



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
Annual Report 2025/26

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 cross-section 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 and 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.

healthwatch
Central Bedfordshire

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**Acting Chief Executive
Healthwatch England**
Chris McCann

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“The NHS plays a vital role in our lives, and we know it faces real challenges. Listening to people’s thoughts about their care is one of the best ways to improve services. Every comment, concern, and compliment helps health and care professionals see what works and what needs to change, so care can be safer and better for everyone.

“We want to say a heartfelt thanks to all the local people who have taken the time to share their experiences, and to the health and social care professionals who have listened and acted on that feedback. Your commitment has helped make a real difference for our community.”

A message from our Chair

This year has shown once again why independent community voices are so important in shaping health and social care services.

Across Central Bedfordshire, residents shared their experiences with us openly and honestly, helping to highlight the challenges people face and the improvements they want to see in the services they rely on every day.

Throughout the year, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has continued to ensure local people's experiences are heard by decision-makers. From raising awareness of barriers to ADHD support and veteran healthcare, to improving access to preventative health services through our outreach work, we have helped ensure lived experience informs change across the health and care system.

We have brought together residents, Carers, community groups, NHS organisations, councils, and voluntary sector partners to identify inequalities, improve understanding of local needs, and collaboratively develop practical solutions. Through our new Community Partnership Groups, engagement events, focus groups, and outreach activity, we have helped ensure communities are not only listened to, but actively involved in shaping services and support.

I would like to thank our volunteers, Board members, staff team, partners, and everyone who shared their experiences with us this year. Your voices continue to drive positive change and help improve health and care services for local people.



Chair
Gill Hiscox



“Real change happens when people feel heard, valued, and involved in shaping the services they use.”

About us

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

We ensure that NHS leaders and decisionmakers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

A Central Bedfordshire where everyone receives the health and care they need, when they need it.



Our mission

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



Our values are:

Equity: We are compassionate and inclusive, building strong connections and empowering the diverse communities across Central Bedfordshire.

Collaboration: We work closely with individuals, community groups, and partners, amplifying the voices of local people to influence positive change.

Impact: We are ambitious about driving improvements that matter to residents. We are accountable to our communities and challenge others to deliver better outcomes.

Independence: We are guided by the people of Central Bedfordshire, offering a trusted, independent voice and acting as a critical friend to health and care decision-makers

Truth: We act with honesty, integrity, and transparency, ensuring that real experiences inform and drive action.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than **38,000** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed seven staff and, our work was supported by 54 volunteers.



Reaching out:

17,420 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

21,310 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as support to access a GP appointment and finding an NHS dentist.



Championing your voice:

We published **12** reports about the improvements people want to see in areas like Men's Health, Understanding ADHD and veterans healthcare.

Our most popular report was 'Understanding ADHD, challenges, barriers and pathways to support', to highlight gaps in information, signposting and post diagnostic support.



Statutory funding:

We're funded by Central Bedfordshire Council. In 2025/26 we received £181,603, which is 5.46% more than last year.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Central Bedfordshire. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Through Central Bedfordshire Council's Older People's Network, we helped ensure older residents' experiences shaped more inclusive, age-friendly services and stronger community connections.



Our involvement in the BLMK ICB Learning and Action Network helped ensure resident experiences informed work to reduce health inequalities, improve access to care, and support more preventative, joined-up health services.



Summer

We heard the views of local people through our Just Ask outreach events, helping residents share their experiences and access information, advice, and support from a range of health and social care partners.



We supported the NHS 10 Year Plan engagement work by helping local people share their experiences and priorities to inform future healthcare planning.



Autumn

Our involvement in the BLMK Community and Mental Health Services Review helped shape future plans for more joined-up community and mental health support across Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes.



We held the Festival for Older People, bringing together over 400 residents and 47 organisations to improve access to information, support, and local services in one accessible community setting.



Winter

Our partnership Men's Health event with the Mayor of Ampthill and 'For Men To Talk' helped men engage with local health services, increase awareness of preventative care, and access wellbeing support in a trusted community environment.



We launched new Community Partnership Groups for Carers, Autistic Adults, and people with Learning Disabilities. Participants shared experiences and collaboratively developed solutions to barriers around support, accessibility, and health inequalities.



Working together for change

We worked with Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICB) and neighbouring Healthwatch organisations to gather residents' experiences of palliative and end of life care and ensure community insight informed future service development across the BLMK area.

This year, we worked with Healthwatch partners across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes to support a shared programme of engagement commissioned by BLMK ICB:



A collaborative approach across BLMK:

Healthwatch organisations across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes carried out local focus groups and community conversations to better understand people's experiences of palliative and end of life care. Bringing together feedback from across BLMK created a stronger regional picture of the challenges people face and what matters most to residents, Carers and families.



Listening to lived experience:

At Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire, we facilitated focus groups with residents, Carers and bereaved family members to explore experiences of communication, care coordination and access to support. Feedback highlighted the importance of earlier support, clearer communication and better support for Carers and families.



Influencing future care across the system:

Our engagement work provided BLMK ICB with valuable community insight to support future planning for palliative and end of life care services. By ensuring local experiences were reflected in system-wide discussions, we helped strengthen plans for more compassionate, coordinated and person-centred care across the BLMK area.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here are some examples of our work in Central Bedfordshire this year:



Bringing health support closer to local people

We helped residents access preventative health support in a trusted community setting.

Through our Festival for Older People, over 400 residents accessed information, advice and wellbeing support from more than 47 organisations. Visitors were able to receive flu vaccinations, hearing checks and blood pressure checks on-site, helping improve access to early intervention and preventative care in the community.



Ensuring local voices influence services

We created opportunities for residents to share experiences and shape local support.

Through our Just Ask engagement work and community outreach, over 700 residents shared feedback about barriers to accessing services, gaps in information and the support they need most. This insight helped strengthen local signposting, informed discussions with providers and ensured community experiences were reflected in service improvement conversations.



Building stronger community connections

We worked with local partners to reduce isolation and improve awareness of support available locally.

By bringing together local organisations, volunteers and residents in accessible community spaces, we helped people connect with services, wellbeing activities and trusted advice. Feedback from visitors and partner organisations showed the events improved awareness of local support, encouraged community participation and helped people feel more informed and connected.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



"Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) plays a valued role in strengthening local health and social care services. Through strong partnerships and an independent, trusted voice, HWCB ensures that the real experiences of local people help to shape meaningful service improvements. The introduction of the community partnership groups is a powerful addition to their work, bringing residents, professionals, and providers together to address issues, influence decisions and improve future service delivery. Thank you to the dedicated staff and volunteers whose commitment continues to make a positive difference to individual lives and to services across Central Bedfordshire."

Suzanne Keen, Commissioning Officer, Strategic Commissioning – Adult Social Care, Health & Housing, Central Bedfordshire Council



Championing community voices to improve ADHD support

Last year, we championed the voices of residents to highlight the urgent need for better ADHD assessment, diagnosis, and support services across Central Bedfordshire.

People living with ADHD, alongside parents, Carers, educators, and health professionals, told us that delays to diagnosis and gaps in care were having a major impact on mental health, education, employment, relationships, and daily life.

What did we do

We launched a survey between April and August 2025 to better understand the experiences of people in Central Bedfordshire seeking an ADHD assessment, diagnosis, or ongoing support.

Key things we heard:



86%

of respondents waiting for an ADHD diagnosis had already been waiting 1–2 years.

72%

of respondents said the information provided while waiting for an assessment was poor.

57%

of respondents told us they received no support at all while waiting for an ADHD assessment.

Our work highlighted how delays, poor communication, and gaps in care are leaving people with ADHD struggling to access the help they need.

What difference did this make?

The voices of local people transformed individual experiences into a collective call for change. Our findings highlighted the real-life impact of delayed diagnosis and limited support, providing health and care leaders with evidence they could not ignore. We used these insights to push for earlier intervention, better communication, and more consistent support, ensuring the experiences of people with ADHD are helping to shape future services.

Improving healthcare support for veterans in Central Bedfordshire

Last year, we listened to the experiences of local veterans to better understand the barriers they face when accessing healthcare and support services across Central Bedfordshire.

Veterans told us that many felt their service-related health needs were not fully recognised, with low awareness of veteran-specific support, difficulties accessing services, and limited understanding of veterans' experiences within healthcare settings. Through surveys, local veterans' groups, and community engagement events, we heard directly about the challenges veterans face navigating care and wellbeing support.

Key things we heard:



96%

of veterans said their GP practice had never asked if they were a veteran.

82%

of veterans said better awareness of services would make it easier to access the support they need.



"I did advise a consultant at a recent out-patients appointment that I was a veteran. He did state in his reply that this was the National Health Service and that wouldn't make any difference."

