



# Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Bexley 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 chair

69 I am pleased to present Healthwatch Bexley's Annual Report for 2025/26 and reflect on a year of ensuring local residents' voices continue to shape health and social care services across the borough.

This year brought both challenges and achievements. Like Healthwatch organisations nationwide, we faced uncertainty about future funding and the continuation of independent patient and public voice services. I am delighted that Healthwatch Bexley will continue for at least another year, allowing us to build on our achievements and continue championing local people's experiences.

I would like to thank Rikki Garcia, who stepped down as Chair during the year, for his dedicated leadership and commitment to Healthwatch Bexley. On behalf of the Board, I extend our sincere thanks for his contribution. Following his departure, I was honoured to take on the role of Chair and continue supporting Healthwatch's important work. Despite these changes, Healthwatch Bexley continued to deliver impactful engagement, exploring barriers to quitting smoking, reviewing Adult Health and Social Care services, attending local events, engaging communities, and providing information and signposting to thousands of residents.



Chairman  
Healthwatch Bexley  
David Palmer

My sincere thanks go to Simone and Monique for their professionalism, dedication and commitment throughout the year. I also thank our volunteers and Board members, whose time, expertise and enthusiasm remain invaluable. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the continued support of the London Borough of Bexley, our health and care partners, and community organisations. While Healthwatch remains independent, these partnerships help ensure local experiences lead to meaningful service improvements. Most importantly, thank you to the residents of Bexley who have shared their experiences with us. Your voices remain at the heart of everything we do.

As we look ahead, we remain committed to tackling health inequalities, reaching underrepresented communities, and ensuring local people's experiences continue to influence health and social care services.

# About us

Healthwatch Bexley 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 **9,462** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **2** staff and, our work was supported by **1** volunteer.



## Reaching out:

**8,042** people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

**1,420** people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as **Adult Health and Social Care Services** and **access to GP surgeries**.



## Championing your voice:

We published **2** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **Adult Health and Social Care Services** and **Smoking Services**.

Our most popular report was **Adult Health and Social Care Services** highlighting people's struggles in **accessing and improving the services**.



## Statutory funding:

We're funded by **London Borough of Bexley**. In 2025/26 we received **£100,000**, which is **the same as** 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 **Bexley**. Here are a few highlights.

## Spring

We regularly updated our social media pages, sharing important information, local updates, and resources to keep residents informed about services and opportunities across the borough.



We attended various community events borough wide, during mental health week, We engaged in diverse groups and heard their personal experiences with mental health and the support they've received.



## Summer

Community signposting helped residents access relevant services and support by improving awareness, strengthening local connections, and promoting available resources across the borough.



Resident feedback gathered through community engagement across the borough, identified inequalities in more deprived areas, informing targeted initiatives to improve awareness, access to appointments & support for services.



## Autumn

We conducted an online survey and engaged with various community groups to explore smoking behaviours, awareness of smoking cessation services, and the barriers they faced to quit.



We hosted focus groups to gather views from diverse community groups on the changes they would like to see within their borough.



## Winter

We attended a range of community events across the borough, engaging with diverse groups and gathering feedback on the accessibility and quality of local services.



We produced a report on adult and health and social care services to understand the extent to which residents feel supported, listened to, and able to exercise choice and control over their care.



# Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in **Bexley** are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at **Southeast London**.

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch's across **Southeast London** to achieve the following:



## A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

Healthwatch Bexley contributes to a collaborative network of local Healthwatch organisations across South East London, ensuring that the experiences of Bexley residents help inform both borough-level priorities and wider health and care system improvement. Each quarter, thematic findings and emerging issues identified through reports published by local Healthwatch organisations across South East London are collated and analysed. Healthwatch Greenwich and Healthwatch Lambeth coordinate this work, bringing together insights from across the region to identify common trends, barriers to access, health inequalities, and opportunities for improvement. These collective findings are shared with the South East London Integrated Care Board (ICB), supporting system oversight, quality improvement, and a greater understanding of residents' experiences. The shared intelligence is regularly presented to key system forums, including the ICB Quality Directorate, Engagement Assurance Committee, Primary and Secondary Care Interface Group, and Equalities Subcommittee. This helps ensure that the experiences of residents from Bexley and across South East London inform strategic discussions on service quality, patient safety, access to care, service integration, and reducing health inequalities. System-level representation is jointly provided by the Chief Executives of Healthwatch Greenwich and Healthwatch Lambeth, who represent the collective views of local Healthwatch organisations within South East London governance structures. This collaborative approach strengthens the influence of local Healthwatch organisations, ensuring that the voices and experiences of residents across the region remain central to planning, decision-making, accountability, and continuous service improvement.

