healthwatch Hackney

Annual report and accounts 2025-26

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Message from our Chair

The past year has been one of consolidation and contraction, reflecting wider changes across the health system. In July 2025, following the Dash Report, we learned that the Healthwatch network will be abolished and replaced by a new patient experience directorate within the Department of Health and Social Care. During the same period, our NHS contracts came to an end, leaving Healthwatch Hackney now solely on core funding from Hackney Council.

Despite this uncertainty, staff and volunteers at Healthwatch Hackney continued to deliver influential work on issues that matter to residents of the borough. Hackney Council commissioned Healthwatch Hackney to carry out a mystery shopping project examining public experiences of accessing Adult Social Care; the findings are now informing service transformation. Demonstrating the value of sustained, long-term engagement, we published a follow-up report on sickle cell care in Hackney, ten years after our original review, focusing on provision at Homerton Hospital.

Our Enter and View visits to GP practices and the community Ear, Nose and Throat service generated practical recommendations to improve service users' experiences. In addition, a report published at the start of 2026 highlighted the success of the System Influencers programme, which brought young people and healthcare professionals together to deliver meaningful improvements in local health and care services. The programme concluded after five successful iterations.

From a financial perspective, Healthwatch Hackney was in a relatively strong position when the funding reductions were announced, having already relocated to smaller premises. We took the decision to give up our office entirely at the end of 2025.

I would like to express my thanks to Catherine Perez Phillips, the deputy director, who retired at the end of 2025 after 8 years at Healthwatch Hackney. Her knowledge and wisdom are missed. I would also like to thank the staff and volunteers who have left this year as the contracts they were working on came to an end, and the staff who remain and my fellow Board members for their commitment to steering the organisation through this difficult time.

Deborah Cohen

Chair of the Board of Directors

Message from our Executive Director

It gives me great pleasure to reflect on the team's many achievements throughout 2025/26. Following the announcement that central government intends to change legislation to abolish local Healthwatch, our staff responded with determination, delivering impactful work for the benefit of Hackney residents and clearly demonstrating the value of both the organisation and the work we do.

Our special report on local Sickle Cell services was received at the highest levels, with presentations to both the Hackney Health and Wellbeing Board and the Health in Hackney Scrutiny Committee. Our Enter and View reports have driven positive change across GP practices and other services, while our mystery shopping exercise supported Adult Social Care in Hackney to better understand and improve how residents access support for the first time. We have also worked to improve experiences for young people, fathers, and residents receiving care both in the community and in hospital settings.

As we prepared for potential closure, we said farewell to several valued colleagues, including our long serving Deputy Director, who is greatly missed. Looking ahead to 2026/27, despite operating with a much smaller team, we remain excited to deliver a full and meaningful work programme and will continue to serve the residents of Hackney for as long as we are able to do so.

Sally Beaven
Healthwatch Hackney Executive Director

About us

Our vision

Our vision is of a borough where the provision of health and social care is equal and accessible to all; where services are of high quality and meet the needs of all communities in Hackney and where residents are at the heart of the design, delivery and improvement of health and social care services.

Our mission

Our mission is to improve health and social care provisions and outcomes for people in Hackney but working to ensure that the treatment and care provided is provided with respect and dignity, valuing diversity, and encouraging participation and working together.

Highlights

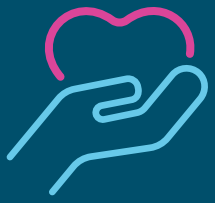
Our work is driven by the voices of the residents, ensuring their feedback shapes our recommendations.

Reaching out

3,862 people shared with us **14,886** issues on health and social care services, helping to improve care.

Supporting services to deliver better care

We published **3** Enter and View reports about individual GP surgeries and **2** special reports, one on Adult Social Care and one on Sickle Cell patient experience of care in Hackney.



