

Healthwatch

VSNW
Voluntary Sector
North West

Guidance for the Voluntary and Community Sector

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Introduction

Healthwatch is the new independent consumer champion for both health and social care. It will exist in two distinct forms – local Healthwatch, at a local area level, and Healthwatch England, at national level. The aim of local Healthwatch will be to give citizens and communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided within their locality. Local Healthwatch will also provide or signpost people to information to help them make choices about health and care services.

Healthwatch England

Healthwatch England has been set up as sub-committee of the Care Quality Commission and its role is to be the national voice for people's concerns about health and social care issues. It will work closely with local Healthwatch organisations through a national network. Local Healthwatch will provide evidence and make recommendations to Healthwatch England which will inform its work at a national level.

Local Healthwatch (LHW)

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 sets out that local Healthwatch will be established by April 2013 and will take over the statutory functions of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs). A local Healthwatch will be an independent organisation, able to employ its own staff and involve volunteers, so it can become the influential and effective voice of the public. It will have to keep accounts and make its annual reports available to the public.

Many voluntary sector organisations have been involved to a greater or lesser extent with LINKs; some as a host organisation supporting LINKs in their work and others as part of local networks. The key difference between local Healthwatch and LINKs is that Healthwatch will be independent organisations legally constituted carrying out statutory functions as laid down by Parliament. LINKs carried out statutory functions but were a network of organisations and individuals with no legal status other than through their functions.

The relationship between the voluntary sector and Healthwatch should be one of mutual collaboration and support. The form this takes may vary depending on the organisational structure of local Healthwatch. Government regulation states that local Healthwatch organisations will be social enterprises but does not stipulate the form this should be other than it meets the criteria set out in the regulation¹.

Local authorities have been charged by Government with making arrangements for the setting up local Healthwatch. They have all taken different approaches to this and have used a variety of approaches to achieve this including open competitive tender, tender waiver and grant aid, and encouraging consortium bids from the local voluntary and social enterprise sector. In addition some have transitioned their current LINKs to the new Healthwatch organisation with the support of their current voluntary sector host or have developed it from scratch with more limited input from the LINK.

Dependent on the organisational structure chosen voluntary sector organisations will have opportunities to become a member of their local Healthwatch or be part of a stakeholder forum. However, regardless of the structure it is important that the voluntary sector is involved with local Healthwatch.

In addition, for voluntary sector organisations which have a sub-regional or regional presence, in the future it may be that you will be able to work through LHW networks. Local Healthwatch organisations will work collaboratively where their local populations access services across local authority boundaries or where specialist services are

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/3094/contents/made>

commissioned over wider areas. For instance Greater Manchester Healthwatch organisations are already planning that they will meet regularly. Over the first year of their development it is anticipated that LHW will be identifying the different ways in which they need to collaborate.

Identifying local Healthwatch

There is a common branding for all Healthwatch organisations so regardless of the area of the country you operate in you should be able to identify your local Healthwatch. They are all called Healthwatch followed by the local area name, e.g. Healthwatch Lancashire, Healthwatch Bradford, etc.

There is a local Healthwatch organisation for every upper tier local authority area, i.e. that has responsibility for adult and children's services; and you can find your local Healthwatch by going to <http://www.healthwatch.co.uk/find-your-local-organisation>.

Functions of local Healthwatch

The functions of Healthwatch have been broken down into the following six elements. The voluntary sector will have opportunities to contribute to and support local Healthwatch in a variety of ways. Suggestions are included below each of the functions.

1. Gathering views and understanding the experiences of people who use services, carers and the wider community
 - Promoting Healthwatch to members or users so that they are aware of the opportunities to get involved
 - Making use of your own organisations activities and networks to gather information which could contribute to the work of Healthwatch
2. Making people's views known
 - Ensuring that any specialist knowledge that users of services that you work with are able to add to evidence gathered by Healthwatch around a specific issue.
3. Promoting and supporting the involvement of people in the commissioning and provision of local care services and how they are scrutinized
 - Volunteers will play an important role in Healthwatch's work and organisations working with people who have specialist knowledge will be a valuable asset in helping to shape health and care services.
4. Recommending investigation or special review of services via Healthwatch England or directly to the Care Quality Commission (CQC)
 - There are opportunities for organisations supporting people with specialist conditions to work collaboratively with Healthwatch to help understand the experiences of these service users.
5. Providing advice and information about access to services and support for making informed choices
 - Healthwatch in some areas will be delivering this service in partnership with another organisation. There is a role for the wider voluntary sector in ensuring that its members and users and the wider community know how to access this service.

6. Making the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England and providing a steer to help it carry out its role as national champion
 - The voluntary sector can play a role in supporting LHW to provide well evidenced information to HW England by collaborating around specific issues of concern.

More information on how the voluntary sector can work effectively with Local Healthwatch can be downloaded from the Regional Voices website:

<http://www.regionalvoices.org/healthwatch>

NHS Complaints Advocacy

NHS Complaints Advocacy is to be commissioned by local authorities but very few local authorities have commissioned local Healthwatch organisations to provide this service. Local Healthwatch will however have a close working relationship with the commissioned NHS Complaints Advocacy provider for their local area as they will wish to gather data to inform evidence about health provision. Local Healthwatch will also signpost people to this service. The wider voluntary sector will also need to be aware of who is providing this service in the local area.

Health and Wellbeing Boards

Health and wellbeing boards have been operating in a shadow form since 2011 and like Healthwatch will formally come into being on 1st April 2013. Local Healthwatch has a statutory place on the health and wellbeing board. Like local Healthwatch, health and wellbeing boards have been set up in every local authority area which has responsibility for adult and children's services.

Health and wellbeing boards (HWBs) have been set up to enable the better integration of health and social care services through a more collaborative approach to shaping how services are delivered.

The local Healthwatch representative is seen as having a key role in bringing the views of those using health and care services but will also have a role as a member of the HWB taking part in its decision making. Local Healthwatch is also seen by many HWBs as having a key role to play in the engagement of the wider public with HWBs.

There is no statutory requirement for the voluntary sector to have a place on the HWB and local Healthwatch will also have a role in representing the voluntary sector where the sector does not have its own place. Some HWBs have a voluntary sector place, usually this is for the local CVS or voluntary action organisation.

Regional Voices is working to develop routes of influence for the voluntary sector into health and wellbeing boards. To find out more about this work:

<http://www.regionalvoices.org/health-wellbeing>

The HWB is required to produce a Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the local area and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) is a key process by which the Strategy will be informed. Local Healthwatch will play an important role along with the voluntary sector in informing the evidence base for the JSNA and ultimately the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Further information on health and wellbeing boards and their role and function can be found at: http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=ca8437aa-742c-4209-827c-996afa9583ca&groupId=10171

Local Healthwatch is being set up at a time of public spending cuts and from events that have been held across the country by Regional Voices it is clear that there are different capacities, expectations and priorities of Local Healthwatch. To have any chance of delivering genuine change, the relationship with Healthwatch has to be mutually beneficial. Healthwatch needs the support of the voluntary and community sector to be successful. It could be said that the bottom line for VCS providers and other organisations will be: what can local Healthwatch do for the people we work with and only by engaging with Healthwatch will the sector find out.

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To find out more about Regional Voices' work in health, wellbeing and care go to <http://www.regionalvoices.org/developments>



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Regional Voices connects voluntary and community organisations with government, through nine regional networks, to inform and influence policy at local, regional and national levels. Regional Voices is a Strategic Partner to the Department of Health, NHS Commissioning Board and Public Health England.

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