



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Bucks annual report 2025/26

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Chief Executive
Zoe McIntosh

“

Health and social care services play a vital role in people's lives, and we all know the NHS and Local Authorities face real challenges. Listening to people's thoughts and feedback 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.

I want to say a heartfelt thank you 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 and contributions helped make a real difference for Buckinghamshire residents.”

A message from our chair

I was delighted to step into the role of Chair of Healthwatch Bucks earlier this year. The organisation plays a vital role in championing the voices of Buckinghamshire residents and ensuring that their experiences and views are heard and acted upon across health and social care services.

This has been a challenging year for the Healthwatch Bucks team, with considerable uncertainty surrounding the future of local Healthwatch organisations. Despite this, we remain committed to promoting the importance of an independent patient and public voice. Many of the people who rely on us do so precisely because we are independent of both the NHS and the Council. That independence creates a trusted space where people feel safe to speak openly and honestly about their experiences.

This is particularly important for those whose voices are lesser heard & from communities facing health inequalities; disabled people, carers, people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, migrants, those whose first language is not English, and individuals who are digitally excluded. Ensuring that these voices are heard, remains at the heart of everything we do.

My thanks go to our volunteers, staff team and fellow Directors for their dedication and commitment to championing the voices of Buckinghamshire residents. Their hard work and passion have enabled us to continue making a difference in our communities throughout a challenging year.



Chair
Tim Summerley



“Many of the people who rely on us do so precisely because we are independent of both the NHS and the Council. That independence creates a trusted space where people feel safe to speak openly and honestly about their experiences.”

About us

Healthwatch Bucks is your local health and social care champion. We ensure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

Our vision is that your experiences, ideas and opinions make a positive difference to the way health and social care is provided in Bucks.



Our mission

Our mission is to ensure that the collective voice of people using health and social care services is heard, considered and acted upon.



Our objectives

- Listen to you, the residents of Bucks, so we understand what you think about health & social care.
- Influence the right people so that your views make a difference to health and social care services.
- Change the way health and social care services are commissioned and delivered for the better.

Our values

We are:

- Independent – of those who buy, design or deliver health and social care services.
- Listening – and focused on understanding what your views are on health and social care services.
- Active – we get out and about and make things happen.
- Focussed – and target our delivery on our priority areas.
- Balanced – we work across the health, wellbeing and social care agendas.
- Volunteer based – volunteers are at the heart of Healthwatch Bucks.
- Collaborative – we work with other people to extend our reach.
- Signposters – helping you work out where you need to go to get the services you need.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 2501 people to have their say and get information about their care. We are a small team over 2.5 FTE, and our work was supported by 12 volunteers.



Reaching out:

1264 experiences of health and social care services were shared with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

We were contacted 164 times for clear advice and information on topics such as mental health support and finding an NHS dentist

In 2025/2026 we collected more than 2501 views on health and social care from local people.



Championing your voice:

We published 5 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like travel to hospital appointments, men's health and accessing information on social care.

Our most popular report was the Men's Health report, highlighting issues in accessing appropriate health support.



Statutory funding:

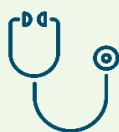
We're funded by Buckinghamshire Council. In 2025/26 we received £182,108 which is 4.6% less than last year.

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 Buckinghamshire. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We gathered men's views on health and wellbeing, creating new insight into the barriers and motivations that influence how men seek support.



Our work on community hospitals, Hospital at Home and social care information highlighted people's experiences and provided evidence to help improve local services.



Summer

Findings from our men's health research were submitted to the Department of Health and Social Care's Men's Health Strategy for England call for evidence, ensuring Buckinghamshire voices contributed to national policy discussions.

Through events, webinars and community engagement activities, we strengthened relationships with local residents, patient groups and community organisations, helping more people influence health and care services.

Autumn

Our work on the NHS Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme helped secure improvements locally, demonstrating how public feedback can lead to positive change.



Despite significant organisational challenges, we continued to represent local people's experiences and maintain our core Healthwatch functions.



Winter

We launched new research into rural healthcare and public attitudes to health and wellbeing, helping shape future priorities and identify emerging issues.



We strengthened our engagement capacity, enabling us to hear from more communities and broaden the reach of our work.



Working together for change

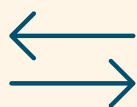
We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch's to ensure people's experiences of care in Buckinghamshire are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at Thames Valley ICB.

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Buckinghamshire to achieve the following:



Strengthening collaboration across Thames Valley:

Over the past year, we strengthened our partnerships with local Healthwatch organisations across the Thames Valley in preparation for the expansion of the Integrated Care Board footprint from April 2026. This collaborative approach will help ensure local people's experiences continue to influence decision-making across the wider health and care system.



Influencing system change:

In March, we published a joint response to the Thames Valley ICB Operating Model 2026–27. Together, we highlighted the importance of meaningful public engagement and called for clear, effective routes for local people's voices to shape services and future decision-making.



