



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Dorset

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“The impact that local Healthwatch have is vitally important. Healthwatch are empowering their communities to share their experiences. They’re changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people’s views are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities.”

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our chair

Our focus this year has been on responding to everything you have told us about your experience of local health and care services.

You have told us that access to services is still difficult especially GP, dentistry and pharmacy services. We shared all the information you provided with decision-makers within NHS Dorset as well as local councillors and MPs.

Over 900 of you took the time to complete our survey on local pharmacy services. The findings have been welcomed by those who are responsible for assessing and documenting local need and will form a key strand within the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment.

But we know that we need to hear everybody's voice if services are to get better and work for everyone. This year we have specifically engaged with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, and with people who are experiencing homelessness. Making sure that we recruit a diverse range of volunteers, including young people, also helps to ensure our work remains relevant.

This year, we welcomed two new members of staff: Lindsey, Volunteer Officer and Adele, Information and Signposting Officer, who both hit the ground running and have already made an enormous contribution.



“Thank you to everyone who has supported and contributed to our work, including those who have acted on our recommendations, and to all of you who have so generously shared your experiences with us in order to help to make services in Dorset and BCP better for others.”

Viv Aird, Healthwatch Dorset Chair

About us

Healthwatch Dorset is your local health and social care champion

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



Our vision

For health and care services in Dorset and BCP to achieve the best possible outcomes for local people and to be holistic, tailored to the needs of the individual and delivered with compassion.



Our mission

To achieve this by: Ensuring health and care services are informed and shaped by the views and experiences of local people.



Our values are:

- **Independent.** Our agenda is driven by local people. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.
- **Inclusive.** We're compassionate and focused on reducing health inequalities.
- **Influential.** We're ambitious about creating change and hold commissioners and providers to account.
- **Credible.** We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.
- **Collaborative.** We build strong connections and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Our year in numbers

We supported more than 7,101 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ four staff and our work is supported by 71 volunteers.

Reaching out:



1,869 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

5,232 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as mental health support and finding an NHS dentist.

Championing your voice:



We published **three reports** about the improvements people would like to see in:

- Health inequalities for people experiencing homelessness.
- Development of Boscombe Integrated Neighbourhood Team.
- Pharmacy services.

Our most popular report was [*Voiceless, unheard and socially excluded: Accessing health and care while homeless or vulnerably housed.*](#)

Statutory funding:



We're funded by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council and Dorset Council.

In 2024/25, we received **£201,927**.

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 Dorset. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Our host, Evolving Communities, were delighted to be awarded the contract to continue delivering Healthwatch across Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole and Dorset for another three years.



We celebrated Volunteers' Week with a series of local events, social media promotions and by sharing a video we made with Liv, one of our amazing young volunteers.



Summer

Our interview with Janet from Volunteer Centre Dorset highlighted the impact they make when supporting people to leave hospital in Dorset. "Sometimes the smallest things can have the biggest impact."



We published our report *Voicelless, unheard and socially excluded* which is about accessing health and care services while homeless or vulnerably housed.



Autumn

We launched our pharmacy survey to find out more about local people's experiences of services and their understanding of the new initiative, Pharmacy First.



We worked with community groups, the voluntary sector and local people in Boscombe, gathering feedback to inform the development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams.



Winter

Our volunteers received training and support to carry out interviews with carers who are looking after someone receiving care through the Hospital at Home service.



We shared our pharmacy survey results with Public Health Dorset, to inform the local Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, and with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Pharmacy.



Working together for change

We've worked with other organisations to ensure people's experiences of care in Dorset are heard at the regional level, and we work closely with education, community and voluntary sectors.

This year, we've worked collaboratively to achieve the following:

A collaborative project on homelessness:



I am More Than... is a project delivered jointly by Bournemouth University, NHS Dorset, HealthBus Trust and The Lantern Trust to hear and understand the unique experiences of those living, or having experienced, homelessness. We have worked with the project team to share learning and to present our process and report at events. Together, we have been able to push the need for co-production in health services for people who are homeless.

The big conversation:



We supported the Healthwatch England and Care Quality Commission *Share for Better Care* campaign in February 2025. It encouraged people to share their stories to help improve health and care and was supported by a range of national organisations including the Race Equality Foundation, National Voices, the Patients Association, VoiceAbility and Disability Rights UK. By working together, we helped more people have their say and saw our own enquiries double during the campaign.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



During our [community engagement project](#) this year, we interviewed Josh from BCHA, who manages the new Access Wellbeing Hub in Boscombe. The Hub is a warm and welcoming space where people can access support on their terms, when and where they need it. By building strong relationships in local communities, we raise awareness and support people better.

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 Dorset this year.

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

When we first spoke to Joe in March 2024, he was experiencing homelessness and suffering from chronic alcoholism. Nine months later, [we interviewed Joe](#) again and his story is now very different, showing just how vital it is not to give up, and to provide the right support, care and treatment at the right time.

