

Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

14th November 2025

Ref: AB/SRL/CD

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: The Future of Healthwatch and the Importance of Independent Public Voice in Health and Care

We are writing to you as co-chairs of the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership Board to express our concerns regarding the proposal within the NHS 10 Year Plan to dissolve Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch bodies, absorbing their functions into Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and Local Authorities.

In Greater Manchester, Healthwatch plays a vital role in ensuring that the voices of our residents, particularly those who are seldom heard, are captured and acted upon. Their independence is central to this. Healthwatch organisations across our ten localities have built trusted relationships with communities, local authorities, NHS providers, and the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector. They are uniquely positioned to act as a bridge between people and the system, offering insight that is grounded in lived experience. People speak to Healthwatch because they are outside the system - they are impartial, trusted, and provide a safe space for concerns to be shared.

In addition, Healthwatch organisations across Greater Manchester have delivered distinct and high-impact pieces of work. These include the examples below, with a longer list featured in the appendix.

- **Targeted engagement with ethnic minority communities** to understand barriers to cancer screening uptake and reduce variation and inequalities in access.
- **Investigations into access to mental health services** for young people, leading to service redesign across several Greater Manchester boroughs.
- **Partnership work with VCFSE organisations** to amplify the voices of disabled people, informing accessibility improvements in primary care.



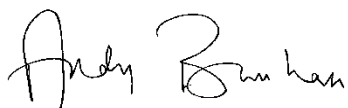
The Integrated Care Partnership Board membership reflected on the value of Healthwatch, its functions and the implications of the proposed changes at the meetings of 22nd August and 7th November. The Board agreed to begin in earnest to design the arrangements that we will need in GM to maintain the principles of transparency, accountability and co-production across our Integrated Care System in the future. It has been requested that the Board endorses an approach to develop a new offer according to the following principles:

1. The independent public voice will be maintained, integrated and embedded effectively in the new system.
2. Localised relationships will be maintained and strengthened in structures e.g. through linking with portfolio leads in the Local Authorities.
3. Local, place-based working will remain at the heart of how we work together
4. We will embed population health principles as we continue to work closely with leaders across the localities and city region.
5. We will ensure that the system is accessible for all, and that all of our communities are heard.

The independence of resident and patient voice is a necessity. Without it, we risk losing the trust of the public, the richness of lived experience, and the ability to challenge and improve the system from within, particularly during this time of significant system reform in the delivery of the three shifts and development of neighbourhood health.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Andy Burnham
Mayor of Greater Manchester
GM ICP Board Co-Chair



Sir Richard Leese
GM ICP Board Co-Chair

Appendix: Summary of distinct pieces of work delivered by GM Locality Healthwatch organisations and Healthwatch in GM.

Bolton

- Over 1,341 people shared experiences with Healthwatch Bolton, and 374 sought advice. Their work on menopause and maternity care led to improved professional practice and better access to support and information. The “Menopause and Me” report helped shape local service delivery and awareness campaigns.
- The “Choosing Your Healthcare” project revealed gaps in how choices were offered to patients. This led to a developing action plan with local providers to improve transparency and patient empowerment.

Bury

- Healthwatch Bury engaged 400+ people and reached 1,300 through events. Their work improved menopause support, introduced patient-led prescribing, and clarified hospital appointment communications. The “Women’s Health Project Report” raised awareness and informed service redesign.
- Contributed to national eye care research and raised concerns about dementia service changes, prompting local reviews and safeguarding discussions.

Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale

- Reached 600 people directly, supported 2,500+, and had 14,629 website visits. Their “Menopause Matters” report highlighted cultural barriers and led to targeted outreach and service adjustments.
- Conducted enter & view visits to care homes, urgent care, and outpatient departments, resulting in practical recommendations to improve care standards and patient experience.

Manchester

- Through Enter & View visits before and after ward relocations, Healthwatch Manchester provided timely feedback that influenced safeguarding protocols and patient engagement strategies in Mental Health Inpatient care.
- Mystery shopper calls and website reviews assessed how well GP practices communicated enhanced access. Findings led to recommendations for clearer online information and improved service accessibility.

Oldham

- Engaged 480+ residents and supported 450+ with advice. Their secondary cancer pathways report highlighted gaps in communication and support, informing hospital planning and patient navigation improvements.
- The Young People's Mental Health survey shaped the 2025/26 workplan, and clearer communication was introduced for young people awaiting CAMHS support.

Salford

- Engaged 2,198 people and supported 3,289 with advice/signposting. Their Communications report covered a number of different areas including capturing the experiences of staff under pressure, revealing the need for better communication and mutual understanding between patients and professionals and the experiences of the d/Deaf community in Salford.
- As a result of hosting the Men's Mental Health Commission, funding totalling £18k was given to groups directly supporting boys and men's mental health in Salford. Further pledges by key stakeholders are being followed up on currently.

Stockport

- Reached 280 people and supported 100+. Their hospital to home report informed an action plan to improve hospital discharge processes, communication, and continuity of care.
- Contributed to the GM-wide CAMHS report by engaging local families and support groups, ensuring young people's voices shaped mental health service design.

Tameside

- Engaged 684 people and supported 2,500+. Their work on GP access & Cost of living led to improved appointment booking systems and informed public health strategies addressing inequality.
- Co-designed resources that placed inclusion and lived experience at the heart of service improvement, now used in local diagnostic centres and pharmacy services.

Trafford

- Reached 5,900 people and supported 18,069 with advice. Their work on vaping & sexual health services led to education campaigns in schools, improved online sexual health information, and influenced Trafford's Locality Plan.
- Led the GM-wide CAMHS project initiative, ensuring children, parents, and professionals shaped future mental health services across Greater Manchester.

Wigan & Leigh

- Engaged 196 people and supported 59 with advice. Their report on delayed hospital discharge prompted system redesign and improved communication with patients during discharge.
- Explored barriers to mental health access, contributing to both local and GM-wide CAMHS planning, with insights now informing service transformation.

Healthwatch in GM (HW in GM)

- This organisation acts as a collaborative network for the city region, bringing together the 10 locality based Healthwatch organisations at system level in partnership as a 'critical friend' to the Integrated Care System.
- Since 2023, Healthwatch across GM collectively has:
 - Supported over 100,000 people to share their experiences of the health system in GM
 - Has reported on over 250 'Enter and View' visits
 - Been present at over 1000 engagement events to listen to people's experiences.

- More recent work involves the development of a report capturing the lived experience of over 500 people accessing Urgent and Emergency Care Services in GM, and a series of recommendations for improvement to support GM Patient Services to function more accessibly, inclusively and responsively to public concerns.
- Provided patient representation at key ICB strategic committees and forums
- Incoming reports due to focus on health literacy (report to be established in Q3 this year) and prostate cancer (reporting in Q4)

