



Health and Wellbeing Board Annual Report

(May 2025)



Foreword

We are pleased to present this, our second Annual Report of the West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

The report provides a summary of the progress we have made against each of the five core priorities of the Berkshire West Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy:

- Priority One: Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people
- Priority Two: Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives
- Priority Three: Help families and children in early years
- Priority Four: Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children
- Priority Five: Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

The report also sets out how we have responded to challenges that have emerged since the Strategy was published, such as the ongoing cost of living crisis, and the increasing prevalence of housing related issues, which are having tangible impacts on the physical health and mental wellbeing of our residents.

The Health and Wellbeing Board has developed and continues to develop, strong cross-sector partnerships. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of the various sub-groups of the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the wider partnerships.

Looking ahead, we will seek to act on the learnings from the recent Local Government Association review of the Health and Wellbeing Board. In particular, we will look to optimise our governance model, and to improve our focus and effectiveness in driving improvements to the health and wellbeing of the local population.

We recognise that there will be challenges in making these reforms, particularly as we enter a period of significant uncertainty associated with changes taking place at national, regional and local levels. These include the abolition of NHS England, changes to the role of and funding for Integrated Care Boards, the creation of strategic authorities, and reorganisation of local government. However, we feel that we have partners with the requisite vision, skills and determination to make this succeed.



Cllr Heather Codling
Executive Portfolio:
Children & Family
Services (Chairman)



Dr Ben Riley
BOB ICB Chief Medical
Officer
(Vice Chairman)

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Further information about the Health and Wellbeing Board can be found on the West Berkshire Council website:

[Health and Wellbeing Board - West Berkshire Council](#)



Strategic priorities

Health and Wellbeing Boards bring together local leaders from the health, public health, and social care systems, along with those from key local partners involved in delivering shared work to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.

Each Health and Wellbeing Board has a statutory duty to produce a Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which commits to improving health and wellbeing by setting out priorities for where members of the Board will work together in planning and delivering local services.

The Health and Wellbeing Boards for Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham have developed a [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) in conjunction with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Partnership, with the aim of securing improvements in population health across the three local authorities, which together comprise the Berkshire West 'Place'. The Strategy is focused on five priorities.

Strategic Priorities

1. Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people.
2. Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives.
3. Help families and children in early years.
4. Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people.
5. Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults.

Although the strategy applies across the three local authorities, each has adopted its own delivery plan incorporating a unique set of actions that reflect the particular needs of its residents and the priorities of local partners. These can be updated independently in response to changing circumstances while still allowing for joint working.

BERKSHIRE WEST HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY (HWBS)

2021- 2030





Progress on priority one: Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people

Objectives

1. Use information and intelligence to understand communities, identify those in greatest need and ensure they are able to access the right services and support.
2. Assess how Covid-19 has differentially impacted local populations, including through displacement/disruption of usual services. Ensure access to these services are available to all during recovery.
3. Take a Health in All Policies approach that embeds health across all policies and services.
4. Address the variation in the experience of the wider social, economic, and environmental determinants of health.
5. Continue to actively engage and work with ethnically diverse communities, the voluntary sector, unpaid carers, and self-help groups, ensuring their voices are heard.
6. Ensure services and support are accessible to those most in need through signposting, targeted health education, promoting digital inclusion, and addressing sensory and communication needs. All in a way that empowers communities to take ownership of their own health.

Progress on Actions

Health in All Policies (HiAP) - The process for reviewing new council policies and their impact on health and emotional wellbeing, with a focus on reducing health inequalities, is being refined and strengthened as part of the broader implementation of the HiAP approach.

Health Impact Policy (HIP) – Work has progressed on development and implementation of a HIP to ensure that planning decisions support healthier environments by embedding health considerations into development proposals and land use strategies. It is hoped that the Policy will be adopted later this year.

Supported internships – These are being used to help young people aged 16-24 with an Education Health and Care Plan transition into employment. Newbury College supported four students were supported with work placements in 2024/25, with a three more students given work experience pending discussions about how they could be supported to complete supported internships. For next year, 10 students have been identified for the Pre-Supported Internship programme and eight for Supported Internships.

Support for Schools – The Department of Work and Pensions' Support for Schools Advisers offered free employability, information and advice sessions to students aged 12-18 (up to 24 for SEND students). Their support assists students with their transition from school/college into the world of work and further education.

Tackling Digital Exclusion – This has been identified as a key issue for some residents. It can lead people to feeling isolated, as well as representing a significant barrier to accessing services.

West Berkshire's libraries have played a key role in helping people to get online, with residents now able to book 30 or 60 minute IT help sessions.

Also, a partnership between the NHS and local libraries has helped more people to access online health services by teaching them how to use the NHS app. This has allowed patients to better understand and manage their health and to access services more easily.





Progress on priority one: Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people

Case Study: Community Wellness Outreach Service

Solutions4Health have been commissioned to deliver a targeted Community Wellness Outreach Service in West Berkshire over an 18 month period from January 2024.

Eligible residents are contacted by their GP to inform them that they would be invited for a free NHS Health Check. Although the main focus of the service is detection of patients with cardiovascular disease (CVD), it provides patients with a check-up of their overall health and an indication of whether they are at higher risk of getting a range of different conditions including:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Stroke

During the check discussions take place with the patient about how to reduce their risk of these conditions, and if they are over 65, they are also told about symptoms of dementia to look out for.