Our work highlighted how many veterans feel unsupported when accessing healthcare, with low awareness of entitlements, limited referral pathways, and inconsistent understanding of veteran-specific needs across services.

What difference did this make?

Our findings have helped raise awareness of the challenges veterans face when accessing healthcare and support services, strengthening local discussions around improving veteran identification, referral pathways, and awareness of veteran-specific services. We are now working with partners and local organisations to promote more joined-up, veteran-aware healthcare, to improve access to tailored support across Central Bedfordshire.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Central Bedfordshire. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- **Listening Where It Matters:** Our 'Just Ask' events brought local experiences directly into service improvement discussions.
- **Supporting Men's Wellbeing:** Conversations at our Men's Health Event highlighted the information, support, and preventative care men want in their communities.
- **Championing Older People:** Engagement with community cafés and dementia groups helped inform more age-friendly approaches to care and support.
- **Reducing Mental Health Inequalities:** Community-led discussions with mental health teams highlighted barriers to accessing support and opportunities for improvement.



Turning lived experience into action

We help to bring residents and decision-makers together to improve local health and care services.

Working together to improve support and accessibility.

In late 2025, we launched Community Partnership Groups for Carers, Autistic Adults, and people with Learning Disabilities to ensure lived experience directly informed local health and care improvement. By bringing residents, commissioners, providers, and support organisations together, the groups moved beyond identifying problems to collaboratively developing practical solutions to local issues and inequalities.

Autism Partnership Group

Improving post-diagnostic autism support

Autistic adults told us they often felt unsupported after diagnosis, with little follow-up guidance or clear information about available support.

Working alongside commissioners and providers, the group began co-producing a practical post-diagnostic resource to help autistic residents better understand services, support options, and what happens next after diagnosis.



“Instead of just sharing our frustrations, we’re helping design something practical that will support autistic people after diagnosis.”

What difference did this make?

The group began co-producing a practical post-diagnostic support resource to help autistic residents better understand available support and services.

Carers Partnership Group

Strengthening support for unpaid Carers

Carers shared concerns about difficulties accessing assessments, respite, and ongoing support, despite existing Carers policies and strategies.

The group worked collaboratively with commissioners to identify practical improvements around communication, staff awareness, Carers' rights, and access to support, helping inform future service development and review work.



"It's good that this is being looked at, and that our feedback is being taken back to improve things."

What difference did this make?

The discussions helped highlight gaps between Carers' policies and real-life experiences, informing ongoing review work and future improvements to Carers support services.

Learning Disabilities Partnership Group

Improving access to healthcare for people with learning disabilities

People with learning disabilities described barriers accessing GP services and annual health checks, including communication difficulties and lack of reasonable adjustments.

The group brought together people with lived experience, Carers, and health professionals to identify practical solutions and share examples of good practice to help improve accessibility and reduce anxiety around healthcare appointments.



"I liked that people listened to what makes appointments difficult for me and talked about how things could be made easier."

What difference did this make?

The group identified practical ways to improve GP accessibility and reasonable adjustments, helping influence discussions with local health partners.

Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

This year over 16,000 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services

“

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire has been a valued and constructive partner over the past year. Their ability to capture and represent the voices of local people has provided vital insights that help shape and improve our services. We have particularly appreciated their collaborative approach and the way they work alongside partners to drive meaningful, person and community centred change.”

Tasha Newman, Assistant Director, Central Bedfordshire Adult Community Mental Health Teams, Pan Bedfordshire Early Intervention Service, Pan Bedfordshire Eating Disorders Service and ADHD Service, East London Foundation Trust



You said, We did....

Improving access to proactive pharmacy care

A local resident visited our Just Ask stand in Leighton Buzzard and took the opportunity to have a blood pressure check with Healthwatch staff. The reading raised concerns, and we strongly advised her to seek further support from her GP and local Pharmacist.

Following this advice, the resident received a detailed review of her medication, recent health results, and ongoing treatment. The Pharmacist arranged a 24-hour blood pressure monitor and adjusted her medication to provide more personalised care.

What began as a routine check at our community stand led to further investigations and support that helped the resident feel reassured, listened to, and more informed about managing her health.



“When you leave an appointment and think, ‘Wow! Did that really happen?’”

Helping families access autism support

A grandmother contacted us after her autistic grandchild lost their childcare placement due to behavioural challenges, leaving the family struggling to find suitable support.

