

Chair's report

Purpose

1. To update the Board on recent meetings I have attended on behalf of Healthwatch (see Appendix 1).

Key Issues

2. It is now four months since I became acting Chair due to the continuing unfortunate health challenges faced by our Chair. I have been grateful for his continued support in the background. We have agreed that this arrangement should be reviewed in two months in the best interests of our Healthwatch.

3. The Prime Minister has announced plans to abolish NHS England, the body established in 2012 to oversee the NHS in England. The management and oversight responsibilities previously held by NHS England will be transferred directly to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). This move aims to streamline operations, reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies, and enhance democratic accountability within the health service.

The restructuring includes significant changes to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) that oversee NHS trusts. ICBs are mandated to reduce their operating costs by 50% by the end of the year, leading to very significant job losses. This directive is part of broader efforts to address projected overspend in the 2025-26 fiscal year.

The government's primary objectives with these reforms are to streamline NHS management, reduce unnecessary administrative layers, and improve service delivery. By consolidating control under the DHSC, the government intends to enhance efficiency and reduce waiting times for patients. However, there are serious concerns about the potential impact on NHS operations with stakeholders expressing concerns that the reorganisation may divert attention from immediate healthcare improvements.

As the local consumer champion for health and social care, Healthwatch Cambridgeshire & Peterborough will monitor these developments closely. It is crucial to assess how the proposed changes will affect local services, patient care, and community health outcomes. Engaging with stakeholders, including patients, healthcare providers, and policymakers, will be essential to ensure that the community's needs and concerns are addressed during this transition.

In summary, the proposed abolition of NHS England and the restructuring of ICBs represent significant shifts in the governance and operation of the NHS. While the reforms aim to enhance efficiency and accountability, it is vital to carefully consider and address the potential challenges and implications for local health services and patient care.

4. At the time of writing this report, the UK government is still developing a long-term NHS plan (The NHS 10 Year Plan) focused on shifting care from hospitals to communities, enhancing digital healthcare, and prioritising prevention. Public consultations are ongoing, with the final plan due in spring 2025.

The Dash Review of the Care Quality Commission (CQC) highlighted failings in oversight and quality control. Further reviews are now assessing six key health bodies (including Healthwatch England) to improve patient safety and regulatory effectiveness.

Both initiatives aim to reform NHS management and patient care for long-term sustainability.

5. The Government is advancing its plans to reform local government through a comprehensive devolution strategy, aiming to enhance local autonomy and streamline administrative structures.

The "English Devolution White Paper: Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth," outlined key proposals such as the establishment of strategic authorities and structural reorganisation from two-tier local government systems to single-tier unitary authorities to improve efficiency and service delivery.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has been identified as one of the areas invited to submit reorganisation proposals.

Action required by the Board

The Board is asked to note the contents of this report

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26th March 2025

Appendix 1

Meetings attended by the Chair – 1st February to 26th March 2025

Meeting	Date
ICB Meeting	7 th Feb
Meeting with LA Commissioners (with HW CEO)	14 th Feb
Meeting HW CEO	17 st Feb
Meeting with Potential new NED	18 th Feb
HW Development Session	24 th Feb
Meeting with Chair	28 th Feb
Health and Wellbeing/ICP Board meeting	7 th Mar
GPG meeting	12 th Mar
ICB Board Meeting	14 th Mar
Meeting HW CEO	19 th Mar