



# Together we can

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire  
Annual Report 2022–23

**healthwatch**  
Central Bedfordshire

**10**  
years

# About Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is the local consumer champion promoting choice and influencing the provision of high quality health, social care and wellbeing services for all across Central Bedfordshire.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) has significant statutory powers to ensure that the voice of the consumer is strengthened and heard by those who commission, deliver and regulate health and care services. HWCB engages and consults with all sections of the local population so that a wide crosssection of views are heard, understood and acted upon. Everything we say and do is informed by our connections to local people and our expertise is grounded in their experience.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is one of three local Healthwatch in the County of Bedfordshire which belong to a network of local Healthwatch. Healthwatch England leads, supports and guides the Healthwatch network which is made up of the national body and local Healthwatch across each of the 152 local authority areas in England.

Healthwatch is the only body looking solely at people's experience across all health and social care. As a statutory watchdog our role is to ensure that local health and social care services, and the local decision-makers put the experiences of people at the heart of their care.

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# Message from our Chair

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I have to start this year's message with a tribute to Dave Simpson who was our Chair for a number of years and was with us since the beginning in 2013. Sadly, Dave passed away just a few weeks ago following illness. His contribution was outstanding, his sense of humour unique, and his shoes will be extremely hard to fill.

I have been Chair since 1st April 2023 and over the past 12 months, after the many difficulties faced by all since emerging from the pandemic, we have been able to resume face to face engagement with the local community and restarted our programme of Enter and View visits which are so important to our work and gives us an insight into local service provision. Online activity has been the only method of communication for far too long!

As we all know, GP Services and NHS Dental provision are key issues in all areas and, with the recent introduction of the Integrated Care Board, we are able to work more closely with our health colleagues in addressing current concerns and working towards improvements.

As we move into our 10th year since conception, I look forward with positivity to continuing the good work and outcomes that have been achieved by Healthwatch over the years.

My sincere thanks go to our volunteers (without whom we could not function), our Directors who work hard to monitor and maintain the service we provide, and of course our small band of dedicated staff, headed by Diana our CEO.



**Gill Hiscox**  
**Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire**  
**Chair**



*"I have been part of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire since the beginning and have always enjoyed everything I have been involved in and learning a lot about all issues concerning Healthwatch. It has become my second family as we all work together to help improve things for all of us. It has been a fulfilling time for me and it's made me proud to realise just how much my volunteering has meant to a lot of people. Thank you all for working with me and the team in bringing so much advice to the public."*

**Linda, Healthwatch Central**  
**Bedfordshire Volunteer**

# About us

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Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and 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.

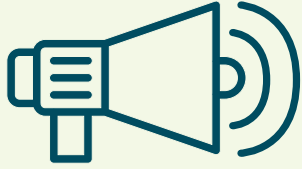


## Our values are:

- **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.

# Year in review

## Reaching out



**10,257 people**

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

**7,563 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost of living crisis.

## Making a difference to care

We published

**13 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**The Denny Review**

which highlighted the health inequalities for those that may be disproportionately impacted due to a physical and/or learning disability, living in deprived areas of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes.



## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**52**

outstanding volunteers who gave up 252 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2022-23 we received

**£161,252**









which is 6% more than the previous year.

We currently employ

**5 staff**

who help us carry out our work.

# How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>Working with a local care home Activities Coordinator increased our 'Pen Pal' membership to help combat social isolation for older people living in residential care.</p>	 <p>Sharing communications and social media encouraged more people to access the mobile Lung Health Check Unit based in Central Bedfordshire to help improve lung cancer outcomes.</p>
Summer	 <p>When a local Parish Council raised concerns about patient access to a local GP Surgery, we developed an extensive online patient survey resulting in recommendations for improvement.</p>	 <p>Following concerns raised about specific Home Care services we interviewed users and family members to support quality improvements and encouraged timely actions on our recommendations.</p>
Autumn	 <p>Our Festival for Older People helped many residents learn more about support services available in their local community with the opportunity to talk directly to healthcare staff.</p>	 <p>Teaming up with healthcare partners our final 'Just Ask' event encouraged local people to share feedback about services, which was then used to influence service improvements.</p>
Winter	 <p>To allow patients to have a stronger voice, HWCBC representatives acted as Patient Assessors as part of the PLACE Assessment for NHS Eng &amp; NHS improvement.</p>	 <p>We continued to help vulnerable people to access their booster jabs for the Covid-19 vaccination and supported them to navigate to their nearest provider.</p>

# 10 years of improving care

This year Healthwatch celebrated its 10-year anniversary. For 10 years we have listened to the public's feedback and used it to improve services. A big thank you to all our Healthwatch Heroes that have stepped up and inspired change. Here are a few of our highlights:

## How have we made care better, together?

### Hospital Discharge

Bedfordshire Hospital NHS Foundation Trust are leading on several workstreams to improve the patient's experience of discharge thanks to key findings in our report.



### Deaf Community support

Our report clearly identified that D/deaf and hard of hearing people continue to face barriers when accessing healthcare services. Our seven key recommendations called for full implementation of the NHS Accessible Information Standard (AIS).



### NHS dentistry costs

Our research investigating access to dental services highlighted the differences in costs people experienced prior to and during the pandemic. Our recommendations included provision of short-term financial support for those on a low income.



### Mental health challenges

A survey to look at the impact a poor-quality mental health service can have on service users emphasised clear and consistent messages about improving the lives of those living with mental health issues.



### Health Inequalities

We highlighted the challenges and barriers disabled people face when accessing services and recommended six key actions to prevent people being disproportionately impacted due to their disability.



### Vaccine confidence

Our regular signposting, guidance and support service, provided in various formats, gave people the information and advice they needed to access their vaccination and the people they care for.







Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Team





## Healthwatch Hero



### Celebrating a hero in our local community.

George is a Healthwatch Hero for sharing his experience with us and creating change so other patients did not have their cancer treatment delayed as he did.

George had difficulties trying to obtain medications, tests and appointments from his GP following a referral from his oncologist. After a month's delay, his situation had escalated and was seen as an emergency although his GP had still not addressed his requests.

We helped George to escalate his issue to the Practice Manager who acknowledged that mistakes had been made, with communication failures between teams. Apologies were offered and reassurance given that going forward their systems and processes would be improved, and staff are learning from events such as this, which helps them to embed change going forward and improves service provision.

Without George sharing his experience with us, we would never have known about the issue. Thanks to George, other cancer patients accessing the surgery will now receive a prompt and responsive service.



# 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 feed this back to services and help them improve.



*“As the Chief Medical Director of the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board I have enjoyed working with such a progressive organisation that ensures the voices of public and patients are heard in all parts of the health and care system. Central Bedfordshire Healthwatch partnered in a key piece of work looking at inequalities, known as the Denny Review, <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/the-denny-review> which demonstrated that the wider determinants of health, including socioeconomic deprivation, psychological, cultural and individual factors affect health and wellbeing. Relating to these conclusions one of the areas of Healthwatch work that has been particularly valuable, as well as challenging, has been feeding back residents’ views. As a result, we are working closely with many others to improve access to General Practice and Dentistry, in particular. This has helped the way in which we have been able to articulate the challenges facing the NHS to support patients in navigating the system as effectively as possible.*

*The Junior Healthwatch segment of the organisation is especially impressive, and I enjoyed spending an evening with the group, several of whom are hoping to work in the health and care sector. One of our local practices has supported one young person with a work experience placement and it is this sort of initiative that symbolises the joint working that will secure success both for the individual and system as we move forward. Thank you for all that you do.”*

**Dr Sarah Whiteman, Chief Medical Director - Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board**





# Tackling Health Inequalities as part of the Denny Review

**People living in deprived areas of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes may be disproportionately impacted due to a physical and /or learning disability, making it harder for them to access health and care services.**

The Denny Review; 'A rapid evidence review of the health inequalities experienced by the local communities of BLMK aimed to improve its understanding of health inequalities in its local communities and good practice to address them.

**Working together on an action research project**, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, the Disability Resource Centre and Community Dental Services, engaged with residents, to learn more about their experience of accessing services.

The joint survey generated over 1290 responses from local residents and six in-depth case studies, highlighting the following issues:



- The D/deaf community are struggling to secure 'face to face' appointments with their GP, and consultants, due to the impact of long waiting lists.
- People want to see more Interpreters available in GP and hospital settings and be able to easily secure an appointment with a Disability Champion.
- Lack of disabled access to premises has a major impact on people with a physical disability and is preventing disabled people from accessing the services they need.
- People with physical/learning disabilities want to be treated equally, highlighting the importance of being listened to, and always being involved in decision-making.

## What difference will this make?

Local residents' feedback was used to help improve services and better meet the expectations of people across BLMK.

By ensuring the issues raised, and our recommendations for improvement are highlighted as a priority for all commissioners and providers of healthcare services, this will vastly reduce health inequalities.



*"I need to get more mental health support, Autism support and hard of hearing support, and there is a lack of supported employment to secure permanent employment for disabled people."*

**Joan, from Central Bedfordshire**



# Improving the provision of domiciliary care

**Many people receive care at home and concerns were raised by relatives and service users about the quality of service provided by care agencies in Central Bedfordshire.**

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire were asked by the Council to undertake an independent review, on their behalf, into the quality of homecare services delivered in Central Bedfordshire.

The purpose of the review was to gather independent feedback from a targeted cohort of customers about their experience of domiciliary care.

For some people who currently access home care services, there were discrepancies and large differences in Carer competence, and recent changes caused anxiety. Replacement of Carers was high and communication barriers were evident due to accents of foreign speaking Carers. Frustration with arrival times, length of stay and inconsistency of Carers, including a lack of agency staff with the right skills and experience, was also evident.


## Our recommendations:

1. Up to date Service User Guide's to be provided to all service users and an urgent review of all care plans undertaken to ensure they are up to date and person-centered.
2. Customers to be provided with information about how their care records are currently stored and advised of any plans to switch to electronic records with accessible communication.
3. Additional training of care staff implemented to ensure dignity and respect is observed at all times and the message reinforced regarding permissions from customers.
4. The Councils' review team to regularly monitor the performance of the agency involved, on a minimum monthly basis, to ensure actions identified to address customers complaints are being implemented, with feedback from customers used as evidence.

## What difference will this make?

Thanks to our review, the Council are able to directly address concerns raised about the care being provided, and to review, develop and improve home care services across the area.

Direct feedback from the report is extracted and used to inform 'Section B – Service User Feedback' of the Provider Assessment and Market Management Solution (PAMMS) inspection report which is a tool used by the Council to assess the quality of care delivered by providers of adult social care services.

 *"I won't have any male Carers doing my personal care; I don't even let my husband do that. Again, they say they don't have any female Carers, but this only happens at night. In the evening they are meant to come at 7pm but they asked on a Sunday, if they can come early because of 'double-ups'. I said, 'yes' as a one off but they now come at that time every night, but I don't want to be in my night clothes at 6pm!"*

**Carol, from Central Bedfordshire**



*"I am proud of the work that the ICB has done together with our valued colleagues in Central Bedfordshire Healthwatch this past year. By working together to put the voice of residents at the heart of everything we do, we are together making sure that the health and care services of the future are informed by the real world experiences of those we serve. I am particularly proud of our joint efforts to deliver 'Just Ask' events across Central Bedfordshire – opportunities for Healthwatch and ICB colleagues to get together out into High Streets and Town Squares to meet residents face-to-face and discuss local services. Our new Memorandum of Understanding, expected to come to the Board later this year, will, I hope, provide an exciting and solid foundation for many more years of great partnership work."*

**Dr Rima Makarem, Chair, Bedfordshire Luton Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board**



# 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.

## Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



**It's important for services to see the bigger picture. Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.**

As part of our work on the Denny Review project, to improve understanding of health inequalities, we interviewed four individuals to highlight as case studies to support the Review.

