

The value of listening

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest
Annual Report 2023–2024



healthwatch
Bracknell Forest

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"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



Message from our Head of Healthwatch

I hope this report finds you well. This year Healthwatch Bracknell Forest has had a big focus on reaching out to communities we don't often hear from.

Our work has included listening to people with sensory loss about their communication needs and working with carers for people with dementia. We re-started our Enter and View program, which was paused during the pandemic, allowing insight into people's experience of residential care settings in Bracknell Forest.

Working closely with our partners across the health and care system has been another key theme this year for example we are pleased to have been involved in collaborating to improve communications regarding hospital appointments.

I would like to extend a huge thanks to our dedicated staff team and our wonderful volunteers whose hard work and commitment enabled us to achieve so much over the year. Also, thanks go to our community partners who have supported us to reach out to people in communities all over Bracknell Forest.



Thank you to everyone who has shared their views and experiences with us. Sharing your feedback really does make a difference.

Neil Bolton-Heaton, Head of Healthwatch



About us

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.



Year in review

Reaching out:

702 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

863 people

were signposted to advice and information through our helpdesk, digital and engagement work

34,749 people

were given clear advice and information about topics such as mental health, local NHS services, voluntary sector services and the cost-of-living crisis.



Making a difference to care:

We published

6 reports

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Big Health Chat

which highlighted the multiple factors that people need to be healthy and happy.



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

17

outstanding volunteers who gave up 41 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

£64,439

which is the same as the previous year.





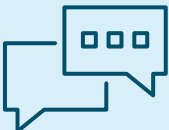

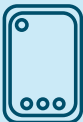

We currently employ

1 full time and 1 part time member of staff

who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>Heard the experiences of sensory impaired local residents about their experiences of the Accessible Information Standard across NHS and Social Care.</p>	 <p>Working together with ageing well team heard carers views about the Anticipatory Care Plan, now Proactive Care Plan, what cares want to be included in plans and what improvements are needed. Ageing Well team and Frimley ICS have agreed to use carers views for future plans.</p>
Summer	 <p>Communication campaign informing residents about local mental health and wellbeing services. Including talking therapies, advice to stay well during cost of living and information about local programs for health and wellbeing, including happiness hubs and walks for wellbeing.</p>	 <p>Via the Bracknell Dementia Forum and Dementia Café we heard the voices of carers for people with dementia about their experiences and difficulties accessing primary care. Report and recommendations with Frimley ICB.</p>
Autumn	 <p>Walks For Wellbeing. Promoted this Bracknell Forest initiative to prevent isolation, increase physical and mental wellbeing. We participated in all the various walks and had the opportunity to provide signposting to participants about health and social care locally.</p>	 <p>Trained 9 of our volunteers as Authorised Representatives enabling them to carry out Enter and View visits to care home services, seeing how they are run and gathering experiences from residents.</p>
Winter	 <p>Helped people to understand the HNS complaints process and access advocacy support.</p>	 <p>Following patient feedback at Wexham Park hospital Frimley ICB committed to improve road direction signage to Priors Close to raise awareness of same day GP services.</p>

Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Bracknell Forest influence decisions made about services at Frimley Health and Care Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year we've worked with Frimley ICS to achieve:



We presented a dementia carers case study at Frimley Primary Care Board, helping to secure commitment for improvement from primary care network leads.

Bracknell Forest service users' feedback is represented at the Frimley Escalations board using a template. Unfortunately, we do not get to hear about any service change as a result of this feedback so we will be looking at other opportunities to share feedback with the ICS in 2024.



We attend meetings with Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, Patient Experience Forum, Children and Young People's Mental Health Group, and Frimley Primary Care Communications Group among others. This enables us to share Healthwatch reports and intelligence at an ICS level. This year Feedback from these forums has led to volunteer involvement in PLACE assessments, service improvements, communications being designed with feedback from service users and better information for carers.

This year the restructure of the Frimley integrated care system has presented a challenge for Healthwatch with some of our key contacts moving on or taking new roles. Funding to operate at an ICS level continues to be an issue, we do not have staff available to attend all the boards that may be optimal.





Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Improving patient experience at Wexham Park Hospital

This year we published findings of the experiences the public shared with us during 6 Months of visiting Frimley and Wexham Park hospitals

At a glance

We heard about issues with the way hospitals communicated with patients about their appointments as well as examples of when this was working well.

Patients told us about good examples of care and wanted to pass on their feedback to the department or individual who had looked after them.

Not all patients understood the options for same day treatment in primary care.

When people had concerns about care we were able to signpost them to PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) or advocacy organisations. We were also able to offer further listening and signposting via our Healthwatch hub.

Our monthly hospital visiting program has been running since September 2023.

We have spoken to 240 patients, visitors, volunteers, and staff at Frimley and Wexham Park hospitals.



