

**Cllr J Hanna OBE**

Chair, Oxfordshire Health  
Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee

**11 November 2025**

Dear Oxfordshire MPs,

**Preserving and supporting the independent Patient Voice in Oxfordshire:**

I am writing on behalf of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) to brief you on a matter of significant importance to our local health and care system: the future of the independent patient voice in Oxfordshire.

Recent national proposals, as outlined in the July 2025 Dash Report, are likely to result in the abolition of local Healthwatch bodies and also the Council of Governors of acute Trusts who have staff and patient representation and currently oversee appointments

The extent of our concern is reflected in a recent Oxfordshire County Council motion agreed cross party which was also supported by the Oxfordshire HOSC, which includes all District as well as County Council representation and independent members.

While we recognise that these legislative changes are imminent and that the structure of Healthwatch Oxfordshire as an entity may not be preserved, we believe there remains a compelling case for ensuring that the core functions Healthwatch has provided—namely, a truly independent, locally-rooted patient voice—are not lost in the process of reform.

Over the past decade, Oxfordshire has benefited greatly from having a dedicated function that gathers, represents, and amplifies the views of patients and the public. This function has operated independently of service providers and commissioners, enabling it to build trust with communities and act as a critical friend to the system. Through its work, thousands of residents have been engaged, seldom-heard voices have been brought to the fore, and evidence-based recommendations have led to tangible improvements in local services—from the development of women's health strategies to enhancements in urgent and emergency care.

The independence and local presence of this patient voice function have been central to its effectiveness. It has ensured that feedback is honest, credible, and reflective of the real experiences and needs of Oxfordshire's communities. Academic studies and national evidence consistently highlight that such independent mechanisms are crucial for improving health outcomes, service design, and accountability. The risk, as reforms progress, is that centralising or integrating these functions within larger bodies could dilute their independence and weaken their ability to represent local perspectives.

As system partners in Oxfordshire consider how best to implement national reforms, we urge that the principles underpinning the independent patient voice are safeguarded. This means retaining a function that is:

- Independent from service providers and commissioners,
- Locally present and engaged, especially at neighbourhood level,
- Driven by public need rather than solely system priorities,
- Able to reach seldom-heard groups and address inequalities,
- Confident and influential in shaping service improvement.

We are not seeking to resist the direction of national policy, but rather to ensure that, whatever new model emerges, Oxfordshire continues to benefit from a robust, independent patient voice function. We believe this is essential for maintaining the credibility and effectiveness of public engagement in health and social care, and for ensuring that reforms are shaped by the real experiences of our residents.

We would greatly value your support in advocating for the preservation of these principles as national reforms are delivered locally. Your engagement will be vital in helping system partners design and implement a model that retains the strengths of the independent patient voice function that has served Oxfordshire so well.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Jane Hanna'.

Cllr Jane Hanna OBE

Chair, Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee