



# Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Reading Annual Report 2025/26

# Contents

A message from our Chair	3
About us	5
Our year in numbers	6
A year of making a difference	7
Thinking together and making a difference	8
Working together for change	14
Making a difference in the community	16
Listening to your experiences	18
Hearing from all communities	25
Information and signposting	31
Showcasing volunteer impact	34
Your feedback	36
Finance and future priorities	39
Statutory statements	41



**Lead officer**  
Alice Kunjappy-Clifton

“Healthwatch Reading ensures local people’s experiences shapes health and social care decisions. We engage with residents across the borough via surveys, focus groups and targeted engagements in neighborhood settings.

We continue to use our statutory powers to hold services to account and work constructively with partners to ensure residents’ voices are heard and acted upon. Community insight has been shared with commissioners, service providers and system leaders, informing service discussions and improvement work.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who has supported us during this period through sharing feedback, collaborating with us and working together to ensure the public voice truly matters.”

# A message from our chair

Since 2022, Healthwatch Reading has grown into a confident and influential statutory public voice ensuring local experiences shape design and delivery of local health and social care services.

Our journey has been one of a steady evolution—responding to a changing system, rising demand, and widening inequalities—while remaining firmly anchored in our purpose: **to listen, to represent, and to drive improvement.**

Since the pandemic, we prioritised reconnecting with communities reaching out to people who were distanced from services, experiencing inequalities and were at a greater risk of being unheard. We worked hard to rebuild trust, strengthen our presence, and create meaningful opportunities for people to share their experiences.

As our reach expanded, so too did our influence. Local experiences of accessing care, navigating complex systems, and understanding rights reinforced a fundamental truth: **lived experience is a powerful evidence for change.** Through this, we helped bring focus to key issues such as GP access, oral health inequalities, and barriers linked to language and communication.

Our progress comes at a pivotal time. In 2025, national proposals to bring public voice “in-house” within the NHS and the local authority structures marked a significant moment of change for Healthwatch and the wider system. While these changes may create opportunities for closer alignment, they also raise **important questions** about how the **independence** of public voice is preserved.

At Healthwatch Reading, we are clear: independence is essential to trust, credibility, and impact. It is what enables us to build relationships with communities, particularly those least likely to engage, and to raise difficult issues with honesty and integrity. As the system evolves, our commitment is to ensure that the public voice remains not only heard, but trusted, visible, and able to challenge constructively.

# A message from our chair

**This year we have focused on Speaking Up for Better Care. In a period of uncertainty, our role has never been more important.**

We have continued to:

- Ensure people's voices are heard during system transition
- Challenge where progress is too slow or inequalities persist
- Support partners to embed meaningful community insight into decision-making
- Maintain confidence in the strength and independence of the public voice

Looking ahead, one principle will continue to guide us: **each voice matters**. Behind every experience is an opportunity to improve care—not only for individuals, but for communities across Reading. Healthwatch Reading remains committed to championing equity, strengthening accountability, and ensuring that lived experience shapes better, fairer care for all.

From listening to leading—and now speaking up in a time of change—we remain focused on what matters most: **making sure people's voices continue to shape the future of care in Reading.**



**Reading Chair**  
Luke Howarth



“More recently, our role has matured further—from listening and amplifying voices to influencing change. We have worked closely with system leaders ensuring community insight informs decisions at a strategic level. Alongside this, we have continued to support individuals directly, helping them navigate services and making their voices heard when it matters most.”

# About us

Healthwatch Reading is your local health and social care champion.

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



## Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



## Our mission

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



## Our values are:

**Equity:** We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

**Collaboration:** We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

**Impact:** We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

**Independence:** Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

**Truth:** We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

# Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 8489 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed 4 staff and, our work was supported by 11 volunteers.



## Reaching out:

2850 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

3202 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as GP and, accident and emergency services.



## Championing your voice:

We published 3 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like accessing interpreter services, tackling NHS overseas billing errors and evaluation of the Community Wellness Outreach project.

Our reports were well received and have made an impact with the community and service providers.



## Statutory funding:

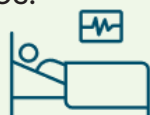
We are funded by Reading Borough Council. In 2025/26 we received £100,000, which is the same as last year.

# A year of making a difference

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

## Spring

Collective insights from the end-of-life care community conversation, co-hosted by us, led to a series of webinars to address public responses.



The patient engagement programme, set up with Royal Berkshire Hospital, raised a need to address systemic racism and strengthen trust in healthcare..

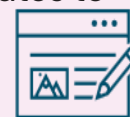


## Summer

Using our 'Thinking together' model, we celebrated our annual report launch and held the first local discussion on the NHS 10-Year Plan.



We continued working at system level on our previous projects - Language matters and Eligibility to NHS treatment, after which we published the latest updates to our website.

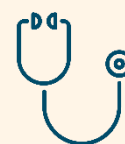


## Autumn

Evaluation of the Community Wellness Outreach project enabled us to make recommendations that amplify local voices and reflect local needs.



Following the Government's 10-year NHS plan, we carried out a series of local engagements to gather experiences of accessing and using the NHS App.



## Winter

Insights from our work contributed to the launch of a free supervised toothbrushing programme. This will support oral health of 1800 local children.



Our youth team insight and focus group participation highlighted the need for more accessible communication for the deaf community.



