Healthwatch Hertfordshire Board Meeting
2pm on Thursday 28th August 2025, Online

Board Members: Eve Atkins, Alan Bellinger, Alex Booth, Amanda Hutchinson, Jan Taylor, Ryan Heard, Karen Middleton, Yolanda Roach, Ramone Samuda (left at 3:30), Neil Tester (Chair)	
Executive Team: Jane Brown (Quality Manager), Ivana Chalmers (Chief Executive), Fiona Corcoran (Deputy Chief Executive), Nuray Ercan (Deputy Chief Executive, Governance and Operations)	
Visitors/others:	
Apologies: Enoch Kanagaraj, Natalie Kelly, Amy Willcox-Smith	

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1. Welcome, apologies and register of interests
Neil welcomed everyone present and noted apologies, as above. Register of interests are correct as at the time of publication.

2. New Trustees welcome
Neil welcomed new Trustee colleagues to their first Board meeting in public.

3. Minutes and actions 10th June
The minutes were approved as an accurate record and signed off.
It was noted that both actions are complete and can now be removed.

4. Chair's update
Neil referred to his report circulated as part of the meeting papers and highlighted the following:
- Both Eve and Alan are nearing completing their phenomenal 9 years on the Board. Neil and Board expressed their gratitude to them.
- Meg Carter carried on representing the organisation in relation to West Herts Hospital Trust meetings and is stepping down as a volunteer, now that new arrangements are in place with Ramone and Amanda taking over. Neil and Board gave thanks to Meg Carter.

In response to a query about any further information about the Integrated Care Board's transition timescales and how this might affect us, Neil surmised that changes would come after the clustering arrangements are fully in place. Additionally Neil highlighted that he was involved in one of the external panels for some of the very senior level recruitment for the new ICB last week. Beyond this we still don't know any more about timetables for the change in legislation however it is looking likely that it will be included in the King's speech in the middle of November. Neil confirmed that he will be keeping a close eye on what happens with this agenda over the coming months.

The Board agreed:
- To thank Eve, Alan and Meg for their service.
- To establish a Future Planning Working Group, to supersede the planned finance group, on the basis of the terms of reference and membership discussed in the private session.
- To agree the next wave of meeting dates by email.

The following items were noted:

- The appointment of Amanda Hutchinson as the Board Advisory Committee Chair, taking over from Alan Bellinger
- The Board's decisions, made electronically:
  - To provide for a staff support offer
  - To procure external advice where appropriate, including financial modelling support imminently
- The Board Advisory Committee's consideration of the health and safety audit. Thanks were noted for Jan, Natalie and Nuray on the work in this area
- The Chair's report

5. Chief Executive's update

Ivana highlighted points from her paper:

- She welcomed the new Trustees
- Thanked the Board for making sure we could immediately act on a staff support offer - the first of the peer support sessions took place this morning. This, alongside various other support mechanisms are now in place, and is much appreciated
- We have also sought external support with financial modelling to support the Future Planning Working Group, leveraging external expertise and creating resilience for us
- Thanked Fiona for the massive impact that she has had whilst at the organisation and for helping her to settle in. She will soon be moving onto work at the Electoral Commission. Board thanked Fiona and wished her well in her new role.

6. Recommendations from Board Advisory Committee - changes to

c) Annual Business Plan

Ivana introduced the item by highlighting that our annual planning process takes a great deal of consideration. It is shaped according to what is most important to the local public and where we can really add value, where we can work in partnership, but also where we are able to complement and support the work of others, and therefore not duplicating.

Given that the external environment is changing, tweaks have been made to the plan to ensure its approach is still appropriate. Changes to the external environment has meant that we are investing more time and resource into certain areas and so we've deprioritised other areas that were no longer adding value. Sequencing of the work was also considered.

It is important to note that the changes in the plan are focused on delivering our core and statutory functions, and we are able to honour all our existing commitments. We are also refocusing to support staff wellbeing and retention, effective governance and financial sustainability.

Board signed off the changes to the Annual Business Plan

d) Annual Research and Engagement Programme

Ivana introduced the item by saying that we have similarly reviewed our annual research and engagement programme, which is one of the ways in which we hear from our more marginalized and underserved communities. The paper presented proposes small changes to two projects which were more forward looking and which have been scaled back into this business year in terms of ambition. The proposed changes do not affect any of our core commitments, contracts or services to the people of Hertfordshire, which continues to be the top priority for us.

