healthwatch
West Berkshire



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch West Berkshire annual report 2025/26

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Lead Officer
Fiona Worby

"Over the past year, we at Healthwatch West Berkshire have seen just how powerful it is when people speak up about their care. Listening to real experiences, both positive and difficult has reinforced our commitment to make sure those voices are heard, valued, and used to push for changes that genuinely improve services..

"We are deeply grateful to everyone who shared their experiences with us this year, and to the professionals who took the time to listen and respond. Your honesty, openness, and willingness to act have helped create real change and continue to shape care around what truly matters to people."

A message from our chair

This year we have accomplished a lot and all within ranging confinements. Our projects this year have been many and varied, including reaching out to seldom heard groups along the way.

This year's projects include:

- **Pills, Chills & Pharmacy Skills** - Following the 2024 Pharmacy First rollout, we gathered feedback from 169 West Berkshire residents. The key themes identified have been shared with the head of Community Pharmacy and the local ICB for further investigation.
- After recent tragic events, we engaged with **Lambourn's Racing Community** to identify key trends, including severe isolation and dental shortages. We shared these insights with the local authority and BOB ICB, successfully establishing Lambourn as a health priority and driving plans for mobile dentistry and outreach events.
- We mapped over 150 local Health and Social Care feedback pathways , revealing significant systemic duplication. This evidence base supports **BOB ICB and West Berkshire Council transformation goals** by establishing a blueprint for a unified, "single front-door" approach —simplifying resident access , reducing data silos , and improving strategic quality assurance.



Chair
Michael Fereday

"In the turbulence and change that currently permeates health and social care, it is crucial that patients are involved in decision making. I am proud that Healthwatch West Berkshire has been that voice, successfully representing the citizens of West Berkshire."

About us

Healthwatch West Berkshire 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 **718** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **3 part –time** staff and, our work was supported by **5** volunteers.



Reaching out:

1,437 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

22 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as **Mental Health Support** and **finding an NHS Dentist.**



Championing your voice:

We published **7** reports, Impact statements and Executive Summaries about the improvements people would like to see in areas like **Dental**, **Men's Health** and **Pathways to Health** .

Our most popular report was **Pharmacy First**: This report outlined what people know about the service, and how they feel about using it.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by **West Berkshire Council** In 2025/26 we received **£96,000** 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 **West Berkshire.** Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We Identified generally positive patient experience at GWH*, with strengths in care and access, alongside improvement areas in discharge, communication, aftercare and consistency of experience.

*Great Western Hospital



Our work with the Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group highlighted gaps in digital access, skills and confidence, helping address barriers to health and care services



Summer

Delivering a community health event in Theale, we engaged older residents with local services.
Gathered feedback and raised awareness of health and wellbeing support available.



Our Pharmacy First project highlighted low public awareness of the service, leading to improved promotion and increase uptake through community pharmacies.



Autumn

Our Women's Health project highlighted gaps in strategic focus and helped secure ICB commitment to develop a dedicated Berkshire West Women's Health Strategy



We asked residents how they would feel about AI recording GP appointments; the response was clear: strong opinions, serious concerns, and big questions about trust.



Winter

We mapped over 150 health and social care feedback pathways across West Berkshire, identifying opportunities to improve access, navigation, transparency and resident engagement



The Men's Health project identified barriers to accessing services, highlighting stigma and awareness gaps, and encouraging targeted approaches to improve engagement and early intervention



Working together for change

We work closely with local partners to ensure the voices and experiences of local people shape decisions in health and social care. By sharing insight from feedback and engagement, we help highlight priorities, inequalities, and opportunities for improvement, supporting more responsive and informed services.

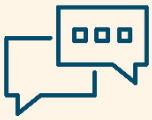
This year, we've worked with services across **West Berkshire** to achieve the following:



Building strong relationships to achieve more:

In January, we met with decision-makers from the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) to discuss how best to work together over the coming year, alongside the forthcoming changes to the ICB structure.

We agreed to continue our quarterly meetings with the new Thames Valley ICB and were provided with a dedicated email address to support more effective ongoing liaison.



A big conversation:

Alongside service providers, we attended the Health and Wellbeing Board's All Age Mental Health priority workshops, where we contributed to identifying collaborative actions needed to deliver meaningful change in this area.

The workshops focused on ensuring plans reflect local need, make best use of system resources, and support improved mental health outcomes for West Berkshire residents of all ages.



National Changes:

During the year, many changes in health and social care have been happening, with more to come.

Healthwatch West Berkshire have been included in conversations about how these national changes will impact and inform local changes and improvements to our services.

We will continue to work collaboratively with services to ensure the local independent voice of our residents continue to be heard.

Making a difference in the community



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.

Patients in West Berkshire were trying to use the 'Find A Dentist website and told us the information was not matching what the patients were told when they contacted practices directly. We are now working with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to ensure the dentists, in adherence to their contracts update the website regularly.



Listening to Lambourn's Racing Community

By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.

We brought together the racing community, healthcare providers and support organisations to discuss barriers that racing staff face when accessing healthcare.

By facilitating conversations between services and the community, we raised awareness of the unique challenges faced by this workforce and encouraged partners to consider changes that could improve access to care.



