healthwatch Isle of Wight

Cancer Services Review Summary of Results

July 2026

ISLE OF WIGHT

Cancer Services Review: Summary of Results

What 229 patients and carers told us about cancer services on the Isle of Wight

229	20+	169 (74%)	60 (26%)
People who shared their experiences	Cancer types represented	Were patients	Were carers or family

Between February and April 2026, Healthwatch Isle of Wight surveyed Island residents on behalf of Wessex Cancer Alliance, to find out what patients, carers, and families really think about local cancer services. 229 people shared their experiences, covering every stage of the cancer journey, from first noticing symptoms to life after treatment. This summary presents the headline findings, ahead of the full report.

What people told us is working well

- Cancer nurses at St Mary's Hospital were praised again and again for the support and care they gave.
- The on-Island chemotherapy team was described as outstanding by many respondents.
- The Lighthouse Clinic in Newport received consistent praise for skin and melanoma care.
- Wessex Cancer Support Trust, Mountbatten IW, and the Daisy Ring Bus were described as making a real difference.

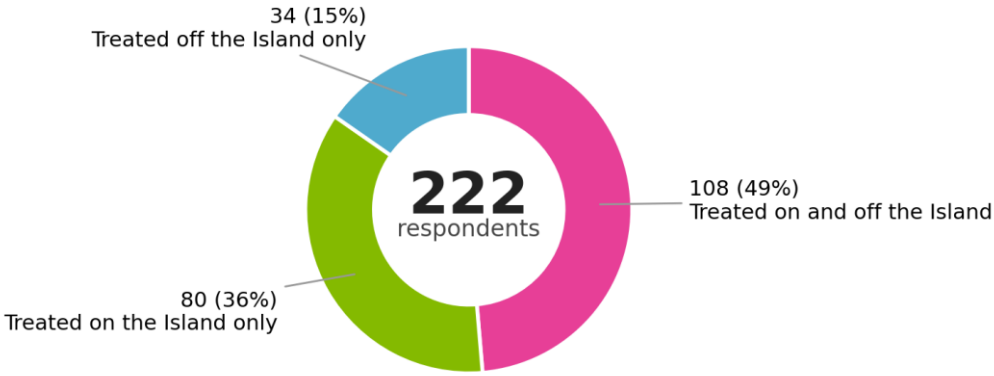
What needs to change

- Travel to the mainland for treatment was the biggest concern, raised by most respondents — the absence of radiotherapy on the Island has a huge impact on patients and families.
- Information sharing between hospitals, departments, and GPs is often poor, leaving people to coordinate their own care.
- Some GPs dismissed symptoms for too long, particularly in women and younger patients, leading to delays in diagnosis.
- Most people found out about practical support, such as ferry discounts and travel cost refunds, by chance rather than at diagnosis.
- Many felt abandoned at the end of treatment, with no clear follow-up plan or emotional support.

Travel and Mainland Dependency: the headline finding

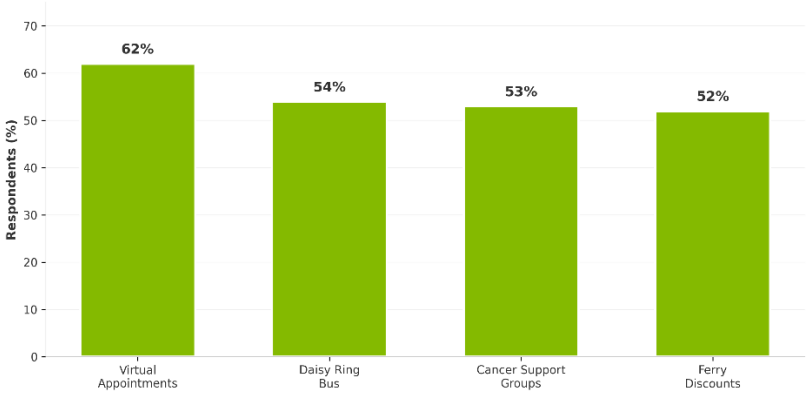
The absence of radiotherapy on the Island was the single most frequently raised concern in the entire dataset.

Of the 222 respondents who answered this question:



Awareness of Key Island Support Services

Over half of respondents were aware of key Island support services - 62% had used virtual appointments, while 52–54% knew about the Daisy Ring Bus, cancer support groups, and ferry discounts.



What patients and carers told us

Theme 1	**Travel and Mainland Dependency** The most frequently raised concern across the survey, regardless of cancer type.

Living on an island brings unique challenges when you are seriously ill. Getting to treatment means crossing the Solent by ferry or hovercraft, often when patients are exhausted, unwell, or at their most vulnerable.

> *"Going over to the mainland every day for 3 weeks was exhausting."*
> **Patient, breast cancer**

Theme 2	**Coordination and Communication** 122 respondents (53%) cited coordination or communication failures.

Cancer care on the Island often involves multiple teams at multiple sites. When teams don't communicate well, patients are left to fill the gaps themselves - chasing results, repeating their story, and managing their own pathway.