Health and social care that works for you

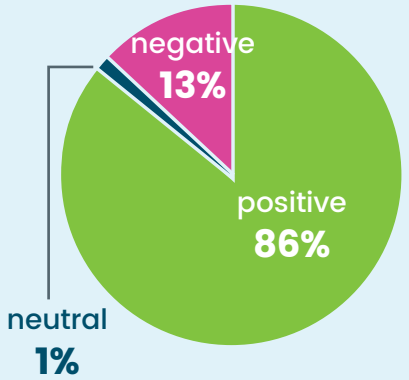
22 volunteers and interns gave **2,063** hours to help improve care in the borough.

Your views on health and care

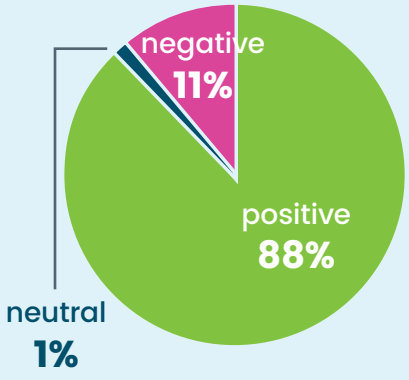
In 2025-2026 we identified and analysed 14,886 issues from 3,862 people.

- 97% collected from social media and provider websites
- 3% collected from Healthwatch Hackney activity (outreach, information and signposting).

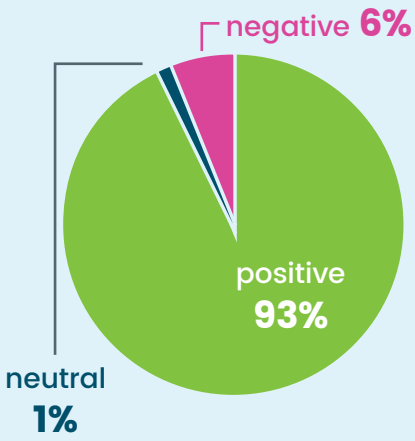
How do people feel about health and care services in general?



How well informed, supported and involved do people feel?

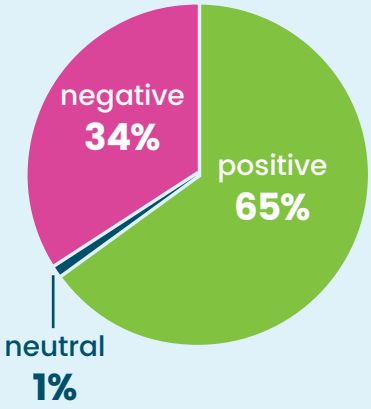


Quality and empathy



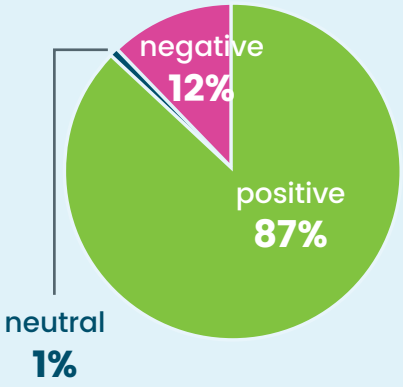
3% improvement from last year

Access to services



7% improvement from last year

General Practice



2% improvement from last year

POSITIVES

- Feedback suggests a long-term improvement in GP patient experience.
- Patients tell us it's easier to get an appointment (satisfaction up by 8% over the year) and waiting times are coming down (satisfaction up by 6%).
- Satisfaction on access is up by 7%, compared with a year ago.
- We receive compliments about GPs, nurses and practice staff (satisfaction up by 3% over the year) and administration has improved - we hear it is easier to access test results and repeat medication (satisfaction up by 5%).

NEGATIVES

- With a rapid move to online services, telephone access has become less reliable compared with a year ago (satisfaction down significantly, by 17%).
- Communication needs to improve - satisfaction is down marginally (by 1%) over the year.

Homerton University Hospital

Homerton University Hospital remains one of the best performing in North East London.

We receive compliments about planned care (such as inpatients, general outpatients and surgery).

On unplanned care however (A&E and Maternity) satisfaction has noticeably dropped compared with a year ago, feedback suggests.

Healthwatch reports

Ellerton Road enter and view report

What was the problem?

