

## **Local Healthwatch Decision Making Policy and Procedure: Agreeing and Setting Annual Priorities**

Healthwatch is part of the government's health and social care reforms introduced under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. A principle of the reforms is that patients and the public must be at the heart of everything our health and social care services do.

Healthwatch Somerset wishes to ensure that the way it makes decisions, and the outcome of any decisions made is transparent. This procedure sets out how Healthwatch Somerset and the Advisory Board of Healthwatch Somerset involves others, particularly lay people and volunteers, in its governance and work planning. Regular engagement work with local people on particular health and social care issues takes place in addition to this procedure.

### **Who makes the decisions about our work plan activities?**

Evidence from regular and ongoing engagement activity is collated and analysed by the Healthwatch Somerset staff team, and provided to the Healthwatch Somerset Advisory Board and commissioners on a regular basis as emerging themes.

### **To which decisions will these procedures apply?**

Governance decisions made on any key matters are known in the statutory regulations as Relevant Decisions. Healthwatch Somerset draw on the methods below to ensure broad input into its governance and work planning. The methods shown can each be used singly, or in combination, to help Healthwatch Somerset gather input to enable it to make well-informed decisions. All intelligence is recorded in the Healthwatch Somerset data management system, (Local Healthwatch), which enables themed reports to be produced to inform decision-making.

The 9 Relevant decisions are:

- how to undertake your activities
- which health and care services you are looking at covering with your activities
- the amounts you will spend on your activities
- whether to request information
- whether to make a report or a recommendation
- which premises to enter and view, and when those premises are to be visited
- whether to refer a matter to an overview and scrutiny committee
- whether to report a matter concerning your activities to another person
- any decisions about subcontracting

### **Intelligence – Public engagement and involvement**

Throughout the year Healthwatch teams gathers intelligence from engagement with the public in a variety of forms. We attend partner events, run our own public events, go out to visit partner organisations and groups, and engage with the public on specific issues when we are conducting investigations in more depth. We use a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to form a picture of the state of health and social care in Somerset and people's experiences of their care.

### **Healthwatch Advisory Board and volunteer involvement**

We seek input from our Advisory Board members, volunteers, and staff on how we run Healthwatch Somerset. Their views are sought by email or at meetings. We seek their views on general topics, or on specific issues, as well as their input on how we go about our role. The views expressed on specific decisions are fed into the Advisory Board. Views on more general topics are aggregated and summarised as appropriate.

### **Partnership working – voluntary and community sector organisations**

Healthwatch Somerset works with key organisations within health and social care, in particular, the local voluntary and community sector (including faith groups, community groups, charities, residents' groups, patients' groups, etc).



We aim to:

- hear from them about the views and experiences of their members and clients.
- at times arrange through them, to hear direct from their members and clients about their views and experiences.
- co-ordinate our work with them so that we are not duplicating effort.

### **Working within the health and social care 'system'**

Commissioners and providers in both health and social Care also assist Healthwatch in identifying any specific topic related priorities. We also take consideration of existing local needs assessments (for example Joint Strategic Assessment). An ongoing dialogue with stakeholders through forums including the Somerset Board, Integrated Care Boards, and voluntary sector groups and forums, etc is key to identifying 'system' priorities and support decision making processes.

### **Enter and View decisions**

Enter and View visits are undertaken when sufficient evidence exists that this is an appropriate intervention, which may be at short notice. The evidence may arise from any source, and the Healthwatch Enter and View procedures will be followed for both announced and unannounced visits. There are certain circumstances where Healthwatch will consider invoking a responsive Enter and View visit. These could be announced or unannounced visits, and could include:

1. If local Healthwatch receive a referral from a relevant Local Authority's or Integrated Care Board's Quality Assurance Board
2. If the CQC ask the local Healthwatch to look at a specific area to assist their inspection regime
3. If through the local Healthwatch's quality monitoring, we identify a trend or pattern of concern
4. If the local Healthwatch are alerted to concerns from a number of local people
5. As a result of observations made whilst carrying out engagement, for example, through work plan engagement or talking to patients in an acute setting.

If it should be necessary to make decisions under this procedure very quickly and it is not possible to convene the Board sufficiently quickly, even by email, then decisions may be taken by the host Chief Operations Officer, Healthwatch Somerset Manager, and the Advisory Board Chair.

### **How will decisions be published?**

To meet the statutory requirement that any 'relevant decisions' made under the Procedures must be published, our Healthwatch Advisory Board minutes set out decisions taken and reasons for such decisions, and these are published on the website, generally within 21 working days.

