



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Blackburn
with Darwen

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"The impact that local Healthwatch have is vitally important. Healthwatch are empowering their communities to share their experiences. They're changing the health and care landscape and making sure that people's views are central to making care better and tackling health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our Chair

A look back over 2024/25

Our work in 2024/25 has again focused on access to services and experiences of more vulnerable and under-represented members of our community. We have focused on uptake of screening amongst our South Asian heritage community, listened to carers about the barriers they face getting the support they need and engaged with residents in Emergency Department who were there for mental health issues. We engaged with residents in receipt of domiciliary care about their experiences of this care – a group who often do not have a voice in society. We also supported a group of young people to become Royal Society of Public Health 'Young Health Champions' pioneering health campaigns in their school.

Our work on uptake of cervical screening amongst young South Asian heritage women has been recognized by the Chief Medical Officer of Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB and has been shared across the NHS England North West Screening network.

Our work on mental health crisis has been well received by Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust and because of this report, they are reviewing the effectiveness of their Initial Response Service and looking at an alternative setting for people to attend in mental health crisis.

We work closely with the other local Healthwatch organisations across Lancashire and South Cumbria to ensure residents' voice is both heard and acted on by the Integrated Care Board and Partnership.



"The team continue to address the significant health inequalities faced by members of our community through their work and make recommendations for change to those in power. I would like to thank our Board, staff and volunteers for all their hard work."

John Easton, Chair of Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen

About us

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen 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

We have supported more than 1,300 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 5 staff and our work is supported by 12 volunteers.

Reaching out:



1,323 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

164 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as hospital care, finding an NHS dentist and GP care and communication.

Championing your voice:



We published 17 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like accessing mental health support in crisis, support for bereavement and support to access health screening.

Our most popular report was 'Understanding the reasons for mental health attendances at Royal Blackburn Hospital', highlighting people's struggles when attending Emergency Department for mental health issues.

Statutory funding:



We're funded by Blackburn with Darwen Council. In 2024/25 we received £133,700 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 Blackburn with Darwen. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We supported twelve 14–15-year-olds from a local secondary school to become Level 2 accredited RSPH Young Health Champions delivering health campaigns in their school.



As a result of our Enter and View visit to Primrose Bank GP practice, they updated their website to be accessible in a range of languages and included a more accessible version of their complaints procedure.



Summer

We engaged with 85 women of South Asian heritage about the barriers they experience accessing cervical screening. This report is being used to help shape local Women's Health Hubs provision.



Our report on families' experience of support for their child who has Avoidant Restricted Food Intake Disorder has informed the development of the Lancashire and South Cumbria Arfid Support Pathway which previously did not exist.



Autumn

We engaged with 700 residents on what bereavement support is available in the borough. This work has resulted in a new commission by BwD Public Health of a community-based bereavement café provision.



Our Bowel Screening report highlighted the need for increased local campaigns particularly amongst our South Asian heritage community. This resulted in NHS England local team hosting an event for 200 South Asian residents.



Winter

Our report on mental health attendances at our local Emergency Department highlighted the need for an alternative venue for people in crisis. Lancashire and South Cumbria Foundation Trust are now exploring venues for a crisis café.



Our partnership working with our local Population Health team and BwD Council's Wellbeing team has seen additional support put in place by primary care and the Council in one of our most deprived wards.



Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care in Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board.

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Blackpool, Cumberland Lancashire, Westmorland & Furness to achieve the following:

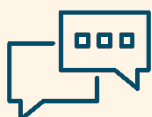
A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



Healthwatch Lancashire is part of Healthwatch Together, a collaboration of five local Healthwatch organisations that ensure community voices shape healthcare decisions across Lancashire and South Cumbria.

We represent residents at strategic meetings, including the ICB, Quality Committee, ensuring local experiences influence service improvements.

The big conversation:



Maternity and Neonatal Care - Listening to Families

Through our Healthwatch Together partnership we have worked closely with our Local Maternity and Neonatal System. In September 2024, we published our report Maternity and Neonatal Matters. The report highlights the experiences of people accessing maternity and neonatal services across four hospital Trusts.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



Through this project we:-

- Partnered with Local Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnerships (MNVPs) to improve services.
- Worked with the Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) to standardise feedback collection.
- Attended the LMNS Insight, Co-production, and Engagement (ICE) group to ensure patient voices drive improvements.

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 are some examples of our work in Blackburn with Darwen 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.

