

# The value of listening

Healthwatch Bexley  
Annual Report 2023–2024



---

# Contents

---

Message from our Chair	3
About us	4
Year in review	5
How we've made a difference this year	6
Your voice heard at a wider level	7
Listening to your experiences	8
Hearing from all communities	11
Advice and information	14
Volunteering	13
Finance and future priorities	15
Statutory statements	17



**"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."**

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



---

# Message from our Chair

---

As I reflect on my fifth year as Chair of Healthwatch Bexley, it's with a deep sense of pride and admiration for the resilience and dedication shown by our team and the wider community.

This past year has been one of considerable change and stability; we welcomed Simone as our new Healthwatch Manager, bid farewell to Jayne Garfield-Field, and welcomed new people into leadership roles across the NHS and Bexley Council.

Our commitment to ensuring the voices of Bexley's residents are heard has never been stronger. Through increased face-to-face engagements, targeted community projects, and strategic collaborations, we have enhanced our presence across the borough. Our current efforts to revitalise our volunteer base and reintroduce our Advisory Board post-Covid are fundamental in ensuring that we remain a true reflection of the community we serve.

This year, we have worked hard to integrate feedback from residents in the North of the Borough into the redevelopment plans for the Erith Hospital site, with a focus on making community input a cornerstone of local development. Our active participation in key local boards and partnerships, like the Adult Safeguarding Board and Bexley Wellbeing Partnership, continues to influence and shape the health and wellbeing strategy that impacts every resident.

Looking forward, we are dedicated to expanding our outreach and enhancing opportunities for community involvement. The revamp of our Advisory Board is set to elevate our profile and foster deeper connections within the community, ensuring that every voice is not only heard but also acted upon.



**“The optimism and commitment to improving local services and reducing inequalities, which I have witnessed over the last few years, continue to inspire me. Together, we are making strides towards a healthier, more inclusive Bexley “**

Rikki Garcia

Chair, Healthwatch Bexley Advisory Board



---

# About us

---

## Healthwatch Bexley is your local health and social care champion.

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

### Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



### Our mission

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



### Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.



# Year in review

## Reaching out:

**8,000 people**

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



**1,400 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost-of-living crisis.

## Making a difference to care:

We published

**3 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

**Health and Wellbeing Strategy**

which highlighted the struggles people face maintaining a healthy lifestyle.



## Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have had:

**5 outstanding volunteers**

outstanding volunteers who gave up 23 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2023 - 24 we received

**£100,000**

which is the same as the previous year.

We currently employ

**3 staff**

who help us carry out our work.



# How we've made a difference this year

Spring



We updated our social media page and regularly shared important posts for those in the borough.



We distributed approximately 3500 leaflets amongst individuals and different groups.

Summer



We attended carers week and heard about the challenges carers faced in the borough.



We reached out to less heard groups such as Mencap, Age UK and attended the Asian health and wellbeing event.

Autumn



We attended Oxleas AGM where we listened to their achievements, improvements and plans for the future.



Through phone calls and emails we were able to help over 50 people who were looking for advice or signposting to a service.

Winter



Attended six mother, baby and toddler groups and listened to their thoughts on the services available to them in the borough.



Attended eleven different community engagements in the North of the borough and spoke to more than 600 residents about Erith hospital.



---

# Your voice heard at a wider level

---

**We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Bexley influence decisions made about services at South East London Integrated Care System (ICS) level.**

This year we've worked with Healthwatch across Bexley to achieve:



**Achievement one:** Fed in people's experiences to identify, shape, and develop the six South East London Integrated Care System priorities, the principles that underpin them and the ICS Integrated Care Strategy. We also provided support for this programme's community engagement.

**Achievement two:** Provided representation on 16 ICS and ICB Boards, Committees, and Groups. Through this participation, we ensured an independent voice for the public, and highlighted the insight and intelligence gathered by SEL Healthwatch to decision makers and health providers.



**Achievement three:** Developed south east London Healthwatch webpages, bringing together key Healthwatch reports in one place to facilitate health commissioners' access to people's views, experiences, stories, and recommended solutions.

