

# The value of listening

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham  
Annual Report 2023–2024



**healthwatch**  
Barking and  
Dagenham

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**"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



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# Message from our Chair

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Once again, it is my privilege to introduce the Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham Annual Report, updating our community on the work we have been doing to represent your views on health and social care services. This year has been particularly busy, with significant challenges facing both the health and social care system and our residents.

LifeLine continues to deliver Healthwatch in the borough, and we have worked diligently to amplify residents' voices, build a cohesive team of staff and volunteers, and provide work placements for young people in our borough. We are pleased to highlight the achievements we have made this year and the positive impact we have had on the quality of local health and social care services.



Our efforts this year have focused on four key areas:

- Engaging with residents
- Making recommendations based on resident experiences and feedback
- Providing solutions to service providers and commissioners
- Ensuring we make a tangible impact on those using services

Within this report, you will find fantastic examples of various projects we have undertaken. Healthwatch exists to listen to everyone's voices, and we strive to be as accessible as possible. Over the past year, we have continued to offer regular face-to-face opportunities for local people to talk to us and share their experiences of the health and social care system.

Our strong working relationship with the Integrated Care System and partners continues, allowing us to represent local people's views and experiences and challenge decision-makers. Additionally, we collaborated with other local Healthwatch organisations in North East London on three projects, which are detailed in this report.

I am proud of Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham's role in ensuring that the impacts on local people are never forgotten when decisions are made about how services are shaped, commissioned, and delivered.

Looking ahead, we will continue to:

- Help people find out about local health and social care services
- Listen to feedback on those services
- Improve service quality by informing providers, commissioners, and the Government about people's experiences and needs
- Encourage service providers to involve people in changes to their services

As we anticipate the coming year, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all our volunteers, our Board, our Enter and View representatives, and our Healthwatch Champions, whose valuable time and effort have significantly contributed to our achievements.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nathan Singleton'.

**Nathan Singleton**  
CEO of LifeLine Projects

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# About us

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## Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham 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:

**1004 people**

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



**164 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

**6 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**Enter and View at  
Hanbury Court Care Home**



## Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

**16**

outstanding volunteers who gave up 26 days to make care better for our community.

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

**£115,160**

which is the same as the previous year.





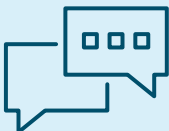





We currently employ

**3 staff**

who help us carry out our work.

# How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We launched a social media drive highlighting the impact of our projects, spreading awareness of improved services</p>	 <p>We worked with other Healthwatches in North East London on choices in antenatal care, resulting in improved services.</p>
Summer	 <p>Community Phlebotomy Services at Barking Community Hospital improved their booking system and staff training after hearing our recommendations.</p>	 <p>We worked with other Healthwatches in North East London to explore patient experiences at BHRUT hospitals (Queens and King George).</p>
Autumn	 <p>We held a large event at Barking Learning Centre on health and wellbeing, raising awareness of local services that can help residents.</p>	 <p>We engaged with over 80 residents to find out how they boost wellbeing, leading to continuing dialogue with NELFT.</p>
Winter	 <p>We highlighted the issues reported to us by parents and carers around Education Health Care Plans (EHCP).</p>	 <p>Barking and Dagenham Council began responding to our recommendations around access to social care for South Asian community.</p>

# Your voice heard at a wider level

## We collaborated with other Healthwatches to ensure the experiences of people in Barking and Dagenham influence decisions made about services at North East London Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year we've worked with Healthwatches across North East London to achieve:



**The Big Conversation:** Eight local Healthwatches worked in collaboration on an ICB funded project to ask over a thousand residents what good care looked like to them. They told us it should be *accessible, competent, person-centred, and trustworthy*. The ICB used the findings to develop draft success measures that will be reflected back to local people in the coming months and eventually lead to a single outcomes framework for the Integrated Care System. Focusing on outcomes rather than services or outputs will strengthen the ICBs focus on making a difference to what local people feel is most important.

