

Developing Local HealthWatch in Buckinghamshire

Discussion Document
What Do You Think?

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Supplementary Documents available on

<http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/sites/partnership/BSP/healthwatch.page>

Summary of the outputs from each focus group

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 Slide set - possible Local HealthWatch responsibilities

Introduction

The development of Local HealthWatch in Buckinghamshire

Guidance has been issued by The Department of Health setting out the broad remit for a new organisation called Local HealthWatch. This states,

“Local HealthWatch organisations will provide authoritative, coordinated local consumer voice for both commissioners and providers of services to help them develop high quality responsive services. They will also provide a valuable source of information about services to local people and make sure those who need help to access information in order to make appropriate choices are supported to do so.”¹

Local HealthWatch organisations are scheduled to be established in October 2012 depending on Royal Assent of the necessary legislation. Local HealthWatch will absorb the functions currently provided by Local Involvement Networks (LINKs), which will cease to exist when Local HealthWatch comes into being. Local HealthWatch will undertake three broad areas of responsibility as outlined below.



Local HealthWatch will have a seat on local Health and Wellbeing Boards to influence commissioning decisions by representing the views of local stakeholders. Information that Local HealthWatch gathers on “users” and the public’s views and experiences of health and

¹ Transparency in outcomes: a framework for quality in adult social care; a response to the consultation and next steps , DH, 31 March 2011 (page 30)

social care locally will inform HealthWatch England's role in influencing health and social care services at the national level.

Buckinghamshire County Council has the responsibility of setting up Local HealthWatch in Buckinghamshire. Whilst there is broad guidance on the responsibilities of Local HealthWatch, it is up to the County Council to determine both the form and function of the new organisation. In other words, what the new organisation should do and how it should do it. In order to take local views into account in October 2012, the County Council commissioned Transforming Health Ltd. to run a series of focus groups across Buckinghamshire as an initial stage in engaging people about what they felt the new Local HealthWatch should focus on in its work.

The outcomes from these focus groups are detailed in this report and have led to a set of questions Buckinghamshire County Council would like further views and opinions on. You can post your views directly on the Buckinghamshire Local HealthWatch web site at <http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/sites/partnership/BSP/healthwatch.page>

Or please send or email your views by Wednesday 18th January to:

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Buckinghamshire Focus Groups

Seven focus groups took place across Buckinghamshire between November 17th and November 29th 2011. Five of the groups were aimed at a general audience recruited from current LINK members; voluntary organisations, local residents and Parish Councillors. The two other groups were aimed at County and District Councillors and representatives from statutory health and social care organisations.

In total 67 people attended the groups. At each focus group those attending considered three key questions:

1. What are the most important services that the Local HealthWatch needs to provide in Buckinghamshire?
2. What should Local HealthWatch do to drive up the quality of local health and social care services?
3. How should local HealthWatch interact with local people in order to understand their experience of health and social care?

In addition, a meeting was held with young people attending the Buckinghamshire Youth Cabinet and 24 young people responded by email to an online questionnaire.

This discussion document summarises the key themes that arose from these deliberations and poses a series of questions for further consideration. Full details of the points made by each focus group are available on the Local HealthWatch Bucks web site at <http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/sites/partnership/BSP/healthwatch.page>



Important issues and key questions



What services should Local HealthWatch Bucks provide?

A key responsibility discussed at every focus group was that the new Local HealthWatch needed a **strong role in representing the views of local people** in order to influence health and social care. There was however a difference of opinion both within and across groups about how evidence on current services should be gathered. Some people felt that the Local HealthWatch should gather information from individuals whilst others felt strongly that this information should be gained through other mechanisms such as existing groups and relationships with the statutory provider organisations.

What was unanimous was the view that the new Local HealthWatch needed to **'have teeth'** in order to be able to really make a difference, the conclusion being that the organisation needs to be **credible in order to be able to hold others to account**. There was recognition that in order to gather evidence about people's experience of health and social care, and then represent that back to those who commission or run services, Local HealthWatch Bucks would need to work through other groups with strong community links, especially those who work with harder to reach or disenfranchised groups. A key comment from every group was that Local HealthWatch Bucks should **not duplicate** the work of existing organisations, but should work in collaboration with these.