The check includes:

- Height and weight measurements
- Waist measurement
- Blood pressure check
- Cholesterol testing
- Blood sugar testing

Specialist staff from Solutions4Health talk to patients about their mental health and any issues affecting their wellbeing. They are also able to support patients take key actions, including stopping smoking, losing weight, eating healthier and getting more exercise.

After the health check, the results are recorded and, with the patient's consent, shared with their GP to update their health record. If patients aren't registered with a GP, the team can help patients to do that.

Mobile clinics are provided across the district, and patients can just drop-in for a health check or pre-book a slot.

The service has been successful in delivering its objectives. As of 5 February 2025:

- 2,181 full health checks completed (of a target of 2,500), of which 1,576 were with people in priority groups.
- 131 'mini' health checks completed.
- 412 clinics held across 35 locations.
- 65 people supported to register with a GP.
- 455 referrals made to health behaviour change support.
- 51 CVD prevention community engagement sessions held, working with 20 VCSE organisations – 1,203 people attended.

Evaluation of the project will take place from the first quarter of 2025/26.



Client case study:

When did you have your NHS Health Check?

Council offices 9/10/2024

How did you find out about the service?

I was phoned

How has the service helped you?

It has highlighted to me that I need to be more active and how I need to make changes

What changes have you made to stay healthy? Please provide details

I want to start walking and help my family be more active

How have these changes helped you improve your health and well-being?

I think my mental health will improve

Any other comments

I have always had problems with my weight, and I have found really it hard to do anything about my weight since reaching menopause. I have shared my thoughts with the GP. They took bloods from me. I have not been offered any support, advice or help. I hope that my raised cholesterol levels will get the GP's attention and help me find another path for my weight loss journey.

Thank you so much for helping me today and for giving me information on the menopause café



Progress on priority two: Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives



Objectives

1. Raise awareness and understanding of dementia and ensure support is accessible for them and their unpaid carers. We will work together to ensure the Dementia Pathway is robust, including pre-diagnosis support, improving early diagnosis rates, rehabilitation, and ongoing support.
2. Improve identification and support for unpaid carers of all ages. Work with unpaid carers and partner agencies to promote the health and wellbeing of unpaid carers.
3. Work together to reduce the number of rough sleepers and improve the mental and physical health of rough sleepers / homeless, through improved access to local services.
4. Prevent, promote awareness and provide support to those who have experienced domestic abuse in line with proposals outlined in the Domestic Abuse Bill.
5. Support people with learning disabilities, engaging with and listening to them to focus on issues that matter most to them.
6. Increase the visibility of services and signposting to them, as well as improving access for people at higher risk of bad health outcomes, working with and alongside voluntary and community organisations who are supporting these groups.

Progress on Actions

Dementia Cafés – Two dementia cafés have been successfully opened at Hungerford and Theale, targeting residents with a dementia diagnosis. The cafés provide a range of dementia focused sessions as well as other activities designed to mentally stimulate those with dementia and encourage conversation with others. Both cafés are well attended.

Carers Strategy – A draft Strategy has been developed, which explains how West Berkshire Council, the Integrated Care Board and partner organisations will work together to identify carers and help them to balance their caring responsibilities with a life outside of caring. The Strategy was developed in conjunction with carers and young carers, and takes account of feedback obtained through the Personal Social Services Survey for Adult Carers in England. The Strategy is due to be adopted in May 2025.

Support for Carers and Young Carers - West Berkshire is part of a joint project with four other local authorities to focus on developing resources and campaigns to help identify new carers. This project is funded through the Accelerating Reform Grant.

The Carers Partnership signposts carers for health checks/other services appropriate to their emotional, physical or mental health needs. A Social Care Practitioner has also been appointed to focus mainly on completing and monitoring carers assessments and signposting

carers to appropriate help at a much earlier stage.

A self-assessment tool for carers has been developed and is in the testing phase.

Work is ongoing with Calcot and Thatcham Family Hubs to develop regional clubs for young carers, with the aim of reaching families who live in more rural areas of West Berkshire.

A weekly youth group has been established for secondary school age carers where carers are offered a hot meal and various activities.

Domestic Abuse Strategy – The Domestic Abuse Strategy (incorporating the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy) was adopted in September 2024. The Strategy sets out how statutory requirements are to be met by ensuring that support in safe accommodation is commissioned to meet the needs of victims and their children.

A local needs assessment was carried out to inform the Strategy, which involved gathering data from internal and external providers, as well as victim engagement and interviews. The draft Strategy was then the subject of public consultation between April and May 2024.

A draft delivery plan has also been produced which sets out how the Domestic Abuse Board (a Sub-Body of the HWB) will work with stakeholders to deliver activities that address identified gaps and support the Strategy's objectives.



Progress on priority two: Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives

Case Study: Housing and Health

The correlation between poor housing and health inequalities is stark. Along with poverty, lifestyle and poor nutrition, these make up the main drivers of health inequalities and variances in life expectancy. It represents a crucial factor that shapes wellbeing, economic stability, and overall quality of life.

Local authorities and their partners play a significant role in seeking to improve standards and to mitigate risk, including:

- Planning policies, systems and allocations that deliver social housing.
- Building control, ensuring the safety and standards of new housing.
- Statutory housing service dealing with rough sleeping, and providing a safety net and long-term housing solutions
- Public protection service, managing rental housing standards and regulating landlords.