# Thinking together and making a difference

Our joint Annual Report Launch with Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, in July 2025, hosted a **'Thinking Together'** community engagement model attended by over 90 attendees from different sectors such as the NHS, local authority, voluntary sector, Integrated Care Board (ICB), community leaders and system partners. This asserted the strong trust placed in **Healthwatch as an independent voice for local people.**

Our launch celebrated the **achievements and impact** of both Healthwatch work and introduced the first local discussions on the **NHS 10-Year Plan** and its emerging **Neighbourhood Health Programme**. This created an early space for attendees to consider what these changes could mean in practice for communities and local services.

Dr Priya Singh, Chair of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) (now known as Thames Valley ICB) highlighted the importance of **neighbourhood working** and **partnership-based** approaches. Through presentations, guest speakers, our interactive live poll and Q&A sessions, attendees explored the **opportunities** and **challenges** of delivering **more joined-up, community-based care** through the emerging Neighbourhood Health Programme.



# Thinking Together and making a difference

Our launch event took place shortly after the Government announced the closure of Healthwatch across England and plans to **bring public voice functions in-house** within NHS organisations and local authorities.

Since 1974, England has benefited from an **independent public voice** in health and social care. Closing Healthwatch will end more than 50 years of independent representation for local people.

This context strengthened discussions at the launch about **the role and importance of public voice in shaping care and services**, particularly within the emerging Neighbourhood Health Programme. Attendees widely recognised the importance and **continued need for independent public voice** at a time of significant system change.

Our launch event created an important valuable space for discussion, collaboration, networking and shared learning. Our live poll captured key themes and concerns, reinforcing system-wide interest in the future of public voice:

## Loss of the independent voice

"No patient voice, no review, no accountability, no change, no co-production, no unity, no representation"

## Loss of local knowledge and lived experience

"Views, opinions and voices will be lost"

## Poorer quality of service and care

"Access issues, poor outcomes, organisation complacency"

## Reduced trust in services

"Biased decisions – reduced trust in services, lack of accountability"

## Less ability to influence change

"Services wouldn't receive constructive feedback missing the opportunity to improve"

# Thinking Together and making a difference

Our launch event highlighted the **importance of involving local people** from the outset to ensure health and social care services reflect real needs and experiences. We showcased our work and demonstrated the **value and impact of public voice** in practice.

Our launch helped raise awareness of the Neighbourhood Health Programme and supported early thinking on more joined-up, community-based care. We have helped and continue to help ensure the **programme aligns with local needs** and reflects community views and feedback, ensuring **public voice is at the heart** of its development

Key impacts are set out in the infographic below, with this work continuing through ongoing engagement and partnership.

## Event impact



- 1 We held the first local discussion on the NHS 10-Year Plan and the Neighbourhood Health Programme.
- 2 Greater recognition and understanding of the importance and impact of independent public voice and the vital work we do.
- 3 Stronger system-wide partnerships and increased engagement from councils, the NHS, and other organisations wanting to work with us; recognising our impact, trusted relationships and community connections.
- 4 Played a key role to ensure the Neighbourhood Health Programme reflects the needs, experiences and expectations of local people and communities. We are now consultants supporting its local planning, including sharing our "Thinking Together" engagement model to keep public voice at the centre of its development.

“Over [...] time, Healthwatch and yourself [Alice Kunjappy Clifton, Lead, Healthwatch Reading] directly have been both a support of Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust as well as a critical friend when we needed to do better. I thank you personally for your support, approach and advocacy of our amazing teams at the Trust.”

**Steve McManus - Chief Executive Officer, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust**

# Thinking Together and making a difference



"Please convey to your team my thanks for taking both the time and effort of putting on yesterday's meeting which showcased Healthwatch annual reports for Reading and Wokingham [Borough].

Annual reports are often seen as "must do brochures" rather than documents that can point to best practice, examples of great quality health and care, or as signposts to potential or actual health and care issues that are facing the community.

The range of voices that you managed to attract to your meeting as well as the healthy numbers in the audience, are a testament to the importance of Healthwatch as an organisation that champions patient voice.

Each of the speakers brought a valuable set of learning to the proceedings. It was good to get a helicopter perspective of the 10-year plan and the Dash review, and these were complimented so well by the local reports from Healthwatch officers, demonstrating how Healthwatch has been able to address strategic issues in a practical way.

I particularly enjoyed listening to the beginnings of how we need to develop integrated neighbourhood partnerships – and these will be informed and complemented also by the important work being carried out in the public health domain.

I'm glad that you included Nick Fellows who brought us a very innovative community vision for working in the borough. This alongside the other volunteer organisations will help to address the current health inequalities that we see across the whole of the UK not just in our area.

I can understand that the future of Healthwatch as an organisation is held in the balance, whilst our government decide on how patient voice should be heard and acted on. In that interim period, we value the work of all the voluntary sector organisations, Healthwatch included, who stand in the gap for us.

We need to stand together as voluntary sector organisations in order to support the ongoing work of Healthwatch and to ensure that this valuable work is not lost in the government scramble to rationalise or save money."

**Douglas Findlay – Health Innovation Oxford and Thames Valley**

# Thinking together and making a difference



"The launch event was incredibly valuable and well organised, with a high calibre line up of relevant speakers.

It was particularly helpful to be there amongst this diverse group, not only for the opportunity to get my message across, but to learn from others about critical developments in the sector.

What I was able to take away, in relation to Neighbourhood Health plans, enabled me to become more engaged and ensure colleagues were better informed, leading to positive action on our part that will hopefully help to shape new services for the communities we work with and ensure their needs are both heard and responded to."

