



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest annual report
2025/26

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Acting Chief Executive
Chris McCann

“

The NHS plays a vital role in our lives, and we know it faces real challenges. Listening to people’s thoughts about their care is one of the best ways to improve services. Every comment, concern, and compliment helps health and care professionals see what works and what needs to change, so care can be safer and better for everyone.

“We want to say a heartfelt thanks to all the local people who have taken the time to share their experiences, and to the health and social care professionals who have listened and acted on that feedback. Your commitment has helped make a real difference for our community.”

A message from our Head of Healthwatch

This year, Healthwatch Bracknell Forest has delivered clear outcomes by turning people's experiences into evidence that drives change. Our work has influenced improvements in GP access and primary care, highlighting issues with appointments, communication, and service navigation, and ensuring these were recognised and addressed.

Our engagement on urgent care and system navigation has revealed how residents access support, identifying confusion and service pressures. This has helped partners improve signposting, communication, and coordination across services.

Through our focus on accessible information and inclusion, we have amplified the voices of those facing communication barriers, strengthening awareness of the need for clear, inclusive, and legally compliant information.

Our Enter and View programme remains central to our impact, providing independent insights and practical recommendations to improve care quality, dignity, and patient experience. Alongside this, our engagement work has reached underrepresented groups, ensuring lived experience informs decision-making.

Together, these outcomes show our role in shaping responsive, equitable, and person-centred services. By combining community insight with system influence, we ensure local voices lead to real improvements.

At a time of uncertainty, including the planned abolition of Healthwatch, our commitment to independence remains unchanged. Our value lies in local trust and our ability to represent people without bias. We will continue to be a strong, independent voice, ensuring lived experience shapes decisions and advocating for meaningful involvement in future arrangements.



Neil Bolton-Heaton



"Looking ahead, we remain focused on sustaining this impact—continuing to challenge, influence, and collaborate to ensure that everyone in Bracknell Forest can access high-quality, inclusive, and person-centred health and care services.

Our achievements are a testament to the commitment of our team, our volunteers, and the many residents who shared their experiences with us."

About us

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

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



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

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



Our values are:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than **10,300** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **6** staff and, our work was supported by **13** volunteers.



Reaching out:

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

9,420 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as **mental health support** and **finding an NHS dentist**.



Championing your voice:

We published **4** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **women's health**, **new hospital planning** and **residential care**.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by **Bracknell Forest Council**. In 2025/26 we received **£63,846**, which is **1% less** than last year.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Bracknell Forest. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Our What Matters Most survey results spotlighted primary care, waiting lists and children and young people's mental health as local priorities.



Our insights on disability access influenced plans for quick wins and longer-term projects to remove barriers and improve care for disabled people.



Summer

We shared research which enabled women to have their say on and shape the delivery of women's health services locally.



We supported hospital teams to understand people's experiences with patient information, so what's available could better fit the needs of those who use it.



Autumn

Engagement with diverse community groups gave those at risk of health inequalities a better chance for meaningful involvement in new hospital planning.



We raised concerns with community dentistry to ensure people with learning disabilities weren't left behind when it came to routine six monthly check-ups.



Winter

We contributed to the delivery of, and formally endorsed, a Communities Strategy which laid out a vision for building strong, connected and cohesive communities.



Sharing positive feedback on GP practice system efficiencies helped primary care staff to learn from successes and provide more timely support for patients.



Working together for change

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Frimley and with the Frimley Integrated Care System (ICS) to achieve the following:



Representing residents

We have represented resident's views and experiences of healthcare at the Frimley ICS System Quality Group and Experience of Care Forum. Healthwatch Bracknell is a member of these forums, and we have provided quality and intelligence reports and shared case studies of resident's experiences of care and support provided by Frimley services. This has ensured that patient and public voice is at the centre of quality improvement.