**Care Homes:** Each Healthwatch visited **care homes** in their borough to talk to staff and residents about how GPs and other care staff could support residents. Simple information was produced for care homes on how doctors, nurses, carers and volunteers could work with them to look after residents.

As a result of better joined-up care, residents are less likely to deteriorate, can remain comfortable in familiar surroundings and are less likely to be admitted to hospital.



Healthwatches in North East London supported the North East London ICB **Research Engagement Network** to improve participation and diversity in research through engaging over 300 people from diverse communities at events and over 400 through our survey. We used the Big Conversation Good Care Framework to lay out how research could be accessible, competent, patient-centred and trustworthy. We identified community priorities for research (e.g. mental health, diabetes). We want to get the message out that if you want medical products and services to meet the health needs of your community you need to be involved in the research that develops them.

**Maternity:** in past years, we engaged with **pregnant women** from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority communities to understand how all babies born in North East London could have the best possible start. As a result, maternity providers committed to work towards cultural competency training and a communications post in each Maternity Unit, trauma-informed care for staff and service users and the provision of accessible, timely information, and multilingual advocates on site.





## 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.**



# Improving experiences of patients from minority or marginalised groups when accessing and experiencing maternity services

Last year, we published findings of the experiences of patients from minority or marginalised groups when accessing and experiencing maternity services. We worked with other Healthwatches in North East London on this project.

Thanks to this insight, North East London Local Maternity and Neonatal System equity and equality strategy was updated with an ongoing plan based on our results and feedback.

You shared experiences with us that suggested a lot still needs to happen to make sure that language and cultural barriers do not impact upon care. We spoke to 42 people in Barking and Dagenham.

**50%**

of respondents said they did not feel confident that midwives and other medical professionals will take them seriously.



## What did you tell us about maternity services?

- **55%** of respondents told us that receiving maternity care from professionals of their preferred gender was very important; however, only **27%** interacted with medical professionals that were all their own gender.
- **55%** of respondents also said it was important to that the professionals could speak their first language; however, only **39%** found this was the case.

## What difference did this make?

- The introduction of the CardMedic app providing instant translation in different languages, British Sign Language and subtitles, Easy Read and a 'read aloud' function;
- Midwifery Unit staff will take e-learning trauma-informed care courses;
- A planned Maternal Health Inequalities day with a focus on service user voice driving change;
- Work is taking place towards a central helpline in each Maternity Unit;
- A commitment to translate patient information leaflets for emergency Maternity outcomes.

# Perceptions of access to social care within the South Asian Communities in Barking and Dagenham

We investigated access to social care for the South Asian community in Barking and Dagenham. Navigating these services can present unique challenges related to culture, language, and religious beliefs.

You told us of barriers including language, lack of cultural understanding among service providers, and concerns regarding religious and dietary needs not being adequately addressed. Other concerns involved stigma surrounding social care.

**34%**

of respondents said they do not feel that social care professionals understand the challenges people from South Asian background face



## What did you tell us about perceptions of social care?

- 74% of respondents told us religious beliefs play an important role when considering social care;
- 36% said that stigma (negative attitude towards a person who needs social care support) plays a role in their ethnic community when accessing social care support, though this opinion varied and seemed dependent upon if there is existing family support available for the person needing care.

## What difference did this make?

The service provider pledged to:

- Sharing the findings and insights from this report with staff, care providers and the Safeguarding Adults Board;
- Check the training provided to staff to ensure it includes cultural responsiveness, religious literacy and the experience of carers from different ethnic backgrounds;
- Strengthen engagement with communities and faith settings to raise awareness of social care and safeguarding;
- Link insights from the report with work on direct payments in social care, because employing a Personal Assistant may be a good option for people with language or related requirements;
- Review the information on their website to make sure it is clear how people can get help with translation and interpreting.