**Nick Fellows – Chief Officer, The Wokingham Volunteer Centre and Chair, Community Vision 2035 (Wokingham Borough)**



"Attending the Healthwatch launch event and participating in discussions around the NHS 10-Year Plan reinforced my absolute belief that meaningful positive change and outcomes happen when we genuinely listen to the community who use services and involve them in shaping solutions.

I have been consistently impressed by the way Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham [Borough] bring people together, residents, partners and decision-makers to ensure the public voice is heard and responded to.

The positive outcomes we have seen through an approach of collaboration clearly demonstrate the real value of partnership working and the difference it can make to local communities.  
Thank you Healthwatch!"

**Denise Challis – Chair, Royal Berkshire Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership**

# Thinking Together and making a difference



"What stood out most was not only the depth of insight from local communities, but also the strong presence of health and social care professionals. Their attendance reflected clear support for Healthwatch as an independent voice, even where it provides constructive challenge and scrutiny of services.

I have a unique perspective, having been directly involved on the ground in mobilising the contracts when they transferred to The Advocacy People. From that mobilisation through to seeing the genuine change being achieved by our teams of paid staff and volunteers, it has reinforced for me how essential it is that people have the opportunity to speak to someone who is independent and objective. In a period of uncertainty, this is more important than ever because services are stronger, fairer and more effective when they are shaped by the people who use them."

**Sarah Deason – Chief Operating Officer, The Advocacy People**



"One of the key things I took away from the Annual Report launch event was the importance of ensuring that the public voice remains central within healthcare and social care. Feedback from patients, carers, families, and communities provides an essential perspective that professionals and organisations may not always see through data or operational reporting alone.

I reflected on how valuable lived experience is in shaping services that are compassionate, inclusive, and responsive to people's needs. Hearing examples and discussions at the event reinforced that engagement should not simply be a formality, but an ongoing conversation where people feel their views genuinely influence decisions and outcomes."

**Stephen John – Head of Operations, The Advocacy People**

# Working together for change

The Advocacy People hold the service contract for seven Healthwatch; Hampshire, Portsmouth, Reading, Somerset, Southend, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough.

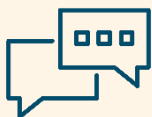


This year, we've worked with seven Healthwatch under The Advocacy People's infrastructure across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Reading, Somerset, Southend, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough to achieve the following:



## A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

The Advocacy People have provided consistent infrastructure, governance, and operational support to the seven hosted Healthwatch, enabling them to work both locally and collectively. This includes shared leadership, senior guidance, and coordination across contracts. We have created space for collaboration, ensured consistency where needed, and supported each service to retain its distinct local voice.



## A big conversation:

The seven local Healthwatch hosted by The Advocacy People have worked closely together in the last year. We have been proactive in our learning objective which was to understand the changing landscape for Healthwatch in response to Government proposals announced last July to transfer the functions of local Healthwatch to Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities.



## Building strong relationships to achieve more:

The Advocacy People supported the seven Healthwatch to lead meaningful community conversations by providing practical tools, coordination, and strategic oversight. This included enabling shared knowledge, supporting engagement planning, and facilitating the exchange of approaches and learning. We ensured local teams were equipped to respond to community priorities while linking these insights into a broader, coherent narrative at a regional level.

# Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Reading are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at BOB ICB (now Thames valley ICB). Below are some examples of our work this year.

## Maternity and mental health:



We continued pushing forward maternity and mental health conversations with key focus on addressing maternal mental health and reducing suicide risk within the first year after childbirth. We have now progressed this locally with the Reading Suicide Prevention Group and across Pan Thames Valley to help ensure support systems are joined up and gaps in provision are identified.

We also continued raising feedback and concerns with the ICB and RBH about postnatal care, women not feeling listened to, and the need for stronger mental health support during and after pregnancy. In response, the ICB has increased awareness across primary care and will be delivering sessions with Thames Valley Primary Care Networks to improve conversations and engagement with women about their mental health needs.

## Patient Participation Group (PPG) charter:



The PPG Inclusivity Charter was created by Healthwatch in Berkshire West for PPGs in Reading, Wokingham Borough and West Berkshire after an incident at a PPG meeting showed the need for clearer expectations on how people should behave and work together.

The charter, available to PPGs across Berkshire West, sets out simple shared rules to support respect, inclusion and good communication to ensure meetings are safe, welcoming and open to everyone to take part.

We continue to support PPGs across the area by sharing learning and good practice as they develop locally. Our aim is to make sure patient voices are not just heard but really help shape how services listen, learn and improve.

We have also highlighted some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the report sections below.

# Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here is an example of our work in Reading this year:



## Improving care over time

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

### Local voice shaped local health services – oral health programme for 1800 children across Reading

Healthwatch Reading, a member of the **Oral Health Board** which oversees the strategy and implementation of the Supervised Toothbrushing programme, was delighted to see the **launch of a new free supervised toothbrushing programme** that will support **1,800 children across Reading** to help tackle rising levels of tooth decay.



The programme, launched in January 2026, will run in early years educational settings for 3–5-year-olds, children's centres and in special needs schools up to the age of 10.. In line with our recommendations, the programme also provides:

- Specialist support for children with additional needs
- Sensory-friendly toothbrushes and toothpaste
- Information translated into multiple languages and easy-read formats



“a recent report from Healthwatch Reading revealed several barriers to dental care, including limited awareness of dental services among parents and language barriers”.

**British Dental Journal\* (9th January edition)**

# Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time. Here is an example of our work in Reading this year:



## Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

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

Since 2024 we have been working on the issue of eligible adults, and children being billed for free NHS treatment. Based on our recommendations, the overseas billing webpages were updated for clarity and a draft factsheet explaining NHS overseas billing was produced.

