

**healthwatch**  
Central Bedfordshire

# JUST ASK 2025

## Report Summary



# CONTENT OVERVIEW



3	At a Glance
5	Introduction
8	Just Ask Summary
11	Just Ask Houghton Regis
13	Just Ask Leighton Buzzard
16	Just Ask Biggleswade
18	Just Ask Ampthill
20	Just Ask Shefford
22	Just Ask Dunstable
28	Summary
30	Conclusion
32	Appendix
35	About Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire





# JUST ASK AT A GLANCE

During 2025, **six** Just Ask events were held in the community between April and September.

**668 visitors across all of the events.**



**The events were supported by 156 volunteer hours**



**17 organisations joined us this year**



**We visited 6 locations in Central Bedfordshire**



**Enquiries we received included:**

- **Difficulty accessing GP surgeries**
- **Gaps in mental health provision**
- **Limited digital help for older people**
- **Insufficient services for ADHD and neurodiversity**
- **Requests for information about diabetes services**

**A key concern was inability to access GP surgeries**





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## Introduction





# INTRODUCTION

In 2025, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) continued to strengthen its commitment to listening to the community through its outreach programme, 'Just Ask'. As our primary vehicle for engaging directly with residents, 'Just Ask' played a vital role in gathering local experiences, identifying barriers to care, and ensuring that the voices of the public are heard by key decision-makers, commissioners, and service providers.

Held monthly across six locations from April to September 2025, 'Just Ask' events created accessible spaces within Central Bedfordshire, where community members could speak openly about the health and social care services they rely on. Widely promoted through our website, social media, local publications, and Parish Councils, with targeted advertising ahead of each event, the programme successfully encouraged meaningful engagement across the area.

Through 'Just Ask', HWCB listened to consistent concerns from the community about GP surgery access, and this feedback led us to place focus on understanding these experiences in greater depth. Many residents told us about their difficulties securing general appointments, their challenges in accessing a GP rather than a nurse or other clinician, the limited ability to book non-urgent appointments in advance, and the growing reliance on digital-first systems such as online triage forms. The outreach programme also highlighted ongoing inequalities linked to the digital divide, especially for older people who struggle with technology-based access routes.

Each 'Just Ask' session brought together a range of valued partner organisations who worked alongside HWCB staff and volunteers to offer a wealth of information, guidance, and support. This collaborative approach not only provided residents with immediate help but also enabled us to gather detailed insight into the issues affecting local people, directly shaping our priorities for 2025 and into 2026.

To ensure transparency and ongoing community engagement, all updates on 'Just Ask', along with our wider events, reports, and surveys, continue to be shared through our website, social media channels, weekly E-bulletins, and quarterly newsletters.



*Right: Visitors to the 'Just Ask' events in Biggleswade, Leighton Buzzard, and Dunstable, joined by a representative from Sight Concern*



*We were joined by representatives from Carers in Bedfordshire, at 'Just Ask' in Biggleswade.*





The image shows two women standing on a sidewalk next to a recruitment stand for NHS Local Healthwatch. The stand is purple and green, with text that reads 'Support your local hospital Become a Member today It's FREE!' and 'Luton and Dunstable University Hospital'. The stand also lists 'Membership benefits' such as 'Regular updates about the hospitals', 'The chance to have your say in how your local hospitals are run', and 'Invitations to attend meetings & lectures'. The women are wearing lanyards and are smiling at the camera. A man in a high-visibility vest is partially visible behind them. In the background, there is a blue car and a shop named 'Floris Florist'.

## Just Ask Summary



# JUST ASK SUMMARY

In February 2025, HWCB staff and volunteers began preparations for the upcoming 'Just Ask' outreach programme through a series of regular meetings. These sessions focused on reviewing the outcomes of previous 'Just Ask' events, generating new ideas for improvement, and developing a draft timetable for the year's activities.

To raise awareness of the programme, a promotional poster (Appendix) was produced and shared extensively across our networks. This was supported by a sustained digital campaign across all social media platforms, launched early and maintained throughout the programme to maximise visibility and engagement.

The monthly 'Just Ask' events, held from April to September 2025, took place across six locations: Dunstable, Ampthill, Houghton Regis, Biggleswade, Leighton Buzzard, and Shefford.

Each event was delivered with the support of HWCB staff, volunteers, and partner organisations.

This report includes detailed summaries of each event delivered as part of the 'Just Ask' 2025 programme.