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 **Bexley** 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.**

This year, we engaged with residents across Bexley to better understand their experiences of Adult Health and Social Care services and the factors influencing smoking and vaping behaviours. Through surveys, focus groups and interviews, we gathered valuable insight into barriers, support needs and lived experiences. These findings are helping to shape local improvements, strengthen support services, and ensure residents' voices inform future health and care provision.



## Getting services to involve the public

**This year, we strengthened our relationships with Adult Health and Social Care services, voluntary sector organisations and community groups across the borough.**

By working closely with local partners, we strengthened referral and signposting pathways and improved our understanding of the support available to residents. These partnerships have helped connect people to the right services while ensuring local voices help shape health and social care provision.



## Improving care over time

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

We have worked closely with Adult Health and Social Care services, smoking cessation providers, and community organisations to improve support for residents across Bexley. Through sharing resident feedback and insight, we have helped strengthen communication, coordination, and access to services. These partnerships have supported more responsive, person centred care, while enabling us to provide residents with ongoing information, guidance, and signposting to the support they need.

# 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.



# Championing community concerns adult health & social care services

**The Adult Health and Social Care Report gathered residents' views and experiences to better understand how adult health and social care services are accessed and experienced across the London Borough of Bexley.**

Respondents acknowledged that these services can make a significant difference in helping people maintain their independence, remain in their homes, and sustain a good quality of life.

## What did we do

We conducted focus groups and distributed an online survey to residents who had accessed Adult Social Care services within the previous 12 months, to gain a deeper understanding of the impact these services were having on residents across the borough of Bexley.

## Key things we heard:



**68%**

**of users reported that the services and support provided felt matched to them**

**55%**

**stated that they had a positive experience with our staff**

**63%**

**reported that they are able to live the life they want.**

The findings show that many residents value Adult Social Care services in Bexley, particularly where communication, support and relationships are strong. Feedback also identified opportunities to improve service coordination, communication and person centred care planning.

## What difference did this make?

The findings were shared with the Adult Health and Social Care services and presented to the Scrutiny Committee. Recommendations we suggested have been accepted, and improvements are being implemented.

# Actions on lived experience and insights on smoking, vaping and quitting

**This report explored smoking and vaping behaviors among residents of the London Borough of Bexley, including the health impacts of tobacco and e-cigarette use and the support available to help people quit.**

Based on 360 survey responses, focus groups and interviews, the report found that smoking remains a key public health issue, with stress, social factors and health inequalities influencing smoking and vaping behaviors. It highlights the need for ongoing education, prevention and accessible stop-smoking support across Bexley.

## Key things we heard:



**71%**

**of respondents told us they intended to quit smoking within the next 12 months.**

**91%**

**of respondents expressed their concerns around youth nicotine use being high.**



“People think you didn’t try, but they don’t see what tipped you over.”

The case studies identified common patterns in stress, coping and quitting behaviors, while the ten in-depth interviews provided deeper insight into how smoking resumes, confidence fluctuates, and quit attempts either succeed or break down over time.

## What difference did this make?

The findings have helped shape local improvements to tobacco control services in Bexley, supporting more targeted and joined up support for residents. The recommendations are informing changes to reduce smoking related harm, improve access to cessation support, and address health inequalities across the borough.

# Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of **Bexley**. 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:**

- We attended events such as; the carers event for unpaid carers and mental health week events.
- We engaged directly with individuals accessing food bank services to better understand their experiences, the factors that led them to seek support, and their perspectives on the assistance provided.
- We share feedback from local residents with our local authority, ICB and ICS, through our local care network meetings.



# Understanding health and social care residents experiencing health and social inequalities

**We investigated access to health and social care for the seldom-heard groups.**

Feedback from seldom-heard residents highlighted barriers to accessing health and social care services, including referrals to services outside their local area, difficulties securing GP appointments, and poor communication. These findings underscored the need for more accessible, coordinated, and locally available support.

## What difference did this make?

The report findings highlighted barriers faced by underserved residents in accessing health and social care services, including difficulties with appointments, communication, and local service availability. In response, service providers and the local authority have acknowledged these issues and are using the findings to inform improvements aimed at creating more accessible, coordinated, and responsive support across the borough.

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## Hearing from the Community: Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

**Through surveys, focus groups, interviews, and community engagement activities, residents shared a range of experiences relating to their mental health and emotional wellbeing.**

Common themes included difficulties accessing timely support, long waiting times, the impact of loneliness and social isolation, financial pressures, and a need for greater awareness of available services. Residents also highlighted the importance of community connections, safe spaces, and support that is culturally appropriate and easy to access.

