

The value of listening

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
Annual Report 2023 – 2024



Contents



Message from our Chair P3

About us P4

Year in review P5

How we've made a difference this year P6

Your voice heard at a wider level P7

Listening to your experiences P8

Raising awareness of Pharmacy Services P9



Increasing the update of cervical screening P10

Three ways we have made a difference in the community P12

Hearing from all communities P13

Redesigning a new Musculoskeletal Service (MSK) P14

Advice and information P16

Tackling health inequalities - a follow up to the Denny Review P17



You said, We did P18

Volunteering P22

Finance and future priorities P25

Statutory statements P28

Thank you P36

Acronym answers P37

What they say P38

Message from our CEO P43



“Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people’s views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities.”

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



Message from our Chair

This is my second annual report and I have now completed my first full 12 months as Chair of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB), which despite the learning curve, I have thoroughly enjoyed.

The Integrated Care Board covering Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes (BLMK ICB) was established in 2022, and is now bedded in. Throughout the year we have worked on joint projects with our Healthwatch colleagues across the patch which has enabled us to influence the wider decisions taken by the ICB.

We have continued with all our usual activities and once again had a hugely successful Festival for Older People with over 380 attendees, and in October 2023 we held a Young People's Health and Wellbeing Conference which was attended by over 70 young people. More recently our Young Healthwatch group re-visited Bedford Hospital Paediatric wards to ascertain if any of their recommendations from a previous visit had been implemented. There are very few Young Healthwatch groups in England and we are rightfully very proud of our Young People. They continue to impress, and their achievements can be read in their own Annual Report and of course on our website <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/>.

Our 'Just Ask' events have continued across Central Bedfordshire, and in addition we held several Women's Health Forums, Musculoskeletal Focus Groups, and initiated surveys on 'Using Community Pharmacy Services', all of which allow us to gain valuable feedback from our local community on health and social care services and allows us to drive forward with trying to implement change and improve services for the local community.

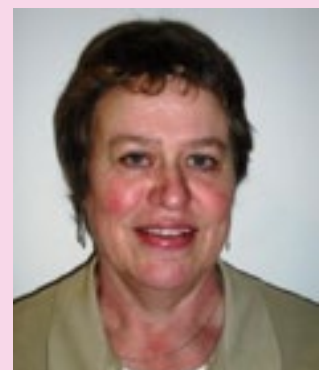
My sincere thanks go to all the staff, those who have recently left and all current staff for their continued hard work and commitment. Special thanks to Diana, CEO who leads the team and of course our volunteers without whom we could not do the work we do.

Despite a number of staff changes at the beginning of 2024 which can be difficult to manage, we move forward with positivity to meet the challenges the year will bring, and we will continue to reach out to the people in Central Bedfordshire to ensure their voices are heard and represented.



"We have had a busy 12 months, and I am pleased to say we have continued to obtain feedback from our population that has enabled us to drive forward and influence change within health and social care services."

Gill Hiscox, Chair, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire



About us

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:

10,911 people

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

14,150 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

9 reports

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

Our most popular report was

Using Community Pharmacy Services

which highlighted a lack of public awareness around a significant number of essential services.



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

53

outstanding volunteers who gave up 272 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

£172,201

which is 6.8% more than the previous year.





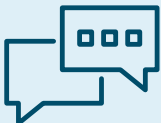



We currently employ

7 staff

who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <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>	 <p>We worked with Healthwatch colleagues to map Diabetes support in our area to help inform a wider project to appoint research champions across BLMK</p>
Summer	 <p>Teaming up with healthcare partners our 'Just Ask' event encouraged local people to share feedback about services, which was then used to influence service improvements</p>	 <p>To increase the number of women offered pre-pregnancy care and advice across BLMK we held a series of focus groups to determine current support offered in our area</p>
Autumn	 <p>To raise awareness of the importance of cervical screening we held interviews to determine what barriers and challenges currently exist, to help improve take up</p>	 <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>
Winter	 <p>Following the announcement of a Pharmacy First model we raised awareness of Pharmacy Services available for residents locally and reported our findings</p>	 <p>We supported service users to feedback their experiences of Musculoskeletal Services to help inform a new countywide procurement contract</p>

Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Central Bedfordshire influence decisions made about services at Bedfordshire, Luton & Milton Keynes Integrated Care System (BLMK ICS) level.

This year we've worked with Healthwatch across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes to achieve:



Women's' Health Forums – starting in November 2023, together with our colleagues from Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes, we held a series of 'Women's Health Forums' to support improving women's health outcomes across BLMK. The forums were aimed at seldom heard women to encourage them to consider their health before pregnancy. Initially the project was designed to determine the number of women offered advice about pre-conception, or who had accessed pre-pregnancy advice, but evolved into including all women's health issues due to the wealth of feedback received. To support the aim of BLMK ICS, which is to improve outcomes for birthing people and their babies, by enhancing pre-conception health, we also conducted an independent survey for people who may be thinking about starting a family, or extending their current family, to inform the ICB's work in this area.