Their experiences and insights provide a valuable perspective on the challenges faced by individuals and highlight the need for healthcare providers to improve accessibility, and tailor care to the unique needs of patients with physical and learning disabilities.

## Getting services to involve the public



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

We were contacted by a local practice to help support the development of their Patient Participation Group (PPG) to ensure patients voices were heard. We helped to develop a Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct for the group and discussed ways in which PPG members can support the practice, improve communication and understanding of the challenges facing the practice, and how they can tackle the issues together. This has improved care locally, as well as the relationship between the practice and their patients.

## Improving care over time



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

Following concerns raised from patient's who had experienced challenges accessing mental health services we arranged a series of visits to the community mental health teams across Central Bedfordshire to better understand how the service is managed and led. We met with a range of staff and discussed how we can work with them to raise patient issues and concerns and help to resolve in a timely way.





# Hearing from all communities

Over the past year we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently, to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard and services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Working jointly with other voluntary organisations to reach people who may find it difficult to access health and care services due to a physical or learning disability.
- Reaching out to the public through our outreach project – ‘Just Ask’, visiting many towns and villages in Central Bedfordshire to talk to people directly.
- Liaising with local schools to find young Carers to interview about the challenges they face in supporting their loved one.
- Visiting local community and support groups encouraging residents to share their health and care experience.



*“Our Healthwatch partners in Central Bedfordshire have continued throughout this year to provide the Integrated Care Board with valuable insights into residents’ views on their local health and care services.*

*The launch of the ICB’s Working With People and Communities Strategy, developed in collaboration with Healthwatch, sets out why working with our local residents and their communities matters so much to us, and how we’re putting them at the centre of everything we do. Our trusted partnership with our Healthwatch colleagues is paramount in achieving this ambition.*

*Of particular note has been our work together on the Denny Review – hearing, often for the first time, the views of seldom heard communities. These deep insights are providing the basis for us to work ever more closely together to tackle health inequalities in the year ahead.*

*We are especially grateful for Healthwatch support in delivering the rollout of the ICB’s landmark co-production training, and look forward to the exciting prospect of a new Memorandum of Understanding between the ICB and our valued Healthwatch partners which will provide an ambitious framework for our work together in 2023/24 and beyond.”*

**Felicity Cox, Chief Executive – Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board**





## Improvements to Community Nursing

To understand public perceptions on the value of community nursing, local Healthwatch in the East of England engaged with patients, families and Carers about their experiences.

When we reached out, many people acknowledged that their poor experiences were a product of systemic issues and the pressures on the service, such as high caseloads and lack of staff.

We recommended that NHS England and other commissioning bodies needed to ensure community nursing is appropriately resourced and funded, including the need to look to recruit to, and retain the community nursing workforce, particularly specialist community nurses, to improve user experience.



**“** I've used community nurses since 2013, so that's nine years. It's because I have a catheter and they need to do things for that, change it, sort out problems. Rarely I see the same nurse and every time I would have to explain how long I've had it, how many infections I've had, every single time.”

**Service User who responded to our survey**



## Changes made to hospital services as a result of joint visit

Over 20 recommended changes were actioned by hospital staff as a result of a joint 'Enter & View' visit to four emergency departments at Bedford Hospital.

Following an ease of restrictions for hospital visits, staff and volunteers from Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and Healthwatch Bedford Borough spoke to a wealth of patients, Carers, relatives and hospital staff during July 2022.

We were told by patients and relatives that their main areas of concern were lack of communication, shortage of staff, long waiting times, and lack of adherence to AIS standards for patients with additional communication needs. Hospital staff told us morale was low with staff feeling undervalued with insufficient time to attend training.

Bedford Hospital acted on our recommendations and made over 20 improvements and/or adjustments to different service areas, to ensure the best possible patient experience, whilst also addressing staff morale and training needs .

**“** We arrived at 11pm last night when the injury occurred but the wait time was seven hours, so we went home again without being seen.”

**Parent of hospital patient**



*“Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire continue to play an important role as a key and trusted partner in ensuring feedback around the quality, responsiveness and personalised nature of health and care services is embedded within our commissioning and contract management processes.*

*By engaging with the local authority and our health partners at a strategic and operational level they work positively with us to shape a health and care system which better meets the needs of residents at a local level.”*

**Andy Sharp, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing, Central Bedfordshire Council**







# Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch 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've helped people by:

- Providing up to date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Signposting people to support services
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost of living crisis



*“We are very happy to be part of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire 10 year anniversary. We have established good open communication pathways with Healthwatch over the past 10 years and been able to respond to their enquiries on behalf of the people of Central Bedfordshire. Healthwatch have continued to effectively ensure that concerns and feedback, raised by local people and their families/Carers, are escalated to our services openly and responsively. They have attended ELFT stakeholder events and contributed on behalf of local people through their experiences and feedback. This feedback has supported service reviews and development and contributed in shaping and transforming future services. We shall continue to work in partnership on behalf of the people of Central Bedfordshire.”*

**Tasha Newman Assistant Director, Central Bedfordshire Adult Community Mental Health Pan Bedfordshire ADHD, Eating Disorders, Early Intervention and Community Rehab Services**





# You said, We did

Listening to your experience is a priority for us. This allows us to understand the full picture, to feed back to services to help them improve.

Here are just some of the ways we have helped people in the local community...