We brought leaders from Primary Care and the Mental Health Trust to meet with residents of Ash Grove estate, a deprived area of Darwen which experiences significant health inequalities, compounded by lack of public transport to the town centre. We are now working with both to explore drop-ins at the local community centre and the option of a new pharmacy on the estate.

Getting services to involve the public



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

We lead on the 'Resident Voice' subgroup of the borough's Adult Safeguarding Board and have championed the involvement of people with lived experience in shaping and improving the work of the Safeguarding team and increasing awareness of safeguarding amongst our South Asian community by coproducing promotional materials with them.

Improving care over time



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

In 2023/24 we carried out a project engaging with residents in 'Priority Wards', experiencing high levels of deprivation and Emergency Department attendances. We have continued this engagement in neighbourhoods across 2024/25 alongside Population Health from the ICB and will bring additional focus to this work in our 2025/26 workplan.

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.



Listening to your experiences

Reducing Wait Times in Emergency Department

In Summer 2024 we worked with East Lancashire Hospitals Trust to gather feedback on new initiatives in Emergency Department to reduce wait times for patients – a key concern for our population.

What did we do?

We engaged with residents in the waiting room at Emergency Department to understand whether the new triage process was more effective in helping them be seen more quickly in department.

Key things we heard:

80%

of patients felt that they were directed to the right service to help with their symptoms

85%

Reported that their experience of the Emergency Department was better than previous times.

30%

reported concerns about lack of privacy when discussing symptoms with the initial clinician

Our work showed that despite great improvements in the triage process, people did not feel comfortable discussing their symptoms in a tight setting close to the first row of patients in the waiting room.

What difference did this make?

Changes were made to the layout of the Emergency Department waiting room to allow for greater privacy for patients discussing their symptoms with the initial triage nurse and we ensured that patients were given more information about the role of this triage nurse in speeding up their journey through the department.

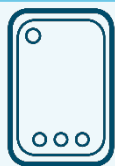
Listening to your experiences

Improving access to bereavement support for our residents

Residents told us that there is a real gap in support for bereavement.

We spoke with 700 residents about their experiences of support after bereavement through which it became evident that there was very little other than through the hospice which already has a waiting list for their support.

Key things we heard:



85%

of respondents told us that they had never accessed support for bereavement.

70%

of respondents said that they would have wanted to access pre-bereavement support, but this was not available to them.



"I thought I was going to get some support and I'm still waiting – that was last year."

We talked with groups of residents about what support they would want to access, and the feedback was that they would want a mix of individual and group support and that bereavement cafes would be very beneficial.

What difference did this make?

The findings from our report have been used by Blackburn with Darwen Public Health in shaping a new tender for local organisations to deliver bereavement cafes across the borough, offering both therapeutic support and upskilling and supporting residents to run volunteer support groups as bereavement cafes.

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of Blackburn with Darwen. 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:

- Door knocking to understand people's access to health and social care in areas of high deprivation and significant asylum seeker and refugee populations
- Working with residents in areas of high deprivation to address the key issues in their local area
- Sharing the barriers experienced by young South Asian women in accessing cervical screening with the ICB.



Addressing barriers to uptake of cervical screening amongst young South Asian women

We investigated the low uptake of cervical screening amongst South Asian women

Women we spoke with had a low awareness of the reason for cervical screening, spoke about their fears and misconceptions around screening as well as the topic being taboo amongst families.

What difference did this make?

Our recommendations were taken up by Blackburn with Darwen Public Health and the NHS North West Screening team who shared our report across their network. The report was also recognized by the Chief Medical Officer at Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB and will help shape women's health hub provision in the local area.

Helping asylum seekers and refugees understand and access maternity care

Asylum seekers and refugees adapting to life in Blackburn told us they did not understand how to access maternity support in the borough.

Whilst door knocking in two wards which experience high levels of deprivation, we met several women who did not know how to access support before and during pregnancy.

What difference did this make?

We shared this feedback with our local Family Hubs and the maternity team at the local Hospital Trust who have now started drop-ins at the two charities who directly support asylum seekers and refugees in the borough to raise awareness of support available.

Information and signposting

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 164 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

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



Improving support for residents with mental health issues

Thanks to Adam contacting us, the local mental health trust is reviewing their long-term support for patients with psychosis.

Adam contacted us from Australia because he was desperate for help for his mother. She lives on her own and neighbours had reported that they were worried about her mental state. He was frustrated with lack of support from services, so we contacted the Safeguarding team and the mental health trust.

As a result, the safeguarding duty team arranged a same day visit and the mental health trust stated that they would review their long-term support for people like Adam's mum with psychosis..