**Achievement four:** Championed digital inclusion across south east London programmes and services so that as technology use becomes more widespread, the reality of digital exclusion, which many people face, is mitigated.





# Listening to your experiences

**Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.**



# Experiences of tier 2 weight management in Bexley

Last year, we published findings of the experiences the public shared with us surrounding weight management services in the North of the Borough. With this insight we were able to understand what residents would like a local weight management/ healthy lifestyle service to include.

You shared with us many different experiences that suggested there were still many barriers to weight management services and maintaining a healthy lifestyle in general. We were able to speak with many residents within the North of the borough regarding their experiences with weight management services and how they managed their weight in general.

The North of the borough was targeted in particular due to it having the high poverty rates.

**64.4%**

of adults aged 18 and over in Bexley have excess weight



## What did you tell us about weight management?

- The majority of people we spoke to wanted cooking classes for a healthy balanced diet.
- That there is a need for mental health services to provide support regarding weight.
- There was a real importance of losing weight and being able to maintain keeping the weight off which can be established with an effective tier 2 weight management service.

### Recommendations:

- The new service should especially target those who belong to high risk groups within the borough.
- A community hub that is available for regular weigh ins and advice/information.
- To ensure that the new service will be flexible with times and locations for those who may work full time or shift work and those who have accessibility needs.
- Less advertisement of fast food in local areas such as bus stops, billboard and on the side of buses.
- More information such as leaflets and flyers being present in GP surgeries, libraries and community areas.

# Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

## Ensuring everyone's voice is heard:

This year we really engaged with our local residents. We were able to focus on ensuring that we were interacting with specific groups who's thoughts and opinions may not have been so easily heard.

By doing this we were able to tap into completely different views, offer support and plan projects for the next year with what these groups had told us.



## Building relationships:

This year we really focussed on expanding our relationships with other health and social care organisations and services. Through meeting new people and learning about other companies, we have been able to expand our knowledge on services within the borough, this helped and improved our signposting of residents.



## Outstanding service

This year we have provided excellent service, all phone calls, emails and letters were answered with the utmost support, care and dignity. We have built some great relationships with residents and have many that we stay in regular contact with to continually provide support and guidance. We have received such positive feedback regarding our customer care.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



# Hearing from all communities

**Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.**

**This year we have reached different communities by:**

- Attending enjoyments such as the Asian health and wellbeing event
- Meeting carers during carers week and listening to their experiences.
- Regularly attending Bexley pensioners forum.
- Engaging with members of Bexley's Community and Faith Leader's forum

---

# Hearing from the North of the borough

**Healthwatch Bexley undertook a project for a hospital situated North of the borough, the surrounding areas are the most deprived of the borough. Engagement with individuals from this particular area allowed us to gain insight into their experiences.**

Although the project was focussed on a particular service, over three months of engagement we spoke to over 600 residents who shared their experiences of accessing primary care services in poorer areas of the borough.

## **As a result of what people shared, Healthwatch Bexley found:**

- Many residents were being relocated to services outside of their residing area and where unable to make the journey due to accessibility issues, age and childcare.
- Unable to get a GP appointment or 3 week waits for an appointment.
- Poor communication between service providers and users.
- A dislike of the E-consult online service.
- A general lack of care for those living in the north of the borough
- Insufficient funding.

## **A case study from a resident describing their experience at Erith hospital:**

Mrs J told us about a particularly challenging event during the pre-Christmas period when both her children, aged 8 and 3, fell ill. Initially dismissing their symptoms as a common cold, the situation for her 3-year-old worsened significantly overnight. Faced with the decision of where to seek urgent care, Mrs J opted for Erith Hospital over Queen Elizabeth's A&E, hoping for shorter wait times. Upon arrival at Erith Hospital, she and her children were met with a crowded waiting area, forcing them to wait outside in the cold December weather. Mrs J vividly described the scene: "Being December, it was freezing outside, and I had to stand and wait with my two poorly children." The overcrowding inside meant many were seated on the floor, a sight that both surprised and concerned her.

