

Transition Panel: Terms of Reference (May 2026)

Background

In June 2025, Health Secretary Wes Streeting announced the closure of Healthwatch as part of 10-year NHS restructuring.

Funding for local Healthwatch has been confirmed until the end of March 2027, with the intention of passing the NHS Modernisation Bill in April 2027, to include the abolition of NHS England and Healthwatch. The Department of Health and Social Care intends that there should then be a short Transition Period (6-8 weeks) to move from the Healthwatch service to any new arrangements.

The government plans to transfer the responsibilities of Local Healthwatch organisations to NHS Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities. We invite the ICB, Local Authority, Hospital Trusts and other Stakeholders to join us to explore options for transferring our functions.

Challenges for our system and communities

- Without clarity on which Healthwatch functions will be delegated and to whom, insufficient planning and accountability from stakeholders could result in functions being lost.
- The loss of an independent organisation means that engagement and health priorities risk being driven by NHS and Local Authority agendas, rather than the needs and voices of the communities.
- Without an independent organisation to gather public voice, feedback may remain unheard, if people lack the confidence that their views can be shared safely, freely, and without consequence to their care.
- The loss of face-to-face outreach means that digitally excluded people and those from frequently ignored communities are less likely to be heard, further marginalising the voices who already find it difficult to be heard.
- The loss of a cross-system organisation means that people, often at their most vulnerable, are left to approach health and care services individually, with no single body to help them resolve issues that cut across the system.

Transition Panel: Terms of Reference (May 2026)

- A short transition period may be an insufficient time for an adequate handover, and risks losing accumulated knowledge and the culture of successful community engagement.
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We propose these challenges are addressed through transition panels.

Aim of the Transition Panels, June 2026 – March 2027

To bring together stakeholders from across the health and social care system to create a framework ensuring robust arrangements for patient and public voice remain at the heart of planning, development, delivery, and evaluation of health and care services.

Core Membership

The Transition Panels will include representatives from:

- Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Local Authority Leads
- Healthwatch Warwickshire staff

Also Invited

- NHS Provider Organisations
- Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector
- Integrated Neighbourhood Teams Leads
- Patient Groups
- Researchers: Warwick Business School, Kings Fund

Objectives

- Describe current Healthwatch Warwickshire functions, and identify which organisations are best placed to take responsibility for each, ensuring no function is lost.
- Confirmed commitment from the Core Group, ICB, providers and Local Authority with named roles to take responsibility for transition and adequate resourcing of functions.

Transition Panel: Terms of Reference (May 2026)

- Develop a framework for the transfer of responsibilities, with clear timelines and accountability.
- Establish mechanisms to ensure that community and patient voice continues to be gathered independently.
- Co-produce with 'frequently ignored groups' to identify and mitigate risks to digitally excluded and marginalised communities during and after transition.

Reporting

The Panels will produce:

- A final report and action plan by March 2027, to be submitted to the Core Group for agreement and sign off ahead of the legislative transition in April 2027
- A public-facing summary of findings, accessible to communities and written in plain language.

Join our Transition Panels

Transition Panels will be launched at the **Healthwatch Warwickshire Annual Conference on 16th June 2026.**

To find out more and to join the Healthwatch Warwickshire Transition Panels please [EMAIL US](#) with the subject '**Transition Panels**'

The dates of the initial Transition Panel meetings are:

South Warwickshire - Mon 13th July 10-11am

Rugby - Thurs 16th July 10.30 – 11.30am

Warwickshire North - Mon 13th July 1-2pm

Additional Information: System responsibilities and statutory guidance**[NHS England » Strategic commissioning framework](#)**

“4.2. For services to truly meet the needs of communities, people must be involved from the start of planning through to implementation and review.

Each ICB should have a systematic approach to co-production – meaningfully involving patients, service users, unpaid carers and community groups in co-designing solutions.

This goes beyond formal consultation and means working with people as partners. ICBs will need to ensure that focused effort and resources are deployed to reach seldom heard and underserved people and communities, working with trusted community partners to achieve this.

ICBs need to make best use of the skills, capability, capacity and expertise across the health and care system in carrying out these duties alongside their own.”

[NHS England » Working in partnership with people and communities: Statutory guidance](#)

“While involving people and communities is a legal requirement, working with them also supports the wider objectives of integration including population health management, personalisation of care and support, addressing health inequalities and improving quality.

The legal duties provide a platform to build collaborative and meaningful partnerships that start with people and focus on what really matters to our communities. However, the ambition is for health and care systems to build positive, trusted and enduring relationships with communities in order to improve services, support and outcomes for people.”

Relevant Research and Documents

- **[The future of patient voice: learning from the Healthwatch model | The King's Fund](#)**
- **[Concord Study - shaping better engagement - Happy Healthy Lives](#)**
- **[Health Bill: patient voice - fact sheet - GOV.UK](#)**
- **[Impact Assessment Health Bill patient safety measures](#)**