"Thank you so much again Healthwatch BwD, you've been amazing!"

Improving gynaecological surgery practice

Anna felt that she was being passed from department to department without access to the surgery she needed

Anna contacted us, upset that surgery for severe endometriosis kept being delayed by the hospital trust and they kept changing which department would be carrying out the surgery.

We contacted the Director of Patient Experience, and she was thankfully seen the following week and had the required surgery.

"I really do appreciate it; all the staff were excellent. My main concerns were related to the infrastructure related to complex gynae care and the overall management and lack of services for complex cases."



"Thank you once again for listening and your support."

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 50 days 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
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Carried out Enter and View visits to local services to help them improve



Showcasing volunteer impact

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.

"I am an associate dentist but cannot work currently due to an injury. I saw the work that the Healthwatch team carry out and just wanted to be part of the solution by supporting them to improve health and care services in our local area.

I've loved engaging with communities and joining the Enter and View visits. It's sparked an interest in me for pursuing public health as a potential career!

Miebaka



"I love being able to give back and give a voice to care home residents who might not otherwise be heard."

Liz joined our team after a long career in a local hospital trust.

"I want to ensure that all our residents receive the care they deserve in the borough's care homes. I love visiting care homes and speaking with residents and staff."

Liz



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.healthwatchblackburn

withdarwen.co.uk



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Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Blackburn with Darwen 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	£133,700	Expenditure on pay	£136,492
Additional income	£14,123	Non-pay expenditure	£14,243
		Office and management fee	£7,062
Total income	£147,823	Total Expenditure	£157,797

Additional income is broken down into:

- £13,923 received from the ICS joint work on maternity services
- £200 received from Healthwatch England for supporting to develop new Enter and View resources

Finance and future priorities

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. Improving the health and social care pathway for prison leavers
2. Understanding from adults with learning disabilities how well they are supported by their housing providers
3. Improving complex hospital discharges

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen, Unit 19 Eanam Wharf Business Centre, Eanam Wharf, Blackburn, BB1 5BL

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen 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 7 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 2024/25, the Board met 8 times and made decisions on matters such as the budget and workplan for the year as well as reviewing our risk register. 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 2024/25, 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.

Statutory statements

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 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 the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Blackburn with Darwen Place Based Partnership.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care System.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen is represented on the Blackburn with Darwen Health and Wellbeing Board by Sarah Johns, Chief Officer.

During 2024/25, our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing updates on our activities and reports.

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen is represented on Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Partnership and Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board by David Blacklock as part of Healthwatch Together.. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

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Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Andrew's Court Care Home	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on external improvements and increased activities
Branch Court Care Home	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report praising the care home for the improvements made since our last visit.
Ravenswing Care Home	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report praising the care home for the improvements made since our last visit.
Thornccliffe Care Home	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service has created an action tracker to cover these.
Darwen Healthlink GP practice	Scheduled visit and feedback from residents with concerns about wait times	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on patient information displays
Olive Medical Practice	Scheduled visit and concerns raised by residents	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on the appointment system, website improvements and improvements in the waiting room.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Primrose Bank Medical Centre	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up accessibility of the website and changes to the complaints procedure.
Shadsworth Surgery	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed by launching a new website.
St George's Practice	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on car parking availability, the welcome message on the phone and raising awareness of evening appointments.
William Hopwood Practice	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service followed up on website accessibility and making the practice more dementia friendly.

Statutory statements

2024 – 2025 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Understanding people's experiences of bereavement support	As a result of our engagement, BwD Public Health have commissioned a new contract for bereavement café support across the borough
Understanding people's experiences of bowel screening	As a result of our engagement, the local NHS bowel screening team and BwD Public Health have increased awareness raising campaigns in the South Asian community
Understanding people's experiences of services and support for Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder	Our engagement and report have helped shape the pathway for Arfid support across Lancashire and South Cumbria and we continue to be a member of the steering group
Breaking barriers: improving access and awareness of cervical screening	The recommendations from our report have been picked up by the Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB Chief Medical Officer and the NHS North West Cervical Screening team
Understanding people's experiences of accessing Emergency Department for mental health issues	As a result of our report, the local mental health trust is reviewing the effectiveness of its Initial Response Service and is looking to establish an alternative venue to Emergency Department for people in crisis.
Improving access to Emergency Department	As a result of our engagement, the local hospital trust implemented a new streaming tool and improved the layout of the waiting room to allow for confidential initial triage.
Engagement with carers	We have highlighted areas for improvement in the carers assessment process which have been picked up by Adult Social Care

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