



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Bexley

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"The impact that local Healthwatch have is vitally important. Healthwatch are empowering their communities to share their experiences. They're changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people's views are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our Chair

Over the past year, Healthwatch Bexley has continued to grow in reach, depth and influence. The team have worked hard to ensure that the experiences of local people, especially those whose voices are often unheard, are at the centre of how health and care services are designed and improved.

Healthwatch Bexley listened to more than 10,000 residents and published reports on issues that matter most to people in Bexley, from GP and dental access to diabetes education and hospital discharge. The work has led to tangible improvements, such as greater satisfaction with GP appointments compared to three years ago, and better information being shared with patients and carers at key transition points.

I am especially proud of our staff team, who consistently deliver high-quality, impactful work despite being just two people and a small number of hardworking volunteers. Their dedication and professionalism are at the heart of everything we do.

Relationships have been strengthened with local services and decision makers, ensuring community voices are reflected at both borough and Integrated Care System levels. Through collaboration with other South East London Healthwatch partners, we've been able to influence strategic planning and service redesign beyond our local patch.

Most importantly, our staff and volunteers have reached people in the most deprived parts of our borough, listened to their concerns, and used their insight to push for fairer, more responsive care. As we look ahead, we remain committed to amplifying every voice so that no one is left behind.



"Healthwatch Bexley is a small but amazing team, who've turned the experiences of Bexley residents into practical change, making local health and care more accountable, accessible and inclusive."

Rikki Garcia
Chair, Healthwatch Bexley Advisory Board

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

We've supported more than 10,571 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 2 staff and, our work is supported by 1 volunteer.

Reaching out:



8,650 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1,921 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as discharge from hospitals and access to primary care services.

Championing your voice:



We published 5 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like access to primary care, insight report to complaints and diabetes structured education.

Our most popular report was access to primary care, highlighting people's struggles in access to GP and dental services.

Statutory funding:



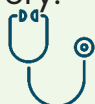
We're funded by London Borough of Bexley under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. In 2024/25 we received £100,000 which is the same as last year.

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 focused on primary care access in the borough, prioritising GP and dental services by identifying barriers and exploring ways to improve timely, consistent care delivery.



This work highlighted inequalities in lower-deprived areas, leading to targeted efforts that improved awareness, appointment access, and support for GP and dental services



Summer

We identified people with Type 2 diabetes and supported access to structured education, helping improve their self-management, health literacy, and long-term outcomes through targeted interventions.



We visited unpaid carer groups of those with mental health conditions to listen, gather insights, and explore what additional resources and support could benefit them.



Autumn

We focused on digital access for the frailty population, identifying barriers like limited digital skills, connectivity issues, and lack of confidence affecting their use of social care services.



We attended various community events borough-wide, engaging diverse groups and listening to their feedback on the accessibility and quality of local services available to them.



Winter

We engaged with patients who were recently discharged from hospitals to listen to their thoughts on their discharge care plan and after care services.



We updated our social media page and regularly shared important posts for those in the borough.



Working together for change

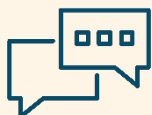
We've worked together with our five neighboring Healthwatch in South East London (SEL) and used our collective influence to ensure people's experiences of care in Lambeth and across SEL are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at South East London ICS. This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across South East London to achieve the following:

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Each quarter, we worked closely with other SEL Healthwatch teams to collect feedback on health services through calls, emails, meetings, outreach, and events. This shared insight was passed on to the ICB and ICS to support improvements. Our system representative regularly presented clear, balanced summaries and joint recommendations, reflecting the collaborative efforts of the Healthwatch network to influence positive change across the health and care system.

The big conversation:



Through our joint work as SEL Healthwatch, we brought the voices and experiences of patients, carers, and families into decision-making processes. This feedback helped shape the SEL ICS strategy, informed the development of a new ICS Digital Strategy to address digital exclusion, and guided the creation of the ICS Engagement Toolkit to support meaningful engagement. We championed digital inclusion across SEL services to reduce the barriers many face as technology use grows.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



The SEL Reference Group, made up of board and committee members, supported the procurement of new ENT services by participating in the panel and providing feedback that led to improvements. They also contributed residents' experiences to shape SEL ICS priorities and supported community engagement. We look forward to continuing to collaborate to make care better across south east London.

