



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

Stephen Hammond MP  
Minister of State for Health

39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

020 7210 4850

Sir Robert Francis QC  
Chair, Healthwatch England

By email to: [REDACTED]

Dear Sir Robert,

Further to my letter of 12 April, I am now in a position to respond fully to your letter of 18 March. I would like to apologise for the delay in replying to you, but I wanted to ensure that we set the right accountability framework to NHS England and NHS Improvement.

Thank you again for Healthwatch England's continued contribution to ensuring that the direction we set for the NHS and the way that we hold it to account, reflect the needs of patients and the public. This year, you have provided invaluable input to the development of *The Government's 2019-20 Accountability Framework with NHS England and NHS Improvement*, as well as to our wider work with the NHS on Long Term Plan implementation.

Your formal submission, the useful meeting between Imelda Redmond and Jonathan Marron, the Director General responsible for developing the Accountability Framework, and discussions at official level have shaped our thinking. Building on this engagement, I am writing to set out how we have taken on board your views.

I am particularly pleased that you support our decision to combine, for the first time, our annual mandate to NHS England with the remit set for NHS Improvement, as well as our focus on laying the building blocks for future delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan. This is an important year for the NHS, as it transitions into full implementation of the Plan that the Healthwatch network has ensured reflects the insights of patients and the public, and that the Government wholly supports. At the same time, the NHS will need to ensure that every patient in England will continue to receive vital services as the country leaves the EU.

For 2019-20 only, therefore, we have set two objectives for both NHS England and NHS Improvement:


1. Ensure the effective delivery of the Long Term Plan; and
2. Support Government in managing the effects of EU Exit on health and care

The first of these represents a clear expectation that NHS England and NHS Improvement will oversee a concerted period of local and system level planning that will feed into a national implementation programme by the end of 2019, whilst also working with Health Education England to ensure that we have motivated and empowered staff in place to deliver it. This clearly demonstrates our commitment to NHS staff, to the public, to patients and to taxpayers, that the Plan will be delivered, making effective use of the £33.9 billion cash injection that we have committed to providing the NHS by 2023-24. We expect NHS England and NHS Improvement to ensure that there is good engagement with wider partners and local communities on implementation planning, and it is good to see that the Healthwatch network will be actively working with them on this.

In 2016, the country voted in a referendum to leave the EU. The Government remains committed to leaving the EU with a deal; however, if Parliament does not ratify the Withdrawal Agreement and no other solution can be found, the legal default is that the UK will leave the EU without a deal on 31 October 2019. Therefore, as a responsible government, we continue to prepare the NHS for all possible EU exit outcomes from our current discussions to achieve a deal. Although Healthwatch England has not offered views on the second objective, we are already working with NHS England, NHS Improvement, and our other Arm's Length Bodies to ensure that is the case and this objective cements that.

We intend to set multi-year objectives for NHS England and NHS Improvement in a further Accountability Framework to cover the years between 2020-21 and 2023-24. We will seek to align these closely with the NHS's national implementation programme and workforce implementation plan, as well as the outcome of the 2019 Spending Review. We will also ensure that these multi-year objectives reflect the needs of patients and the public and look forward to further discussing our approach to this with Healthwatch England.

The attached annex sets out how we have considered each of Healthwatch England's specific comments for 2019-20.

*Yours sincerely*  
  
**STEPHEN HAMMOND**



**Department of Health and Social Care response to Healthwatch England submission on *The Government's 2019-20 accountability framework with NHS England and NHS Improvement***

**Send a strong message about involving people in NHS decision-making**

We are very grateful for the role that Healthwatch England and the Healthwatch network played in bringing forward the views of 85,000 members of the public during the development of the Long Term Plan, and the role that they will continue to play in ensuring that implementation of the Plan is similarly informed by the views of patients and the public. We have included several references to the Healthwatch network in the accountability framework document, and the Secretary of State has also emphasised its role in his foreword.

