

Joint Meeting of the Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission and the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Commission – 27th January 2015

Healthwatch Update – Leicester City Council's response

The purpose of Healthwatch is to act as the champion for local people, by ensuring that people's health and social care needs are heard, understood and met.

This will be achieved by:

- Listening to people, especially the most vulnerable, to understand their experiences and what matters most to them
- Influencing those who have the power to change services, so that they better meet people's needs now and into the future
- Empowering and informing people to get the most from their health and social care services and encouraging other organisations to do the same
- Championing service improvement across the health and social care systems

The following information provides an overview of the current position relating to Healthwatch Leicester, as requested by the joint scrutiny commission.

The contract for the development of Healthwatch was awarded to VAL in early 2013. The tender highlighted that the development of Healthwatch was still subject to further guidance. The regulations were published after the tender closing date in December 2012. Initially the contract was for a 3 year period, due to the uncertainty around the final guidance.

A number of clarification meetings were held with VAL about the need for an independent Healthwatch body. The Council was clear that an independent body was needed to make decisions about the priorities for Healthwatch Leicester and to influence and champion improvements across the health and care economy in the City.

Confirmation was received on 9th May 2013 that VAL would agree to the transitioning of Healthwatch Leicester into an independent body by 1st April 2014.

Philip Parkinson was appointed as the interim chairperson and was being supported by VAL to create an independent body.

Karen Chouhan was appointed as the permanent chairperson, supported by Philip Parkinson, whilst the independent board was created.

On 28th February 2014 a meeting was held with Philip Parkinson, Keven Liles (VAL) and Council Officers where it was agreed that VAL would agree to novate the contract to the newly formed Healthwatch Leicester Ltd. A target date of 1st October 2014 was agreed.

At the meeting it was agreed that the independent body would need to assure the Council that it was 'fit for purpose' and able to deliver a Healthwatch service for the City. It was agreed that the independent body would need to provide a range of evidence and documents to the Council.

The City Council received correspondence from VAL on 6th October 2014, raising concerns about the capability of the independent body to deliver a Healthwatch service in the City. None of the issues appeared to be unresolvable.

Therefore, a meeting was arranged for 6th November 2014, to discuss the issues and to seek a way forward. However, Linda Jones chairperson of VAL advised that VAL's Board would not agree to the novation of the contract.

Following this meeting Karen Chouhan and Philip Parkinson resigned as did a number of other Healthwatch board members.

The provision of a Healthwatch service is a statutory requirement and they have a place on the Health and Wellbeing Board and other key Health and Social Care meetings, where they can raise issues on behalf of the local community. At this time there is a lack of presence from Healthwatch board members.

Contract monitoring information is being provided by VAL, which shows they appear to be delivering to the required performance outcomes. However, concerns relate to the lack of a Healthwatch presence, an inability to raise and influence key issues, which is a major concern, especially with the state of the current health and care economy in the City.

The City Council has met with VAL to discuss the situation and they are aware that they are required to have an independent board in place by 1st June 2015.

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