What did you tell us about good care?

Patients wanted to recognise the importance of good care and were often positive about their experiences, We passed this feedback on so that individuals and teams could be congratulated, recognising examples of good practice.

“I’ve had amazing treatment at Frimley, 99% absolutely incredible. The breast care nurses, and radiology treatment was fantastic. They have a very holistic approach. They look after their patients, including mental health and financial wellbeing. The nurses are like gold.”

What difference did this make?

- NHS Frimley ICB listened to our feedback and improved communications to patients. This work is ongoing. We will continue to raise awareness of issues and celebrate success.
- We were able to support patients with concerns about care to access Patient Advice and Liaison Service, NHS complaints or advocacy services as appropriate. This enabled individuals to reach a resolution and the system to learn and improve.
- NHS Frimley ICS heard your feedback about public awareness of same day primary care services and committed to working with Slough Borough Council to improve road signage. This will allow patients informed choice and release pressure on A&E at Wexham.

Hearing the experiences of people with a sensory impairment



Healthwatch aim to champion the voice, views and experiences of residents with a sensory impairment to ensure they have equality of care as laid out in the Equalities Act 2010.

In 2016 the [Accessible Information Standard](#) was introduced to give disabled people and people with sensory loss the legal right to receive information from the NHS and local adult social care in a format they choose.

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest heard from the local Macular Support Group and the local Deaf Support Group that they weren't always getting their preferred information and communication needs from NHS and social care providers.

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest along with Healthwatch Slough and Healthwatch Windsor, Ascot, and Maidenhead co-ordinated feedback via surveys and interviews with local groups including those with sight loss, hearing loss and those with a learning disability.

We found that some people didn't know what they were entitled to. Information about individuals' rights under the Accessible Information standard were not easy to find, for example, no posters appeared in NHS or social care settings.

Individuals told us they didn't always get the information and communication they needed even if they asked for it. Some people didn't know how to complain if they didn't get what they were entitled to.

People were concerned that without the accessible information and communication they needed that it would have an impact on their health and wellbeing. Our report was sent to Frimley ICS.

What difference did this make?

Frimley ICS and Frimley Health acknowledged the report and feedback from service users. Responses to our recommendations included

- Patient information has been identified as a key area for improvement this year, with additional resource being dedicated to this
- The Trust is in the process of creating a new website, and the design phase will include exploring options for how our information will be accessible for people with varying communication needs
- The introduction of the Electronic Patient Record and the My Frimley Health Record app provide great opportunity for recording and flagging where adjustments are required
- There has been work to raise awareness amongst staff on how to book British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters and we now have access to video British Sign Language
- NHS Frimley work closely with a wide range of health and care providers including primary, secondary and community care. We are committed to ensuring we raise awareness of the Accessible Information Standard and, as a result of this report, will share further information through our internal staff and stakeholder networks

Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

At a meeting with the Learning Disability Health Group there were concerns raised about foot health and an impact on general health. The local podiatry service doesn't provide foot health checks or nail cutting services.

Arranged a meeting with the podiatry service manager to discuss the issue and any options.

Service manager told us that recruitment of podiatrists is difficult. The manager said training could be provided for carers of people with learning disabilities to understand good foot health and how to spot any foot health issues. Explained that people can self-refer into the Foot Health service. We informed Learning Disabled group members who weren't aware of this and communicated this to Bracknell residents.



Getting Carers feedback on the anticipatory care service

At a carers forum we worked with Bracknell Forest Council (Ageing Well) and carers to understand what was important to them. We asked what they knew about the program? Was the name confusing and if there was a better way to describe it? What they wanted in a plan and what would be useful conversations to have with health professionals to help them plan?

The recommendations from the work including better communication of the program and what it is, having face to face conversation and in a timely manner in a personalised way. Frimley ICS accepted the recommendations and will take them initially to the Ageing Well program board to discuss how they can implement this at the five Frimley places.



Supported roll out of GP digital access program

We talked to the public about the ways they access their GP, difficulties they face, and supported the local primary care system by sharing information and providing feedback on communications to residents.

Healthwatch continue to monitor the effect of access changes on marginalised people such as carers and those who do not have digital access. In 2024 we will work to help the system improve access for unpaid carers of people with dementia and educate young people who are independently accessing their GP for the first time.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



Hearing from all communities

Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Listening to people with learning disabilities at a health group.
- Participating in a large event about mental health with local primary schools.
- Listening to and providing information and advice for people with sensory loss at local macular and deaf groups.
- Listening to Carers of people with dementia about their caring responsibilities and how that can impact their access to services and their health and wellbeing.
- Attending ex service personnel mental health and wellbeing group.

