

Local Healthwatch Advisory Group membership and next steps

November 2023

The Local Healthwatch Advisory Group (LHWAG) was established in February 2023 and comprised of Healthwatch Surrey volunteers, staff and Luminus board members. The latest version of the terms of reference can be found here: [Terms of Reference for the Local Healthwatch Advisory Group for Surrey](#). The plan for the future of the group was to increase the diversity of members as well as redressing the balance between staff and board members and volunteers in order to ensure better representation of local people in the decision-making of Healthwatch Surrey. The vision at that time was that in the longer term, Board Directors would be in the minority; and the LHWAG would be chaired by a volunteer. This paper provides an update on progress against this goal as well as proposing next steps.

In Summer 2023, we advertised for new members to join the Advisory Group. We contracted Getting on Board to provide advice on our recruitment process and materials, in order to ensure we were as inclusive as possible. Unfortunately, despite advertising more widely than we ever have before, we received very few applications. The LHWAG agreed on the criteria that we were looking for in potential candidates and interviewed 3 potential new members. We were unable to recommend any potential recruits following interview, although we have been working with 1 candidate to induct them into the Healthwatch Surrey volunteer team with a view to becoming a member of the advisory group. At the same time, 2 existing members of the group have become less able to commit regularly to the meeting series.

Conversations with a community leader from Woking and our Getting on Board consultant have suggested that there may be something in the nature of our LHWAG (not a Board for people wanting Board experience, yet still quite a formal grouping); the time commitment; and the tension

between quite a formal recruitment process and the desire to be inclusive, which is creating challenges for us.

Therefore, we have come up with a plan to fulfil our requirement as a local Healthwatch to involve local people in our decision-making in different way, rather than just repeat the recruitment exercise.

Proposal 1: Continue the LHWAG as is

We recognise the value of having a core group of members to advise, challenge and comment on some of the LHWAG agenda items that have become business as usual (general updates on priority progress, progress against the communications and volunteer strategies, Escalations Tracker, Impact Tracker) and propose that the current group continue to oversee this work. Laurence Oates is happy to join the LHWAG which will strengthen numbers and challenge. For the time being Sam will continue to chair the group, although we will still retain the ambition to have a volunteer chair if the right person can be found.

Proposal 2: Convene a wider range of local voices on each priority area

We propose that we convene a number of Healthwatch Surrey volunteers and other stakeholders as relevant in planning work relating to each of our priority areas at least once per year. These groups will comprise of local people who have a special interest in each of our priority areas and priority coordinators from the staff team will present on progress against each priority to date as well as workshopping project proposals for the following quarter or beyond as appropriate. We believe it will be easier for people who are active in communities and interested in particular topics to get involved with our work on that specific issue, without having to commit to a monthly formal meeting.

Proposal 3: Strategic Influencers become a Reading Panel

We propose that we stand down the current Strategic Influencers (SIs) group of volunteers to resolve overlap with the Advisory Group. Instead we will create a *Healthwatch Surrey volunteer reading panel* and offer the chance for those who were SIs plus new and existing volunteers to join. The purpose of the group will be two fold – to help prepare HWSy reps for

attendance at meetings by reading papers in advance; and to provide a lay/public perspective on communications materials. Quality Accounts and ad hoc requests for comments on changes to policies, leaflets, patient facing comms and similar will also be shared with the reading panel to provide comment on. We believe this will eliminate current overlap of roles between LHWAG and the current Strategic Influencers, and provide a useful support to both Healthwatch Surrey representatives and to system partners. We will develop guidance to manage expectations and assist with the brief for the reading panel, as we need to be clear what the ask is for each task.

Proposal 4: Work with our existing volunteer pool

None of our existing Healthwatch Surrey volunteers applied to join the LHWAG. The existing volunteers would seem to be the obvious place to be looking to encourage people to become more involved in the overall decision-making of Healthwatch Surrey. We will pursue a strategy of discovering more about any potential barriers to increased volunteer involvement, and encouraging/nurturing some volunteers to join the LHWAG.

Next steps

If the CIC Board approves these plans, we will implement with immediate effect, and recommend a review in November 2024 to see how we are progressing.

Proposed Structure