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# Exploring the social prescribing service in Barking and Dagenham, with a focus on mental health support

**In 2023, we explored the experiences of residents that had interacted with the local social prescribing service.**

We spoke to 54 people with the aim of assessing awareness levels of social prescribing services in the local community and to explore the experiences of those who have used these services, to identify what is working well, and areas for improvement.

- 47% of respondents had not heard of the social prescribing service;
- 69% felt that there should be more publicity about the social prescribing service;
- Of those that had accessed the service, 86% of people did so due to having depression, and reported that they had a positive experience with the service.

## What difference did this make?

The service provider is:

- Planning to make it easier for people to be referred to social prescribing;
- Evaluating the information that is currently displayed on the website and making it easier to understand

Social prescribing can be beneficial to people with mental health issues, and overall is providing a very good service to people that have been referred into the service. We recommended that more advertising is needed, and that linking with faith settings would be beneficial. We also recommended that learning from other boroughs on areas such as self-referral will improve access for local residents.



**“This is an opportunity to meet people (break isolation) and introduce routine, and self-management. Please support and promote this as an invaluable service. I hope to get going as the art therapy is very helpful. People are worried about what is going to happen after the sessions end and whether there will be follow-up.”**

**—Survey participant**

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# Community Dental Services in Barking and Dagenham

**In early 2024, we spoke to residents who had experience of interacting with local Community Dental Services.**

Community Dental Services are used by those who are housebound or have additional needs such as a disability or health issue. We spoke to **48** individuals and found that, although there were some issues with access at Five Elms Clinic as the clinic does not have a visible allocated receptionist for the service, patients generally felt that the service was good.

- **76%** found it very easy to book a routine appointments, though the figure for booking an emergency appointment dipped to **50%**;
- **86%** of patients were seen within 20 minutes of arrival at the clinic;
- **93%** of respondents told us they felt their questions and concerns were adequately answered by the dentist and dental staff.

## What difference did this make?

The service providers have informed us that:

- They will streamline the checking-in process for patients' appointments;
- Recall appointments will be sent out to the most vulnerable patients rather than relying on them to contact the service;
- Staff members will alert parents and carers if the appointment is running late particularly if they are with a patient who exhibits challenging behaviour.

The service also caters to people that have anxiety around dental treatment (including children), and the comments below demonstrate the support that is required and received. Highlighting good practice benefits our local health care system.



**“Trying to go regularly helps. The dental nurse was very good, very patient, and allowed her to touch the machinery and turn it on, she was allowed to hold it.”**

**—Parent of patient**



## 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:**

- Visiting our local mosques and gurdwara to engage with worshippers and building relationships with faith settings to hear what issues local people are facing. We also work in partnership with the Barking and Dagenham Faith Leaders Network and regularly present at their meetings.
- Connecting with the Just Say Parents Forum for our EHCP research, building relationship by attending their events, and developing a good relationship with the SEND drop-in service where we present occasionally to get feedback



## Advice and information

**If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. 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, we've helped people by:**

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust;
- Helping people access the services they need;
- Helping people access NHS dentistry;
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost-of-living crisis;
- Guiding people through the complaints process for local healthcare settings.



# Volunteering

**We're supported by a 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;
- Carried out Enter and View visits to local services to help them improve;
- Helped with general office duties;
- Contributed to our social media and newsletters;
- Gave their time to support us at large events;
- Shared their insight on where Healthwatch should have a visible presence.



I enjoyed the community engagement sessions. In the engagement sessions we went to collect some feedback from support groups Mums Matter and Chill and chat for mums. My main job was to take note of everything we discussed and then summarise it into a blog.

My tasks varied in difficulty but what I liked about working here is that there was no pressure to finish them faster and I was encouraged to take my time with them.

Now I know that I like jobs that involve more travelling and a bit of interacting with people and wouldn't go for a typical office job or the one that involves a lot of writing and research.

—Year 12 placement student



I volunteer with Healthwatch as an office admin and enter-and-view representative.

