

**Our story
of the year**

**Annual Report
Summary
2024/25**



A message from our Chair and Chief Executive

We're here for you — and this year, we've made progress in delivering services that matter to you. We have big ambitions for our communities and we're working hard to make them happen.

Every year, we share what we have been doing to care for the nearly one million people across our area.

Our full Annual Report and Accounts is on our website, but we know not everyone wants to read pages of detail. So, this summary gives a quick, easy-to-read look at:

- What we're proud of this year, and;
- What we're focusing on next year

In 2024/25, we've made big changes to how we work—so we can improve care for local people.

Like many parts of the NHS, we've faced financial pressures from rising costs, medicines, and ongoing care. That's made it harder to do everything we'd like—like upgrading buildings and facilities.

But we've focused on what matters most to you, including improving access to local services, making more appointments available and closing the gap between the healthiest and least healthy in our communities.

We've finished the year with a balanced budget – for the third year in a row, which means that we are in a strong place to keep improving care in the years ahead.

We are grateful to our partners – local councils, hospitals, NHS teams, emergency services, Healthwatch and the VCSE for the work that we have done together to improve local health care.

We are also incredibly grateful to you - the many residents who have worked with us this year to share your views, join a campaign or helped to shape decisions. Your voice has helped us to improve NHS services and prevent poor health across our communities.

We are proud to share this year's highlights with you – and we'll keep working to build a healthier future – together.



Manjeet Gill, Acting Chair (Jan 2025-May 2025)



Felicity Cox, Chief Executive Officer

The people and communities we serve

190,500

residents living in rural and urban areas

306,000

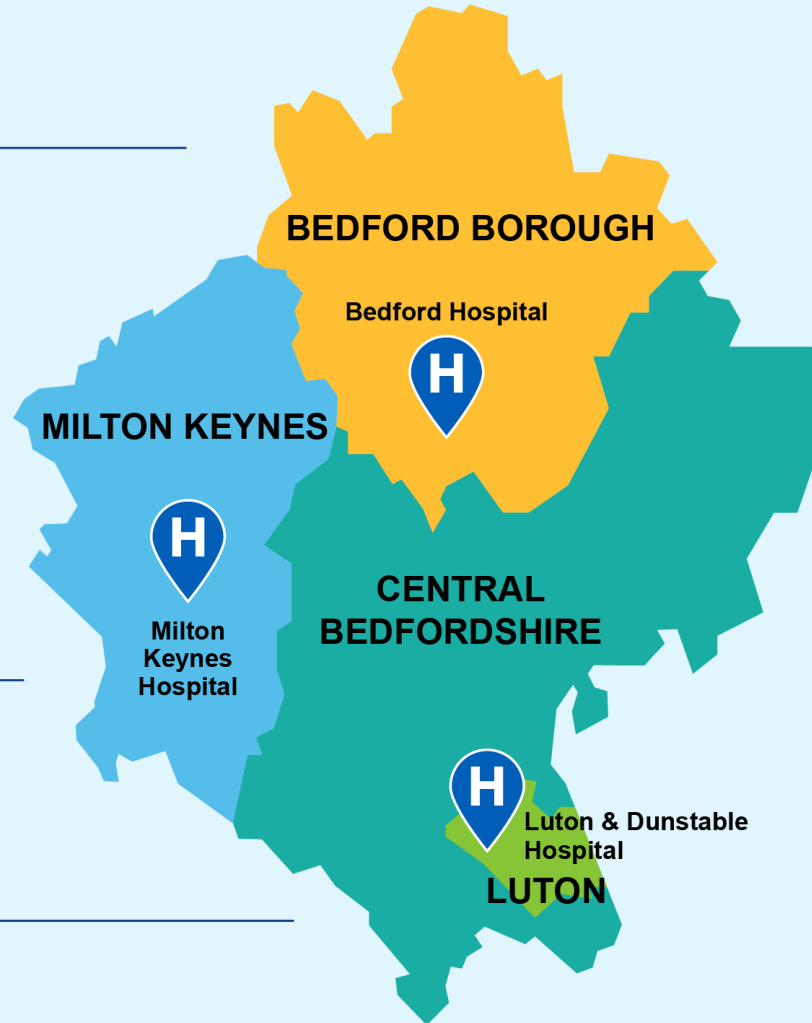
residents living mostly in market towns and rural villages

294,000

residents living in mostly urban and some rural

231,000

residents living in urban areas



We're proud to work together with your local councils - Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes - to support the health and wellbeing of our communities.

We also work with Buckinghamshire Council to care for 6,000 residents who are part of our area.

BLMK is home to over 1 million people from all walks of life, living in both bustling towns and peaceful countryside. It's a vibrant, diverse region - and we're here to meet your health needs.

We remain one of the fastest growing areas in England, with our population rising more than twice as fast as the national average.