She told us she felt overwhelmed trying to navigate autism services and did not know where to turn for specialist childcare or post-diagnostic advice.

We provided personalised guidance and connected the family with local SEND support services, specialist childcare advice, and organisations offering help with education, behaviour support, and family wellbeing. By helping them access the right information and support pathways, we ensured the family had clearer options and practical support to move forward.



“It was such a relief to finally know where to go for help and support.”

Supporting a patient left in limbo during changes to NHS weight management services

A local resident contacted us after seeing promotion of our recent Weight Loss Medication survey and recognising similarities with her own experience of accessing NHS weight management support.

The patient had been left in prolonged uncertainty following referral into an NHS weight management pathway. Despite meeting the eligibility criteria and being referred by her GP in October 2025, she received no clear communication regarding waiting times, pathway ownership or next steps.

The ongoing uncertainty was having a serious impact on both her physical and mental wellbeing, and her GP practice was also struggling to obtain clear answers from the service during changes to ICB commissioning arrangements.

We escalated the concerns directly with Central East ICB, liaised with the GP practice, and supported communication between all parties involved, including the patient's MP.

As a result of these discussions, the ICB clarified that tirzepatide prescribing had transitioned into primary care arrangements and the patient's surgery was able to progress her care pathway locally. The patient was subsequently booked in with her GP to begin the next stage of her treatment journey.

What difference did this make?

The patient finally received clarity and a clear route forward after more than seven months of uncertainty.

The case also highlighted wider communication and pathway issues affecting practices and patients during the transition of weight management services across the new ICB structure, helping raise awareness of the need for clearer operational guidance and patient communication moving forward.



“I felt totally disregarded and ignored before contacting Healthwatch. Having support, being listened to and finally getting answers has meant everything to me. I now finally have hope and a plan moving forward.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 1,875 hours to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out Enter and View visits to local services to help them improve



"We have enjoyed a collaborative and beneficial relationship with Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire over many years now, with the last year being no different. The team have always been great at getting us involved in events such as the Festival for Older People, and continue to give us valuable feedback on individual patients' experiences with us, which helps us to clarify and sometimes adjust our processes and communications to ensure that we provide the great care our patients need and expect. Thanks again to your team!"

Jemma O'Brien, GP Engagement and Community Integration Lead/Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, Circle Health Care



At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.



Sue

Sue joined Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire over five years ago to support consultation work linked to Mount Vernon Cancer Care and has since become a dedicated volunteer helping to raise awareness of Healthwatch within local communities.

Sue enjoys speaking with residents about their experiences of health and social care and encouraging people to share their views, knowing that community feedback can help improve local services and ensure people feel heard.

“Every experience matters. By listening to local people, we can help services understand what is working well and where improvements are needed. If people don’t share their views, opportunities for change can be missed and services cannot improve for the future.”

Roger has volunteered with Healthwatch for over 10 years and has played a vital role in helping us reach local communities through our Just Ask events. From helping to set up community events and maintaining equipment, Roger’s practical support and dedication have helped ensure our engagement work runs smoothly across Central Bedfordshire.

“I enjoy helping Healthwatch connect with local communities and making sure people have the opportunity to share their experiences and be heard.”



Roger

Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.co.uk



0300 303 8554



info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

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

Our income and expenditure:

Income	Expenditure		
Annual grant from Government	£181,603	Expenditure on pay	£160,088
Additional income	£33,938	Nonpay expenditure	£ 58,401
		Office and management fee	£22,868
Total income	£215,541	Total Expenditure	£241,357

Additional income is broken down into:

- £1,950 received from Central Bedfordshire Council for work on a CAPVA project
- £15,000 received from Central Bedfordshire Council for facilitation of Community Participation Groups
- £600 grant funding received from ASDA to support a community event
- £885 grant funding received from Mount Vernon Cancer Care centre to facilitate a focus group
- £3,393 received from various sponsorships related to event management
- £1,635 grant funding for Young Healthwatch activities
- £2,475 received in bank interest

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

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

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Joint Project on Health Inequalities	£8,000

Finance and future priorities

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. Improving Inclusion and Reducing Inequality

We will champion the voices of communities often overlooked by health and care systems and work to reduce health inequalities. By improving access to information, support, and services, and challenging barriers that prevent people from being heard, we aim to ensure that everyone, regardless of background or circumstance, can influence the care they receive.

