



Speaking up for better care

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen
Annual Report 2025/26

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**Acting Chief Executive
Healthwatch England**

Chris McCann

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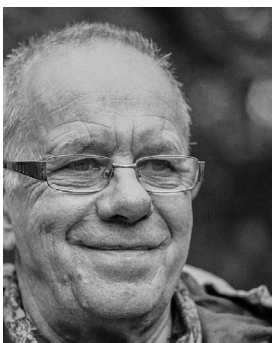
The NHS plays a vital role in our lives, and we know it faces real challenges. Listening to people’s thoughts about their care is one of the best ways to improve services. Every comment, concern, and compliment helps health and care professionals see what works and what needs to change, so care can be safer and better for everyone.

“We want to say a heartfelt thanks to all the local people who have taken the time to share their experiences, and to the health and social care professionals who have listened and acted on that feedback. Your commitment has helped make a real difference for our community.”

A message from our chair

A look back over 2025/26

Our work in 2025/26 has again focused on access to services and experiences of more vulnerable and under-represented members of our community. We have focused on support for adults with learning disabilities; residents accessing domiciliary care and young people. We spoke with people about their experiences of hospital discharge and the findings are now being followed up by both adult social care in the borough and the local hospital trust. Our report on child injuries in the home now has a dedicated multi-agency steering group picking up on the actions we recommended. Our report on young people's experiences of vaping illegal substances made the news on BBC Northwest Tonight. We continue to 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.



“The team continue to address the significant health inequalities faced by members of our community through their work and make recommendations for change whilst navigating uncertain times. I would like to thank our Board, staff and volunteers for all their hard work.”

Chair of Healthwatch
Blackburn with
Darwen

John Easton

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

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 1,444 people to have their say and get information about their care. We employed 5 staff and, our work was supported by 11 volunteers.



Reaching out:

1,444 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1,017 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as corridor care in hospital, finding an NHS dentist and support from their GP surgery.



Championing your voice:

We published 16 reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like domiciliary care, learning disability supported accommodation, vaping amongst young people and keeping children safe in the home.

Our most popular report was “People’s Experiences of Leaving Hospital in Blackburn with Darwen”, highlighting the lack of consistency in support on hospital discharge and carers’ needs not being taken into consideration in the discharge process.



Statutory funding:

We’re funded by Blackburn with Darwen Council. In 2025/26 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 spoke with 390 young people about the barriers to being healthy and maintaining a healthy weight. As a result of this work, a Tier 2 young people weight management programme is being commissioned locally.



We spoke with residents about their experiences of the Section 42 enquiry process which has resulted in a key focus on 'Making Safeguarding Personal' by the Adults Safeguarding Board in its workplan.



Summer

Our findings from visits to supported accommodation for adults with learning disabilities helped shape the recommissioning of this provision in the borough.



Our insight on hospital discharge highlighted the need for improved multi-agency working and greater recognition of the needs of unpaid carers.



Autumn

Our report on childhood injuries highlighted the lack of basic knowledge of managing children's health amongst parents which is now being addressed by the Family Hubs and Public Health through campaigns.



Our visit to a local GP practice highlighted concerns about safe management which has resulted in a targeted visit by the ICB quality team.



Winter

Our report on vaping amongst young people including vapes with illicit substances highlighted the common use amongst our young people and was recognised at a regional level.



Following our visit to St James House care home, the home has acted on internal repairs highlighted and recruited an activities coordinator.



Working together for change

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

This year, we've worked with Healthwatch across Lancashire and South Cumbria to achieve the following:



A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:

Healthwatch Together is a collaboration of five local Healthwatch organisations that ensure community voices shape healthcare decisions across Lancashire and South Cumbria. We work together to ensure the voices of local residents are heard through neighbourhood and Place and represented at the ICB.



A big conversation:

Through distributing an online survey, Healthwatch Together engaged with 254 people between February and April 2025 on their views and experiences of community pharmacy. Of the feedback collected, it appears that overall, patients are satisfied with the service that their pharmacy provides. However, we were able to highlight areas of lack of consistency in provision.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

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.

Listening to residents in receipt of domiciliary care and their loved ones, highlighted that most people were happy with the care provided but that improvements are needed regarding the timing and length of visits and better communication about who will be coming out to see them. This feedback has been shared directly with the Council's commissioning team to support the redesign of this offer in the borough.



Getting services to involve the public

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

We worked with East Lancashire Medical Service, which provides the out of hours GP service in the borough to gather increased patient feedback about their provision. We carried out an Enter and View visit at their request and reviewed their methods for gathering patient feedback after appointments.