Getting services to involve the public



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

Our volunteers take part in yearly Patient-Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE). The main purpose of these visits is to get the patient view and our volunteers are able to explain how care settings really feel, with a view to making improvements for the people visiting them. Last year one of our new volunteers, [Gary, blogged about his experience](#).

Improving care over time



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

In our 2022 [Carers report](#), we recommended that hospitals better support unpaid carers by having a named contact and consistent use of Carer Passports and/or *This Is Me* forms.

[Our follow up](#) revealed that the local NHS delivered a training package to make sure carers of patients who come into the hospital are supported and looked after. Our local hospitals now have named Carers Leads and support the promotion of Carers Passports.

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.



Listening to your experiences

Championing community concerns to inform future pharmacy services in Dorset

This year, we collected the views of 907 people on pharmacy services.

Locally we had been hearing from people facing issues with medicine shortages and with pharmacy closures. We wanted to find out more about people's experience of Pharmacy First.



"If I can't access the medication, then I have to deal with the symptoms of ADHD which can be pretty severe. There are times when I feel very agitated." Jamie, survey respondent

What did we do?

We launched a survey to better understand the impact pharmacy closures and problems getting medication were having on local people. We also gathered case studies to bring the issues to life.

Key things we heard:



63%

of people who took part in our survey had not heard of Pharmacy First.

39%

told us they'd had problems getting their medication.

29%

use an online pharmacy and feedback was mostly positive.

People told us they find their local pharmacy easy to access when it's within walking distance or has parking, has friendly staff and when its opening hours suit them. Pharmacy closures and reduced hours are having a significant impact on access for people in more rural areas.

What difference did this make?

Our [report findings](#) are being used by Public Health Dorset to inform the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment and by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Pharmacy. We're working with NHS Dorset, the local Pharmacy Committee and GP Alliance to share your feedback and improve local access.

Listening to your experiences

Boscombe Voices

Boscombe is the second pilot area identified for the development of an Integrated Neighbourhood Team (INT). This is a group of practitioners from primary care, community care, adult social care, children and young people services, and the voluntary sector who work closely together.

Census data identifies areas of Boscombe as being among the most deprived in the South West. High levels of deprivation play a significant role in health inequalities.

What did we do?

We spoke with over 180 local people about their experiences. Their stories highlight the need for improved access to GPs and NHS dental services, stronger community mental health services and more continuity in social care.

Key things we heard:



While some specialist services work well, access to community mental health support and treatment for leg ulcers remains difficult.

Long wait times by phone and a lack of available appointments make it challenging for residents to access primary care.



“Without trying to understand the perspective of people who live and work in local communities, INTs will not be able to deliver the change that the NHS desperately needs.” Jack Blankley, BCP Council

We used our findings to make recommendations to help Our Dorset, the Integrated Care System, shape the INT for Boscombe and ensure it meets the community's needs effectively.

What difference did this make?

We shared [our report](#) with Our Dorset and the NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board to amplify the voices of Boscombe residents and inform the development of INTs. We are working with other INT project groups around the county to help them involve local people by sharing our learning and community engagement techniques.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Dorset. 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:

- Working with people experiencing homelessness and the groups who support them.
- Diversifying our volunteer bank by reaching out to colleges and schools.
- Ensuring that the voices of our local community are heard by local NHS leaders and the Integrated Care System.



Hearing from all communities

Voiceless, unheard and socially excluded

We investigated access to health and care for people experiencing homelessness or vulnerable housing.

[Our report](#) highlights the concerning disparities in health outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and is rich with firsthand and poignant accounts from service users.



“There is no accountability for people who are dying on the streets. Services are very limited to us.” Service user

What difference did this make?

We presented our findings at the Integrated Care Board meeting in January 2025 and NHS Dorset are now developing a Homeless Health Plan to meet all six of our recommendations. We continue to work with the people who shared their stories in our report to raise awareness and remove systemic barriers to care.

Supporting the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community to have their say

Sharing experiences to support mental health and influence the NHS 10 Year Plan.

On #BlueMonday (20 January 2025), we shared a [video of our volunteer Michael](#) talking to us about his experience of depression. Michael is from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community in Dorset and is passionate about helping others with their mental health and drug and alcohol addiction.

What difference did this make?

This led to us holding a focus group with members of the local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community in Bourne Valley, Poole to gather their feedback as part of the public consultation for development of the NHS 10 Year Plan. The group raised concerns about digital exclusion, their fear of losing face-to-face appointments, lack of person-centred care and the need for more community support. We shared this with NHS Dorset and NHS England to feed into the national consultation.

Information and signposting

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 5,232 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

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.



Alderney Hospital improves patient environment

We received anonymous feedback about Alderney Hospital in Poole.



“The consulting room at Alderney Hospital was bleak to say the least – cold, damp and empty other than a desk, computer and chairs. No soft furnishings, no pictures. For a person (and their accompanying family or friends) facing the reality of dementia, there could be so much done at little cost to make them feel comfortable, safe and more positive about the future while attending appointments. There could also have been various dementia-friendly products available to view and leaflets/guides from various dementia charities.”