> *"Nobody shared records with anybody else. Nobody owned a problem. All anybody did was their one specific job."*
> **Patient, melanoma**

Theme 3	**Diagnosis and GP Referral** 83 respondents (36%) reported diagnostic delays; highest in Freshwater (PO40) at 50%.

Symptoms in women were too often attributed to menopause; younger patients described their age being used as a reason not to investigate further. Several respondents described months or years of visits before being taken seriously.

> *"It took months for the GP surgery to move away from what they thought were menopause symptoms to looking at something more serious."*
> **Patient, colorectal cancer**

Theme 4	**Signposting and Support Awareness** 38 respondents (17%) were unaware of any of the listed support schemes.

Practical support, such as ferry discounts, travel cost reimbursement, and free prescriptions, was rarely offered proactively at diagnosis. Most people found out by chance, often well into their treatment.

> *"We found out we should not be paying for prescriptions two years after diagnosis."*
> **Patient, prostate cancer**

Theme 5	**Aftercare and Life After Treatment** One of the most emotionally powerful themes in the dataset.

Finishing treatment should be a moment of relief. For many respondents, it was a moment of loss - appointments stopped, clinical contact ended, and people were left to manage the physical and emotional aftermath largely on their own.

> *"You see so many doctors and have so many appointments and then nothing."*
> **Patient, breast cancer**

Theme 6	**Cancer Infrastructure on the Island** Gaps beyond radiotherapy affect safety and quality of care.

Respondents identified the lack of a dedicated oncology ward, no emergency pathway for cancer patients, and inconsistent access to oncologists as ongoing safety concerns.

> *"If you deliver chemotherapy, you should have an oncology ward to treat people and keep them safe."*
> **Patient, upper GI cancer**

Theme 7	**Virtual Appointments** 142 respondents (62%) had used virtual appointments; views were mixed but broadly positive.

Virtual appointments saved time and travel, but were considered inappropriate for sensitive conversations. Several respondents described receiving a cancer diagnosis by telephone, without warning or support in place.

> *"You need to see someone and read their body language. My wife had cancer. You need to see someone."*
> **Carer, pancreatic cancer**

Theme 8	**End of Life Care** Mountbatten IW Hospice was praised as outstanding.

However, several accounts described serious gaps in out-of-hours support and coordination between Island and mainland teams for patients in their final months.

> *"The night is a frightening time to be left alone with no support."*
> **Carer**

Our recommendations

These recommendations are addressed to Wessex Cancer Alliance, NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICB, Isle of Wight NHS Trust, and wider system partners. They are based directly on what respondents told us. Healthwatch Isle of Wight will monitor progress and publish an update in October 2026.

R1 Travel	Clear public information on radiotherapy provision; review ferry transport of chemotherapy drugs; share travel support schemes at diagnosis.
R2 Coordination	Introduce a named care coordinator for every patient; improve record-sharing between Island and mainland sites; keep GPs updated in real time.
R3 Diagnosis	Strengthen GP training on atypical presentations, particularly in women and younger patients; review two-week-wait referral rates Island-wide.
R4 Signposting	Give every patient a single, clear information resource at diagnosis covering all available practical and financial support.
R5 Aftercare	Build a structured aftercare pathway with proactive contact after treatment ends and routine access to psychological support.
R6 Infrastructure	Establish a dedicated emergency pathway for cancer patients and explore a dedicated oncology ward or bay at St Mary's.
R7 Virtual Appts	Publish clear criteria for when virtual vs face-to-face appointments are appropriate; never deliver a diagnosis by phone without support in place.
R8 End of Life	Strengthen out-of-hours palliative care and coordination between Island and mainland teams for patients nearing the end of life.

About this review

This review was commissioned by Wessex Cancer Alliance and delivered by Healthwatch Isle of Wight. It is based on 229 individual responses gathered between February and April 2026, supported by conversations at community events and with local support groups. All quotes are taken directly from respondents; names have not been used.

Thank you

We would like to thank everyone who took part in this review. Sharing your experience takes courage and trust, and we are deeply grateful for every response we received. This report belongs to you. Particular thanks go to Wessex Cancer Alliance and the Healthwatch IW and WCA Steering Group, St Mary's Hospital Isle of Wight NHS Trust, the Lighthouse Clinic, Wessex Cancer Support Trust, Mountbatten Isle of Wight, Macmillan Cancer Support, the Daisy Ring Bus team, local support groups, and all the GP practices, pharmacies, libraries, and community venues across the Island that displayed our materials.

Get in touch: Healthwatch IW	Get in touch: Wessex Cancer Alliance
The Riverside Centre, The Quay, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 2QR Telephone: 01983 608608 Email: enquiries@healthwatchisleofwight.co.uk Website: www.healthwatchisleofwight.co.uk	Website: www.wessexcanceralliance.nhs.uk Patient support: www.cancermatterswessex.nhs.uk

The full Isle of Wight Cancer Services Review 2026 report, including all findings, quotes, and recommendations, is available from Healthwatch Isle of Wight.

healthwatch Isle of Wight

NHS Wessex Cancer Alliance