The organisations that joined us throughout the programme of events included:

- ◆ Age UK Bedfordshire
- ◆ Bedfordshire and Luton Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- ◆ Bedfordshire, Luton & Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICB)
- ◆ British Liver Trust
- ◆ Carers in Bedfordshire
- ◆ Central Bedfordshire Council Safer Communities Outreach Team
- ◆ Central Bedfordshire Council Tenancy Involvement & Engagement
- ◆ Circle MSK
- ◆ Community Immunisation Team
- ◆ East London Foundation Trust Recovery College
- ◆ Headway (Luton)
- ◆ Herts Urgent Care (HUC)
- ◆ Mind BLMK
- ◆ Respite At Home
- ◆ Sight Concern





## Events



# JUST ASK – HOUGHTON REGIS

## FRIDAY 11TH APRIL 2025

The first 'Just Ask' event of the 2025 programme took place on 11th April in Morrisons car park in Houghton Regis. This initial session was supported by five partner organisations: Age UK Bedfordshire, BLMK Integrated Care System, East London Foundation Trust (ELFT) Recovery College, the Stroke Association, and Headway.

Throughout the event, we engaged with many older residents, offering information, advice, and signposting to a wide range of services available across Central Bedfordshire. We also promoted our upcoming Festival for Older People in October, an annual event that provides attendees with an opportunity to learn more about local health and social care services available for older people and their Carers, while enjoying activities, entertainment, refreshments, and free entry.

A total of **106** people visited the event. These brief but meaningful interactions demonstrate our ongoing commitment to connecting residents with essential health and community resources. The event was supported by seven HWCB staff members and volunteers.

## FEEDBACK FROM VISITORS

The examples below represent a snapshot of the feedback and enquiries we received at Houghton Regis, highlighting the themes and experiences that will help inform our ongoing work.

A young man shared concerns about the quality of local mental health support, drawing on his own experience but feeling unable to discuss the details.

We ensured he had the direct contact details for urgent crisis support and provided information about relevant local mental health services, along with a Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire leaflet. We also reassured him that he was welcome to speak with us in more depth whenever he felt ready.

A lady explained she had recently been diagnosed with macular degeneration.

We introduced her to our partner organisation, Sight Concern, who were present at the event. She was able to discuss her concerns face to face and received tailored information to help her understand her diagnosis, along with contact details for ongoing support should she need it.





# JUST ASK – LEIGHTON BUZZARD

## TUESDAY 13TH MAY 2025

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The 'Just Ask' event in Leighton Buzzard is a well-attended community initiative held on the High Street during Market Day. This session was supported by Age UK, ELFT Recovery College, Circle MSK, Herts Urgent Care, iCash, and Sight Concern.

A total of **127** residents engaged with the event, raising a wide range of topics such as issues with local GP surgeries, difficulties accessing dental care, and the need for support around neurodiversity. Several visitors also highlighted growing concerns about the widening digital divide, particularly affecting older people.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire staff and volunteers carried out 13 blood pressure checks, identifying several individuals with previously undetected high readings. Those affected were advised to seek follow-up medical support from their GP or local pharmacy.

These interactions demonstrate the important role we play in connecting residents with vital health and community services.

The event was supported by eight HWCB staff and volunteers.

## FEEDBACK FROM VISITORS

The examples below represent a snapshot of the feedback and enquiries we received at Leighton Buzzard, highlighting the themes and experiences that will help inform our ongoing work.

A gentleman in his seventies shared positive feedback about the care he received before and after heart surgery. He felt well supported by his GP practice in Leighton Buzzard and by Milton Keynes Hospital.

We thanked him for sharing his experience and provided a Healthwatch leaflet for future reference.

We spoke with a woman whose father has recently been diagnosed with epilepsy.

We provided information about epilepsy and shared contact details for specialist support services. She also received Healthwatch leaflets, and we directed her to our website for further guidance and resources.





A resident raised concerns about the lack of telephone appointments at Leighton Road Surgery. She explained that patients without access to technology are required to complete a paper form and take it to the surgery, and she felt that e-consult presents too many difficulties. She described the system as unsuitable for older people and considered it discriminatory.

We noted her concerns alongside similar feedback received from other residents. As a result, Leighton Road Surgery was added to our 2025 Enter & View visit schedule. The visit took place on Monday 30 June, and the findings are now available on our website.

