

Chief Executive's update

FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

1. Board developments

Given key aspects of our governance context were covered in the Chair's update, I will keep this section brief.

Firstly, I want to extend my own warm welcome to our three new trustees, on behalf of all the staff at Healthwatch. The induction process has progressed very successfully and is something the team should take pride in, given the broader context. We all look forward to upcoming sessions where new trustees will meet all members of staff and learn more about the detail of our work.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge that given the busy agenda and the previous conversations at Board Advisory Committee, my thanks for the opportunity to formally recognise two update papers during the closed session of the board. One from the directors of Healthwatch Hertfordshire Trading Limited on our activities over the past year, and, the final adjustments made by our accountants in the presentation of the Healthwatch Hertfordshire Annual Accounts. The updates will be raised during the public meeting to ensure we have public record of these developments.

2. Organisational developments

As the Chair outlined in his paper, there has been and continues to be an evolving picture and we are not yet working within a certainty of the outcomes of the changes ahead. This has been a challenging time for staff, as they both continue to deliver outstanding and meaningful impact to our local communities, whilst also anticipating various scenarios of what the future might hold. We were pleased to be able to celebrate last year's phenomenal achievements during our AGM and continue to welcome the outpouring of support from local partners and stakeholders, and our communities.

As a Healthwatch, we provide something quite unique in our work, as illustrated by the item on Quality Accounts on the agenda, where our connections to communities and understanding of the system creates a

bridge across which we can help others navigate positive improvements in health and care services for all.

We will continue to deliver high quality signposting, research, engagement and holding to account functions, and ensure people's voices continue inform decision makers about what changes are needed, as long as we can. Whilst there is uncertainty, the staff continue to deliver to the benefit of all in Hertfordshire – and I must extend my sincere gratitude for the supportive and conscientious working environment they uphold.

I am very grateful to the Board for their continued support of the staff team, but especially for putting into place a comprehensive package of support in order to help us have multiple options to navigate any concerns and anxieties, and bolster our resilience through additionally provided external support and facilitation.

I would also like to wish a dear colleague, Deputy Chief Executive Fiona Corcoran, all the best as she takes up a Regional Manager role at the Electoral Commission. The legacy of her work at Healthwatch, and the respect she has gained as a colleague will continue to shine, and we wish her all the best.

3. National and local system context

Healthwatch England have recently written to local Healthwatch about their approach to services they provide during the transition process. In practice, and for now (recognising they may have staffing changes that make this challenging in future), they will continue to provide important support of our work by sharing briefings, facilitating networks, and providing tools and resources (e.g. website, Smart Survey). We welcome this confirmation, but will begin to make plans for when this is no longer available.

Local Healthwatch organisations each have a unique operating environment, and are independent charities in their own right, and will need to make decisions about their future on the basis of the circumstances in their local environment. However, given the core values underpinning all of our work, there has been an increase in conversations between local Healthwatch across the country about ways of supporting

each other and mobilising on opportunities. There are two working groups that have been established, one about monitoring the national political picture and hoping to influence and shape by coordinating a response as local Healthwatch (given Healthwatch England cannot do so), and the other is around articulating the strengths and the offer that local Healthwatch can make to local stakeholders, once the legislative changes are in effect.

I am staying close to all of these conversations, in order that we get the full range of intelligence, insight and support. Locally, I have also been in conversations with our East of England CEO network, and two of the Healthwatch CEOs part of our clustered ICB, so that we can coordinate our activities and seek opportunities together.

4. Planning for the future and ensuring sound decision making

Given the scenario modelling ahead of us, I am pleased to say that the Board decision to enable the procurement of financial modelling expertise has allowed me to immediately begin work and, I look forward to the formal establishment of the Future Planning Working Group who will leverage this expertise to present options for decision-making to the Board.

I am also grateful to Board's commitment to minimise uncertainty and mitigate risk, and you will see this agenda will bring a review of our workload and priorities for the year to ensure prioritisation of our core functions and services, and focus on what's most important to local communities and our partners, as well as a refresh of our risk register to enable better planning and sound decision making.