The Board received a report in December 2024, which provided a summary of a local housing stock condition survey and the local response to the survey's findings.

The survey found that the standard of the housing stock in West Berkshire was very good. However, the report estimated that: 6,500 (11%) of properties have Category 1 Hazards that present an immediate risk to occupants, with the highest concentration of in rural areas.

Cold, damp and mould are issues in some properties as seen by the Public Protection Service on a regular basis. However, Officers believe these issues to be significantly under-reported along with other hazards (based on the stock condition survey and other evidence from the voluntary sector). It is thought that people may be reluctant to report issues because of potential impacts on relationships with landlords.

A significant number of local properties are of an age where energy efficiency is low and other standards are also not in keeping with modern requirements. There are also a number of poorly converted properties that have inherent problems.

House prices and rents are very high. The median price to median earnings ratio is just short of ten. Good rental properties are in short supply and rents and mortgages have been rising in line with rising interest rates. Some landlords have indicated that maintenance costs and mortgage rates have risen so steeply that repairs are becoming unaffordable without significantly higher rents.

The impact of the Renters Reform Bill is not yet known. The abolition of the Section 21 no fault evictions could lead to a flurry of evictions ahead of enactment as landlords seek to exit the market or evict tenants they see as problematic. New rules on energy performance restricting new lets to A-C ratings may be desirable, but this may have unforeseen consequences. The

combination of measures may also see rents rising in a diminishing market.

The future of energy security is linked intrinsically to world events as seen in 2021-23 where prices rose exponentially. Although they have fallen back significantly, the price cap has outstripped inflation. The means testing of the winter fuel allowance will significantly affect those at the margins with many living in older less energy efficient properties.

Finally, there is the cost of emergency and temporary accommodation which is a challenge for all councils in the region. Demand is high but so are costs and this will continue to present operational and financial pressures for the foreseeable future.

In response to the report, the Board resolved to:

- Appoint the Executive Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing as a permanent Board Member.
- Establish a working group to develop an action plan to respond to the issues highlighted in the housing stock condition survey.
- Receive an update on the likely impacts of the Renters Reform Bill.

The Board will continue to keep a watching brief on housing related issues and the impact of changes arising from the emerging legislation as it is enacted.



Progress on priority three: Help families and children in early years



Objectives

1. Work to provide support for parents and carers, during pregnancy and the early years, to improve personal and collective resilience using research and good practice.
2. Ensure families and parents have access to right and timely information and support for early years health. Working with midwifery, Family Hubs, health visiting and school nursing to improve the health, wellbeing, developmental and educational outcomes for all children.
3. Increase the number of two-year olds (who experience disadvantage) accessing nursery places.
4. Ensure that our early years settings staff are trained in trauma-informed practice and care, know where to find information or help, and can signpost families properly.
5. Publish clear guidelines on how families can access financial help, including for childcare costs; tackling stigma around this issue where it occurs.

Early Response
Hub



Progress on Actions

CAAS & ERH – The Contact Advice and Assessment Service (CAAS) and Early Response Hub (ERH) have continued to develop their offer, providing the right support at the right time from the right people.

A practice framework has been developed that enhances the local offer and provides a way of working that ensures that children and families are enabled to bring their own solutions and supported to do so. The success of this model of working is significant. The data clearly shows a reduction in children being progressed for longer term statutory intervention. Most new 'Child in Need' referrals now work with the CASS and ERH.

The Family Help and Achievement Practice Model has been enhanced and practices embedded, and its success is tangible. Family First Assessments are being utilised widely across CAAS and ERH, and the 'spectrum of need' developed as part of the model enables and facilitates movement across the threshold.

1001 Days Platform - There was a soft launch for the digital platform in December 2023. Parents' feedback was collected during the development stage, but it has been tested further as a live resource. The webpage was launched to Health visitors and midwifery colleague earlier this year and since then stickers with a QR code have been printed and given to community midwives and health visitors

for use in the Red Books. The webpage continues to be promoted via antenatal and postnatal courses and on Facebook.

Reducing Parental Conflict Training – The government developed the RPC programme to reduce parental conflict and improve children's outcomes. It delivers training to professionals, and a full day workshop to parents to help them co-parent more effectively and reduce conflict. The programme is being funded for a further year into 2025/26 and an application will be submitted to support continuation of the programme in West Berkshire.

Family Hubs – Work has been ongoing to develop and expand the Family Hub offer, ensuring more children, parents, and carers can access the support they need, when they need it. Starting in April, changes will ensure a more seamless and joined-up support system. The Family Hubs will work more closely with our Early Help teams, strengthening the support available, not just for families with young children, but also for those with older children and young people aged up to 19 years.





Progress on priority three: Help families and children in early years



Early Years System Workshop

The Health and Wellbeing Board identified concerns around school readiness and the attainment gap between pupils on free school meals and other pupils.

These issues need to be considered using a systems approach, since school readiness is not an isolated issue—it is often influenced by broader, underlying factors that affect many aspects of a child's health and wellbeing.

A workshop was held on 16 January, attended by elected members, and representatives from Public Health, Children & Family Service, Education Service, Culture & Libraries Service, health, and the voluntary sector.