## What is Enter and View?



*Part of the local Healthwatch programme is to carry out Enter and View visits. Local Healthwatch representatives carry out these visits to health and social care services to find out how they are being managed and make recommendations where there are areas for improvement.*

*The Health and Social Care Act 2012 allows local Healthwatch authorised representatives to observe service delivery and talk to service users, their families and care workers on premises such as hospitals, residential homes, GP practices, dental surgeries, optometrists and pharmacies.*

*Enter and View visits can happen if people tell us there is a problem with a service but, equally, they can occur when services have a good reputation, so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.*

*Enter and Views are not intended to specifically identify safeguarding issues. However, if safeguarding concerns arise during a visit they are reported in accordance with Healthwatch safeguarding policies.*

A woman caring for her elderly mother, who has had a stroke, and her father, who is believed to have Alzheimer's, told us she was unsure where to start in finding appropriate care and support.

We provided information on stroke and Alzheimer's and introduced her to Age UK, who were also present at the event, so she could receive further guidance and explore the support available.

During a visit to the Chatty Café, our Director and a volunteer spoke with 37 residents. Many expressed concerns that the "NHS in Leighton Buzzard is falling apart" and shared a general feeling of being let down. Several also raised issues about pharmacies in the town closing between 1–2pm for lunch, which they felt limited access to essential services.

We thanked residents for sharing their views and assured them that their feedback will be incorporated into our ongoing work. These insights will inform our discussions with system partners as we advocate for improved, accessible services for the community.

# JUST ASK – BIGGLESWADE

## TUESDAY 24TH JUNE

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The 'Just Ask' event in Biggleswade took place on 24th June in the Market Square, positioned directly opposite Surfers Café. The initiative brought together a collaborative group of six partner organisations: CBC Tenancy Involvement & Engagement, Age UK, Carers in Bedfordshire, ELFT Recovery College, The Stroke Association, and Bedfordshire & Luton Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

Throughout the day, the event attracted **86** local residents, many of whom engaged in meaningful conversations about a wide range of health and wellbeing topics. Common areas of discussion included diabetes management, neurodiversity, and access to mental health support, highlighting the diverse needs and interests of the community.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) further used the opportunity to provide 11 free blood pressure checks, offering residents immediate health insights and promoting early detection of potential issues.

The event was delivered with the support of six HWCB staff members and volunteers, whose presence ensured the smooth running of activities and enabled residents to access information, guidance, and signposting throughout the day.

## FEEDBACK FROM VISITORS

The examples below represent a snapshot of the feedback and enquiries we received at Biggleswade, highlighting the themes and experiences that will help inform our ongoing work.

A member of our Healthwatch team spoke with a social prescriber from Biggleswade.

We discussed the role of Healthwatch and how we support the local community, as well as exploring opportunities to share knowledge and information. We provided leaflets and our contact email for future communication. We also shared details of our 2025 Just Ask programme and our Festival for Older People, which will take place on the first Friday of October.

A gentleman, who told us he has difficulties with his mental health is experiencing issues with his Housing Association, Sovereign.

We introduced him to CBC Tenancy who supplied him with information regarding the tenancy team and Sovereign who would help.



A gentleman asked for information about local carers' groups. He explained that his mother-in-law had recently been discharged from hospital without any care in place, despite a diagnosis of Alzheimer's.

We provided him with Healthwatch contact details and signposted him to Carers in Bedfordshire, who were also present at the event. They spoke with him directly, recorded his details, and encouraged him to register so he could access their support.

A woman, accompanied by her mother, asked how requests for social care support are currently considered. Her son is neurodiverse and has an EHCP, but his assessment concluded that a social worker was not required. She was uncertain about what other support options might be available. They described regular behavioural challenges that significantly affect family life.

We listened to her concerns and acknowledged the difficulties she and her family are facing. We explained that HWCB recently completed a project featuring a focus group and case studies, titled 'Breaking the Silence: Voices from Families Facing Child-to-Parent Abuse'. We encouraged her to read the report and to contact us afterwards so we could discuss her situation further and help explore potential support pathways.

Several individuals raised concerns about accessing appointments at Ivel Valley Medical Centre. Residents reported that appointments can only be made online, with no option to book by phone. One man, aged around 35–40, told us that the practice operates walk-in appointments at 8:30am only, which he felt made it difficult to be seen and created accessibility challenges.

