

Decision-making procedure

Introduction

Healthwatch Southend wishes to be known as an open and transparent organisation. If we are to form effective partnerships with our community and stakeholders, we need to build and maintain their trust. Equally if we are to hold stakeholders to account, we need to show that we do this in an objective manner.

Legal requirements

The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012¹ state that the arrangements for carrying out Healthwatch activities (and the arrangements for sub-contracting those activities) must require each Healthwatch to establish and publish procedures for its decision-making in relation to "relevant decisions". The procedures must include:

- Who can make decisions
- How lay persons or volunteers can be involved in these decisions
- How to deal with breaches of any procedure, including the circumstance in which a breach would be referred to the local authority

What is a "relevant decision"?

"Relevant decisions" for Healthwatch Southend include:

- How to undertake our activities
- Which health and social care services are covered with our activities
- The spending amounts of our activities²
- Whether to request information
- Whether to make a report or a recommendation
- Which premises to enter and view and when those premises will be visited
- Whether to refer a matter to an overview and scrutiny committee
- Whether to report a matter concerning our activities to another person, for example Healthwatch England or the Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Any decisions about subcontracting

The majority of these decisions will be taken by the Advisory Group; this will also be informed by feedback from members of the community. The Advisory Group may delegate smaller pieces of work to the staff team which do not have a substantive impact on resourcing.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/3094/contents/made>

² Recognising that the overall budget is set by The Advocacy People in consultation with the Chief Officer

The staff team may also undertake exploratory work to inform future action without the involvement of the Advisory Group. Healthwatch staff have general authority to make certain operational and administrative decisions in accordance with their terms of employment and job description.

An agreement to a “relevant decision” will be recorded in the minutes of that Group meeting and will be publicised on the website.

Prioritisation

We will use the following points as a guide for making decisions and prioritising where we focus our work.

- Does the issue impact on a large number of people or have a very significant impact on a smaller number of people?
- Has the issue has been raised by a large number of people?
- Is there the potential for Healthwatch Southend to make a significant difference to the issue in question?
- Does the issue fit with Healthwatch Southend's priorities or the priorities and timescales of other strategic local commissioners, providers and organisations?
- Has the issue been raised and evidenced by a representative organisation with specialist knowledge of concerns or views of local people, such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC)?
- Does the issue highlight gaps, such as gaps in service delivery or where the voice of local people is not being considered?
- Does the issue affect people who find public services hard to access?
- Do we have sufficient resources and capacity?

Public involvement

We gather the views of the public by

- Collating and analysing the calls made to our helpline
- Comments left on our website, or that of Healthwatch England
- Our engagement activities, including focus groups
- Having lay people and volunteers on our Advisory Group, as well as volunteers in other roles
- Encouraging the public to attend our meetings held in public
- Using staff networks in local NHS and the City Council, recognising that many staff are also local residents
- Use of partner newsletters eg the SE Essex Alliance (part of the Mid & South Essex Integrated Care Board) or the Southend Association of Voluntary Services
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Data from other organisations

- Monitoring local media
- Using our statutory powers to Enter and View premises providing health and care services

Breach of procedure

It is unlikely that relevant decisions will be taken without due regard to this procedure. It may be that time is of the essence and precludes the wider considerations set out above. In the event of a breach, the Chief Officer will inform the Chair of the Advisory Group before:

1. Undertaking a review of the circumstances
2. Identifying any mitigating factors
3. Identifying the impact of any decision taken

A written report will be submitted to the Chair within five working days. The Chair and Chief Officer will agree whether the issue requires being drawn to the attention of the commissioning manager at Southend City Council. A formal report will be submitted to the next Advisory Group meeting in public and subsequently published on the website.

Interested parties

Healthwatch Southend is commissioned by Southend City Council from The Advocacy People (the contract holders) using a grant from the Department of Health & Social Care. This may lead to potential difficulties.

There may be instances where Healthwatch Southend needs to investigate concerns about other commissioning decisions or activities undertaken by the Council which are within the scope of a local Healthwatch.

- a) In such a situation, Healthwatch report to the relevant executive director of SCC as well as the appropriate cabinet member.
- b) Healthwatch Southend, as a statutory member of the Health & Wellbeing Group, may also relay its concerns to this multi-agency group. This Group operates on the principle of collective responsibility across partners, where all partners hold themselves to account.
- c) Finally, Healthwatch may refer an issue to the People Scrutiny Committee of the Council, where other elected members of the Council hold cabinet members and officers to account.

Healthwatch Southend will also maintain a register of Advisory Group members' interests and the Chair will call for any interests to be declared at the beginning of each formal meeting.

Version control

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