Involving communities in hospital rebuild plans

We collaborated with Healthwatch Surrey and Hampshire as well as Frimley ICS to gather insights from local group leaders on how Frimley NHS Foundation Trust can best engage with and involve their communities with the Frimley Park New Hospital Programme. We ensured that under-represented groups such as those with hearing and vision loss, carers and people with learning disabilities had their voices amplified.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here are some examples of our work in **Bracknell Forest** this year:



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

Hearing personal experiences and their impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

Our hospital visiting program has both shone a light on what good looks like and highlighted areas for improvement at Frimley Park Hospital. Through listening to patient and carer experiences, supporting them to raise concerns, and sharing feedback with our system partners, we have drawn attention to issues with communication, discharge processes and waiting times as well as celebrated strengths such as quality clinical care and compassionate staff.



Getting services to involve the public

By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.

By involving community group leaders as lay readers in Frimley NHS Foundation Trust's review of their patient information range, we supported the Trust to better understand people's experiences with, and of, patient information - and action meaningful change such as reducing jargon and considering more use of video and audio content. Thanks to feedback from members of the public, future patient information will better meet the needs of those who use it.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.

Our Enter & View work has supported local care homes to become more dementia friendly – read our summary report for visits carried out across East Berkshire last year [here](#). Hearing what residents had to say and following our recommendations has enabled service providers to improve experiences for all. *“It was truly an amazing experience meeting you and your team, and there was a lot for me to learn as well. Thank you so much for everything and for the valuable feedback.” – Care Home Manager.*

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Exploring local women's views to shape healthcare improvement ideas

Last year, we heard from 580 women from Bracknell Forest, Slough and Windsor, Ascot & Maidenhead to better understand women's views on local NHS services for women's health (excluding maternity care).

With national plans to establish new women's Health Hubs evolving, we wanted to give women in East Berkshire an opportunity to have their say and influence the delivery of women's health services locally. We had a particular focus on hearing from women of Asian ethnicity due to their under-representation in the national women's health survey.

What did we do

We collected feedback using an online survey which was translated into four community languages (Punjabi, Nepali, Polish and Urdu) and in person at focus and discussion groups which included the Early Help Hub and the JMIC mosque in Slough, the Asian Women's Group in Maidenhead and the English Language Café in Bracknell. We also co-hosted a Women's Wellness afternoon with public health Bracknell for the Nepali community. We asked women what would improve care locally, what sources of information they use to support health, and what might stop them getting help for a women's care issue when needed.

Key things we heard:

"It's really important for clinicians to give women good, clear information about the options available to them. They should listen to the patient and work with them to find the best solution for them."

Women told us:

- Dedicated resources and joined-up care are needed for women's health, including translated information resources and suitably trained interpreters, culturally sensitive information, and access to wellbeing support and peer networks.
- Good healthcare looked like quick appointments, helpful communication, compassionate professionals, feeling heard and understood, and provision of high quality, relevant information.
- Difficulty accessing GP appointments, long referral waits, poor information, feeling unheard or disrespected, and lack of support or services stopped some women getting the care they needed.

What difference did this make?

Our report was used to inform NHS Frimley Integrated Care Board and Frimley Health NHS Trust's ongoing workplan for women's health. Our healthcare system partners have committed to:

- Working with GPs and primary care teams in their central role supporting women's health – equipping them with the right information, pathways and access to treatments such as pessaries, so more care can be delivered closer to home and the need for multiple referrals reduced.
- Prioritising reducing waiting times for women and building on successful initiatives such as a recent Women's Health webinar.
- Exploring co-designing more tailored resources with local women, including translated materials and culturally relevant support.

You can read our full Women's Health report [here](#).

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Bracknell Forest. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Supporting those at risk of health inequalities to understand how to access timely health and social care support.
- Reaching out to communities that may go unheard to understand how system leaders can best engage with them to ensure their voices are listened to.



