



Department of Health & Social Care

From Dr Zubir Ahmed MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
for Health Innovation and Safety

39 Victoria Street
London
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Your Ref: GG/AN154307

PO-1647114

The Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP
By email to: anneliese.dodds.mp@parliament.uk

13 November 2025

Dear Anneliese,

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 October to the Secretary of State on behalf of Councillor Jane Hanna, Chair of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee about the closure of Healthwatch. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I appreciate Councillor Hanna's concerns.

Dr Penny Dash conducted a review of patient safety across health and care from October 2024 to February 2025. The review focused on six national organisations overseen by the Department: the Care Quality Commission, the National Guardian's Office, Healthwatch England (and the local Healthwatch network), the Patient Safety Commissioner, the Health Services Safety Investigations Body and the patient-safety learning-related functions of NHS Resolution. The report was published in July.

Dr Dash found that there has been a significant shift in focus towards patient safety compared with other areas of healthcare quality over the last five to ten years, with considerable resources deployed but relatively small improvements seen. In addition, there has been limited strategic thinking and planning to improve the quality of care.

The review also found that there are many organisations carrying out reviews and investigations, or looking at user experience, leading to an overwhelming number of recommendations, and that this can cause confusion for patients and users. At the same time, user or patient experience is not given the attention that it deserves in the NHS, with few boards having an executive director for this area.

Dr Dash made nine recommendations, which the Government has accepted in full. Recommendation 5 focused on Healthwatch England and the local Healthwatch network. Her findings and recommendations have fed into *Fit for the Future: The 10 Year Health Plan for England*, which was also published in July.

Although we recognise the hard work and success of Healthwatch England and the local Healthwatch network as a national, independent voice, and the many ways in which they have helped users and patients, we believe that simplifying the system will make things clearer for patients and users.

The Department is transitioning local Healthwatch organisation functions to place responsibility for seeking patient, user and wider community input on integrated care boards, local authorities and providers, where it can be closely aligned with the commissioning and provision of care and patient voice becomes a more integral part of care. We will transfer the strategic functions of Healthwatch to the new directorate for patient experience in NHS England, which will subsequently merge with the Department. The directorate will have an explicit responsibility to encourage feedback and ensure significant improvements in complaints functions across the system.

The NHS complaints regulations make provision for a complaint to be referred to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman if a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of their complaint locally. The Ombudsman is completely independent of the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Z. Ahmed", is written above a solid horizontal line.

DR ZUBIR AHMED MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
for Health Innovation and Safety