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 continue to work alongside the ICB Population Health team and VCFSE partners to address health inequalities in these wards, with a focus on improving access and uptake of services and targeted work addressing respiratory and cardiovascular issues in the community.

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.



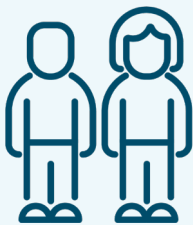
Championing child health awareness amongst parents in the borough

We know from hospital data that Blackburn with Darwen has a significantly high number of children attending hospital and being admitted because of unintentional and deliberate injuries.

What did we do

We developed a survey for parents to complete which was shared both in person in the Family Hubs and Baby Zone and online with Care Network, the Family Hubs, BwD Council and via schools. We received 112 responses from parents.

Key things we heard:



- **There was a lack of awareness of fire safety amongst parents we heard from.**
- **As many would turn to friends and family for advice as would use a trusted NHS resource**
- **There was a lack of basic child health awareness and management amongst parents resulting in unnecessary A and E attends.**

Our work showed how improved messaging by midwives, health visitors and Family Hubs could significantly increase parents' confidence in managing their child's health at home.

What difference did this make?

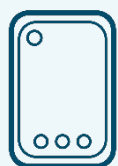
We have established a multi-agency steering group to develop new resources, promotional campaigns and training for new parents together with parents who agreed to stay involved in the project to ensure these are meaningful to them.

Supporting a smoother transition from hospital to home

People told us that their journey from hospital to home was not always easy or person centred.

We spoke with over 100 residents who had been discharged from hospital with support from adult social care and their loved ones about their experience of the discharge process.

Key things we heard:



66%

of carers did not feel that their needs were taken into consideration in discharge planning.

33%

of respondents felt that when their loved one lacked capacity, decisions were not always made in their best interest.



“I could never get a straight answer when my husband was going to be discharged. When you spoke to hospital staff every member gave you a different answer. Communication was terrible.”

Our findings highlighted gaps in joined up care and poor communication between the hospital trust and adult social care.

What difference did this make?

Our report was shared at the Pennine Urgent and Emergency Care Board, Blackburn with Darwen Enablement Board and Blackburn with Darwen Place Based Partnership Board. Our findings are being used to shape the new enablement provision in the borough to ensure that short term rehabilitation provision post discharge meets the needs of our residents.

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:

- Speaking with residents who need homecare support.
- Visiting adults with learning disabilities in their supported accommodation.
- Attending Blackburn Pride to speak to LGBTQ+ people about their access to health care
- Highlighting the issue of vaping illicit substances amongst young people to Public Health and Community Safety Partnership based on what young people told us.



Improving understanding of safeguarding within South Asian communities

We investigated the reasons for low referrals to Adult Safeguarding amongst the South Asian community.

People told us about language barriers, a lack of cultural understanding within adult social care and concerns around trust of services and stigma within their community.

What difference did this make?

We worked with South Asian women's groups to coproduce information and advice materials about safeguarding to help increase understanding of the safeguarding process, address concerns about trust and promote the role of the Adults Safeguarding team amongst this community.

Listening to adults with learning disabilities about the support they want from supported accommodation providers

The supported accommodation provision in the borough for adults with learning disabilities was due for review by the Council.

To help, we went out and spoke with residents about what it was like to live there, whether they were supported to access opportunities in the community as well as health and social care services.

What difference did this make?

Our feedback about the different providers of supported accommodation helped the Council shape the new framework for providers and we were able to flag up concerns which were then acted on by adult social care and safeguarding teams.

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 178 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 and raise concerns about services
- Signposting people to additional support services



Safe discharge for mental health inpatients

Thanks to patient feedback, the local mental health trust is reviewing discharge pathways from private hospitals they support.

We met John at Blackburn Foodbank who was collecting a crisis parcel having been discharged from a private mental health hospital with nowhere to go. We contacted our local NHS Mental Health Trust for advice and found out that they support the private hospital with discharges.

The discharge pathways have now been reviewed to ensure all patients have somewhere safe to go on discharge.



“Thank you for helping me find somewhere to stay this week. It means a lot.”

Improving end of life care in hospital

We had a call from Ian who was greatly worried about care for his mother at Royal Blackburn Hospital.

Despite repeated efforts, Ian had not received any proper communication or follow-up about his mother’s biopsy results, diagnosis or treatment options. The PALS team acknowledged his concern but had failed to follow up on it and his mother’s condition remained fragile and distressing for Ian.