Healthwatch Hackney visited Allerton Road Medical Centre following a conversation with the practice's Patient Participation Group (PPG). While it was clear the practice was responsive to PPG feedback, patients were reporting mixed experiences with appointment booking, inconsistent reception staff communication and difficulties accessing services in languages other than English. We also heard that two thirds of patients were unsure how to provide feedback, despite the practice actively working to gather it.

What did we do?

We conducted two Enter and View visits in June and September 2025. In preparation, we reviewed the surgery's website, the latest CQC report and 12 months of patient feedback. During our visits, we spoke with 14 patients, the practice manager, two clinical staff members and the lead receptionist. We observed the practice environment and interactions with patients, focusing on access to appointments, reception staff's communication style, support for vulnerable patients and how the surgery engages with feedback.

What difference did it make?

The practice welcomed our findings and moved quickly to act on them. Key improvements include recruiting new GPs and developing a communication plan to rebuild patient trust and familiarity; reinforcing reception standards through training, re-educating staff on Language Line and improving translation protocols; enhancing the visibility of feedback and complaints processes. The practice also committed to strengthening governance, to maintain clear accountability alongside its supportive team culture.

> **Allerton Road Medical Centre welcomes Healthwatch Hackney's feedback and remains committed to delivering high quality, patient-centred care. We acknowledge the concerns raised and have already taken decisive steps to address them.**

This is one of eight Enter and View visits we did as part of our commitment to ensuring high quality, patient-centred care. We also visited The Riverside Practice, Trowbridge Surgery and the ELFT mental health wards at Homerton Hospital. You can read the reports on our website.

Sickle Cell

What was the problem?

In 2015, Healthwatch Hackney published a report highlighting serious problems in sickle cell care at Homerton Hospital, including poor staff attitudes, inadequate pain relief and concerns about cleanliness. Ten years on, we returned to evaluate whether patient experience had improved – and where care still needed to change.

What did we do?

Between June and November 2025, we gathered evidence from people living with sickle cell disease and the staff caring for them. We held a focus group with 16 participants, conducted an Enter and View visit to Lloyd Ward at Homerton Hospital in July 2025, and a second Enter and View to the Medical Day Unit (MDU) in November 2025, speaking with eight patients and three staff. We analysed all feedback against our 2015 findings and national evidence, including the 2021 parliamentary inquiry into sickle cell care.

What difference did it make?

We presented the report at both the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Health in Hackney Scrutiny Commission, where Homerton University Hospital gave a formal response.

The Hospital committed to tackling racism and stigma on Lloyd Ward, continuing monthly pain relief audits, and working more closely with GPs to improve how care plans are shared and followed. The Solace patient group will receive regular updates on progress and help sense-check improvements. An external peer review will also monitor delivery of the report's recommendations.

The ICB committed to improving GP knowledge of sickle cell through an existing training programme and is considering appointing a GP with a sickle cell brief to provide leadership in primary care.

The Scrutiny Commission will revisit progress in 18 months, with input from Solace to keep the patient voice central.

> **I was impressed by the way Healthwatch had tackled the issue, and by Homerton Healthcare not being defensive, but genuinely trying to deal with the criticisms. which had been raised.**
>
> **Chair, Health in Hackney Scrutiny Commission**

Experiencing adult social care in Hackney: Mystery shopping exercise

What was the problem?

At the request of Adult Social Care, we set out to understand what that experience is like for Hackney residents seeking help from adult social care, and where it could be improved.

What did we do?

We recruited 15 volunteer mystery shoppers and gave each a realistic scenario reflecting the concerns residents bring to Adult Social Care. Over three weeks in April and May 2025, shoppers reviewed the Adult Social Care website, made calls to the main contact number and submitted online referral forms. We assessed how easy it was to find information, the quality of support offered at first contact, and how well the service responded to diverse needs.

What difference did it make?

