

Healthwatch Hertfordshire Board Meeting
10am on Thursday 27th March 2025, Online

Board Members: Eve Atkins, Alan Bellinger, Ryan Heard, Amanda Hutchinson, Neil Tester (Chair)

Executive Team: Ivana Chalmers (Chief Executive), Fiona Corcoran (Deputy Chief Executive), Nuray Ercan (Deputy Chief Executive, Governance and Operations)

Visitors/others: Susan Ebanyat (HCC Commissioner)

Apologies: Alex Booth, Jan Davies, Enoch Kanagaraj

1. Welcome, apologies and register of interests

Neil welcomed everyone present and communicated apologies, as above. Register of interests are correct as at the time of publication.

[Action: Nuray to follow up with Ramone re potential change of employer and update register of interests accordingly.](#)

2. Minutes of 28th November 2024 and outstanding actions

[The minutes were approved as an accurate record and signed off.](#)

Neil noted that both actions are complete and will duly be removed from the actions tracker.

3. Chair's update

Neil referred to his report circulated as part of the meeting papers and highlighted the following:

- Is delighted that Amanda has offered, and has been unanimously elected to be Vice Chair. He thanked her and said that he is looking forward to working with her going forward. Amanda thanked the Board for supporting her nomination into the Vice Chair role and is very pleased and honoured to be taking it up.
- Neil thanked Board for taking the time to attend Board 1:1s.
- Applications closed for Trustee recruitment on Monday and will be shortlisting tomorrow. Thanked the staff team for their efforts to support the process which has successfully built on the efforts of last year.
- Much of the focus for this meeting will focus on plans and resources for the coming year and he said that he is heartened by the cohesive papers brought to the meeting to enable this crystallisation of upcoming plans.
- There is continuing and accelerating uncertainty in our external environment so being clear in our plans whilst being agile is important for us, and the work as presented in papers gives us this clarity of focus and purpose so we are in a good place to respond to change

[Board noted the Chair's report.](#)

4. Chief Executive's update

Ivana referred to her report circulated as part of the meeting papers and highlighted the following:

- Her paper sets the scene for what is coming in the paper pack and outlines how we arrived at all the various critical milestones. She thanked the Board for their support and the staff team for their thinking and aligning to bring this all together.

- Our contract monitoring reporting is currently under review and together we are thinking about how best to report to give our Commissioners all the evidence of how we are discharging our duties and how we are supporting communities. Ivana drew everyone's attention to the Compliments document highlighting that the team get a lot of positive feedback from our partners and from the signposting service.

Board commented on the general decline of the social media platform X by many users. Ivana confirmed that the Comms team are aware of this and various audiences and channels are being considered as part of the Comms Growth plans. Additionally a query regarding having an indictor against Instagram was mentioned. Ivana noted that it is difficult to predict the speed of growth and we are using it as a targeted platform to reach the general public. The comms team are thinking about how to leverage this platform's own benefit and approach, as it is very different from others.

[Board noted the report.](#)

5. Pre-Election Period of Sensitivity

Fiona referred to the paper circulated and noted that we are following the same approach that we have done in the past, which is also in line with Healthwatch England and Herts County Council guidance, and has been crossed against NHS guidance. The paper outlines the key things to think about both as an organisation and as an individual. We avoid publishing new findings or launching new consultations during this period and it will be back to business as usual on 2nd May. It is at this point that we plan to engage with the new Councillors.

[Board noted the guidance.](#)

6. Annual Business Plan

Ivana highlighted that the Annual Business plan is a framework, but that this is a snapshot in time and it will continue to be developed as we move forward with it. In light of what is emerging in the environment and the change we can see coming, it could have an effect, so we must be ready to change approach in a flexible way.

We are using this annual plan as a framework to develop individual and team work plans, and having some measures of success to review. It had been created with the whole team's input.

Some strands are new and some are core which we already do really well. At the top of our priority list and thinking is ensuring that we fundamentally make a difference to Hertfordshire's communities and what we can uniquely deliver as a Healthwatch.

For each core theme within the plan; there are activities across the year of planning and enabling work, and then we also need to evaluate. There are also points where we will bring information and progress back to Board so that there can be deep dives so that strategic steers and principles can be identified.

Ivana and Neil reflected that there are different considerations about the work, where Healthwatch might be a champion, convenor/connector, or contributor. This approach is not commenting on effort, rather whether we are a lead or a support in the work of others.

