

HealthWatch Advisory Group bulletin

Issue 1

22 June 2011

Introduction

This is the first issue of a regular bulletin from the HealthWatch advisory group. It contains up to date, authoritative information on HealthWatch developments. The bulletin will be distributed through the Department of Health (DH), the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the National Association of LINK Members (NALM) and other advisory group members.

Feel free to use the content in your publications to keep your stakeholders and members informed about HealthWatch.

Newsflash

The Government response to the NHS Future Forum listening exercise was published on 20 June. [Click here to view the document](#). A key headline from the document is that HealthWatch England and Local HealthWatch organisations will now be launched in October 2012.

Background to HealthWatch

To strengthen the collective voice of patients and carers in the system at both a local and national level, Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) will evolve to become Local HealthWatch, and HealthWatch England will be set up as the independent consumer champion within the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Local HealthWatch key issues

LINKs were established through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007. LINKs are responsible for both health and social care, wherever funded by public money. Their main powers and responsibilities are to influence commissioning, to monitor services by entering and viewing, to make recommendations, to request and receive information and to gather the views and experiences of their community about their local services. Local HealthWatch will have additional responsibilities for NHS complaints advocacy and for signposting information. The Health and Social Care Bill also states that Local HealthWatch organisations will be 'bodies corporate' and will be able to hire their own staff.

It is proposed that, subject to the passage of the legislation, Local HealthWatch organisations will begin in October 2012, with their NHS complaints advocacy responsibilities coming on stream in April 2013.

Currently, the proposed evolution of LINKs to Local HealthWatch organisations is being explored through Local HealthWatch Pathfinders, early adopter Health and Wellbeing Boards, the HealthWatch Programme Board, the HealthWatch Advisory Group, and forthcoming Action Learning Sets. The National Association of LINK Members (NALM) is also undertaking work to consider HealthWatch transition issues which will feed into the Advisory Group.

Additionally, the Department of Health is pulling together a network of regional leads for HealthWatch.

These multiple initiatives will help ensure that as many people as possible are involved in the work to develop HealthWatch and get it up and running smoothly. They may be paused or parked as the many representations made about all aspects of the Bill continue to be considered.

Meanwhile, there are two key messages from the first meetings of the Advisory Group:

- The first concerns the continued support for LINKs. LINKs will remain until legislation changes. LINKs' funding, provided by the Department of Health to local authorities, remains at the same level as under the area based grant. The Department of Health's funding has not been reduced but neither is it 'ring-fenced'. LINKs should expect to be fully funded for the work they do. Further, as the Bill intends for Local HealthWatch organisations to be 'bodies corporate' with the power to hire their own staff should they wish to do so, local authorities should work with LINKs and other partners to fully explore the options for moving from LINKs to local HealthWatch. Some options and advice are set out in [the HealthWatch Transition Plan](#) published on 30 March 2011.
- The second concerns clarification of roles and responsibilities of local authorities and Local HealthWatch organisations and summarised the key points as:
 - Local authorities will be responsible for establishing and funding Local HealthWatch organisations;
 - Local authorities will commission a Local HealthWatch organisation;
 - Local HealthWatch organisations will, as bodies corporate, be responsible for arranging their own support services;
 - Local authorities will be responsible for ensuring accountability and value for money (of Local HealthWatch organisations).

Summary of discussions from HealthWatch advisory group sub groups

The HealthWatch advisory group has set up four sub groups to focus on specific areas of the work programme. They are:

- HealthWatch England Principles and Practicalities
- Local HealthWatch: Building a convincing case

- Local HealthWatch: Creating a good local HealthWatch
- Communication and engagement: a strategy

On Tuesday 21 June the communications sub group met and discussed reputation development (or branding) for HealthWatch and solutions for the HealthWatch website approach and domain strategy.

How to get involved in developing HealthWatch

To set up HealthWatch the Care Quality Commission and the Department of Health have set up a joint programme. This is made up of a programme board and an advisory group. To read more about these groups and to read the minutes of the meetings please visit the CQC [website](#).

To ensure people can feed in their views on the development of HealthWatch an online forum is being set up for anyone who is interested to feed in their views. The forum will start running in July. From the date of this bulletin, if you haven't already noted your interest in joining, and you would like to, please email healthwatch@nunwood.com

If you would like to find out more about the NHS modernisation programme, please visit the DH website at: <http://healthandcare.dh.gov.uk>.

HealthWatch Advisory Group