

Full statement from Healthwatch York

Time to strengthen, not silence, people's voices in health and care – Healthwatch York respond to recent announcements about the future of the Healthwatch Network

Last weekend, the Government briefed the Daily Mail, BBC News and the Health Service Journal about part of the NHS 10-year plan. They informed them of the closure of the Healthwatch Network, the National Guardian's Office and the Health Services Safety Investigations Body. Healthwatch England and some leaders of local Healthwatch were given prior notice of the Daily Mail story at 5pm on Friday, giving them just an evening to brief their staff and volunteers before they would read about the news. Others found out they would lose their jobs only on seeing the news.

What will replace these groups isn't clear even though the NHS 10-year plan has now been published in full. What has been suggested is that local Healthwatch roles can be absorbed into local authorities and Integrated Care Boards. The role of Healthwatch England will be integrated into the role of National Director of Patient Experience at the Department of Health and Social Care. It has also been announced people will be encouraged to share their feedback on hospital services via the NHS App.

For over twelve years, Healthwatch York has worked to bring more voices to decision making in the city. From demanding better support for people experiencing mental health crisis, to highlighting the challenges for Deaf people in accessing health and care support, they have advocated for people in York.

Siân Balsom, the Manager of Healthwatch York said: "Every day we've listened to people's stories; we've connected them to people and support that makes a difference to their lives; and we've raised the

voices of those too often overlooked in our health and care system. We've constructively challenged partners as needed, with the power of real-life stories. The stories we share are rich in the sorts of details a service review simply can't provide."

The new NHS 10-year plan outline the three left shifts needed to create a modern health system. These are:

- Moving care from hospitals to communities
- Making better use of technology
- Focusing on preventing illness, not just treating it

We could play a vital role in supporting these shifts. In fact, we would go further. We believe the missing part of the 10-year plan is about the 4th shift. Namely the NHS working as equal partners with trusted VCSE groups and groups like Healthwatch to really tackle the 'medieval' levels of health inequalities that cost our health services as much as £50bn a year. Sadly, this dream of a genuine neighbourhood health approach seems further away this week than it did the week before."

Jason Stamp, Acting Chair of NHS Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) stated "The independent voice of patients and the public is vital in shaping effective, inclusive and responsive health and care services. We remain committed to ensuring local people are at the heart of everything we do.

We will work closely with our local authority partners, as well as voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, to explore how we can maintain local mechanisms for patient and public involvement.

Our priority is to ensure that voices of patients, carers and communities across Humber and North Yorkshire continue to inform decisions about health and care in a meaningful way."

Janet Wright, Chair of Healthwatch York added "This is a really sad day for everyone involved with the Healthwatch network. Successive

governments have said people should be at the heart of our system. But that can only really happen when that voice is independent. Self-regulation doesn't work. Independence is part of our DNA. The irony is that it has taken us a long time to establish ourselves as an equal partner in the health and care system. To lose what we've worked so hard to achieve, to lose the people who have made this the success it is, would take years to rebuild.

Despite the government's announcement, for Healthwatch York it is business as usual. The organisation will continue until new legislation confirms the abolition and this is not expected until 2026. Their priority remains the independent voice of local people. They will be working with partners at City of York Council and Humber and North Yorkshire Integrated Care Board to make sure there is still space for this. Anyone who wants to share their experiences of local health and care services or ask for information about who can support their health and care needs is encouraged to get in touch. The email is: healthwatch@yorkcvs.org.uk or phone: 01904 621133.

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Please get in touch – you can phone 01904 621133, email healthwatch@yorkcvs.org.uk, or find us on facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/healthwatch.york/>

For more information about the work of Healthwatch York visit: www.healthwatchyork.co.uk.

For further insight into our activities last year and further quotes from partner organisations see our Annual Report here <https://www.healthwatchyork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/HWY-Annual-Report-2024-25-min-size-1.pdf>

And our independent evaluation. <https://www.healthwatchyork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Healthwatch-York-evaluation-2025-Final-min.pdf>