

# Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest  
Annual Report 2021-22



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# Message from our Head of Healthwatch

I hope this report finds you well. This year has been one of a transition as we move forward from the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and find new ways of working to where we learn to live safely with this pandemic.

While it has been a challenging year for many of us there have been some amazing achievements and new relationships and partnerships formed. We have worked closely with our neighbouring Healthwatch on issues such as waiting times for hospital treatment.

You told us that one of your priorities was GP services and as a result we focused on a review of GP surgery websites and undertook an extensive piece of work to identify your experiences of accessing GP led services.

Looking forwards you have told us of issues in accessing NHS dental services and we look forward to working on this and other issues over the coming year.

We fundamentally believe that together we can give a stronger voice to the residents of Bracknell Forest in relation to what matters to you about your health and social care services, please keep sharing your experiences and stories with us.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who has supported our work this past year including our amazing staff and volunteers. Thank you.



Neil Bolton-Heaton  
Head of Healthwatch



“The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities.”

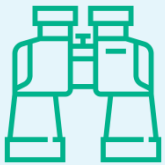
Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England



# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch **Bracknell Forest** is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



### Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



### Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



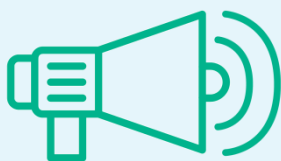
### Our values

- Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

# Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

## Reaching out



**672 people**

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

**There were 21941**

Interactions with our clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and COVID-19.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**2 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

**What Matters Most**

which highlighted the struggles people have on Access to Primary Care/GP Services

## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**11**

outstanding volunteers, who have supported us to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received:

**£64,438**

We also currently employ

**1 x full time staff member and 1 part time staff member**

who help us carry out this work.

## How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring



We ran our **What Matters Most Project** to engage residents to identify their health and social care priorities.



Enabled us to identify residents' health and social care priorities.

Summer



We **reviewed all** GP practice websites and telephone messages across the borough.



We made recommendations to commissioners and GP practices regarding website and telephone message improvements.

Autumn



We ran our **Access to GP services** project and conducted a GP service staff survey to explore issues that patients were having in accessing GP services.



We made recommendations to commissioners and GP practices regarding improving experiences for people accessing GP services. Final report due in July 2022.

Winter



We engaged with the public to understand their experiences of **waiting for hospital treatment**.



We made recommendations to commissioners and service providers about how people's experiences of waiting could be improved.

# Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feedback to services to help them improve



## What Matters Most to local residents

We wanted to find out what “Matters Most” to residents in respect to their Health and Social Care services.

In March 2021, the three local Healthwatch organisations across East Berkshire (Bracknell Forest, Slough, and Windsor, Ascot, and Maidenhead) worked together to develop their foundation of knowledge about their individual local communities, including their health and social care needs. The survey and engagement ran until May 2021 and collected people’s opinions, concerns, and experiences of using, and accessing, health and social care services.



### 155 Bracknell Forest residents took part in the engagement

We asked residents what they thought Healthwatch Bracknell Forest priorities should be for the year. In order of preference these were:

1. GP Services
2. Mental Health Services
3. Access to Services

Residents also told us what that they most valued from Health and Social Care services:

Clear communication and information	Up to date service websites with relevant and accurate information
Better communication health and social care services	Information about reasons for delays or difficulties in booking appointments
Keep the patient informed of appointments, progress, and treatment plans	Better follow up care after appointments, procedures, and treatments
Not needing to explain the same situation/story to several members of staff	Keep the patient’s family informed if they’re unable to visit the patient
Improvement to patient pathways	Provided with a choice of locations for required service



*“Using the Echo service run by my pharmacy to order and deliver prescription drugs from my GP surgery has been a boon”*





## Access to GP Services

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a huge strain on the NHS and impacted how the public access health services.

Like many organisations, General Practice needed to adapt quickly as our Country went into lockdown and respond to new ways of working such as offering video and telephone consultations. Some people have told us that these new ways of accessing GP services have worked well them, allowing them to save time and get the help they need, quickly. But for others it's been more difficult, time consuming and frustrating to access support when they need it.

In mid 2021 we teamed up with other local Healthwatch in the South East and also with practice staff, Care Quality Commission and commissioners to develop a piece of work to identify peoples experiences of accessing primary care. From this we aimed to collectively identify constructive solutions to benefit both GP staff and also the people who use their services.

We ran patient engagement in the form of a survey and 347 Bracknell Forest residents responded. Key themes that emerged from the work concerned:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long telephone queues, exacerbated by lengthy messages whilst on hold</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of face to face consultations.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone consultations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-line services</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Triaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff attitudes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of consultations</li> </ul>	



*"Took 50 minutes on hold / in a queue before I got through to actually speak to someone, however she was lovely when I did get to talk to someone"* – patients experience of telephoning surgery

*"The system is a bit hit and miss. I have had good experiences but also bad experiences"* – patients experience of accessing online services



### What difference did this make

This report is due to launch in early July 2022. We look forward to working with GP services and commissioners in responding to the recommendations made.

## Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.



### Improving primary care communication

It's important for the NHS and social care services to step back and be able to see the services they provide from the perspective of patients and residents. This provides a deeper understanding than using data alone, can challenge assumptions and motivate people to think and work more creatively.

In partnership with NHS colleagues we collaborated on a "quality check" where we reviewed the quality of all GP websites and telephone messages. We shared our insight with the NHS who used it to develop a new template website for GP practices. We also shared a "top three changes you can make now" guide for GP practices on how they could improve telephone messages that would improve the experience of patients.