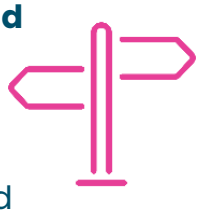
Improving care over time

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

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is beginning to play a greater role in NHS and social care services. Healthwatch West Berkshire is working closely with local providers to make sure that patients, service users and the wider public have a voice in how these technologies are introduced and used.

150+ Ways to be Heard: Creating a 'Single Front Door' for your Care.

At the end of 2025, Healthwatch West Berkshire worked with our local MP, Lee Dillon, and his team to review the feedback pathways available for health and social care services across West Berkshire.



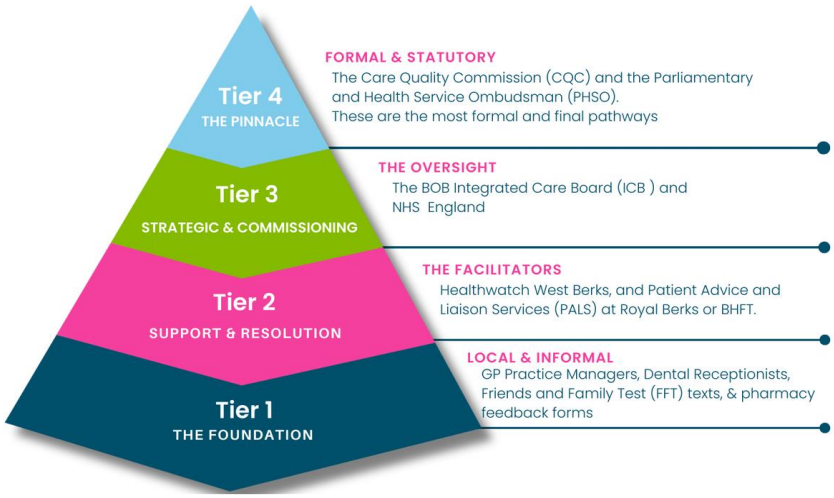
This work was prompted by the number of residents contacting the MP's office who were unsure where to direct their feedback, concerns, or experiences. The project helped identify clearer routes for people to have their voices heard and ensure they could access the most appropriate support and advice.

What did we do?

We carried out a comprehensive mapping exercise to identify all the formal and informal routes available for residents to share feedback, raise concerns, or make complaints about health and care services in West Berkshire. The review identified more than 150 individual feedback pathways relating to NHS services alone, including local GP practices, NHS Trust Patient Advice & Liaison Services (PALS), NHS SE regional teams, Regulatory bodies, Commissioners, and many others.

The findings highlighted the complexity of the current system, and the challenges residents can face in understanding where to direct their concerns or experiences.

FEEDBACK PATHWAY FLOW



What difference did this make?

Opportunities for simplification: By confirming the existence of over 150 pathways, we have provided the local council and the BOB Integrated Care Board (ICB) with concrete evidence of "system clutter." This has highlighted that the barrier to feedback is not a lack of options, but an overwhelming surplus of them.

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.



Sharing Positive Feedback

While much of our work focuses on identifying areas for improvement, we also believe it is important to celebrate when services provide excellent care.

During the year, Healthwatch received seven compliments from local people about one service, praising the kindness, compassion and professionalism of staff. People told us they felt treated with dignity and respect and valued the quality of care they received.

We shared this positive feedback directly with the service through a formal letter of recognition, ensuring that staff could see the difference they had made to people's experiences.

By highlighting good practice as well as areas for improvement, we help promote a culture of learning, recognition and high-quality care across West Berkshire.

"I have always been able to collect my prescriptions on time and with no issues." Mrs. D.

"I had a terrible sore throat, and they were so helpful recommending different medications for me to try and saved me a trip to my doctor". James

"The staff were so kind, they saw I was a bit worried and asked the pharmacist to sit and talk to me and go through my medication with me, which helped me understand it better. Mrs. J

"Always friendly and polite staff, even when they are busy and rushed." Mr. W.D.

Sharing Positive Feedback

The formal letter of recognition sent to the service.

healthwatch West Berkshire

Broadway House 4-8 The Broadway,

Northbrook Street, Newbury

RG14 1BA

17th March 2026

Dear Mr Sabo,

Burdwood Pharmacy

I am writing on behalf of **Healthwatch West Berkshire**, the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. Our role is to listen to the experiences of our local residents, understand what is working well, and highlight where improvements can be made. We share the public's feedback with providers, commissioners and decision-makers to help ensure services always meet people's needs with dignity, compassion and respect.

It is a genuine pleasure to contact you with such positive news. Over the last quarter, we received **seven separate compliments** from members of the public about the care and support provided by your pharmacy team. These comments consistently highlighted three key themes:

- **Kindness** – People repeatedly told us how warmly they were treated, noting that your staff go out of their way to make patients feel comfortable and supported.
- **Dignity and Respect** – Several individuals shared that they felt listened to, valued and treated as individuals, not just as customers passing through.
- **Quality of Treatment and Advice** – You were commended for providing clear, professional guidance and high-quality care, especially for those who were anxious, unwell or unsure where to turn.

Feedback of this nature is not only encouraging—it is a testament to the commitment and professionalism of your team. In a period where community pharmacies continue to play a vital role in supporting the health and wellbeing of local people, it is heartening to see your work recognised so strongly by those you serve.

Please pass on our sincere thanks and congratulations to everyone involved. Positive experiences like these make a real difference to individuals and to the overall confidence the community has in local health services.



