

# The value of listening

Healthwatch Slough  
Annual Report 2023–2024



**healthwatch**  
Slough

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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 Head of Healthwatch

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**I hope this report finds you well. This year Healthwatch Slough has had a big focus on reaching out to communities we don't often hear from.**

Our work has included supporting pregnant women and new mums from diverse ethnic backgrounds to share their experience, listening to refugees and having important conversations with residents in Slough's care homes.

Working closely with our partners across the health and care system has been another key theme this year for example we are pleased to have been involved in collaborating to improve communications regarding hospital appointments.

I would like to extend a huge thanks to our dedicated staff team and our wonderful volunteers whose hard work and commitment enabled us to achieve so much over the year. Also, thanks go to our community partners who have supported us to reach out to people in communities all over Slough.



**Thank you to everyone who has shared their views and experiences with us. Sharing your feedback really does make a difference.**

Neil Bolton-Heaton, Head of Healthwatch



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# About us

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## Healthwatch Slough 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:

**551 people**

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

**1750 people**

were signposted to advice and information through our helpdesk, digital and engagement work

**19,851 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

**5 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**Use of folic acid in pregnancy and pre-conception**

which highlighted the experiences of pregnant women and new Mothers.



## Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

**17**

outstanding volunteers who gave up 38 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

**£64,439**

which is the same as the previous year.





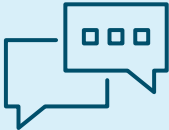



We currently employ

**1 full time and 1 part time member of staff**

who help us carry out our work.



# How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>Helped people to understand the HNS complaints process and access advocacy support.</p>	 <p>Shared feedback that resulted in improved patient communication about hospital appointments</p>
Summer	 <p>Shared feedback from refugees about the challenges they face with community groups to enable better support.</p>	 <p>Listened to people's concerns about GP access and shared information about digital options, enabling choice for patients.</p>
Autumn	 <p>Trained 9 of our volunteers as authorised representatives enabling them to carry out Enter and View visits to social care services, seeing how they are run and gathering experiences from residents.</p>	 <p>Slough maternity system improved access to healthy start vitamins following feedback from new Mothers.</p>
Winter	 <p>Following our folic acid report, information provided on notification of pregnancy will be available in multiple languages.</p>	 <p>Following patient feedback at Wexham Park hospital Frimley ICB committed to improve road direction signage to Priors Close to raise awareness of same day GP services.</p>

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# Your voice heard at a wider level

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## We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Slough influence decisions made about services at Frimley Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year we've worked with Frimley ICS to achieve:



We presented a dementia carers case study at Frimley Primary Care Board, helping to secure commitment for improvement from primary care network leads.

Slough service users' feedback is represented at the Frimley Escalations board using a template. Unfortunately, we do not get to hear about any service change as a result of this feedback so we will be looking at other opportunities to share feedback with Frimley ICS in 2024.



We attend meetings with Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, Patient Experience Forum, Children and Young People's Mental Health Group, and Frimley Primary Care Communications Group among others. This enables us to share Healthwatch reports and intelligence at system wide level. This year feedback from these forums has led to volunteer involvement in PLACE assessments, service improvements, communications being designed with feedback from service users and better information for carers.

This year the restructure of the Frimley integrated care system has presented a challenge for Healthwatch with some of our key contacts moving on or having new roles. Funding to operate at an ICS level continues to be an issue, we do not have staff available to attend all the boards that may be optimal.







## 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.



# Working in partnership with local pregnant women and new mothers to address health inequalities.



This year, we published the experiences the public shared with us about finding information regarding taking folic acid in pregnancy

Uptake of folic acid was low in Slough in 2018/ 2019. (Source [Frimley LMNS Perinatal Equity and Equality plan 2022](#)) Particularly in certain ethnic minority groups which may be contributing to poorer health outcomes in this cohort. Folic acid uptake in Slough was less than half that of Bracknell Forest .

Almost a third of all pregnancies within the Frimley area were in Slough – 72% of which were to non-UK born parents.

[Frimley's perinatal equity strategy](#) recognises the importance of working in partnership with local women and their families to address health inequalities

## What did you tell us about healthy pregnancy?

- For women who did not take folic acid during pregnancy, the reasons were varied. The common themes were, mis-understanding the benefits or lack of awareness
- Getting information to people considering pregnancy in the target groups could be challenging but the women we spoke to made valuable suggestions.
- Very few people (2) had heard about the offer of free vitamins that contain folic acid for pregnant women, through the healthy start scheme. This was the number one thing that women thought would encourage folic acid uptake in their community.
- 38% of women took folic acid when trying to conceive their current or last pregnancy. 62% did not.