Helping people with learning disabilities understand how to access timely dentistry care

A local learning disability health group raised concerns with us around a lack of six-month check-ups for community dentistry and long waits for non-emergency treatment

We linked in with Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust's Chief Dentist and were provided with feedback that internal work was ongoing to identify which patients needed to be recalled regularly. Six months was not necessary for all; however patients were welcome to get in touch sooner if this felt helpful. We provided signposting information for how to contact the community dentistry team directly, as well as out-of-hours emergency dentistry via 111.

What difference did this make?

The group was reassured that they had not been forgotten and updated with useful information on evolving processes. Individuals were empowered to understand how to reach out for dentistry support proactively as well as the various scenarios where this may be useful for them.

Involving unheard groups in hospital rebuild engagement planning

We spoke to group leaders to understand how to gain open and honest feedback from diverse communities

We held structured discussions with the leaders of Bracknell Deaf/Hard of Hearing (BADHOGS), Bracknell Dementia Carers and Bracknell Macular Group and used the findings to contribute to a report which shared insights around how NHS partners can best engage under-represented communities with the Frimley Park New Hospital Programme.

What difference did this make?

The New Hospital Programme team was supported to better understand the needs of Bracknell residents who may experience barriers to accessing hospital care when it comes to carrying out meaningful community involvement with the planned hospital rebuild. Local people at risk of health inequalities were placed front and centre in future engagement strategy planning.

Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

This year **9,420** people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Supporting people with autism to advocate for themselves

Our advice, information and signposting service helped Steven to speak up after he experienced barriers to accessing local services

Steven has autism and told us he was refused a GP appointment after seeking support with managing his symptoms. He had tried to access advocacy support through a local service but struggled to complete their email form on his own.

After feeling unable to get help with making a complaint Steven had turned to us. We helped him by listening and enabling him to feel heard, offering to complete an advocacy referral form on his behalf and providing signposting information on other support available.

Afterwards Steven thanked us for talking the situation through and supporting him to come to a solution himself. He let us know that his friend was now helping him to write a complaint letter – using information on the Healthwatch website as a guide.

Highlighting the impact of poor planning on patient care

Providing the right guidance to empower people to make complaints

Aliya had recently lost her husband to bowel cancer. She reached out to us while grieving with her family, to access support getting local healthcare services to acknowledge and address events leading up to the death.

Aliya felt poor planning had contributed to her husband's death – surgery which aimed to help prolong his life had been cancelled twice. We provided information and guidance on how to make a complaint to the hospitals involved and how to request more information on the case, as well as signposting to local advocacy services and the Care Quality Commission for help with this.

We also suggested contacting a bereavement charity so Aliya and her family could be supported with their grief.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given **238 hours** to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

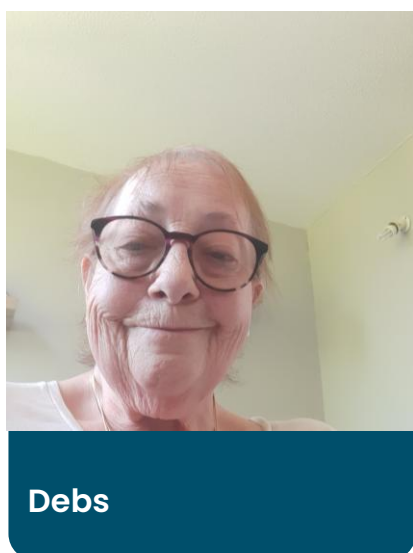
This year, our volunteers:

- Took part in Enter and View visits as Authorised Representatives, helping us to fulfil this important function.
- Collected experiences and helped communities to share their views.
- Attended meetings and groups, raising awareness of Healthwatch and the feedback we have received.
- Provided strategic decision making and advice via our Strategic Advisory Group.



At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.



“My role of proof reading with Healthwatch is a very interesting one. Apart from keeping my brain sharp I also have the pleasure of learning how local Care Homes are run.

