**NHS England to give 'significant investment' to Healthwatch**

 27 November 2018

* NHS England and NHS Improvement to provide funding to Healthwatch England, likely as a one-off sum
* Funds will be used for patient and public engagement in the NHS long-term plan
* Local patient network usually funded by the government

Healthwatch England is to be given “significant investment” from NHS England and NHS Improvement.

The new money will be used to consult with staff, patients and public about how the NHS long-term plan will affect the healthcare offered in local systems.

The information was revealed in a November update by NHS England on the plan.

It said: “To help facilitate this ongoing engagement [on the plan], NHS England and NHS Improvement will be providing significant investment, via Healthwatch England, to support local Healthwatch to ensure that the views of patients and the public are heard.”

The contract between NHS England and Healthwatch is still being finalised so the level of investment has not been disclosed.

The funding is likely to be a one-off sum for Healthwatch England to coordinate a national consultation through its local network into the long-term plan. The consultation is likely to begin in January 2019. The document did not say over what time period the public engagement would last.

Healthwatch funding is normally provided by the government directly to local councils, not Healthwatch England. Councils are then responsible for commissioning local Healthwatch services.

Earlier this month, a Healthwatch England report raised concerns about significant cuts to this funding. It said, in 2018-19, Healthwatch funding dropped by 4.2 per cent compared with the previous financial year to £26m. It added total annual government funding had fallen by 35 per cent since 2013, when the Healthwatch network was established.

The new investment does not appear to address these concerns, because the funding is non-recurrent and specifically related to work around the long term plan.

The November long-term plan update said the funding would be used for local areas to develop detailed plans for the next financial year by April 2019, and five year plans by summer 2019.

Neil Tester, deputy director of Healthwatch England, said: “Healthwatch England [has] already been able to feed evidence from over 85,000 people into the development of the national level plan, covering everything from mental health and primary care to the experiences of carers and homeless people.

“This investment from NHS England is recognition of Healthwatch’s unique reach into communities right across the country and our ability to bring independent insight into the planning processes at a regional and local level.”

An NHS England spokesman said: “NHS England will be providing funding to help Healthwatch engage at a local level to ensure that the views of patients and the public on the NHS long-term plan are heard.”

**Source**

NHS England document

**Source Date**

22 November 2018