



**Annual Report 2024–2025**

# Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Luton

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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

## Adapting, Evolving and Listening: A Year of Growth and Impact.

Over the past year, our activity has increased significantly, and we are now more embedded in the community than ever before. New staff members have joined us, bringing fresh ideas and a strong sense of purpose to our work. We are also incredibly grateful to our volunteers—many of whom have been with us from the beginning—for their continued and invaluable contribution to Healthwatch Luton and the wider community.

While COVID-19 has largely receded from daily life, we remain acutely aware of its long-term impact on many individuals and continue to be mindful of the ongoing needs arising from it. Our engagement across the community has been extensive, reflecting the rich diversity of Luton. We have placed particular focus on underrepresented communities, while ensuring that the broader population is not overlooked.

In recognition of the challenges of today's world, we have actively engaged with young people around mental health and LGBTQIA+ issues. Being thanked simply for 'listening' reinforces our core purpose: to listen and act.

Healthwatch Luton has contributed to a wide range of projects this year, including work on the Mental Health Strategy, translation services, and support for carers. Our strong collaboration with other Healthwatch organisations within our ICB helps to minimise duplication and strengthen the collective impact of our work—ensuring the voices of Luton residents are heard clearly. Collaborative working now means that we are fully accepted as part of the system. Working with both the users of Health and Social care and the Providers of the services.



“‘Thank you’ are the two words I hear most often. Thank you for listening, Thank you for being here. It is heartwarming to know that we make a difference and have an impact.”

**Phil Turner, Chair, Healthwatch Luton**

## About us

# Healthwatch Luton 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

We've supported more than 4000 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 4 staff and, our work is supported by 8 volunteers.

## Reaching out:



**3525** people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

**275** 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 14 reports on the improvements people want to see in areas such as mental health services, maternity services, and local community outreach.

Our most read report was *Your Voice Counts: St. Thomas Gypsy & Traveller Community*, which highlighted the challenges faced by the local Gypsy and Traveller community in accessing healthcare.

## Statutory funding:



We're funded by Luton Borough Council. In 2024/25 we received £122,000, this remains the same as funding given in 2023/2024.

# A year of making a difference

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

## Spring

HWL engaged local women to gather views on women's health and is now working with the ICB to address health inequalities identified within the community.



HWL is proud to support the ICB in shaping a new contract for musculoskeletal treatments, contributing to commissioning decisions and taking part in the consultation phase of the procurement process.



## Summer

HWL, in partnership with Health Innovation and REN Champions, hosted a diabetes event to encourage ethnic minority groups to join research aimed at reducing diabetes risks and improving health outcomes



HWL, in partnership with Penrose, engaged with the local community to gain insight into the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in accessing health and social care services.



## Autumn

In response to feedback, HWL conducted Enter and View visits to ELFT mental health wards in Luton. We identified areas for improvement and are now working with services to improve care quality.



HWL, with BLMK HW, researched translation and interpreting services in Luton's healthcare system. The findings helped highlight how language barriers affect access to care and patient experiences.



## Winter

HWL connected with communities through visits and social media, sharing winter health advice. Improving public information and communication in healthcare services.



Following feedback from the English Gypsy and Irish Traveller community, HWL is working closely with primary care services to deliver health checks and improve access, trust, and overall experiences of care.





# Working together for change

**We have worked alongside neighbouring Healthwatch organisations to ensure that people's experiences of care across Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, helping to shape decisions made across the BLMK Integrated Care System.**

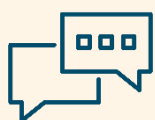
This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across BLMK to achieve the following:

## A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



HWL collaborated with three neighbouring Healthwatch organisations, commissioned by the ICS, to review how translation and interpretation services function across the region's healthcare system. The project ensured that lived experiences from local communities informed decision-making at ICS level. Insights gathered through questionnaires from patients, families, and staff in both primary and secondary care have created a strong evidence base, now helping to shape commissioning decisions.

