



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham
Annual report 2025/26

Contents

A message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Our year in numbers	5
A year of making a difference	6
Working together for change	7
Making a difference in the community	8
Listening to your experiences	9
Hearing from all communities	11
Information and signposting	17
Showcasing volunteer impact	19
Finance and future priorities	17
Statutory statements	23

A message from our chair

I am pleased to present our Annual Report, which demonstrates the strategic value of listening to local people and using their experiences to influence improvement across health and social care.

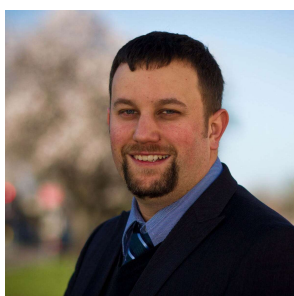
This has been a year of change for residents, communities and the wider system, as national reform increasingly focuses on three major shifts: moving care from hospital to community, from analogue to digital, and from sickness to prevention. In this changing landscape, our role is clear: to ensure that local insight, lived experience and the voices of those most at risk of being overlooked remain central to decision-making, service design and accountability. It is imperative that an independent voice is needed for local people in whatever is to come next.

Over the year, 1,328 people shared their experiences with us through outreach, surveys, focus groups, Enter and View visits, and work with voluntary, faith and neighbourhood partners. This broad engagement provides a strong evidence base, helping to show what is working well, and where inequalities or barriers remain.

It also enabled us to bring local intelligence into wider conversations across North East London, strengthening the link between residents' experiences and system-level planning. By translating what people tell us into clear insight and practical recommendations, we helped partners understand what needs to improve and why it matters in residents' daily lives.

As health and care services respond to increasing demand, financial pressure and reform, independent community insight will be critical to ensuring change delivers real benefits for residents. The development of neighbourhood health offers a significant opportunity to bring services closer to people, strengthen prevention and improve coordination between all partners .

We would like to thank everyone who trusted us with their story, all our volunteers, board members, staff and partners for their continued support.



“Our priority is to ensure these changes are shaped with communities, not simply delivered to them, and that fairness, accessibility and lived experience remain at the heart of future models of care”

About us

Healthwatch **Barking and Dagenham** 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

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

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



Our values are:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than **2000** people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed **3** staff and, our work was supported by **17** volunteers.



Reaching out:

1328 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

111 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as **primary care** and **secondary care**.



Championing your voice:

We published **7** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like social care and women's health.

Our most popular report was "Carers Needs" highlighting people's struggles when providing informal care to loved ones.



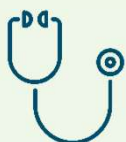
Statutory funding:

We're funded by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. In 2025/26 we received £118618.8

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 **Barking and Dagenham**. Here are a few highlights.

We shared our findings with the London Ambulance Service from individuals who had to call 999 or 111 during pregnancy or 12 months postpartum.



We attended a number of events that allowed us to engage with people from different communities, including Ukrainians, Indians, Africans, Caribbeans, and freshers.



Our volunteers took part in planning our Family Carers project, ensuring this was influenced by local people.



We hosted our annual volunteer event to show appreciation and thank our volunteers for their time.



We provided information to the local community on Pharmacy First, enabling them to make informed decisions and get faster care.



We carried out two Enter and View visits focused on women's health outpatient services.



We carried out an Enter View at a GP practice, highlighting good practice and areas where patients felt needed improvements.



Our annual survey influenced our work plan for next year.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighboring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in **Barking and Dagenham** are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services in North East London.

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across **North East London** to achieve the following:



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

In North East London, this collaborative approach is delivered through the Community Insights Programme with the Integrated Care Board. The programme brings together the experiences of 193,448 local people, up from 163,340 last year, and has identified 655,165 issues, concerns and examples of good practice, compared with 540,000 previously. Using the Community Insights System, the eight Healthwatch organisations have produced 1,040 reports and 396 dashboards on GP and hospital services alone, up from 822 reports and 317 dashboards. This gives Healthwatch and system partners a strong evidence base to identify trends, understand differences between communities and inform planning, commissioning and service improvement.



Safer Surgeries:

Along with eight other Healthwatch organisations across North East London, we reviewed the GP registration process for people who may not have formal identification. This included assessing how many local practices had signed up to the Safe Surgeries commitment, developed by Doctors of the World, and exploring how accessible registration processes were for people who face barriers to care. This work strengthened regional collaboration and highlighted opportunities for services to become more inclusive, accessible, and responsive.

