

Together

healthwatch
Reading

We're laying the foundations
for making health and social
care better

Annual Report April 2022 – March 2023



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"In the last ten years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of local Healthwatch hasn't. Your local Healthwatch has worked tirelessly to make sure the views of local people are heard, and NHS and social care leaders use your feedback to make care better."

Louise Ansari, Healthwatch National Director

Message from Lead Officer

Welcome to the first Annual Report since Healthwatch Reading has been hosted by The Advocacy People. The ten months since the transfer have been busy, with lots of change so this year's report will look a little different.

Much of our time has been about building up the team – our first task was to recruit a dedicated team of employed staff and volunteers. We have been pleased to welcome people from a diverse mix of backgrounds with a variety of skills and experience to help us reach across Reading communities.

Having got our team in place, as well as recognising and championing the work of the previous Healthwatch Reading provider, our focus has been to make Healthwatch Reading even more relevant and responsive to the needs of the Reading community, validating the trust that has been placed in us.

Our team has been out and about on a Reading 'roadshow', raising awareness of who we are and what we do and getting insight into the experiences of people using local health and social care services. We have also made sure our print materials can be found and our digital information is up to date.

At the same time as reaching out to the public, we knew we needed to raise awareness of Healthwatch Reading as an independent public voice by being present at meetings to make sure the public voice is being listened to when decisions are being made.

A key part of this work has been to ensure Healthwatch, and therefore local people, are fully represented in the new Integrated Care System for Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West where Berkshire West covers Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough. You'll find more about what this means on page 14.

I am grateful to the Advisory Group who supports the team to deliver a quality service that is realistic about what we can take on with our finite resources and increasing demand.

This report has helped us take stock, reflect on what we have achieved in our first 10 months and plan our priorities for next year. Hence why we have called our report 'Laying the Foundations' – we have laid the groundwork to be a powerful voice for Reading residents in decisions about health and social care and ask you to join us on the next phase by responding to our calls for feedback, following us on social media and signing up to our newsletter.

Alice Kunjappy-Clifton
Lead Officer, Healthwatch Reading

About us

Healthwatch Reading 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.

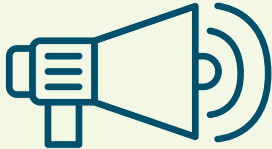


Our values are:

- **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



We have been out and about in the community **meeting local people** and the organisations who work in the Borough through being out and about in the community on our roadshow.

Local people have contacted us in different ways to directly share their experiences of health and social care services and/or for advice and information. We have heard lots about important topics such GP access and dentistry

Making a difference to health

We have continued to speak up on behalf of asylum seekers in the Home Office Contracted Accommodation in Reading. We heard about the experience of women and children. As a result, the NHS Safeguarding team is planning safeguarding assurance visits to check on the residents' health and wellbeing.



Health and care that works for you

We're lucky to have

6 outstanding volunteers with a range of different experiences and background who form our Advisory Group.

We're funded by our local authority. From 1 June 2022 (when The Advocacy People took over the contract) to 31 March 2023 we received

£80,988.

We currently employ

6 staff who help us carry out our work on a part-time basis.



Our year in brief

Spring



During March, April and May 2022, The Advocacy People worked with the outgoing provider to get ready for the transfer.

Summer



On 1 June 2022, The Advocacy People took over the Healthwatch Reading contract. We advertised for new staff and volunteers.



We reached out to local health and social care providers to build relationships and make sure we were invited to the right meetings to bring the voice of Reading residents to people making decisions.

Autumn



A new team was established. We started awareness of Healthwatch in the community, starting with voluntary sector organisations.



Women locally were asked about maternal mental health as part of the Healthwatch England campaign.

Winter



We heard how asylum seekers living in Reading, particularly women and babies, were having difficulties with getting nutritional food and access to Healthcare. We talked to Reading Borough Council and the NHS about our concerns. You can read more about this further down..



We championed the use of accessible language and the need to provide interpreters through Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality's Community Champions.

10 years of improving care

This year marks a special milestone for Healthwatch. Over the last ten years, people have shared their experiences, good and bad, to help improve health and social care. As well as informing local decision-making, feedback from Reading residents has contributed to Healthwatch England’s evidence so they have been able to make care better at a national level. Here are a few of the highlights :

How have we made care better, together?