Listening to residents at Bracknell Care Home

As part of our Enter and View program we visited The Bracknell Care Home.

Healthwatch spoke to residents, family, staff and the care home manager. We observed residents and staff in the dining room during lunch. We also observed the home environment for dementia friendliness using the Kings Fund care home observation tool.

The visit and report recognise how the environment people live in and the support they receive affects the health and wellbeing of our older and vulnerable residents. This visit was planned to look at what is working well with the service and what could be improved. We had a particular focus on independence and choice.

Residents and family reported that it was a homely environment that provided a high standard of care. The quality of food and daily life was also praised by the majority of people. Staff were happy and felt well supported in their roles.

The care home have a good relationship with their GP but getting dental appointments for residents is an issue. There is a long waiting list and getting treatment for residents confined to their bed is difficult.

The recommendations including environment, measures to reduce loneliness and isolation and healthier snacks provided.



As a result of our visit and report, the home manager response told us the home had an action plan to implement recommendations, this included:

- Implementing volunteers visits to sit and chat with residents who would like more company and communication.
- Taps to be marked clearly which are hot and cold and change toilet seats so they are a different colour to the toilet. This would help the visually impaired on those with dementia
- Change handrail colours so that they are in a contrasting colour to the wall, so they stand out for those visually impaired or with dementia
- Summary sheet of past life information on residents' doors so any new or cover staff know something about residents' past
- Although snacks were plentiful in the home, they will provide more healthy choices



They were wonderful during the discharge from hospital. The manager visited and talked to her to let her know what to expect. They asked her what her favourite foods were, and she said, dark chocolate. When we arrived, there was a bar on her bed waiting for her. It was such a nice way to welcome her."

Helping children to learn about positive mental health and wellbeing

Healthwatch took part in an event that invited primary schools around Bracknell, Windsor and Ascot to participate in mindfulness, yoga and discussion to benefit their wellbeing.

Children enjoyed learning about wellbeing and trying out different ways to relax and move in a way that supports their development. We ran a mindfulness colouring station and talked to children about who helps them to stay healthy. Children mentioned their families, school, sports clubs and doctor.

We supported children and their teachers to-

- Reflect on their experiences and share challenging situations with their peers.
- Take part in mindfulness colouring activities that they could continue at home with their parents or carers.
- Shared signposting with teachers and support workers to enable children struggling with their mental health to access early help.

Hearing carers of people with dementia experiences about GP access

Healthwatch collaborated with Bracknell Dementia community health team, dementia forum and dementia café to talk to carers about their difficulties with Primary Care access.

We heard about

- Difficulties waiting in long telephone queues or calling at 08:00 because of caring responsibilities.
- Not being able to use the digital access options due to lack of skills, not having the time to learn new skills, the cost of the equipment being prohibitive.
- Problems travelling to surgeries, within their primary care network rather than their local surgery, barriers are transport, time, cost, caring responsibilities.

This project carried on into financial year 2024–2025. The findings were presented to the Bracknell Dementia Forum in April 2024. In June 2024, the report was sent to the Frimley ICS for comment before publishing.

“Having heard first hand some of the issues people with dementia and their carers face with access to primary care, I fully support the recommendations within this report” – Karen White – Dementia Services Development Coordinator Bracknell Forest



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Helping people understand changing health information.
- Supporting people to look after their mental health and wellbeing during the cost-of-living crisis
- Local out of hours health provision
- How to stay well during winter
- Promoted Bracknell Forest Council health initiatives, for example the Happyness Hubs and Walks For Wellbeing programmes
- How to make a complaint by signposting them to local NHS and social care advocacy services

Sharing important learning from an equality and diversity project about folic acid in pregnancy.

It's essential that people have clear, accurate information so they can make the best choices for their families.

Following a report published by Healthwatch Slough, our partner Healthwatch service, we shared the findings with colleagues in the Frimley Integrated Care System.

This has led to a number of service improvements that will improve information and access for people in Bracknell Forest.

- **Frimley Local Maternity and Neonatal System has created a clearly defined action plan to improve knowledge about folic acid and make Healthy Start vitamins more widely available across all 5 places in the Frimley Integrated Care System footprint.**
- **An Equity and Equality Steering Group has been established to oversee the plan's implementation. Frimley equality, diversity and inclusion annual report**

Supporting improvements to the NHS app

Digital tools can make a positive difference to healthcare – but only if it's clear how to use them.

People shared challenges with using the NHS app including dementia carers who were unable to get the app for the person they were caring for as the verification process did not take account of the differing abilities of those with dementia. We also spoke to members of the public who were confused by their 'John Hopkins' score appearing in the test results section of the app with nothing to explain what this was.

We asked for clarification from our NHS digital lead who was able to work to fix the error with the 'John Hopkins' score and pass on feedback from dementia carers to a national forum affecting app design. Thank you to those who shared feedback with Healthwatch and enabled better functionality and accessibility.