Diabetes Advice and Support across BLMK – During February and March 2024, local Healthwatch from BLMK were commissioned by Health Innovation East (HIE), to map the level of activity across the BLMK footprint that supports people with Diabetes. Having previously successfully led a project to create Diabetes and Research Champions in BLMK to develop research ready communities, HIE were keen to establish opportunities for a future Champion model (including research in community organisations) to link into existing community-based initiatives and interventions. In Central Bedfordshire we focused on current opportunities in schools utilising our Young Healthwatch Group, and the communities we currently work with, to make a valued contribution to a BLMK wide database of existing support in our area.



Redesigning a Musculoskeletal Service (MSK) – together with our Healthwatch colleagues across BLMK we held a series of focus groups during April 2024 to help residents feedback their experience of MSK Services and contribute to the design of a new MSK model across BLMK. Further details about this project can be found on page 14.



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.

Raising awareness of Pharmacy Services

Earlier this year, we published findings of how residents currently use Pharmacy Services in Central Bedfordshire, following the launch of the governments 'Pharmacy First' model. Thanks to this insight Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICB) are working more closely with Pharmacies to implement the 'Pharmacy First' model which will play a key role in supporting self-care, self-management, and urgent care, striving to make better use of Community Pharmacies.

We developed a survey to better understand public attitudes and views to Community Pharmacy and how they are currently used, whether they would utilise their local Pharmacy more if they were aware of additional services that a Pharmacist offers, and/or if they would prefer to speak to a Pharmacist rather than visiting their GP surgery. In total 161 respondents who access Central Bedfordshire Pharmacy Services completed the survey and shared their views and experiences with us.

67%

of respondents would consider using their Pharmacy before contacting other services such as their GP or calling NHS 111.



What did you tell us about using Pharmacy Services?

- ◇ Many people were aware of essential services provided by their Pharmacy, including 'prescribing' (94%), 'dispensing' (86%) and the 'disposal of unwanted or out-of-date medicines' (64%). However, for all other essential services (mentioned in the survey) awareness was low (under 25%).
- ◇ 81% of people indicated they had never been invited for a medical review by their local Pharmacist.
- ◇ 44% never used their Pharmacy to provide advice on a current health problem or long-term health condition.

We recommended that BLMK ICB undertake a media and communication campaign to inform residents of the new changes to Pharmacy Services to encourage behavioural change from patients to access their local Pharmacy, e.g. the unlearning of the 'GP first' mentality.

What difference did this make?

- ◇ BLMK ICB took our recommendations seriously and are working with Pharmacies to enable them to address staff pressures, capacity and resources, and identify challenges and barriers to the initiative going forward.
- ◇ The support will help to instigate a culture change to ensure the public are aware of, and willing to accept, the 'Pharmacy First' model, highlighting the opportunity for patients to obtain prescription only medicines directly from Pharmacists instead of their GP for seven common conditions.

Following the survey and subsequent report, we also created an Information Booklet to ensure residents are fully informed and aware of the 'Pharmacy First' model, which was widely distributed across Central Bedfordshire, see link here: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/pharmacy-first-information-booklet>



Increasing the uptake of cervical screening

In December 2023, we supported Healthwatch England in their campaign to address cervical screening barriers and improve access.

We focused on the experiences and attitudes towards cervical screening and conducted interviews with young women aged between 25–29 who found it challenging to attend screening or had worries about it. We wanted to understand any barriers they faced and the impact they had on young women being able to get screened.

The young women interviewed had received an invitation to a Cervical Screening test within the last few months and had previously attended a screening in the past, but were hesitant about going again due to:

- ◇ Difficulty to fit in the time to make the appointment given work commitments – getting time off during the day was a challenge.
- ◇ Having an unpleasant or stressful experience and general reluctance and hesitation in going again.
- ◇ A lack of confidence that the screening would be handled sensitively.

Suggestions to improve the process and encourage uptake included:

- ◇ More awareness and understanding of pre-existing conditions.
- ◇ Not feeling rushed during the appointment, and to make women feel more comfortable during the test itself.
- ◇ A ‘helpline’ – a number to call for more information about the procedure and what to expect, particularly for those who are feeling anxious.
- ◇ A better explanation included in the invitation letter about why you should attend the screening with straightforward wording. For example, many people are aware the test is looking for abnormal, potentially cancerous cells, but women need to be told it’s not because you may have cancer, it’s to rule it out.
- ◇ For the NHS to improve the booking of the appointment by sending an email with a link to book the screening direct, so you could search for the most convenient time for you. This would avoid the arduous process of getting through to the GP surgery to book an appointment.

What difference did this make?

- ◇ We know that currently, some people find cervical screening challenging or even feel unable to get screened. Being able to show the real experiences of young women will help Healthwatch England to make a more powerful argument for changes to how cervical screening is carried out.
- ◇ Our research, and the research of 10 other local Healthwatch who took part in the campaign, will be included in Healthwatch England’s national report.



“Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire provide an important role in local health and social care services in Central Bedfordshire. They work in partnership with organisations and individuals across the system, building relationships, and acting as a critical friend to services, using the voice of the residents of Central Bedfordshire to encourage improvement. It is fantastic to see the examples showing the difference that they make both to individuals and to services more generally. Thank you to all of the staff and volunteers for the work that you do.”