We thanked them for sharing their concerns and reiterated that GP practices must offer accessible alternatives for patients who cannot use online systems. We will seek further clarification from the surgery about its current appointment arrangements to ensure that all patients have fair and equitable access to care.

A lady aged 50 explained she is pre-diabetic and currently attending a 14-week NHS diabetic course. Although she is finding this very useful, she also feels this is a big commitment and suggests it could be condensed to a 6–8-week program.

We gave the lady information on T2 Diabetes and encouraged her to access Diabetes UK website for further specialist information.

The Healthwatch team spoke with a couple in their sixties to share information about Healthwatch, its purpose, and the events we deliver. They told us their 47-year-old son had a stroke two years ago and were looking for guidance on suitable exercises to support his recovery.

We provided information about Healthwatch, including a link to our website, and highlighted our flagship event, the Festival for Older People. We also introduced them to the Stroke Association, who were able to offer tailored advice and support relating to stroke recovery.

# JUST ASK – AMPTHILL

## THURSDAY 24TH JULY

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The 'Just Ask' community outreach session in Ampthill took place on 24th July, coinciding with the town's market day and situated prominently within the main marketplace within the town centre carpark.

The initiative brought together six partner organisations: Age UK, CBC Safer Communities, British Liver Trust, ELFT Recovery College, Carers in Bedfordshire, and the Community Immunisation Team.

Throughout the day, we engaged with over **82** visitors, offering them the opportunity to share concerns and seek information. Residents raised a range of issues, including concerns regarding limited transport links across Central Bedfordshire, significant delays in accessing hospital treatment, and insufficient support for people with disabilities. These conversations provided valuable insight into the ongoing challenges faced by the community.

These focused, one-to-one interactions demonstrate the continued importance of our role in providing local residents with vital health, care, and community services.

The session was staffed and supported by five HWCB team members and volunteers, who ensured that visitors were welcomed, listened to, and signposted to appropriate support where needed.

## FEEDBACK FROM VISITORS

The examples below represent a snapshot of the feedback and enquiries we received at Ampthill, highlighting the themes and experiences that will help inform our ongoing work.

A woman told us she felt that disability support had been poor. Although she received a diagnosis from her doctor, she was not signposted to any further help. Occupational Health visited her home but were unable to offer support, leaving her feeling dismissed and without follow-up.

We acknowledged her experience and assured her that her feedback is important. We will raise her concerns with the relevant services. We also signposted her to organisations that may be able to provide advice or additional support.

A gentleman who had recently returned home from hospital following treatment for a brain tumour approached us to learn more about Healthwatch.

We provided him with Healthwatch leaflets and information about organisations that may be able to support him as he recovers. We also discussed the types of care and assistance available at home, should he need additional help.

An elderly lady approached us to discuss the difficulties she was experiencing with visual impairment.

We provided her with information and signposted her to Sight Concern for specialist advice and support.

A woman aged 75+ shared positive feedback about the health and social care support she received following recent heart surgery.

We welcomed her feedback and were pleased to hear that the care she received had a positive impact on her recovery. Experiences like hers help highlight what is working well for patients and can inform best practice across local services.

We spoke with a mother of four who shared her concerns about two of her children's health needs. Her 8-year-old daughter was recently diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, and her 13-year-old son, who has ADHD, has also become profoundly deaf and now uses a cochlear implant.

We provided her with information about Young Healthwatch for her son, signposted her to Xyla Care for specialist support with Type 1 diabetes, and gave her a parental guide on ADHD to help her navigate the available support.

A woman approached us seeking advice for her parent who has Parkinson's. She mentioned that she is already registered with Carers in Bedfordshire.

We provided her with a Parkinson's information sheet from Healthwatch, along with details for the Lifeline Service, Priority Services for Silsoe, and additional mental health support options. This ensured she had a range of resources to help her access further assistance for her parent's needs.

A 91-year-old woman spoke with us about the poor transport links in the area.

We acknowledged that reliable and accessible transport is vital for older residents to attend appointments, remain connected, and maintain their independence. We will share her feedback with local services so that transport challenges can be considered in future planning and improvement work.

A resident told us that both of her parents are beginning to show signs of memory loss and possible dementia.

We provided her with information leaflets on memory loss and dementia, including contact details for specialist services that can offer further guidance and support.

A woman told us she had seen her GP in May and urgently needed an appointment with a neurological consultant. She waited four weeks for the referral letter, only to learn that the NHS waiting time would be around 45 weeks. She has opted to go private instead, where the wait is six weeks.