## Inadequate joined up support following several hospital stays

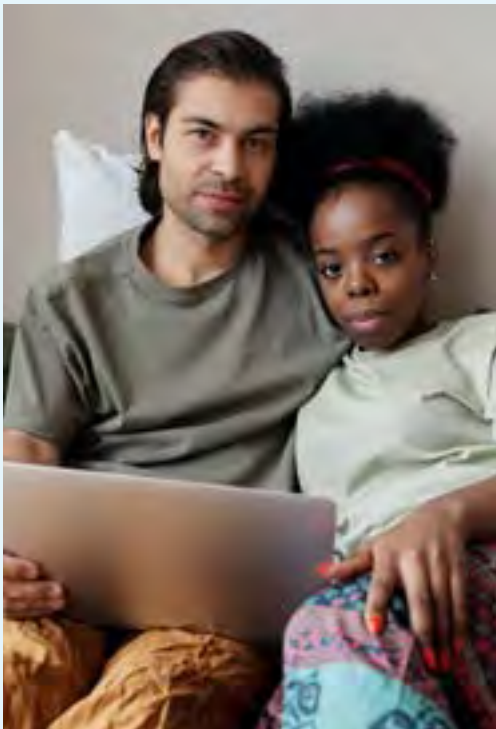
A daughter contacted us about her elderly mother who had been 'in and out' of hospital over a period of weeks after being diagnosed with dementia in 2018. Daughter is a part time Carer for her mum and cares for her physically disabled husband.



She was concerned that her mother was not properly assessed when in hospital and the package of care put in place following each discharge was inadequate. The daughter said when her mother was being cared for at home, she endured a 'dance' between the GP and District Nurses, before her mother was once again returned to hospital. She felt her mother needed residential care but was told by Discharge Coordinators that she could not be involved in where her mother is placed.

We directly contacted the Patient Experience Team at the hospital and the Discharge Team to explain the chronology of events relating to her mother's care and treatment. They agreed to investigate and shortly after the daughter called and advised of the following:

“I don't know what miracles you/your colleagues have worked but I just had a call from the Discharge Coordinator. There is no comparison between the conversation I have just had with her on Sunday! It seems we have several options regarding residential care, but the choice is ours. I don't know how to thank you. That's nothing short of miraculous! I will let you know what we decide but I just wanted to say a massive thank you to everyone involved.”



## Pre adoptive parents struggling to secure a medical assessment

A lady and her husband, who were hoping to adopt, had been requesting a 'pre-medical' from their GP Practice for over two months, which they needed to provide to the adoption agency but were being told the surgery did not have the capacity to do so. Without the medical they could not go any further forward with the adoption process.

We contacted the Head of Primary Care and Commissioning who subsequently spoke to the Practice Manager at the surgery. They advised that the surgery definitely had options for the patient and the surgery would call them directly to discuss. The GP surgery also confirmed they would be carrying out some learning within the team.

The lady advised she had been contacted by the surgery and forms had been sent to her for completion to progress with the medical. She was very grateful for our intervention and support saying:

“Thank you so much for all your help.”

## Challenging DST Assessment process

A mother of a severely disabled child who is currently going through transition to adult social care called us to help support a complaint about the DST Assessment process recently undertaken by the Continuing Healthcare (CHC) Team. Although agreement was reached with social workers, the mother and her representative, on the scoring for each domain, this was completely at odds with the Assessor which meant that no agreement for funding was reached, and the mother was also asked for additional medical proof relating to her son being in pain. Mum was becoming increasingly frustrated with the process and was now required to go to dispute to secure the funding required to support her son. She had officially complained to the CHC Team and Commissioners but felt ignored.



After we raised this issue with the CHC Team, they agreed to contact the mother directly to help resolve her complaint. We were subsequently advised by mum that the CHC Team had been in touch, and they had arranged for another DST Assessment to take place with a different Assessor. They confirmed the previous Assessor would receive additional training. Mum told us:

*“I am raising the issue of DST scoring with our local parent forum so hopefully between us this won't happen to another family. I suspect this may not be the end of the problems I face for my son in this instance so I will keep you informed going forward, once again thank you so much.”*



## Lack of communication and support following bereavement

Following the death of her father, a lady called for our assistance as she had been unable to register his death and felt the GP Surgery were not communicating with her. A locum GP from the local surgery had been present at the care home when her father died, and had completed the paperwork, however the surgery had not released the forms for her to submit to the Registrar. This lady had made enquiries with the receptionist at the surgery but had found her to be 'very rude' and 'unhelpful'.

We contacted the surgery to enquire about the forms and were advised that as the forms had been completed by a locum GP, who was unsure of the correct process, they had to be checked by a GP at the Practice before they could be sent on, hence the delay. We suggested they could have alleviated the daughter's anxiety if she had been informed of the reason for the delay. It was subsequently confirmed that the forms had been completed and would be sent to the daughter asap. We updated the daughter and sent her a copy of the surgery's complaints form so she could pursue a formal complaint if she wished to do so. She thanked us for our help and added:

*“Your intervention resulted in the surgery acting more promptly and I will consider a formal complaint.”*

## Miscommunication by hospital staff led to anxiety and frustration

An elderly lady contacted us as she had received a long-awaited letter from the hospital containing the results of a two-day monitoring period for her condition, but the letter was in terminology she did not understand and which she described as 'jargon'. The letter asked her to contact her GP for further explanation. As she wanted to speak to a clinician, and reluctant to take up the GP's time, she sent a message online to the surgery but had received no reply.

We spoke to the Practice Manager at the surgery who agreed to investigate further, adding that the surgery were not medically specialised to explain the content of the letter. The surgery subsequently contacted the hospital to advise that the letter should not have been sent to the patient in its current format. The hospital are now in the process of arranging for the patient to meet with a specialist. The lady was very grateful for our help and said:



“Thank you so much, I really didn't want to bother the surgery, but I couldn't understand what the letter was saying.”