Vaccine Confidence

Public health received valuable information around vaccine confidence with people from different backgrounds, which provided vital lessons for subsequent campaigns



Healthcare information

Your feedback helped inform our ‘your care, your way’ campaign to make sure everyone gets healthcare information in a way they understand. Our work helped lead to a review of the Accessible Information Standard.



NHS Dentistry

We have continued to express concerns about dentistry, which has helped to secure changes which the NHS will be introducing soon.



Discharge from hospital

Healthwatch heard from patients and carers that discharge from hospital can be difficult and confusing. The Government listened to our recommendations and updated key guidance to put patient safety first.



NHS Waitlist

Healthwatch joined with other organisations to request an urgent response to hospital waiting lists, to include better communication and support without overloading primary care. The NHS set out a recovery plan to address the backlog.





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.

This year we have reached different communities by:







- Attending events and community centres locally
- Attending weekly community conversations and groups
- Ensuring our marketing materials are appropriate to ensure easy engagement with communities, online and in print.

Laying the foundations: making Healthwatch Reading visible

As we are building the foundation of the new team of Healthwatch Reading to be the organisation to go to for advice and information on health and social care, we have had to look at how we can improve our visibility.

We have been out and about in the Borough attending events and holding pop-up clinics in different places. We have been asking communities what we can do to make more people aware of Healthwatch Reading.



	Minor cuts and grazes Colds Bruises, Minor Sprains	Self care Stock up on medicines
	Minor illnesses Headaches Bites and stings Stomach upsets	Pharmacy
	Feeling unwell? Anxious? Unsure? Need help?	NHS 111 You can call us 24/7
	Long term conditions Chronic pain Persistent symptoms	GP Advice
	Skin rashes and infections Suspected broken limbs Minor scalds and burns	Urgent Treatment Centre Walk-in and book via 111
	Serious bleeding Blacking out Choking, Chest pain	A&E or 999 Emergencies only

We have been sharing frequently asked questions to support the Reading public with the challenges of dentistry and GP access.

We've been supporting residents to understand the new way in which GP surgeries in particular are now providing services.

Our Lead Officer, Alice Kunjappy-Clifton, spoke at The Advocacy People's all staff away day to make sure everyone knows about Healthwatch, wherever they work.



Asylum Seekers living in Reading

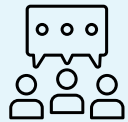
Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Through building relationships with other organisations in the community, we have heard a lot of concerns about the conditions in which asylum seekers placed in Home Office contracted accommodation are living in Reading.

Examples include lack of:

- appropriate facilities to prepare baby food
- suitable food to meet different dietary requirements, including for children
- communal space where people can spend time away from their room
- transport to medical appointments
- access to dental treatment.

Healthwatch Reading has taken the following action:



- Raised safeguarding concerns with the NHS (Buckingham, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West ICB) who are now conducting safeguarding assurance visits.
- Met with Reading Borough Council, the Home Office, Clearsprings (part of Ready Homes who run the accommodation where asylum seekers are housed – see below) and local voluntary organisations.
- Ensured the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board are aware of the issues and asked for joined up working between the three local authorities in Berkshire West (Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough).

Context

Whilst awaiting an initial decision, emergency support is provided by the Home Office in Initial Accommodation, which could be a hotel, flat, house, hostel or bed and breakfast. Whilst these might previously have had guest facilities, these have been suspended. Asylum seekers in this position have a right to NHS healthcare; local authorities have no statutory responsibilities.

How will Healthwatch Reading make a difference?



- We will follow up with the NHS to check that recommendations leading from their visits will be acted upon to ensure issues such as lack of access to healthcare are addressed.
- We will continue to share information with Clearsprings and ask what action they are taking.
- Whilst we know that local authorities are limited in what they can do, there are examples of good practice. We would like to see the three Berkshire West councils joining together to share and work together.

Maternal mental health

This year Healthwatch England worked to find out about the experiences of mothers and birthing parents of mental health care.

As part of their project, Healthwatch England conducted a national survey from October to December 2022. At the same time, the three Healthwatch in Berkshire West (Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough) felt it was important to understand the local picture and how it compares to the national situation.

We therefore did the same survey, adding a question so people could tell us which of the three areas they lived in.