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



Three ways we have made a difference in 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.

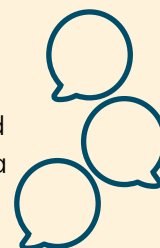
Thanks to our work interviewing service users and their family members accessing Domiciliary Care services provided across Central Bedfordshire, the Council are able to directly address concerns raised about the care being provided and to review, develop and improve home care services across the area. Direct feedback from our reports is extracted and used to inform Central Bedfordshire Council's inspection report, which is a tool used by the Council to assess the quality of care delivered by Providers of adult social care services.



Getting services to involve the public

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

We worked together with Central Bedfordshire Council, Bedford Borough Council and Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICS) to develop a survey to ensure residents had the opportunity to share their opinions on Advocacy Services delivered across BLMK. As a result of feedback received, all three statutory organisations involved in the procurement process for a new Advocacy contract, will ensure that customers remain at the centre of this process.



Improving care over time

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

In the last 12 months we have held regular meetings with colleagues from East London Foundation Trust (ELFT) who are responsible for the provision of mental health services across Central Bedfordshire. As a result of patient feedback shared with ELFT colleagues, this highlighted communication and relationship issues between agencies managing transition from the service into community care. By providing valuable insight this has resulted in ELFT offering HWCB a visit to a specialist unit to better understand the increase in demand and pressures on the system, to be able to help bring about change.



There is a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



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.
- ◇ Visiting local community and support groups encouraging residents to share their health and care experience.

Redesigning a new Musculoskeletal Service (MSK)

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care System (BLMK ICS) gave residents the opportunity to contribute to the design of a new Musculoskeletal Service (MSK) and to feedback their insight on the current service, based on findings from focus groups run by local Healthwatch in Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes during April 2024.

Sessions commissioned by the ICS focused on groups that face inequalities: those that the ICB had not previously engaged with regarding MSK Services and were identified as communities which are underrepresented as users of the service.

As a result of what people shared, BLMK ICS have committed to:

- ◇ Work to design a single model for a community Musculoskeletal Service to start at the end of 2025/26 for all residents of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes.
- ◇ Develop a community service that helps to keep people well at home and support them to live independently, delivered in community settings close to home.
- ◇ Ensuring the experience of those who have previously used the MSK service, or are currently using the service, is reflected and used to deliver improvements for patients, Carers and residents across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's focus group discussion points were based on four key themes:

- ◇ Services working together
- ◇ Communications
- ◇ Prevention / Health Education
- ◇ Access to treatment

Discussions during each session did not always fit with the themes identified, however a wealth of feedback about MSK provision in Central Bedfordshire was provided, with many suggestions for how the service can be improved which will ultimately help to redesign the community MSK service model across BLMK

Recommendations to help design the MSK service across BLMK included:

- ◇ Initiating a 'holistic service' as a key part of MSK service provision, one that considers the entire individual.
- ◇ Creation of a 'Patient Passport' or 'Care Plan' given to every patient or service user, at the beginning of their MSK journey which can be viewed by all healthcare professionals.
- ◇ Instigation of a more 'joined up approach' where the individual is involved at every stage to avoid patients being consistently 'referred back to their GP' if a particular treatment does not work.
- ◇ Creation of a dedicated up to date MSK website to provide information about MSK Services, including 'who to contact if I have any questions', 'how to cancel or rearrange an appointment', 'what are the likely pathways and timescales for treatment', 'how to make a self-referral' and a 'frequently asked questions' section.



“Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has worked with the other local Healthwatch colleagues to help us put together a programme of targeted engagement with communities in relation to the ICB’s re-procurement of Musculoskeletal Services (to help people with muscle and joint pain). This work is happening right now, and HWCB are using their expertise and connections to help us engage with harder to reach communities. The insights gathered will mean we can deliver a service that meets the needs of all of our population.”

Samita Dass, Transformation Manager, System Transformation Team
NHS Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes ICB



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, making 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
- ◇ Helping people to find local support organisations and online forums
- ◇ Supporting people to look after their health during the cost-of-living crisis

Tackling health inequalities – a follow up to the Denny Review

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care System (BLMK ICS) recently commissioned Healthwatch across BLMK to undertake specific projects to support the implementation of the Denny recommendations in Central Bedfordshire and across BLMK.

The Denny Review is a rapid evidence review of the health inequalities experienced by the local communities of BLMK aimed at improving its understanding of health inequalities in its local communities and good practice to address them.