The aim was to explore how to collaborate more effectively to reduce demand and, ultimately, improve all health and wellbeing outcomes for children. The workshop aimed to do this by developing a stronger strategic foundation for systems working and thinking across relevant services.

A trauma informed approach was proposed. Many traumas originate in early childhood and are often the result of children's essential needs not being met.

The workshop was the starting point for discussing how the system can adopt an approach that supports parents and caregivers in meeting their children's essential needs. It proposed that the approach should span the

entire system, from primary prevention services like midwifery and health visiting to early help services through family hubs, children's services, and the voluntary sector.

In order to establish an approach to systems working that tackles root causes and wider determinants, it is essential to understand each of the services within the system in terms of their purpose and the challenges they face.

Feedback from the workshop can be broadly categorised into two main themes:

1. The importance of prevention:

- Preventing issues from arising unnecessarily and reducing reliance on statutory intervention, ultimately leading to better outcomes for children.
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing.
- Addressing the attainment gap
- Embedding the understanding that prevention and early help is everyone's responsibility, requiring a cultural shift.

2. A collaborative approach:

- Partnerships based on a common strategy and vision.
- Ensuring commitment from all partners to complete early help assessments and develop plans, reinforcing that this is not solely the responsibility of Children's Services.
- Developing a clearer, more focused Early Help strategy and structure, distinct

from rebranding existing Children's Services.

- Creating mutually beneficial arrangements by actively listening to partners' needs in these collaborations.
- Gaining a better understanding of the skills within the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Provide upskilling opportunities for smaller voluntary sector organisations.

Next Steps

The following next steps have been agreed:

- Examine the current prevention and early help structure and identify opportunities to strengthen it.
- Develop a plan for engagement with key partners to develop a comprehensive prevention and early help partnership strategy and shared vision.
- Take a joined-up systems approach to ensure appropriate collaboration, alignment, and communication across the interconnected pieces of work currently underway, including:
 - The Health Scrutiny Children's Mental Health Task and Finish Group.
 - Recommissioning of the 0-19 Public Health Nursing contract.
 - Director of Public Health's annual report.
 - Aligning Family Hubs with the evidence-based Family Hub model, supporting the "Best Start in Life" vision.



Progress on priority four: Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children



Objectives

1. Aim to enable all our young people to thrive by helping them to build their resilience.
2. Aim for early identification of those young people in greatest need.
3. Use evidence to support interventions at the individual, family and community levels.
4. Engage with staff, students, parents, the community and mental health support teams to inform interventions for emotional health and wellbeing,
5. Proactively support the mental health and wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers.
6. Expand trauma-informed approach.
7. Improve the process for transition to adult mental health services for our young people.

Progress on Actions

Health and Wellbeing in Schools Programme:

The Health and Wellbeing in Schools Award offers a practical 'plan do and review' approach to improving health and wellbeing in children, young people and staff. One school achieved the Award in the 2024/25 academic year.

The Public Health Team delivers healthy lifestyles workshops for Year 3 pupils. All primary schools are eligible for the Food and You workshop, with the additional Be Active, Sleep and Wellbeing workshop available to selected schools, based on data received from the National Child Measurement Programme. 30 schools received workshops in 2024/25.

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) provides a Young Health Champion qualification for young people to enable them to learn new practical skills and knowledge for promoting health and wellbeing to peers, friends, family and their wider communities. 30 Young Health Champions were trained in West Berkshire in 2024/25.

Substance Behaviour Transitions Worker:

A transitions worker started in post in September 2024 within the Children and Young People Substance Misuse Service.



Progress on priority five: Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults



Objectives

1. Tackle the social factors that create risks to mental health and wellbeing including social isolation and loneliness.
1. Work with local communities, voluntary sectors and diverse groups to re-build mental resilience and tackle stigma.
2. Continue to recognise the importance of social connection, green spaces and understanding of different cultural contexts for mental wellbeing. Increase social prescribing.
3. Improve access to, quality and efficiency of services available to all who need them.
4. Work with professionals in workplaces and other settings; using a preventative approach.
5. Improve access to support for mental health crises and develop alternative models.

Progress on Actions

Suicide Prevention – The Suicide Prevention Outreach Service was commissioned by the Public Health Team in 2024 and is being delivered via the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire. The aim of this service is to engage with a range of organisations to provide information and resources about suicide prevention and deliver training. The suicide prevention outreach worker has continued to provide accredited half-day suicide prevention first aid courses to front line workers, managers, HR staff and the voluntary sector, as well as day-long accredited suicide prevention courses for adults working with young people.

Samaritans' signage has been erected at locations such as bridges, car parks, and waterside areas in West Berkshire to encourage people who are contemplating suicide to seek support.

Recent suspected suicides at and around Thatcham Railway station prompted the Chair of the Suicide Prevention Action Group (SPAG) to contact rail industry representatives to ask what resources were available for railway employees to look out for and offer support to people who may be considering taking their own life on the railway. The Chair has sought the support of the Health and Wellbeing Board in encouraging the rail industry to explore preventative measures, including both physical barriers and technology solutions.