Working here has been an incredible experience, from meeting new people to learning about the issues they face on a daily basis. I especially enjoyed the Enter and View visits, which allowed me to interact with the local community, gain first-hand experience, and also challenge myself by interacting with total strangers on a consistent basis.

These experiences developed many key skills for me, such as general administration, teamwork, social media content creation, and conducting interviews with strangers, but also soft skills which I had not thought were lacking such as rapport building and empathy.

These experiences allowed me to contribute effectively to Healthwatch's mission of championing the voices of local people, and ensuring their concerns are heard by key decision makers

## Do you feel inspired?



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



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



[0800 298 5331](tel:08002985331)



[info@healthwatchlbbd.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchlbbd.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 local authority	£115,160	Expenditure on pay	£81,280
Additional income	£9,888	Non-pay expenditure	£43,768
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£125,048</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£125,048</b>

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### Additional income is broken down by:

- £5,678 received from the Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust (BHRUT) for joint work on local project;
- £2,000 received from the North East London Local Maternity and Neonatal Service for our work on maternity;
- £210 received from the North East London Integrated Care Board for interviews with care home managers;
- £2,000 received from the North East London Health and Care Partnership for engagement work on The Big Conversation.

### ICS funding

Healthwatch across North 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
Healthwatch representative for North East London Healthwatches during workshops and meetings	£5,000

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## Next steps

**Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of the borough, so that those in power hear your 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. Social care
2. Bowel cancer
3. Women's health



# Statutory statements

## Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham

Contracted to LifeLine Projects

LifeLine House, 25 Neville Road, Dagenham, RM8 3QS

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

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# The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of 6 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 met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as on approving our annual workplan and advising on engagement strategies.

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.

## **Responses to recommendations**

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, therefore, 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.

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to the Health and Wellbeing Board, and other local authority meetings such as the Safeguarding Board and Health Scrutiny Committee.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in North East London Integrated Care System, on behalf of all Healthwatches located in North East London. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

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## Enter and view

This year, we made 3 Enter and View visits. We made 24 recommendations or actions as a result of this activity.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Care home, Hanbury Court	Hanbury Court Care Home was chosen randomly to collect evidence of what works well and what could be improved from the resident perspective in care homes	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service responded to these, including monitoring staff to ensure they provide residents with the mobile pendants when needed
Blood Testing Service, Barking Community Hospital	The service was changed from walk-in to appointment only, so we wanted to find out how this worked and what could be improved from the service user perspective of using phlebotomy services.	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service committed to ensuring all staff were trained in Customer Care and updated their booking information page.
Care home, George Brooker House	The care home had last been inspected by the CQC in 2020, therefore we decided to visit to see if any improvements could be made	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service responded to points raised including their service provided overnight.

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## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham is represented on the Barking and Dagenham Health and Wellbeing Board by Nathan Singleton, CEO of LifeLine Projects. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by attending all meetings and representing the views of local people

Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham is represented on Integrated Care Partnership and Integrated Care Boards by Manisha Modhvadia, Manager and Jenny Hadgraft, Interim Manager.

## 2023 – 2024 Outcomes


Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
We worked with Healthwatch Redbridge and Healthwatch Havering to explore patient experiences at Queens Hospital in Romford and King George’s Hospital in Goodmayes. The hospitals are part of Barking, Havering, and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust (BHRUT).	BHRUT accepted our findings which included improvements to the discharge process, avoiding moving patients overnight, and having less noise on the wards at night to minimise disruptions to sleep.
We worked with local youth groups Sw!tch Lives and Fusion to hold two community carwash events to raise awareness of our services	We raised money for these charitable groups and added to our social value in the borough.
We held a successful event for World Mental Health Day at Barking Learning Centre, attended by the Mayor of Barking and Dagenham and over 100 local people.	Residents were signposted to local organisations that support health and wellbeing, and connected with groups that tackle loneliness and isolation.

# healthwatch



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