

Consultation – Proposed change to Healthwatch provision in North Somerset November 2018



Introduction

Healthwatch North Somerset was first created in 2013. It is designed to gather the views and experiences of local people using health and social care services to:

- give them a say in how local services are changing; and
- influence decision makers on local people's behalf.

The current arrangement for the provision of this service ends on 30th September 2019.

Healthwatch North Somerset is run as an independent social enterprise and currently receives £119,300 per year from by North Somerset Council as its primary source of funding. Local Authorities receive money from the Government to pay for their Local Healthwatch schemes via the Local Reform & Community Voices Grant. The Department for Health & Social Care has allocated £53,490 within this grant to North Somerset Council to provide a local Healthwatch scheme in 2018/19. Other forms of funding available to North Somerset to add to this grant have reduced considerably over the last few years. This means that the council will not have enough money to supplement this grant at the same level as in previous years, alongside providing all the other services which local residents rely on, so it has to decide carefully where to allocate its resources.

The council is also keen to look at other ways in which Healthwatch can be provided to better suit a changing local healthcare system, in which we are increasingly working with neighbouring councils and a newly formed regional Clinical Commissioning Group.

Now the Council wants to hear your views to make sure the best possible decisions are being made for local people.

What does Healthwatch do?

Healthwatch was created by Part 5 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Healthwatch consists of a national body, Healthwatch England, and a local organisation operating in each local council area in England with social care responsibilities. In our area this organisation is known as Healthwatch North Somerset.

Healthwatch is a statutory service, which means that North Somerset Council must by law ensure that it is provided, and that it should do so by providing funding to an independent social enterprise. The law also describes what each local Healthwatch needs to do, a summary of which includes:

1. Promoting and supporting the involvement of local people in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of local care services.

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2. Enabling local people to monitor the standard of provision of local care services and in deciding how local care services could and ought to be improved.
3. Obtaining the views of local people regarding their experiences of local care services and making these known.
4. Making reports and recommendations about how local care services might be improved and informing commissioners and providers of care services about these reports, which are also shared with Healthwatch England.
5. Providing advice and information to the public about access to local care services so that they may make informed choices.
6. Formulating views on the standard of provision and whether and how the local care services could and ought to be improved; and sharing these views with Healthwatch England.
7. Providing Healthwatch England with the intelligence and insight it needs to enable it to perform effectively
8. Making recommendations to Healthwatch England to advise the Care Quality Commission to conduct special reviews or investigations

What kind of things does Healthwatch do in North Somerset?

Healthwatch North Somerset is involved in the following key activities:

- Conduct 'enter and view' visits to GP surgeries and care homes, to understand patients' experiences and recommend changes
- Produce special reports on matters which affect the local community (recently, this has included reports on Diabetes Care in North Somerset, and the support available to Carers)
- Hold public meetings where users of services can discuss issues and concerns about health and care services they use
- Produce an annual report of its activities.

The annual report of the current provider, Healthwatch North Somerset is available at the following website: <https://www.healthwatchnorthsomerset.co.uk/> along with more details of its activities.

Why are we thinking of changing how we commission Healthwatch?

Our current arrangement with Healthwatch North Somerset will come to an end in September 2019, so we will need to seek a new agreement to start from October 2019. This offers an opportunity to think about how we could do things differently to ensure our local Healthwatch is sustainable, can continue to meet the needs of local people, and that it provides the best value for money.

Another opportunity arises from changes in local health services. Our local health services are commissioned by a body known as a Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). This body decides what kind of health services are needed in the local area and ensures that they are provided to high standards. Recently, the CCGs covering

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Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) have merged into a single organisation called BNSSG CCG. Local Healthwatch organisations work very closely with CCGs, providing challenge, support and scrutiny to their decision-making.

This merger has already created opportunities to work together on a range of projects, reducing duplication of effort and resources where it makes sense to do so.

Now that a single commissioner of health services for our local area is in place:

- It will be more effective for a single Healthwatch organisation to challenge, support and scrutinise the new BNSSG CCG
- It is more efficient to use council resources to support a single Healthwatch organisation, sharing the cost of their offices, management and administration with our neighbouring authorities
- Reduced costs of providing a local Healthwatch means more of the limited funding available can be spent on the activities which most benefit users of the service
- A more efficient Healthwatch means that more of the scarce funding available is directed to services which benefit local users of care services

All local authorities are experiencing a period of unprecedented financial challenge, and grants from central government are being reduced. This means we need to make careful decisions about how our resources are used to ensure the needs of the most vulnerable people are met.

What are the options available?

We must ensure that a local Healthwatch service is provided by law, so discontinuing the service is not an option. We have identified the following options for the service:

Option 1 – Continue to allocate a grant to commissioning a much-reduced Healthwatch service operating solely in North Somerset. This could ultimately reduce the level of service which Healthwatch could provide.

Option 2 - Contributing to a jointly-commissioned Healthwatch service with our neighbours in South Gloucestershire and Bristol, aligned to the new Bristol, North Somerset & South Gloucestershire CCG. This would ensure that our local Healthwatch organisation was providing effective representation at a strategic level and will also ensure that a sustainable service can continue to be provided locally.

Considerations in Moving Forward

In determining which of these options we take forward, we will consider the following areas alongside the outcomes of the consultation:

- What provides the best value to people using services in North Somerset?

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- What could ensure a more sustainable Healthwatch service in the future?
- What provides the best opportunity to represent local people's views at a strategic level to those who commission health and care services?

How might Healthwatch change in North Somerset?

Whichever option for change is taken forward, there will be a need to make changes to the local Healthwatch service. As part of this consultation the North Somerset Council, along with colleagues in Bristol and South Gloucestershire will be working with some of the organisations who run Healthwatch across the country, to discuss different ways of adjusting to less money.

This could be by:

- focussing on the areas of most concern to the people of North Somerset,
- and/or prioritising the areas where Healthwatch can have the most impact.

The information from these discussions and this consultation, will help all three councils to make an informed judgement on what would work and what wouldn't, so when organisations apply to do the work, the Council is best placed to judge the best offer.

What will happen when the Consultation period is over in February 2019?

We will be looking at your responses as they come in, taking account of individuals' and organisations views on how the changes may affect you. We will then be organising the necessary discussions locally and/or with colleagues across Bristol and South Gloucestershire to move forward on the most appropriate way of delivering a Healthwatch service for North Somerset residents.

We will then enter a procurement process locally and/or with colleagues across Bristol and South Gloucestershire, where we will invite interested bodies to bid for the opportunity to provide the local Healthwatch services, by telling us how they would meet their duties, involve local people and represent the views of North Somerset residents, and how they would use our funds to do this.

The provider who's bid best fits the requirements will begin providing Healthwatch services, representing North Somerset residents, from October 2019. They would likely have an agreement to do so for three years initially, with options to extend this further.

The current providers of Healthwatch services in North Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire may wish to bid to operate the new service.

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How can I have a say?

We are keen to understand if, and how you currently use Healthwatch, and if, or how the proposed options may affect you as an individual or as an organisation providing services to local people.

You can give your views on our proposals by visiting our e-Consult website at:

<http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/healthwatchsurvey>

We will also publish the outcome of the consultation via e-Consult when it is completed.

You may also respond by printing and returning the questionnaire to the address below. If you require this document or the questionnaire to be provided in an alternative format, please contact us at heather.whittle@n-somerset.gov.uk

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The closing date for comments is 21st February 2019