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



This year, we made it a priority to connect with communities whose voices are often missing from mainstream conversations.

Through targeted outreach and inclusive engagement, we heard from groups who face barriers to being heard. These conversations gave us new insights, deepened our empathy, and helped us understand different lived experiences. What we learned is now shaping our future planning, ensuring upcoming projects reflect the needs of those too often overlooked in health and care decision-making.

Getting services to involve the public



This year, we focused on building relationships with health and social care organisations to promote greater public involvement in service design and delivery.

By connecting with new partners and learning more about local services, we strengthened our understanding of what's available across the borough. These relationships helped us encourage services to better engage with residents and consider their views. This collaborative approach also improved our ability to signpost people effectively and ensure their voices are heard in shaping care.

Improving care over time



We've worked collaboratively with a range of service providers to improve communication and coordination, ensuring residents receive the best possible care.

By strengthening these partnerships, services are now more joined-up and responsive. We've also built strong, lasting relationships with many residents, staying in regular contact to offer ongoing support and guidance. Our person-centred approach has been well received, and we're proud of the positive feedback we've had from residents about the quality, warmth, and consistency of our customer care.

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.



Listening to your experiences

Championing community concerns to restore access to primary care

Last year, we championed the voices of our community to hear their experiences of access to primary care services, after covid 19.

The two areas of primary care we investigated were general practices (GPs) and dentists.

What did we do?

This project explores the experiences of Bexley residents in accessing primary care, specifically GPs and dentists. Healthwatch Bexley received ongoing feedback via community engagement, phone calls, and emails, highlighting ongoing access issues. A similar report was published in 2021, and three years later, these challenges remain. This continued concern prompted a renewed focus on gathering resident experiences, feedback, and suggestions for improvement.

Key things we heard:



73%

of users reported they were satisfied with their appointments, while the 2021 report 41% of people said the service was very poor.

35%

Found it easy to get an NHS dentist appointment.

54%

reported staff were very friendly and welcoming, where back in 2021 they found them unsympathetic and rude.

While there was positive feedback on dentistry in the borough, there is a lack of dentists accepting NHS patients and the second barrier was financial costs for those who couldn't get an NHS dentist and would have to look at private.

What difference did this make?

Our work showed that there was a great increase in service user satisfaction compared to our GP 2021 report. When asked how satisfied participants were with their appointments, the 2021 survey has a shocking 40% of responses being very poor. With the 2024 survey, where by 73% said they were satisfied with their appointment, which means recommendations that were put in place last time are working.

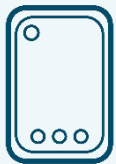
Listening to your experiences

Action on type 2 diabetes education

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases in the UK and its prevalence is only increasing. About 90% of adults diagnosed with diabetes have type 2.

Between September and October 2024, Healthwatch Bexley carried out engagement activities with over 1,900 health and social care service users, focusing on those newly diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. This qualitative research aimed to gather experiences, perceptions, and feedback on diabetes education courses.

Key things we heard:



57%

of residents were recommended to attend the course by their GP practice.

46%

of residents said they had no knowledge of the courses. When asked what the reason was, they did not attend



"Being able to discuss with other attendees and mix socially, in the break and afterward, I was able to understand more about diabetes than from the GP and I have since lost 10kg in weight."

In terms of additional needs and adjustments for these courses only three were suggested. A course that caters for those with learning difficulties, a course delivered in a specific language for those whose first language is not English and a same sex course where both teachers and attendees are of the same gender.

What difference did this make?

Based on the wide range of feedback we received during this engagement it was clear that many participants liked the course they attended. Looking at the feedback as whole we have been able to make five recommendations that may be considered in the future. These were, Awareness, refresher courses, accessibility, continued peer support and engaging attendees.

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 Asian health and wellbeing event and the carers event.
- We engaged with residents in the northern part of the borough and nearby areas, identified as the most deprived locally, to better understand their experiences and gather valuable insights.
- We share feedback from local residents with our local authority, ICB and ICS, through our local care network meetings.



