

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee Update

June 2026

Activity	Quarter Total
Residents engaged	143
Information & signposting enquiries	8
Outreach events attended	5
Surveys launched	4
Reports published	4
Themes escalated to partners	Quality of treatment, Access to services, Parking & Transport

Purpose

To update the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on Healthwatch West Berkshire's activity during the reporting period, emerging themes from resident engagement, and current project work.

Key Activity This Quarter

During this quarter, Healthwatch West Berkshire has continued to engage with residents, patients, carers, and community groups to gather feedback on local health and social care services. Engagement has taken place through community events, outreach activity, partnership meetings, surveys, and individual enquiries.

Alongside our core information and signposting service, we have continued to share resident experiences with service providers and commissioners to support service improvement.

Proposed Abolition of Healthwatch (DHSC Modernisation Bill)

Recent national reporting highlights significant concern regarding proposals within the NHS Modernisation Bill to abolish Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch services, with responsibilities instead transferred to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and local authorities.

Healthwatch is currently an independent body that represents patients' views on health and social care services, providing challenge, scrutiny, and feedback to improve care. Under the proposed changes, this independent function would be removed, with ICBs and councils expected to take on responsibility for responding to patient feedback about their own services.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has raised concerns that the removal of Healthwatch could leave the system without an independent voice, leading to what they describe as NHS organisations effectively "marking their own homework." They warn this could create a more fragmented accountability system, with potential gaps and duplication in how concerns are managed.

The LGA has also highlighted the absence of a clearly defined alternative model, stating that abolishing Healthwatch without a robust replacement would represent a “significant step back” for transparency and accountability. They are calling for government to work closely with local government to design a new model that maintains independence and ensures communities continue to have a strong voice.

In contrast, the Department of Health and Social Care argues that the reforms will streamline structures, reduce bureaucracy, and strengthen patients' voices by embedding them more directly within health and care systems.

The proposals are currently progressing through Parliament as part of the NHS Modernisation Bill, with concerns focusing on how independent challenge and patient representation will be maintained if Healthwatch is removed.

Annual Report

At this time Healthwatch Berkshire is currently devising our annual report for 2025/2026, due to be published June 30th.

The report demonstrates how resident feedback has informed discussions with local health and care partners and showcases the range of engagement activity undertaken across West Berkshire. The report also identifies ongoing themes around access to services, communication, health inequalities, and understanding of social care.

Current Projects Update:

EMED Patient Transport

Following complaints from members of the public regarding their transport service issues, Healthwatch West Berkshire has commenced a project to further understand residents' experiences of EMED patient transport services.

The project is gathering feedback from patients and carers regarding booking arrangements, communication, journey times, reliability, and the overall impact on access to healthcare appointments.

Initial responses indicate that while some residents report positive experiences, concerns continue to be raised regarding communication and delays. Engagement is ongoing and a full report will be produced upon completion of the project.

Adult Social Care After 18 Project

This quarter we have begun work to better understand public awareness and experiences of Adult Social Care, particularly for young people transitioning into adult services and their families.

The project aims to explore:

- Awareness of Adult Social Care support.
- Understanding of eligibility and charging arrangements.
- Experiences of transition into adult services.
- Information and communication needs.

Early engagement suggests that many residents have limited understanding of how Adult Social Care operates and what support may be available to them.

Women's Health

We requested an update from BOB ICB at the beginning of the year regarding the promise of a Women's Health strategy for Berkshire West, (West Berks, Reading & Wokingham). We were informed due to the changes for the ICB, (now Thames Valley ICB), it had been put on hold and will be resumed later this year.

We will be requesting an update from Thames Valley ICB this month.

Emerging Themes

Feedback received during this quarter has highlighted several recurring themes:

- **Access to Services**
- Residents continue to report challenges navigating health and care services, particularly where multiple organisations are involved.
- **Communication and Information**
- Clear information remains a priority, with residents frequently highlighting difficulties understanding service pathways and available support.
- **Adult Social Care Awareness**
- There remains a need to improve public understanding of Adult Social Care, including eligibility criteria, assessments, and funding arrangements.
- **Health Inequalities**
- Healthwatch continues to focus engagement on communities whose voices are less often heard, helping to ensure a broad range of experiences inform local decision-making.

Upcoming Priorities

Over the next quarter, Healthwatch West Berkshire will focus on:

- Completion of the EMED patient transport project.
- Further engagement for the Adult Social Care After 18 project.
- Continued delivery of the Young People's Health Rights (13+) programme.
- Community engagement through neighbourhood and outreach activity.
- Gathering resident feedback to support service improvement and reduce inequalities.