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In her absence Neil fed in Natalie's comments supporting the annual business plan and research and engagement programme changes, and the establishment of the Future Planning Working Group.
Board agreed and signed off the changes to the Annual Research Programme

7. Risk register
The paper circulated contains a list of risks that capture conversations Board have had over several meetings regarding risks for the organisation, within the changing environment. This is an evolving picture and in the closed session of Board, it was agreed that this will be developed into a risk register to outline very clear mitigations. It was recommended that the risk register is brought to every Board Meeting and kept under review. It was noted that these risks represent the most strategic level and that there are other operational organisational risks that staff manage at a project level. It may further be expanded when the staff team have the opportunity to review and may add to the mitigations.
Action: To review the risk register at every Board Meeting going forward

It was noted that it is important that Board recognise that decisions may have to be made quickly and that Trustees will need to be able as responsive as possible. This may include Neil taking urgent Chair's action/decision between trustee meetings. In cases such as these Neil proposed that a similar approach be taken as previously whereby the Chair takes action and informs the Board at the earliest opportunity, normally via email. This would be for issues that were urgent but not necessarily strategically significant. In the main there would be time for an email to be circulated and for a decision to be made relatively quickly by consensus, if this was required.
Board agreed that Chair's action should be included within the next iteration of the risk register as a mitigation.

Board's appreciation for the work on mitigating key risks and updating the approach to the annual business plan was noted.

Neil observed that there were no additional risks to include and proposed that the draft register is taken to the Future Planning Working Group to refine and produce the full version to bring back to the November Board Meeting.
This proposal was agreed and the draft Risk Register was noted.

8. Quality Accounts approach overview
Jane introduced herself and provided key highlights.
We recently completed the annual review of quality accounts from 10 NHS providers in our area; this demonstrates our unique value in translating what can often be quite technical performance data into community focused insights. Our responses are aimed to bridge the gap between organisational reporting and what matters to local people, ensuring people's experiences continue to influence service delivery across the health system. The cross cutting themes identified patterns and opportunities that spanned organisational boundaries, particularly around health inequalities and inclusive technology adoption. We highlighted successful practices that could be replicated across providers, particularly around reasonable adjustments and coproduction approaches.
We referenced 6 pieces of our own research to inform provider priorities including doing work on health inequalities, international recruits and digital inclusion, and we established a large number

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of potential collaboration opportunities for next year which aligns with both provider priorities and community needs, positioning us as a strategic partner and not just as a commentator. Across the ten providers, four critical themes emerged: patient access and equity, communication and experience, system integration and workforce and culture. Other highlights include the usual challenges like waiting times, particularly paediatrics, mental health and ambulance responses, ageing estates, hospital redevelopment delays. However progress was noted in areas such as dementia care, carer support, digital transformation and the use of AI and patient safety initiatives such as Martha's Rule. It was also evident that providers are trialling more coproduction approaches and using population health data to tackle inequalities. This review demonstrates HwH's unique position to identify system wide patterns that can sometimes be invisible to individual providers. We created collaboration opportunities that benefit both providers and communities, and we're ensuring community voices influences strategic decision making. The next step is the collaboration opportunities identified that provide a clear road map for deeper engagement over the coming year, focusing particularly on children's services, mental health and health inequalities. Ivana reflected that she (as well as Fiona and Neil) took part in the review and some of the documents were near a hundred pages, full of quite technical language. She supported Jane's point about our review being a translating tool between what communities are telling us and how providers think strategically about their performance, which only Healthwatch is uniquely placed to do. Board thanked Jane and the team involved for such a comprehensive and coherent piece of work. Board noted the quality accounts review paper.
9. Board Advisory Committee (BAC) update Alan highlighted that there were two deep dives at the last meeting: a discussion on the steps that we want to take going forward, ensuring the resilience of the organisation in the future and a session Jan led on health and safety. He concluded by saying that it had been a privilege to Chair the BAC over the years and was delighted to pass it onto the safe hands of Amanda and wished her every luck in in taking it forward in the future. Board's thanks were noted to Alan for ensuring that trustees were able to have very important discussions at Board Advisory Committee over the years. Board noted the update.
10. Management accounts as at June 2025 Alan presented the management accounts for the first quarter, April – June 2025, for Board sign off. He explained that the accounts were finalised before the news in July and although they are accurate to the time of production, the forecasts on the accounts will be updated in the next quarter. Alan confirmed that the organisation will still be in a strong position, with significant reserves, at the end of the year. Board approved the Management Accounts as at June 2025

11. Contract monitoring submission quarter 1 Nuray introduced the contract monitoring pack for quarter 1, April – June. Ivana added that the commissioners are happy with the documents in their current form. This tweaked format makes it easier for our commissioners to pull common data into a central dashboard across their various contracts but the fundamental content of them has not changed and everything we report on continues to be the case. This now completes the transition from the previous contract to the current, including all the reporting mechanisms that underpin it. A query was raised about whether discussions had started with commissioners about the annual review of the key performance indicators under the contract for next year to which Ivana responded by saying that local government changes may affect how quickly this happens for the next contract year. Over the past year Herts County Council have gone through a restructure and made a number of redundancies and then came newly elected Councillors. This all means that they are now starting to stabilise and we can start to look at our KPI's for next year and identify and risks related to reporting. Action: To include reporting on KPI's within the Risk Register
12. Any other business including questions from the public Jane's thanks to Eve and Alan, who she highlighted have been brilliant through her time at the organisation in supporting her with all the activities that she's asked them to do, particularly in the additional volunteering arena.
13. Closed CEO and Board session

Next formal meeting of the Board: Wednesday 26th November 2025

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