We found that people in Reading were experiencing the same issues as people across the country:

- Care and support provided is having an impact on mental health. 37% of people we heard from experienced negative impacts on their mental health due to the care and support they received during labour and childbirth. This compares to 42% nationally (HWE 2023).
- Mental health is not routinely discussed at postnatal checks. Nearly half (46%) of the people we heard from said that mental health was either not mentioned or not discussed enough at their postnatal check. At nearly half, this compares with the national findings of 22% (HWE 2023)
- Care is inconsistent for pre and postnatal mental health difficulties. Over half the people we heard from experienced mental health difficulties. One third of these people were not offered information or a referral.

What has happened since the report?

NHS England have published their plan for improving experiences for mothers and birthing parents. Their commitments reflect the findings of the Healthwatch England report – this shows that the NHS are listening to what people are saying.

What will Healthwatch Reading do next?

We will continue to work 'behind the scenes' to see how the plan is rolled out locally and how this is impacting local people. If we hear concerns from local people we will ask questions of the people making the decisions.



If you've recently given birth, we'd like to hear from you about your experiences of maternal and birthing parent care:

healthwatchreading.co.uk

t: 0118 214 5579

e: info@healthwatchreading.co.uk



Healthwatch Hero

Utulivu Women's Group supports the voice of ethnically diverse communities. They are our beacon to ensure ethnically diverse communities, especially women, get important information, support, advice and give feedback.

Since the change in provider to The Advocacy People in June 2022, they have supported Healthwatch Reading by:

- Spreading the Healthwatch message, helping to increase our visibility amongst the ethnically diverse communities in Reading.
- Sharing what they have heard ethnic minority women say about maternity services in Reading and the experiences of the asylum seekers in Home Office Contracted Accommodation.

Working with Healthwatch Reading team has been a great help to Utulivu Women's Group and the Community Hub. They helped us to highlight some of these issues at all levels and we feel that change is starting, and the voices of the grassroots communities are being heard. Healthwatch has been instrumental in supporting our health Champions to find volunteering and training opportunities in their organisation. We will continue to work closely, make our voices heard and achieve positive change in our communities.

Eva Karanja, Manager, Utulivu Women's Group



Working in partnership

Healthwatch isn't just about getting feedback from local people and passing this on ourselves.

We promote and support organisations to make sure they involve local people when they are making decisions.

Our approach as 'critical friend' is to work constructively and collaboratively, looking for solutions to make health and social care better.

We do this by:

- Making sure we are involved, and asking questions, in committees/boards/programmes where decisions about health and social care are being made
- Advising organisations on what they should do to involve people, including reviewing surveys suggesting how views can be collected from across our communities.

Working in the new Integrated Care System

This year has seen a big change to the way in which the NHS is organised locally so that services are more joined up and can provide the care we need, when and where we need it.

This means that NHS services in Wokingham Borough are now part of an Integrated Care Board (ICB) which covers Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West, known as **BOB**. Berkshire West is made up of Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham Borough.

The ICB decides how the budget is spent and develops plans to improve people's health. Locally, Berkshire West (a 'place' in the ICS) there is a partnership which makes sure local services meet the needs of local people.

What does this mean for Healthwatch Reading?

The Advocacy People host the three Healthwatch in Berkshire West. This makes it very easy to work together to be in more places at once – on the ground in Reading and ensuring Reading residents are represented when decisions are being made. This is very important as we have limited resources.

As well as working together in Berkshire West, we have been working with Healthwatch Bucks and Healthwatch Oxfordshire and getting to know the people who work in the new system.

For next year, we have been given some extra money so that we can increase our capacity to attend different meetings and talk to residents of Reading about what's being planned across BOB.



"BOB ICB recognises Healthwatch as a key partner in our Integrated Care System as we continue to develop our mission and deliver better care for our residents. In Berkshire West place we value the role of Healthwatch as a patient-centred advocate and as a critical friend. We look forward to our continued joint working in 2023-24."

Ellis McCarthy
Programme Manager and Locality Lead (Reading)
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board



Working with BOB Integrated Care Board: an example

Transforming continuing healthcare

Some people with long-term complex health needs qualify for free social care arranged and funded by the NHS. This is called NHS continuing healthcare. Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) ICB is working to make sure that people across BOB get fair and equitable access to continuing healthcare and, if eligible, get consistently good quality care.

The programme of work for making this happen is called the All Age Continuing Care (AACC) Transformation Board.