## Absence of information following hospital admission

The main Carer and daughter of an elderly gentleman was becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of information provided by hospital staff following her father's admission to a ward. As she was unable to visit, she wanted information relating to his condition and treatment and had contacted the ward several times each day, and been told to call back again, or at a later time of day. When she did, the same response was given.

On one occasion when the doctor was present on the ward she was placed on hold for some time and then advised that the doctor had left, and she would need to call back or visit in person. After a week of failing to get the information needed, she contacted PALs who emailed the ward but again, no response received. Shortly after, the daughter was called by ward staff to be advised that the ward had now 'gone red' and she would not be able to visit, although a doctor was still unavailable to talk to. Although the daughter appreciated the pressure hospital staff were under, her anxiety increased as her mother was in this position last year and sadly, subsequently died from Covid-19. She was very worried that her father would suffer the same fate.

We contacted the Patient Experience Manager at the hospital who spoke with the Head of Nursing for the area, who also alerted the Deputy Chief Nurse, who agreed to raise this issue with the Nursing team at the staff meeting she was about to attend. Shortly after, we spoke with the daughter who confirmed she had spoken to a doctor on the ward who had updated her concerning her father's condition. She thanked us for our intervention and '*speed of action*'.





# Volunteering

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

## This year our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire and what we have to offer
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve
- Helped to deliver our Enter & View programme of visits to healthcare settings
- Collected the most up-to-date information on changes to service provision, such as future investment in healthcare hubs.

## Audrey

"When considering what sort of volunteering I would like to do, I felt that an organisation which looked for ways to improve health services and the experience of users, might be something I could contribute towards and enjoy. I am also curious to know what services and facilities are available locally, and how different areas and providers work together and complement each other, and I hope being part of Healthwatch will help my knowledge of this, which in turn I can use for the benefit of others. I have been asked to help HWCB with a preconception project to look at improving health outcomes relating to childbirth for all women, but with a particular focus on people from ethnic backgrounds which has been shown to increase poor outcomes/health issues compared to the general population and which may be preventable".



## Alan

"It was at the Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) stand on Market Day, in Leighton Buzzard 2022, that I made contact with HWCB.

I also attended the Festival for Older People, organised by HWCB in Flitwick in October 2022, representing EEAST Community Engagement Group, who are a group of volunteers from all across East Anglia, who work with the Ambulance Service. The group attend many committee meetings, Community Engagement events, Quality Audit Ambulance Stations. Shortly after I made the decision to volunteer for HWCB to hopefully apply some of the skills that I have obtained over the years, and put something back into the local community."



## David

"Volunteering at Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has allowed me to discover a lot more about the medical and care sector, and to do my bit to help out. I am involved in the 'Enter & View' programme, which is where Healthwatch visit and feedback on the quality of service provided by GP surgeries and hospital wards. I have joined 15 visits and I also took part in the domiciliary care project, interviewing those receiving home care. This will help the Council in improving these services."



### Do you feel inspired?

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

 [www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](http://www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk)

 **0300 303 8554**

 [info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](mailto:info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.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.

## Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£161,252	Expenditure on pay	£109,757
Additional income	£9,268	Non-pay expenditure	£35,204
		Office and management fee	£24,468
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£170,520</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£169,429</b>

Additional funding is broken down by:

- **£1,250** received from Healthwatch England for Unmet Needs project
- **£4669** received from BLMK ICS for work on the Denny Review
- **£462** received from BLMK ICS (Young Healthwatch project)
- **£2887** received from NHS Eng for work on Community Nursing Project

## Next steps

In the ten years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in helping the health and care system understand what is working, spot issues and think about how things can be better in the future.

Services are currently facing unprecedented challenges and tackling the backlog needs to be a key priority for the NHS to ensure everyone gets the care they need. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving them a voice to help shape improvements to services.

We will also continue our work into tackling inequalities that exist within our services and work to reduce the barriers the local community face when accessing care, regardless whether that is because of where they live, income or race.

## Top three priorities for 2023-24

1. Develop engagement projects relating to Pharmaceutical services, women's healthcare and the cost-of-living crisis to support Healthwatch England national campaigns.
2. Progress and develop activities reaching out to the local community, engaging with seldom heard communities, to ensure all voices are represented and included in commissioning decisions.
3. Continue to develop our Enter & View programme visiting health and care settings, listening to patients and the public and liaising with the Care Quality Commission to identify areas of concern.





# Statutory statements

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, Capability House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire, MK45 4HR

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

# The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of six members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Throughout 2022/23 the Board met five times and made decisions on matters such as budget setting, future engagement and activities, governance and recruitment of additional Board members.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. For example, we regularly hear from local residents sharing their lived experience when visiting our outreach events, and at our larger scale events, such as the Festival for Older People. Hearing from residents and members of the local Parish Council, who were very dissatisfied with the service provided by their GP Practice, led to an in-depth survey and visits to the practice with recommendations for urgent improvements.

We gather insight from information and signposting enquiries to inform our priorities, and opinions from local voluntary and community groups to inform our work.

In addition, we use opinions and comments posted on our website feedback centre to identify trends and themes, and most notably this year, once again it is about GP accessibility, or registering and securing an appointment with an NHS Dentist. We have prioritised work in this area and researched further to get additional views.