We will share her experience with the relevant NHS services to highlight the impact of long waiting times on patients. We also provided her with neurological information leaflets to support her while she waits for her appointment.



# JUST ASK – SHEFFORD

## THURSDAY 7TH AUGUST

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The 'Just Ask' outreach session in Shefford took place on 7th August, positioned on the High Street close to the local pharmacy, library and supermarket, making it easily accessible to passing residents. The session was delivered in partnership with six additional organisations: Bedfordshire & Luton Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Carers in Bedfordshire, ELFT Recovery College, Sight Concern, The Stroke Association, and the Community Immunisation Team.

Throughout the day, HWCB staff engaged with residents on a wide range of health-related topics. Many conversations centred on dementia, diabetes, cancer, and neurodiversity; subjects that most visitors had either experienced personally or encountered through family members or friends. To support these discussions, the team provided a variety of information materials, including leaflets on specific conditions, guidance on accessing specialist support aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles.

The session attracted a total of **103** visitors, reflecting strong community interest and the value of providing accessible, face-to-face health information in town centre locations. These brief but meaningful interactions reinforce HWCB's ongoing role in connecting local residents to vital health and community services, ensuring they are aware of the resources available to them.

The outreach was supported by eight HWCB staff members and volunteers, whose efforts helped create a welcoming environment and ensured that residents received timely information, signposting, and support.

## FEEDBACK FROM VISITORS

The examples below represent a snapshot of the feedback and enquiries we received at Shefford, highlighting the themes and experiences that will help inform our ongoing work.

A woman told us she was feeling overwhelmed with grief. Her former partner is dying from prostate cancer, and her brother-in-law has also recently been diagnosed. She is finding the situation very difficult and is seeking support.

We encouraged her to contact Macmillan for emotional support, practical advice, and guidance relating to her loved ones' diagnoses. We also provided a Sue Ryder leaflet on coping with grief, explaining that it offers strategies for managing intense emotions, information about the grieving process, and details of additional support services she can access.

The Healthwatch team spoke with a woman about her 31-year-old son. She explained that he has severe dyslexia and cannot read or write. Although he was non-verbal for many years, he now speaks constantly and also struggles with significant anger issues, which she is finding increasingly difficult to manage.

We provided information about Adult Social Care and encouraged her to contact Autism Bedfordshire for further guidance and support. She confirmed that she is already registered with Carers in Bedfordshire and is able to attend sessions with her son at The Hub, which may offer additional help.

We gave a lady, who is new to the area, information about our Healthwatch events including the Festival for Older People, details about local NHS services, the local Good Neighbours Group, and the CBC waste-disposal wheel.

Connecting new residents with local events and groups strengthens community participation and reduces isolation.

A grandmother asked for information about autism, explaining that her friend's grandchild had recently lost her childminder due to challenging behaviour.

We provided information about SNAP and SENDIASS, noting that the SNAP forum may be able to help identify a childminder with appropriate SEND training and experience.

### Who are SNAP?

*SNAP stands for "Special Needs Action Panel." It's an independent, parent-led forum for families in Central Bedfordshire who have children or young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), from birth up to age 25.*

### What is SENDIASS?



*SENDIASS stands for 'Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service.'*

*It provides free, confidential and impartial information and advice about SEND law, local policy, and how SEND works in schools, colleges, and other settings.*

A woman told us her pregnant daughter was experiencing health issues, and she was looking for information to better support her.

We provided a range of resources, including information from Maternity Voices Matters, perinatal mental health materials, NHS pregnancy leaflets, and a British Heart Foundation leaflet on pregnancy. We hope these resources will help her feel more informed and better equipped to support her daughter.

# JUST ASK – DUNSTABLE

## FRIDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER

The final 'Just Ask' community outreach session for 2025, took place in Dunstable near the entrance of the Asda store, a high-footfall location that consistently draws strong public engagement. As expected, the session proved very popular, welcoming **152** visitors throughout the day. The outreach was delivered in partnership with six supporting organisations: Headway Luton, the Bedford, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board, Circle MSK, Sight Concern, Stroke Association, and the Community Pharmacy Team.

Residents raised a variety of questions and concerns, reflecting the broad spectrum of health and wellbeing issues experienced within the community. Common themes included general health queries, the need for clearer or more accessible diabetes support, and ongoing challenges related to accessing GP surgeries, particularly difficulties securing appointments with a GP rather than other clinicians. These conversations highlighted the importance of accessible, face-to-face information sessions where people feel comfortable discussing their concerns.

