

Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Bexley
Annual Report 2021-22



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Message from our chair

The last year has continued to be an extremely challenging time for all of us, with patients, service users and carers particularly affected. The grief and loss of the last two years still weighs heavy, despite the more recent lifting of restrictions and a return for most of us to the freedoms we'd previously enjoyed. However, there is still a huge amount of work to be done. Many health services have a significant backlog, especially elective procedures, which may take months or years to clear. Some care homes are struggling from the sheer exhaustion and stress of the last two years, but also financially and operationally due to reduced occupancy and nationwide staffing shortages. GP services are as pressured as ever, with appointments and access remaining some of the biggest issues people contact Healthwatch Bexley about.

Over the last year Healthwatch Bexley has been heavily involved in supporting the Covid-19 recovery across Bexley, attending strategic meetings, carrying out surveys and research and continuing to amplify the voices of residents and patients. The team have worked closely with the local authority and the Clinical Commissioning Group, which has itself been going through major changes as regional integrated care systems are introduced and local borough based systems are developed.

The team carried out a significant piece of research, identifying and describing the problems local people have had accessing GPs. These findings were published in our comprehensive GP Access Report and were discussed at the Bexley Health and Wellbeing Board, Bexley Strategic Board and local authority Scrutiny Panels. We will be revisiting the recommendations in the report over the coming year to identify changes and improvements in access and to ensure patients are kept informed of the rapid changes the local health economy has and is continuing to go through. We have also placed a great deal of emphasis on digital inclusion over the year, challenging the shift to online across primary care, to help ensure services continue to be provided for those who may be digitally excluded, for example, older people, people on low incomes, and people with disabilities.

The Healthwatch Bexley team have been through a few changes and has a renewed set of priorities continuing the strong focus on inclusion, access and reducing inequalities. Bexley Council has awarded us another three to five year contract to enable us to plan longer-term, and continue building on the team's great work.

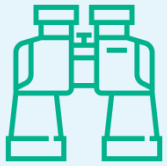


Rikki Garcia
Chair, Healthwatch Bexley Advisory Board

About us

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Bexley is your local health and social care champion. From Sidcup to Thamesmead and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other 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

- 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.



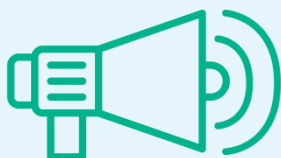
“The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities.”

Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England

Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

Reaching out



4,535 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

17,396 people visited our website for information and advice.

221 people contacted us by email or telephone.

2,307 engaged with us through social media.

We reached out to local residents by circulating **30,000** Healthwatch Bexley leaflets, mainly through Covid-19 vaccination centres.

Making a difference to care



We published

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

1 commissioned report

We worked with Public Health Bexley and produced a report exploring vaccine confidence in certain groups of the population less likely to be vaccinated.

Health and care that works for you



We were lucky to have

9 outstanding volunteers

who gave up **18 days** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received:

£100,000

Which is the same as the previous year.

During the last financial year we employed

3 part time staff

Full time equivalent 2.4%. This is the same as the previous year, however due to staff changes there were periods in the year where we were not at full capacity.

How we've made a difference throughout the year

Some of the projects we have worked on from April 2021 to March 2022 include.

Spring



20,000 Healthwatch Bexley leaflets were distributed through local Covid-19 Vaccination Centres.



We worked with 2 local, merging GP practices to answer patients questions about their concerns and gain feedback about the merger.

Summer



We reached out to less heard residents, visiting a traveller site, food banks and homeless groups. We held workshops and focus groups for minority and faith groups to explore Covid-19 vaccine confidence.



In response to residents concerns about GP access, we engaged with residents and conducted a survey. Our report and findings were presented to primary care, commissioners and the local authority.

Autumn



All South East London Healthwatch were commended under the 'Working With Your Integrated Care System' category in the Healthwatch England Awards 2021 for creating the role of South East London Healthwatch Director.



