

Chair's Update

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Board and organisational developments

Health Bill

Almost a year after the Government's initial announcement, on 14 May the [Health Bill](#) received its First Reading in the House of Commons and was published. The [explanatory notes](#) to the Bill describe the mechanisms being proposed to abolish Healthwatch England and transfer local Healthwatch statutory functions as follows:

"The statutory functions of Healthwatch England will be transferred to the Secretary of State, who will have responsibility for overseeing the collection of more informed feedback from patients and carers and making this information publicly available. The Bill abolishes Local Healthwatch. Local Healthwatch arrangements are currently the responsibility of local authorities. Local authorities enter into contracts with social enterprises to carry out engagement with local people. Once the contracts are agreed, the social enterprise can carry out their functions using the Local Healthwatch trademark. The Bill provides for the statutory functions of Local Healthwatch to be transferred to ICBs for health services, and to local authorities for social care services and their public health services."

There is little detail on the face of the Bill about how public bodies would be expected to deliver their new responsibilities. This is expected to be fleshed out in regulations and directions.

I will provide more information about what this could mean for us in practice, and how the proposals are being received, at the meeting. However it is worth noting that the Government has confirmed that even if passed as originally drafted, the Bill will not preclude the NHS or local authorities from delivering some or all of the transferred functions by commissioning organisations such as ours. It is also worth noting that a wide range of organisations are expressing concerns about this proposal and as yet no-one outside government has expressed support. It remains to be seen whether the resignations of the Secretary of State and the junior minister responsible for Healthwatch will affect the Government's approach to the Bill.

The Bill will be debated and receive its Second Reading on 1 June, ahead of our meeting. This may provide us with more information.

Our strategic awayday planned for later this month thus comes at an important time for us and will be central to determining our next steps.

Annual report and Annual General Meeting

I am grateful to the trustees who were able at short notice to join the recent informal discussion on the framing and content of our annual report and the AGM. I know the staff are working hard on the report and am looking forward to celebrating its publication towards the end of the month, following Board sign-off.

Charity Commission guidance

The Charity Commission has recently updated its [guidance on conflicts of interests](#). In addition to our standard procedures of maintaining our register of interests and considering any potential conflicts at the start of each meeting, I am conscious that we are entering a fluid period where issues that might not previously have presented a conflict might need to be thought about differently. It would be helpful if all trustees could please read the new guidance so we can make sure we continue to handle these issues appropriately.

2. Items for the Board to note

Board members previously considered a specific potential item of expenditure and gave approval by email for me to take Chair's action if the final figure exceeded the level which the Chief Executive could approve but did not exceed the upper estimate. In order for us to have a clear audit trail, please can the Board note that I took the necessary Chair's action as agreed?

As recommended by the Board Advisory Committee, the Board approved an updated Reserves Policy, subject to a minor addition. The final version is attached as Appendix A and the Board is asked to note the policy's approval.

3. Local system developments and meetings

I will provide a verbal update on a busy and productive couple of months, during which we have continued to influence and shape future plans and structures, and circulate a note to the Board following the meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS – The Board is asked to:

1. Consider and note the update, including the items for noting in section 2.