Developing effective local Healthwatch: key success features

1 Vision, values and identity

• Has a clear vision and demonstrable goals for the organisation, which have been developed in partnership with local stakeholders and the wider community. It will have clear priorities, which are based on evidence and local need.

• Has an appreciation of the learning, experience and knowledge that the LINk has collected in their area and will have in place a strategy to retain and build on this experience to ensure as much continuity as possible and appropriate.

• Has an organisational model that is capable of learning and adapting to meet further policy changes around the citizen voice in the NHS and social care.

• Has a visible presence in the area it serves, with a recognisable local brand as an independent consumer champion, representing the views of people who use, or may use, health and social care services and members of local communities.

• Local people understand how to access local Healthwatch for help and support.

2 Local Healthwatch purpose – empowering local people

• Is rooted in the community and acts with a view to ensuring that local Healthwatch, its volunteers and its subcontractors taken together are representative of the local population and promote community involvement in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of health and social services.

• Raises awareness amongst commissioners, providers and other agencies about the importance of engaging with communities, and the expertise and value that individuals and VCOs can bring to discussion and decision making on local and national issues.

• Works with other VCOs to put in place appropriate representation and membership of VCOs and individuals as community representatives on key local partnerships.

• Helps community representatives on key health and social care partnerships to understand their role and responsibilities and seeks to promote the exchange of information and views between representatives and the wider community, using a mix of communication methods6 to reach the public in the most effective manner.

• Is proactively engaged in the development and operation of working partnerships and networks, seeking to maximise the complementary relationship with the wider community engagement mechanisms and activities in the local area.

Eg by ensuring people can get information in different formats (electronic, hard copy, Braille, preferred language translations etc.) and by making full use of social networking tools to reach communities that might otherwise be under-represented

• Works collaboratively with other local groups and organisations as part of local community networks to draw upon knowledge and experience that already exists and to maximise its reach across the diversity of the local community, with a particular focus on understanding the views and experiences of less well heard groups.

3 Local Healthwatch purpose – information gathering and giving

• Gathers the views and experiences of individual service users as well as other sorts of local information that is already available from local voluntary and community groups and triangulates this with other sources of information, making effective use of the Healthwatch England information repository.

• Understands what local information sources are available (including LINk legacy data) and seeks to identify new information sources in order to develop views about key local and national issues. This should include an understanding of the methodologies used to collect data.

• Understands the different techniques for gathering views and chooses the most appropriate method, including understanding where enter and view can be used as a source of evidence about the experience of service users and quality of services.

• Has the necessary skills to synthesise, interpret and understand different kinds of data and information and uses information appropriately to provide the evidential base for any reports and recommendations to commissioners and providers to improve services, and for input to the health and wellbeing board.

• Identifies unmet need so gaps in information can be plugged.

• Ensures that the information it collects and analyses can be easily accessed and used in a variety of formats.

• Provides or signposts people to the information they need helping them to make the right choices for them / their circumstances.

• Provides voluntary and community organisations with the information they need to be able to take an active part in strategic partnerships.

• Evidence and insight gathered by local Healthwatch is fed into Healthwatch England, using the information repository, enabling it to advise on the national picture and ensure that local views influence national policy, advice and guidance.

4 Local Healthwatch purpose – representation and relationships

• Operates independently, constructively and authoritatively, relentlessly representing the voice of local people on what matters most to them in the strengthened system of strategic needs assessment and commissioning decision making.

• Makes the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England to help it carry out its national champion role.

• Develops and maintains good working relationships with appropriate scrutiny committees (or other scrutiny arrangements), NHS Foundation Trusts and (where this is provided separately) with the independent NHS complaints advocacy service.

• Plays a full role in strategic decision making as a member of the health and wellbeing board as well as acting as a constructive 'critical friend' on the board. Is seen as an essential contributor to the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies ensuring that local people's views are integral to local decision-making about services.

• Encourages high standards of health and care provision and challenges poor services.

• Champions equality of health and care access and provision.

• Has real influence with commissioners, providers, regulators and Healthwatch England, using knowledge and evidence of what matters to local people, and is able to demonstrate that decisions about commissioning priorities and services are based on the needs and experiences of local people.

• Has arrangements in place to be able to show how it has made a positive impact on local decision-making and improved services.

5 Governance
• Has an open and transparent recognised structure for making decisions and enabling local people to influence what it does (eg internal processes, work prioritisation, recommendations, impact analysis) and acts in accordance with the Nolan principles of standards in public life.

• Has good governance and management arrangements in place including processes to maintain robust accounts of how it has used its funds.

• Demonstrates accountability to the local community for the way it takes decisions through adoption and use of good governance principles including transparency, independence and lay leadership.

• Values people and skills and has a set of competencies that enables it to deliver its statutory roles.