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 **Barking and Dagenham** this year:



Creating empathy through lived experiences

Feedback helped the service understand both what patients value and where communication could be improved.

Our Enter and View visit to the Community Diagnostic Centre (CDC) at Barking Community Hospital identified several areas of positive practice, including welcoming and professional staff, efficient reception processes, and a clean, comfortable environment. Feedback also highlighted opportunities to strengthen communication, particularly around what patients can expect during appointments, how they can raise questions, when results will be available, and how to access interpretation services.

The service welcomed our recommendations and is using patient feedback to reinforce existing good practice while driving improvements. Progress is being shared through ongoing feedback monitoring and visible "You Said, We Did" updates, helping patients see how their experiences are shaping service delivery.



Improving care over time

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

The team attended a Workshop and Discussion about the planning process for the NEL ICB system strategy shift as part of the NHS 10 Year Plan. Health Representatives across NEL were present, and discussion groups took place to consider the NEL ICB strategy. Healthwatch contributed to these discussions by highlighting the importance of empowering vulnerable communities to communicate confidently with healthcare practitioners, particularly those from underserved communities. We also emphasised the need to include children and young people in prevention strategies to support sustainable, long-term illness and disease prevention. NEL ICB will acknowledge our comments in their strategy shift.

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 listened to people from across our community by attending a wide range of events and engaging with people of different ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities. Their experiences of health and social care helped us identify what's working, highlight areas for improvement, and ensure local voices influenced positive change.



Championing community voices to improve support for unpaid carers

Last year, we listened to unpaid family carers to understand the pressures they face.

We explored carers' health and wellbeing, awareness of carer assessments, access to support, involvement in care decisions, and barriers linked to culture, language and communication.

What did we do

We listened to unpaid carers through surveys, focus groups and case studies, working with community organisations and carers' networks to hear from people from different backgrounds.

Key things we heard:



78%

of carers felt involved in decisions about the care and treatment of the person they support.

61%

said services were not coordinated in a way that reduced their burden.

What difference did this make?

Our evidence helped shape the borough's JSNA Deep Dive on Carers' Health Needs by bringing unpaid carers lived experiences into the assessment. It highlighted gaps in recognition, support, information, culturally sensitive services and carers' involvement in planning. The JSNA signposted readers to our carers lived experience report, recognising it as a valuable source of community insight.

West One PCN identified actions to improve carer identification, assessments, social prescribing and communication; NELFT confirmed the recommendations align with its Carers Strategy; and BHRUT identified actions to strengthen carer support plans, staff awareness and service improvement.

Pharmacy First

This year, we explored how residents are experiencing the NHS Pharmacy First service, assessing its impact, understanding levels of public awareness, and identifying examples of best practice.

Our findings were informed by feedback from 154 residents, alongside mystery shopping visits to 18 pharmacies across Barking and Dagenham. Together, these insights provided a picture of how the service is being delivered and experienced locally.

Key things we heard:



46%

of respondents had never heard of Pharmacy First

56%

of respondents said they had heard of Pharmacy First

80%

of respondents said their visit resolved the issue they went to see the pharmacist for.

81%

of respondents were satisfied with the care they received.

Mystery shopping visits found that information about the service was not consistently displayed, with some pharmacies lacking visible posters, leaflets or promotional materials.

Based on these findings, we called for stronger public awareness campaigns, improved promotion within pharmacies and clearer signposting from GP practices and NHS services.

What difference did this make?

Our report In response, Community Pharmacy North East London committed to working with pharmacies across Barking and Dagenham to improve awareness and promotion of the service, helping more residents access timely care through their local pharmacy.

Hearing from all communities

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

Over the past year, Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham has taken a proactive approach across the borough, creating opportunities for residents to share their views and experiences.

To reach a wider range of communities:

- we worked with the Faith Leaders Network,
- held regular pop-up sessions
- gathered insight through voluntary sector organisations to support our projects.





Reaching Communities through events across the borough

Every member of our community should have the opportunity to share their story and help shape services that meet their needs. This year, we took a targeted and inclusive approach to engagement to ensure we heard from people whose voices are too often missing from conversations about health and care.

