

Shropshire Health & Wellbeing Board 17th September 2026

Chair's Report

Healthwatch / Independent Patient Voice

Since the last Board meeting, there have been a number of national and local developments regarding the future of Healthwatch and the wider independent patient voice function.

The Government continues to progress plans through the Health Bill to abolish Healthwatch England and local Healthwatch organisations, with statutory responsibilities for ensuring patient and service user voice being transferred to Integrated Care Boards (health services) and Local Authorities (social care services). Recent briefings from DHSC have confirmed that current Healthwatch duties, funding arrangements and contractual commitments remain unchanged until the legislation is enacted and transitional arrangements are confirmed.

Locally, we continue to work closely with colleagues across the Integrated Care System and Shropshire Council commissioners to understand the implications of the proposed changes and ensure continuity of an effective and independent patient voice for local residents. Discussions are ongoing regarding future commissioning arrangements, statutory guidance, governance and the management of any transition once greater national clarity is available.

Healthwatch Shropshire continues to play an important role in gathering insight from local communities, particularly those whose voices are less frequently heard, and in providing constructive challenge across the health and care system.

Further updates will be provided to the Board as national legislation progresses and the local implications become clearer. In the meantime, officers will continue to monitor developments, assess risks and opportunities, and work with partners to ensure that the voice of Shropshire residents remains central to the planning, design and improvement of health and care services.

Better Care Fund (BCF) Support Programme

Shropshire has been selected to participate in the national BCF Support Programme, receiving both **Communities of Practice support for Health and Wellbeing Boards** and **targeted support focused on neighbourhood health and system integration**.

This provides an opportunity for Board leaders and partners to learn from other systems, share best practice and strengthen the Health & Wellbeing Board's strategic leadership role.

The programme will support the ongoing refresh of the Board's strategy and Terms of Reference, helping to ensure the Board is well positioned to provide effective oversight of neighbourhood health, integration and population health improvement across Shropshire.