Driving improvements thought shared insight:

We continued to work with ICB commissioners to review progress against recommendations from our joint children's oral health report and maintained our involvement in the ICB System Quality Group. This ensured concerns and experiences shared by residents across Buckinghamshire, Berkshire West and Oxfordshire were raised directly with system leaders.

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 Buckinghamshire this year:



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

People with young onset dementia and their families told us that existing support often failed to recognise their specific needs.

Their experiences helped shape Buckinghamshire Council's future dementia service, with the new specification including a stronger focus on young onset dementia and proactive outreach to people who may not otherwise engage with services.

"The new service includes a stronger focus on assertive outreach to reach people who may not have engaged previously, including people with a learning disability, people living with young-onset dementia..."

Colette Pinion, Buckinghamshire Council.



Improving care over time

After speaking to people staying in discharge hub beds and their families, we highlighted concerns about communication, involvement in decisions and coordination between services.

Following our recommendations, BOB ICB confirmed a range of improvements, including updated patient information, earlier involvement of patients and families in discharge planning, dedicated staff to support transfers, more face-to-face communication, and regular partnership meetings to review patient feedback and continue improving the service.

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. From those living in the Opportunity Bucks areas of Aylesbury, Chesham and High Wycombe to residents living in more rural areas.

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.



Men's health

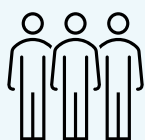
We gave local men the opportunity to share their experiences of seeking support for their health and wellbeing, helping to inform local and national conversations about men's health.

Following the Government's call for evidence on a Men's Health Strategy, we asked men across Buckinghamshire when, how and why they seek support for their health and wellbeing. Between 1 May and 12 June 2025, 655 people living in Buckinghamshire or registered with a Bucks GP shared their views through surveys and discussion groups.

What did we do

We analysed people's experiences to identify barriers to seeking support and made recommendations to improve awareness, access to services and opportunities to support men's physical and mental wellbeing. We submitted our findings nationally and shared them with local partners to help shape future services.

Key things we heard:



35%

said they never seek medical help or only seek it when absolutely necessary.

Main barriers included difficulty getting appointments, not making time, embarrassment and not knowing what support was available.

61%

had been invited for an NHS health check or screening, although many eligible men reported never receiving an invitation.

Our findings helped ensure local men's experiences influenced discussions about improving men's health locally and nationally.

What difference did this make?

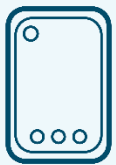
We submitted our report to the Government's Men's Health Strategy consultation. Healthwatch England used our evidence in its national report and invited us to present our findings to other local Healthwatch organisations. The report also informed work by the BOB Integrated Care Board and Buckinghamshire Council to improve men's health and wellbeing.

Healthcare Travel Cost Scheme

Our research highlighted how a lack of awareness of financial support can prevent people from accessing healthcare appointments. Our report has helped drive improvements across Buckinghamshire.

We wanted to understand what people knew about the NHS Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS). Between July and September 2025, 154 Buckinghamshire residents shared their experiences of travelling to healthcare appointments and the barriers they faced in accessing available support.

Key things we heard:



31

People said they could not afford to attend a hospital appointment.

3

People missed an appointment because they could not afford the travel costs.



“Thank you for sharing the report... We appreciate the valuable insights and recommendations provided to Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (BHT).”

Raghuv Bhasin, Chief Executive Officer, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust

Our findings showed that improving awareness of available financial support could help more people attend the healthcare appointments they need.

What difference did this make?

Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust committed to improving patient communications, developing a dedicated HTCS webpage, sharing information with community groups and supporting joint awareness campaigns.

Buckinghamshire Council also improved its website, search functions and plans to promote the scheme through digital bus stop displays, helping more residents find and access the support available.

Enter & View

Our Enter & View visits helped ensure patients' experiences directly informed improvements to community hospital care.

Healthwatch has a statutory power to visit publicly funded health and social care services where there is a clear reason to do so. In 2025/26, our Enter & View programme focused on community hospitals, in line with our annual priorities, to better understand patient experience and identify opportunities for improvement.

What did we do

Our authorised Enter & View representatives visited Marlow and Thame Community Hospitals, speaking with patients and staff and observing the care environment. The visits celebrated good practice while identifying ways to make accessibility, communication and the hospital environment better.

Key things we heard:



Patients consistently described staff as caring, compassionate and professional.

Hospital environments were clean, welcoming and well maintained.

Small improvements to signage, facilities and communication could further enhance patient experience.

Listening to patients through Enter & View visits helped drive practical improvements that will benefit future patients.

What difference did this make?

Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust accepted our recommendations and made improvements, including clearer accessibility signage, changes to ventilation and heating, and action to address concerns about roof access. The Trust recognised our findings as "vital for enhancing patient care and experience."

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Buckinghamshire. 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 our community should have the opportunity to share their experiences and influence local services.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Recruiting four Community Researchers from refugee and asylum seeker, homeless, older Muslim women, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to explore local health issues.
- Meeting residents at libraries, community action days, carers' events, college fresher's fairs and local festivals to hear from people we might not otherwise reach.
- Working with partners to ensure community experiences informed local services, while sharing our Community Research Toolkit to support similar work elsewhere.



