Local HealthWatch will be the local consumer champion for health and social care

* according to the UK Government’s Health & Social Care Bill

What will stay the same?

Local HealthWatch will keep the involvement and scrutiny functions of the Oxfordshire LINk (Local Involvement Network) including:

- promoting involvement
- obtaining views
- monitoring health and care services
- making reports and recommendations
- carrying out Enter & View visits.

What will be new?

- From October 2012 the Oxfordshire LINk will be taken over by Local HealthWatch – an independent statutory body
- Local HealthWatch will provide information about services to patients and service users and will support them to make choices
- There will be a HealthWatch representative on local Health & Wellbeing Boards: These boards will include local councillors, social care commissioners and GP commissioners. They will be responsible for overseeing the joined-up work of the County Council and local NHS. The head of Local HealthWatch will be on this Board and will tell the Board members what people in Oxfordshire have said about health and social care services, ensuring people’s views and experiences are at the heart of decision making. Further, commissioners such as the GP commissioners will be under a duty to work with Local HealthWatch.
- From 2013 Local HealthWatch will support and speak up for people who want to complain about the NHS: Currently this service (known as ICAS) is bought and organised at a national level. From April 2013 it will be the responsibility of local authorities (Councils); Oxfordshire County Council will therefore be responsible for arranging this further element of Local HealthWatch. Providing complaints advocacy and support requires specific skills, so the people providing this part of Local HealthWatch’s work may be different to those carrying out Local HealthWatch’s other roles.

When will this happen?

LINks will come to an end when Local HealthWatch contracts begin in October 2012.
HealthWatch in Oxfordshire & how you can get involved...

As you will see from this newsletter, the Government has given little detail on *HOW* Local HealthWatch should be run. This is because a lot is left up to Oxfordshire people to decide how it wants its Local HealthWatch for Oxfordshire to work.

Oxfordshire County Council is running a range of activities to give young people, children and adults across Oxfordshire the chance to have their say.

This work is being coordinated by a ‘HealthWatch Steering Group’ that includes members of the Oxfordshire LINk, young people, representatives of the voluntary sector, parents, carers and the NHS. An independent consultant, with extensive experience in supporting local authorities to develop LINks and Local HealthWatch, has been employed to support and advise the Steering Group.

So far we have run:

- 2 workshops for service users, patients, carers and the public a chance to discuss ideas for Local HealthWatch
- 3 focus groups for voluntary organisations, the LINk and public engagement staff to share their experiences
- A questionnaire to gather people’s and organisations’ ideas
- Debate at the Oxfordshire Youth Parliament and Children’s Parliament
- Outreach to targeted groups, (e.g. Age UK, Unlimited, the Children in Care Council)
- A session with County Councillors to hear their views and the views of the people they represent
- A Stakeholder Event for 70 people from across Oxfordshire, where results from the above events were presented and further detail of Local HealthWatch was developed

Results of this work are summarised in a **DISCUSSION DOCUMENT** for individuals and organisations across Oxfordshire to read and respond to:

[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/healthwatch](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/healthwatch)

or call 01865 323604 for a paper copy

What sort of organisation will Local HealthWatch be?

**Local HealthWatch will not be a ‘network’ like the LINk.** It will be a ‘corporate body’ meaning it has to be registered as a company, corporation, charity or similar.

The ‘corporate body’ that becomes Local HealthWatch for Oxfordshire will be selected through a tendering process coordinated by Oxfordshire County Council.

This process involves the County Council writing a contract, laying out what Local HealthWatch must provide and do. This will be based on what people have said in the consultation as well as what the law will require. The Council will then advertise for ‘corporate bodies’ to bid, or tender, for the contract. The ‘corporate body’ with the best bid will become the Local HealthWatch for Oxfordshire.
As a ‘corporate body’, Local HealthWatch will:

✓ be an independent organisation in its own right, not a network overseen by volunteer groups (as the LINk is) or the County Council or the NHS.
✓ be able to appoint its own staff
✓ have to produce its own annual accounts
✓ have to meet standards provided by the national HealthWatch organisation, Healthwatch England

Local HealthWatch ‘Members’:
The Health & Social Care Bill talks about Local HealthWatch Organisations having ‘members’. Members could be interested individuals, representatives of organisations (such as local charities) or the members could be organisations themselves (e.g. if a group of local charities came together).