Bereavement Support – The Mental Health Action Group (MHAG) held a bereavement support workshop in July, which brought together a range of local statutory and voluntary sector organisations. The aim of this workshop was to consider whose mental health would be at risk of being adversely impacted by a bereavement and what support is in place for them. A webpage was also produced, highlighting resources to signpost people to sources of help and support that are available following a bereavement. This was promoted during Grief Awareness Week 2024: [Bereavement and Grief - West Berkshire Council](#)

Mental Health Forum – MHAG has worked in partnership with service users and local organisations to run a 'co-produced' West Berkshire Mental Health Forum. This brings together service users, voluntary sector and public sector partners to learn from people with lived experience of mental health challenges and share knowledge and information to help improve local services and initiatives.

The first meeting was held on 14 October 2024, with post-meeting evaluation finding 100% of people felt it was 'good' (74%) or 'great' (26%). The Forum continues to meet monthly and is providing valuable feedback on service users' experiences and concerns.



Progress on priority five: Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults

Case Study: Let's Get Mindful Fund

Greenham Trust has partnered with West Berkshire Council to launch a new £90,000 fund to support voluntary and community sector organisations working to enhance mental health and wellbeing across the district.

The aim of the Let's Get Mindful Fund is to enable local, not-for-profit organisations to carry out meaningful and impactful projects that support people with mental health challenges. It also ensures that organisations have access to financial resources to expand their work, offer additional support, make one-off purchases, purchase equipment, or launch new initiatives.

The fund provides grants from £500 upwards and is targeted at smaller organisations.

It will seek to deliver the following objectives:

- Prevent poor mental health and cultivate good mental wellbeing to give people more choices and control over their care
- Support children, young people and their families impacted by mental health and wellbeing issues and enable their access to services.
- Narrow inequalities in mental health and wellbeing
- Support community-based activities including peer support, and community support groups.

- Support vulnerable, and socially isolated residents, including older people.

In assessing grant applications, priority will be given to areas considered most in need, and to projects that support people who are considered vulnerable and/or isolated. Funding will be allocated on a rolling basis as applications are approved. Some examples are described below.

Recovery in Mind: Recovery in Mind CIC provides a Recovery College for the local community. They work with people whose mental health challenges affect many areas of their lives. By providing creativity opportunities, they can move forward in their recovery and lead better lives, whatever that means to them.

Recovery in Mind was awarded £6,200, which will be used to develop the creativity programme by offering more courses in areas such as; the written word, craft, group reading, mindful sewing, woodwork, art and nature-based activities. The current offer makes a real difference to the mental wellbeing of all the students that attend the Recovery College.

Students are from all age groups and benefits of attending workshops include: improved concentration, skill acquisition, improved self-esteem, developing a new interest or hobby, working collaboratively, and a sense of accomplishment leading to personal growth. The grant will fund venue hire, specialist tutors and peer trainer support, creativity equipment and supplies.

Eight Bells for Mental Health: Eight Bells for Mental Health is a member-led charity that supports residents of West Berkshire affected by mental health issues, loneliness and social isolation by running drop-in sessions throughout the week. They have over 100 members registered and on average, 70 attend the session each week.

In 2024 they provided 41 free art sessions for their members, as well as 80 hours of counselling and 450 subsidised lunches.

They were awarded a grant of £14,400 which will be used to support some of the charity's running costs, and will allow recruitment of additional volunteers to support the drop-in sessions and provide support.

As a member-led charity, members play an active role in shaping their services through their own management committee and member trustees. They also plan day trips, activities and fundraising events which contributes to their mental health recovery.

Eight Bells provides a lifeline to people experiencing mental ill health, many of whom face complex challenges such as social isolation, unemployment, financial hardship and stigma. The funding will allow them to continue a variety of activities connected to the five ways to wellbeing such as art therapy, yoga, exercise, cooking and gardening. This will help their members to maintain/improve their wellbeing, develop new skills and regain confidence.



Joint Strategic Needs Assessment



About the JSNA

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 introduced duties and powers for health and wellbeing boards in relation to Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies (JHWSs). Local authorities and integrated care boards (ICBs) have equal and joint duties to prepare JSNAs and JHWSs, through the health and wellbeing board.

The purpose of JSNAs and JHWSs is to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community and reduce inequalities. They require a continuous process of strategic assessment and planning.

JSNAs are produced on particular topics. The outputs, in the form of evidence and analysis of needs, and agreed priorities are used to help to determine what actions local authorities, the local NHS and other partners need to take to meet health and social care needs, and to address the wider determinants that impact on health and wellbeing.

The JSNA can be found on the Berkshire Observatory website: [Berkshire Observatory – West Berkshire – About and frequently asked questions](#)

Healthy Weight Needs Assessment

The Healthy Weight Needs Assessment was last updated in 2020.

Excess weight represents a major barrier to good health and wellbeing and significantly

contributes to high risk of preventable diseases and early mortality. Excess weight has further negative impact on the mental health, lower education attainment in children, and frequent absence from work amongst others. Beyond individual health impacts, there are broader social and economic consequences, which further increases the burden on an already stretched health and social care services.

The Healthy Weight Needs Assessment focuses on both preventing and addressing excess weight in West Berkshire, ensuring that local strategies support healthier lifestyles and reduce inequalities in access to good nutrition and physical activity. It has been informed by a variety of data sets, including the results of a local survey carried out in 2023.

