

Chair's update

FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION/DECISION

1. **Board developments**

I was delighted by the excellent response to our recent trustee recruitment round and by the strength of the applications received. It was great to hear candidates talking about the positive impression they had of Healthwatch Hertfordshire and how that had been enhanced by the professional manner in which our staff team was dealing with them and by the summary of the business plan that we shared with them. I am grateful to all those board members who took part in the assessment process. At the end of this paper is a recommendation to note the decisions made electronically by the board.

In my last update I mentioned the 1:1 conversations concerning board members' increased capacity to represent us externally. I'm delighted to say that Amanda Hutchinson is now representing us at the Integrated Care Board's Primary Care Transformation Committee and that Ramone Samuda and Amanda will now be playing an increasing role in our relationship with the West Herts Trust.

2. **Organisational developments**

I write this having recently drafted my introduction to the 2024-25 annual report, and we will be meeting shortly before the board is given the draft report for feedback before sign-off. As always, I'm struck by just how far we've come in 12 months and how much difference we've made. This year, it's particularly noteworthy that we're cataloguing so many achievements during a year which was roughly divided in half between two chief executives. Organisations typically experience a dip in performance during those transitions and it's a credit to all concerned that this has not been the case for us. I'm looking forward to us being able to make the report public shortly and to celebrate it with our partners and stakeholders at next month's annual general meeting.

3. **National and local system context**

Ivana's chief executive's update provides a helpful summary of the way the current NHS structural changes are shaping up. These issues are likely to require our continuing attention, and to have practical implications for us, for some time. However they represent only one piece of the jigsaw puzzle (albeit a pretty large piece). The day after our meeting, the Chancellor will announce the results of her multi-year spending review, with consequences not just for the NHS and social care but for local authorities and a range of other public services that have an impact upon people's health and wellbeing. We are also expecting the

NHS 10-Year Plan to be published in June. Our board strategy session in July should therefore be well-timed to help us make sense of how those changes and announcements fit together.

May's local elections also delivered a change in administration at the county council. I am looking forward to us continuing to work effectively with councillors in executive roles and those who scrutinise decisions, including through our interactions with them on the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Integrated Care Partnership, the Health Scrutiny Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It is worth noting that the Government has now responded to the initial submission from the county, district and borough councils in relation to the proposed move to unitary authorities and has confirmed that elections to shadow authorities are likely to take place in 2027 before those authorities go live in April 2028.

4. **'Holding to account' and other meetings**

A number of the meetings at which I would usually have represented Healthwatch since March were cancelled or postponed due to the local system changes and the council elections. These are now beginning to pick up momentum again. However, Ivana and I have had several useful meetings with leaders of individual organisations as well as our annual sessions with the ambulance Trust and the HUC urgent care service. It was good to have an initial meeting with the new West Herts Chair, Catherine Dugmore, and we are hoping to build upon the existing effective executive relationships there by deepening our relationship with the Trust's board.

RECOMMENDATIONS – The Board is asked to:

1. Note the board's decisions, made electronically:
 - a. To make three nominations for election as trustees at the Annual General Meeting and to recruit a further trustee, to serve as treasurer, in the Autumn of 2025.
 - b. To agree in principle to establish a finance working group, to include interested trustees and appropriate staff, to ensure that the Board has a sufficient understanding of our financial processes ahead of the treasurer handover, and to agree membership and terms of reference at a later date.
 - c. To nominate Karen Middleton, Natalie Kelly and Yolanda Roach for election as trustees at the 2025 Annual General Meeting.
2. Note the report.