We attended an event at the Job Centre where we engaged with residents who were seeking employment whilst struggling with their mental health. We offered signposting and heard about the challenges residents faced.

Winter



We worked with partners on the local Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment and review of Urgent Treatment Centres ensuring local voices and views were heard.



We regularly supported Bexley's Health and Wellbeing Bus visiting various locations and talking to residents about health and social care issues. We conducted a review of the bus and the service provided.

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 feedback to services to help them improve.



Improving GP Access

Thanks to people sharing their experience of GP access with us over the last year, we've helped to raise patients' concerns with decision-makers and highlight the need for better communication between primary care and patients.

The way we accessed our GP changed throughout the pandemic, seeing a sudden move to a "total triage system" and an increased requirement for patients to use digital services such as eConsult. Telephone appointments were commonly used as a means for patients to speak with a GP rather than face to face appointments.

The changes happened rapidly without consultation or communication in order to keep both patients and staff safe from Covid-19. Whilst these changes suited some patients, for many they caused confusion and frustration. We wanted to make sure patients were still getting the support they needed. We heard from 685 people during our campaign and used this feedback to advise primary care, commissioners and the local authority.



91% of people

we heard from had not had any communication from their GP practice about changes to accessing services.

We made 7 recommendations including the following:

There should be a communication programme from commissioners and primary care to address residents' concerns and reassure patients. It should include how to access primary care and alternative services such as pharmacies and NHS 111. This would help ensure patients know how and where to go to get the correct help they need.

We suggested one method to do this would be via the Bexley Magazine delivered to all households.

What difference would this make?

Bexley Magazine was used to promote pharmacies and NHS 111. Commissioners are looking to appoint a communications specialist to improve communication between primary care and patients.



"I'm grateful for any communication but this doesn't happen with my surgery. We are all kept in the dark, frustrated and confused of the best way to get care"

"Communicate with the patients - let us know what you are doing."



Improving vaccine confidence

Thanks to over 1,000 people sharing their views on the Covid-19 vaccination and following on from a recommendation in our previous report, “Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy”, we were pleased to be commissioned by, and work with Bexley’s Public Health team and other stakeholders, identifying those less likely to be vaccinated and the reasons why.

We regularly went out into the community with the Local Authority “Let’s Talk Covid” bus, listening to residents’ concerns and questions. We also extensively reached out to local faith groups and minority groups such as the Gypsy and Traveller community, asylum seekers and the homeless.

We found that many people were confused by misinformation and conflicting media stories, whilst others just wanted reassurance from a professional that the vaccine was safe for them. Others felt at low risk of catching the virus and didn’t see the need to be vaccinated.



89% of people

told us they have enough information to make an informed choice about having the Covid-19 vaccination.

What difference did this make

We identified common concerns about the vaccine so that targeted communication and events could be held to address specific concerns, such as vaccination during pregnancy or whilst breastfeeding.

Workshops and question and answer sessions were held in the community with relevant professionals in attendance.

The Local Authority provided training for stakeholders so they felt confident answering vaccine related questions.

We worked with the Local Authority and a local homeless shelter, identifying a convenient local GP practice for the homeless to register with and be vaccinated.

We conducted a general survey at the end of the project which showed a slight increase in those vaccinated or willing to be vaccinated.



“I wasn’t going to get vaccinated yet as it wasn’t recommended at first for pregnant women, but after advice changed and speaking to my midwife I decided to have the Pfizer vaccine.”



Three ways we have made a difference for the community

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



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

The NHS and social care services should step back and see the bigger picture, through hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives. This provides a deeper understanding than using data alone, can challenge assumptions and motivate people to think and work more creatively.

We have a dedicated volunteer who regularly attends Patient Experience Groups for hospital trusts, the London Ambulance Service and the Healthwatch South East London Patient Experience Group. He raises your concerns and highlights the experiences you tell us about so that your voice makes a difference.



Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

When two GP practices were merging, we helped arrange question and answer sessions for patients so that they felt confident that their care would not be affected.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.

We have known about issues residents were having booking phlebotomy appointments. The situation worsened during the pandemic when there were long waits to get through on the phone, no walk-in appointments and no effective online booking system.

A new online booking system is now in place increasing the ways people can book a blood test.

Advice and information

If you are uncertain or confused Healthwatch Bexley can assist you in finding the information you need to help you understand your options or find support. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist or how to make a complaint – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up to date information on COVID-19
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme
- Helping people to access the services they need



Signposting people who needed additional support

Malcolm is a long term carer for his elderly wife. They live in a social housing flat and despite several calls and call-outs to the housing provider, the heating and hot water had not worked properly for several months.

During a spell of colder weather, Malcolm couldn't cope anymore and called us. He was struggling to look after his wife and this was made worse by his living conditions. He felt he was going around in circles with services not helping. With his consent, we worked with social services, environmental health and the housing provider to ensure the heating was fixed. He reconnected with social services and was referred for support as a carer, including support for his mental wellbeing.



Registering with a GP Practice

When Ann's grandson came to live with her he experienced problems registering with a GP Practice. He tried to register with the same practice as Ann but was told he needed two forms of ID, with a photo, as proof of his address. Without these, he told us the practice refused to register him as a new patient and turned him away.

We advised him of his rights to GP access without proof of ID and he gave consent for us to contact the practice on his behalf.

On speaking with the practice they confirmed that although they routinely ask for proof of ID, this is not needed and that he could register without ID. With his consent, the practice called him and registered him as a new patient.



Volunteers

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

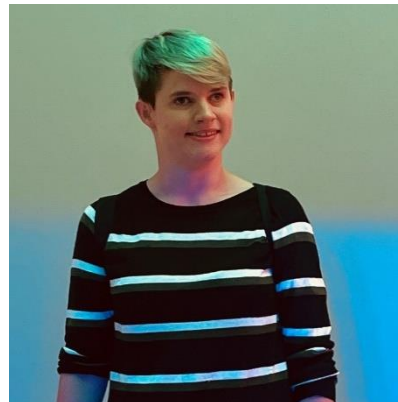
This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say, carrying out surveys face to face, over the telephone and online
- Carried out website and telephone reviews for local services
- Attended patient experience groups putting forward the views and experiences of local residents
- Supported the Bexley Covid-19 Bus and Health and Wellbeing Bus
- Represented Healthwatch Bexley at the Healthwatch South East London Patient Experience Group



Holly

“I have almost finished my final year at the University of Greenwich where I have been studying a BSc Public Health degree. As I am Deaf, I have a passion for improving deaf people’s ability to take part in their community and access services equally. I realise the importance of building awareness of the barriers deaf residents face on a daily basis, especially when it comes to accessing health settings. I have been specifically working to investigate GP access for Deaf people who either live in Bexley and/or attend a GP practice in Bexley. I helped to recruit for and run a focus group with Deaf people and wrote a report of the findings. Healthwatch Bexley had already produced a report on the views of GP access of Bexley residents, but wanted to examine the same topic amongst minority groups such as the Deaf community who use BSL. This has been a great learning experience for me and I hope to be able to use this knowledge in my future work.”



Saby

“Some of my most memorable experiences over the past year have been representing Healthwatch Bexley on the “Covid-19 testing bus” and the “Health & Wellbeing bus”, listening to people’s experiences, which I then took to committee meetings, to help improve our services. During this time I’ve heard many sad stories but also been uplifted by people’s resilience and their optimism in looking forward to a Covid free future.”

Saby also regularly attends the London Ambulance Service meetings, Patient Experience Committee meetings for Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust and Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust and he is also the Healthwatch Bexley Representative at the Healthwatch South East London Patient Group where he puts residents’ views and experiences forward.