Influencing, commissioning and monitoring services were felt to be key roles for Local HealthWatch Bucks and there was recognition that in order to accomplish this, the new organisation would have to be both professional and credible. Further views on how this might be accomplished are set out in the section below on 'what sort of organisation should Local HealthWatch Bucks be'?

In order for Local HealthWatch Bucks to be effective, **high visibility** was a key issue raised by all groups. This relates to the branding and marketing of the organisation in order for individuals and/or organisations to be aware of its role and then use it appropriately. The media, social networking, web sites and the provision of clear written material such as newsletters were all methods through which it was felt Local HealthWatch would be able to raise its profile. Young people felt that Local HealthWatch Bucks should work through schools to advertise its role.

A number of groups made the point that the new organisation needs time to develop and that name and organisational change within a short period of time would have a detrimental effect on how effective the organisation could be. **Don't change it once it's set up was the clear message.**

The key difference between groups and sometimes within groups was the issue as to whether Local HealthWatch Bucks should have a **direct interface with individual members of the public**. Some felt that Local HealthWatch Bucks should be the place individuals go to ask for **information on local health and social care services** and/or **complain about a service**. **Providing advocacy** came up a number of times. Others felt that as there will clearly be restrictions on resources available for the new organisation, taking on this 'direct service' role would swamp any other functions. It was also pointed out that other **places/people/organisations already fulfil this role**, so what was needed was the ability to help people find the right place to either get the information or to make a complaint.

?? Key questions:

1. What are the most effective ways for Local HealthWatch can signpost people to relevant sources of information and help
2. Should Local HealthWatch Bucks **provide** direct advocacy services – eg offer to support individuals as they interact with health and social care or point out where advocacy services are available?
3. Should Local HealthWatch Bucks be the place people go for help if they have a **complaint?**

What type of organisation should Local HealthWatch Bucks be?

Many of the groups expressed the view that Local HealthWatch Bucks needs to be able to **influence the commissioning** of health and social care services and also **monitor the quality** of those services. In order to do this it was felt that there needed to be **high calibre, paid staff** who have a detailed understanding of local health and social care services and how they are commissioned. In addition, if volunteers are part of the service they should be well **trained** (the example of school governors was cited as a model). There was also recognition that the Local HealthWatch Bucks would require **administration support** along with the **technical infrastructure**. People were clear that Local HealthWatch needs to have its **own budget** but also very **clear terms of reference** at the outset.

A strong message was that the new organisation should **not rely on volunteers** and that it should be a **'doing' organisation** (not a talking shop) with a clear work plan and key performance objectives. The organisation should publicise how it has met these objectives on a regular basis. **Demonstrate value for money** was a theme that came from some groups.

Young people felt that Local HealthWatch Bucks needed to ensure it had good knowledge about health and social care issues that are particularly **pertinent to young people**, for example **alcohol** and **drug abuse, sexuality** and getting **access** to health and social care services. They also raised the issue of trust and confidentiality.

There were some interesting view-points about the **independent nature** of the new organisation and its relationship with its commissioner (Buckinghamshire County Council) and other providers of health and social care, for example voluntary organisations. The complexity of these relationships was recognised and the suggestion made that in the set up period other models should be looked at, for example the current Buckinghamshire County Council Standards committee. One idea was to establish an **independent steering group** to help set up Local HealthWatch Bucks in order to help preserve its independence.

?? Key questions:

1. What should be the role of volunteers on Local HealthWatch Bucks?
2. How can we ensure Local HealthWatch Bucks is value for money?

How should Local HealthWatch Bucks drive up the quality of services?

The focus groups generated many practical ways that Local HealthWatch Bucks could help drive up the quality of health and social care services, these included:

- Form a direct link with the **relevant cabinet member** at Buckinghamshire County Council
- **Be party to local statistics** provided by health and social care organisations
- **Keep engaged** with local decision-makers

There was an emphasis on the organisation taking a professional approach and **building non-adversarial relationships with both statutory and voluntary organisations**. One idea how to strengthen these relationships was to have representatives on each others panels and steering groups.

There was a strong message that the new organisation should **not duplicate the work of other organisations** and in terms of the quality agenda it should not duplicate role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

'**Enter and view**' was considered an important function but in a managed way, e.g. planned and aligned with the work plan of the organisation. One group talked about not 'sweating the small stuff' i.e. concentrate on making the biggest impact.