## The big conversation:



Together with three other local Healthwatch, we listened to women across the region to understand what healthcare looks like from their perspective — what makes it accessible, person-centred, and trustworthy. This work not only deepened public involvement but also highlighted the barriers women continue to face when accessing care. Funded by our regional ICS, the findings are now being used to inform action aimed at reducing health inequalities for women.

## Building strong relationships to achieve more:



In April, we met with Integrated Care Board leaders to explore how we could work more effectively together. We committed to co-producing a new model of care for musculoskeletal (MSK) services, using focus groups and collaborative input. Luton residents played a key role in shaping the design and delivery of the service.

We have also summarised 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 Luton this year:

## Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life



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

A Deaf patient in Luton shared her experience of being denied a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter when accessing GP and hospital services. As a result of her story being raised with primary care commissioners, GP surgeries and hospitals have now introduced inclusive policies to ensure BSL interpretation is always available – empowering patients to make informed decisions about their care.

## Getting services to involve the public



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

HWL worked with East London Foundation Trust in Luton to ensure that every resident and relative had the opportunity to share their views on the inpatient wards. After a resident's father raised concerns about the care his daughter was receiving, the ward manager met with him the same day, and further meetings were arranged to maintain open communication. HWL continues to meet regularly with the team to support ongoing improvements.

## Improving care over time



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

In 2025, Healthwatch Luton connected with members of the English Gypsy and Irish Traveller community to better understand their experiences of using primary and secondary care. Through informal interviews, individuals generously shared their perspectives, which we passed on to the Primary Care Network (PCN) and three local GP practices. This has led to a more patient-friendly approach, bringing services into the community. Together, we're building trust by delivering local health checks and involving GP representatives directly.



# 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

## Listening, Learning, and Leading Change in Mental Health Services

**This year, through ward visits and direct engagement, we brought real experiences into the spotlight — helping shape safer, more responsive mental health care in Luton.**

After concerns were raised by patients, carers, and professionals about inpatient mental health services in Luton, we heard clearly that more needed to be done to improve care and communication.

### What did we do?

We visited seven diverse mental health wards — spanning acute, intensive care, and adolescent services — to observe care and gain first-hand insight into how admissions, care, discharge, staffing, and environments shape patient experience.

### Key things we heard:



**71%**

**of wards reported patients were unsure whether they had received or understood their care plan.**

**57%**

**of wards had patients that did not clearly understand their discharge process.**

**43%**

**Of wards offered structured indoor and outdoor activities, while 14% had no visible activities observed during the visit.**

Our work highlighted how inconsistent communication, unclear care planning, and fragmented discharge processes can leave mental health patients feeling unsupported and disconnected from their care

### What difference did this make?

We worked closely with ELFT to share our findings and outline clear next steps. The trusts is now reviewing communication, admissions, and ward activities to enhance consistency, inclusion, and the patient experience.

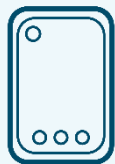
# Listening to your experiences

## Lost in Translation: Tackling Language Barriers in Luton's Health Services

**Patients and professionals told us clearer communication and better access to translation services are needed to ensure everyone can understand and navigate healthcare confidently.**

We visited 12 healthcare settings across Luton – including GP practices, pharmacies, opticians, dentists, hospital departments, and a mental health ward – to explore how translation and interpretation services are accessed, how well they work, and where gaps in provision are affecting patient care.

### Key things we heard:



**57%**

**of sites relied heavily on informal translation services (e.g. relative, staff, google translate).**

**78%**

**of sites did not display clear signage about available translation services.**



**"It's easier when someone explains things in my own language, especially medical stuff." - *Patient***

**"We need better training – especially in BSL and medical language support." - *Staff***

By exploring both formal and informal translation practices, we uncovered the real barriers preventing people from accessing care in their own language. We shared these findings with the ICB, highlighting gaps in visibility, booking systems, and staff training – and provided services with information on available translation support to help them better meet patients' needs.

### What difference did this make?

Our findings were shared with the ICB as part of a wider review of health inequalities across the region. As a result, services are now reviewing how they book and promote translation support. We've also provided information to local providers to help raise awareness of the services available. Our work is helping to shape future commissioning and ensure language is no longer a barrier to accessing healthcare.