At the trust's request, we have signed off final changes to the trust's website and the draft factsheet.



## Getting services to involve the public

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

We co-hosted a "Dying well" community conversation in partnership with Reading Borough Council. Residents, carers, voluntary organisations, and professionals attended to share end-of-life care experiences and reflect on how support could be improved locally.

Collective insights led to tangible system-wide action.. A series of public webinars was designed to respond to public priorities of earlier, clearer, and culturally sensitive information. As a result:

- Residents received information before reaching a crisis point.
- Communities were supported to engage in earlier and more open conversations about dying.
- Understanding of choice, rights, and early planning was strengthened.
- Importance of clear, consistent, and culturally appropriate communication was reinforced.

# Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.

69

"I welcome the opportunity [to do a health check in the community] because they were able to identify health issues like high cholesterol and my blood sugar was showing as borderline diabetes. I would not have known this if the check was not available to me"

**Community wellness outreach evaluation participant feedback.**



# Digital futures: local voices about the NHS App

**Last Autumn, we gathered the voice of our community to better understand how the NHS App is locally used.**

According to the NHS 10 Year Plan, the NHS App will become the main 'front door' to NHS services. Our joint project explored how people in Reading and Wokingham Borough use the NHS App, and why some people do not use it.

## What did we do

- We gathered residents' views and experiences using online and paper surveys, and informal conversations and discussions at community events.
- Analysed the feedback to gain insights into the App usage and barriers accessing/using it.
- Shared our early findings with the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

## Some key findings:



**Two thirds of the surveyed residents across Reading and Wokingham Borough report using the NHS App.**

**One-third of surveyed residents in Reading and Wokingham Borough do not use the NHS App.**

**Multiple healthcare apps and digital platforms are causing confusion and frustration amongst residents.**

## Our impact so far

### In the community

- Improved understanding of the NHS App, including how it is used to access NHS health services and managing care.
- Increased awareness of available local support and guidance for using the NHS App and other NHS digital services.

# Digital futures: what local voices told us about the NHS App

## In the community (cont)

- Greater confidence in using the NHS App, with reduced confusion and improved ability to engage with digital health tools.
- Supported residents to better manage their health, appointments and engagement with healthcare services.
- Improved understanding of patients' rights, data use and future changes in healthcare services (NHS 10-year plan).
- Increased recognition of the value and importance of sharing feedback and how it influences local health and social services.

## The ICB:

- Welcomed our early findings, response confirmed barriers identified reflect wider national feedback.
- Recognised that digital services designed to improve access to care should not create new inequalities.
- Recognised our findings helped reinforce system-wide understanding of lived experiences and importance of addressing digital exclusion.
- Clarified and confirmed system responsibilities:
  - NHS England responsible for NHS App platform and national communications
  - Local NHS organisations for supporting App access and use.
- Response confirmed willingness to continue working with Healthwatch to explore solutions that build confidence, trust, and digital inclusion.



“We would welcome a discussion with you and colleagues to review your emerging findings in more detail and to explore where collaborative action, particularly around community-based confidence building and trust, would add value ahead of your final report”.

**Dr Nick Broughton FRCPsych, Chief Executive  
NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB &  
NHS Frimley ICB**

# Addressing systemic racism and strengthening trust in care

## Turning lived experiences into action against racism.

Feedback and lived experiences from borough residents highlighted the impact of racism and discrimination on people's health, access to services, and overall wellbeing. People told us that racism is being experienced in everyday life, in the community and within health and care settings affecting safety, trust and confidence in services.

### What did we do:

- Raised concerns with Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) about racism affecting patients and staff from the borough.
- Worked closely with RBH to support on improvements needed to addressing racism, which included:
  - understanding the system-wide triage approach to support hospital staff experiencing racism
  - understanding RBH's "Up the Anti" programme
- Identified a clear need for a broader approach to address racism across Berkshire West following our work with RBH, feedback from local people and national evidence.
- As no single organisation can address this alone, we recommended a collective approach involving key partners- local councils, the Integrated Care Board, NHS trusts, Thames Valley Police and community leaders.
- Recommended a community conversation with key partners to share experiences, identify solutions, and agree on a collective action,.

### What difference did it make

- Elevated local dialogue around the ongoing impact of racism on services across Reading.
- Encouraged direct action to tackle these issues through a commitment to anti-racist policy.
- Our recommendation for a broader community conversation on racism and inequality is now being taken forward. The event, currently in development, will involve the NHS, local authorities, community groups and other partner organisations.

# Evaluation of Community Wellness Outreach (CWO) Project

**Residents value health checks in community settings and want the project to continue running with added improvements.**

We evaluated the impact and effectiveness of the project by collecting feedback from participants who had their health checks in community settings.

## Key things we heard:

**81%**

**of respondents visited their General Practice due to CWO checks.**



“I was not aware that GPs do health checks”. “Grateful for the check – without it could have been very ill”.

**54%**

**saw clinical changes such as new medication, dosage increase, further/continued monitoring.**



“My BP is well managed”. “Dosage of my medication was increased. Was also given a new medication”

**92%**

**saw an improvement in their health since the CWO check ranging from a little to very much.**



“Eat healthy lost 3 stone, I drink less”.  
“Stopped smoking and improved diet – cut down on red meat significantly”.