2. Delivering Partnership Groups

We will continue to facilitate three Community Partnership Groups on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council: Autism, Carers, and Learning Disabilities. These groups bring together people with lived experience, Carers, professionals, community organisations, and service providers to identify issues and priorities, share experiences, and work collaboratively to develop practical solutions that improve local services and support. Through partnership working and co-production, the groups will help shape more inclusive, responsive, and person-centred services across Central Bedfordshire.

3. Expanding Our Enter & View Programme

We will increase the number and reach of our Enter & View visits across health and care services. These visits provide valuable firsthand insight into the quality of care environments and patient experience, enabling us to highlight good practice, identify areas for improvement and ensure services are meeting the needs of the communities they serve.

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 six members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as budget setting, future engagement activities and governance. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

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 2025/26 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://healthwatchcentralbedfordshire.org.uk/>, in our regular Newsletter and weekly Ebulletin, and share directly with Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission, Central Bedfordshire Council, Central East Integrated Care Board and key stakeholders.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had one provider who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us.

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

We also gave insight and experiences to decision-makers in Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICB), (now Central East ICB). 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 representatives

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is represented on the Central Bedfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board by our CEO, Diana Blackmun.

During 2025/26, our CEO has effectively carried out this role by highlighting our projects, activities and events and to seek action on our recommendations.

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

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Residential Care Home - Dukeminster	The visit was scheduled following a request from Central Bedfordshire Council to assess and better understand the services delivered at Dukeminster Court.	Wrote a report with a series of recommendations to enhance resident experience and service delivery, which the provider responded to positively and agreed to take forward.
Nursing & Residential Care Home – Elm Lodge	The visit was scheduled following a request from Central Bedfordshire Council considering concerns raised about insufficient meaningful activities, resident engagement, feedback about food quality and the selection of available menu options at Elm Lodge.	Produced a report with recommendations to support improvements in leadership, care quality, and resident experience, which the provider responded to positively through a Service Improvement Plan and the appointment of a permanent Manager.
GP Surgery – Saffron Health	The visit was undertaken in response to patient feedback regarding difficulties accessing appointments and routine care, with the aim of gathering current patient experiences, reviewing patient engagement processes, and supporting ongoing service improvement.	Wrote a report with recommendations to improve patient access, communication, staffing capacity, appointment efficiency, and patient information, which the surgery responded to positively by outlining a range of actions and improvements to enhance patient experience and service delivery.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
GP Surgery – Leighton Road	Initiated in response to patient feedback regarding communication, access to appointments, and difficulties using the eConsult system, with the aim of gathering current patient experiences, reviewing patient engagement processes, and supporting ongoing service improvement at Leighton Road Surgery following the announcement of changes to back-office support arrangements.	We wrote a report with recommendations to improve the eConsult and triage experience, communication, continuity of care, complaints handling, and patient support, which the Surgery and ELFT responded to positively by outlining existing measures, planned actions, and a commitment to ongoing service improvement and regular progress updates
GP Surgery – Toddington	To explore patient access and service experiences, with a particular focus on telephone wait times, online booking processes and service consistency.	Wrote a report with recommendations. The report is with the Provider for a response.



Statutory statements

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
BLMK LAN Learning Sessions	Contributed resident insight to collaborative improvement planning, ensuring lived experience remained central to future system developments.
MHA Carers Mental Health Workshop	Improved understanding of the challenges faced by mental health Carers and strengthened awareness of available support networks.
Beds & Luton Children’s Whole Service Meeting	Increased professional awareness of CAPVA (presented HWCB report) and promoted stronger multi-agency collaboration to improve support for affected families.
Understanding ADHD Report	Highlighted the significant barriers faced by residents seeking ADHD support and set out recommendations for more timely, coordinated, and neuro-affirming services.
Carers Support Services Tender Evaluation	Ensured Carers lived experiences meaningfully informed procurement scoring and future service recommendations.
‘Serving Those Who Served’ Veterans Report	Influenced system partners to act on improving veteran identification, support pathways, and access to tailored healthcare services.
‘Just Ask’ Outreach Programme	Connected 700+ residents across Central Bedfordshire to health, social care and community services. Gathered vital insights to inform service improvement and bridge gaps in local care.