The development of the Healthy Weight Needs Assessment has been an ongoing process; however, progress was significantly delayed due to changes in personnel within the Public Health and Wellbeing team. With the appointment of a Senior Programme Officer and support from the Consultant in Public Health, work on the assessment has now resumed, ensuring its completion aligns with current priorities strategic objectives. Also, the recommendations provided in this document are being reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose and should bring about a reduction of excess weight within the council.

The needs assessment is being developed with a whole system approach, which recognises that

behaviours are influenced by a complex interplay of factors that has links with health inequalities and wider determinants of health. This document being developed will show how our approach moves beyond isolated interventions and instead fosters collaboration across multiple sectors, ensuring that healthy weight is embedded into wider policies, services, and community initiatives.

Approach to Updating the JSNA

The review and update of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for West Berkshire will follow a structured, collaborative, and data-driven approach. Led jointly by the Public Health teams at West Berkshire Council and Reading Borough Council. The process is supported by a dedicated working group and overseen by a steering group comprising of local authority and health system partners. The process will ensure the JSNA remains relevant, reflective of current needs, and responsive to local priorities.

The methodology will include a review of best practices and extensive stakeholder engagement. The approach is grounded in co-production and continuous engagement, aligning with Integrated Care System (ICS) priorities and Health and Wellbeing Board strategies. In parallel to the JSNA review, a rapid “State of the District” JSNA report will be produced to support strategic commissioning, inform service planning and ensure alignment with Integrated Care System objectives and the priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Boards.



Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment



Each Health and Wellbeing Board has a statutory duty to publish and keep up to date a statement of needs for pharmaceutical services for their population. This is called the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA). The purpose of the PNA is to:

- inform local plans for the commissioning of specific and specialised pharmaceutical services
- to support the decision-making process for applications for new pharmacies or changes of pharmacy premises undertaken by NHS England

The PNA assesses whether the current provision of pharmacies and the commissioned services they provide meet the needs of West Berkshire's residents and whether there are any existing gaps, or future gaps that are likely to occur within the three-year lifetime of this document, taking account of factors such as new development.

It assesses current and future provision with respect to:

- Essential Services, i.e., current accessibility of pharmacies and their provision of Essential Services
- Advanced Services
- Other services (which may be commissioned at the local or national level).

The current PNA was adopted in September 2022 and expires in September 2025. Since this was developed, there have been a number of

significant changes to the community pharmacy landscape at both the national and local levels.

Nationally, some of the big chains, such as Boots, Lloyds and Superdrug have closed or sold many or all of their branches, including several in West Berkshire. In many cases the large chains have been replaced by independent community pharmacies, and often these have been found to be work more closely with local GP surgeries and offer additional services to patients, such as home delivery.

As such, only one Supplementary Statement has been issued during the lifetime of the current PNA to reflect the significant gap in provision that was created following closure of the pharmacy at the Sainsbury Supermarket in Calcot.

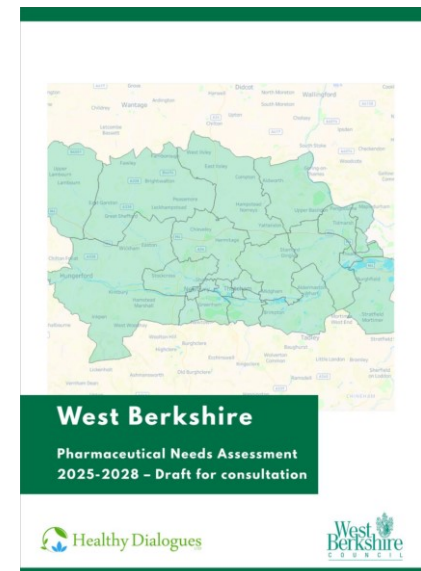
There have been several recent applications for new pharmacies wishing to open in West Berkshire, of which two have been approved. These are deemed to offer unforeseen benefits (i.e. they do not respond to an identified gap in provision set out in the PNA).

The role of pharmacies has also been boosted following the introduction of the Pharmacy First Scheme, which enables patients to be referred into community pharmacy for a minor illness or an urgent repeat medicine supply.

Work on the next PNA is currently underway. The process is prescribed in the national guidance and includes:

- a review of the current and future demographics and health needs of West Berkshire population
- a survey of West Berkshire patients and the public on their use and expectations of pharmacy services, which took place between 13 December 2024 and 16 February 2025.
- an assessment of the commissioned essential, advanced, and other commissioned pharmacy services provided in West Berkshire
- a 60-day PNA consultation with statutory stakeholders.

The intention is to adopt the updated PNA at the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting on 24 September 2024.





Better Care Fund



A key function of the Health and Wellbeing Boards is to encourage greater integration and partnership working between health and social care. The Better Care Fund (BCF) supports this using pooled budgets.

The Policy Framework requires systems to have a jointly agreed plan across Health and Social Care which demonstrates how people are supported to stay well, safe, and independent at home for longer, and how the right care is provided at the right time and in the right place. The plan is refreshed annually.

The Board is required to report quarterly on the performance against four national metrics:

- 1) Avoidable admissions - indirectly standardised rate per 100,000 population
- 2) Falls – Emergency hospital admissions due to falls in people aged 65 and over directly age standardised rate per 100,000. (This metric is new for 2023-25)
- 3) Discharge to usual place of residence – percentage of people, resident in HWB, who are discharged from acute hospital to their normal place of residence.
- 4) Residential Admissions – long-term support needs of older people (age 65 and over) met by admission to residential and nursing care homes, per 100,000 population.