We presented the report at the Health and Wellbeing Board, where Adult Social Care engaged constructively with our findings. They committed to reviewing the consistency of support at first contact (by phone, online form, and regardless of who responds) and to ensure residents receive the same quality of help every time. Adult Social Care also acknowledged the need to improve the accessibility of their website and reaffirmed that the phone will always remain a fully available option for residents who need it. They also recognised the importance of cultural competency and committed to continuing their anti-racism work.

> **In general the report was well received and Adult Social Care and Customer Services are considering a number of recommendations in their transformation programmes.**
>
> **Hackney Council, Adult Social Care**

Engagement and Co-production

The Engagement and Co Production Project ran from November 2016 to July 2025. Its aim was to improve how local health and care services communicate and work with residents, making sure services reflect the needs and experiences of the people who use them. Due to budget cuts across the health and care system, funding for the project sadly ended.

The project played a key role in championing meaningful public involvement across City and Hackney, helping ensure that patients and service users had a real voice in shaping care.

Its work focused on three main areas:

- Supporting and leading the Integrated Care Communications and Engagement Enabler Group.
- Providing advice and support on communications, engagement, and co-production to partner organisations.
- Recruiting, supporting, and developing Public Representatives, as well as co-ordinating their network

The role was hosted by Healthwatch Hackney but worked across the wider City & Hackney Integrated Care Partnership, in close collaboration with staff from local health and care organisations.

CASE STUDY

Public Representatives worked with the team from 2021 to co-produce a digital self-referral tool for musculoskeletal (MSK) physiotherapy. This tool allows patients to access physiotherapy directly without needing a GP referral.

They were involved from the outset, helping design the look and feel of the app and shaping the wording to ensure it was clear, accessible, and user friendly. After launch, they continued to provide feedback, using real user data to help refine and improve the questions over time.

CASE STUDY

The City and Hackney Place-Based Partnership developed a delivery plan outlining key priorities and approaches for local health and care services. While it was agreed this should be shared with residents, the original document was written in complex language and that was not easily accessible.

To address this, the Director of the Place-Based Partnership met with Public Representatives to discuss the plan and gather their feedback. The Representatives then took part in a co-design session, where they helped simplify the language and improve the layout of the public-facing version. The final, resident-friendly document was widely shared with local communities and is now available on the North East London NHS website.

Healthwatch Hackney would like to thank all the Public Representatives who have contributed over the years. Their involvement has helped local services respond better to residents' needs.

Learning Disabilities Quality Checkers project

The learning-disabled quality checker project ran from September 2024 – May 2025. It demonstrated value of co-produced production by placing the voices of people with lived experience at the centre of service improvement.

The findings demonstrate that meaningful, person-centred care is being delivered across the system. Staff were consistently described as respectful, compassionate, and proactive in supporting individuals, often going beyond standard practice to create safe, inclusive environments. Practical adjustments, such as sensory-friendly spaces, flexible appointments, and tailored communication methods, had a direct and measurable impact on people's sense of dignity, safety, and ability to engage with care.

Crucially, the project highlights the transformational value of listening to people with learning disabilities. Where services adapted based on feedback, whether introducing quiet rooms, improving appointment scheduling, or personalising support. Service users reported feeling more confident, respected, and in control of their care experience.