### Supporting Services with their public involvement

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

We discovered that our local NHS were keen to understand peoples experiences of waiting for hospital treatment. We proposed a collaboration of local neighbouring Healthwatch and the NHS to engage with the public to identify their experiences of waiting for hospital treatment and to understand more about the support they needed whilst waiting.



### Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.

We have known about dental problems for a long time. Access to NHS dentistry is one of the publics main concerns that we hear about. We have been sharing the feedback we receive with NHS England and we have met with them directly to raise concerns and amplify the issues that residents have been telling us. Access to NHS dentistry is our main priority for the year and we are currently developing a programme of work with regional local Healthwatch and other partners to identify solutions.

# Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Bracknell Forest is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up to date information on COVID-19
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme
- Helping people to access the services they need



## Signposting people who needed additional support

A resident contacted us and was suffering from injuries following an accident. They were not receiving the investigations required to ascertain diagnosis and treatment required. The caller's GP was twice meant to refer them to Orthopedics following an MRI that recommended further urgent and immediate treatment. The individual informed us that treatment delays were not only affecting their quality of life but also their employment.



We discussed emotional support and options for making a complaint. We signposted the individual to local Health Advocacy services and to Social Prescribing services.

## Providing advice and information

As demand for NHS services increases, particularly when services are under considerable pressure, it is important that individuals are seen and supported by the appropriate service for their health concern.



We supported our health partner communication campaigns in providing advice and information to the public to help them decide which service was right for them.

### Tell us about your health and social care experience

Please get in touch with us:



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



0300 0120184



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

# Volunteers

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in NHS and social care.

We have reviewed our volunteer roles and offer in light of the impact that Covid-19 has had on volunteering and peoples availability and preferences

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say by promoting our surveys.
- Carried out website and telephone reviews for local services on the information they provide and assessing their accessibility.
- Attended virtual coffee mornings and our annual cross network volunteer meeting.





"I run a carers support group in Cippenham and have been an active volunteer for Healthwatch for many years. I have recently helped to introduce tablets to my carers group, that have allowed them to 'face-time' loved ones in Care Homes during the COVID lockdowns, donated by Slough Carers Support. Volunteering for Healthwatch helps me to connect more with people in my local community to help to support them further". **Zhora**

**"A big thank you to the Healthwatch volunteers that have supported us over the year"**

"I like volunteering to help older people to support Healthwatch, Talking to people and finding out what is working well or not allows me to make a difference in our community and help improve the standard of care offered to everyone." **Marcia**



"I have supported Healthwatch for many years now as I know how important their work is. Their officers have visited my care groups several times now to complete surveys that help with key decision making, and I was really pleased when I was able to collate 30 copies of these in December. It is always a pleasure to help." **Gaye**



### Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.



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

0300 0120184

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

# Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Income	
Funding received from local authority	£64,439
Additional funding	£0
Total income	£64,439

Income	
Staff costs	£43000
Operational costs	£2618
Support and administration	£9000
Total expenditure	£54,618

## Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. Access to NHS Dentistry
2. Increasing our face to face public engagement with seldom heard communities
3. Enhancing our Enter and View programme

## Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that's because of where you live, income or race.

# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch Bracknell Forrest, Help and Care, A49, Aerodrome Studios, Airfield Way, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 3TS. Registered Company No. 3187574 | Registered Charity No. 1055056.

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest 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.

As a relatively new provider of the Healthwatch contract in Bracknell Forest we have an ongoing recruitment exercise for Local Leadership Board members. Uptake of these opportunities has been difficult to establish in the year. In relation to this we launched our “What Matters Most” engagement to ensure we identified local peoples priorities for the 21/22 year. This for example informed our work on primary care.

We ensured wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

- We analyse all the feedback that the public share with us directly or that we hear about when undertaking public engagement
- We identify themes that emerge from our project work
- We undertook our “What Matters Most” public engagement

### Methods and systems used across the year’s work to obtain people’s views and experience.

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, **running a targeted and specific engagement to understand residents health and social care needs.**

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it [on our website](#).

### Responses to recommendations and requests

We had 0 providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

## Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Bracknell Forest is represented on the Bracknell Forest Health and Wellbeing Board by Nicholas Durman. During 2021/22 our representative has effectively carried out this role by attending and participating in Health and Wellbeing Board and sub group meetings.

### 2021-2022 Outcomes

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
Increasing our digital communications reach	Due to the Covid-19 restrictions over the reporting period and their impact on our ability to engage with the public, we further developed our digital communications. We have seen increases in our social media followers and people accessing our website for advice and information.
Primary Care Regional Advisory Group	Along with neighbouring Healthwatch we set up a Regional Advisory Group to support our work in primary care. This was made up of GP's, GP Practice Staff, Care Quality Commission and Commissioners. This was an important collaboration and we look forward to working with the group in identifying shared solutions in the future.
Reviewing our Volunteer offer	As a consequence to Covid-19 and the impact this had on availability of volunteers we have undertaken an extensive review of our volunteer roles and general offer. We have expanded the roles volunteers can undertake to take account of the changed needs expressed by our volunteers.
Developed and published Dying Matters	The guide provided support, advice and guidance around Covid-19 and death and dying
Collated all intelligence relating to access to NHS dentistry	Representations directly made to NHS England. This has resulted in our priority for 22/23 regarding access to NHS dentistry.

# healthwatch

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