We reached a wide range of communities by attending local events and meeting people where they are. This included outreach at the Ukrainian Family Fun Day, Indian Independence Day, the African and Caribbean Health Event, the Mental Health Crisis service launch, and a Diabetes Awareness event. Engaging in these settings enabled us to speak directly with residents who may not otherwise be involved in formal consultation processes. Many of the people we met face barriers linked to language, culture, mental health, caring responsibilities or socio-economic disadvantage.

What difference did this make?

The insight residents shared helped us better understand lived experiences, highlight inequalities in access, and ensure local voices were reflected in conversations with service providers, NHS partners and wider system leaders. Where relevant, this feedback also informed our project work and shaped the recommendations we made throughout the year.

Working with the Faith Leaders Network

Faith Leaders Network

We also continued our work with the Faith Leaders' Network, recognising the vital role that faith communities play in supporting local wellbeing and sharing trusted information with residents. Partnership working remains central to Healthwatch's approach, helping to ensure that residents have meaningful opportunities to be informed, involved, and heard in decisions about health and care services.

By working closely with faith leaders, we were able to share important health and care information through trusted community channels, helping residents access information, make informed decisions, and understand what is happening both locally and nationally. These partnerships also provide valuable opportunities for residents to share their experiences and perspectives, ensuring that community voices help shape services and influence change.

We attended the Faith Leaders' event to encourage discussion about neighbourhood health, the role of faith communities in shaping and delivering services, and the ambitions set out in the NHS 10 Year Plan.

What difference did this make?

The event also strengthened connections between community networks and statutory partners, helping to open doors for greater collaboration, information sharing, and collective action to improve outcomes for local people.



Improving understanding of social care and awareness

Adult social care is valued by many residents and can make a meaningful difference to people's lives. To better understand how support is accessed and experienced, we undertook a borough-wide study, engaging **97 residents through surveys, focus groups, and case studies** to capture lived experiences and public perceptions.

This report highlights that adult social care in Barking and Dagenham is valued and beneficial, with many residents successfully accessing support. However, the positive impact is reduced by systemic challenges, particularly around waiting times, communication, awareness, and accessibility.

What difference did this make?

The service provider has responded positively, with clear commitments to:

- Improve access and information
- Reduce delays
- Enhance user experience
- Strengthen inclusivity and community engagement

Overall, the findings provide a strong foundation for improving services and ensuring that all residents can access timely, effective, and equitable care.

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, 111 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



Providing information about Pharmacy First

As part of our Pharmacy First project, we spoke with residents to understand their awareness of the service and how they access support for common health conditions. Our engagement highlighted that 46% of the people we spoke to had not heard of Pharmacy First. In response, we developed and shared a clear signposting leaflet with residents to raise awareness of the service and explain when it may be appropriate to visit a local pharmacy for same-day advice and treatment. Increasing understanding of Pharmacy First can help residents access timely care without waiting for a GP appointment, while also empowering people to make informed choices about where to seek support.

By signposting residents to the most appropriate service for their needs, this work also contributes to reducing pressure on GP practices and supporting better use of local healthcare services.

Cancer Support in the Community

A newly diagnosed cancer patient contacted the service seeking clear information about the support available to them following their diagnosis. They were feeling unsure about where to turn and wanted guidance on services that could help with both the emotional impact of cancer and the practical challenges that can arise during treatment and recovery. After listening to their needs, they were signposted to Macmillan for specialist cancer information, emotional support, and advice around financial concerns.

They were also directed to local social care services, where they could explore practical assistance and community-based support. This helped the individual better understand the range of help available and take the next steps toward accessing the support most relevant to their circumstances.

Contact our free information and signposting service to speak to a member of our team.



www.healthwatchlbbd.co.uk



0800 298 5331



info@healthwatchlbbd.co.uk

Keeping Communities informed and engaged

We are committed to using and continually developing a wide range of communication channels to raise awareness of our work, keep local people informed about opportunities to get involved, and ensure their voices help shape improvements in health and care services.

Our communications also encourage residents to share their experiences of using services, particularly when they are unsure where to turn for support or when things have not gone as expected. By listening to these experiences, we can provide information and signposting where needed, while using feedback to influence positive changes in local services.