Although interactions were often brief, they provided meaningful insight into community experiences and reaffirmed HWCB's vital role in connecting residents to essential healthcare, and community services. Staff and volunteers offered information, advice, and signposting to help visitors navigate available support more effectively.

The session was delivered with the assistance of seven HWCB staff members and volunteers, whose presence ensured that residents were welcomed, listened to, and supported throughout the day.

## FEEDBACK FROM VISITORS

The examples below represent a snapshot of the feedback and enquiries we received at Dunstable, highlighting the themes and experiences that will help inform our ongoing work.

A patient from Peel Street Surgery in Houghton Regis told us he had received excellent treatment for throat cancer and good ongoing support for diabetes.

We were pleased to hear about his positive experiences, and it is encouraging to know that the care he received has met his needs so well.

A couple with a disabled daughter, who currently receives eight hours of social care support per week, enquired about available support for carers.

We signposted the couple to Carers in Bedfordshire, Carers Central Luton, and also provided information from the Care Quality Commission. These specialist services can offer detailed guidance and support tailored to their needs.



A resident raised concerns about the diabetes service at Wheatfield Surgery. He had been offered a diabetic pump, but the offer was later withdrawn. He has submitted a letter of complaint and is currently awaiting a response.

We provided him with a Healthwatch leaflet and advised that he could contact us for further support if he is unable to reach a satisfactory resolution to his complaint.

A woman with Multiple Sclerosis told us that her symptoms had recently changed and that she had missed her annual appointment.

We encouraged her to make a written list of her new symptoms and to contact her GP as soon as possible to ensure her care is reviewed. We also signposted her to MS-specific organisations, such as the MS Society, where she can access advice, peer support, and information on managing symptoms at home.

The Healthwatch team spoke with a woman who works with members of the deaf community.

We shared information about our accessible resources and provided her with a Communication Board created by Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire. She plans to use it within her voluntary group to support clearer communication and help make their activities more inclusive for people with hearing loss.

We talked to a lady who has a heart condition and borderline diabetes.

We discussed the importance of regular check-ups, monitoring her health, and accessing local support and resources to help manage her conditions.

We spoke with a woman from a Women's Centre who is awaiting council housing. She has three young children, two of school age and one aged 18 months, and was looking for advice on financial matters.

We signposted her to Central Bedfordshire Council for financial support and guidance. We also discussed options for furnishing her new home once housing is secured and advised her about the Preen Reuse Centre in Biggleswade and the items they can provide. She was also given a Healthwatch leaflet for future reference.

Another gentleman told us that he was in need of support with his housing situation.

We provided him with contact details for NOAH (New Opportunities and Horizons) in Luton, who offer practical assistance and guidance for people experiencing housing difficulties. We also gave him a prospectus for the ELFT Recovery College, which provides free courses to help build confidence, develop skills, and support personal wellbeing while navigating challenging circumstances.

## What is NOAH?

NOAH in Luton is a charity that supports homeless and vulnerable adults by providing meals, showers, clothing, healthcare access, housing advice, and practical support, as well as training, education, and work-readiness programs to help people move into stable employment and independent living.

## Who are ELFT Recovery College?



East London NHS Foundation Trust. Through ELFT, the Recovery College is a free service offering courses and workshops focused on mental health, wellbeing and recovery.

A woman approached us for advice regarding her father, whom she believes may be showing early signs of dementia.



We provided a range of information leaflets, including Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire materials, resources on living with dementia, and details for the CBC Older People's Network website. We also shared information from the Fire Service about a flashing light alarm switch, which can support safety at home. In addition, we told her about the Festival for Older People 2025 to encourage engagement with wider support services. She confirmed that a Power of Attorney is already in place and that she intends to register as a carer with her father's GP surgery.





# ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK FROM ORGANISATIONS WHO JOINED US

Throughout our outreach programme, we were joined by a wide range of partner organisations who offered visitors invaluable advice, information, and guidance. Their expertise and willingness to engage directly with the community played a vital role in the success of the programme. We greatly appreciate their continued support and the positive impact they make for local residents.