Local resident's feedback from the initial review in late 2022 was used to help improve services and better meet the expectations of people across BLMK. More information can be found in the full Denny Report 2023 here: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/the-denny-review>. Follow up actions to the BLMK wide report are as follows:

- ◇ **Translation and Interpretation services** – working with BLMK Healthwatch colleagues, we have undertaken a deep dive of current translation and interpretation services in our area, to ensure there is a consistent service across all health and care services and translated materials are available in line with legal duties. Our surveys and interviews with hospital and primary care staff and patients has given us insight into the inconsistencies across NHS Provider organisations. The aim of the project is to shape future service provision and enable people to have easier access to translation and interpretation services.
- ◇ **Communication and Advice** – to support the health campaigns as recommended in the Denny Review, we are planning a 'Men's Health Forum' and a 'Wellbeing Forum' during 2024 working in partnership with a Primary Care Network (PCN) in south Bedfordshire. We aim to ensure the forums are accessible to all, and that residents are asked about or offered information in a format or language they can understand. Consideration will be made to help prevent residents being excluded from services due to barriers which include lack of access to digital technology.
- ◇ **Patient Participation Groups (PPG)** – GP Practices are required, within their contract, to create a PPG to support the Practice to deliver a good quality service. To discover the current extent of Practices which have a proactive PPG and receive sufficient investment, we initially developed a survey to understand, from a patient and staff perspective, what they knew about their surgery's PPG. Information, from the evidence gathered, will be used to create a good practice model as a benchmark, and help create a 'toolkit' for each practice to use in the design and delivery of their PPG. By involving our Young Healthwatch Group we are also investigating how younger patients can be involved with their PPG (and incentivised) to bring a new perspective to Primary Care delivery and provision. The aim is to produce a refreshed model for resource, design and delivery of PPG's, which effectively involves their community, and contributes to reducing health inequalities in their neighbourhoods.



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...

Unacceptable Pharmacy Service led to safety concerns

A couple raised safety concerns regarding a local Pharmacy and the current level of service provided to their mother from the only accessible Pharmacy in the area. They were requesting an investigation into the Pharmacy Service as it fell below acceptable standards putting vulnerable patients at risk, which included a shortage of supplies of medication, long wait times, poor customer service, lack of confidence in Pharmacy staff and sudden unannounced closures.

We raised the issue with the Chief Commissioner of the Community Pharmacy BLMK & Northants who agreed to raise a concern with the Pharmacy Director. The issues arose due to staffing levels, a change in management and hours of opening which have all now been addressed by the Pharmacy. The lady was extremely grateful for our help and said:



“Thank you for investigating our concerns. It was helpful to hear about the context for the problems with the Pharmacy Service and that they have been addressed. We appreciate your thoughtful response.”

Lack of communication and support following medical emergency

Following a hospital visit for her daughter’s chest pain, a mother contacted us to explain her daughter was subsequently seen by her GP who referred her to Cardiology as a medical emergency at a nearby hospital. Despite chasing the surgery several times, weeks went by without contact from the hospital and her daughter’s condition deteriorated. After downloading the NHS App, it was discovered that the hospital had rejected the referral on the same day it was made as they do not treat under 18’s, however the surgery had not picked this up. Having spoken with NHS 111, the hospital and the surgery, plus the Urgent Treatment Centre to get help for her daughters worsening condition, the mother felt she was constantly being passed from one service to another without an outcome.

We directly contacted the Practice Manager at the surgery to explain the issue and asked for a full investigation. The surgery have subsequently been in touch with the mother, who told us:



“Really appreciate your correspondence, we did receive some acknowledgement from the Practice Manager - she has responded to the complaint in writing, and it has been posted although we have not received it yet. She has also made an appointment for my daughter – this is the forward care that should be taking place. Once again, thank you for your continued support.”

Challenging Nursing Care assessment and funding issues

The family of a patient contacted us as the patient was refused re-admission to residential care as she required nursing care. The GP had placed the patient on palliative care and the family were informed by the hospital that the patient did not qualify for any funding support. They wanted the patient assessed for a fast-track pathway for Continuing Healthcare (CHC) but were unsure how to proceed.

We spoke with colleagues in the CHC team who advised that the family needed to speak with the Care Home Manager if they felt there had been 'rapid deterioration' as the Manager can complete a fast-track application. If the patient is 'palliative but stable' the Manager can complete a checklist to assess, and if the criteria is met the Manager can make an application for Funded Nursing Care (FNC) using the 'Decision Support Tool' (DST). We explained the process to the family and sent a link to explain the terminology around palliative care, and to the BLMK ICB website, to explain more about funding Continuing Healthcare.



"We are exceedingly grateful for all your help and support."

Inadequate support following a move to a new surgery

A patient struggling with their mental health was experiencing issues accessing their medication after moving to a new surgery. In a very agitated condition, they explained they felt no one was listening and they needed help, adding they were reluctant to leave the house, were struggling financially, rely on a food bank and need help to complete a PIP application.

As the patient had previously been in touch with the Crisis Team, who had made a referral to a local mental health unit, we advised the patient to talk to staff at the unit and ask them to liaise with the surgery regarding the correct medication and dosage. We were able to confirm that a particular medication had stock issues, and this could be a reason for the reduction in quantity or weekly access requests required. We also put the patient in touch with a Social Prescriber to help with activities outside of the house, to support completion of a PIP application and advice on debt management. Links to several websites offering wellbeing support were also supplied.



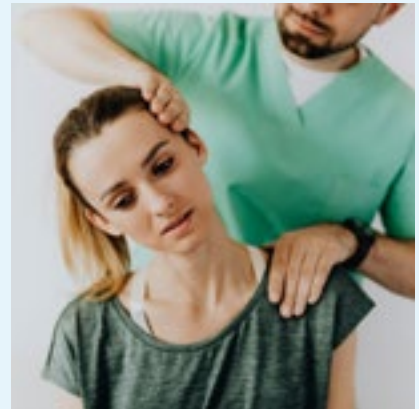
"Thank you for all of your advice, I am very grateful. It is good to feel listened to."