### **When do these procedures NOT apply?**

These procedures do not apply to decisions that result in a relatively small amount of work being undertaken, not exceeding 7 days of staff time. This is known as the de minimis rule. It enables Healthwatch Somerset to undertake exploratory work on matters raised with us or of which we otherwise become aware, in order to assess how serious or widespread such matters may be, before proposing to devote significant resource to any of them. This means that if Healthwatch Somerset receive information about a small number of negative experiences of a local service, it does not need to apply these procedures before undertaking some initial exploratory work. It does not need to seek Local Board input before undertaking some preliminary or validation work to try and establish whether the issue is worth pursuing more formally. Even though these procedures do not apply where the ensuing work will take less than 7 days of staff time, staff may, of course, choose to seek Local Board input, as this is quite likely to be one way in which the seriousness of the issue can be tested and evaluated. If the reported experiences are, in fact, relevant to one of the topics already prioritised under the existing work programme, then the decision to undertake further work into that issue has already been made under these procedures. In this case, no further formal decision is required.

### **Review of procedures**

The Advocacy People<sup>1</sup>, Healthwatch Somerset Manager, and the Healthwatch Somerset Advisory Board will review the effectiveness of the decision-making policy set out in this document on an annual basis.

## **Setting and agreeing annual priorities and work programmes**

Each year local Healthwatch organisations have to agree their annual work plan priorities for the forthcoming year as well as its programme of work.

Our approach to priority setting is one which recognises that Healthwatch sits inside the health and care system. The process will be cyclical and will typically start in November with the plan for priorities shared with commissioners by end of March.

Priorities for Healthwatch are identified in a number of ways:

- The **Healthwatch Advisory Board volunteers, and staff** will be involved with consultation and planning meetings to analyse the data and intelligence collected across the year.
- **Local people** are encouraged to identify areas of concern and bring these to the attention of Healthwatch by telephone, email or letter, or attendance at local events. Where particular issues are not within Healthwatch remit, people will always be advised on the right agency to contact for help. Local people can also complete an annual survey promoted across the area through existing contacts and networks to find out what they think is important.
- **Partnership working** is key to Healthwatch philosophy, so local service user organisations suggest areas of work, and timescales for completion. This avoids duplication of effort.
- **Commissioners** in both Health and Social Care also assist Healthwatch in identifying any specific topic related priorities. We also take consideration of existing local needs assessments (for example Joint Strategic Assessment). An ongoing dialogue with stakeholders through forums including Somerset Board, Integrated Care Boards, and voluntary sector groups and forums etc is key to identifying 'system' priorities.
- **Healthwatch England** heads up the nationwide network of Healthwatch organisations and sets out its statutory responsibilities, for example, the right to Enter and View any publicly funded health and social care service.

Each year a long list of emerging priority themes is collated by the Healthwatch Staff. This is then discussed by the Advisory Board who shortlist depending on the team's capacity to undertake projects. The shortlist is then the subject of a 'People's Vote' an innovative way of reaching out to our local communities to ask for their opinions.

The result of the People's Vote process is taken back to the Advisory Board and a clear set of priorities which deliver on the outcomes required of Healthwatch and determines the engagement work programme for the year. Our governance model dictates that Healthwatch Local Boards will take the final decision about the set of annual priorities.

All work undertaken by Healthwatch, including partnership projects, is subject to evaluation, review, and formal reporting to the Healthwatch Somerset Local Board. Good practice is noted, along with areas for improvement. Reports are circulated widely and published on the Healthwatch websites.

### **Step 1 (November)**

**Draft** – Local Healthwatch staff teams meet to consider the following:

- Evidence and intelligence recorded on their database management system
- Data and intelligence collected from current work plan engagement activity
- Local priorities identified by system partners (Somerset Board, Integrated Care System committees and programme board and other local stakeholders and providers)
- Data and intelligence identified at a National level (Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission, NHS England)

### **Step 2 (November)**

**Produce** – Healthwatch Manager with the support of the staff team will produce a summary of the outcomes of the above. This might entail a large list of key messages and possible areas to prioritise.

### **Step 3 (December)**

**Consult** – Draft summary to be shared with the Advisory Board and volunteers for consultation and shortlisting. The purpose of this is to ensure those involved

with delivering the annual work plan and directly hearing the experiences and views of local people are involved. It is an opportunity to include additional priority areas for consideration and also to challenge why others might have been included.

#### **Step 4 (January)**

**Consult** – In January the draft summary should be considered formally by the Advisory Board and the People’s Vote should be created.

#### **Step 5 (January to March)**

**Check** – Share priorities with key stakeholders (including commissioners) and the public. This is an opportunity for people to agree and or challenge whether priorities are right, and to understand what the potential work programme for the coming year will look like.

#### **Step 6 (March)**

**Agree** – Bring back the results from the People’s Vote to the Advisory Board for them to take the final decision about the annual work plan.

#### **Step 7 (April)**

**Share** – Publicise the work plan for the coming year in the newsletter and on our website.