

Open Letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Re: The Future of Public Voice and the Importance of Independent Advocacy

Dear Secretary of State,

We, the Chief Officers/Chairs of local Healthwatch services across England, are deeply concerned by the government's proposal to bring public voice functions under the control of local authorities and NHS bodies - undermining the independence that makes public feedback effective.

For over a decade, Healthwatch has served as a trusted, impartial voice for members of the public, carers, and communities. Our statutory independence enables us to speak truth to power, challenge poor practice, and amplify the experiences of those too often unheard - particularly the most vulnerable and those with the most complex needs. We work constructively with local systems, but always with the freedom to raise concerns without fear or favour.

The Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust scandal stands as a stark reminder of the consequences of failing to listen. The Francis Inquiry made clear that independent scrutiny and public advocacy are essential. It also exposed the failure of local democratic scrutiny mechanisms, which lacked the expertise to detect serious failings - giving false reassurance to regulators.

Bringing public voice functions in-house risks creating a system where feedback is filtered, inconvenient truths are softened, and accountability is diluted. It sends the wrong message at a time when public trust in institutions must be rebuilt, not eroded.

We have countless examples of where people have chosen to share their experiences with local Healthwatch instead of providers, due to fear of repercussions, previous dismissal, or lack of access. People often tell us we are the first service to truly listen and the only one that follows up to ensure they receive the support needed.

Beyond gathering feedback, Healthwatch provides trusted, independent information and signposting to help people navigate complex health and care systems. We also respond to concerns from the public by carrying out Enter and View visits and conducting focused research that has resulted in real changes to local services. Our local knowledge and impartial advice are often the only support available to those struggling to access services - something not readily offered by the NHS or local authorities, nor covered in the new 10-Year Health Plan.

Since 1974 there has been continuous parliamentary support for independent public voice initiatives being able to hold services to account. Therefore, we urge you to reconsider this direction. Instead of dismantling independence, we should be

strengthening it - ensuring every community has access to strong, well-resourced, and fearless local public voice initiatives that hold services to account and shape care that truly meets people's needs.

We ask to meet with you to discuss why preserving independent public voice is essential. We remain committed to improving services - but cannot do so effectively if our independence is compromised.

Yours sincerely,

The Chief Officers/Chairs of 131 Local Healthwatch services

Manisha Modhvadia	Healthwatch Barking and Dagenham
Debra Gordon	Healthwatch Barnet
Sarah Campbell	Healthwatch Barnet
Dan Rogers	Healthwatch Barnet, Healthwatch Croydon, Healthwatch Haringey and Healthwatch Hounslow
Lesley Cooper	Healthwatch Barnsley
Amrit Kaur	Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire
Kevin Peltonen-Messenger	Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset, Healthwatch Bristol, Healthwatch Gloucestershire, Healthwatch North Somerset, Healthwatch South Glos, Healthwatch Swindon and Healthwatch Wiltshire
Simone Kerr	Healthwatch Bexley
Andy Cave	Healthwatch Birmingham and Healthwatch Solihull
Sarah Johns	Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen
Julie Darbyshire	Healthwatch Bolton
Helen Rushworth	Healthwatch Bradford & District
Patricia Zebiri	Healthwatch Brent
Gina Aston	Healthwatch Brent, Healthwatch Kensington & Chelsea and Healthwatch Westminster
Alan Boyd	Healthwatch Brighton and Hove
Geoffrey Bowden	Healthwatch Brighton and Hove
Carolina Echegaray	Healthwatch Bristol, Healthwatch North Somerset and Healthwatch South Gloucestershire
Charlotte Bradford	Healthwatch Bromley
Zoe McIntosh	Healthwatch Bucks
Andrew Holland	Healthwatch Bury
Stacey Appleyard	Healthwatch Calderdale and Healthwatch Kirklees
Jess Slater	Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Healthwatch Peterborough
Stephen Heard	Healthwatch Camden
Diana Blackmun	Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire
Louise Barry	Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West
Rachel Cleave	Healthwatch City of London
Debbie Gilbert	Healthwatch Cornwall
Julia Catharall	Healthwatch County Durham