## What difference did this make?

- 'Frimley Local Maternity and Neonatal System has created a clearly defined action plan to improve knowledge about folic acid and make it more widely available across all 5 places in the Frimley Integrated Care System footprint. An equity and equality steering group has been established to oversee the plan's implementation. [Frimley equality, diversity and inclusion annual report](#)
- 'This report has offered the Public Health Children and Young People team with invaluable insights and actionable recommendations. It will play a crucial role in guiding Slough's efforts to enhance the uptake of folic acid intake and will serve as a cornerstone for planning evidence based Healthy Start folic acid campaigns in the future.'
- Cippenham nursery has been established as a new distribution point for Healthy Start vitamins and held an awareness raising event.
- Maternity and neonatal voices representative will work with key community group Café Mama to co-produce communications materials.
- Information provided following notification of pregnancy will now be available in different languages.

# Improving patient experience at Wexham Park Hospital

This year we published findings of the experiences the public shared with us during 6 Months of visiting Frimley and Wexham Park hospitals

## At a glance

We heard about issues with the way hospitals communicated with patients about their appointments as well as examples of when this was working well.

Patients told us about good examples of care and wanted to pass on their feedback to the department or individual who had looked after them.

Not all patients understood the options for same day treatment in primary care.

When people had concerns about care we were able to signpost them to PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) or advocacy organisations. We were also able to offer further listening and signposting via our Healthwatch hub.

Our monthly hospital visiting program has been running since September 2023.

We have spoken to 240 patients, visitors, volunteers, and staff at Frimley and Wexham Park hospitals.



## What did you tell us about good care?

Patients wanted to recognise the importance of good care and were often positive about their experiences, We passed this feedback on so that individuals and teams could be congratulated, recognising examples of good practice.

***“I’ve had amazing treatment at Frimley, 99% absolutely incredible. The breast care nurses, and radiology treatment was fantastic. They have a very holistic approach. They look after their patients, including mental health and financial wellbeing. The nurses are like gold.”- Patient feedback***

## What difference did this make?

- NHS Frimley ICB listened to your feedback and improved communications to patients. This work is ongoing. We will continue to raise awareness of issues and celebrate success.
- We were able to support patients with concerns about care to access Patient Advice and Liaison Service, NHS complaints or advocacy services as appropriate. This enabled individuals to reach a resolution and the system to learn and improve.
- NHS Frimley ICS heard your feedback about public awareness of same day primary care services and committed to working with Slough Borough Council to improve road signage. This will allow patients informed choice and release pressure on A&E at Wexham.

# 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.

## Listening to older people in care homes.

**Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives of the care environment they live in helped to inform the Slough Borough Council older people's strategy.**

We worked with Slough Borough Council and the Slough Co-Production network, we spoke to residents and staff at Oak House in Slough. The conversations we had about quality helped to inform development of Slough Borough Councils Older Person's strategy.



## Helping services to involve the public

**Services working to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.**

Healthwatch Slough worked with Slough Borough Council to share contacts and groups that supported the development of the learning disability and autism strategies. We attended events, continuing the conversation with experts by experience.



## Supported the roll out of GP digital access program

**We talked to the public about the ways they access their GP, difficulties they face, and supported the local primary care system by sharing information and providing feedback on communications to residents.**

Healthwatch continue to monitor the effect of access changes on marginalised communities such as carers and those who do not have digital access. In 2024 we will work to help the system improve access for unpaid carers of people with dementia and educate young people who are independently accessing their GP for the first time.



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 refugee support groups
- Listening to attendees at mum and baby groups in areas of economic hardship.
- Reaching out to Muslim community by attending Friday prayers at the mosque.



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## Effective and respectful communication with pregnant people from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

For our folic acid project, we wanted to speak to pregnant people and new mothers who were from Black and Asian backgrounds as this was the demographic that had been identified as having a lower uptake of folic acid in pregnancy.

We reached out to women across Slough in a variety of ways. We conducted semi-structured interviews at JMIC Mosque Café Mama group, library rhyme time sessions and at maternity clinics. We also hosted an online engagement session to capture feedback from people who are not able to attend groups.

**Following the project engagement, we made community links that enabled us to re-visit groups, keeping the women involved in delivery of the recommendations.**

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## Supporting refugees in Slough to provide feedback.

As part of our Big Chat engagement, we visited Slough refugees group twice to speak to people who had recently arrived in the UK. We followed this up with a third visit in 2024.

We spoke about access to healthcare, mental health and wellbeing and their experiences living in hotel accommodation.

The language barrier made it difficult for some people to access care

**“It is hard when you can't speak the language, that is why I am trying to learn English, GPs do not want to listen, they just give tablets”**

People told us that they appreciate the English classes provided by Slough Refugees.

We published the feedback we received in a report and spoke to the group leader, Slough Borough Council and ICS leads. We continue to monitor service improvements.

On our follow up visit refugees told us that they were happy with their healthcare and were not experiencing any access issues.





## 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 understand changing health information.
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost-of-living crisis

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# Sharing important communications to reduce the risk of a measles epidemic.

**It's essential that people have clear, accurate communication about their care.**

Measles is a highly infectious disease that can result in serious illness or even death. An uptake of 95% over 2 does on MMR jab protects us from outbreaks. Slough has one of the lowest uptakes of MMR vaccine in the Southeast and is geographically close to West London where there was an outbreak.