Provided residents with advice on Bedfordshire Fire Safety visits, free health checks, and initiatives designed to support healthier homes. They also shared information on utility assistance schemes, opportunities for tenant involvement, and support available for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

**CBC Tenancy Involvement & Engagement Officer  
Housing Initiatives**

Offered guidance on mental health support and signposted individuals to a range of local services, including community wellbeing programmes and specialist organisations providing further advice and assistance.

**Mind BLMK**

Shared information with the community about the Dunstable iCaSH clinic and how to access its sexual health services.

**iCaSH**

Held discussions with visitors on topics such as Power of Attorney, Wills, becoming an executor, home help, the Handyperson Service, dementia support, mental health and housing.

They also spoke with a gentleman caring for his wife and experiencing significant pressure, providing information on gardening support, respite care, and how to apply for carers' vouchers through Central Bedfordshire Council.

**Age UK Bedfordshire**

Engaged with numerous residents on Pharmacy First, acute care pathways, GP appointments, the NHS App, and prostate cancer treatment options. They also emphasised the importance of regular blood pressure checks.

**BLMK Integrated Care System**

Engaged with residents about available stroke support services and risk-reduction strategies. One couple sought guidance on recovery following their son's stroke at age 47, while others received information on TIAs, cholesterol management, lifestyle changes, and stroke during birth.

**Stroke Association**

Discussed their services with local residents and explored a range of health-related concerns. They encouraged regular blood pressure monitoring and shared details of additional support available through the Stroke Association, the NHS, and the Integrated Care Board.

**Headway Luton**

Raised awareness of liver health, shared information on prevention and early intervention, and signposted individuals to specialist support services.

**British Liver Trust**

Raised awareness of their services through conversations, leaflets, and newsletters. Many discussions focused on maintaining good eye health, the importance of regular eye examinations, and the use of assistive technology including mobile phone apps.

**Sight Concern**

Provided information about Bedford Hospital, including details on Trust membership and its benefits. Representatives also spoke about the role of governors and opportunities to get involved.

**Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**

Engaged with members of the public on issues such as scams, personal safety, crime prevention, cuckooing, and violence against women and girls, helping residents understand how to stay safe and seek support.

**CBC Safer Communities Team**

Distributed multiple copies of their latest course prospectus and took the opportunity to share knowledge, network, and connect with fellow partners at the event.

**East London NHS Foundation Trust Recovery College**

Provided advice on exercise, secondary health issues, hospital care, and pathways into MSK services, helping residents better understand how to manage musculoskeletal concerns.

**Circle MSK**

Identified several self-referrals to the Type 2 diabetes education programme. They supported individuals in understanding their condition and offered tailored dietary and lifestyle advice.

**Diabetes Education Team**

Promoted vaccine awareness, provided guidance to individuals and families, and signposted visitors to clinics and walk-in vaccination centres.

**Community Immunisation Team**

Spoke with community members about the range of support available to unpaid carers. They provided detailed guidance to several carers, helping them understand how to access services and additional assistance.

**Carers in Bedfordshire**

Shared information with residents on how to access urgent care services and what support is available.

**Herts Urgent Care (HUC)**

Discussed services offering relief and practical support for unpaid or family carers, helping them understand the options available.

**Respite at Home Volunteers**

Provided information to residents on how their service helps individuals remain independent at home, offering practical support tailored to everyday needs.

**Good Life Sorted**



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark blue zip-up jacket, is smiling and holding a small, fluffy, light-colored dog. The dog is wearing a red harness. They are standing on a city street with brick buildings and shopfronts in the background. A green banner with the word 'Summary' is overlaid on the image.

## Summary

# SUMMARY

The 2025 'Just Ask' programme of events attracted more than **650** visitors over six locations across Central Bedfordshire.

Local residents raised a wide range of issues and concerns. The summary below outlines the main topics, queries, and concerns raised throughout the program of events. These were addressed either through information provided by HWCB staff and volunteers or directly by the relevant service if they were present.

Where advice or information could not be provided on the day, visitors were signposted to the appropriate service, including contact details, or followed up by Healthwatch staff at a later date.

