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Chair of the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board

Date: 5th February 2026

Dear Sir Richard Leese,

Re: NHS GM IVF Cycles Consultation - Board decision

Healthwatch in Greater Manchester is writing to formally raise concerns regarding the Integrated Care Board's decision to standardise NHS-funded IVF provision to one cycle (plus an additional attempt where a cycle is abandoned or cancelled) across Greater Manchester.

Over the course of the recent engagement and consultation activity, Greater Manchester heard from more than 2,200 people from across the city region. The strength, consistency, and depth of feedback was clear. People shared personal testimony describing the emotional, physical, and financial impact of infertility, the distress caused by variation in access, and the importance of equitable, evidence-based fertility treatment.

Healthwatch was itself included as part of the consultation process. While we appreciate being engaged, the final outcome raises serious questions about the purpose and value of that inclusion. Where both public feedback and independent patient insight appear to have had little influence on the final recommendation, engagement risks becoming a procedural exercise rather than a meaningful component of decision making.

We have reviewed the Board paper and accompanying Consultation Report presented in support of this decision. Whilst the paper acknowledges that the public feedback did not support the preferred option of standardising to one IVF cycle, and that concerns were raised in relation to equity, mental health impact, and disproportionate effects on people already experiencing disadvantage, the recommended outcome does not reflect this feedback.

Standardisation should not be used to justify a reduction in provision. Alternative options more closely aligned with public feedback and NICE clinical guidance were discarded in favour of alignment with the majority of other ICB's, a position that more readily supports prevailing financial constraints.

While Healthwatch recognises the significant financial pressures facing the system, this weighting of finances over public voice and established clinical guidance raises serious concern about how population need and equity have been prioritised within the decision making process.

This decision also raises wider concerns about how patient experience and public voice are positioned within system decision making. When engagement results in outcomes that appear to run counter to both public need and national guidance it reinforces perceptions that involvement lacks real influence. That perception is damaging, not only for this decision, but for trust in the system more broadly.

Healthwatch exists to provide independent insight and challenge, on behalf of local people. This case clearly demonstrates why an independent patient voice remains essential. Where engagement and commissioning sit too closely together, there is a real risk that challenge is weakened and that public feedback, even when formally sought, becomes secondary to predetermined system constraints.

We therefore request that the Integrated Care Board:

- Provides a clear and transparent account of how public feedback and input from the IVF consultation, were weighed in reaching the final decision
- Reconsiders the decision to standardise NHS-funded IVF provision to one cycle, in light of the strength and consistency of public feedback, the concerns raised regarding equity and mental health impact, and the departure from NICE clinical guidance

We look forward to receiving formal acknowledgement of the concerns we have raised, together with a clear outline of the proposals the Integrated Care Board intends to put in place to address these matters.

This correspondence is issued under the statutory remit of Healthwatch Bury as the host organisation for Healthwatch in Greater Manchester. As such, we would also like to remind you that providers of publicly funded health and social care services are required to respond to Healthwatch within twenty working days, as set out under Regulation 44 of the Local Healthwatch Regulations 2012. Further information can be found here: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/3094/regulation/44/made><http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/3094/regulation/44/made>

Yours sincerely,

Healthwatch in Greater Manchester