Healthwatch Reading, alongside our colleagues from the other four Healthwatch in the BOB area, have been part of the Hearing People's Voices Task and Finish Group.

We are there to make sure the experiences of people who have applied for and those who receive continuing healthcare are listened to when decisions to change the way services are delivered are being made.

In order to understand more about people's experience of continuing care, we helped design a survey of people receiving continuing healthcare. This survey will be sent out in July 2023 and then twice a year thereafter.

We are planning to speak to people who have applied for but not been eligible for continuing healthcare. The findings from this research, together with the results of the surveys, will help BOB ICB understand how people experience its services and contribute to the design and delivery of services in the future.

We will continue to work with the Board in the coming months.



"BOB ICB is keen to obtain constructive feedback from service users on their experience of continuing healthcare. All five Healthwatch have made an important contribution to this work and we hope that they will continue to support efforts to improve access to these services and the quality of care provided by obtaining and interpreting service-user feedback. This is essential input to achieve continuous improvement across BOB based on evidence derived directly from those people who have experienced the continuing healthcare pathway."

Dr Paul Pettigrew
External Consultant
Waite Atkins Limited



Ensuring language is accessible and easy to understand

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

We also make sure that other organisations take the same approach to sharing and gathering information about their services.



Healthwatch Reading were involved in chairing an online meeting for the public in Berkshire West where the NHS shared their draft strategy for working as part of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB).

Healthwatch Reading, with Healthwatch West Berkshire and Healthwatch Wokingham Borough, asked BOB ICB if the meeting would have British Sign Language interpretation. As a result of asking this question, BSL interpretation was arranged.

As part of the new hospital development of Royal Berkshire Hospital, the Building Berkshire Together team created a survey to ask local people for their views. We worked with the team to make sure the language used in the survey was easy to understand and would reach people who don't use the internet. We will continue to ensure that the public are properly consulted on the plans.



Our goal at Building Berkshire Together, the new hospital programme for Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is to build a new, purpose-built hospital which meets the needs of the diverse communities we serve. Working with Healthwatch has given us invaluable insight, support and opportunities to engage with our local communities to develop healthcare facilities which helps us tackle accessibility and health inequalities.

Alison Foster, Programme Director, Building Berkshire Together



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, how to make 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 on access to NHS dentistry and GP-led services.
- Linking people to reliable information and services they need.
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme.
- Helping people to access the services they need.
- Creating a new website which is accessible and easy to use.

Case study: support to access a local pharmacy

What happened: Mrs A told us about her bad experience when she went into her local pharmacy to pick up her and her daughter's medication.

She was given a sealed medication bag and asked whether both items were in the same bag as she had been expecting the items in 2 separate bags, as before.

The member of staff became angry and accused Mrs A of time wasting. Mrs A's first language isn't English, so she didn't fully understand what was being said and this raised her anxiety. She did however pick up that she was being asked to leave and that if she didn't then force would be used.

As a result of this, Mrs A did not feel able to return to the same pharmacy.

What Healthwatch did:

Healthwatch Reading contacted the Thames Valley Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) member who looked at ways to support Mrs A. He had a conversation with the lead pharmacist where this happened who then looked at the CCTV from that day. The lead pharmacist wanted to continue to serve Mrs A and advised that they have a member of staff who speaks Mrs A's first language.

Healthwatch Reading spoke to Mrs A again and explained that she has two options: to choose another pharmacy or stay where she was.

Mrs A decided she wanted to stay with the pharmacy as there wasn't another one near where she lives.

How this has made a difference:

Mrs A told us that she felt heard and feels she now understands the options open to her. She knows that if she has further difficulties at the same pharmacy, she can come back to Healthwatch Reading.

The lead pharmacist was able to speak to the staff at the pharmacy about what had happened so the staff are more informed about working with people who do not have English as their first language.



"I have always admired the work that Healthwatch provides but over the last 3 years that I have worked with them, I have found Healthwatch to be professional, understandable, and extremely approachable. It is great that we have the same goal of satisfying a customer's needs."