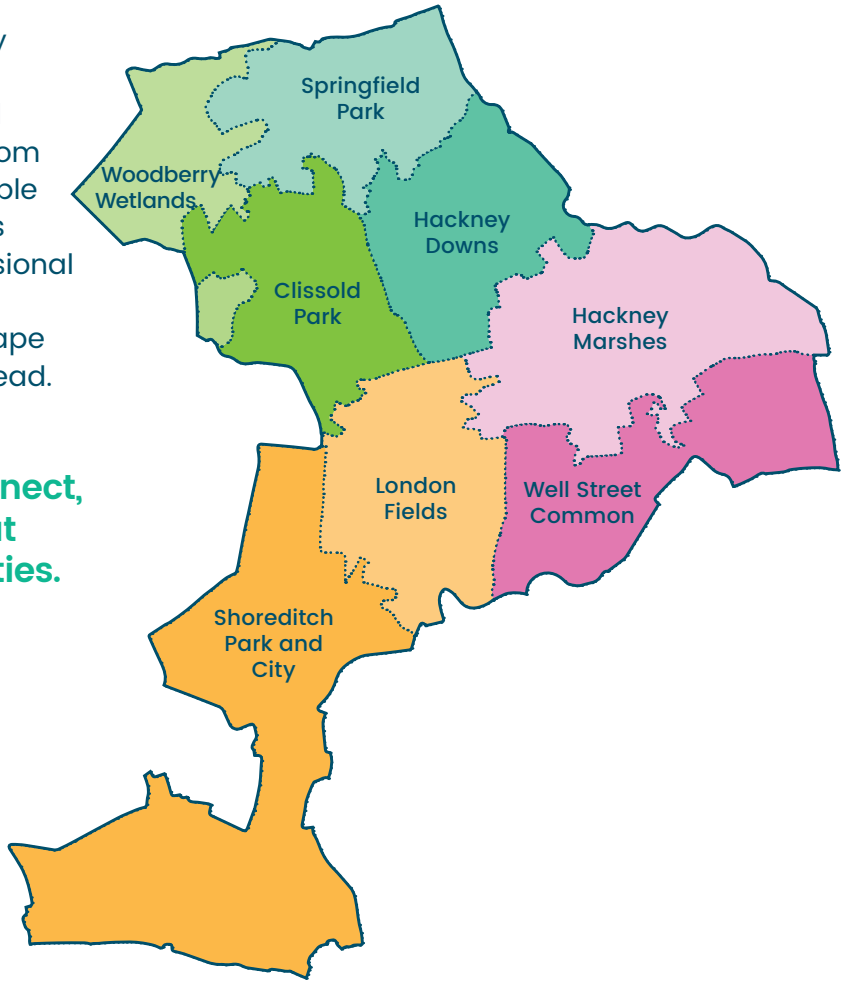
At the same time, the project identified opportunities for improvement. Inconsistent access to Easy Read materials, gaps in recording communication needs, and shortcomings in some physical environments to create barriers to fully inclusive care. Expanding the involvement of people with learning disabilities in staff training and service design will be critical to closing these gaps.

This programme provides evidence that co-production leads to better outcomes. By embedding lived experience services can move beyond compliance toward genuinely inclusive care.

Neighbourhoods

The City and Hackney Neighbourhoods way of working brings residents, health and care services, community organisations and local authorities together to improve health and wellbeing. The aim is to make services more joined-up, accessible and shaped by local people. Healthwatch Hackney continued to support this work, until April 2026, by helping to build stronger connections between communities and decision-makers.

Over the past year, Healthwatch Hackney finalised the latest set of Neighbourhood Insight Reports, combining detailed local data, real life examples, and feedback from residents to give a clearer, more accessible understanding of health and care across each neighbourhood. These offer professional and residents a clear snapshot of what matters most to local people, to help shape Neighbourhood priorities for the year ahead.



> **Neighbourhood forums help bring people together to connect, stay healthy, and learn about available support and activities.**
>
> HCVS community activist

Healthwatch Hackney also produced accompanying executive summaries, designed to make the key findings more accessible for residents, professionals and local partners, supporting wider understanding and use of the insights gathered.

> **I got good information from the breast care nurse so I can feel ok about supporting my daughter-in-law.**
>
> **Well Street Common Neighbourhood Forum resident attendee**

Neighbourhood priorities for 2025–26 were based on the latest Insight Reports and selected by residents and professionals through the Neighbourhoods programme. Each Neighbourhood identified key issues to focus on, with Action Groups and Neighbourhood Forums exploring these issues in more depth to co-design ways to address them.

Latest priorities by Neighbourhood:

- **Clissold Park:** Support for long-term health conditions; community support for finances.
- **Hackney Downs:** Support for long-term health conditions; health support for children and young people.
- **Hackney Marshes:** Health support for children and young people; better access to active and healthy lifestyles.