Ivana thanked Board for their feedback and support, and asked if there is anything more to feed in for the team to consider. Board commented that it has been really good to be part of the process of developing the plan and it has felt that there has been some genuine involvement from Board which has been reflected well within the plan. Success measures are really important and having goals is helpful for the team for reflection purposes.

Board approved the Business Plan

7. Financial year 2025 – 26 budget

Neil thanked Alan, Natalie and Ivana for all the work that has gone into the budget process this year and handed over to Alan to talk to the 2025-26 budget.

Alan noted that receiving the confirmation of uplift from HCC was really helpful and we have embedded this into the budget now. Alan conveyed his appreciation to Susan and noted that this has helped our position for next year.

Alan highlighted the following information within the paper:

- There is an increase in staff costs which is fundamentally due to National Insurance
- Our core funding from HCC has been increased by 6%
- Our ability to generate external revenue next year is constrained
- This year we are predicting a loss of £11.8k and our deficit for next year is anticipated to be £64k
- Our contingency reserves next year will be £221k so our total reserves for the end of this year will be nearly £375k and with this budget our reserves will be £310k which will mean that we will have £68k in our general reserves
- Although the anticipated deficit is somewhat different from previous budgets, we must recognise the change in the working environment. However, reassured that we have put together a robust budget for the next year

Ivana thanked Alan and Natalie in particular and echoed Alan's comments saying that listening to partners and learning about budget pressures, means we have had to take a pragmatic approach to next year's budget. Thankfully the success of the organisation has established such a good baseline which means we are very privileged to have sufficient reserves, without concern that we are projecting a deficit. This allows us space to make future plans about financial sustainability. We are trialling different approaches, and partnering with organisations, to grow our core value and pull in partners to raise impact, informed by our annual business plan, which should in turn continue to position us as a partner worth investing in.

In response to a question about the lower income generation figure for next year and whether this is a conservative estimate, this was confirmed as such. Ivana noted that we have a number of longer term projects that are coming to an end in this financial year and so it captures the fact that stream of longer term funding is coming to an end, which we can't guarantee a renewal for.

Board approved the budget for 2025-26

8. Research and Engagement Annual Plan

Talking to the paper and plan circulated Ivana recapped that we have brought this to Board previously and have incorporated their reflections into our approach. This paper brings to light the

story of where we are and the phasing of work along with the balances and nuances we have to take when we think about our work such as breadth, depth, geography, where we add value, past focus etc. We've spoken to many partners and stakeholders in the system and there is a real perception that Healthwatch has credibility in bringing objectivity that other organisations do not have the privilege of doing so. Over the next year we are also looking at the cost basis of our work and partnering for impact. Underneath this will sit a very detailed plan for each strand of work. How we talk about our work makes a difference as well as about holding history and seeing through change over a longer period of time. We aim to zoom out a little more broadly from our work and make links and connections about the bigger picture and will pilot a way of communicating this. In all of our work is a golden thread of mental health and financial health impacts.

Board were pleased to see the focus on partnership working throughout and leveraging insights from other organisations.

Board also reflected how useful it was to see what is coming out of our core funding and what is additionally commissioned in helping us get assurance that the things that we are doing under our core contract are in line with our unique Healthwatch range of functions. Also looking at the distinction between the kinds of issues and approaches that we are using our core funding for and how that work is complemented by and expanded on by additionally commissioned work.

In Chloe's absence, Ivana thanked her for pulling this together and it is a huge credit to her that she was able to convey our work in the coming year in such a clear way and with so many partner's contributions.

[Board approved the Research and Engagement Annual plan for the coming year.](#)

9. Board Advisory Committee (BAC)

Alan updated that the BAC had a productive meeting and focusing on budget, ensuring that it was robust enough to recommend it to the Board. Additionally BAC looked at the research and engagement programme for the coming year in order to provide early feedback. He thanked everyone who contributed.

10. Management accounts as at December 2024

Before handing over to Alan, Neil highlighted that it might look slightly odd that the management accounts do not marry up completely with the more updated figures within the earlier agenda item on budget. This is because it is good governance practice to look at the management accounts on a cyclical basis, so the snapshot provided is for the prior quarter.

Alan asked for the management accounts as at December 2024 to be taken as read.

[Board signed off the Management Accounts as at December 2024.](#)

11. Any other business including questions from the public – NA

12. Part 2 – Closed

Next formal meeting of the Board: Tuesday 10th June 2025