*“Over the last 10 years Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire have provided valuable support to improve health and social care services in Central Bedfordshire. The support provided to individuals in signposting to services and in supporting investigating complaints and comments on services is invaluable, with feedback from those accessing services highlighting this. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire have built fantastic relationships with local health and care services to enable brilliant partnership working to improve services for residents of Central Bedfordshire. Thank you to all at Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire for all of your hard work over the last 10 years. Your support and influence continues to be helpful in the commissioning of services for the future.”*

**Lorna Corbin, Commissioning Officer, Strategic Commissioning – Social Care, Health & Housing, Central Bedfordshire Council**

# The way we work

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## Methods and systems used across the year to obtain peoples experiences

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 using services. During 2022/23 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a feedback centre/rate and review system on our website, attended virtual and face to face meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual and face to face activities, and engaged with the public through social media and postal surveys.

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, engaging with people who may be disproportionately impacted due to a physical and/or learning disability, (see our case study on page 12).

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 at [www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](http://www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk), in our regular Newsletter and weekly Ebulletin, and share directly with Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission, Central Bedfordshire Council, Bedfordshire Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board and key stakeholders.

## Responses to recommendations

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

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so 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 insight and experiences that have been shared with us.





In our local authority area for example we take information to Central Bedfordshire Council's Health and Wellbeing Board, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Joint Safeguarding Board.


We also take insight and experiences to decision makers in Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care System (BLMK ICS). For example, along with Healthwatch colleagues in Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes we have representation on the Integrated Care Board, the Integrated Care Partnership and many other Committees and Board relating to specific service areas. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.



## Enter and view

This year, we made five Enter and View visits. We made over 86 recommendations or actions as a result of this activity.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
<p><b>Bedford Hospital, Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust</b></p> 	<p>Advised by patients and relatives of concerns relating to lack of communication, shortage of staff, long waiting times, and lack of adherence to AIS standards for patients with additional communication needs.</p>	<p>Over 20 recommended changes were actioned by hospital staff as a result of a joint 'Enter &amp; View' visit to four emergency departments at Bedford Hospital.</p>
<p><b>Swiss Cottage Care Home, Leighton Buzzard</b></p> 	<p>Following an overall 'Inadequate' rating given by the Care Quality Commission on 5th April 2022, Central Bedfordshire Council asked us to visit the home and meet with residents and their relatives, including staff.</p>	<p>Recommendations included an urgent review of residents' care records with additional training or support for staff, to ensure records are kept fully up to date and accurate; the food menu to include pictorial photographs of meals to help inform the choice of meals available; and a wider variety of activities, including outside of the home.</p>
<p><b>Chiltern View Care Home, Dunstable</b></p> 	<p>Following an overall 'Inadequate' rating by the Care Quality Commission on 31st August 2022, Central Bedfordshire Council asked us to visit the home and meet with residents and their relatives, including staff.</p>	<p>Our recommendations included: consideration to the décor of the interior to make it more 'Dementia friendly'; review of infection control/contamination procedures for the storage of soiled clothes/linen; review how residents' are able to contact staff members for assistance.</p>
<p><b>Orchid Lawns Care Home, Flitwick</b></p> 	<p>The Care Quality Commission had given an overall rating of 'Requires Improvement' on 10th August 2021. We therefore included Orchid Lawns on our list of Care Homes to visit.</p>	<p>Seven recommendations were provided including: Review the ratio of staff to residents due to the specialist care required; a review of ongoing training needs to include more robust training regarding mental health, especially dementia.</p>

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
<p><b>Cranfield and Marston Surgery, Cranfield and Marston Moretaine</b></p> 	<p>Patients raised concerns and issues about both Marston Moretaine and Cranfield surgeries, regarding the telephone system, appointment availability, apparent withdrawal of services, and communication with patients.</p>	<p>We provided 11 recommendations including: a review of the telephone systems and how they are managed; additional training to better support staff when managing patient's anxiety and frustrations; to provide patients with the option to see a male or female clinician or given an explanation why this is not possible at the time.</p>



*“During the past year, the organisation continued to work collaboratively with Healthwatch to shape the services we provide. The feedback we received enabled us to improve our services therefore giving patients, Carers, families and our staff a better experience. The contents of the annual report best describes this continued partnership.”*

**Micah Matore, Patient Experience Manager, Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**



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## Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is represented on the Central Bedfordshire Council Health and Wellbeing Board by our Chief Executive, Diana Blackmun. During 2022/23 our representative has effectively carried out this role by attending each meeting and development session, feeding back public views on various issues and concerns, and disseminating information as detailed by attending providers.

Our CEO has presented various reports throughout 2022/23 to highlight our projects, activities and events and to seek action on our recommendations.

Following the recommendations in our report about local resident's experience of hospital discharge, undertaken as a result of the national Discharge to Assess operating model and guidance introduced in March 2020 as a response to Covid-19, this led to several system updates and joint workstreams between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, to improve patient and people's experience of hospital discharge. This included better communication between staff managing arrangements for discharge, a dedicated consultant hotline for GPs to gain advice about their patients, and the development of a 'hospital discharge customer charter' with accompanying information videos due to be introduced in 2023.



*"Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire have done a great job through their staff and volunteers in ensuring that the views and feedback from local patients and carers are integral to the design and delivery of local services. As the local consumer champion promoting choice and influencing the provision of high-quality health, social care, and wellbeing services for all across Central Bedfordshire, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire provide a valued service to all residents in a professional and caring manner. I celebrate their 10th Anniversary and look forward to future collaborative work with Central Bedfordshire Council over the next 10 years."*

**Cllr Mark Smith, Central Bedfordshire Councillor (Amphill Ward), Executive Member for Adult Social Care**



*"In my current role I'm minded of the impending CQC Assurance process for Adult Social Care which is due to be rolled out this year. At the centre of the assessment framework is the rightful focus on us listening to the voice of the person. Healthwatch are experts in relaying the views and experiences of people they come into contact with, and this has incrementally developed over the last 10 years in Central Bedfordshire. It's the common value base I like to think we share in common, and I look forward to continuing to call on their support when required."*

**Stuart Mitchelmore, Assistant Director Adult Social Care, Central Bedfordshire Council**



# Thank you

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## Thank you to everyone that is helping us put people at the heart of health and social care, including:

- Members of the public who shared their views and experience with us.
- The voluntary organisations that have contributed to our work.
- Key stakeholders and partners who have responded to our recommendations for improvements to local services.
- Central Bedfordshire Council.
- East London Foundation Trust.
- Bedfordshire, Luton & Milton Keynes Integrated Care System (BLMK ICS).
- Our regional Healthwatch colleagues, particularly local Healthwatch across BLMK; Bedford Borough, Luton and Milton Keynes.
- Healthwatch England.
- Our amazing volunteers.
- Our Young Healthwatch team for all their outstanding work and projects to highlight the experiences of young people in their community.