David Blacklock	Healthwatch County Durham, Healthwatch Cumberland, Healthwatch Lancashire, Healthwatch Stockton-On-Tees and Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness
Sally Thoburn	Healthwatch Cumberland
Michelle Thompson	Healthwatch Darlington
James Moore	Healthwatch Derby
Helen Henderson	Healthwatch Derbyshire
Pat Harris	Healthwatch Devon, Healthwatch Plymouth and Healthwatch Torbay
Fran Joel	Healthwatch Doncaster
Louise Bate	Healthwatch Dorset
Jason Griffiths	Healthwatch Dudley
Carleen Duffy	Healthwatch Ealing, Healthwatch Hammersmith and Fulham, Healthwatch Hillingdon and Healthwatch Lewisham
Helen Grimwood	Healthwatch East Riding, Healthwatch Hull, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire and Healthwatch North Lincolnshire
Carrie Duran	Healthwatch East Riding, Healthwatch Hull, Healthwatch North Lincolnshire, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire
Veronica Kirwan	Healthwatch East Sussex
Sam Glover	Healthwatch Essex
Yvonne Probert	Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle
Lucy White	Healthwatch Gloucestershire
Dave Wilson	Healthwatch Halton
Lydia Hughes	Healthwatch Halton and Healthwatch Warrington
Stephen John	Healthwatch Hampshire, Healthwatch Portsmouth, Healthwatch Reading, Healthwatch Somerset, Healthwatch Southend, Healthwatch West Berkshire and Healthwatch Wokingham Borough
Paull Addae	Healthwatch Haringey
Yaa Asamany	Healthwatch Harrow
Christopher Ackers-Belcher	Healthwatch Hartlepool
Ian Buckmaster	Healthwatch Havering
Christine Price	Healthwatch Herefordshire
Ivana Chalmers	Healthwatch Hertfordshire
Lisa Taylor	Healthwatch Hillingdon
Lynn Hill	Healthwatch Hillingdon
Aastha Binjrajka	Healthwatch Hounslow
Catherine Fuller	Healthwatch Isles of Scilly
Laura Saksena	Healthwatch Islington
Robbie Goatham	Healthwatch Kent
Stephen Bitti	Healthwatch Kingston upon Thames
David Aspin	Healthwatch Knowsley
Paul Mavers	Healthwatch Knowsley
Folake Segun	Healthwatch Lambeth
Hannah Davies	Healthwatch Leeds
Gemma Barrow	Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire

Liz Ball	Healthwatch Lincolnshire
Navaz Sutton	Healthwatch Lincolnshire
Sarah Thwaites	Healthwatch Liverpool
Pat Lattimer	Healthwatch Luton
Neil Walbran	Healthwatch Manchester
Svajune Ulinskiene	Healthwatch Medway
Dave Curtis	Healthwatch Merton
Maxine Taffetani	Healthwatch Milton Keynes
Danielle Ruane	Healthwatch Network Greater Manchester
Pratima Dattani	Healthwatch North Northamptonshire
Paul Jones	Healthwatch North Tyneside
Ashley Green	Healthwatch North Yorkshire
Derry Nugent	Healthwatch Northumberland
Sabrina Taylor	Healthwatch Nottingham and Healthwatch Nottinghamshire
Veronica Barry	Healthwatch Oxfordshire
Alice Kunjappy-Clifton	Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham
Cathy Turland	Healthwatch Redbridge
Mike Derry	Healthwatch Richmond
Simon Boddis	Healthwatch Richmond
Kate Jones	Healthwatch Rochdale
Margaret Parker	Healthwatch Rochdale
Duncan Gall	Healthwatch Rotherham
Kate Holt	Healthwatch Rutland and Healthwatch West Northamptonshire
Sam Cook	Healthwatch Salford
Alexia Farmer	Healthwatch Sandwell
Amritpal Randhawa	Healthwatch Sandwell
Diane Blair	Healthwatch Sefton
Lucy Davies	Healthwatch Sheffield
Lynn Cawley	Healthwatch Shropshire
Sheila Scott	Healthwatch South Tyneside
Amanda Kelly	Healthwatch Southampton
Owen Richards	Healthwatch Southend
Rhyana Ebanks-Babb	Healthwatch Southwark
Jayne Parkinson-Loftus	Healthwatch St Helens
Anna Mather	Healthwatch Staffordshire
Maria Kildunne	Healthwatch Stockport
Simon Fogell	Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent and Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin
Andy Yacoub	Healthwatch Suffolk
Samantha Botsford	Healthwatch Surrey
Janet Wingrove	Healthwatch Sutton
Alex Leach	Healthwatch Tameside
Andy Latham	Healthwatch Trafford
Lewis Smith-Connell	Healthwatch Wakefield
Aileen Farrer	Healthwatch Walsall
Dianne Barham	Healthwatch Waltham Forest

Stephen Hickey

Norman Holding

Kate Rees

Lacey Briscoe

Kirsteen Sheppard

Stacey Lewis

Siân Balsom

Healthwatch Wandsworth

Healthwatch Warrington

Healthwatch Westmorland and Furness

Healthwatch Wigan and Leigh

Healthwatch Wirral

Healthwatch Wolverhampton

Healthwatch York