With warm regards,

Fiona Worby

Fiona Worby
Healthwatch West Berkshire Lead Officer

Making Seniors' Voices Heard in West Berkshire





As part of our *"Health Management in Your Golden Years"* project, Healthwatch West Berkshire organised an event and produced a survey to better understand the experiences of older residents and the challenges they face when accessing healthcare and support.

Older people told us about difficulties booking appointments and accessing test results as services increasingly move online.

Many described feeling excluded by digital systems, while others spoke about loneliness, long waits for hospital appointments, lack of awareness of NHS Health Checks, and concerns about staying active and independent as they age.

The project provided an opportunity for residents to speak directly with local organisations including Age UK Berkshire, Citizens Advice, Solutions4Health, Care UK and Get Berkshire Active.

By bringing services and residents together in one place, we helped organisations better understand the experiences, concerns and priorities of older people living in West Berkshire.

Key things we heard:



75%

of respondents said that:

regular physical activity plays the biggest role in maintaining good health in their 'golden years'.

Making Seniors' Voices Heard in West Berkshire. (continued)

We heard that many older residents struggle with digital healthcare systems, feel isolated from their communities, and are unaware of some of the support and preventative health services available to them.

"Everything seems to be online now.
Hospital appointments, GP services, test results and health information often expect you to use a smartphone, laptop or the internet.
Many people my age did not grow up with this technology and find it difficult to use. It can be frustrating, stressful and sometimes makes us feel left behind.
We still need paper information and other ways to access services."
- Joan



Making Seniors' Voices Heard in West Berkshire. (continued)

What difference did this make?

This project gave older residents the opportunity to share their experiences and influence discussions about local health and care services.

Healthwatch West Berkshire identified key barriers including digital exclusion, loneliness, difficulties accessing appointments, and low awareness of NHS Health Checks.

The findings highlighted inequalities affecting older people who struggle to access increasingly digital healthcare services.

Feedback also identified unmet needs, including better support to reduce loneliness, more community activities, improved promotion of NHS Health Checks, and greater access to non-digital information.



By bringing together organisations such as Age UK Berkshire, Citizens Advice, Solutions4Health, Care UK and Get Berkshire Active, we improved awareness of local support services and encouraged direct engagement between residents and providers.

The findings were shared with stakeholders and decision-makers to help inform future service improvements and ensure older people's voices help shape local healthcare provision.

Women Told Us. We Listened.



Healthwatch West Berkshire spoke to 86 women from across West Berkshire to better understand their experiences of healthcare and identify where local services are not meeting women's needs.

Through our '*Women's Health Needs in West Berkshire*' survey, women shared their experiences of accessing healthcare; highlighting challenges including long waiting times, difficulties accessing local services, poor communication between services and feeling that their concerns were not always taken seriously.

What did we hear?

- Women told us they face a range of health challenges, particularly gynaecological conditions, menopause symptoms and mental health concerns.
- Many reported difficulties accessing support, including long waiting times, poor communication and feeling that their concerns were not always taken seriously.
- We also heard a strong demand for healthcare closer to home, faster appointments, better coordination between services and greater access to specialist women's health support.
- Many also said it was important to have the option of seeing a female healthcare professional.

Women Told Us, We Listened. (continued)

"Menopause can affect every part of your life, but sometimes it feels as though your concerns are being brushed aside. I have had appointments where I felt my symptoms were minimised or treated as something I should simply put up with."
- Tessa

"It can be frustrating when someone who has never experienced menopause (like male doctor) tells you that what you' are feeling is normal or not serious. As women, we know our own bodies.

"What we need is to be listened to, taken seriously, and supported with the right information and treatment."
- Debbie

Key things we heard:

67% **of respondents said that the most important aspect of women's health services for them is having local and accessible care.**

62% **said they wanted faster appointments and shorter waiting times.**

Women Told Us. We Listened. (continued)



What difference did this make?

- This project provided evidence about women's experiences of healthcare and highlighted areas where local services could better meet women's needs.
- The findings were shared with BOB ICS, local GPs and healthcare partners to support the local implementation of the Women's Health Strategy for England.
- Women's experiences helped identify important service gaps, including long waits for appointments and referrals, limited local menopause, fertility and postnatal services, poor communication between services, and difficulties accessing specialist support.
- The findings also highlighted inequalities affecting rural women, neurodivergent women and those who felt their cultural, dignity or gender preferences were not consistently respected.
- The project also found that some women had to pay for private healthcare or travel outside West Berkshire, and in some cases even abroad, because they could not get the support they needed locally.

Most importantly, our project ensured that local women's voices were heard by decision-makers in our area.

Pills, Chills and Pharmacist Skills

Holding Pharmacy Services to Account

Following the introduction of Pharmacy First, Healthwatch West Berkshire gathered feedback from local residents to understand how pharmacy services are working in practice.

People told us about long waiting times, prescription delays, privacy concerns, difficulties contacting pharmacies and confusion about what pharmacists can treat.

By analysing this feedback, we identified areas where improvements may be needed.

Residents' experiences were shared with Community Pharmacy Thames Valley, Primary Care Networks, local pharmacies and NHS partners to help ensure local services understand the impact these issues are having on people's lives.

The project also highlighted that many residents continue to visit GPs for conditions that could be treated through the Pharmacy First Service.



Pills, Chills and Pharmacist Skills (continued)

What did we do?