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest wanted to make sure as many people as possible could get the benefits of digital services.

- Raising awareness during engagement with key groups such as older people, carers and young people.
- Using our contacts to raise issues and influence at national level through NHS digital.



Volunteering

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited community groups and events to promote their local Healthwatch and what we have to offer
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out Enter and View visits to local services to help them improve



Charlotte is a Registered Nurse and a Life Coach. During her career she has worked in the pharmaceutical industry, healthcare and social care settings, in the UK and abroad. She has also set up and run her own home care agency supporting people to live independently in their own homes.

Her involvement as an advisory board member to Healthwatch enables her to actively contribute towards an improved provision of health and social care services in her area.



Mike is a retired practitioner who worked in local authorities & private sector organisations that needed to transform working relationships & practice. He is a strategist and now supports carers & their families. He volunteers in a nursing home which helps in his Healthwatch role.

Mike is an authorised representative and brings his wealth of experience to supporting our Enter and View visits. He recently undertook an environmental check using a dementia friendly toolkit.



Umar is a Senior Project Manager at a regional health trust, specialising in the design and delivery of mental health services for adults and young people. Umar currently sits on the managerial board of one of the largest faith centres in the Thames Valley and is also involved in community development and support programmes.

Umar helps to set our strategic direction as part of our advisory group. He represents Healthwatch on the Health and Wellbeing Board.



Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

 <https://www.healthwatchbracknellforest.co.uk/>

 0300 0120184

 Ann.Brosnan@healthwatchwam.co.uk



Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£64,439	Expenditure on pay	£48,254
Additional income	£0	Non-pay expenditure	£13,419
		Office and management fees	£10,000
Total income	£64,439	Total expenditure	£71,673

Additional income

We did not receive any extra income this year

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Women's Health
2. Young Carers
3. Hospital Discharge





Statutory statements

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest

Hosted by- Help and Care, Unit A49 Aerodrome Studios, 2-8
Airfield Way, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 3TS

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch Advisory Group consists of 5 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Advisory Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Advisory Group met 6 times and made decisions on matters such as our Enter and View schedule and our workplan. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email. We also provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website <https://healthwatchbracknellforest.co.uk>

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so, no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to the Place Committee and Health and Wellbeing Board and our commissioners.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Frimley Integrated Care System. For example, we attend the Patient Experience Forum, Children and Young People's Transformation Board, Primary Care Board and Frimley ICS Carers Steering Group. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest is represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board by Nicholas Durman, Healthwatch assistant manager. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing information and public voice and supporting colleagues to reach out to the public. Healthwatch Bracknell Forest is represented on Frimley Integrated Care Partnerships by Joanna Dixon and Frimley Integrated Care Boards by Joanna Dixon


2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Supported people contacting our hub about failings in care to understand their options including advocacy, NHS complaints, PALS and freedom of information requests.	Helping the NHS to learn from experiences and make improvements to services.
In Summer 2023 our engagement team and volunteers embarked on a listening tour of Bracknell Forest called 'The Big Health Chat'.	Feedback recognises how a variety of services and the environment people live in affect the health and wellbeing of our community. We heard that health and care experiences are varied, but that there are common themes. The top five themes obtained during our conversations with residents were GP access, Town centre amenities, Public parks or recreation spaces, Hospital outpatients, Youth centres and activities. Feedback was shared with NHS and Council service providers
Held a forum promoting and hearing the views of carers about the Anticipatory Care Plan. Asked carers what they want from such a plan.	Carers forum gave Healthwatch, the council ageing well team and the ICS information about what carers would want from anticipatory care plans. Local council and ICS agreed to include those views as the program develops
Listened to people about their mental health support needs and attended Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust One Team events to directly raise issues.	Service user feedback is part of the design of new services and review of current provision by BHFT. New mental health services will be designed with patient voice at the centre enabling them to be more effective.
Heard experiences and concerns about foot health in the learning disability community and concerns about how this may impact their health. They no longer have access to regular foot check-ups as the service provided by podiatry has changed	Podiatry service manager can provide training to Learning Disability carers about what good foot health is and how to look out for any issues. We learnt that you can self-refer to the podiatry service. If you have a concern, this was communicated to the Learning Disability Health Group enabling people to seek help if needed.
Engaged with care homes and local authority care home leads to plan Enter and View strategy. Trained volunteers to participate in the program and put policy and procedure in place.	Program of Enter and View visits in place for 2024 enabling evidence gathering about what works well and what could be improved.
Developed our strategic advisory group, supporting members to take an active role in the community and Healthwatch activity.	Ensuring our activity is relevant and matched to the needs of the community.

healthwatch

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