

Doncaster LINK

Local HealthWatch Initiative

What is local HealthWatch?

HealthWatch will be the independent consumer champion for the public – locally and nationally – to promote better outcomes in health for all and in social care for adults.

Local HealthWatch will act as a point of contact for individuals, community groups and voluntary organisations when dealing with health and social care systems. Local HealthWatch will have a seat on the local Health and Wellbeing Boards to influence commissioning decisions by representing the views of local stakeholders. Local information that they gather on patients' and the public's views and experiences of the NHS will inform the role of HealthWatch England to influence the health and social care services at the national level.

What is HealthWatch England?

HealthWatch England will be a committee of the Care Quality Commission and will act independently of Government. It will provide leadership, support and advice for local HealthWatch. It will seek to advise the Secretary of State for Health, the NHS Commissioning Board, Local Authorities, and Monitor. HealthWatch England will also advise the Care Quality Commission to investigate any serious concerns about care and poorly performing services.

What are the responsibilities of local HealthWatch?

Building on the LINKs' functions, there are three core functions for local HealthWatch: influencing, signposting and advising.

1. **Influencing** - local HealthWatch will present the views and experiences of local service users to local managers and decision makers (as well as to HealthWatch England at the national level) and be part of prioritising conversation on the local Health and Wellbeing Board, and also hold local service providers to account.

2. **Signposting** - providing information to service users to access health and social care services and promoting choice. Some signposting is currently provided by Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) as part of their Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) responsibilities.
3. **Advising** - focussed on providing NHS complaints advocacy. At present, the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) provides support to people in England wishing to complain about the treatment or care they received under the National Health Service (NHS). The support offered ranges from helping the client with initial preparation, through to attendance at resolution meetings and helping people with correspondence. From April 2013, local authorities will be responsible for commissioning this support and individual local authorities may decide to make this available through local HealthWatch.

What is the role of local authorities?

The Health and Social Care Bill 2011, currently in parliament, sets out the responsibilities of local authorities and local HealthWatch as follows:

- Local authorities will be responsible for funding local HealthWatch organisations
- Local authorities will commission a local HealthWatch organisation
- Local authorities will be responsible for ensuring accountability and value for money (of Local HealthWatch organisations)

What is ICAS?

Independent advocacy services in England for those wishing to complain about the NHS are provided currently by ICAS, which provides client-centred support to people in England wishing to complain about the treatment or care they received under the National Health Service (NHS). The Department of Health (DoH) currently has responsibility for management of the ICAS contracts and the quality of services provided.

Under the proposals in the Health and Social Care Bill local authorities will take on the responsibility for commissioning of ICAS from April 2013.

Local HealthWatch and ICAS

Subject to the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill, local HealthWatch organisations will be established in October 2012 and continue the functions currently provided by Local Involvement Networks (LINKs), which will cease to exist when Local HealthWatch comes into being.

From October 2012, subject to parliamentary approval, local HealthWatch will also signpost people to information about health and social care services. This is one of a range of services currently provided by the PCT Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS).

In April 2013, local authorities will take on the responsibility for commissioning NHS complaints advocacy services, either from local HealthWatch or a third party provider. If a third party is commissioned by the local authority, local HealthWatch will signpost patients and members of the public to the relevant service. The Department of Health's (DoH) Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) currently performs this function.

The Department of Health will allocate funding to local authorities for the new responsibilities when they transfer to local HealthWatch as part of the Learning Disabilities and Health Reform grant. This consultation will inform the Department's decision about how this new funding will be allocated to local authorities.

This funding comes on top of the existing funding for LINKs, which is currently allocated as part of the local government Formula Grant and is not affected by this consultation.