national organisations including Healthwatch England, NHS England and the Care Quality Commission.**

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# About Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire

Young Healthwatch Northamptonshire are a group of young people between the ages of 11 to 24 who are health and social care champions.

What we do:

- **Look at local health and social care issues**
- **Give young people a voice for all aspects of health and social care locally.**
- **Work with professionals on the health and wellbeing of young people locally and nationally**
- **Set our own work plan**
- **Learn new skills**
- **Report back to the Healthwatch Northamptonshire Board**



yhwnorthamptonshire



younghealthwatchnorthamptonshire



YHW Northamptonshire



YHWNorth1

If you are a professional that wants to work with us please contact us on the details on the next page or email [younghealthwatch@healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk](mailto:younghealthwatch@healthwatchnorthamptonshire.co.uk)

**Young**  
**healthwatch**  
Northamptonshire

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# About Connected Together CIC

Connected Together Community Interest Company (CTCIC) is a social enterprise and a partnership between the University of Northampton and Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire.

We have expertise and experience in delivering community engagement, research, surveys, training and more. Connected Together Community Interest Company (CIC) is the legal entity and governing body for Healthwatch Rutland and Healthwatch Northamptonshire.

The remit of the Connected Together CIC includes:

- Contract compliance
- Legal requirements
- Financial and risk management
- Sustainability and growth
- Agreeing strategy and operations
- Agreeing policies and procedures



**Connected Together**  
First for Community Engagement

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# Contact us

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