Kevin Barnes

Thames Valley Local Pharmaceutical Committee member



Volunteering

It continues to be a challenging time in volunteer recruitment; however, we are now supported by a team of fantastic volunteers who make up our newly created Advisory Group. The group works alongside the paid staff team to:

- Agree the strategy and priorities for our yearly work plan.
- Ensure Healthwatch Reading adheres to its principles and purpose.
- Support management, staff and other volunteers.
- Ensure accountability for quality and delivery of the strategy and workplan to local people.
- Represent Healthwatch and the voice of local people at strategic meetings with health and social care partners.
- Be ambassadors for Healthwatch Reading and to use every opportunity to promote our work, share our successes, raise our profile and listen to local voices and help make change

Luke Howarth is one of our Volunteer Advisory Group members who brings vast experience working in local government, housing and homelessness. Here he talks about why he has joined Healthwatch Reading.



"I am proud to be from Reading, so when I saw that Healthwatch were looking for new Advisory Board Members, I wanted to offer my experience from working in local government and housing and homelessness services.

By listening to experiences, enhancing our understanding of barriers and working together, we can improve access to and the quality of health services. We can improve local healthcare and outcomes.




I look forward to hearing from patients about their experiences."

Do you feel inspired?

We are still on the lookout for new volunteers, from across our community. As well as our Advisory Group, we have roles in Community Engagement and Enter and View (where we visit services to see them in action).

For more information and to get in touch:



 [Healthwatchreading.co.uk](https://healthwatchreading.co.uk)
 0118 214 5579
 info@healthwatchreading.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	
Reading Borough Council (core funding)	£80,988	Employment costs	£69,045
Healthwatch England for local database development	£1,500	Other operating costs	£12,219
Additional income	£360	Support and administration costs	£8,834
Total income	£82,848	Total expenditure	£90,098

Next steps

In the ten years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in helping the health and care system understand what is working, spot issues and think about how things can be better in the future.

Services are currently facing unprecedented challenges and tackling the backlog needs to be a key priority for the NHS to ensure everyone gets the care they need. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving them a voice to help shape improvements to services.

We will also continue our work to tackling inequalities that exist and work to reduce the barriers you face when accessing care, regardless whether that is because of where you live, income or race.

Top three priorities for 2023-24

- GP access and quality – looking at people's understanding of how GP-led services are structured and self-care options.
- Maternal mental health – see page 10.
- Dentistry – focus on: pregnant women; women who have had a baby in the last 12 months; and people with learning disabilities.



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Reading, Dept 77, 105 London Street, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 4QD

Contract held by The Advocacy People, Rock House, 49-51 Cambridge Road, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 1DT

the
advocacy
people®

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 newly created Healthwatch Advisory Group consists of 5 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. As a new Advisory Group, they have met once to discuss progress to date and our forward plans.

We also ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. Our top priority for the year ahead was determined through a public survey.

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

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of using services. During 2022/23 we have been available for local residents to contact us by phone, email, provided a webform on our website and through social media, as well as attending events and 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.healthwatchreading.co.uk.

Responses from recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or comment on observations and recommendations.

Taking people's experiences to decision makers

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

In Reading we take this information to the Reading Integration Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board so it is heard by decision makers at local authority level.

We also take insight and experiences to decision makers in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System and work with the other Healthwatch within this area to ensure voices are heard from all parts of the community. For example, we are part of a Hearing People's Voices strand of the All Age Continuing Care Transformation Board and have a seat at the System Quality Group.

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Enter and view

This year, we made 0 Enter and View visits as we did not receive feedback about any one particular service that warranted such a visit.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Reading is represented on the Reading Health and Wellbeing Board by Alice Kunjappy-Clifton, Lead Officer. During 2022/23 our representative has effectively carried out this role by sharing how we work and our future workplans and, asking questions from the public perspective and ensuring the public voice is considered in decision-making.

Healthwatch Reading works in collaboration with the other 4 Healthwatch in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) to ensure Reading residents are represented at Place level (Berkshire West) and Integrated Care Board level. With the three Berkshire West Healthwatch delivered by The Advocacy People, representation for Place is shared between Alice Kunjappy-Clifton (Lead Officer, Healthwatch Reading and Wokingham Borough), Fiona Worby (Lead Officer, Healthwatch West Berkshire) and Sarah Deason (Area Director, Healthwatch in Berkshire West).

Representation at BOB Level is in conjunction with Zoe McIntosh and Veronica Barry, Chief Officers in Healthwatch Bucks and Oxfordshire respectively. We look forward to continue our partnership in 2023/24.





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