## What difference did this make?

In response to community feedback, we are working with local partners to improve awareness of mental health services, strengthen community-based support, and promote opportunities for social connection and wellbeing. We are continuing to engage with residents to ensure services reflect local needs, supporting early intervention initiatives, and helping people access the right support at the right time. Community feedback will continue to inform future planning and service development.

# 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 **9,462** 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



## Adult Social Care Support for Local Resident

**A Bexley resident contacted us unsure how to access the right Adult Social Care support for their needs. They were unclear about available services and how to request an assessment.**

We provided clear information and signposted them to the appropriate Adult Social Care team, as well as local community support services for immediate help.

As a result, the resident was able to access the right support more quickly and reported feeling more informed and confident about where to go for help. This highlights the importance of effective signposting in improving access to care and not feeling lost in the social care system.



“I didn’t know where to start or who to contact, but once I was signposted by Healthwatch, to the right team it made everything much clearer and I finally felt like I was getting the help I needed.”

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## Supporting a Resident to Quit Smoking

**A Bexley resident shared that they had smoked for many years and found it difficult to quit due to stress and daily pressures.**

They were aware of the health risks but felt unsure where to start or what support was available locally. Through receiving clear information and being signposted to stop smoking support services, the resident gained a better understanding of the options available to them, including practical advice and behavioral support.

They reported that having accessible information and guidance made quitting feel more achievable and helped them take the first steps toward reducing their smoking.



“I knew smoking was affecting my health, but stress made it really hard to stop. When Healthwatch gave me clear advice and support options, it helped me understand what I could actually do to start cutting down and trying to quit.”

# Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteer has given 36 hours over 12 days 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:

- Visited faith forum groups
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out online patient experience meetings.



## 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.



Saby

Over the last year, my wife's health has remained unaltered and as a result I am still unable to attend meetings in person but I am still attending PEC meetings via Teams/Zoom, Lewisham & Greenwich NHS trust as well as Dartford & Gravesham NHS trust regularly.

Due to staff shortages and future uncertainty my report is not as lengthy or comprehensive as was in the past but still worthwhile. We still learn from other Healthwatch groups during our sessions at the meeting and pass on any updates to Bexley residents."

### 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.healthwatchbexley.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk)



0208 304 9344



[info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk)

# Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from **London Borough of Bexley** under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

## Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£100,000	Expenditure on pay	£95,262
Additional income	£6,000	Non-pay expenditure	£9,944
		Office and management fee	£10,054
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£106,000</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£115,260</b>

## Additional income is broken down into:

- £6,000 received from Public Health Bexley for work on a project

## Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch Lambeth and Healthwatch Greenwich receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support South-East London Healthwatch representation at this level:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Participation and Involvement in SEL ICB governance meetings ( x13 )	£1,755
Producing the South East London Quarterly Insight report	£810
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£2,565</b>

# 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 three priorities for the next year are:**

1. Mental health awareness
2. Social isolation and loneliness
3. Plans to reach communities we don't usually hear from

# Statutory statements

**Healthwatch Bexley, 2a Devonshire Road, Bexleyheath DA6 8DS.  
Healthwatch Bexley uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking  
our statutory activities as covered by the license agreement.**

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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 **11** 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 **3** times and made decisions on matters such as next years work plan and underrepresented communities we need to engage with more. 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 and send it to those on our mailing list.

# Statutory statements

## Responses to recommendations

We had **0** providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were 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 shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, we take information **to health and wellbeing partnership and scrutiny committee.**

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in **South East London Integrated Care System.** For example, we **produce an integrated report of all SEL Healthwatch reports published every quarter, which is shared widely. In addition, we provide updates on Healthwatch activity to the ICB Engagement Assurance Committee and to the System and Concerns Group.** We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch **Bexley** is represented on the **Bexley** Health and Wellbeing Board by **David Palmer Chairman Healthwatch Bexley.**

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by actively attending all health and wellbeing board meetings and providing feedback to internal and external stakeholders.


Healthwatch **Bexley** is represented on **South East London** Integrated Care Partnerships and Integrated Care Boards.

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**Healthwatch Bexley**  
**2A Devonshire Road**  
**Bexleyheath, Kent**  
**DA6 8DS**

A pink circular icon containing a white globe symbol.

[www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk)

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0208 304 9344

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[/HealthwatchBexley](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchBexley)

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A pink circular icon containing a white camera symbol.

[@healthwatchbexley](https://www.instagram.com/healthwatchbexley)

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