> **I feel more informed, more confident, and more motivated to keep pushing for positive change in Hackney.**

- **London Fields:** Support for long-term health conditions; health support for children and young people.
- **Shoreditch Park:** Better access to mental health support.
- **The City of London:** Social connection and isolation.
- **Springfield Park:** Enhancing community connection; health support for children and young people.
- **Well Street Common:** Support for long-term health conditions; health support for children and young people; better access to health and wellbeing services.
- **Woodberry Wetlands:** Support for long-term health conditions; health support for children and young people.

> **I've lived with pain for a long-time following injuries in a car accident. The forum was a friendly place to talk about my experiences and find out what has helped others. I am glad my experiences will help shape services.**

System Influencers programme 2024/25

Empowering young voices to shape Health and Care Services in City & Hackney

The System Influencers Programme was established to bring young people and healthcare professionals together to create lasting improvements in local Health and Care Services across City and Hackney. Rooted in the principles of co production, placed young people age16–25 at the heart of decision making, ensuring services are responsive and relevant the needs of young people.

> **I feel more informed, more confident, and more motivated to keep pushing for positive change in Hackney.**

Over the past year, the System Influencers Programme has delivered tangible benefits for both young people and professionals. In total, 29 young people took part as System Influencers, giving their time, insight and enthusiasm to improve services. They were supported by 12 dedicated Mentors from across health and care settings, several of whom returned for multiple cycles, recognising the value of learning directly from youth perspectives.

CASE STUDY

System Influencers school workshops and one to one interviews in youth clubs, led to gathering insight from young people living with health conditions, including undiagnosed mental health needs. Their findings and recommendations are now supporting the Homerton Peer Connect team in advocating for peer led peer support, awareness raising and assemblies in schools.

Key projects delivered in 2025 included:

- Interviews with young service users to explore experiences before, during and after their initial CAMHS appointments.
- Youth insight informing Public Health Healthy Weight co design work.
- Polling young people's views on local substance support services.
- A mystery shopping exercise at HealthSpot to assess accessibility and care quality for young people.
- Outreach in schools and youth clubs to understand peer support needs among young people with health conditions and young carers.

> **Through the program I gained valuable skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are essential in this field. Overall, this experience has given me confidence and insight that will definitely help me in my future career in health and social care.**

The programme has helped to open education and career pathways. Several young people were inspired to pursue further study in health and social care. One young Influencer, Nana Ama, has already taken this step. She is now employed in an advocacy role at Rethink Mental Illness, a powerful example of how meaningful participation can translate into real career opportunities.

CASE STUDY

A standout achievement this year was the System Influencers' planning and delivery of outreach activities for a Sexual Health Week at a local clinic. As a direct result, 21 young people attended the clinic during the week. Many were engaging with sexual health services for the first time and reported that they would not have attended without peer led engagement. This demonstrates the unique reach and trust that young people bring when they lead outreach themselves.

CASE STUDY

The co-production of a food map, listing support provision in the Hackney Marshes has been very successful. This resulted producing a clear, accessible leaflet to help residents locate local support. This resource has since been shared digitally through neighbourhood networks, with interest from London Brough Hackney in wider distribution.

Professionals involved have equally valued the programme. Mentors reported a deeper understanding of the barriers young people face when accessing services and described being better equipped to make youth centred decisions within their organisations. As one young participant noted, "The biggest surprise was how open professionals were to listening and making space for youth voices."

The System Influencers Programme concluded with Healthwatch Hackney in December 2025. However, its legacy continues. Many former Influencers now volunteer with local youth services, and the insights, resources and relationships built through the programme will continue to shape more inclusive, responsive Health and Care Services for young people across Hackney.

Father Friendly Borough

Summer 2025 saw the final completion of the Hackney Fathers perinatal mental health and parent infant relations needs assessment report, created after extensive engagement with local fathers. Research methods included both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather a comprehensive view of fathers' experiences.

Running alongside research, a wide range of activities took place between April and October, in continuation of the previous years' work. The activities increased fathers' engagement, confidence, and access to support, while also strengthening peer networks and awareness of services. The coffee mornings at Homerton Hospital provide an important early engagement point, helping new fathers feel included from the outset and encouraging them to connect with ongoing support through newsletters and WhatsApp groups. This early contact helps reduce isolation and builds confidence in their parenting role.

