

Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership Board

Date: 7 November 2025
Subject: Greater Manchester's Response to the Abolition of Healthwatch
Report of: Eve Holt – Head of Policy and Implementation – GMCA

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

This report provides an update on actions agreed at the August ICP meeting following a discussion about the proposed abolition of Healthwatch in the NHS 10 Year Health Plan. A draft letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care voicing our concerns about the proposed abolition and GM's future plans is featured as an appendix to this paper. ICP members are asked to support the letter before it is sent to the Secretary of State, and to consider and discuss how best to ensure that independent patient and resident voice is maintained in future.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The GM Integrated Care Partnership Board are requested to:

- Support the messaging in the attached letter
- Review and offer feedback to the draft principles in Section 2.2.
- Consider and discuss how best to maintain independent public voice in the future.
- Note the update provided

Contact officer(s)

Name: Conor Dowling – Health and Care Policy Manager – GMCA
E-Mail: conor.dowling@nhs.net

1. INTRODUCTION – PUBLIC ICP MEETING OF 22ND AUGUST 2025

- 1.1. At the ICP meeting held on 22 August 2025, members discussed concerns arising from indications in the 10-Year Health Plan that Healthwatch would be abolished. During the conversation, members reflected that Healthwatch serves as a vital, independent voice for residents, especially those who are seldom heard, ensuring their experiences and concerns inform health and care services. Trusted by communities and partners at both place and city-regional level, Healthwatch acts as a bridge between people and the system, offering impartial insights grounded in lived experience. The work of Healthwatch has led to tangible improvements; from increasing cancer screening uptake among ethnic minority groups, to redesigning youth mental health services, enhancing accessibility in primary care, and shaping local responses during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2. There was a view that the proposal to dissolve Healthwatch threatens to silence this essential voice at a time of significant NHS reform, undermining transparency, accountability, and co-production across the system.
- 1.3. Following the discussion, ICP members agreed that:
 - Greater Manchester would ensure the independent patient voice was not lost from the healthcare system.
 - That the ICP Chairs should engage with the leaders of Healthwatch in GM to discuss how the organisation could be improved going forward.
 - That Healthwatch in GM leaders should highlight and demonstrate examples of distinct pieces of work delivered locally and across the city region to support the case for maintaining a function that elevates independent patient voice.
 - That the Chairs write to Government to express concern in Greater Manchester about the potential loss of independent functions which elevate patient voice as a result of the proposed abolition of Healthwatch organisations.

2. UPDATE ON ACTIONS TAKEN SINCE AUGUST ICP MEETING

- 2.1. Andy Burnham, as co-chair of the ICP, met with Heather Etheridge (Chair, Healthwatch in GM) and Danielle Ruane (Chief Network Officer – Healthwatch in GM) on 30th October to discuss these concerns. During the conversation it was agreed that a strong independent public voice must be maintained within the system. It was also highlighted that the proposed changes present an opportunity to make an offer nationally to describe how GM will do this effectively in line with the broader structural changes associated with NHS Reform.
- 2.2. The conversation led to the development of several principles to guide how this offer could be developed, which are:

- The independent public voice will be maintained, integrated and embedded effectively in the new system.
- Localised relationships will be maintained and strengthened in structures e.g. through linking with portfolio leads at Local Authority level.
- Local, place-based working will remain at the heart of how we work together
- We will embed population health principles as we continue to work closely with leaders across the localities and city region.
- We will ensure that the system is accessible for all, and that all of our communities are heard.

2.3. A letter for the attention of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has been prepared which flags the ICP's concerns about the proposed changes. The letter also features further information on the role of Healthwatch and information about the distinct pieces of work which the locality level and GM level organisations have led in recent years. The letter goes on to highlight that GM could lead nationally in development of an updated offer, featuring the draft design principles which underpin the system's stance.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The Integrated Care Partnership Board is asked to:

- Support the messaging in the attached letter
- Review and offer feedback to the draft principles in Section 2.2.
- Consider and discuss how best to maintain independent public voice in the future.
- Note the update provided