



Stephen Hammond MP
Minister of State for Health
Department of Health
Richmond House
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London
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Monday 18 March 2019

RE: The Joint NHSE/NHSI Accountability Framework

Dear Minister,

As you will be aware, Healthwatch England is a statutory consultee on the Department's Mandate to NHS England. This role has grown significantly since the current Mandate was set in 2015, with the Department increasingly calling on Healthwatch to both inform the refresh of the annual deliverables and to report back on what people's experiences of care tell us about NHS England's performance.

From helping to set a clear expectation about the NHS learning from feedback and complaints, to seeking assurances about maintaining patient safety whilst reducing delayed transfers of care, our contributions have helped the Department ensure the Mandate has set clear objectives on the issues that matter most to people.

I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you and fill you in on where we have got to with your officials so far this year. As well as discussing the changes in process, we have also highlighted five areas where we think it would be useful for the Department to ensure additional focus. More details on these points are provided in our formal submission document.

Views on aligning this year's process with the NHS Long Term Plan

Firstly, on the overall approach, we understand that this year's Mandate is quite correctly being aligned with the NHS Long Term Plan. This is important for setting a single vision and direction for the health service. Healthwatch therefore supports this decision.

We also understand that given the closer alignment of NHS England (NHSE) and NHS Improvement (NHSI), the Mandate will be adapted into a joint accountability framework. Again, Healthwatch England very much supports this, and in particular the Department's extension of our statutory role advising on the priorities for both NHSE and NHSI.

Finally, given that the NHS is still working through a number of the specifics in relation to implementation of the Long Term Plan, it makes sense that the new joint accountability framework is only focusing on 2019/20. To look further ahead at this time could restrict how the NHS thinks about how it achieves the ultimate aims set out in the Long Term Plan. However, we advise that the Department actively sets out at this stage how the Mandate process will work in future, including any intention to consult more broadly with the public.



Views on the draft joint accountability framework

Although this year is being seen as a transition year, putting in place the building blocks to deliver the Long Term Plan, there are still a number of areas where we advise the Department to use the new joint accountability framework to set some clear longer term direction.

The following five points pick up on areas of the Long Term Plan which we would like to see developed further and elements we think are missing or under-emphasised. We have also highlighted where expectations set by the previous Mandate process must not be lost.

- **Send a strong message about involving people in NHS decision-making**
Healthwatch brought 85,000 people's experiences to the table during the development of the Long Term Plan, but this level of involvement needs to become part of the DNA of the NHS, helping to shape plans and to track progress.
- **Make NHS targets more meaningful for people**
We urge the Department to back the work of the Clinical Standards Review and outline a clear expectation that new performance measures will need to be fully tested with service users to ensure they improve people's experiences of care.
- **Reassert the focus on the NHS being the world's largest learning organisation**
Whilst we support the alignment of the joint accountability framework with the NHS Long Term Plan, it is vital that we do not lose important direction set by the existing Mandate about the importance of learning from feedback and complaints.
- **Building public confidence in new technologies**
We fully support the Long Term Plan's commitments to grow the use of technology across the NHS, and this is very much in line with what people want. To ensure these initiatives have the trust of the public and achieve the maximum impact in improving care for everyone, they need to be fully user tested. They must also be continually refined in response to user feedback. There is significant opportunity to develop this approach by ensuring public engagement is put at the heart of the way NHSX will operate.
- **Listen to what people want from the future of the NHS workforce**
As the NHS finalises the workforce strategy, we encourage the Department to ensure those in charge take on feedback from people about the different types of professionals and peer support services they would like to access. This will be important if the health service is to address people's concerns about continuity of care and the level of empathy services are able to offer.

We appreciate the involvement in this year's process and would like to thank officials for taking on board our feedback and suggestions throughout the development of the proposed joint accountability framework for 2019/20.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Robert Francis, QC
Chair, Healthwatch England