?? Key questions:

1. What are the most important ways in which Local HealthWatch Bucks can drive up the quality of health and social care services?
2. How should the power of "Enter & View" be organised and overseen so that it is deployed most effectively?
3. What is the right balance of Local HealthWatch Bucks 'resources between improving the user experience of current services and influencing the commissioning of services?

How should Local HealthWatch Bucks interact with local people?

There was recognition in all groups that people often find it difficult to navigate their way around health and social care – especially at the 'transition' points for example moving from

the GP to the hospital, or from hospital to social care. Local HealthWatch Bucks as the **single point of contact** was discussed, however the Buckinghamshire geography with small villages and rural communities was a reason why one single 'physical' premises would not work. One solution suggested was a single Local HealthWatch for Bucks with links into local area forums. It was also noted that Buckinghamshire residents also travel outside Oxfordshire and elsewhere for healthcare which raises the question of how Bucks and other Local HealthWatch organisations work together.

One focus group asked a question about how Local HealthWatch Bucks will link with the new public **involvement mechanisms** being put in place by GP commissioners. The point was made that there needs to be co-ordination so as to avoid confusion and duplication. This issue is currently being discussed with the local GP consortia.

It was recognised that in order to interact well with a wide range of people/groups Local HealthWatch Bucks will need a sophisticated approach to managing and keeping up to date its **databases of organisations and stakeholders**. Modern communication practices, direct marketing approaches and the associated technology, will be required.

Other ideas about how Local HealthWatch Bucks might interact with people included;

- Establish community champions or HealthWatch ambassadors
- HealthWatch advocates embedded in each GP locality
- Satisfaction surveys in GP surgeries
- Go to a wide range of places and organisations where people are
- Use other networks such as The University of the 3rd Age to link with people

?? Key questions:

1. If you would like to be involved in Local HealthWatch, how would you like this to happen?
2. How can Local HealthWatch Bucks capitalise on the local area forums and other local networks.
3. How should Local HealthWatch Bucks work with and alongside voluntary organisations?
4. What does Local HealthWatch Bucks need to do to become a 'listening organisation'?
5. How can Local HealthWatch Bucks represent the views of people who are often hard to reach?

Additional points

There were a few other points made that have a bearing upon what Local HealthWatch Bucks will do and how it will do it. There was a strong message that it needed to **'be very clear about the offer'**, in other words what HealthWatch Bucks is and what it is not. Trying to do a wide range of things might spread the organisation too thinly to be effective. Others made the point that the new organisation and the commissioners of that organisation need to learn from LINKs about what has and hasn't worked.

In some of the existing guidance the local PALs (patient advocacy and liaison service) has been mentioned and a question asked about whether this service should become part of the new Local HealthWatch Bucks structure or be separately provided alongside Local HealthWatch Bucks. (It is anticipated that the new legislation will transfer responsibility for the PCT PALs service to Buckinghamshire County Council in April 2013 when the PCT is disbanded). This was not discussed in detail at most of the groups but where it was (in the statutory organisations group) there was a strong view that the service currently operating within hospitals needs to remain physically located in healthcare services in order to provide a very direct and quick service to patients and their families.

?? *Key questions:*

1. Which points raised by the focus groups do you feel are the most important and why?
2. Is it feasible for Local HealthWatch Bucks to provide the range of functions described?
3. Are there other points, not raised in the focus groups, you feel should be considered?



Priorities for Local HealthWatch Bucks

The list below represents a summary of the functions that the focus groups felt Local HealthWatch Bucks should perform. We are interested in your views about which you feel are the most important; please tell us your top three.

- Monitoring health and social care
- Representing local people's views on health and social care
- Influencing commissioners
- Driving up the quality of services
- Providing advice
- Signposting services
- Providing advocacy
- Dealing with complaints

Next steps

The next steps in the process of setting up Local HealthWatch Bucks are:

- to consider the views of people responding to this discussion document
- to draw up models for the future organisation
- to present the Buckinghamshire County Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee with some options for the future design of Local HealthWatch
- to hold a workshop with representatives from the voluntary sector across Buckinghamshire
- to begin a procurement process that will lead to the commissioning of the new service in time to meet the October 2012 timeframe.

Please send your views to:

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