

Functions of Local Healthwatch

As outlined in "Local Healthwatch: A strong voice for people – the policy explained" – Department of Health, 2012

The proposals set out in the Bill mean that local Healthwatch, to be established in April 2013, will:

- 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 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); to promote and support the involvement of people in the monitoring, commissioning and provision of local 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 care services
- make reports and make recommendations about how those services could or should be improved.

Additionally, local authorities will take on responsibility for commissioning NHS complaints advocacy from April 2013. The intention is that local Healthwatch will either provide the service or be able to signpost people to the provider of the service.

Local Healthwatch will have a seat on the local authority statutory health and wellbeing board. These boards will lead the statutory Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies on which local commissioning decisions will be based making local Healthwatch an important contributor to the local work on reducing health inequalities.

Local Healthwatch organisations will carry out statutory functions. They will be non-statutory (i.e. not created by the Bill) corporate bodies which will allow them to employ staff in addition to involving volunteers in their work. They will be able to contract out functions while remaining accountable for the public funding they receive. The proposed legislation will also ensure that, through

regulations, local Healthwatch organisations will act with a view to securing that they and their subcontractors taken together are representative of their local communities.

As with any body we would expect local Healthwatch organisations to act in accordance with the Nolan principles of standards in public life.

It is the government's view that local Healthwatch organisations will be subject to the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 and the Freedom of Information Act will apply to them.

In summary, our intention is that local Healthwatch will:

- carry out statutory functions;
- be corporate bodies, embedded in local communities;
- act as local consumer champion representing the collective voice of patients, service users, carers and the public, on statutory health and wellbeing boards;
- play an integral role in the preparation of the statutory Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies on which local commissioning decisions will be based;
- have real influence with commissioners, providers, regulators and Healthwatch England using their knowledge of what matters to local people; and
- support individuals to access information and independent advocacy if they need help to complain about NHS services.