# Evaluation of Community Wellness Outreach (CWO) Project (continued)

## What difference did this make?

- Local public voice was heard and passed on to decision-makers.
- Raised awareness of the project.
- Allowed local people, including those who are seldom heard, share their project experiences.
- Helped discovery of project strengths such as easy access, community settings, inclusivity, early issue identification, care quality and professionalism, information and advice given.
- Developed improvement suggestions to the project, including additional and frequent checks, follow-up and ongoing monitoring, improved capacity, inclusion and access.



## Reading Borough Council

“The evaluation of the Community Wellness Outreach project shows that bringing NHS Health Checks and wellbeing support directly into our communities has made a real difference. Participants reported improved health, early identification of conditions, and greater confidence in managing their wellbeing. Reading Borough Council is proud to support initiatives that empower residents and reduce health inequalities.”

**Beverley Nicolson, Integration Programme Manager, Commissioning & Transformation, Directorate of Community & Adult Social Care Service (DCASC)**

# Language matters, continuous follow-up

**Feedback from residents highlighted the need to move from awareness to more consistent delivery and accountability.**

We kept building on the strong foundations we created. Fresh insights and feedback reinforce that accessing interpreter services remains a challenge.

## Key things we heard:



### **Difficulties accessing interpreters in a timely way.**



“Feel better to have [health check] in the community because translator available, not like at the GP”



### **Variable quality and consistency in provision of services.**



“Sometimes they provide a translator, sometimes they don't. Hard to know (mostly not), will bring someone to translate for me”



### **Continued reliance on telephone interpreting that does not always meet people's needs**



“Translation was done on the phone, and this was difficult for me as I don't hear very well. I use hearing aids”

We continued raising the issue at system level, including the ICB and primary care partners, for visibility and priority in the access and inequalities discussions.

## What difference did this make?

- Greater awareness of language barriers across the system.
- Community feedback confirmed that accessing interpreter services is still challenging.
- Developed understanding that the issue is system-wide and persistent.
- The issue requires ongoing focus rather than a one-off intervention.

# Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Reading. That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

## This year, we have reached different communities by:

- **Working collaboratively with grassroots organisations** like St Barnabas Food Pantry, Reading GOLDERS Luncheon Club and Reading City of Sanctuary Café allowed us to capture lived experiences from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds and build trust and relationships with local communities.
- **Going beyond technology barriers:** in-person community engagements across Reading, including The Weller Centre, Whitley Wood and Hexham Road Community Centres, and Berkshire MS Therapy Centre, helped us gather local voices and share them with decision-makers.
- **Going beyond language barriers:** working with volunteer interpreters at community centres, such as the Forgotten Gurkha Centre, enabled us to hear and amplify local voices that may have gone unheard.



# Empowering residents to help shape local health services

**Golders Luncheon Club members spoke to us about digital services confusion caused by too many Apps and unfriendly triage systems.**

There was also a reluctance to feedback demographic information believing this would not change anything. We explained the value of demographic information in identifying health inequality trends, provision of targeted resources and delivery of inclusive healthcare.

## What difference did this make?

- Feeling of reassurance, willingness to provide demographic information.
- Improved understanding of public contribution towards healthcare development.
- Increased confidence of local voice and identity in shaping local health services.

---

# Helping the Forgotten Gurkha community access healthcare services

**Working with the Forgotten Gurkha Centre, we heard that members still struggle to access healthcare services due to language barriers.**

To help, we agreed to meet the centre members, listen to their experiences and answer any questions they may have.

## What difference did this make?

- A significant gap in knowledge and awareness of accessing interpreter and digital services, including the NHS App, was identified.

We have been invited to raise awareness of:

- Availability of interpreter services while accessing healthcare services.
- The NHS App and other digital health services.

# Improving understanding of Digital Healthcare systems

**Working with the over-50s lunch club at Whitely Wood Community centre highlighted the frustration with digital healthcare systems.**

Older people who are digitally excluded felt left behind and abandoned. We listened to their problems, provided face-to-face guidance and advised them to visit their GP surgery in-person for further help with the NHS App.

## What difference did this make?

- Community members felt listened to, included and supported.
- Helped raise awareness of the NHS App.
- Members felt confident and connected while accessing healthcare services.

---

# Helping local diverse and refugee communities access healthcare

**Local community members told us they struggled to book GP appointments, talk with the doctors and use the NHS App due to language barriers.**

We informed community members about the availability of translation and interpreter services while booking and attending appointments. We also created an NHS App information sheet in multiple languages. The sheet was published on our website for easy availability.

## What difference did this make?

- Local voice was heard and acted on.
- Improved awareness of access to interpreter services.
- Easy NHS App information availability.
- Availability of NHS App information in multiple languages helped overcome language barriers while accessing information and digital tools.

# Hearing from communities in pictures

Engagement activities of the year



# Healthwatch Youth

Our Healthwatch youth team is made up of 4 fantastic volunteers who live and study in Reading and Wokingham Borough.

**Healthwatch Youth continued to champion the views of young people locally, so that services can improve to better meet their needs.**

**This year, the Healthwatch Youth team has been actively involved in:**

- Promoting our NHS App project through community and university networks, including a pop-up stand at The University of Reading, university societies, such as the Autistic Students Society and Wokingham Baptist Church.
- Helping with our volunteering recruitment programme by attending recruitment events in Wokingham Borough.
- Supporting and promoting recommendations from our previous *Empowering Young Women: Improving Sexual Health Awareness and Services* report, contributing to ongoing improvements in sexual health service.