We collected and analysed feedback from **167** residents through surveys, community conversations, social media and face-to-face and engagement at Hillier Garden Centre in Thatcham.

We used residents' experiences to scrutinise pharmacy services, identify recurring concerns and understand which groups experience the greatest barriers to access.

Our findings were shared with the Community Pharmacy Thames Valley, local pharmacies, Primary Care Networks, commissioners and NHS partners to ensure public experiences are taken into consideration with future service planning and improvement.

Our project also increased the awareness of Pharmacy First in our local area, and the wider role pharmacists can play in supporting people's health to the public.

Key Things We Heard:

167 residents shared their experiences of local pharmacy services.

42% said long waiting times for prescriptions were the biggest challenge when accessing a pharmacy.

24% were unaware pharmacists can now treat seven conditions through the *Pharmacy First* programme.

57% had never used a private consultation room, despite privacy being one of the most raised concerns.

47% said expanded pharmacy services, such as vaccinations, blood pressure checks and minor illness treatment, would make managing their health easier.

Pills, Chills and Pharmacist Skills (continued)

What difference did this make?

Our project provided local decision-makers with clear evidence about how pharmacy services are working from the public's perspective.

It highlighted inequalities affecting older people, disabled residents, carers and rural communities, ensuring these experiences were visible to those responsible for planning and delivering services.

The findings increased understanding of unmet needs relating to privacy, accessibility, awareness and service capacity. They also strengthened the case for improving public information about Pharmacy First and expanding community-based healthcare options.

By sharing residents' experiences directly with providers and commissioners, Healthwatch West Berkshire helped improve transparency, inform service improvement discussions and ensured local people's voices were heard in shaping future pharmacy services.





AI in GP Appointments

Media had reported that AI in GP appointments was starting to be used, and we wanted to hear and see from residents in West Berkshire what their thoughts around this topic were.

Our **AI in GP Appointments** project was a two-week snapshot exercise designed to understand public views on the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) within primary care.
Using social media to reach residents quickly and effectively, we gathered opinions on AI assisted note-taking, appointment recording and the wider use of technology in healthcare.
The project revealed a broad range of views, with many people recognising the potential benefits of AI in improving efficiency and reducing administrative burden, while others expressed concerns around privacy, consent, data security and maintaining the human element of care.

AI RECORDING AT GP APPOINTMENTS

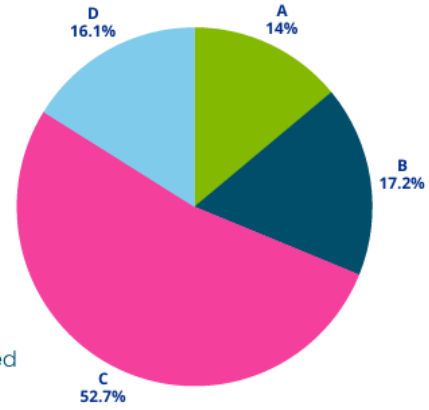
Poll Results

A Happy to try it

B Maybe, with consent & privacy safeguards

C Not comfortable

D Useful, but have concerns



Residents Sentiments

Below are a few of the 27 comments we received

Positive

- "I think it may be a good thing as I always forget conversations that I have!"
- "If it helps make the NHS more efficient then I am all for it."
- "A useful filter to assess and prioritise needs and stream to the correct level of resources and assistance. Used wisely and with safeguards a great tool to manage workload and practitioners' availability."

COMMENTS

"I would be ok to trial it, but want to have the choice to opt out if I didn't like it"

"If it helps make the NHS more efficient then I am all for it."

"No - I would not like my appointment recorded and a summary given"

"If using AI can aid efficiency / scheduling, then it's a useful tool."

The findings provided valuable insight into local attitudes towards emerging technologies and highlighted the importance of transparency, patient choice and clear communication as AI becomes more widely used within healthcare settings.

AI in GP Appointments
(continued)

The feedback highlighted the importance of trust, transparency and patient choice, as well as concerns around data security and digital exclusion.

We shared these findings with the ICB, which recognised the value of residents' views and confirmed that the feedback would help shape future discussions, communications and guidance on the use of AI in GP practices.

Reply from :
Nick Broughton, FRCPsych
Chief Executive
NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB & NHS Frimley ICB

Thank you for sharing the Healthwatch West Berkshire social listening snapshot on Artificial Technology (AI) recording at GP appointments.

We welcome the insight this provides into residents' views. The feedback clearly highlights that, in the context of GP appointments, public confidence is closely linked to trust in the GP–patient relationship, clarity about how technology is used, and reassurance around confidentiality, safety and choice.

It may be helpful to reassure residents that any use of AI in GP appointments would be focused on supporting clinicians, for example through note taking and reducing administrative burden, rather than replacing clinical judgement or face to face care. The technology summarises the patient's consultation for coding into their record on the clinical system and these summaries should be checked by the GP/clinician before they are committed to the record, therefore minimising risk of miscoding. This enables the GP/clinician to focus much more on their patient rather than diverting their attention to contemporaneous notetaking.

It's also worth noting that GPs are making their own decisions about the adoption of this technology, although the ICB has a diligence obligation to advise on how it is used, which we will strengthen.