Local HealthWatch Organisations will be able to employ their own staff. Therefore some members might be paid. There may be volunteers involved as well as these paid members.

The Government does say that Local HealthWatch members must be “representative of local communities”. Some people have raised concerns that this might be difficult to achieve, as volunteers from hard-to-reach sections of the community may not always put themselves forward for these sorts of roles. The ‘corporate body’ who wins the contract to provide Local HealthWatch for Oxfordshire will have to consider this carefully when it sets up in 2012.

How will Local HealthWatch be funded?

Local HealthWatch will be funded with money from central Government, via Local Authorities (in Oxfordshire this is the County Council).

The amount for each Local HealthWatch across England will be different, as it is worked out from the number of people in area, their ages, levels of deprivation and other factors. The amount available for 2012/2013 will be announced soon.

Additional money will also be added from April 2013. This will be for providing information to people and signposting them to services – one of the roles that is at present carried out by PALS at PCTs (see below); 65% of the money that went to the PCT PALS will come to Local HealthWatch. There will also be money for the role of support and advocacy for people who want to complain about NHS services. This role is at present carried out by ICAS, the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service. When Local Health Watch takes over this role, all of the money for ICAS will instead go to Local HealthWatch.

So, from April 2013, the Local HealthWatch budget is roughly calculated as:

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\text{Former LINk budget} + \text{About 65% of PALS budget} + \text{Current ICAS budget} = \text{Local HealthWatch budget}
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However, this Local HealthWatch money is not ‘ring-fenced’. That means that Local Authorities do not HAVE to spend the money on Local HealthWatch. The money will go into the Local Authority’s giant pot, from which it has to buy many services. The amount that Local Authorities spend on Local HealthWatch will vary from place to place.
What role will Oxfordshire County Council have?

- The County Council must make arrangements to establish an independent Local HealthWatch for Oxfordshire (through the tendering process explained above).
- The County Council will hold the contract with the corporate body that becomes Local HealthWatch, it will pass the funding for HealthWatch from central Government to Local HealthWatch, and it will monitor the contract to make sure Local HealthWatch is carrying out its duties. This is the same arrangement as for the LINk currently.
- If the County Council has evidence that the performance of the Local HealthWatch is unsatisfactory it can talk to HealthWatch England about selecting a different ‘corporate body’ to take over Local HealthWatch.

What is HealthWatch England?

- HealthWatch England is an organisation that will represent Local HealthWatch Organisations at a national level. It is proposed to be a committee of the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- HealthWatch England will put together standards for Local HealthWatch to be measured against, and provide guidance for Local HealthWatch Organisations.
- Local HealthWatch Organisations will be able to pass concerns to HealthWatch England, who will work with the CQC to look into concerns raised from local information.

What is PALS and what does it have to do with Local HealthWatch?

PALS stands for ‘Patient Advice and Liaison Service’ (www.pals.nhs.uk). PALS staff work in hospitals and health trusts. They help patients get answers to any questions that they might have about NHS services. They also help resolve problems and concerns for patients who want problems resolved rather than making a formal complaint.

Some of PALS’ work can be described as ‘signposting’ or information-giving. It is this role that will move over from PALS teams in Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) to Local HealthWatch, along with the funding to do this.

Want to read some more ....?

- Oxfordshire LINk: - www.oxfordshirelinek.org.uk
  - 01865 883488;
  - Oxfordshire LINk, ORCC, Jericho Farm, Worton, Nr Cassington, Witney, Oxon OX29 4SZ.

This newsletter was compiled by Oxfordshire County Council, based on a paper by the Somerset LINk www.somersetlink.org.uk