## Impact of our sexual health project

Findings and recommendations from last year's *Empowering Young Women: Improving Sexual Health Awareness and Services* continue to influence sexual health service improvements, with action taking place this year:

### ✓ **Young people shaping services**

The Florey Clinic invited Healthwatch Youth to take part in a focus group on local sexual health services. The team shared their views, helping to shape future service developments and highlighted accessibility barriers, including the need for more accessible communication for the deaf community.

### ✓ **Reaching more young people**

Following our project recommendation, the clinic delivered a social media campaign that reached approximately 75,000 young people, increasing awareness of sexual health information.

### ✓ **Supporting future improvements**

Our project findings identified low awareness of HIV prevention services and PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) amongst young women. This helped inform the development of 'PrEP on Wheels' service for 16–18-year-olds. Launching in September 2026, it will improve access to HIV prevention medication. Healthwatch Youth will continue to support this project and the clinic's future service developments.

# Healthwatch Youth

We have 4 fantastic volunteers who currently make up our Healthwatch Youth team who live and study in Wokingham Borough and Reading.

69

"Thank you for coming in to meet with us last Friday, it was great to meet you and really useful to have the focus group [...]. It's always so beneficial for us to hear the voices of young people first hand so we can help create an accessible and approachable service based on their feedback."

## Florey Clinic team (The Florey Sexual Health and Contraceptive Services)



**Florey Clinic team:**  
Emily King and Paula Lane

**Healthwatch Youth team:**  
Bethany, Chloe, Jeanet and Leia

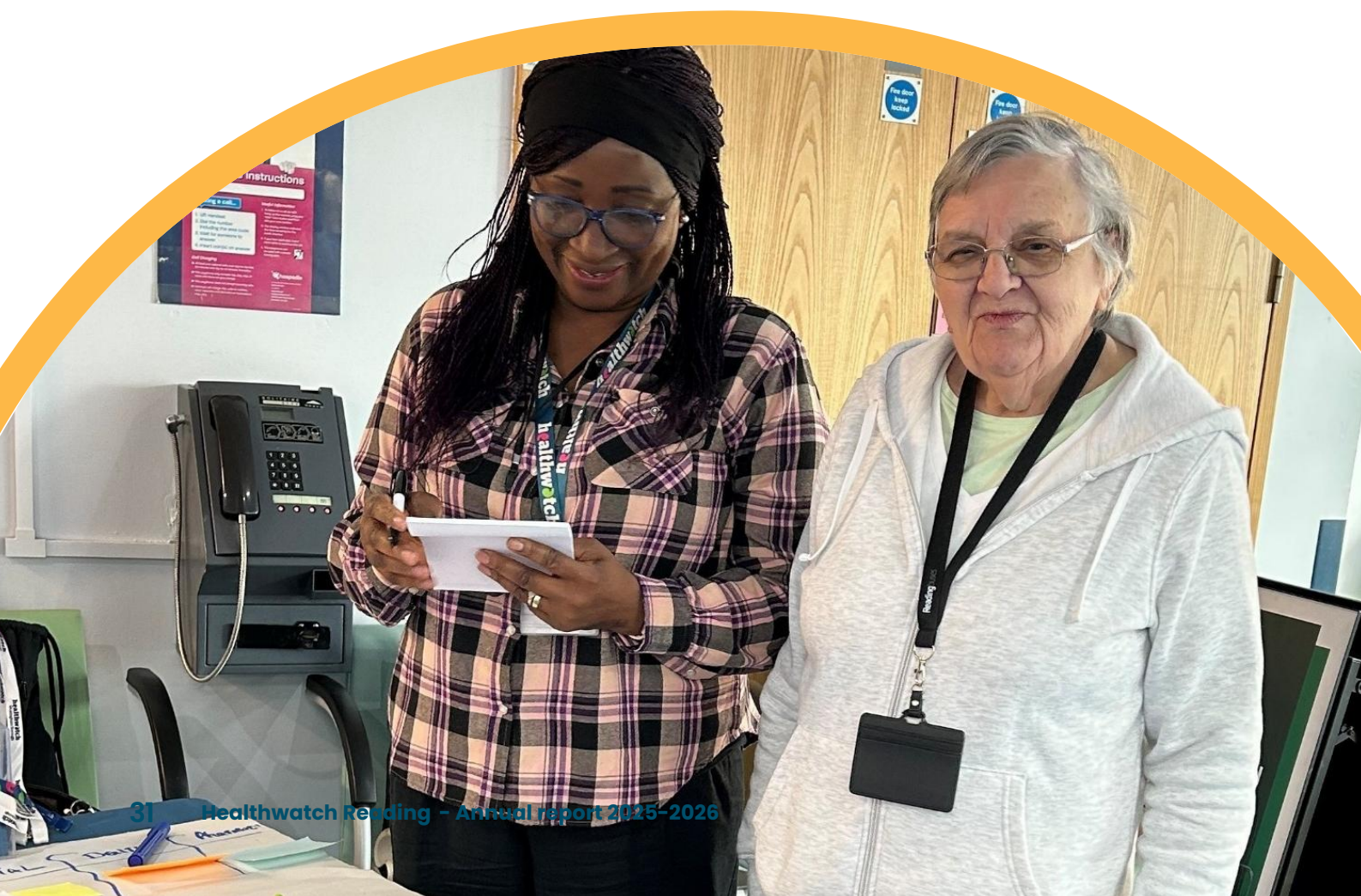
# Information and signposting

When you're struggling to find an NHS dentist, looking for help about how to make a complaint, or need advice about a good care home for a loved one – we're your first port of call.