Delay in referral to MSK Services led to increased pain and discomfort

A patient contacted us about a delayed referral to MSK Services for a diagnostic procedure. The patient had waited five months for news about the referral and was finally told that the referral had been refused as the locum had not followed the correct procedure – the patient should have been referred to MSK Services in the first instance.

Having suffered chronic pain throughout this time, the patient was frustrated and angry to learn that she would have to start the whole process again from the beginning.

We advised the patient to formally complain to the surgery and we contacted the Practice Manager to ask for an investigation into the patients concerns. We also added this surgery to our 'Enter & View' programme to visit at a later date.



"I am very grateful for your advice. I would welcome an investigation as I am keen to ensure that this issue does not happen again and other patients do not experience the same delays in the referral procedure."

Child with challenging behaviour struggling to access an NHS Dentist

At one of our recent events a mother approached us to ask for some advice on where she could access an NHS Dentist for her child who has a learning disability with challenging behaviours. She was struggling to secure an NHS dentist due to her child's disability.

We advised her to contact the Community Dental Services (CDS) directly or visit their website, <https://www.communitydentalservices.co.uk>. They currently have branches in Bedford, Luton, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard, as well as others across the UK.

We confirmed that she would need a referral from a dentist, as stated on their website, and her current or previous dentist should be able to refer her if they feel they are no longer able to provide treatment. If she is unable to secure a referral, she was advised to contact the CDS for advice and help.



"Thank you for all your help, I am very grateful. I will let you know how I get on."



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 via our 'Just Ask' outreach activities
- ◇ Carried out enter and view visits to local services to help them improve



“I have been engaged with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire for several years now. It is the sort of organisation that appeals to me because I want to spend my time ‘wisely’ and know that what I do can genuinely ‘make a difference’. Healthwatch staff and volunteers work so hard at working with the NHS and CBC in ensuring that the Central Bedfordshire public have a body that represents them in health and care matters. The atmosphere that they create is ‘can do’ and as such I know that NHS and Council officials do listen to Healthwatch and respond to their reports. This last year I have spent my time at the Festival for Older People, doing visits to people in receipt of domiciliary care and conducting surveys on care standards, and also reading and reporting back on NHS & Charity Bodies Quality Accounts. It takes time, it requires a little knowledge of how organisations work but by feeding back to Healthwatch the views of the public, it allows Healthwatch to feedback to the NHS organisations and can lead to improvements in service. I really enjoy it.”

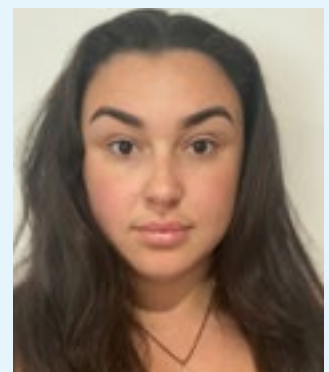


Paul –
HWCB volunteer



“I joined Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire to share my passion for improving health and social care within my local community.

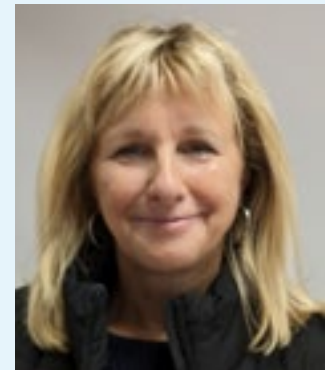
As a Regional Quality Manager for a private mental health provider, I have leveraged my extensive experience in both the NHS and private sectors to enhance care standards and compliance. I am dedicated to amplifying the voices of individuals and communities, ensuring their concerns are addressed and their experiences shape better health and social care services.”



Vanessa –
HWCB Director and
volunteer



"I am very pleased to have recently become a volunteer for Healthwatch. I retired in 2023 from a 40 year career in the NHS. One of my great passions has always been partnership working. There is something special about working across service or organisational boundaries, to improve services and make a difference to the community we serve. In my professional roles I have worked with Healthwatch, utilising their expertise and the voices of local people that they can bring to inform how services should be designed and delivered successfully.



Julie –
HWCB volunteer

So, when I retired, I wanted to use some of the skills I had acquired over the years and learn some more. I can do this by volunteering at Healthwatch. Whether it be engaging with people in the community as part of the wider Healthwatch team, helping in the office or undertaking Enter and View visits, I'm looking forward to this new opportunity."

Do you feel inspired?