The themes raised around misunderstanding of the technology, concerns about data security, and the risk of digital exclusion are particularly important and will inform ongoing discussions and engagement as this work develops.
Thank you again for sharing this snapshot. We appreciate Healthwatch's role in capturing and amplifying residents' voices, and we will keep this feedback in mind as conversations about the future use of technology in GP appointments continue.

The project ensured that the patient voice was heard at an early stage as new technologies continue to develop within primary care.

The Dental Dilemma: Verifying NHS Dental Access in West Berkshire

The imperative need for NHS Dental Care - It's become progressively hard for the residents of West Berkshire to access local NHS Dental Care.

We initiated initiated the 'Action on Access' project in direct response to community feedback regarding the extreme difficulty residents face finding available NHS dental care.

Key things we heard:

"*There are not enough of the Primary services (GP, Dentists, Pharmacies, etc) available to support the ever-growing population of people living in West Berkshire. My husband is number 250 on the waiting list for a dentist." — Anonymous, May 2025*

"I am desperate for a dentist. I can't find any taking on NHS and I am in a lot of pain with one of my teeth. My dentist is going private and the NHS one has a waitlist of 2-3 years." — Anonymous, September 2025

"My dentist not supplying correct online, important information when it is needed. I have to call them now to confirm and waste more my time." Anonymous, November 2025.

Public information on the NHS 'Find a Dentist' website was frequently inaccurate, acting as a barrier rather than a gateway to essential services.



The Dental Dilemma: Verifying NHS Dental Access in WB. (continued)

What we did!

As a direct result of this feedback:

- The local commissioning provider, **Community Dental Service, (CDS),** was consulted and provided valuable input into the project. CDS were also made aware of practices that had not responded to enquiries.
- We carried out a comprehensive verification exercise, contacting every local NHS dental practice to confirm whether they were accepting new patients and to establish what emergency dental provision they offered.
- We gathered feedback from both practices and residents to identify inaccuracies in the NHS **'Find a Dentist '** website, such as opening hours, or information about specialist treatments.
- Where possible we updated verified practice information based on the latest details supplied by local NHS dental practices.
- Our findings have been shared with the ICB's Pharmacy Optometry and Dentistry (POD) team, including **Hugh O'Keefe, Heald of Pharmacy, Optometry, and Dentistry, for BOB ICB.** This team are now working to obtain responses from the remaining practices and address the issues identified.

12 out of 19



Dental practices responded to our repeated requests to verify public online information.

What changed as a result?

This work has provided health leaders with reliable information to support improvements in access to NHS dental services and ensure practices are meeting their commitments to the public. It has also helped highlight the importance of accurate online information, making it easier for residents to find the right care and understand what services are available.

As a trusted partner to local health services, Healthwatch West Berkshire has recommended that dental practices review and update their online information every 60- 90 days to help ensure it remains accurate and up to date. We will continue to monitor the situation to ensure these services are fulfilling their roles and that more appointments become available for everyone in West Berkshire.

Our findings have been shared with local decision-makers, and we will continue to monitor progress to ensure the issues identified are addressed and that access to NHS dental appointments improves for residents across West Berkshire.

Great Western Hospital Patient Perspective Snapshot 2025/26

A Snapshot view

We meet regularly with Great Western Hospital's (GWH) Patient Experience Team and Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).
Because GWH serves a significant number of our local population, we co-produced a short survey to capture and understand the experiences of West Berkshire residents using these services.

From our 'Your Visit to GWH' Survey we found the following themes throughout -

Overall Care: While 81% of patients felt safe and 76% would recommend the hospital, up to 15% experienced a lack of dignity or respect, highlighting inconsistency in the patient experience.

Information Flow: Communication challenges persist around transitions of care; 21% felt uninformed about delays, and 14% rated the discharge process as "poor."

Staff Excellence: With 84% of patients feeling treated with dignity, particularly in departments like Outpatients, this data provides a strong benchmark to celebrate and replicate best practices.

Outcomes and Benefits

GWH Leadership - Clear, evidence for service improvement and staff development, directly linked to patient satisfaction.

GWH Staff - Specific, constructive feedback on their service, with opportunities to receive commendation for good practice.

Patients/Community - Tangible changes to services, demonstrating that their views and time investment have led to real-world improvements in care.

Continuation of good practice - Feedback positive experiences for continuation of current standards.

Healthwatch West Berks - A strong, established partnership with GWH, achieving our mission to make health and social care services better.

Great Western Hospital Patient Perspective Snapshot 2025/26 Contd

Key findings



81%



Of patients felt staff explained their treatment well.

Success Metric	Result	Impact
Dignity & Respect	84.21% Positive	High level of trust in frontline staff interactions.
Patient Safety	81.58% Positive	Patients feel clinically secure during their stay.
Ease of Access	71.05% Positive	The hospital remains physically accessible for most West Berkshire residents.
Communication	81.58% Positive	Staff are perceived as clear and helpful when explaining treatments.

"Overall I felt amazed by the care and professionalism shown by this team." - ***Anonymous, 16th Feb 2026***

"I was seen early and the surgeon was excellent." - ***Anonymous, 2nd Mar 2026***

How we reach out to our communities

We're here for all residents of **West Berkshire.** 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.

So, as a small part-time team, reaching every corner of West Berkshire requires us to think creatively about how we engage with our communities. We know that people are unlikely to travel from one end of the district to another to attend an event, so we focus on taking our engagement activities to where people already are.

Throughout the year, we have worked hard to hear from a diverse range of residents, including groups whose voices are not always heard. This has included older people, men, and the horse racing community, as well as carers, young people, and those experiencing digital exclusion.

"As a small team, we can't be everywhere, but by working creatively and building strong local relationships, we can ensure more people have the opportunity to be heard."

By attending community events, partnering with local organisations, visiting community venues, and making the most of our social media channels, we have been able to connect with people in ways that are accessible and meaningful to them..

By meeting people where they live and work, and through trusted local networks, we continue to ensure that the views of communities across West Berkshire help shape services and influence change



Improving Health Access for Lambourn's Racing Community



Healthwatch West Berkshire were approached by representatives from the racing industry and Racing Welfare following concerns about how racing staff access healthcare services

The unique nature of racing work, including early starts, long hours and physically demanding roles, was making it difficult for some staff to access healthcare services when they needed them

Our discussions with racing organisations highlighted concerns about barriers to healthcare, wellbeing support and the overall health needs of a workforce that plays a vital role in the local community and economy.

We brought together evidence, local insight and partner organisations to highlight the challenges, and following engagement and discussions with stakeholders, healthcare providers reviewed how local services could better meet the needs of racing staff.



As a result, partners have committed to continuing to work together to improve access to healthcare and support services for racing staff in the Lambourn community.

Healthwatch West Berkshire will return to the racing community later in 2026 to hear directly from staff about their experiences and to understand whether the changes made have resulted in meaningful improvements.

What difference did this make?

We raised awareness of the healthcare challenges faced by racing staff, brought key partners together to explore solutions, and secured a commitment to review and improve access to services.

Follow-up engagement is planned to assess the impact of these changes and ensure staff voices continue to shape local healthcare provision..

Connecting Greenham Residents with the Support They Need

As part of our "*Support and Resources for All*" project, Healthwatch West Berkshire held a community event in Greenham to better understand gaps in social care access and to connect residents with available support.

Understanding Local Challenges



Healthwatch West Berkshire spoke directly with residents in Greenham to understand the barriers they face when accessing health and social care services.

Through surveys, conversations and community engagement, residents told us about long waiting times, difficulties navigating services, poor communication between organisations and a lack of awareness of local support available to them.

We also heard concerns about mental health support, particularly for carers, people with autism or ADHD, and those living with long-term health conditions. Many residents highlighted the impact of transport difficulties, financial pressures and social isolation on their health and wellbeing.

"I often feel like I'm being passed from one service to another without anyone taking responsibility.
It can take months to get help, and when you're already struggling with your health, caring responsibilities or money worries, it's exhausting. Sometimes I don't even know what support is available or who to contact, so I end up trying to cope on my own."
- Bernadette

Bringing Support Closer to the Community



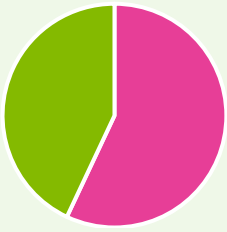
This project gave local people the opportunity to share their experiences and help shape discussions about health and social care services in Greenham. It highlighted gaps in support for carers, disabled residents, neurodivergent people and those facing financial difficulties.

The project also identified unmet needs around mental health support, access to information and better coordination between services. By bringing together local organisations, residents were able to learn about available support and connect with services that could help them.

Connecting Greenham Residents with the Support They Need. (continued)

As a port of our "*Support and Resources for All*" project, Healthwatch West Berkshire held a community event in Greenham to better understand gaps in social care access and to connect residents with available support.

Key things we heard:



57%

Of respondents said that the most helpful support for them would be advice on how to support someone with their mental health



What difference did this make?

The project provided local decision-makers with real evidence about the challenges residents face when trying to access health and social care support. It strengthened links between residents, community organisations and health leaders, ensuring local experiences help inform future service planning.

The findings raised awareness of barriers affecting vulnerable groups and encouraged greater focus on carers, disabled people, neurodivergent residents and those experiencing poor mental health. The project also highlighted the need for services to work more closely together and for clearer information about available support.

Most importantly, Greenham residents were given a voice. Their experiences are now helping shape future community engagement work, awareness campaigns and local discussions about improving access to support across West Berkshire.

Men's Health Kickstart – Power Up Your Heath

Looking after our health is important, but many men delay seeking help until a problem becomes difficult to ignore.

To better understand why, Healthwatch West Berkshire spoke with 100 local men about their experiences of healthcare, awareness of services and barriers to getting support.

"I Will Wait and See" - The Hidden Risk



One of the strongest messages we heard was that many men prefer to wait and see if a health problem improves rather than seek help straight away.

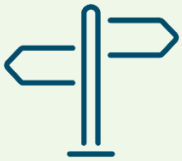
For some, this was because they did not want to make a fuss. Others felt embarrassed discussing personal health issues or worried about being judged. Many said work, family commitments and busy lives often came before their own health.

Unfortunately, delaying support can mean conditions are diagnosed later, making treatment more difficult and increasing pressure on urgent care services.

"I knew something wasn't right, but I kept putting it off. You convince yourself it'll improve tomorrow, then next week, then next month. Eventually the problem becomes impossible to ignore, and you wish you'd asked for help sooner."
- Theo

Not Knowing Where to Turn

Many men told us they were unsure what support was available locally.



Some were unaware of preventative services such as prostate health checks, cardiovascular screening, mental health support or self-referral services. Others did not know whether they needed a GP referral or if they were eligible for specific services.