Communication channels



E-News



Facebook & X



WhatsApp



Website



Freephone Number

Who we keep informed



Residents



People who
work in the borough



Partners



VCSFE & Faith
Organisations



Statutory
Services

Information and signposting

- Sharing local services, events and involvement opportunities
- Helping people understand support available
- Supporting informed decisions
- Enabling people to share experiences and views
- Helping people access further guidance
- Supporting local people to influence services that affect their lives

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given up 283 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 contributed to a number of activities, including:

- 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
- The production of a video in Urdu to help promote volunteering opportunities within the South Asian community. Time was dedicated to preparing the video for wider use.



At the heart of what we do

Turning Challenges into Change: Nikki's Experience with Healthwatch



Nikki

I discovered Healthwatch while searching for meaningful volunteering opportunities and was previously unaware of its vital role in the community. Through its work, I learned how Healthwatch empowers people by gathering public feedback, identifying gaps and failures in services, and helping to improve access and experiences across health and care. Its impact reaches everyone who relies on the NHS and related services, turning real experiences into practical changes that benefit the wider community.

I chose to volunteer because I wanted to do something meaningful with my time and make a positive impact in my community. After being made redundant, I felt lost and powerless in the face of personal and wider social challenges, so I decided to channel that energy into something constructive. Volunteering with Healthwatch gave me purpose, supported my wellbeing, helped me develop new skills, build connections, and stay motivated while navigating a difficult job market.

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.



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Finance and Future priorities

We receive funding from **Barking and Dagenham** under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£118618.8	Expenditure on pay	£107466
Additional income	£6800	Non-pay expenditure	£6942.8
ICB funding	£5000	Office and management fee	£16010
Total income	£130418.8	Total Expenditure	£130418.8

Additional income is broken down into:

(Spent as of 30.06.26)

Additional income of £6800 was carried over from last year for the continuation of work related to the London Ambulance Service.

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across North East London also receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level. This has been included in the above breakdown. The funds were to represent local Healthwatch at ICB level and relevant activities.

The year ahead

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 continue to 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. Highlight people's experiences of the NHS App by gathering feedback from both users and non-users to better understand barriers to access, digital inclusion, and confidence in using the service. We will use what we hear to ensure local people's views inform the future development of digital health services and share our findings with local decision-makers as the NHS 10-Year Health Plan is implemented.
2. Understand people's experiences of NHS referrals to identify what is working well and where improvements are needed. By collecting feedback on referral pathways across hospitals, community services, and diagnostic services, we will use lived experience to influence improvements, reduce health inequalities, and help make local services more accessible and effective.
3. Explore experiences of accessing social care and share feedback with decision makers and service providers.
4. Amplify community voices by engaging with people from diverse backgrounds by continuing our outreach programme. We will ensure that people's experiences, views, and priorities are heard by those who plan and deliver services, helping to shape more inclusive and responsive health and care across the borough.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham, delivered by LifeLine Projects, Neville Road, Dagenham, RM8 3QS.

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the license agreement.

The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 8 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. In 2025/26, the Board met four times, reviewing progress against the workplan and shaping decisions on key areas of work, including social care, Enter and View visits, the community diagnostic centre, Pharmacy First and family carers.

Two new Board members joined during the year, strengthening our governance and bringing additional community insight. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities through our annual survey and engagement stands across the borough.

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 experience of using services.

During 2025/26, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums and also a rolling outreach programme.

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.

Responses to recommendations

During the reporting period, no issues or recommendations required escalation to the Healthwatch England Committee, and no reviews or investigations were necessary.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

The voices of local people are at the heart of our work. We ensure that the experiences and help inform national health and care priorities. feedback shared with us reach the people making decisions, helping to shape improvements to health and care services.

Across Barking and Dagenham, we share insight with key decision-making groups, including the Place-Based Partnership Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee. We also work with voluntary, community and faith organisations, patient panels, carers, and local community groups, including those whose voices are not always represented.

We represent local people through the Carers Strategy Group and share local insight across the North East London Integrated Care System, working with the other Healthwatch organisations to influence improvements across the region. We also submit evidence to Healthwatch England, ensuring local experiences

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham is represented on the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's Health and Wellbeing Board by Nathan Singleton, CEO of LifeLine Projects. During 2025/26, our representative fulfilled this role effectively by contributing feedback and insight on a range of key discussions, including the neighbourhood health pilot, the carers deep dive, Integrated Care System plans, and new ways of working linked to the NHS 10-Year Plan.

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham is represented on the North East London Integrated Care Partnership by Manisha Modhvadia, Healthwatch Manager.



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