Despite these challenges, Mrs J praised the quality of care her children received, highlighting the staff's kindness and effectiveness: "I cannot complain about the care that my children received, the staff were lovely, and the treatment was perfect." However, she stressed the urgent need for expanding the hospital's urgent care facilities to accommodate the high demand and improve waiting conditions, especially for vulnerable groups like young children and the elderly. Her experience underscores the critical balance between service quality and facility capacity, spotlighting the essential need for infrastructure development to match the community's healthcare demands.

## **Our Recommendations:**

1. Update the site.
2. Increase the opening hours.
3. Increase and improve the urgent care waiting area.
4. Create a health and wellbeing hub.
5. Reintroduce physiotherapy and MSK services.
6. Introduce walk in GP service and out of hours dentist appointments.
7. Develop a café.





# Volunteering

**We're supported by a small team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.**

**This year our volunteers:**

- Visited communities to promote their local Healthwatch and what we have to offer.
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views.
- Attended events within the borough to promote Healthwatch and form relationships with residents.





"I originally started volunteering at Healthwatch Bexley as a work placement for university, after I had finished my time there I was offered a permanent position and I am now the community engagement officer. During my time as a volunteer I greatly enjoyed getting out into the community and contributing to something that makes such a difference for those living in it."



Niamh –  
Healthwatch Bexley



"I joined Healthwatch Bexley about 4 years ago and represent our organisation attending Patient engagement committee (PEC) meetings in Lewisham & Greenwich and Dartford & Gravesham NHS trusts as well as Southeast London Reference group meetings. I used to visit local hospitals on a regular basis to show case HW Bexley and do various surveys. In addition I also visited the Reference library in Townley road as well as Blackfen and Sidcup libraries to highlight our work and engage with the public..

I thoroughly enjoy volunteering for Healthwatch Bexley and in the past enjoyed the interaction with the fellow Bexley residents."



Saby –  
Healthwatch Bexley

## Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

-  [www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk)
-  020 8304 9344
-  [info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk)



# Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

## Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£100,000	Expenditure on pay	£98,730
Additional income	£13,907	Non-pay expenditure	£16,429
		Office and management fees	£19,453
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£113,907</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£134,612</b>

---

**Additional income is broken down by:**

- £941 received from Healthwatch England for vaccine confidence deep dive project.
- £10,007 project management and engagement with members of the public.
- £2,959 Healthwatch weight management engagement work.

## ICS funding

Healthwatch across South East London also receives funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
A. SEL ICS posts x2 (1.2 fte)	£91,500
B. South East London Healthwatch Reference Group	
C. Organisational costs	

---

## 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:**

1. To continue focusing on health inequalities within the borough and reaching out to those less heard and vulnerable groups/ individuals.
2. To engage with residents of the borough through the attendance of events, groups and creating presence within the community.
3. An internal refresh of Healthwatch Bexley, raising awareness of our organisation and raising volunteer numbers.





# Statutory statements

**Healthwatch Bexley, 2a, Devonshire Road, Bexleyheath, DA6 8DS**

**[www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk)**

**0208 304 9344**

**[info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk)**

**Healthwatch Bexley 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 around ten members who work on a voluntary basis 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 2023/24, the Board were unable to meet, however we are now reconstituted the board and expect them to meet on a bi-monthly basis from now on. The Chair has been acting as the representative of the advisory board and meets monthly with the Healthwatch Manager.

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 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending 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 and send it to those on our mailing list.

## **Responses to recommendations**

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so 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 that have been shared with us.

We also take insight and experiences to decision makers in the South East London Integrated Care System. For example, we produce an integrated report of all SEL Healthwatch reports published every quarter, which is shared widely. In addition, we provide updates on Healthwatch activity to the ICB Engagement Assurance Committee and to the System and Concerns Group. Our SEL Healthwatch Reference Group has influenced the Digital Strategy and the Anchor System Programme engagement. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.




# healthwatch

Healthwatch Bexley  
2A Devonshire Road  
Bexleyheath

DA6 8DS

 [www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk)

 020 8304 9344

 [info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbexley.co.uk)

 [Facebook.com/Healthwatchbexley](https://www.facebook.com/Healthwatchbexley)

 [HealthwatchBexley](https://www.instagram.com/HealthwatchBexley)