Statutory statements

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Festival For Older People 2025	Connected over 400 residents and 47 organisations, increasing access to preventative services, strengthening community connections and supporting independence for older people.
CBC Carers Sitting Service	Supported plans for public consultation to ensure Carers' experiences help shape future development of the Sitting Service.
IMPAKT Domestic Abuse Networking Event	Strengthened understanding of domestic abuse support pathways to improve signposting and support for residents experiencing abuse.
Understanding ADHD Report	Highlighted the significant barriers faced by residents seeking ADHD support and set out recommendations for more timely, coordinated, and neuro-affirming services.
Working Together for Change	Contributed Healthwatch perspectives to national NHS transformation discussions, ensuring local community experiences inform future health system planning.
Work Experience Programme	Developed a structured placement programme to inspire young people, build practical skills, and increase awareness of careers in community engagement and health advocacy.
Community Pharmacy Collaboration	Strengthened collaboration with community pharmacy leaders to improve local access to care and enhance public awareness of pharmacy services.

Statutory statements

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Community Partnership Boards	Launched and facilitated inclusive Carers, Autism and Learning Disabilities Boards, embedding lived experience into governance, commissioning, service planning and future improvement activity.
Carers Support Services Procurement	Provided independent oversight to ensure transparent decision-making and the Carer voice informed future adult Carers service commissioning.
Women's Health Stakeholder Forum	Amplified women's lived experience to support system-wide improvement in women's health pathways, cancer services and person-centred care.
Patient Experience Council Workshop	Contributed to strategic discussions on embedding patient experience and lived insight into future health and care transformation.
End of Life Focus Groups	Gathered sensitive lived experience insight to inform future engagement, service improvement and equitable person-centred end of life care across BLMK.
Volunteer Participation in 2025 PLACE (Patient Led Assessments of the Care Environment) Visits at Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust	Six Healthwatch volunteers contributed to the national PLACE programme, offering valuable insights into hospital environments from a community perspective. Their involvement supported improvements in patient experience and ensured local voices were reflected in care environment assessments.
Men's Health Event	Engaged 70+ participants through accessible health checks, advice and signposting, demonstrating strong demand for community-based preventative support for men.

Statutory statements

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Cancer Services Consultation Focus Group	Ensured patient insight and lived experience directly informed early-stage cancer service planning, supporting more patient-centred commissioning and improved responsiveness to local need.
MH Association Loss & Bereavement Workshop	Increased community awareness and confidence around end-of-life preparation and bereavement support, helping individuals and families feel better informed and prepared.
Understanding and Supporting People with Personality Disorder & Complex Emotional Needs	Improved staff and community understanding of complex emotional needs, strengthening communication approaches and promoting more inclusive, person-centred support.
Amphill Community Café	Increased community awareness of Healthwatch services, gathered local feedback to inform future engagement priorities and encouraged participation in current health and care surveys.
Bennetts Community Café	Strengthened engagement with local residents through targeted conversations, capturing feedback on autism support needs and signposting families to relevant services and resources.
Everyone Active, Dunstable Leisure Centre	Increased visibility of Healthwatch within the community, gathered public feedback on local health and care services and strengthened community connections through face-to-face engagement.

A message from our Chief Executive

This year has reinforced the vital role independent community insight plays in improving health and care services across Central Bedfordshire. As pressures on the NHS and social care continue to grow, we have remained committed to ensuring local people's experiences are heard, understood, and used to influence positive change.

Throughout the year, more residents turned to us for support and guidance in navigating increasingly complex systems, particularly around GP access, dentistry, mental health, social care and hospital services.

Through focus groups, Enter and View visits, outreach events, and community engagement, we have gathered valuable insight that has helped highlight barriers to care, identify inequalities, and inform discussions with commissioners, providers, and system leaders.

Our Community Partnership Groups have continued to play an important role in bringing together Carers, autistic people, individuals with learning disabilities, professionals, and community organisations to identify challenges and help shape local solutions collaboratively.

We have also championed issues that matter to local communities, including hosting a Men's Health event focused on raising awareness of men's physical and mental health, reducing stigma, and improving access to support and services.

As an independent voice for local people, we continue to play a vital role in ensuring services remain connected to the real experiences of the communities they serve. While national conversations continue about the future of Healthwatch and public involvement in health and care, the importance of trusted community insight and advocacy remains clear.

Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences with us this year. Your voice drives our work and helps create positive change. Thank you also to our partners, volunteers, Board members, Chair, and staff team for their continued dedication and commitment to improving health and care for local people.



Chief Executive
Diana Blackmun



Our role as an independent voice for local people has never been more important.

**Diana Blackmun, Chief Executive Officer,
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



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