We shared this with the hospital and the site’s manager tells us that they have now made more dementia information available in the consulting room. They've put in a bid to get some funds to decorate and brighten up the area and the carpets have been cleaned.

More than just signposting

We have strong links in the community and voluntary sector.

Drug and alcohol support: A volunteer at a local mental health support charity asked for support in the community for drug and alcohol dependency. The charity contacted us to ask for some advice.

We spoke to a support worker from [WithYou](#), who provide drug and alcohol support in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. Our Engagement Officer then met with the volunteer and the charity's Manager to support them in making the referral for their volunteer. The charity now knows how to refer to drug and alcohol support in the future.

Fitness referral: A person we worked with on our homelessness project asked for help to get his fitness levels up and find a local sports group. We arranged a one-to-one personal training fitness session, a tailored programme, and provided details of the Men in Mind AFC Bournemouth group, who provide free activity sessions. The client felt he was then fit enough to participate, and his support worker went with him to the first session to help build his confidence.



“Thank you Healthwatch Dorset for your kind support and care.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

We have **71** fantastic volunteers, and this year they have given **638** 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:

- Interviewed carers to find out more about Hospital at Home services.
- Collected people's experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Carried out PLACE visits to local services to help them improve.



Showcasing volunteer impact

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.



“Completing the communication training with Healthwatch Dorset gave me the skills and confidence I needed.”

Tilly is a Healthwatch Dorset volunteer and an undergraduate in her final year of studying nutrition at Bournemouth University.



“The person I interviewed for the Hospital at Home project also gave me some lovely feedback about how she found the interview, which gave me a lot of confidence and I felt really prepared. I know that if I were to do interviews again, I now have the skills.” Tilly



“I am a retired nurse and I joined Healthwatch Dorset 18 months ago when I moved to the area. Everyone has been super friendly and I felt valued from the outset. It has helped me learn new skills, as well as drawing on and building on those I already had.” Val

Ziyoda was keen to volunteer but had found limited options for under 18-year olds. We’ve supported her to set up a Healthwatch Dorset youth group and design a survey.



“Working with Healthwatch Dorset has given me skills such as writing professional emails, which is something that I’ve never done before, and I would say that now I’m quite good at it.” Ziyoda



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.



healthwatchdorset.co.uk



0300 111 0102



enquiries@healthwatchdorset.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from our local authorities under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from BCP Council and Dorset Council	£201,927	Expenditure on pay	£119,725
Additional income	£440	Non-pay expenditure	£18,878
		Office and management fee	£61,000
Total income	£202,367	Total Expenditure	£199,603

Additional income

£440 bursary funding received from Healthwatch England to attend their national conference.

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 focus will be on communication, information and the digital divide. This will include projects with young people, a project on urgent care with Dorset County Hospital and engagement work with groups facing health inequalities across Dorset.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Working with young people to learn how they search for and access care.
2. Reaching out to diverse groups across Dorset to learn about the digital divide.
3. Gathering in-depth interviews to inform urgent care improvements.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Dorset, The Bridge, Chaseside, Bournemouth, BH7 7BX.

Healthwatch Dorset is hosted by Evolving Communities CIC, a community interest company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with company number 08464602. The registered office is at Unit 2, Hampton Park West, Melksham, SN12 6LH.

Healthwatch Dorset 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 Dorset Board consists of five 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 2024/25, the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as our work priorities and redefining our vision and values. 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 can provide us with insight into their experiences of using health and care services.

During 2024/25, we have been available by phone, email and via an online form on our website, maintained our social media presence, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website, issue a press release, share it through our eNews and make printed copies available.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

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

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

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

For example, in our local authority areas, we take information to the Health and Wellbeing Boards and to the Health Scrutiny Committees.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Dorset Integrated Care System. For example, we attend NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board meetings and have a seat on the Integrated Care Partnership. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Dorset is represented on the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board by Margaret Guy, our Vice Chair and on the BCP Health and Wellbeing Board by Louise Bate, Healthwatch Dorset Manager.

During 2024/25, our representatives have effectively carried out this role by attending meetings and development sessions and by sharing Healthwatch Dorset insights and reports.

Healthwatch Dorset is represented on the Dorset Integrated Care Partnership and the Integrated Care Board by Louise Bate and on the System Quality Group by Margaret Guy.

Statutory statements

Enter and View

Last year we did not carry out any Enter and View visits.

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
1. Health inequalities: People experiencing homelessness	We made six recommendations and NHS Dorset will reflect these, alongside the findings from the <i>I am More Than</i> project that we collaborated on, to refresh their Homeless Health Plan in 2025.
2. Integrated Neighbourhood Teams: Boscome Voices	<p>We recommended that the Integrated Care System commit to ongoing community engagement to design and deliver Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. We are working with them to share the learning from our project on their website as a Listening Better exercise.</p> <p>We are working directly with Purbeck Primary Care Network to support their INT project team.</p>
3. Local pharmacies	<p>Our findings are being used to inform the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment for Dorset.</p> <p>We shared our survey results and insights with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Pharmacy, which is due to publish its report in 2025.</p>



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