Several respondents said that information about men's health services is often difficult to find and rarely feels targeted towards them. Men wanted clear, practical information that explains what support is available and how to access it.

Men's Health Kickstart – Power Up Your Heath (continued)

Breaking the Silence Around Mental Health



Mental health was another major theme throughout the project.

Many respondents felt that men are still less likely to discuss stress, anxiety, depression and emotional wellbeing. Some said they would talk about physical symptoms more easily than mental health concerns.

Stigma remains a significant barrier, with some men feeling uncomfortable discussing their feelings or seeking support. Others reported a lack of trust in mental health services.

The feedback highlighted the need for more open conversations, greater awareness of available support, and services that feel approachable, confidential and easy to access.

Key things we heard:

55%



Of men said they usually deal with health concerns by waiting to see if the problem improves



Men's Health Kickstart – Power Up Your Heath. (continued)



What Did We Do?

Healthwatch West Berkshire spoke with **100** local men to better understand their experiences of healthcare and the barriers they face when seeking support.

Through surveys, social media, local engagement and community conversations, we gathered feedback on physical health, mental wellbeing, awareness of services and access to care.

We analysed the findings, identified common themes, and shared the results with healthcare providers, commissioners and partner organisations to help inform future service planning.

What Difference Did This Make?

- The project highlighted the challenges many men face when accessing healthcare, including delayed help-seeking, limited awareness of services and the stigma surrounding mental health.
- By sharing these findings with local decision-makers, we helped raise awareness of where improvements are needed.
- Most importantly, local men's experiences are now helping to shape future discussions about how services can become more accessible, visible and responsive to the needs of the community.

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 718 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



Information and signposting

Providing clarity and reassurance

A local resident contacted us in obvious distress following an unfortunate outcome from a routine hospital procedure.

We listened to their experience and helped alleviate their anxiety by confirming they had followed all the correct healthcare pathways.

To help the family seek complete closure, we followed up directly with the hospital's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) to verify that everything possible had been done. The hospital confirmed the complaint was on file and all administrative avenues had been exhausted.

While the couple remained understandably unhappy with the clinical outcome, they expressed deep gratitude for our advocacy, guidance, and support, stating:

> "Thank you so much indeed – Thank you again for all of your help and time, we do appreciate it."

Support and Signposting

At our Greenham Event in September 2025.

A couple attended our event and were incredibly worried about their child who was struggling with their SEND needs and who was isolating themselves at home. They had spoken to their doctor but were unsure about who else or what other services could help them.

We signposted them to the West Berkshire Directory and after the event, contacted them again with several more service contact details which they found incredibly helpful.

> "It was so helpful to be able to sit and speak to someone and receive help straight away. Thank you."

Building Connections at Knowledge Academy 2025

Bringing West Berkshire together

On 25th of June 2025, Healthwatch West Berkshire attended the Knowledge Academy event at Shaw House in Newbury. Organised by the Volunteer Centre West Berkshire, the event brought together local charities, community groups, residents, businesses, funders and statutory organisations to showcase the wide range of support available across West Berkshire.



Listening to local voices

The event provided an excellent opportunity for Healthwatch West Berkshire to engage directly with members of the public, raise awareness of our work and listen to local people's experiences of health and social care services.

Throughout the day, we spoke with residents about the challenges people face when navigating the health and care system.

Building stronger partnerships

Knowledge Academy was also a valuable networking opportunity. We met representatives from local charities, voluntary organisations and public sector partners, strengthening existing relationships and making new connections.

These conversations helped us better understand the support available in the community and explore opportunities for future collaboration.



healthwatch West Berkshire

Working together for change

The Advocacy People hold the service contract for 7 Healthwatch; Hampshire, Portsmouth, Reading, Somerset, Southend , West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough.

the advocacy people

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

The Advocacy People have provided consistent infrastructure, governance, and operational support to the seven hosted Healthwatch, enabling them to work both locally and collectively.

This includes shared leadership, senior guidance, and coordination across contracts. We have created space for collaboration, ensured consistency where needed, and supported each service to retain its distinct local voice.

A big conversation:

The 7 local Healthwatch hosted by The Advocacy People have worked closely together in the last year.

We have been proactive in our learning objective which was to understand the changing landscape for Healthwatch in response to Government proposals announced last July to transfer the functions of local Healthwatch to Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:

The Advocacy People supported the 7 Healthwatch to lead meaningful community conversations by providing practical tools, coordination, and strategic oversight.

This included enabling shared knowledge, supporting engagement planning, and facilitating the exchange of approaches and learning. We ensured local teams were equipped to respond to community priorities while linking these insights into a broader, coherent narrative at a regional level.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given over **70 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:

- Attended various events with us to promote our work
- Attended meetings
- Supported us in our decision making.



At the heart of what we do

Following the 2025 announcement regarding the planned closure of Healthwatch England and its local branches, Healthwatch West Berkshire has continued its work during a period of uncertainty. As future arrangements and timelines remain unclear, this has had some impact on volunteer recruitment and retention. Despite this, we remain grateful for the ongoing commitment and support of our dedicated volunteers.



Dr Adrian Barker – Advisory Group member and Volunteer.