# Hearing from all communities

**We're here for all residents of Luton. 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:**

- Engaging with the Hindu community to gather views on translation services and share advice on winter health and access.
- Supporting the 'Know Your Numbers' campaign with LBC to reach the Asian community and address deprivation and health inequalities.
- Working with Luton's Afro-Caribbean community to raise awareness of diabetes and promote participation in research.
- Visiting the Visually Impaired Lounge (VIP) to collect feedback from visually impaired residents and share it with service providers.



# Hearing from all communities

## Improving healthcare access for the Gypsy and Traveller community

**We investigated access to health care for the Gypsy and Traveller community.**

Following a measles outbreak, HWL engaged with the St Thomas' Gypsy and Traveller community to understand barriers to healthcare.

### Key things we heard

**Widespread mistrust in GP services** – fuelled by past experiences of misdiagnosis, appointment delays, poor communication, and feeling dismissed.

**Perceptions of discrimination** – residents shared concerns about discrimination with some believing their ethnicity or site location affected the care offered.

**Mental health concerns** were raised by multiple residents, particularly around anxiety and lack of support.



*'100% of participants reported issues booking GP appointments – with several believing their ethnicity or address influenced the response they received.'*

By visiting St Thomas' Gypsy and Traveller site, we were able to speak directly with residents through informal, conversational interviews, guided by our 'Your Voice Counts' approach. Community members raised key topics, enabling Healthwatch Luton to explore these in greater depth and understand the real-world impact on their access to care. This helped us capture honest, lived experiences and identify where services had been falling short.

### What difference did this make?

We worked with the ICB, LBC, and PCN partners to explore culturally informed solutions that could rebuild trust and improve access to care. Our findings informed Core20PLUS5 health inequalities work and led to plans for on-site outreach, including health checks and engagement stalls. We supported proposals for cultural awareness training, improved communication, and diversity monitoring. Social prescribers are now engaging directly with the community to support early intervention and promote screening and vaccination.



# 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 275 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 through diabetes and blood pressure events
- Signposting people to additional support services





## Dental care for elderly uncle

**Thanks to Thomas' feedback, John was able to find a dentist in Luton.**

Thomas contacted HWL about finding an emergency dentist for his elderly uncle John, who had been struck off his dental practice. HWL advised Thomas that the NHS 111 service could help locate an emergency dentist.

Thomas' contacted 111 on John's behalf and an emergency appointment was made with a dentist in Luton. Following the appointment John was allowed to register with dentist for ongoing treatment.

Thomas contacted HWL to express his thanks . They were both very pleased with the help from HWL and the good service they received from 111 and the dental practice.

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## Improving care services for elderly people in care homes

### Speaking up for fairer care in Nursing homes

Sharon contacted HWL about her brother Simon who is currently paying to be in a nursing home in Luton. Sharon felt it was unfair for Simon was being asked to pay additional money to have a member of staff attend hospital appointments with him.

A concern was raised with Luton Adult Social Care, highlighting the additional fees for essential support. As a result, it was clarified that Simon and other residents in the nursing home, do not have to pay for a member of staff to attend appointments with him.

Sharon felt it was important to raise this issue , not only for her brother, but also on behalf of those who are unable to speak up for themselves.

# Showcasing volunteer impact

**Our fantastic volunteers have given 3765 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:**

- Promoted winter health and shared local health service information in the community
- Helped gather experiences and views on women's health in their communities
- Took part in Enter and View visits to improve local mental health services
- Promoted diabetes support and encouraged research participation in communities
- Collected and shared community views on accessing primary care
- Worked with ICB and LBC to promote blood pressure and health checks



# 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.

"I've volunteered with Healthwatch Luton since the beginning. After retiring, I wanted to stay involved and support others. I joined after hearing about HWL at my PPG.

I love going out into the community, meeting people who've never heard of us, and helping them feel listened to. A man once said, 'Thanks for listening — no one else does.' That really stayed with me.

Enter and View visits helped me understand the reality of care services."

**Maureen**



"I've volunteered with Healthwatch Luton since 2013.