Slough Healthwatch took part in a multi-agency approach, sharing communications via our social media channels, providing information through our hub and talking to the public about the benefits of vaccination during our engagement activities.

This approach was successful, increasing rates of childhood immunisation across the Borough and avoiding an outbreak.

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## Supporting digital improvements to the NHS app

**Digital tools can make a positive difference to healthcare – but only if it's clear how to use them.**

People shared challenges with using the NHS app including dementia carers who were unable to get the app for the person they were caring for as the verification process did not take account of the differing abilities of those with dementia. We also spoke to members of the public who were confused by their John Hopkins score appearing in the 'test results' section of the app.

We asked for clarification from our NHS digital lead who was able to work to fix the error with the John Hopkins score and pass on feedback from dementia carers to a national forum affecting app design. Thank you to those who shared feedback with Healthwatch and enabled better functionality and accessibility.

**Healthwatch Slough wanted to make sure as many people as possible could get the benefits of digital services.**

- Raising awareness during engagement with key groups such as older people, carers and young people.
- Using our contacts to raise issues and influence at national level



# 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 Healthwatch Slough and what we have to offer
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Reviewed written materials and communications, helping to make them more accessible.





**Charlotte** is a Registered Nurse and a Life Coach. During her career she has worked in the pharmaceutical industry, healthcare and social care settings, in the UK and abroad. She has also set up and run her own home care agency supporting people to live independently in their own homes.

Her involvement as an advisory board member to Healthwatch enables her to actively contribute towards an improved provision of health and social care services in her area.



**Mike** is a retired practitioner who worked in local authorities & private sector organisations that needed to transform working relationships & practice. He is a strategist and now supports carers & their families. He volunteers in a nursing home which helps in his Healthwatch role.

Mike is an authorised representative and brings his wealth of experience to supporting our Enter and View visits. He recently undertook an environmental check using a dementia friendly toolkit.



**Umar** is a Senior Project Manager at a regional health trust, specialising in the design and delivery of mental health services for adults and young people. Umar currently sits on the managerial board of one of the largest faith centres in the Thames Valley and is also involved in community development and support programmes.

Umar helps to set our strategic direction as part of our advisory group. He represents Healthwatch on the Health and Wellbeing Board.



## Do you feel inspired?



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

 <https://www.healthwatchslough.co.uk/>

 **0300 0120184**

 [Ann.Brosnan@healthwatchwam.co.uk](mailto:Ann.Brosnan@healthwatchwam.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	£64,439	Expenditure on pay	£48,254
Additional income	£0	Non-pay expenditure	£13,419
		Office and management fees	£10,000
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£64,439</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£71,673</b>



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## Additional income

We did not receive any extra income this year

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## 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. Women's Health
2. Young Carers
3. Hospital Discharge





# Statutory statements

## Healthwatch Slough

**Hosted by- Help and Care, Unit A49 Aerodrome Studios, 2-8  
Airfield Way  
Christchurch, Dorset,  
BH23 3TS**

**Healthwatch Slough 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 advisory group consists of 5 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our advisory group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the advisory group met 6 times and made decisions on matters such as our Enter and View schedule and our workplan.

## 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 [www.healthwatchslough.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchslough.co.uk)

## 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, 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.

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to the Place Committee and Health and Wellbeing Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Frimley Integrated Care System. For example, we attend the patient experience forum, children and young people's transformation board and primary care board. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

# Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Slough is represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board by Joanna Dixon, Healthwatch Manager. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing information and public voice and supporting colleagues to reach out to the public. Healthwatch Slough is represented on Frimley Integrated Care Partnerships by Joanna Dixon and Frimley Integrated Care Boards by Joanna Dixon

## 2023 – 2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Supported people contacting our hub about failings in care to understand their options including advocacy, NHS complaints, PALs and freedom of information requests.	Helping the NHS to learn from experiences and make improvements to services
Held a feedback gathering session with youth group leads to understand the issues young people they work with are facing.	Used feedback about GP access to inform co-design of resources with young people for the Frimley Healthier Together website.
During our 'Big Chat' tour we found that residents were not aware of community groups in Slough	Increased signposting available through our social media, website and hub.
Listened to people about their mental health support needs and attended Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust One Team events to directly raise issues.	Service user feedback is part of the design of new services and review of current provision by BHFT. New mental health services will be designed with patient voice at the centre enabling them to be more effective.
Met with MIND in Berkshire colleagues and shared contact details for community groups enabling them to access service users from diverse ethnic groups for a project.	Increasing representation of underserved communities and addressing a national issue with 5 times greater rates of black people being detained under the mental health act.
Engaged with care homes and local authority care home leads to plan Enter and View strategy. Trained volunteers to participate in the program and put policy and procedure in place.	Program of Enter and View visits in place for 2024 enabling evidence gathering about what works well and what could be improved.
Developed our strategic advisory group, supporting members to take an active role in the community and Healthwatch activity.	Ensuring our activity is relevant and matched to the needs of the community.



Healthwatch Slough

hosted by Help and Care

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