"Although my main role in relation to Healthwatch West Berkshire is on the Advisory Board, providing advice and feedback to those delivering the Healthwatch contract in West Berkshire, it is also fulfilling to help in engagement activities and a privilege to hear from people first hand. I was able to do that last year at an event in Theale. As well as talking to members of the public, it was fascinating to hear from those manning stalls of the many great things being done to help people's health and wellbeing in both the voluntary and public sectors.

The Health Bill, currently before Parliament would abolish local and national Healthwatch organisations. There have been independent organisations to hear the voice of patients and the public for decades and losing this is a retrograde step. Whether or not there is an officially funded body in future, we need to make sure you continue to have your say!"

Finding volunteers isn't always easy, like many organisations, we've seen how hard it can be to recruit people with the time and energy to spare. But those who do come forward make a real difference, and we are so grateful. That's why we're working with The Advocacy People to make it easier and quicker for people to get involved, and to ensure volunteers feel recognised and supported from day.

Come and be part of something that matters.



Ena Blackburn - Volunteer

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.healthwatchwestberks.org.uk

01635 886210

contact@healthwatchwestberks.org.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from **West Berkshire Council** under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
West Berkshire Council	£96,322	Expenditure on pay	£87,401
Additional income	£0	Non-pay expenditure	£9,855
		Office and management fee	£23,871
Total income	**£96,322**	**Total Expenditure**	**£121,127**

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across **BOB ICB** 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
Capacity Building - PPG (Patient Participation Group) engagement programme across Berkshire West	**£16,667**
	£16,667

Future priorities

During 2026–27, Healthwatch West Berkshire will continue reaching out to all parts of our community, particularly people living in deprived areas and those whose voices are less often heard

We will listen to residents' experiences of health and social care, identify barriers to access, and ensure that decision makers understand the real impact services are having on local people.
Through community engagement, partnership working, and targeted projects, we will be working with the elderly, those transitioning to adult services, and our residents in the Learning Disability community, where we will focus on inclusion, accessibility, early intervention, and improving awareness of people's rights and choices within health and care services.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. **Supporting Neighbourhood Working Through Community Voice**
   Working with local communities and partners to ensure neighbourhood health and care services are shaped by the experiences, needs, and priorities of residents across West Berkshire.

2. **Improving Access, Inclusion and Understanding of Services**
   Exploring barriers including digital exclusion, transport, communication, and understanding of health and social care systems and rights.

3. **Supporting Young People's 13+ Health Rights and Early Engagement**
   Working with schools, colleges, families, and professionals to improve awareness and understanding of young people's health rights, choices, and access to support from age 13 onwards.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch West Berkshire, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 1BA.
The Healthwatch West Berkshire contract is held by The Advocacy People and uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making.

Our Healthwatch West Berkshire Advisory Group consists of 4 members who live locally, and who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities. Our Advisory Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26, our Advisory Group met 4 times and gave advice and direction on matters such as our annual work plan, and projects we are considering throughout the year. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities., and we capture all the feedback we receive, along with signposting requests to see if any themes emerge for future work or investigation.

Independent Health Complaints Advocacy (IHCA)

Healthwatch West Berkshire responsibilities also include the IHCA, and we look at the Health complaints made to see if there are thematic issues for us to look in-depth.

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, email, 'Have Your Say' forms, 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 www.healthwatchwestberks.org.uk

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 the Health & Wellbeing Board, The Scrutiny Board and West Berkshire Council.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust (RBHFT) the Primary Care Alliance, and Great Western Hospital.

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch West Berkshire is represented on the West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board by Fiona Worby – Lead Officer, and Mike Fereday, Advisory Group Chair)

During 2025/26, Fiona has effectively carried out this role by attending all meetings and attending the sub-group meetings that feed into the Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group. We share how Healthwatch work, our future workplans and by asking questions from the public perspective to ensure the public voice is considered in decision-making.

Healthwatch West Berkshire is represented on both the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire (BOB ICB) boards and the West Berkshire Scrutiny Committee by Fiona Worby, Lead Officer.

Enter and view

'We did not use our statutory Enter and view powers over 2025/26'.

Project/activity	Outcome achieved
At all our events we hand out free Lions Message in a Bottle to anyone who would like them.	We raise awareness of this potentially life-saving piece of equipment and teach people how to use it.

Influencing Behind the Scenes



Not all our impact comes through published reports and formal recommendations.

Throughout the year, Healthwatch West Berkshire has continued to represent the views of local people through ongoing conversations, meetings and partnerships with health and care organisations.

We regularly attend system meetings, working groups and stakeholder forums, ensuring that the experiences shared with us by residents are heard by those responsible for planning and delivering services. By raising concerns, sharing feedback and highlighting emerging issues at an early stage, we can often help shape discussions before decisions are made.

This year, we have contributed patient and public perspectives to a range of local and regional discussions, helping organisations better understand the real-life impact of their decisions. We have also maintained strong relationships with providers, commissioners, voluntary organisations and community groups, enabling us to share intelligence, identify trends and advocate for improvements on behalf of local people.

Much of this work happens away from the spotlight and may not result in a published report or immediate change. However, it remains a vital part of our role, ensuring that the voice of our residents is considered throughout the year and that opportunities to improve services are identified and acted upon wherever possible.

By being a trusted and independent voice, we continue to influence conversations, challenge where necessary, and support organisations to place the experiences of patients, service users and carers at the centre of their work.

healthwatch
West Berkshire

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