Who we are and what we do



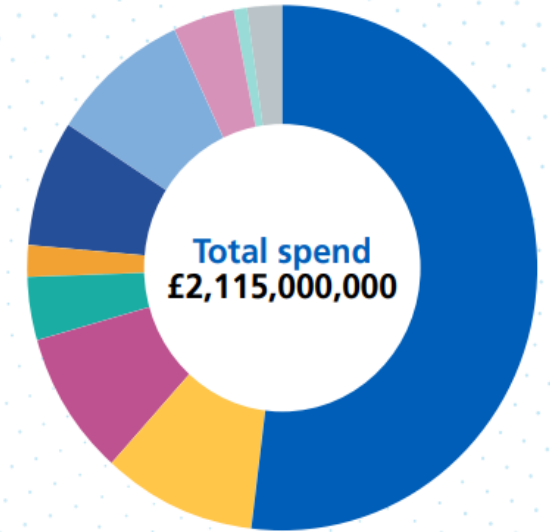
We want to:

- Give children the best start in life
- Help people to live and age well

- Help to make our environment clearer so it has less impact on our health
- Work with local organisations and communities so that people have the opportunity for jobs, training and the support they need to thrive
- Make health and care services fair and easy to access for everyone.

Total spend key:

- 53% Acute
- 10% Mental Health
- 9% Community Health
- 4% Continuing Healthcare
- 2% Primary Care
- 8% Prescribing
- 9% Primary Care Delegated
- 4% Pharmacy, Ophthalmic & Dental Co-Commissioning
- 0% Other Services
- 1% Running Costs





Start Well

We've made a difference to the proportion of children in our area who have attained a Good Level of Development (GLD) by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (which covers nursery education and Reception at school). The percentage of children reaching this level has increased in each of our Places since 2021/22; while it remains lower in Luton, it has risen more quickly, closing the gap with the rest of our area and England as a whole.

We helped to tackle this by:

- Helped establish multi-agency partnerships for children and young people with SEND.
- Set up a new pathway for some young people to self-refer to mental health services



Live Well

We've been tracking changes in preventable premature deaths (those that could have been avoided with timely care) across our area —starting from 2019. Like the rest of the country, all areas saw a sharp rise in 2020 and 2021 because of COVID-19. Things started to improve in 2022, but in Bedford and Luton, that progress hasn't continued into 2023. Sadly, rates there are still higher than they were before the virus.

We helped to tackle this by:

- Helping people to stop smoking
- Creating an early warning system for diabetes in GP surgeries
- Redesigned a new muscular skeletal service with residents.



Age Well

We've made real progress in reducing falls among people aged 65 and over. Since 2019/20, emergency hospital admissions due to falls have dropped across in our area, which means more older adults are staying safe and avoiding serious injury. Through partnerships we are helping more older people recover safely at home and reduce the number of hospital stays.

We're proud that this year, we:

- Led the East of England in Dementia diagnosis rates
- Supported 2,000 people in Bedford to stay warm through our Warm Homes scheme



Growth

We're working to reduce the number of people aged 16–64 who are out of work due to long-term illness. Since 2019/20, this number has gone up in most areas. This matters because long-term sickness can affect not just health, but also income, wellbeing, and independence. That's why we're helping people get the support they need to stay well and, where possible, return to work.

This year, we:

- Worked with the University of Bedfordshire to help people think about roles in the NHS
- Launched a Passport to NHS careers to help people find rewarding careers



Inequalities

We've been working to understand what health inequalities exist in our communities and how we can help people to live longer, healthier lives regardless of their background and where they live. In our area, we know that people who experience health inequality often are diagnosed with high blood pressure, diabetes at a young age, and this leads to heart attacks and strokes.

This year, we:

- Worked with residents to help develop new ideas to help us reduce high blood pressure.
- Reviewed translation and interpretation services to help us communicate better.

Our story in 2024/25

This year, we've made some real progress in areas we know are important to local people. Some of the things we're proud of are:



We have increased primary care appointments – delivering 1,669,754 appointments between September and November 2024, which is a **10.38% increase** on the same period in 2023/24.



Our innovative unscheduled Care Hub has averted more than **2,000 hospital admissions**.



Pharmacy First consultations **increased by 60%** in December 2024.



We have established **two new mental health support teams in schools** in Luton and Milton Keynes to provide additional support to school age children.



Our dementia diagnosis rate has consistently been ranked highest in the East of England Region – and has remained an average of **5.2% over the regional average and 3.7% above the national average** all year.



We have launched a refreshed transforming care pathway for children with learning disabilities and autism so that parents/carers can self-refer to access speedy triage for support to their young person.



We worked with residents to re-design our musculoskeletal services and have rolled out a huge expansion of self-referral, including for musculoskeletal services.

How have we performed?

We know that hospital waits, access to GP appointments and support for mental health services are important to local people, this year we have:



Reduction in hospital waits of more than 52 weeks from 9,371 to 4,305 (reduction of 54% compared with March 2024). We recognise more work is needed on our most challenged pathways. Patients continue to be prioritised by clinical need, with system-wide discussions focused on maintaining quality of care and reducing harm from long waits



Caught cancer earlier – 65% diagnosed at stage 1 or 2 (ahead of national average).



Delivered over 6.2m GP appointments in 2024/25 — up 9% from last year.



