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Chair, Healthwatch England  
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Cllr Philip Atkins OBE  
Leader, Staffordshire County Council  
1 Staffordshire Place  
Stafford  
ST16 2DH

28 November 2017

Dear Cllr Atkins,

Thank you for your letter dated 16 November responding to the Healthwatch England Committee's questions regarding your authority's plans for its local Healthwatch service.

I am now writing to you formally under section 45A (4) of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to advise you of Healthwatch England's concerns in relation to the retendering of the contract for Healthwatch Staffordshire.

Under the terms of the existing contract, the Healthwatch service in Staffordshire has helped to give your community a strong voice in how local services are run. Over the past five years this has led to a series of improvements in the quality of care received by residents, from improving the range of activities on offer in local care homes to ensuring people's concerns about local cancer care are heard by those in charge.

As I know you are aware, our respective teams have been working well together in recent weeks to help inform the development of Staffordshire County Council's service specification for the new local Healthwatch contract.

I am particularly pleased to see that the advice we have provided on the statutory responsibilities has been useful and that we have been able to help clarify points around the governance and contract management arrangements for local Healthwatch.

I was also pleased to see the service specification outline the importance of the role of Healthwatch in ensuring the people of Staffordshire have a strong voice in the conversations about how health and care services across the county are integrated under the local Sustainability and Transformation Partnership.



However, the Healthwatch England Committee has major concerns about the proposal to cut the funding for local Healthwatch in Staffordshire by 50.5%. This means the council will be investing just 25p per head in the Healthwatch service.

In our previous correspondence and in the service specification it is clear the council acknowledges the significance of this reduction and is committed to monitoring the impact this has on delivery. However, there is absolutely no mention of what action the council will take should the provider not be able to meet their statutory responsibilities with the reduced resource.

A 'Plan B' is urgently needed to ensure Staffordshire County Council will be fully compliant with Section 222 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 - (arrangements under section 221 of that Act) as amended by Section 183 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 - which clearly states it is a legal duty of the local authority to ensure the delivery of an effective Healthwatch service.

We recognise the financial pressures and difficult decisions that local authorities are faced with in the current climate. However, the vast majority of councils have chosen to recognise the importance of giving their community a voice by maintaining their investment in their local Healthwatch in the context of other very difficult decisions. Staffordshire is therefore a significant outlier, with the current tender process constituting one of the largest ever proposed cuts to a Healthwatch service in terms of both the amount of money and the proportion of the funding.

As stated above, this letter should be treated as formal advice issued under the statutory powers outlined in the Health and Social Care Act. We therefore expect a response from you on how you intend to address our concerns. Taking into account the timeline for appointing a provider it would be helpful to have your response by Monday 11 December.

Given the severity of the cut in funding, if you proceed as planned Healthwatch England will also be watching the impact on quality of the service being provided. We want to ensure the people of Staffordshire continue to have access to first rate advice and information about local health and care services and are given an opportunity to shape the way services are delivered in the future. Where the provision of the local Healthwatch activities falls below this expectation, the Healthwatch England Committee reserves the right to remove the brand licence.

In view of the gravity of this situation, I am releasing this letter to the media and it will be published on our website. I am also copying in both the Secretary of State



for Health and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, as well as key local stakeholders such as Staffordshire MPs and leaders of health and social care services.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Mordue  
Chair of Healthwatch England

cc:

Cllr Alan White, Deputy Leader, Staffordshire County Council  
John Henderson, Chief Executive, Staffordshire County Council  
The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Secretary of State for Health  
The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government  
Andrew Griffiths MP  
Amanda Milling MP  
Michael Fabricant MP  
Paul Farrelly MP  
The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP  
Jeremy Lefroy MP  
The Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP  
Gareth Snell MP  
Ruth Smeeth MP  
Jack Brereton MP  
Sir Bill Cash MP  
Christopher Pincher MP  
David Pearson MBE, Chair, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust  
Neil Carr, Chief Executive, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Partnership NHS Trust & South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust  
Martin Gower, Chair, South Staffordshire and Shropshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust  
David Rogers, Chair, North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust  
Caroline Donovan, Chief Executive, North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust  
Marcus Warne, Accountable Officer, Cannock Chase, North Staffordshire, South East Staffordshire and Seisdon Peninsula, Stafford and Surrounds & Stoke on Trent CCGs  
Dr Mo Huda, Chair, Cannock Chase CCG



Dr Charles Pidsley, Chair, East Staffordshire CCG

Tony Bruce, Accountable Officer, East Staffordshire CCG

Dr Alison Bradley, Chair, North Staffordshire CCG

Dr John James, Chair, South East Staffordshire and Seisdon Peninsula CCG

Dr Paddy Hannigan, Chair, Stafford and Surrounds CCG

Dr Ruth Chambers OBE, Chair, Stoke-on-Trent CCG

Sir Neil McKay, Chair, Together We're Better

Simon Whitehouse, Director, Together We're Better