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

 www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

 0300 303 8554

 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	£172,201	Expenditure on pay	£111,571
Additional income	£26,364	Non-pay expenditure	£57,456
		Office and management fees	£25,944
Total income	£198,565	Total expenditure	£194,971

Additional income is broken down by:

- ◇ £2,222 received from Bank income.
- ◇ £2,615 received from various providers and support groups for community event.
- ◇ £2,322 received from supporters of a charity event.
- ◇ £1,600 received from CQC for a research project
- ◇ £550 received from Central Bedfordshire Council for a youth project
- ◇ £157 received from an Academy for a youth training project
- ◇ £498 received from Central Bedfordshire Council (Councillor Grant) for a youth project
- ◇ £900 received from Healthwatch England for a youth project

ICS funding

In addition, Healthwatch across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) also receives funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Preconception & Women's Health Forums	£7,000
Joint Mapping of Diabetes Support, including IAG	£4,000
MSK Service Co-design	£4,500



“The ICB relationship with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has continued to strengthen this year with the signing of our landmark Memorandum of Understanding. We’ve accelerated our work together to tackle inequalities, inspired by the Denny Report. Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is an integral partner in our ambition to put resident voice at the centre of everything we do; I am grateful for their support in involving residents in our work to improve our Musculoskeletal Services and to take forward the Women’s Health agenda.”

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

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Continue to develop engagement projects as part of the Denny Review recommendations to ensure all residents have the opportunity to contribute to how services are commissioned and delivered in our local area.
2. Progress and develop activities reaching out to the local community, engaging 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.



“Healthwatch is an integral part of the development of services across all ages and pathways within Central Bedfordshire. They have engaged with ELFT in partnership to support users across the network and in including the user voice in the co-production of the delivery of new and evolving care. We have started to explore additional ways in which we can work with Healthwatch in gaining feedback and influencing future care. 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. We are very pleased to be working so closely with Healthwatch and will 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, Eating Disorders, Early Intervention and Community Rehab Services



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

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of five 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 2023/24 the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as budget setting, future engagement and activities, governance and recruitment of additional Board members.

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 have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of using services.

During 2023/24 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.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish the report on our website at <https://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.



“Over the last year I have been grateful for Healthwatch’s input and support to the Older People’s Network for which I am Co Chair. No matter what the theme or issue is we are discussing their insight and contributions have been invaluable. And on this theme I was delighted to see the Festival for Older People going from strength to strength with this year’s event. It was bigger and better than ever!”

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

The way we work

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





“Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire are a trusted and valued partner who play a critical role in facilitating feedback around the quality, responsiveness and personalised nature of health and care services. The work that they undertake contributes to both our strategic commissioning approach and our contract management processes. By positively engaging with the local authority and our health partners, they work with us to shape a health and care system which better meets the needs of our residents.”

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

Enter and view


This year, we made three Enter and View visits. We made 24 recommendations or actions as a result of this activity.

Location	Reason for visit	Result of visit
<p>Beaumont Park Care Home, Biggleswade</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Care Quality Commission in May 2023 Inspection rated the home as 'Requires Improvement' in all areas. (Report published on 15th June 2023). ◇ Care homes are a Local Healthwatch priority. 	<p>Over six recommendations were included in the report including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Carers to always wear a name badge that is legible to all residents. ◇ The preferred forenames of residents to be displayed on their bedroom door and for staff to ensure that all residents are given a 'choice' regarding their personal care. ◇ For residents' care plans to be explained to them on a regular basis, or to their family member, including when care needs change, so they are aware how they can be involved in its preparation and review. ◇ For residents' complaints about maintenance issues to be listened to and acted upon in a timely manner, i.e., banging doors. ◇ To extend the programme of activities at to include more outdoor activities. <p>The Care Home acted on our recommendations and said :</p> <p>"Thank you for such a positive visit from your team (who were all lovely). Your recommendations we take very seriously and would like to reassure you that we have taken them on board to be addressed. It is nice to have fresh eyes visiting our home as we are always looking for areas of improvement".</p>
<p>Priory Gardens GP Surgery, Dunstable</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ GP surgeries are a Local Healthwatch priority. ◇ To engage with patients of GP Practices and understand how dignity is being respected. 	<p>Over six recommendations were included in the report including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ To notify all patients (via text) that the Practice has recently revised their booking system and phone calls will be answered within a

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	Result of visit
<p>Priory Gardens GP Surgery, Dunstable (cont.d)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Identify examples of good working practice 	<p>certain timeframe (if applicable) if they have not already done so. This would help to alleviate patient anxiety about calling the Practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ To consider a 'parent and child' friendly area to include the availability of books, toys, etc. to keep children occupied whilst waiting to be seen. ◇ To ensure complaints leaflets are more visible and available to patients in the waiting area and on reception. Regular feedback from patients can help to continually improve the way in which services are provided and delivered. ◇ For leaflets, noticeboard information and a TV screen should also be available in different languages to meet the needs of the patient demographic. <p>The Practice were happy with the report and to action the recommendations, they said:</p> <p>“We express our gratitude to Healthwatch for conducting an Enter & View on our surgery. We genuinely appreciate their insights and will actively incorporate their recommendations into our operations and look forward to our continued improvements via patient feedback.”</p>
<p>Potton House Care Home, Biggleswade</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ In November 2023, safeguarding concerns were raised about patient safety at Potton House Care Home to HWCB. ◇ The latest Care Quality Commission Full Inspection in 2019 rated Potton House Care Home as overall 'Good'. 	<p>Over 12 recommendations were included in the report of our visit, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ To ensure that essential information is always displayed in accessible formats, such as easy-read and pictorial versions, prominently throughout the care home, which would facilitate better understanding and engagement from residents.

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	Result of visit
Potton House Care Home, Biggleswade (cont.d) 	<p>However, safety did 'require improvement', for example in the management of Medication Administration Records (MARS).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care homes are a Local Healthwatch priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To revisit communication with staff, by addressing the feedback given and reinforcing understanding of roles, responsibilities and improving relationships between staff and management. Due to staff comments, HWCB recommend a review of ongoing training needs to include more robust training regarding mental health, especially Dementia. To enhancing the admission process to include tours and detailed introductions, and involving relatives in care planning could significantly improve engagement and satisfaction. <p>The final report with our recommendations has been sent to the care home and we are waiting for their response.</p>



“As an ICS we are focussed on improving health outcomes for women. Together with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire we have run a series of events where women have come together to learn more about women’s health & the services available, and to get advice about managing their own health well. As a Women’s Health Champion for our Integrated Care System, I’m proud of the way our partnership with Central Bedfordshire Healthwatch has supported us to engage with residents with diverse backgrounds and experiences.”

Sanhita Chakrabarti, Deputy Medical Director, BLMK ICB, Women’s Health Champion
BLMK ICB, Clinical Lead

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is represented on the Central Bedfordshire Council Health and Wellbeing Board by our CEO, Diana Blackmun. During 2023/24 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 2023/24 to highlight our projects, activities and events and to seek action on our recommendations.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is represented on Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) Integrated Care Partnerships by our CEO, Diana Blackmun and BLMK Integrated Care Boards by our joint Healthwatch representative Maxine Taffertani, CEO, Healthwatch Milton Keynes.



2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
<p>'Just Ask' – outreach project engaging with the community to ensure people's views, concerns and experiences are heard by key decision makers, commissioners and Providers. Seven events held during 2023 where we were joined by our partner organisations and community groups to offer a wealth of information and advice about health and care services delivered locally.</p>	<p>The events held were successful in capturing a variety of issues, concerns and queries raised by members of the public, all of which were responded to or actioned.</p> <p>The events attracted over 400 visitors across seven locations in Central Bedfordshire. More information can be found in our full report here: https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/just-ask-2023</p>
<p>Festival for Older People – held in October 2023, the event is an opportunity for older people, Carers and their family members to find out more about health and care support services available to them within their local community. Over 100 exhibitors were invited to attend the event to offer information and advice about their services.</p>	<p>Over 385 visitors attended the event which offered them the opportunity to talk directly to service Providers. The event generated a wealth of feedback on the day and enabled visitors to take part in local surveys and give their views and experiences about current services. More information can be found in our full report here: https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/festival-for-older-people-2023</p>
<p>Engagement & Wellbeing Event – we worked with our partners at a local practice in south Bedfordshire in May 2024 to co-produce an event and highlight services available to the local community to support their wellbeing with a focus on preventative services.</p>	<p>By working with our partners, we are able to reach many people in the local community to raise awareness of Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, to encourage feedback and offer information and advice about local service provision.</p>



“As Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board, we really value having Central Bedfordshire Healthwatch as a member of the Board. The presentation of the Annual Report is an excellent overview of the valuable work that Healthwatch undertake. As a Board, we are committed to hearing the views of residents and making changes to respond to this feedback when appropriate.”

Cllr Rebecca Hares, Central Bedfordshire Councillor

Thank you

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

**Thank
You**

Acronym answers

BLMK	Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes
BLMK ICB	Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board
BLMK ICS	Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care System
CBC	Central Bedfordshire Council
CDS	Community Dental Services
CHC	Continuing Healthcare
CQC	Care Quality Commission
DST	Decision Support Tool
ELFT	East London NHS Foundation Team
FNC	Funded Nursing Care
HIE	Health Innovation East
HWCB	Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
ICB	Integrated Care Board
ICS	Integrated Care System
MARS	Medication Administration Records
MSK	Musculoskeletal
NHS	National Health Service
PCN	Primary Care Network
PIP	Personal Independence Payments
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



“Just to say a huge thank you for inviting us to your Healthwatch Central Beds Awayday. It was great to share the Cambridge Children’s Hospital project with the team and to answer questions. Some were tough, but that’s good feedback that people want to know the detail!

It was lovely to be with you all for lunch and particularly to meet the young people. Vicky and I both said how much we’d enjoyed the experience.”

Anna Todd, Communications and Engagement Manager
(Cambridge Children’s Hospital project)
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust



“Thank you for allowing the Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to have a stand alongside you at your recent events in mid Bedfordshire. This provided a valuable opportunity to recruit members.

Please pass my thanks to the members of your team who made us welcome at the various locations.”

Jacquie Farhoud, Chair Membership and Communications Committee
Public Governor for the Bedford Borough of the Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



“I am writing to express my appreciation to you for inviting me to attend your simply wonderful Festival for Older People on Friday at the Rufus Centre in Flitwick: it was an experience not to be missed.

