

Healthwatch Newsletter

This newsletter gives you the latest on our journey to build local Healthwatch in Oxfordshire – the independent consumer champion that will help the public to have their say about health and social care services from April 2013 and share the decision making with the commissioners of services.

It describes the work that Oxfordshire County Council has done with the people of Oxfordshire to shape a local Healthwatch for our County. It also describes the Government's wider plans.

“ Healthwatch will be the local consumer champion for health and social care * ”

* Health & Social Care Act 2012

What will stay the same?

Healthwatch Oxfordshire will keep the involvement and monitoring functions of the current LINK, these are :

- ✓ promoting involvement in decision-making
- ✓ obtaining views
- ✓ monitoring health and care services
- ✓ making reports and recommendations
- ✓ carrying out Enter & View visits

What will be new?

- ✓ From April 2013 the duties of the Oxfordshire LINK will pass to a new organisation
- ✓ Healthwatch Oxfordshire will have further statutory duties: to provide information about services to patients and service users and to support them to make choices. It will also monitor how people experience the quality of health care and social care in the county.
- ✓ There will be at least one Healthwatch Oxfordshire representative on the Oxfordshire Health & Wellbeing Board. This Board will include local councillors, the directors of public health, children's and adult services and NHS Clinical Commissioners. They will be responsible for joining up all the Health and Social Care work of the County Council with the local NHS. A lead representative of Oxfordshire's Local Healthwatch will be a member of this Board, representing the views of Oxfordshire people, ensuring people's views and experiences are at the heart of decision making and planning.
- ✓ From April 2013 Oxfordshire County Council will have contracted with a new organisation, which will support and speak for people who want to complain about the NHS. The Council has decided that initially this will be a separate contract from that for Healthwatch Oxfordshire

When will this happen?

The statutory responsibilities of Links will be taken over and extended when the Local Healthwatch Oxfordshire contract begins in April 2013.



Currently this complaints service (known as ICAS) is funded and organised at a national level: in Oxfordshire this is currently delivered by SEAP. Complaints about social care will continue to be managed through the Local Authority Government Ombudsman process.

The story so far.....

Under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, all (top tier) Local Authorities, will be responsible for commissioning a Healthwatch Oxfordshire by April 2013.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire will have a number of statutory functions:

- Provide information and advice to the public about accessing health and social care services and choice in relation to aspects of those services
- Make the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England helping it to carry out its role as the national champion
- Make recommendations to Healthwatch England to advise the Care Quality Commission to carry out special reviews or investigations into areas of concern (or, if the circumstances justify it, go direct to the CQC with their recommendations, for example if urgent action were required by the CQC)
- Promote and support the involvement of people in the monitoring, commissioning and provision of local Health and Social Care services
- Obtain the views of people about their needs for and experience of local care services and make those views known to those involved in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of all care services.
- Hold at least one seat on the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Prepare an annual report and make reports and recommendations about how health and social care services could or should be improved, including challenging the providers of health and social services whenever it is necessary.
- Contribute to the County's strategic needs assessment to improve the county population's overall health and well-being.
- Additionally, local authorities will take on the responsibility for commissioning NHS complaints advocacy from April 2013.

A wide scale consultation was undertaken in the autumn 2011, with a wide range of people and organisations to shape the plan for Healthwatch Oxfordshire

Within the parameters of the statutory requirements under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, a vision for Healthwatch Oxfordshire has been developed, based on these findings.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire will be 'the voice of the people', an independent consumer champion bringing together people's views and experiences to improve health and social care. It will be:

- A well led, high quality organisation that is effectively and professionally managed and organised
- Built on existing local knowledge and expertise, using partnerships and collaborations to provide high quality services and to reach out across the whole of the county
- Well known, independent and accessible to everyone; and
- Influential, respected and trusted by local people, decision-makers and service providers

This vision has been used to draw up a draft service specification which has been co-developed with stakeholders. It is currently being finalised.

So - what next?

Procurement of Healthwatch Oxfordshire

Procurement is the process by which the Local Authority 'buys' a service that it requires. For Healthwatch, the Government has specified what the Local Authority must provide, and the local consultation process has honed this to develop a specification which provides a 'best fit' with the local context.

We have been carefully considering the options we have as a local authority for undertaking our statutory obligations in relation to the establishment of Healthwatch Oxfordshire by April 2013.

We have taken into account the views of the local providers, and have additionally sought advice from the Department of Health and the Local Government Association's Regional Advisor for Healthwatch. We have considered a number of options and decided that the best and most likely option at this stage is to develop a procurement process for Healthwatch Oxfordshire

To help potential bidders have sufficient time to establish themselves, we have revised our original timescales. This will also enable the council to consider the service specification within the context of the public engagement work already carried out by the council and its partners.

The planned procurement process will be as fair, open and transparent, and as accessible as possible to all potential bidders. This ensures the council meets its responsibilities to enter into a contract with an organisation which is best able to meet both the local service specification and the requirements and statutory functions of all Healthwatch organisations across England.

The new timescales mean that the initial stages of the procurement process will start in November 2012 and complete in February 2013 to ensure sufficient time to complete any necessary transition arrangements.

Procurement of Independent Complaints Advocacy Service

Oxfordshire County Council has decided to procure the complaints advocacy service separately from the other functions of Healthwatch, and we are currently in discussion with neighbouring counties regarding regional procurement. We are also in the process of reviewing all advocacy services in Oxfordshire so as to give us the opportunity to ensure that all advocacy across Oxfordshire be coordinated in order to meet the needs of the people of Oxfordshire.

Healthwatch England

Alongside the establishment of Healthwatch Oxfordshire organisations across England, Healthwatch England will also be established in October 2012. Healthwatch England will:

- ✓ be a national body that enables the collective views of all who use NHS and Social Care services to influence national policy, advice and guidance
- ✓ be a statutory committee of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) chaired by Anna Bradley, who was appointed in July (see <http://mediacentre.dh.gov.uk/2012/07/26/anna-bradley-chair-healthwatch-england/>)
- ✓ have its own identity within the CQC, but be able to use the CQC's expertise and infrastructure
- ✓ be funded as part of the Department of Health's grant in aid to the CQC
- ✓ provide leadership, guidance and support to Healthwatch organisations
- ✓ provide advice to the Secretary of State, NHS Commissioning Board, Monitor and English local authorities all of whom must have regard to that advice
- ✓ be able to escalate concerns about health care and social care services raised by any Healthwatch organisation to the CQC, which in turn will be a required to respond to the advice from Healthwatch England
- ✓ have a strong principle of continuous dialogue with Healthwatch organisations, keeping communication lines open and transparent to facilitate Healthwatch England's responsibility to provide national leadership and support
- ✓ be required to make an annual report to Parliament, having received an annual report from each Healthwatch organisation
- ✓ be an organisation which the Secretary of State is required by law to consult.

The recent consultation on membership for Healthwatch England has now been published and can be found on:

www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_132433.pdf

The Healthwatch England website is up and running. As well as providing up-to-date information the website is the first step in providing public information about Healthwatch (see www.healthwatch.co.uk)

Want more...?

Department of Health: <http://healthandcare.dh.gov.uk/what-is-Healthwatch>.

Local Government Association:

http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/health/-/journal_content/56/10171/3492011/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE