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Local Healthwatch Task & Finish Group, Sarah Crossland, Jo Stephenson	16 th November 2011	Local HealthWatch – what it will do and how it will operate	V 0.01

Local HealthWatch – what it will do and how it will operate

Local HealthWatch will be a “body corporate” which means that it will have legal authority to carry out its functions and will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, equalities legislation and the Data Protection Act.

It will be a community organisation, open to all, using the voices and experiences of the people it serves to encourage high standards of health and care provision and to challenge poor services.

Local HealthWatch will be able to enter and view all publicly funded health and social care services either as unannounced spot checks or at agreed monitoring visits. It will report on its findings.

Local HealthWatch will act to promote the voice of local service users and carers in the commissioning of services and, in doing so, champion equality of health and care access and provision. The chair of a Local HealthWatch organisation will have a seat on the local authority health and wellbeing board ensuring there is a route to influence decisions about local service provision.

Although Local HealthWatch will be led by experienced volunteers, equipped to be effective participants, it will also be able to appoint its own staff to carry out specific roles and will operate as an independent organisation.

So what will this mean in practice? This paper sets out how Local Healthwatch will carry out its functions on a day to day basis.

Function One: Gathering views and understanding the experiences of patients and the public

Local HealthWatch will achieve this function in a number of ways:

- by gathering the information that is already available and working with other local voluntary and community groups to understand local views and experiences of health and care services
- by actively seeking the views of those who don't generally come forward
- by publicising information using good information governance, including confidentially, through a range of channels
- by working in collaboration with the CQC
- by developing the skills to understand and interpret different kinds of data and information
- by collating information as evidence to support recommendations to HealthWatch England and/or the CQC

Function Two: Making people's views known

In order to do this effectively, Local HealthWatch will:

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- identify and use existing arrangements to avoid duplication
- develop systematic methods of gathering views from local and national sources, where there are currently gaps
- be responsive to what it finds out and report back on developments
- publish findings and make them fully accessible
- identify causes for concern and celebration amongst the local community and feedback on these findings to the CQC as part of an ongoing, regular dialogue
- use people's views to influence the relevant decision-making bodies including local commissioning groups, health and wellbeing boards and, through HealthWatch England and the CQC, the national regulators and the Secretary of State

Function Three: Promoting and supporting the involvement of people in the commissioning and provision of local care services and how they are scrutinized

If it is to promote the involvement of local people in decisions about health and care provision, Local HealthWatch will need to be completely independent and able to demonstrate its credibility, knowledge and successes. To this end, it will be a highly visible organisation that ensures it:

- is easy to reach – for example, by having a local contact number
- is inclusive of all groups within its local community
- respects, involves and collaborates with existing networks
- provides adequate reimbursement and suitable indemnity for its members
- offers support and training to its staff on, for example, equality and diversity legislation, safeguarding and interviewing
- practices and promotes “enter and view” through support and training
- prioritises the need for continuous dialogue with its members and local community
- develops a strong relationship with the local authority health and wellbeing board, acting as a constructive “critical friend”

Function Four: Recommending investigation or special review of services via HealthWatch England or directly to the Care Quality Commission (CQC)

The exact relationship between HealthWatch England and Local HealthWatch organisations is to be determined through the Statutory Instruments/delegated legislation. However, some requirements are already clear, such as the need to:

- agree, establish and ensure timely two-way information flows between HealthWatch England and Local HealthWatch organisations
- use protocols for good information governance
- ensure that urgent concerns are escalated
- use the rights of NHS and social care staff to act as “whistle-blowers”
- enshrine the NHS Constitution as the benchmark of NHS service-users’ rights
- Work to “Think Personal, Act Local”, and use other policy applying to social care

Function Five: Providing advice and information about access to services and support for making informed choices

Local HealthWatch will have to meet specific criteria that will be set out in their contracts. To carry out this function effectively, Local HealthWatch will:

- identify what information already exists and how to access it
- identify unmet needs so gaps in information can be plugged

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- have its finger on the pulse of the latest information and news and know where to direct people
- fully understand and champion the NHS Constitution
- build people’s knowledge of Local HealthWatch as an information and advice resource, ensuring visibility and ease of access
- develop relationships with commissioners and providers
- make information available in many different formats e.g. electronic, hard copy, Braille, multiple language translations
- have the capacity and systems to direct people to services they require
- ensure that it provides feedback to individual members of the public and other partners

Function Six: 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

A timely two-way information flow will be established between HealthWatch England (HWE) and Local HealthWatch organisations. The role of Local HealthWatch will be to:

- have robust protocols for keeping HWE up to date with issues and concerns
- ensure that contacts are more than ‘a conversation’.
- exercise its influence in steering and directing the emphasis of HWE’s work
- ensure that accountability is a central principle in all exchange with and from HWE
- inform HWE of local matters relevant to wider public health agendas, OSCs, NCB, Monitor, FTs, ADASS, Ministers and the Secretary of State.
- ensure that HWE audits the evidence of Local HealthWatch's contributions to improving health and care outcomes nationally
- foster its own independence by enshrining clear rules of engagement, self-assessment tools etc.

Function 7: NHS Complaints Advocacy

Local authorities will continue to commission Social Care Complaints Advocacy. They will take a decision on how they wish to commission NHS Complaints Advocacy and this may or may not be commissioned from Local HealthWatch. However, Local HealthWatch will support any complaints function by:

- Signposting people to NHS Complaints Advocacy services, in a timely and appropriate manner, if not provided in-house.

Glossary

LHW	Local HealthWatch	OSC	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
ICAS	Independent Complaints and Advocacy Service	NCB	NHS Commissioning Board
LA	Local authority	FT	Foundation Trust
CQC	Care Quality Commission	ADASS	Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group	HWE	Healthwatch England