

TITLE	Local Healthwatch for Reading and Wokingham
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 7 March 2018
WARD	None Specific
KEY OFFICER	Paul Senior, Interim Director People Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

1.1 The Health and Social Care Act 2012 established Healthwatch England at national level and requires local authorities to establish a Local Healthwatch (LHW) in their areas as a consumer champion for healthcare and social care services.

1.2 Local Healthwatch Services are corporate bodies and within the contractual arrangements made with their local authority must carry out particular activities which include:

- I. promoting and supporting the involvement of local people in the commissioning, the provision and scrutiny of local care services.
- II. enabling local people to monitor the standard of provision of local care services and whether and how local care services could and ought to be improved;
- III. obtaining the views of local people regarding their needs for, and experiences of, local care services and importantly to make these views known;
- IV. making reports and recommendations about how local care services could or ought to be improved. These should be directed to commissioners and providers of care services, and people responsible for managing or scrutinising local care services and shared with Healthwatch England.
- V. providing advice and information about access to local care services so choices can be made about local care services
- VI. formulating views on the standard of provision and whether and how the local care services could and ought to be improved; and sharing these views with Healthwatch England
- VII. making recommendations to Healthwatch England to advise the Care Quality Commission to conduct special reviews or investigations (or, where the circumstances justify doing so, making such recommendations direct to the CQC); and to make recommendations to Healthwatch England to publish reports about particular issues
- VIII. providing Healthwatch England with the intelligence and insight it needs to enable it to perform effectively

1.3 In practice, Local Healthwatch delivery involves substantial levels of public engagement in order to gather views, and also spending large amounts of time with other stakeholders in order to feed these views into local or national planning.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee note two proposed options for commissioning the statutory LHW function for Wokingham and are invited to comment on the proposed options:

Option 1: In line with the original consultation proposal, to continue to work in partnership with RBC to explore a single commissioning exercise to secure a LHW service across Reading and Wokingham.

Option 2: WBC to undertake a commissioning exercise to secure a LHW service across Wokingham – with further work to be undertaken to recommend a contract value for the service.

2) That Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the direct award of a 6 month block contract to the current service provider, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough CIC, to ensure that Wokingham Borough Council can continue to deliver the Healthwatch Service - which is a statutory duty under the Care Act.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

3.1 Reading Borough Council (RBC) and Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) undertook a public consultation on a proposal to commission a LHW service for both areas at a cost of £173,000.

3.2 We asked people to tell us what impact they thought there would be if the LHW services for Reading and for Wokingham were commissioned under a single contract in future. We also asked people whether they had used the Reading or Wokingham Healthwatch services in the past; and which aspects of LHW they most valued.

3.3 The Councils received a number of detailed responses to the consultation. Informed by the outcome of the consultation, this report now presents the two aforementioned proposed options for commissioning the statutory Local Healthwatch function for Wokingham.

3.4 The local authority is required to commission a LHW service for its residents. Formal approval has been given to award a short term/ 6 month block contract to the current service provider, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough CIC to enable the Council to meet its obligations under the Health & Social Care Act 2012 in this regard.

Background

4.1 Every local authority in England has a duty to put in place a LHW – an independent organisation which listens to people’s views and shares them with those who have the power to make local services better. Across Reading and Wokingham, LHW services support people to get the best from services such as hospitals, pharmacies, social care, GP and dentistry services. They work with those who provide these services and those who plan and buy them.

4.2 All LHW services have the same statutory duties.

4.3 Reading and Wokingham currently commission separate LHW services. The current budgets for both Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham are £217,000 p.a.

4.4 From December 2017 to February 2018, the local authorities for Reading and for Wokingham consulted with residents about the possibility of commissioning a LHW service across Reading and Wokingham through a single contract.

Analysis of Issues

5.1 The public consultation ran from 19th December 2017 to 6th February 2018.

5.2 An online questionnaire was posted on the websites of both Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council (hosted by Reading), together with some background information on Local Healthwatch functions, and contact details for assistance in taking part in the consultation, including requesting hard copies of the questionnaire.

5.3 This was an open public consultation, but particularly aimed at:

- Residents of Reading and Wokingham
- Members of social care forums and patient participation groups in each locality
- Members of the two relevant Health and Wellbeing Boards
- Other health and social care commissioners and providers serving each locality.

5.4 A press release was issued to draw attention to the consultation.

5.5 Council officers representing both local authorities addressed four public meetings to discuss the proposal:

- An open meeting 15th January 2018 at Reading Borough Council's offices
- An open meeting 18th January 2018 at Wokingham Borough Council's offices
- A meeting focused on potential providers of a future service on 25th January 2018
- The Reading Older People's Working Group on 2nd February 2018.

5.6 109 questionnaires were returned either online or in paper form. In addition to the survey returns, we also received several letters commenting on the consultation proposal.

