

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 4 December 2025

Summary on the future of Healthwatch

Dash Review

The review, commissioned by DHSC, examined six national bodies involved in patient safety, including Healthwatch England and Local Healthwatch. It found duplication, gaps, and confusion in responsibilities across the safety and quality landscape. Despite significant investment in safety over the past decade, it concluded improvements have been limited and uneven. The review also recognised there is no unified national strategy for improving quality, and key areas like effectiveness and user experience are often neglected. The report shared that the system for complaints and user feedback is fragmented, with over 20 organisations involved. It was acknowledged that Healthwatch had done some successful work up until this point.

Recommendations included:

- Creating a stronger National Quality Board to lead a strategic, evidence-based approach.
- Disbanding Healthwatch in its current form, with its core feedback gathering and user engagement functions redistributed.
- Moving the Patient Safety Commissioner's functions to more appropriate bodies (e.g. MHRA).
- Streamlining investigations and embedding responsibility for safety within providers and commissioners.
- Enhancing the role of data, AI, and governance in driving improvement.

The Government has accepted all recommendations

Transfer of functions of local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England:

Legislation will be required to end the statutory provision of local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England and transfer the functions of the former to local authorities and ICBs and the latter to a new Directorate of Patient Experience in the Department of Health and Social Care. The legislation is anticipated in early 2026/27. As is typical with such legislation, there is likely to be a period between the passing of the Act and the implementation of its provisions. However, this timeline and outcome are subject to the Parliamentary timetable and process.

Independent Voice:

Currently the information and guidance provided says very little about any form of independent feedback mechanisms for the public. We believe, albeit not in the "Healthwatch" format, there is value for the local system in having insights that aren't solely gathered by organisations providing the services that people are feeding back about.

In the meantime:

It is business as usual. We are still very much here to support the public so please do keep using us to share experiences of health and care services in Kent and for information and signposting queries.