**This year 3202 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services. These conversations also help us to understand where, and how, your care can be made better.**

**This year, we've helped people by:**

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



## Treating patients with respect and empathy

### **Our involvement has helped towards attitude change of frontline staff.**

SO felt “very bad” and “stressed” by how the frontline staff queried her about a request made by her doctor. This was done in presence of other patients.

SO believes, the intrusive questioning and subsequent responses were heard by other patients. The incident left her feeling unwelcomed, and worried if it could happen again. She wished, she never engaged with the staff.

We raised the issue with SO’s practice manager. SO told us, following our intervention, her concerns were successfully addressed, and frontline staff attitude has also changed.



“Everything changed.” “Thank you so much because when you spoke to them that made a big difference”.

---

## Temporary resident pathway for urgent care

### **Access to urgent medical support prior to full GP registration.**

An overseas student struggled to book a GP appointment following an emergency surgery. She was left housebound, in pain, and without any follow-up care plan.

We raised concerns about the risks created when urgent care pathways are not clearly understood or consistently applied highlighting the temporary resident process.

The student was able to secure an appointment the very same day, and her registration was quickly reviewed.



“I’m happy to report that after my partner’s visit to surgery, I was able to get into the system and check for available appointments within 15 minutes, thanks entirely to your intervention. We had tried twice before and were unsuccessful, so your help has been a huge relief.”

# Better information and guidance for residents on the NHS App

**Helping Reading residents and communities have access to clearer, accessible and easy to understand support.**

The joint NHS App project carried out by Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham Borough has directly strengthened our understanding of the **local digital health needs**.

Through our **community engagement** across ethnically diverse communities and a varied spectrum of age groups across Reading, we were able to better understand the barriers people face when using the NHS App, particularly the difficulties with navigation and a lack of clear, relevant, easy-to-understand information and guidance on the App.

Analysis of **local feedback identified key gaps** in both national and local NHS App support materials. These included limited availability of translated and easy-read resources, and inconsistencies in how NHS App updates were being communicated at a local level.

To address the gaps identified, we added the information and advice webpage developed by Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, enabling us to provide residents and communities with consistent, accessible information both online and through face-to-face engagement.

Working together and using these resources also enabled us to promote NHS App updates more consistently, helping us reach more people through our website, newsletters, social media, and community engagement sessions.

Overall, the project has strengthened our work on digital inclusion and helped us better **support people and the communities in Reading** to access and use NHS digital services with greater confidence.



“This work continues, with ongoing engagement between Healthwatch and system partners to support improvements in digital access, inclusion, and patient experience.”

**Alice Kunjappy-Clifton, Lead officer Healthwatch Reading**

# Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 236 hours to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

## This year, our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote our work and helped us overcome language barriers with their excellent translation/interpretation skills.
- Collected feedback, lived experiences and encouraged their communities to share their views to help shape local health services.
- Our advisory board members played an important role in setting and maintaining the strategic direction of Healthwatch Reading.
- Advisory board members also ensured Healthwatch Reading adheres to its principles and purpose, and operates in a moral and ethical way in the service of the local community.



# At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.



**Errol**  
Advisory Group  
member

“Becoming a volunteer and an advisory group member for Healthwatch was one of my best decisions. The work they do with limited resources is nothing short of incredible.”

Errol, a community activist and an IT professional provides advice on how best we can serve the community. He measures universal wealth by the quality of health.

**“Healthwatch as an organisation are able to advocate for everyone whose voice needs to be heard. This amplification of concerns to those who can affect change is a critical instrument for those in need and wanting to be heard. The Healthwatch team embody service and humility which is remarkable especially in these challenging times.”**

“I chose to volunteer with Health watch because I love to support people for genuine reasons and Healthwatch is the best option because it empowers individuals to have their voices heard helping to improve health services and uplift communities.”

Durga helped us reach out to the Nepali community with her valuable interpretation skills.

**“This has given me the opportunity to meet people of different ages and backgrounds and to listen to their life experiences, giving me a deeper understanding of the challenges they face and the importance of making everyone’s voice heard.”**



**Durga**  
Community volunteer

## Be part of the change.

If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



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



0118 214 5579



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

# Your Feedback



## Public Health and Wellbeing, Reading

"The 2024 report 'CORE20PLUS5 Exploring the oral health of children aged under ten years in Reading; Norcot, Church and Southcote Wards' was well received by public health system partners and wider stakeholders in Reading including council members and local communities. It brought evidence-based clarity and a focus on the widely recognised need of poor oral health amongst local children. The report was appropriately challenging and has had a timely galvanising effect on our local system. Reading Borough Council public health team has been able to respond with the additional capacity of a Public Health registrar and a public health practitioner who have led the implementation of the Supervised Toothbrushing programme and the establishment of a multi-agency Oral Health Board which provides governance for a needs assessment process and associated innovative prevention work."

**Martin White, FFPH, Consultant in Public Health**  
**Public Health and Wellbeing | Directorate Communities and Adult Social Care**

---

## Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (ICB)

The ICB has worked closely with the Reading and Wokingham Healthwatch to improve access to NHS dental services, particularly for adults and children with additional needs. Healthwatch's work with these patients has provided valuable information about their experience of accessing and using NHS services with the local NHS then designing solutions to improve access to and responsiveness of the services.

**Hugh O'Keeffe**  
**Head of Pharmacy, Optometry and Dentistry**  
**Thames Valley ICB**

---

# Your Feedback



## Reading Borough Council

"This[Dying well] report helps us better understand how we can improve information and signposting for people approaching the end of life and has informed our series of Webinars to build a compassionate community to support Dying Well."