The Fathers Intervention Programme delivers direct, personalised impact by offering one-to-one virtual support, enabling fathers to receive guidance that responds to their individual challenges, particularly around mental health and parenting. Alongside this, the Father Friendly WhatsApp groups and Father Circles create safe spaces for peer support, where fathers can share experiences, normalise challenges, and build a sense of community, helping to reduce stigma and improve wellbeing.

Regular communication through the monthly newsletter and weekly WhatsApp bulletin ensures that fathers are consistently informed about local services, opportunities, and parenting advice, leading to increased awareness and uptake of support. The growing number of that registered father demonstrates improved reach and sustained engagement over time.

Wider initiatives such as the Movember campaign and the "Day in the Life" social media series has helped shifting perceptions of fatherhood by raising awareness of men's mental health and showcasing diverse experiences. This helps to normalise conversations around wellbeing and encourages more fathers to engage. The Father Friendly website further strengthens impact by acting as a central, accessible hub, making it easier for fathers to find the help they need when they need it.

At the end of October Healthwatch Hackney handed the baton to the Local Authority, to allow their Babies, Children and Families department to carry on the work supporting Fathers in the Borough. We look forward to following their progress as they implement recommendations from our Hackney Fathers perinatal mental health and parent infant relations needs assessment report, which is due to be published as part of a launch campaign by London Borough Hackney in summer 2026.

People's feedback panel

Every two weeks, a team of volunteers meets online to read through the most recent patient feedback about all health services in the borough, from opticians and pharmacies to GPs and hospital services. We identify trends in service provision, compliments and complaints.

We identify trends in service provision, compliments and complaints. When we find serious issues, we bring them to the service provider's attention, with suggestions for improvements. Likewise, when we find exceptionally good practices, we share them with the service providers to acknowledge their good work.

We held 14 panel meetings between 1 April and 31 March. As a result, we flagged 260 issues to GP Practices, Homerton University Hospital, pharmacies and dentists in the Borough.

What difference did it make?

By making sure patient feedback reaches the right people, we help services improve, and give residents the confidence to know their voice matters.

> I have informed the doctor of your email and he will reach out to the patient soon to discuss these issues. Thank you for your assistance, we will give you an update once the discussion takes place
>
> (Healy Medical Centre)

> Thanks very much for sending the feedback as it will help us to learn and hopefully prevent future patients from having similar experiences.
>
> (Homerton University Hospital)

Information and signposting

This year we've helped 1003 residents with signposting and information.

> Thank you very much for your help with my complaint. You have given me the voice I didn't know I needed.
>
> Hackney resident, April 2025

> It was lovely to talk to you. I am so glad I trusted you with my situation. After we spoke, I felt confident enough to write a complaint to my GP. In no time they responded with an apology and said they will review their processes. Thank you for your ongoing support as always.
>
> Hackney resident, March 2026

> Thank you for your help with changing my GP. I am now registered with a new practice, already had my health check and feel more positive.
>
> Hackney resident, June 2025

> I have looked at the resources you sent me and have decided to reach out to the North London Muslim Community Centre. Thank you for your assistance.
>
> Hackney resident, January 2026

Our Board

Deborah Cohen
Chair

Yas'ina Christopher
Joint Vice Chair

Maggie Gibbons

Anthonia Onigbode
Treasurer

Rebecca Thomas
Joint Vice Chair

Our staff

Sally Beaven
Executive Director

Fabien Decodts
Neighbourhoods Involvement Manager and Learning Disabled Quality Checker project

Ivanka Kolar
Father Friendly Borough Co-production Assistant Manager (July 2025)

Catherine Perez Phillips
Deputy Director (November 2025

Ann-Marie Ruddock
System Influencer project (December 2025)

Sara Morosinotto
Enter and View and Volunteer Manager

Krista Brown
Co-production and Engagement Manager (May 2025)

Finances

Pending

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