Growing Community Researchers across Buckinghamshire

We recruited four new Community Researchers representing refugee and asylum seeker communities, people experiencing homelessness, older Muslim women, and young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Their lived experience helps uncover local health issues, build trust and strengthen links between communities and health services.

What difference did this make?

Our community research programme continues to grow with the researchers working on a wide range of projects including a women's health panel and a public health programme within Buckinghamshire libraries. We continue to promote our free community research toolkit with organisations such as Wigan Borough Community First making it to support their work.

This demonstrates how a small-scale project is having a wider impact on Buckinghamshire communities as well as nationally.

Taking Healthwatch into local communities

Throughout the year we met residents in libraries, community action days, carers' events, festivals, college fresher's fairs and health events across Buckinghamshire. These conversations helped us understand local priorities while providing blood pressure checks and encouraging more people to share their experiences of health and care services.

What difference did this make?

Meeting people where they already are helped us hear from communities that may not otherwise engage with Healthwatch.

At Chesham Schools Carnival alone, around 100 residents shared their views, while students at Bucks College highlighted both positive experiences and concerns about access and waiting times. These conversations continue to shape our work and ensure local voices influence health and care services.

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 we helped 164 people find the help and support they needed.

Whether resolving concerns about GP registration, dental charges or access to services, our free and confidential signposting service helps people navigate health and social care while identifying issues that can be raised with organisations to improve services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing trusted, up-to-date advice and information.
- Resolving concerns about access to NHS and care services.
- Identifying recurring issues to influence system-wide improvements.
- Delivering signposting training across the Healthwatch network.



Dental care for a woman with dementia

Keeping an elderly couple registered with their GP

After being told they would be removed from their GP practice list, an elderly couple contacted Healthwatch Bucks for advice.

Following discussions with the Integrated Care Board, we confirmed the couple remained within their GP practice catchment area because they had not moved home.

Armed with this information, they contacted the practice and the decision to remove them from the patient list was reversed, preventing unnecessary disruption to their care.

“Thank goodness... What you guys do is invaluable.”

Helping a patient avoid unfair dental charges

A patient sought advice after being charged extra for repairs to their NHS denture.

A dental patient contacted us about charges for repairs and additions to their denture. They had paid for a Band 2 course of treatment, which they believed covered everything, but were later asked to pay an additional non-NHS fee. They asked us for advice and we agreed: a Band 2 course of treatment should cover the adjustment to the denture and the repair should be free. We also told them there should be no hidden charges.

With this information the patient was able to avoid paying further unfair charges.

Showcasing volunteer impact

This year, 12 volunteers gave their time, skills and experience to help improve health and social care across Buckinghamshire. From supporting engagement events to analysing feedback, they made a vital contribution to our work. In our 2025 volunteer survey, 93% of respondents said they were very satisfied with their volunteering experience.

This year, our volunteers:

- Supported engagement events, surveys and community conversations.
- Helped analyse feedback and monitor developments across health and social care.
- Completed public health training while helping improve services for local people.



The difference volunteering makes

Our volunteers bring a wide range of skills, experience and perspectives to Healthwatch Bucks. As well as helping improve local health and social care, volunteering also provides opportunities to build confidence, develop new skills and gain valuable experience.

"Thanks so much for giving me the great opportunities I have had at Healthwatch Bucks. I loved working with you."

This volunteer supported our engagement work, helping local people share their experiences of health and social care.

Through volunteering, they developed new skills while helping ensure community voices were heard and acted upon.

Volunteering with Healthwatch Bucks can also support personal development and future employment.

During the year, volunteers completed accredited public health training and gained valuable experience that helped build confidence, skills and career opportunities.

"Thank you for the voluntary employment, I enjoyed it and it helped me gain paid employment!"

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.healthwatchbucks.co.uk



01494 32 48 32



info@healthwatchbucks.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Buckinghamshire 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	£182,108	Expenditure on pay	£206,008
Additional income	£147,516	Non-pay expenditure (note 3)	£41,194
Less income carried forward into 2026/27 (note 2)	(£22,250)	Office and management fee	£59,809
Total income	£307,374	Total Expenditure	£307,011

Notes:

Includes £29,455 for Independent Health Complaint Advocacy.

Income not recognised in 25-26 carried forward into 26-27 for work to be completed.

Subcontractor costs of £30,265 are included in 'Non-pay expenditure'.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Bucks, The Threshing Barn, Manor Farm Barns, Coates Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. HP13 5UX.

Healthwatch Bucks 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 **5** 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 7 times and made decisions on matters such as our annual priorities and organisational sustainability. 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 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.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to members of the public and partner organisations by publishing it on our website.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had 0 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 area, we take information to the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Buckinghamshire Council Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (previously the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board). For example, we attend the Integrated Care Board System Quality Group to share insight from Buckinghamshire residents. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Bucks represented on the Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board by Zoe McIntosh, Chief Executive (from January 2026) and John Meech, former Chair (until December 2025).

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing insight and reports aligned to our 25/26 priorities.

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