We contacted the end-of-life team at the hospital trust directly who arranged for a next day appointment at the appropriate clinic.



“Thank you so much for the update and for continuing to support us. I really appreciate you following up and pushing this forward.”

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 60 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.

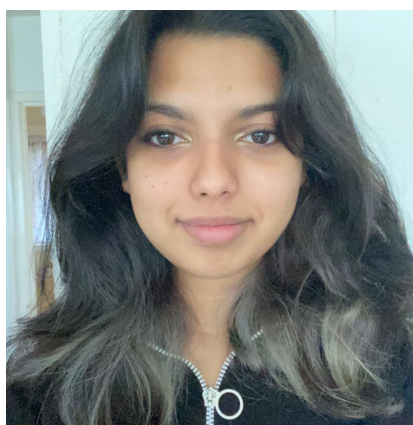
This year, our volunteers:

- 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



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.



Bia

“Volunteering at Healthwatch has helped me with my university studies and shape my plans for the future.”

Bia joined us to help build her skills and practical knowledge as a Public Health student at the University of Manchester.

“I am passionate about addressing health inequalities and want to make a positive impact on public health. Enter and View visits helped me understand issues around accessibility, and I’ve supported focus groups out in the community, tackling issues like dementia and uptake of cervical screening.”

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

Michelle joined our team after a long career as a palliative care link nurse and dementia care champion.

“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.”



Michelle

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.healthwatchblackburnwithdarwen.co.uk



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info@healthwatchbwd.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Blackburn with Darwen 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	£122,907
Additional income	£28,816	Non-pay expenditure	£19,248
		Office and management fee	£7,580
Total income	£162,516	Total Expenditure	£149,915

Additional income is broken down into:

- £6,000 received from University of Lancashire for an NIHR internship for one of our team
- £17,916 received from the local Primary Care Federation for obesity related projects
- £4,900 funding received from Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB for engagement on maternity services

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. Continuing to work in partnership to address health inequalities.
2. Continuing to engage with seldom heard groups.
3. Focus on the quality of end-of-life care in the borough.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen, Unit 19 Eanam Wharf Business Centre, Eanam Wharf, Blackburn, BBI 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 seven 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 eight 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 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.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had one provider 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 and their sub-committees.

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

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

Healthwatch representatives

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

During 2025/26, our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing updates on our activities and reports.

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen is represented on the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Partnership and Integrated Care Board by David Blacklock, as part of Healthwatch Together..

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
East Lancashire Medical Services (ELMS)	At the request of ELMS to support improvement in gathering patient feedback about the service	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service made their website more accessible following our recommendation
Bentham Road Health Centre	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – the surgery promoted its callback service to patients following our visit.
The Family Practice	Scheduled visit and concerns raised by patients	Wrote a report with recommendations – no response from provider.
Little Harwood Health Centre	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – refurbishment of the practice are scheduled and work to improve wait times following our visit
Redlam Surgery	Scheduled visit	We wrote a report with recommendations – the practice has made their complaints policy more visible on their website as a result.

Statutory statements

Enter and view

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Eachstep Care Home	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report praising the home for their care for residents and warm environment
Northwood Complex Care	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report praising the home for their care for residents and clean homely environment
Oldfield House	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report praising the home for their professional and person-centred care.
Oldfield Manor	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report praising the home for their attention to residents' needs.
St James's House	Scheduled visit	Wrote a report with recommendations – the home recruited an activities coordinator following our feedback.

Statutory statements

2025 – 2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Keeping Children Safe at Home in Blackburn with Darwen	We have established a multi-agency steering group to act on the recommendations in our report with a focus on promotion of trusted child safety information and education for parents in Family Hubs.
Blackburn East Child Obesity report	As a result of our engagement with young people and parents, Blackburn with Darwen Public Health are commissioning a new Tier 2 Weight Management Service for young people.
Experiences of home care in Blackburn with Darwen	BwD Adult Social Care Commissioning team have used the feedback about agencies to shape the new domiciliary care commission in the borough.
Young people's views on vaping and vaping additional substances	The recommendations from our report are being actioned by the Blackburn with Darwen Smoke Free Alliance and key statistics in our report made the headlines in the Lancashire Telegraph and BBC Northwest Tonight.
Darwen All Age Obesity project	Recommendations from our report are being actioned by Darwen Primary Care Network which includes local GP surgeries and the Council's Wellbeing team.
Experiences of care from supported accommodation for adults with learning disabilities	Blackburn with Darwen Council's Adult Social Care commissioning team have used our feedback about providers to shape the new supported accommodation commission and acted on concerns we raised about a provider.

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