The turn-out was huge, and I was able to visit and speak to the stallholders at almost every one of the 47 stalls during my 3 hours with you. I was also so pleased to meet quite a number of your colleagues and talk about their successes and challenges, and also share with you some of the many striking initiatives Louise and her team are developing.

Your 10th anniversary of the Festival, and one to which I hope you will invite me again next year!”

Professor David Croisdale-Appleby OBE, Chair of Healthwatch England



“It was our pleasure to be involved again this year with your Festival for Older People. We enjoyed meeting so many people – those who visited our stand – as well as the others when we visited other stands.

We will definitely put the date of the next Festival in our company diary for next year and look forward to working with Healthwatch many more times before then.”

Maria Collins, Director, Home Instead



“Sending my sincere thanks for an absolutely splendid day out yesterday, for the wellbeing day at the Rufus Centre, Flitwick. There were five of us that went from Manor Court and we are all deeply impressed and full of appreciation.”

Doreen Spence, Manor Court, Marston Moretaine



“It was wonderful meeting you on the 6th October at the Rufus Centre event. It was exceptional, from the organisation, very good attendance of public & the VIP you had to open the Festival.

Well done to you & the team.”

Tarsem Paul , Chair Organ Donation, Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



“I have to say that I thought the event was great, we definitely need to champion women’s healthcare, once again we have been lost in the system while male healthcare takes precedence. Hats off to you and the rest of the ladies who are involved with this.”

Amanda, Attendee, Women’s Health Forum, Dunstable



“Thanks again for hosting on Saturday morning, it was a really useful insight.

My poor Dad has arthritis in his knee, but the GP said there was a long waiting list and there was nothing he could / would do!! My Dad never complains and hasn't done anything about it since he went 2 years ago, although I can see he is in a lot of pain when he bends down. Going on Saturday has given me hope that there may be a possibility that he can receive the help he so deserves.

Thanks again!”

Lucy, Attendee, Women's Health Forum, Biggleswade



“Thank you for providing a copy of your Domiciliary Care report. We will use your findings when engaging with people who use the service, in order to gather their views on the quality of care and support they currently receive.”

Terri Brooks, Adult Social Care Inspector, Care Quality Commission



“I have been a volunteer on a few occasions, and to be honest in some cases the volunteers were regarded differently in a more secondary role, and that does not, for me anyway, go down too well, and that did not happen today. The atmosphere was cordial between everyone, and it was blatantly obvious that volunteers weren't asked to do something that the Staff weren't prepared to do also, and that means a lot. So if there is anything at all that I can do for you, to help out in any way, please just ask.”

Alan, HWCB volunteer

Message from our CEO

We have had a very eventful year at Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, from engaging with the public to working more closely with our health and care partners to ensure the patient and public voice is heard, to make change happen and drive up the quality of services.

In all our work, we continue to actively champion equality, diversity and inclusion to ensure services reach every part of the community, especially those who are seldom heard. We have strengthened our commitment to reducing health inequalities and are currently working on three specific projects for the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to support the implementation of the Denny recommendations (as detailed on page 17) in Central Bedfordshire and across BLMK, making a real difference to people through improvements to services which will better meet their expectations.

Feedback on what people tell us is crucial and we have noticed that people are increasingly needing our help to navigate complex systems that are struggling to cope. Access to GPs, Dentistry services, waiting lists at hospitals and mental health are the top issues we hear about repeatedly, with the strain on some services starting to affect the levels of care and empathy that people experience. However, we continue to support people with advice and information, examples of which can be found in our 'You Said, We Did' section on pages 18-21, and we attend Boards and Committees with health and care leaders to ensure your voice is heard and represented, so we can hold the system to account to ensure improvements are made.

Through our newsletters, e-bulletins, social media posts and our website, we have also kept thousands of people up to date on the issues that matter to them.

Our Young Healthwatch group of volunteers have continued to work on activities and projects to improve outcomes for children and young people, more details of which can be found in their Annual Report 2023/24 here: <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/young-healthwatch-annual-report-2023-24>.

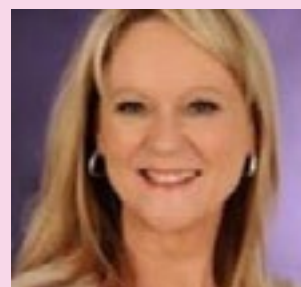
I would like to thank everyone who has shared their health and care experiences with us, and the professionals who have acted on our feedback. Thank you also to our partners in healthcare, and in the voluntary and community sector, for their commitment and positive attitude, and a huge thank you to all 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 and support our residents.



“We continue to actively champion equality, diversity and inclusion to ensure services reach every part of the community, especially those who are seldom heard.”

Diana Blackmun, Chief Executive, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire





healthwatch

Central Bedfordshire

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

 www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

 0300 303 8554

 info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

 [Facebook.com/Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire](https://www.facebook.com/Healthwatch-Central-Bedfordshire)

 [@Healthwatch_cb](https://twitter.com/Healthwatch_cb)

 [hw_centralbeds](https://www.instagram.com/hw_centralbeds)

 [healthwatch-central-bedfordshire](https://www.linkedin.com/company/healthwatch-central-bedfordshire)