As a type 1 diabetic, I was frustrated by changes to diabetes care that weren't explained to patients. I was told, 'If you want change, speak to Healthwatch'—so I joined.

I love meeting people and seeing services improve through HWL's work. I've supported focus groups on women's health, musculoskeletal conditions, and cancer care. It's rewarding to give back and help give a voice to people who might not otherwise be heard.

**Steph**



### 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.healthwatchluton.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchluton.co.uk)



01582 817 060



Email: [info@healthwatchluton.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchluton.co.uk)

# Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Luton Borough 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	£122,000	Expenditure on pay	£116,597
Additional income	£68,615	Non-pay expenditure	£44,028
		Office and management fee	£7,776
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£190,615</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£168,401</b>

## Additional income:

### Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes (BLMK) 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
Denny review project	£50,000
MSK Project	£7,615
REN sustainability	£6,000
Diabetes Project	£5,000

# Finance and future priorities

## Next steps:

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

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

## **Our top three priorities for the next year are:**

### **Improving Signposting, Information and Advice**

Enhance public awareness of available health and care services by developing clear, accessible information and guidance. Strengthening community relationships through attendance and support at local events and increasing the volume and diversity of public feedback.

### **Focusing on Mental Health**

Continue our work on mental health services by gathering feedback from local community groups, attending ward patient meetings, and Conducting Enter and view.

### **Enter and View visits to virtual wards in Luton.**

Distributing questionnaires to patients and staff.  
Establishing a focus group of service users to share experiences and shape improvements of these services.

# Statutory statements

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Healthwatch Luton 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 four 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 quarterly to make strategic decisions, including approving Enter and View visits to mental health wards, reviewing staff training needs, and considering the implications of the Denny Review. The Board also monitored progress on key ICB-led projects aimed at identifying health needs across Luton and addressing health inequalities.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard from. This year we have done this by gathering feedback through signposting, outreach, and public events—directly influenced our work plan. We engaged regularly through local meetings, faith centres, and community hubs to hear from underrepresented groups, including the Gypsy and Traveller community.

## 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 2024/25, 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 as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website, including at community events and at Futures house in Marsh Farm Luton.



# Statutory statements

## Responses to recommendations

There were no instances of providers failing to 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 Well-being Board, the Scrutiny board and Luton and Safeguarding board. We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care System. We regularly attend ICS-level committees and meetings including those focused on primary and secondary care. HWL representatives contribute to these forums by sharing feedback gathered from local communities. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Luton is represented on the Luton Health and Wellbeing Board by Pat Lattimer CEO and Phil Turner Healthwatch Luton Chair.

During 2024/25, our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing reports, presenting information and offering expertise at various meetings. This has included sharing the work plan and completed activities such as contributions to the ICB winter communications, MKS project work and translation and interpretation initiatives.

Healthwatch Luton is represented on BLMK Integrated Care Partnerships by Patricia Lattimer and BLMK Integrated Care Boards by Maxine Tattetani .

*"Healthwatch Luton has helped us engage residents this year – working to understand how translation and interpretation services can be improved to support residents and prevent poor health. They have supported important engagement on women's health, diabetes and increased awareness on the dangers of high blood pressure. Healthwatch Luton help us to link into local communities that they have established relationships with, ensuring that local resident voice is heard."* **Andrew Rochford Chief Medical Director/Luton Place Link Director**

# Statutory statements

## Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Mental Health services (6 individual inpatient wards)	Concerns raised locally	HWL wrote a report which included recommendations – this was discussed with providers.
Maternity Services Luton and Dunstable Hospital (2 Hospital wards)	Assessment of services	A report was written and fed back to the Head of maternity service Bedfordshire

## 2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Denny Report – Review of Translation and interpretation Services	Improved knowledge of access to translation and interpretation services in primary care.
St Thomas Gypsy and Traveller review	Improved access for residents, services visiting the site and knowledge and understanding improvement of service providers about the needs of protected groups in their area.
MKS Project	Improved access to MKS services, with patient centred approach and services working together. Improved communication and access to treatments.
Diabetes project	Understanding of research requirements into the prevalence of diabetes in the area and how educational understanding can improve outcomes.

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