<b>Access to Healthcare</b>  GP appointments hard to get; online booking excludes some residents; limited dental access; long waits for specialists; variable mental health support; Pharmacy First inquiries.	<b>Chronic Conditions &amp; Health Management</b>  Diabetes (Type 1 & 2) support; cardiovascular issues; cancer care; stroke recovery; macular degeneration & visual impairment; neurological conditions; dietary advice.	<b>Neurodiversity &amp; Children's Health</b>  ADHD, autism, dyslexia support; EHCP guidance; Child-to-Parent Abuse concerns; signposting to CHUMS, Autism Bedfordshire, SENDIASS, SNAP.
<b>Carers' Support</b>  Requests for carers' groups; respite and practical support; caring for relatives with Alzheimer's, stroke, or other conditions.	<b>Social Care, Housing &amp; Community Support</b>  Housing issues; hospital discharge support; Housing Association challenges; Blue Badge guidance; support for vulnerable adults; financial help & community resources.	<b>Mental Health &amp; Emotional Wellbeing</b>  Stress, anxiety, grief support; mental health service guidance; support for caregivers.
<b>Older People &amp; Accessibility</b>  Dementia/memory loss; social isolation; transport difficulties; engagement in community events.	<b>Positive Feedback</b>  Praise for NHS care, Healthwatch guidance, and support received.	<b>Health Checks</b>  Blood pressure screenings identifying high readings; advice for follow-up care.





## Conclusion



# CONCLUSION

The six 'Just Ask' events, held in Ampthill, Shefford, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, and Leighton Buzzard, successfully captured a wide range of topics, issues, and concerns raised by local residents.

Feedback included positive experiences, and all queries and concerns were addressed and actioned effectively, either during the events or through follow-up.

Throughout 2025, the 'Just Ask' events played a key role in connecting residents with health, social care, and community services across Central Bedfordshire. By partnering with local organisations and volunteers, the events provided immediate guidance and support on issues such as housing, healthcare access, mental health, neurodiversity, carers' support, and the needs of older people. Through these face-to-face interactions, Healthwatch staff not only responded to individual concerns but also gathered important insights into community health and wellbeing needs.

These activities demonstrate Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire's commitment to being a visible and accessible independent resource, bridging gaps in care, and amplifying the voices of local residents. The views, concerns, and experiences collected are shared with key decision-makers, commissioners, and service providers to inform improvements in local services.





# Appendix



Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

# JUST ASK...

We're here to listen



Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is coming  
to a location near you!

Need advice on **health, social care or other local services**?  
Want to find out what support is available in your area? Come  
and chat with us! We'll be joined by partner organisations and  
local voluntary groups, ready to provide **information, guidance  
and support** tailored to your needs.

Find us at a venue near you:

DATE	JUST ASK 2025	TIME
Friday 11th April	Morrison's, HOUGHTON REGIS	9am-1.30pm
Tuesday 13th May	Market Square, LEIGHTON BUZZARD	9am-1.30pm
Tuesday 24th June	Market Square, BIGGLESWADE	9am-1.30pm
Thursday 17th July	Charter Market, Town Centre, AMPHILL	9am-1.30pm
Thursday 7th August	High Street, SHEFFORD	9am-1.30pm
Friday 5th September	Asda, DUNSTABLE	9am-1.30pm

No question is too big or small – just ask! Whether you need support, have concerns, or simply want to have your say, we're here to help.

**Come along, get informed, and make your voice heard!**

**Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire – Working for You.**





## Are you passionate about Health and Social Care?

Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do, from talking to people about their experiences of local health and social care services and helping at our community outreach events.

Volunteering is flexible, so you can talk to us about how much time you want to give.

it starts with  
**YOU**

T. 0300 303 8554

[www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](http://www.healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk)

E: [info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk](mailto:info@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk)

**healthwatch**  
Central Bedfordshire

# About Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire

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Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is the local consumer champion promoting choice and influencing the provision of high quality health, social care and wellbeing services for all across Central Bedfordshire.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCBC) has significant statutory powers to ensure that the voice of the consumer is strengthened and heard by those who commission, deliver and regulate health and care services. HWCBC engages and consults with all sections of the local population so that a wide cross-section of views are heard, understood and acted upon. Everything we say and do is informed by our connections to local people and our expertise is grounded in their experience.

Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is one of three local Healthwatch in the County of Bedfordshire and belong to a network of local Healthwatch. Healthwatch England leads, supports and guides the Healthwatch network which is made up of the national body and local Healthwatch across each of the 152 local authority areas in England.

Healthwatch is the only body looking solely at people's experience across all health and social care. As a statutory watchdog our role is to ensure that local health and social care services, and the local decision-makers put the experiences of people at the heart of their care.

**healthwatch**  
Central Bedfordshire

# healthwatch

Central Bedfordshire

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**Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire**