

Healthwatch Plymouth - The first three months

Healthwatch Plymouth began on 1st April 2013, following a competitive tender process. Healthwatch will build on the work of Local Involvement Networks (LINKs), to be a consumer champion across Health and Social Care services.

During the first three months of the service the vital infrastructure for a successful delivery has been put into place. A paid team of Healthwatch staff were recruited to support the targeted delivery of the service. The Healthwatch team consists of:

- Healthwatch Plymouth Manager - part time 27.5 hours
- Healthwatch Assistant - Full time
- Healthwatch Research Assistant - Full time
- Healthwatch Engagement Workers x 2 - One full time, one part time
- Healthwatch Volunteer Co-ordinator - part time 22.5 hours (post is temporarily filled)

Relocation within the existing building has allowed the creation of a 'public friendly' drop in facility and 'community hub', to facilitate dedicated support of volunteers involved in Healthwatch, as well as confidential space for members of the public to give feedback in confidence. We also have a Healthwatch branded website - www.healthwatchplymouth.co.uk.

We have the following drop-ins in our current schedule:

- Stonehouse - HQ Building, Monday 1-3pm, Tuesday 9.30-11.30am, Thursday 10-12noon
- Stonehouse - Foodbank/Oasis Café, Monday 1.30-3.30pm
- Devonport - Cumberland Centre, day and time awaiting confirmation
- Beacon Park - Jan Cutting Healthy Living Centre, monthly on a Thursday afternoon 12 noon -2pm
- Various Libraries - details awaiting confirmation

We are now seeking to develop further drop-ins both wider across the city but also with specific community groups that aren't necessarily geographically located.

Policies and protocols in relation to the Small Grants Scheme, overall Healthwatch governance, role descriptions for volunteering opportunities and the constitution of the Management Board have been devised. Publicity of the service began, with press releases to local radio, television and newspapers, as well as distribution of

Healthwatch posters across the city in many locations ranging from libraries and GP Surgeries to community centres and council buildings.

Current Focus

Healthwatch Plymouth is focussed on strengthening existing relationships with key stakeholders and services across the city to ensure that we are best placed to represent the views of patients and the public to improve services.

Priorities include:

- Understanding the issues for 'hard to reach' & vulnerable groups so that Healthwatch Plymouth is able to recommend how services can best meet their needs
- Make local views an integral part of the decision making process of local commissioning groups/boards
- Building relationships with providers to improve services
- Support change to challenge inequalities in access to healthcare and life expectancy

Healthwatch Plymouth recently held a joint launch event with Western Locality NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group, during which the organisation was launched to groups, services and organisations across the City. The event focussed on how we can work together to ensure views and experiences are gathered and shared at the right time, to shape service improvement and design.

We have been engaging our strategic partners in the set-up of Healthwatch Plymouth and have sought their feedback during Healthwatch Liaison Meetings, in regards to structure, process and future priorities. Healthwatch Liaison meetings will take place every 8 weeks, and give the opportunity to view strategic priorities across services and explore collaborative working opportunities.

Requests for involvement with Healthwatch Plymouth are increasing daily, particularly from Health and Social Care services. We are currently represented on strategic groups such as Health and wellbeing Board and JSNA steering group and are assessing Healthwatch representation on key groups and committees with a view to strengthening the patient voice within the commissioning cycle.

Day to day activities within Healthwatch Plymouth also currently include:

- Engaging voluntary and community groups
- Encouraging the sharing of resources
- Work to support joint partnership and outcomes without duplicating services
- Joining partner forums and creating a Healthwatch presence locally, regionally and on national networks

- Marketing and publicity of the service and how to become involved, including development of our social media presence, advertising in key publications, maximising opportunities such as sponsorship and a targeted community awareness programme through links with community and voluntary groups.
- Attendance at events/groups including Locality meetings, Youth Cabinet, Special Olympics, Plymouth Options and West Country Housing.

The Healthwatch Plymouth Small Grants Scheme is another focus for the team, and it is anticipated that promotion of the scheme will commence within the next 8 weeks.

The Small Grant Scheme aims to support small, developing, less well-resourced grassroots groups and organisations to undertake focused consultations related to general health and social care issues which are either emerging or existing within that community.

The Grants Scheme will support community based organisations to develop targeted consultations and provide the means for people within that community to be heard at a strategic level.

We are currently finalising plans with Plymouth City Council Adult Social Care, to work collaboratively with the Quality Assessment Improvement Team, undertaking the role as a lay assessor during selected assessments of care homes in the City. Healthwatch will, by talking to people, add to the information available from residents, to feed in to the assessment process. The role will be supported by a role description, training both from Healthwatch and Plymouth City Council to ensure high quality at all times. We will be looking to this work as a basis for a stronger relationship with care homes, to facilitate more collaborative working. Although we wish to work in partnership, Healthwatch Plymouth does have 'enter & view' powers should issues come to light that require a more direct approach - although close liaison with Adult Social Care would still be central to this.

The next 12 months...

The coming year will see Healthwatch Plymouth develop even further. Our current plans include:

- Focussed work with Health and Wellbeing Board and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Steering Group, to ensure the public and patient voice is fed in to strategic City plans
- Look to develop 'Healthwatch partner' Kite mark to recognise involvement & good practice
- Incorporate Healthwatch's work into existing services
- Engage partners in monitoring the effectiveness of HW

- Create an escalation process for local issues to compliment national guidance
- Development of our IT presence to include blogs, YouTube videos and real time web chats with the public
- Create a Healthwatch 'column' for local publications, using a question and answer format
- Initiate Healthwatch radio 'phone ins'
- Develop our public presence with attendance at a greater number of events including our own 'Healthy Plymouth' and 'Big Debate' events
- Enhance our interactive services, with investigation into the development of a Healthwatch smartphone 'app'
- Finalise plans for 'pop-up' shops and 'on the road' workshops, at locations across the city, including those areas considered to be seldom heard

These developments are just a sample of some of the work Healthwatch Plymouth will be undertaking. The core functions of Healthwatch will continue on a day to day basis, whilst development of the service and of the many collaborative opportunities to work with organisations in our city, drive forward the opportunity and voice for the public.