## Acronym Answers

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ADHD	Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder
AIS	Accessible Information Standard
BLMK ICS	Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care System
CBC	Central Bedfordshire Council
CHC	Continuing Healthcare
CQC	Care Quality Commission
DST	Decision Support Tool
ELFT	East London NHS Foundation Team
HWCB	Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
ICS	Integrated Care System
PAMMS	Provider Assessment and Market Management Solution
PPG	Patient Participation Group



# What they say

The following shows some of the comments we have received from local residents about the work we do, and from stakeholders on how they are using the feedback we provide.

# What they say

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I enjoy the **public engagement events**, such as 'Just Ask' that visit about six towns in Central Bedfordshire, as well as the annual 'Festival for Older People' and I additionally **provide admin support** for the office. It's a good opportunity to meet a wide variety of people, listening sympathetically to their experiences and **providing advice**, by utilising the health and social care knowledge I have increased since joining HWCB, and **making local contacts with the stakeholders** and voluntary organisations that attend the events. I have **gained a better understanding** of Central Bedfordshire Council and the NHS and the wide variety of service provision. I enjoy the company of the **dedicated staff and volunteers** at HWCB all trying to make a difference to the health and social care provided for the people of Central Bedfordshire.

Sharon, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Volunteer



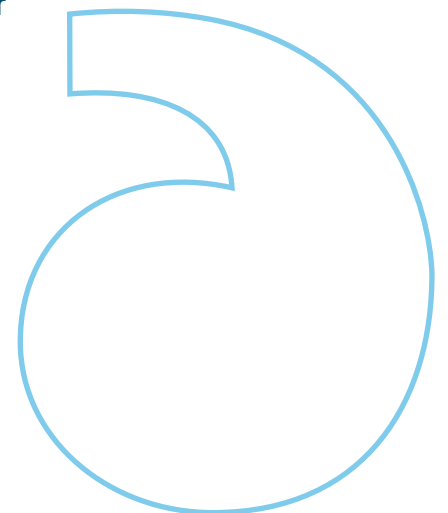
"Thanks for sending the video, I think it really captures the spirit of the day. It was **an absolute pleasure to attend the Festival** and experience the energy and vibrancy of the day. I thought it was an **excellent event** and the quality and volume of the work that you and your team had put into it was very evident. I know Louise was very disappointed to have missed out on being part of it."

Chris McCann, Healthwatch England Deputy Director



"I put myself forward for any involvement that I enjoy. I like **to meet people from all walks of life**. I find that I can converse with almost any person. I have been volunteering for many years and am able to fit in to most roles. I find **HWCB staff very easy to get on with** and being a volunteer with Healthwatch is part of my lifestyle."

Den, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Volunteer







*"On behalf of the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, I would like to thank you for the kind invitation to attend your Festival for Older People 2022. I was very sorry to learn that you are unwell and were unable to attend and sadly we didn't have the opportunity to meet.*

*However, I must report that your **team at Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire arranged an excellent and most enjoyable Festival**. I was made very welcome by Diana and her team and despite my own medical background, I was **amazed at how much I learned** as I travelled around the large number of stalls on display. It is comforting to know that we have **so much support available in Central Bedfordshire** and beyond.*

*The attendance numbers were huge, and I don't think I have seen so many attendees at a function since pre-pandemic days and **it is reassuring that the elderly now feel confident to attend** as we now return to the near normality of 2019.*

*Very many congratulations to you and your team for arranging such an excellent Health Festival.*

*I hope you are on the way to recovery and that we might meet at the next Festival in 2023 which **I plan to attend as a member of the public.**"*

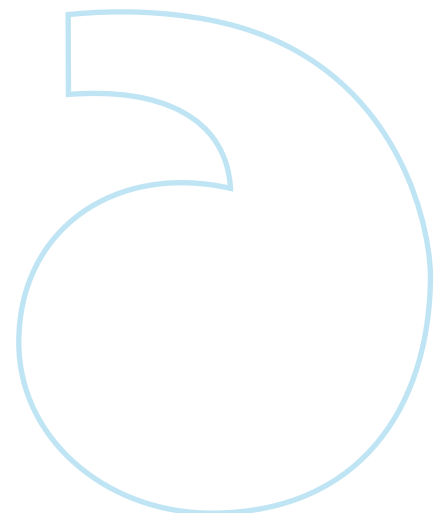
**Dr Robert Oakley OBE DL, Chairman Bedfordshire Lieutenancy QAVS Panel**



*"I started volunteering with HWCB doing 'back office' tasks – dealing with keeping the finance paperwork under control. As a qualified accountant I then progressed to financial administrator. I deal with all bookkeeping, budgeting and management accounts which **allows me to use my qualification**. Being able to volunteer in **a specific role has been great** – I just let the team know I couldn't do public events and that was fine.*

*Since being a part of HWCB I've also become a Trustee at Carers in Bedfordshire and it's been useful to **build bridges between our organisations**. I've found it really fulfilling in my role. If you have specialist skills which could be useful – please ring the team in the office."*

**Nicola, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Volunteer & Finance Administrator**



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“As I work in the community every day and listen to the challenges people face, whether with their health or social care, as a director I **share this information at our board meetings** and update with local information, as well as sharing with HWCB staff so they are all are aware of any local issues. I like interviewing people and I particularly enjoy working on the Domiciliary Care project, the Just Ask events and attending the Enter & View visits. I find that my **other work and voluntary roles help with my HWCB role** as a director and volunteer at Healthwatch, to ensure that the people I meet, I can make a **positive difference** for them..”

