



Steve Brine MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health  
Department of Health  
Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2NS

22 December 2017,

Dear Minister,

As you will be aware, Healthwatch England is a statutory consultee on the Mandate to NHS England.

Over the last few months we have been having constructive conversations with both NHS England and Department of Health officials to feed in to the annual refresh process.

I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you and outline where we have got to in these discussions and formally set out how this year's deliverables could help continue to enhance the role of patient experience and feedback in improving the health service.

The submission attached provides further detail, but there are six areas we have explored this year, drawing on the insight the Healthwatch network has gathered over the last year.

- **Improving public involvement in changes to local services**

The pace and scale of planned transformation across NHS and social care shows no sign of changing. It is therefore important the Government and NHS England continue to send strong and repeated messages to commissioners, providers and health and care professionals reinforcing their expectations that people and communities will play a key role in shaping the future of health and care services.

- **Using discharge as a success indicator for integration**

The new target on delayed transfers of care is an important step. However, there is significant scope to do more to understand an individual's road to recovery and use this to track whether or not services are providing people with a seamless, integrated experience.

- **Demonstrating how learning from feedback is improving care**

Whilst significant progress has been made on complaints in terms of the data collected and internal learning within NHS England, there is still much to do to outline to people what has been learnt from their feedback and what has changed in the way services are delivered. Hardwiring complaints and feedback data into the quality improvement process is a necessary next step.

- **Increasing focus on evaluation of mental health services**

We recognise the Mandate has supported the Mental Health Forward View and the targets set out within it. This is a positive step. However, feedback suggests the



proposed changes are taking time to be implemented and have an impact on people's experiences of care. The Mandate provides an opportunity to increase the focus on evaluation, in particular the importance of evaluating how the changes are affecting people, to ensure services are achieving the intended outcomes. In particular we would like to see greater emphasis on the need for physical health services to improve the way they also meet people's mental health and wellbeing needs.

- **NHS targets and the experiences of users**

Whilst NHS targets are useful for tracking performance from a system point of view, they are not always the best way of tracking people's opinions of the care they receive. The Mandate should encourage the NHS to look at a broader set of metrics that give a rounder picture of people's experiences and create a more meaningful national conversation about how the NHS is doing.

- **Tackling access issues in NHS dentistry**

The experiences shared with us highlight that in some parts of the country people have real trouble accessing an NHS dentist. We have also heard that there are real gaps in provision for particular groups, such as people in care homes. Yet such evidence is often overlooked in national commissioning decisions, particularly where national satisfaction surveys tell a more positive story on average. As an initial step the Mandate should look to raise the priority given to NHS dental services, but looking more broadly it could also be used to encourage NHS England to consider a wider evidence base when commissioning services directly.

We appreciate the early involvement in this year's refresh process and would like to thank officials for taking on board our feedback and suggestions throughout the development of the Mandate deliverables for 2017/18.

Yours sincerely,

Jane Mordue  
Chair, Healthwatch England