**Beverley Nicolson, Integration Programme Manager, Commissioning & Transformation, Directorate of Community & Adult Social Care Service (DCASC)**

---

## Community Pharmacy Thames Valley

"Healthwatch are our eyes and ears for those unable to speak for themselves. Thank you – and we hope that we can continue the great work that you have started."

**David Dean, Chief Executive Officer**

---

## Reading Community Learning Centre

"One of my key reflections from the discussions on the NHS 10-Year Plan was the importance of ensuring that the voices of local communities are not only heard but actively shape services and decision-making. Through RCLC's involvement in projects such as CPAR Project and CareWell with the University of Reading, we have seen first-hand the value of meaningful engagement with women whose experiences are often overlooked. Strong partnership working between communities, voluntary organisations, Healthwatch, researchers and statutory services helps create more inclusive, responsive and effective services. When people are genuinely listened to, their lived experiences can become a powerful catalyst for positive change."

**Aisha Malik, Chief Executive Officer**

---

# Your Feedback



## **Golders Luncheon Club**

“Many thanks to you [Engagement officer, Healthwatch Reading], and your colleagues again for taking the time to come to the Golders lunch. To share the information about Healthwatch, and best of all, you eat lunch with us.”

**Leader, Golders Luncheon Club, Reading**

---

## **Utilivu**

“Collaborating with Healthwatch Reading has been and is vital to our mission to tackle health disparities. Through our joint initiatives, their consistent support for our annual conference and contributions to our Thursday Grassroots Community Conversations, we successfully bridge the gap between communities and healthcare providers. It is a powerful partnership that transforms authentic community feedback into tangible, lasting improvements.”

**Eva Wangui, Manager, Utilivu Women’s Group**

---

## **Alliance For Cohesion and Racial Equality (ACRE)**

“ACRE values its strong partnership with Healthwatch Reading, built on a shared commitment to improving care for our communities. We applaud their role as an independent champion putting people at the heart of services. Our thanks go to Alice Kunjappy-Clifton for her action-focused leadership, Tariq Gomma for his unwavering support, and Zainab Koroma for her insightful health discussions. Together, we continue to create a meaningful impact across Reading.”

**George Mathew, Chief Executive Officer**

---

# Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Reading Borough Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

## Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£100,000	Expenditure on pay	£105,512
Additional income	£30,667	Non-pay expenditure	£12,792
		Office and management fee	£19,139
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£130,667</b>	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£137,443</b>

## Additional income is broken down into:

- £9,000 received from Reading Borough Council for evaluation of Community Outreach Project
- £5,000 received from Reading Borough Council for Dying Matters event

## Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across Berkshire West also receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
BOB ICB Capacity Building Funds continue to contribute to extend the reach of Healthwatch engagement across Berkshire West	£16,667

# Finance and future priorities

**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. Enter and view** work with local adult social care to conduct 'Enter and view' sessions across Reading.
- 2. Men as carers** male carers generally do not access services at early opportunities. We will be listening to these hidden carers and the issues they encounter.
- 3. Access to services (Healthwatch Youth)** work with young people to look at ways to get access to services such as GP services.

# Statutory statements

Healthwatch England, 2 Redman Place, Stratford, E20 1JQ  
The Advocacy People, PO Box 375, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 9HU.

**Healthwatch Reading 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 three members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025/26, the Board met 4 times and made decisions on all of our activities and reports. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

## Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2025/26, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website and publicise the report via our newsletters and social media channels.

# Statutory statements

## Responses to recommendations

We had zero providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

## Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us.

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to **Health and Wellbeing board, the Adult and Children Education committee (ACE), and Reading Integrated Partnership.**

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System and work with other Healthwatch within this area to ensure voices are heard from all parts of the community. For example, we have a seat at the System Quality Group and BOB ICB Health Inequalities Board. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Reading is represented on the Reading Health and Wellbeing Board by Alice Kunjappy-Clifton, Lead Officer, Healthwatch Reading.

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing our work and future workplans, as well as asking questions from the public perspective and ensuring the public voice is considered in decision-making.

The 3 Berkshire West Healthwatch (Healthwatch Reading, Healthwatch West Berkshire and Healthwatch Wokingham Borough) delivered through representation at place level which was and continues to be shared between Alice Kunjappy-Clifton (Lead Officer, Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham Borough), Fiona Worby (Lead Officer, Healthwatch West Berkshire) and Jamie Evans (Area Director, Healthwatch in Berkshire West).

# Statutory statements

## Enter and view

We did not undertake any Enter and View visits during the year, as alternative methodologies were better suited to our priorities—particularly engaging with communities through focus groups and targeted conversations.

For 2025/2026, our focus will be on ensuring that our primary care recommendations are acted upon, alongside gathering views to inform our wider project work. At present, we do not anticipate that these areas will require the use of the Enter and View methodology. However, there are plans to undertake a joint Enter and View visit in the coming year (2026/27).

## 2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Our Annual Report (April 2025 to March 2026), showcases the outcomes of our projects and the tangible impact of our work. It highlights how our efforts have contributed to improving services and amplifying the voices of the communities we represent.



**Healthwatch Reading**  
Oxford Road Community Centre,  
344 Oxford Road,  
Reading, RG30 1AF



[www.healthwatch.readingco.uk](http://www.healthwatch.readingco.uk)



0118 214 5579



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



[/HealthwatchReading](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchReading)



[@healthwatchreading](https://www.instagram.com/healthwatchreading)