The Government continues to endorse the importance of involving patients, public and communities, in NHS decision making. The National Health Service Act 2006, as amended by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, places clear statutory duties on NHS England and Clinical Commissioning Groups in this respect. We will be looking for evidence that there has been good engagement with wider partners and communities in implementation planning, how the insight being gathered is informing decisions and on how this has been reflected in the national implementation programme. Along with the new national NHS Assembly that NHS England and NHS Improvement are setting up to support and guide implementation of the Plan, the engagement work that Healthwatch networks are undertaking will be crucial to this.

**Make NHS targets more meaningful for people**

We note that Healthwatch England welcomes the interim report of the NHS's Clinical Review of Standards. Subject to Government agreement, its proposals will be field tested at a selection of sites across England before final recommendations are made in Spring 2020.

NHS England will continue to engage with partners and key stakeholders nationally, and through the test sites, as field testing continues. This engagement will include the clinical community and, through the Healthwatch network, patients and the public. I particularly welcome Healthwatch's involvement in this.

Evaluation of field testing will specifically consider whether the changes:

- promote safety and good outcomes;
- drive improvement in patient experience;
- are clinically meaningful, accurate and practically achievable;
- ensure the sickest and most urgent patients are given priority;
- ensure patients get the right service in the right place;
- are simple and easy to understand for patients and the public; and
- do not worsen inequalities.

### Reassert the focus on the NHS being the world's largest learning organisation

The NHS becoming a more efficient learning organisation is, as you say, implicit in the NHS Long Term Plan. The benefits of the Plan can only be fully realised, and services improved to better meet the needs and wishes of patients, if roll out of its changes is informed by feedback gathered from a wide range of sources. Your submission refers to Healthwatch England's membership of the Department's Feedback Improvement Partnership. Adding Healthwatch England to this influential group was an important step forward. I know that you are already providing invaluable support for Partnership's work to develop a Strategy to improve the way the NHS handles, and learns from, all forms of feedback in future. Linked to this work, I also know that HWE is working with the Department and the Ombudsman, along with other system partners on a systemwide good practice framework for handling concerns. I can assure you that getting this right is also a priority for us.

### Build public confidence in new technologies

You emphasised the need to put users at the heart of the tech revolution. Our Tech Vision published in October 2018 underpins the Long-Term Plan and sets out a guiding principle that services must be designed to meet user needs. Understanding who the users of a system, website or service are and what they need to do to achieve their goal is vital to be able to deliver great services appropriate for the internet age. We have therefore set out our ambition for NHSX to take forward digital transformation in the NHS so that patients and staff can benefit from the latest digital systems and technology. NHSX will bring together all the levers of policy, implementation and change across the department, NHS England and NHS

Improvement technology leadership to make this happen. We are grateful for the offer of support from Healthwatch to help NHSX to ensure the technology revolution works for everyone. We are keen to work with all who can help us to meet our goals and will be establishing relationships over the coming months.

Your submission specifically asks whether the NHS App, which was launched on 31st December 2018, can be further expanded to enable people to book appointments with a broader range of primary care professionals as this is what patients have told you they want. As a next step, NHS England will be exploring how the appointment booking experience can be improved and whether there is scope to expand it further – this might include making it possible to book other types of appointments over time. It would be very useful, for example, if it can be used to book out of hours dental appointments which we know, based on data on use of NHS111, that many people would find helpful.

#### Listen to what people want from the future of the NHS workforce

Your submission reinforced the importance of patient and public views informing the future NHS workforce. You specifically asked the Government to set an expectation that the NHS People Plan (formerly called the Workforce Implementation Plan) will take account of what patients and public say they want in the future.

We recognise for the NHS to realise the ambitions set out in the Long Term Plan we will need to ensure we have enough people, with the right skills and experience to effectively care for patients. The People Plan will outline how this will be achieved and is due to be published shortly. NHS Improvement has already been working with a broad range of experts (including patient groups, voluntary sector, think tanks, regulatory bodies, academia and trade unions) to develop its thinking. Patients, the public and staff have also been offering their views and have contributed towards the plan's development through a national steering group and stakeholder events. Staff have been engaged through the Department of Health and Social Care's own online community Talk Health and Care. We would value Healthwatch England's continuing views as work progresses.

**STEPHEN HAMMOND**