5.7 Most people who responded to the consultation disagreed with the proposal to commission a single Local Healthwatch service. However, in relation to most Local Healthwatch responsibilities, a majority of people felt there were more potential benefits than losses in having a single organisation deliver the Local Healthwatch functions across both boroughs. The one exception to this was the community engagement area, where most people felt moving to a single provider operating on a reduced budget would result in a lesser service.

5.8 A key issue which the consultation feedback demonstrated is that each borough needs to have its own Local Healthwatch service in order to maximise both public and volunteer engagement. This is not necessarily a barrier to a shared infrastructure, however, such as a single organisation trading as both Healthwatch Reading and Healthwatch Wokingham in different contexts.

5.9 Post consultation, there are two options proposed:

Option 1: To continue to work in partnership with Reading Borough Council on a single commissioning exercise to secure a Local Healthwatch service across Reading and Wokingham.

5.10 Under this option, there would be a clear requirement on the provider to maintain a distinct local identity, even if delivered by a single organisation. Consultation feedback has confirmed that this is important to local residents and likely to be the best way of securing and maximising public and volunteer engagement. Feedback has also indicated that there are potential efficiency savings in having the two Local Healthwatch services delivered by one organisation.

5.11 There is already a precedent for cross-authority LHW arrangements which preserve the individual LHW identity and service in local authority areas, however, a key risk in this option is the potential failure to attract any provider bids to deliver a single contract serving both areas. Moving forward with this option would require the joint approval of both Reading and Wokingham.

Option 2: Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) to undertake a commissioning exercise to secure a Local Healthwatch service across Wokingham – with a local contract and local contract monitoring. This option has been developed as an alternative option to the original proposal – and included in the light of consultation feedback, including engagement through the provider event. The Lead Member for Adult Services is minded to support this option.

5.12 Overall, 58% of consultation respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to bring together the Reading and Wokingham Healthwatch Services as a single service. Consultation feedback highlighted that many people were keen to stress the importance and value of Local Healthwatch having a very local identity. Respondents stressed the very different demographic profiles of the two boroughs, and many felt these were too great to allow for efficiency gains in bringing the two services together.

5.13 The greatest concern was over future engagement with seldom heard groups, with the possibility of established connections into the relevant communities being disrupted through the recommissioning process. Several people felt the proposal was likely to reduce face to face engagement, and increase reliance on other forms, such as online surveys, which are not necessarily accessible to all members of the community and a local commission would.

5.14 If this option was approved, a commissioning process could commence mid-March 2018. It would be expected that such a commissioning process would then take several months to complete and it is anticipated that the start date of a new service would be 1st October 2018.

5.15 It is considered that a number of the expected benefits of the original proposal would only be realised in the event that a suitable organisation could be identified to deliver services across both Wokingham and Reading under a single contract. It is therefore proposed that, if option 2 is supported, further work is undertaken to recommend an appropriate contract value for the Healthwatch Wokingham service.

6. Alternative Options

6.1 To recommission Local Healthwatch services for Reading and for Wokingham as a completely unified service, e.g. using the branding 'Reading Healthwatch and Wokingham'. Healthwatch England guidance is that the Local Healthwatch must use

branding which residents identify with, and consultation feedback demonstrates that residents relate much better to the separate 'Healthwatch Reading' and 'Healthwatch Wokingham' brands. This option was tested through public consultation, and attracted mostly negative feedback.

6.2 A further option would be to work in partnership with Reading Borough Council (RBC) to commission a Healthwatch function through a single framework for services to be delivered in Reading and in Wokingham. Under this option, two 'lots' could be specified and potential providers would be invited to bid to deliver a Local Healthwatch service for Wokingham or a Local Healthwatch service for Reading or both Local Healthwatch services. The Local Healthwatch service for each area would retain a distinct brand and identity, whether delivered by the same organisation or separate organisations. As with other options there is a risk of failure to attract any provider bids to deliver a single contract serving both areas, however, use of a shared framework would facilitate efficiency savings in the event of one provider securing contracts to deliver both services

6.3 Each local authority to re-commission its own Local Healthwatch service, offering contracts for 80% of the current price in order to secure the savings. This would result in two very small contracts with providers having less resilience to changes such as staff absence or turnover. The current Healthwatch Reading provider has 3 FTE members of staff and the Wokingham service operates on 1.5 FTE. to maintain current arrangements. This option is not viable long term due to procurement regulations and would fail to deliver any savings or efficiency gains, and is rejected for this reason.

Partner Implications
The consultation has been undertaken as a joint consultation in partnership with RBC
The consultation proposal was to explore a single commissioning exercise to secure a Local Healthwatch service across Reading and Wokingham.
Both Local Authorities would need to give approval to progress Option 1.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not applicable

List of Background Papers
Not applicable

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