Previously, there was a requirement to report on the reablement metric, but this has been removed for 2024/25.

We are currently on track to meet three out of the four BCF metrics. We are not on track to meet unplanned avoidable admissions to hospital.

As a system, Berkshire West has invested and prioritised several programmes of work in 2024/25 to maximise impact and system

resilience all year round. One of these programmes is same day urgent access – a GP is co-located on the acute site to triage directly from the Emergency Department. Early data indicates that 30-40 patients are being diverted daily. The NHS has seen a huge increase in cases of Flu over the 2024/25 winter season.

	Priority	Update
1	Targeted Community NHS Health Check Outreach Programme	The Community Wellness Outreach Service (CWOS) has successfully delivered NHS Health Checks, held CVD engagement sessions and helped people with lifestyle behaviour changes.
2	JOY platform	Social prescribers across West Berkshire have been using JOY successfully. JOY supports daily client related activity such as case notes and referrals, and links health and social care professionals to community services.
3	Infection Control Service	Direct support into our Care Homes by BOB ICS nurses. Critical support over the winter period with avoiding hospital admissions.
4	Be Well this Winter	Provision of targeted Information and guidance to residents, focusing on falls, self-care, vaccinations and staying warm.
5	Reducing Inequalities	Work supporting PCNs to improve uptake of health checks for people with learning difficulties and severe mental illnesses. Reducing inequalities is a focus across all our work, but this specific work is completed.
6	Workforce	Continues to be a priority for 2025/26. Working on recruitment and retention of social workers and occupational therapists.
7	Falls Pathway	Continues to be a priority for 2025/26. Investment was made into our Falls Coordinators to strengthen the workforce and provision of service.
8	Self-Care Programmes	Continues to be a priority for 2025/26. Focusing on reducing non-elective admissions.
9	Trust Intelligence Notification Assistance (TINA)	Continues to be a priority for 2025/26. Implementation of a system to speed up hospital discharge and reduce meetings held.
10	Reduce the number of people coming out of hospital on pathway 3	Continues to be a priority for 2025/26. Reviewing our decision making and impact on capacity in the care market.
11	Deep dive into data	Specifically relating to avoidable admissions and discharge to normal place of residence.



Cost of living update

As well as progressing the actions set out in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan, the Health and Wellbeing Board must also be responsive to emerging issues.

Since September 2022, the Board has kept a watching brief on the Cost of Living Crisis and its impact on local residents. Price rises have led to significant hardship for some residents, with knock-on implications for their physical and mental health.

Inflation rates have dropped significantly from the peak levels seen after the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict - the latest Consumer Prices Index (CPI) update shows that prices rose by 2.8% in the 12 months to February 2025. However, prices remain significantly higher than they were 5 years ago, and a significant number of residents are still experiencing financial hardship.

The impacts of price rises have been felt disproportionately by certain groups including the disabled, unemployed people, shift workers, those working in lower paid jobs and residents living in rural areas.

Retail prices are predicted to rise significantly as a result of the increase in employer national insurance contributions and the National Living Wage which are due to come into effect in April 2025. Also, from 1 April, the energy price cap will be increasing to £1,849, up 6.4% from £1,738.

Action has been taken place at the local level to support residents. A comprehensive website

offer has been developed, signposting to local and national sources of help and assistance ([Cost of Living - West Berkshire Council](#)). This forms part of a wider communications strategy.

Key stakeholders from the Council and voluntary sector partners meet on a regular basis to share intelligence about the levels and nature of support required from residents and to coordinate activity.

Since the start of the Cost of Living Crisis, the government has released several tranches of the Household Support Fund. Local authorities have been encouraged to use discretion on how to identify and support those most in need, and to use funding to meet immediate needs and help those struggling to afford energy and water bills, food, and other related essentials.

The 2024/25 grant was allocated to the following:

- Assistance for food and energy
- Essential household goods scheme
- Support for those in emergency accommodation
- Discretionary assistance fund
- School holiday meal provision
- Targeted support for pensioners
- Support for young carers and those leaving care
- Main fund for individual and family applications

The grant for 2025/26 will be allocated along similar lines.

Voluntary organisations and charities assisting those struggling financially are reporting significant increases in demand for support and advice.

Demand for support shows no signs of abating and there are a number of external factors that are likely to further exacerbate the situation.

For example, the rise in energy costs combined with sustained periods of cold weather and withdrawal of the winter fuel allowance may lead to increase indebtedness.

Also, the Implications of the Renters Rights Bill on the rental market are not yet known, but it is anticipated that there may be an increase in evictions prior to implementation. Similarly, new rules on energy performance of rental properties may drive up rents.

The Health and Wellbeing Board will continue to receive updates and facilitate joint working between partners where there are opportunities to add value.





LGA review

The Health and Wellbeing Board identified the need to undertake a review of its governance arrangements and working practices in order to increase its overall effectiveness in improving the health and wellbeing of the local population and reducing health inequalities.

The Local Government Association (LGA) was requested to carry out the review. In developing the brief, the Board identified a number of core strengths on which future improvements could build, as well as the drivers for change that had prompted the review.

Interviews with Board Members took place between December 2024 and February 2025. These were used by the LGA to inform their assessment.

