The future of local Healthwatch

A turning point for independent public voice

On 28 October, the Government confirmed it would not proceed with plans to abolish local Healthwatch or Healthwatch England. Healthwatch Bury welcomed the decision as recognition of the importance of an independent voice for patients and the public.

The Government's updated policy now sets out a strengthened Healthwatch model: local organisations will remain independent, locally rooted and commissioned by local authorities, alongside a retained Healthwatch England. The direction is retention and reform—not simply a return to the status quo.

What will change?

More consistent quality. The Health Bill will require Healthwatch England to publish a national quality framework covering performance, data collection and research approaches. Councils commissioning Healthwatch and local Healthwatch organisations will have to have regard to it, while retaining flexibility to respond to local needs.

A stronger route from evidence to action. The Bill will require integrated care boards to respond formally to Healthwatch England's advice and information. A new patient experience directorate within the Department of Health and Social Care will bring together intelligence to inform national policy and improvement; it will complement, not replace, Healthwatch's independent voice.

Priorities for the next chapter

The following are proposed priorities for local Healthwatch and its partners, rather than additional Government commitments:

- **Protect independence and local reach:** maintain the ability to challenge services constructively and hear from people who are less often included, across both health and social care.
- **Secure sustainable delivery:** seek clear commissioning arrangements and sufficient resources to retain staff, volunteers and community relationships, alongside any new quality requirements.
- **Demonstrate change:** track recommendations, seek clear responses from service leaders and tell communities what changed because they spoke up.
- **Shape implementation together:** involve residents, local authorities and NHS partners in preparing for the quality framework, without losing locally chosen priorities.

What this means for Bury

For Healthwatch Bury, the opportunity is to put the uncertainty behind us and continue with purposeful planning: agree priorities with local people, strengthen partnerships without compromising independence, and make the impact of public feedback visible. Retention should be the foundation for a stronger service—not the end of the conversation.