Do you feel inspired?

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

 www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk/volunteer

 0208 304 9344

 info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk

Representation at South East London Level

Folake Segun is the Director for six South East (SE) London Healthwatch, Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark. She works with the NHS, commissioners and other stakeholders, representing us to ensure the intelligence we collect and your voice helps to inform decision making at SE London level. Her role allows local Healthwatch to focus on their boroughs, yet ensures we influence decisions made at SE London level.

Folake presented reflections on her role and the difference it has made, as an example of good practice at the 2021 Healthwatch Conference where we received a Highly Commended Award for our work with the Clinical Commissioning Group and other partners at the 2021 Healthwatch Awards.



Folake Segun
**Director, south east London Healthwatch
June 2022**



“The South East London Healthwatch Director is a key member of the NHS South East London Clinical Commissioning Group Equalities Committee and the Engagement Assurance Committee as well as sitting on the Governing Body. She brings community insight and intelligence to inform the work of the CCG and in particular has been a key contributor to the development of the ICS approach to working with people and communities strategy. We look forward to continuing to work with her as we move to working as an Integrated Care System across south east London”.

**Rosemary Watts, Assistant Director of Engagement, NHS South East London CCG
Our Healthier South East London ICS**

Our influence and impact this year included:

- South East London Healthwatch input into the South East London Digital Patient engagement plan
- South East London Healthwatch were commissioned by the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust as part of the South East London Listens Programme to conduct an audit of local services to support signposting and early intervention
- South East London Healthwatch were involved in developing the Integrated Care System Working with People and Communities Strategy
- Findings from Healthwatch Bexley, Greenwich and Lewisham were included at the Integrated Care System Digital Exclusion Workshop
- The Healthwatch Bexley Digital Inclusion report was included in the Integrated Care System Toolkit and on the Clinical Commissioning Group website

Key meetings where we informed boards and committee about what matters to people and about their experience of health services include:

- Clinical Commissioning Group Governing Body Board Public meeting
- South East London Primary Care Commissioning Committee
- Clinical Commissioning Group Equalities Committee
- Clinical Commissioning Group Engagement Assurance Committee
- Clinical Commissioning Group Quality and Safety Sub Committee
- Integrated Care System Data Usage Committee
- Integrated Care System Working with People and Communities Steering Group
- Integrated Care System Shared Care Record Governance Board

As the NHS SE London CCG ends, we look forward to being active partners in the new South East London Integrated Care System. Healthwatch Bexley will continue to work with Folake to ensure local voices and experiences are represented at South East London level by decision makers.

South East London Healthwatch Patient Group

The group consists of a diverse group of volunteers from each SE London borough, who bring a wide range of experience and perspectives. Saby Ghosh represents Healthwatch Bexley. Members of the group have engaged in:

- The Integrated Care System (ICS) Population Health and Equalities Strategy
- Developing the ICS approach to engagement
- The Working with People and Communities Strategy
- Home First development and promotion



“As a team supporting the development of the ICS (integrated care system), where all health and care professionals, partners and the voluntary sector work together, we need and value the involvement of Healthwatch and its public representatives.

They are involved in a range of decision making groups and meetings and offer support and challenge from a public, patient and service user perspective. Their involvement helps us shape the services we provide, as well as the digital and data sharing initiatives we take forward”.

Dean Holliday, Head of Digital Programmes, Population Health and Care Digital and Information Sharing, Our Healthier South East London ICS

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.

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£100,000	Staff costs	£78,675
Additional funding	£500	Operational costs	£21,128
Additional outstanding Funding from commissioned work	£7,073.70	Support and administration	£4,888
Total income	£100,500	Total expenditure	£104,691

Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. Covid-19 Recovery
2. Health inequalities including access to secondary care services
3. An internal refresh of Healthwatch Bexley’s systems, including undertaking the Healthwatch Quality Framework and raising awareness of Healthwatch Bexley and increasing our volunteer base

Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that’s because of where you live, income or ethnicity.

Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Bexley, 2a Devonshire Road, Bexleyheath, Kent, DA6 8DS is managed by Mind in Bexley and East Kent, 2a Devonshire Road, Bexleyheath, Kent, DA6 8DS, telephone 020 8303 8932, email address info@mindinbexley.org.uk, registered charity no. 1110130, company no. 05393807.

Healthwatch Bexley 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 board consists of ten members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2021/22 the board met twice and made decisions on matters such as health inequalities and our priorities for 22/23.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. During the pandemic we saw an increase in Bexley residents telling us by email, phone and through social media that they were finding it difficult accessing their GP practice. In response, primary care access became one of our main priorities.

We regularly visit the local hospital, libraries, food banks and local groups to listen to people's views about health and social care services. This allows us to identify any concerns and issues that we may need to prioritise.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience.

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, visiting food banks, a local Gypsy and Traveller site and working with faith and cultural groups.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website, social media and will provide a printed copy for those without digital access. The report is sent to all the partners we work with for distribution amongst their contacts.

Responses to recommendations and requests

We had **no** providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. Although responses may have been verbal rather than written.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Bexley is represented on the London Borough of Bexley Health and Wellbeing Board by Rikki Garcia. During 2021/22 Rikki has carried out this role by attending meetings and ensuring the views of local people are represented at a strategic level. Over the last year, the changes to the governance of how health and social care services are delivered in South East London, from borough based Clinical Commissioning Groups to a regional Integrated Care System and local Borough Based boards has dominated meetings, with significant work from all parties to ensure that operational efficiency is improved regionally, while preserving the ability of the system to respond effectively to the needs of local residents. There is still a great deal of work to do, but local people are represented strategically through voluntary sector organisations like Bexley Voluntary Services Council (BVSC) and Healthwatch Bexley. The Health and Wellbeing Board also provides local people with a publicly available forum of senior local decision makers to hear updates on system changes, raise issues and influence decisions about service provision.

2021-2022 Outcomes

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
Vaccine Confidence Initiative	Targeted communication programme from the Local Authority and Clinical Commissioning Group to increase vaccine confidence. Targeted workshops planned and held by Public Health Bexley and the Clinical Commissioning Group, aimed at groups identified as less likely to be vaccinated. As a result vaccine confidence increased as indicated by high vaccination rates within the Bexley borough.
GP Access Survey	Information about access was included in the Bexley Magazine. The Clinical Commissioning Group are looking at how to improve communication and appoint a Primary Care Communications person. The findings from all South East London Healthwatch has been sent to the Integrated Governance and Performance Committee to be reviewed. Primary Care Networks are planning how and when they will engage with patients.
Phlebotomy Service	Your feedback helped shape the booking system to include online booking.

2021-2022 Outcomes Continued

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
Digital Inclusion	Report included in the Integrated Care System Toolkit and on the Clinical Commissioning Group website. Findings included in the Integrated Care System Digital Exclusion Workshop.
Digital	South East London Healthwatch Input into South East London Digital Patient engagement plan.
South East London Healthwatch	Engaged in the development of the South East London Integrated Care System constitution. Involved and collaborated in development of the Integrated Care System Working with People and Communities Strategy.

Thank You Message from Healthwatch Bexley Manager

I would like to thank all the Bexley residents, community groups and charity groups who have shared their experiences and views with us over the last year. Thanks also to our small dedicated team of volunteers who have generously given their time delivering leaflets, representing us at meetings and speaking to people to raise awareness of Healthwatch Bexley.

My special thanks go out to my colleagues whose hard work and commitment ensures we continue to be viewed as a key partner in local forums, meetings and events. Lastly, my thanks are extended to our advisory board, who help guide and support us throughout the year.



Jayne Garfield-Field

Manager, Healthwatch Bexley



healthwatch Bexley

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