Hearing from all communities

Improving understanding of social care within Socio Economic Disadvantaged communities

Engagement with communities in the north of the borough helped us uncover the obstacles they face in reaching social care support.

Many residents were being referred to services located outside their local area, but were unable to attend due to accessibility challenges. There was a general sense of neglect toward those living in the north of the borough, highlighted by insufficient funding, poor communication between service providers and users, difficulty securing GP appointments, and delays of up to three weeks for available slots.

What difference did this make?

The collective findings from the various reports, from across the borough indicate that both service providers and the local authority are aware of the required improvements and are actively working to implement them effectively.

Helping the frailty population accessing NHS care

Listening to and engaging the frailty community to improve their experience of NHS services.

We are actively listening to and engaging with individuals living with frailty to better understand their unique needs, preferences, and challenges when accessing NHS services. By involving them directly in conversations and decision-making, we aim to co-design more responsive, accessible, and person-centred healthcare solutions that enhance their overall experience and ensure that services are truly inclusive and equitable.

What difference did this make?

The Local Care Network has conducted a series of workshops, engaging with individuals living with frailty to gather first hand insights. These contributions are shaping initiatives aimed at enhancing access to NHS services and promoting improved health and wellbeing outcomes.

Information and signposting

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 10,571 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

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



Flu jabs for the older residents

Thanks to residents feedback, we were able to identify what barriers the residents faced in getting their flu jabs.

During our engagement activities, a significant number of older residents raised concerns about the flu vaccine, sharing questions and challenges related to access. Many reported having flu-like symptoms several times during the colder months. Despite widespread promotion, some had not been invited for the vaccine or were unable to find a convenient local provider. Others had received invitations but faced difficulties attending due to distance and mobility issues. To support residents more effectively, we contacted local GPs and pharmacies we already collaborate with to identify where the flu jab was being offered, enabling us to provide accurate signposting going forward.



"Healthwatch Bexley was incredibly helpful in providing clear information about where I could get my flu jab. They went the extra mile to make sure I had everything I needed."

Improving discharge from hospitals and after care.

A residents daughter expressed her worries about the lack of information and care provided after her mum was discharged from hospital.

"My elderly mum had cataract surgery, and while the treatment itself was good and the hospital staff were kind, she was sent home without much advice on how to care for herself afterwards. All they told her was when to come back for her next appointment."



"After my mum was discharged from hospital, we felt a bit lost about what to do next. Healthwatch stepped in and pointed us in the right direction—thanks to their support, we were able to access the services my mum needed quickly and with confidence."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteer has given 12 days and 37 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:

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



Showcasing volunteer impact

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.

“Over the last year, my wife’s health has deteriorated and subsequently, I am still unable to attend meetings in person but do join most Patient experience committee meetings on line. Recently the South East London reference group meetings have been discontinued due to government cuts but I still attend Lewisham & Greenwich and Dartford & Gravesham NHS trust meetings regularly. I normally have a slot at the meeting for Healthwatch Bexley’s latest update but also learn from the experience of the other Healthwatch groups and future plans for the hospitals, which are useful for our residence in Bexley. I still enjoy attending the PEC meetings and to pass on latest updates and future plans for Queen Elizabeth and Darent Valley Hospitals which our residence rely on for their health.”



Saby

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



0208 304 9344



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	£88,906
Additional income	£4,810	Non-pay expenditure	£10,801
		Office and management fee	£9,979
Total income	£104,810	Total Expenditure	£109,686

Additional income is broken down into:

- £4,810 Healthwatch structured type 2 diabetes engagement work

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across **South East London** also receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
ICS Healthwatch post x 2	£112,000
	£
	£

Finance and future priorities

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. Men's health and wellbeing and barriers they face to accessing services.
2. To continue focusing on health inequalities within the borough and reaching out to those less heard and vulnerable individuals.
3. Raise profile awareness of Healthwatch Bexley by increasing activity within the community and on social media.

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.

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 2024/25, 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 2024/25, 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

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 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 Rikki Garcia Chairman Healthwatch Bexley.

During 2024/25, 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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