Expanded perinatal mental health support in the past year, with an 11.6% increase in the number of women who accessed services compared to last year.



Exceeded targets for Learning Disability and Autism health checks, with 76.3% completed, above our target of 75%. This is a 2.1% improvement on the previous year.

How have we performed?

Whilst we have made positive progress within health services for our population across BLMK, we know there are some areas where we can improve:



Long waits for planned care remained a challenge, but the ICB has supported improvement through wait list reviews, extra clinics, patient-initiated follow-ups, and shared learning across sites and providers.



Cancer 62-day waits remain a significant challenge, driven by complex cases and diagnostic delays. In 25/26 we will focus on improvements from diagnosis to treatment, including specialist tests to support staging and treatment decisions.



Children and Young People's Mental Health (CAMHS) access fell 23% below target in 24/25. To improve, we have strengthened data quality, worked with schools on referrals, expanded drop-in sessions, introduced AI to reduce admin, and we are engaging with NHSE on productivity reviews and peer learning.



Diagnostic waits were challenged by high demand. To improve, the ICB introduced i-Refer to guide appropriate investigations, we carried out wait list reviews, and expanded local capacity through Community Diagnostic Centres, with further growth planned for 25/26

What's happening where you live?

We're proud to work with local partners in our four boroughs.



We are helping bring people together to improve health and care where it matters most and turn national plans into real changes that make life better for local people.

In the last year, we have strengthened our place teams, who are working with local councils and organisations who are responsible for delivering health and care services locally – both from the NHS and voluntary sector.

We have made significant progress in the last year and with place very much a part of how we plan to deliver services in the future, we're looking forward to seeing our teams and achievements go from strength to strength.

In Bedford Borough...



In Bedford Borough, we have worked with Bedford Borough Council to establish a team that is working in the town to deliver the services people need:

This year, we have agreed priorities that will:

- Help children stay a healthy weight
- Improve children's oral health
- Encourage more families to get vaccinations during pregnancy and early childhood
- Prevent and managing heart disease
- Increase cancer screening for cervical and breast cancer
- Support older people to live independently for longer
- Improve local health buildings and facilities

In Central Bedfordshire...



In **Central Bedfordshire**, we have focused on improving how health and care services work together in local neighbourhoods and working with all the different partners involved in delivering local services to make it easier for people to access services.

This year, we have:

- Created a clear plan for how neighbourhood teams can work together better, using evidence and the views of local people to guide decisions.
- Reviewed and improved how we deliver services to make sure they're working well for residents
- Organised meetings and planning drop-in sessions with residents so we can keep developing this work and make sure it reflects what matters most to our communities.
- Started to work with people from gypsy and traveller backgrounds to reduce high blood pressure in communities where we know there is high risk
- Introduced walking groups through our social prescribers to reduce social isolation in rural communities and prevent poor health, and;
- Listened to the views of residents in Leighton Buzzard and worked with them, the council and other partners to find ways to increase the number of GP appointments in the town. This led to the launch of seven new clinical rooms at Leighton Buzzard Health Centre, which added 56,000 appointments for local people.

In Luton...



In Luton, we have worked hard to make health and care better for everyone—especially those who need it most. We’ve focused on preventing illness, spotting problems early, and making sure local people feel supported.

This year, we have:

- Brought together teams from health, care, schools, local employers, and charities—to support people in looking for jobs and careers locally.
- Started a programme to reduce high blood pressure with Indian and Black African residents aged 40–50 – who we know to be more at risk of heart attacks and strokes, and worked with them to help more people know their numbers, and reduce their risk.
- Trained 300 care home workers, to help them feel more confident about giving medicine safely and looking after residents.
- Increased the number of people using the NHS App by 20% by holding events in GP surgeries to show people how to manage their health online.

In Milton Keynes...



In Milton Keynes, we are working together with local partners including the city council to make health and care better for everyone. This way of working is called the **MK Deal**—and it's all about helping people live healthier, happier lives.

This year, we have:

- Created a new team at MK Hospital to help people leave hospital sooner and get support they need at home—like housing help and community services
- We have launched the New Care Academy, which is training for care workers designed to help people stay active and get moving.
- We've started to fight obesity – offering smart watches to people who have Type 2 diabetes, and we've introduced new services for children and families, as well as training for local doctors.
- We've introduced better mental health for children – including delivering new psychologist, autism training for professionals like GPs, and a safe space for young people to go when they are in crisis.
- Launched the Bletchley Pathfinder, which runs monthly events, and provides activities like football and gardening to support for families. We've also provided healthy recipe kits and school fruit stalls.
- Helped children stay healthy in school. A new team is working with families and schools to support children who struggle with attendance or emotional issues.

To the future

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board was set up three years ago in July 2022 to improve health and care for the people who live in our area.

In this time, we have developed positive relationships with the people and organisations who can help us to make a difference.

Looking forward, the ICB is set to work as part of a cluster with neighbouring areas: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and Hertfordshire.

We are proud of the progress we have made in the last three years, but we are ambitious for the people and communities we serve, and we recognise there is more to do.

We look forward to working with partners in the year ahead to deliver further improvements for local people.