A workshop was organised for 3 April 2025 where the LGA's reflections were fed back to members of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the HWB Steering Group.

The following themes were identified by the LGA for further exploration:

- Leadership and accountability
- Clarity of purpose in improving population health and reducing inequalities
- The need to focus on a small number of shared and agreed priorities that are above and beyond 'business as usual' activities
- How the HWB is making a difference
- Culture of the HWB – moving towards a 'strategic partnership of place'
- Governance arrangements

- Capacity and resourcing
- Making the geography work
- Clarity about the distinctive role of the HWB
- Partnership working

Those present at the workshop were invited to reflect on the LGA's feedback and to answer the following questions:

- What will help us to achieve what good looks like and work effectively as a HWB?
- What is my role in contributing to the HWBs' success?
- What are my expectations of other Board members?
- What mechanisms can we put in place to continuously improve the way we work for maximum impact?
- What ways of working do we need to put in place?
- What enablers would support me to contribute effectively as a HWB member (considering tools, resources, structures and development opportunities)?

A summary of key points discussed is provided below:

- There was broad agreement that the HWB needed to be more of a strategic partnership.
- There was a desire to move away from formal meetings and have more informal meetings/hot focus sessions, with a focus on a different theme each quarter.

- It was recognised that the HWB should be driven by data, informed by the JSNA/Healthwatch/Health Scrutiny.
- The HWB should be more about creative problem solving and less about policing performance.
- Reports should be about decision making rather than presenting information to note.
- The HWB needed to be able to demonstrate tangible impact
- There should be a clear focus on a small number of priorities at any given time rather than trying to do everything at once – this would require the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan to be updated.
- All members must be involved in actively driving the HWB's agenda and developing a 12 month forward plan.
- The role of the HWB Steering Group needs to be clarified.
- The sub-groups should be audited and rationalised – these should have clear links to the HWB's priorities.
- The HWB needed to develop stronger relationships with its sub-groups.

A task and finish group has been established to map out the next steps, responding to the above points. A report will be brought to a future meeting for consideration.



Looking ahead to 2025/26 (and beyond)



National Context

As part of a significant shake-up of health services, the government has recently announced that it plans to abolish NHS England, with its functions to be integrated within the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) over a two year period.

Initial indications suggest that the government is seeking to reduce the combined size of the two bodies by about 50%. The aim is to cut bureaucracy and accelerate healthcare delivery.

This controversial move also grants more autonomy to Integrated Care Boards regarding use of their funding. However, they are themselves having to take strong action to balance their books, including a 50% cut in ICB management budgets and working with NHS Trusts/Foundation Trusts to reduce their corporate services budgets to pre-pandemic levels.

The impacts of these changes are not yet fully understood. Decisions will need to be taken as to which functions that are currently undertaken by NHS England will be moved to the DHSC, to ICBs or regions, and which functions will no longer be delivered.



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

Changes are also taking place at the local and sub-regional levels. The government has announced its intention to create Strategic Authorities with devolved powers to enable more local decision-making. The default assumption is for them to have a combined population of 1.5 million or above. The long-term aim is for public service boundaries – including those of police, probation, fire and health services – and those of Strategic Authorities, to align.

The government has also indicated that it expects all two tier areas and smaller unitary authorities to develop proposals for reorganisation into new local authorities with populations of around 500,000 or more. Government believes this will help to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and better withstand financial shocks. West Berkshire is in discussions with South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils, and the other five Berkshire unitary authorities, to explore options.

The above will clearly have implications for the geographical footprint over which local HWBs and ICBs will operate.

Local government reorganisation proposals are due to be submitted by November 2025 and it is expected that the new unitary authorities will take over from existing councils by April 2028. Timescales for the creation of the Strategic Authorities have yet to be confirmed.

Local Priorities

Regardless of the wider changes taking place at the national, sub-regional and local levels, there is still a need for the HWB to continue to drive improvements to population health for residents of West Berkshire and to continue to build a sound base on which any new arrangements can build.

Key activities for the coming year will include:

- Mapping out the next steps towards addressing issues identified through the LGA review.
- Developing the new Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, ready for adoption by the end of September 2025.
- Refreshing the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to inform the HWB's future workstreams.
- Updating the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Delivery Plan, with a focus on a handful of core priorities over and above 'business as usual' activities.
- Create a HWB dashboard to show how the area performs against key health metrics – this will be used to help measure the HWB's impacts.



Health and Wellbeing Board partners





Glossary



- BCF** – Better Care Fund
- BOB** – Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West
- CAAS** – Contact Advice and Assessment Service
- CPI** – Consumer Price Index
- CVD** – Cardiovascular disease
- CWOS** – Community Wellness Outreach Service
- DHSC** – Department of Health and Social Care
- EAH** – Early Assessment Hub
- HWB** – Health and Wellbeing Board
- HiAP** – Health in All Policies
- HIP** – Health Impact Policy
- HWB** – Health and Wellbeing Board
- ICB** – Integrated Care Board
- JHWS** – Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- JSNA** – Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- LGA** – Local Government Association
- MHAG** – Mental Health Action Group
- PCN** – Primary Care Network
- PNA** – Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment
- RPC** – Reducing Parental Conflict
- RSPH** – Royal Society for Public Health
- SEND** – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- SPAG** – Suicide Prevention Action Group
- WBC** – West Berkshire Council