Linda, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Director & Volunteer

“It sure sounds like the day went well, **the video is great**, I have shared with the two volunteers that attended the day on behalf of the ambulance service, their **feedback was also very good**.

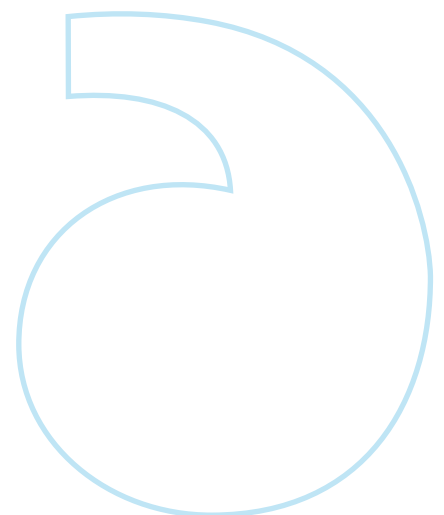
I have added next year's date to the diary already, I am hoping to be there myself with our volunteers.

Do **keep us updated** if you have anything else that will be coming up in the near future that we might be able to attend.”

Gillian Langley, Patient & Public Involvement Officer, East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust

“Thank you so much for helping to **raise awareness** and encouraging the completion and sharing of our Leighton Buzzard Health Survey which runs till the last day of April. Also for **supporting us at the Health and Wellbeing meetings**.”

Edith Griffith, Local Resident





"My main involvement has been Enter and View, in GP surgeries, Hospital A&E and Care Homes. I have also been involved in interviewing people receiving care packages at home, not having done this type of interview before, and have **certainly learnt from it**. Enter and view is interesting, and I have **gained knowledge** about a sector I previously knew very little about. I have seen what goes on in the background of the NHS, not viewed by the general public, and my experiences have made me more able to **understand the enormous challenges that the NHS faces**. I don't think I personally have made much of a difference but as a team member at an Enter and View visit **we do make a difference**; the main player is obviously the person who interviews the Manager. I found the volunteers meetings very interesting, particularly the visiting speakers."

**David, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Volunteer**



"I first got to know of Healthwatch through **my role as a Central Bedfordshire Councillor** sitting on the Health and Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee. After leaving the Council I became a Healthwatch volunteer and then a Board Member, a Trustee... I continue to stay engaged as a volunteer because I **believe the work that Healthwatch does allows the residents of Central Bedfordshire an unbiased voice** in matters relating to health and social care in this area. It is a shame that more people don't know about Healthwatch and the force for good that they are."

**Paul, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Volunteer**



"I am very proud to be a volunteer Director for Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire as this **organisation represents the needs of the users of the health service** and works hard to ensure that the best is offered.

One of my portfolios is Young Healthwatch and I really enjoy the Young Healthwatch meetings as the **young people bring forward new perspectives** and propose some really good projects.

Interaction with the staff is **enjoyable and rewarding** as they all give their best to whatever they are involved in and are very pleasant, helpful and interactive with the volunteers, and the volunteers are friendly and good to work with.

I hope that I have made a difference by being involved in a variety of projects and it has given me **much satisfaction and insight** into a lot of issues."

**Carol, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire Volunteer & Director**



# Message from our CEO

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This year we are celebrating 10 years of listening to the public and hearing their views which has never been more important. Their feedback is essential to ensure we can influence, and help improve, service design and delivery.

Patient and public feedback can enable Providers and Commissioners to spot issues and identify where services may need more resources or other support. It can also help address inequalities in access to care, the extent of which has been laid bare by the pandemic.

By listening to you and hearing your experiences and the challenges you have faced over the past ten years has given us and the decision makers, insight, understanding and learning.

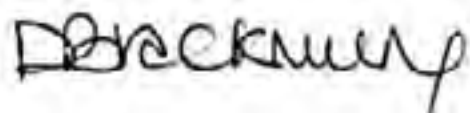
As in many other areas, the health and care landscape in Central Bedfordshire is complex and challenging. Over the past ten years we have contributed to the many strategic developments aimed at securing more integrated healthcare, provided closer to home, and at the wider integration of care services including social care, and will continue to do so to ensure service delivery reflects local needs.

This report highlights some of the work we have done over the past year, from our extensive engagement projects, activities, events, and visits to healthcare services. We are always pleased that so many people give such a quantity of feedback, but we are even more pleased that those responsible for providing services are responding to our reports and recommendations, making sure that the lived experiences of all residents helps to shape the future of health and social care provision. Through our newsletters, e-bulletins, social media and our website, we have also kept thousands of people up to date on the issues that matter to them.

With NHS and social care services under pressure, Healthwatch is calling on more people to tell us when they are doing a good job and when services can be improved.

I would like to thank everyone who has shared their health and care experiences, and the professionals who have acted on feedback since Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire started work in 2013. Thank you also to our partners, in healthcare and in the voluntary and community sector, for their commitment and positive attitude, and a huge thank you to all our wonderful volunteers who work tirelessly in key roles to support our work.

Finally, I would like to thank our Chair and Board who bring effective and insightful governance to our organisation, and our amazing team who always go above and beyond to engage with and support our local residents.



**Diana Blackmun**  
**Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire CEO**





**your**  
**voice**  
**counts**



**healthwatch**

Central Bedfordshire

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

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