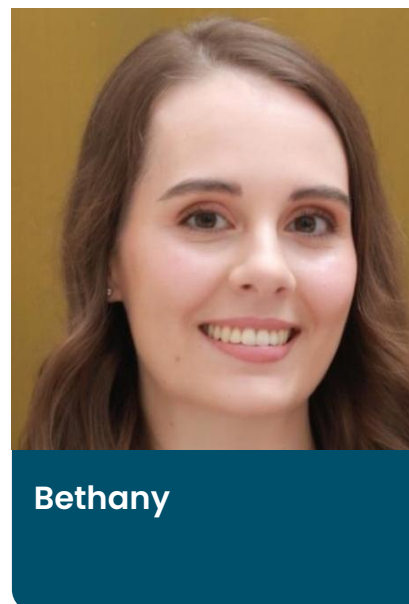
The team are kind enough accept any comments I would like to make concerning the welfare of our vulnerable and senior citizens.

I really feel part of the group and enjoy the small part I play immensely.”

“I joined Healthwatch because I am passionate about improving the health and wellbeing of those in my local community. I believe everyone deserves a voice in how health and social care services are designed and delivered, and I wanted to help make sure those voices are heard.”

Bethany has completed her training and is now an Authorised Representative supporting our Enter and View visits in local care homes.

“As a volunteer I feel I am able to contribute to meaningful change, highlight people’s experiences, and support better outcomes for everyone in the community.”



Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatchbracknellforest.co.uk



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Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Bracknell Forest Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£63,846	Expenditure on pay	£49,512
Additional income	£1,325	Non-pay expenditure	£6,622
		Office and management fee	£5,000
Total income	£65,171	Total Expenditure	£61,134

Additional income is broken down into:

- £1,325 received from the Frimley ICS for joint work on Frimley new hospital engagement

Finance and future priorities

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 priorities for the next year are:

1. To maintain high quality service delivery until the formal abolition of Healthwatch, ensuring residents voices are heard and amplified in influencing decision makers and service providers.
2. To fully support any transitional arrangements following the abolition of Healthwatch.

Statutory statements

Help & Care hold the contract to deliver the Healthwatch Bracknell Forrest service. Help & Care, unit a49, Airfield Way, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 3TS

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

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 4 members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met 5 times and made decisions on matters such as deciding our strategic priorities and agreeing our Enter and View programme of activity. 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 2025/26, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended 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.

Statutory statements

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

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

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to the Health and Wellbeing Board, Place Committees, Primary Care Forums.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Frimley Integrated Care System. For example, we attend the System Quality Group and Patient Experience Forum. 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 Bracknell Forest Health and Wellbeing Board by Claire Shropshall.

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing resident experiences of Health and Social Care Experiences..

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest is represented on Frimley Integrated Care Partnerships and Frimley Integrated Care Boards by Claire Shropshall.

Statutory statements

Enter and view


Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Pinehurst Care Centre	Breakdown in communication between the home and the local authority.	Shared a report with recommendations here . As a result, the home made changes to improve quality of care - to include expanding their visiting hours and enhancing reception systems to give family better access, making dementia friendly adaptations to bathroom equipment and building signage, and involving residents in the coproduction of activities and garden development.
Haldane House Care Home	Rated ' requires improvement at recent CQC inspection.	Shared a report with recommendations here . As a result, the home made changes to improve quality of care - to include making snacks more readily available, improving garden signage, installing memory boxes next to residents' doors and re-thinking lounge and dining room layouts to facilitate more social interaction.

2025 - 2026 outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Women's Health Project	Enabled the voices of 580 local women to be used to influence NHS planning for women's health services.
Frimley New Hospital Programme pre-engagement	Providers gained improved understanding of how to meaningfully involve under-represented groups in the hospital rebuild plans.
Communities Strategy development and endorsement	Opportunities created to listen, engage, enable and inspire people to participate in community action and initiatives that strengthen community cohesion across Bracknell Forest.
Enter & View program	Awareness raised locally around how to create more dementia friendly environments in care homes.
Involving people in the reviewing of health information	Future patient information will better meet the needs of those who use it.

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