

The lives we want to lead: The LGA green paper for adult social care and wellbeing

A response from Healthwatch England

We have responded to as many of the questions posed as we have sufficient data and insight to provide a strong, evidenced based answer to. For those questions for which our data is wanting, we have chosen not to answer.

1. What role, if any, do you think local government should have in helping to improve health and wellbeing in local areas?

Local government has an invaluable role in helping to improve the health and wellbeing of the populations they serve.

However, this role is one that is changing, as well as being commissioners, and in some instances providers of social care, councils have a growing role; as a source of information and advice, often taking on more of a community navigator role.

Councils also have a key role in terms of their oversight of care provision, supply and demand in their local area, this falls under the market oversight duties in the Care Act.

Local authorities in England have a duty under the Care Act to develop and maintain a universal information and advice service. However, our research suggests that public awareness of, and access to these services is limited.¹

This is a key area for improvement, we believe council's role as a source of information and advice to help people plan and prepare for their social care should grow in the coming years.

We recommend that councils should work with their local Healthwatch to develop information and advice services tailored to the needs of the population they serve.

¹ Healthwatch England, *What do people want from social care?*
<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2018-09-18/what-do-people-want-social-care>

2. In what ways, if any, is adult social care and support important?

People have told us about the many ways in which good social care can improve their quality of life, maintain their independence and offer support to live their life on their own terms.

Social care can help people achieve the outcomes they want and to achieve or sustain their independence. Social care also has a great preventative capacity, supporting people to remain in their communities and avoid admissions to hospitals, and can also facilitate a timely and effective discharge from hospital.

3. How important or not do you think it is that decisions about adult social care and support are made at a local level?

Decisions about service provision should be made in consultation with local people and communities. We believe that all decisions about social care provision should be rooted in the needs, expectations and wants of the communities whose care needs they are in place to meet. The insight gathered by the Healthwatch Network shows how this process can drive real service improvement.

4. What evidence or examples can you provide, if any, that demonstrate improvement and innovation in adult social care and support in recent years in local areas?

The local Healthwatch Network can provide many examples of services and situations where people's experiences have been successfully used to shape and improve local services.

In 2017 Healthwatch England conducted a review of the local Healthwatch Network's intelligence on care homes, and the findings from their statutory 'Enter and View' visits. Several key themes as well as a range of low cost, high impact recommendations which have been implemented by care homes emerged, including:

- Redecorating, refurbishing and cleaning;
- Encourage healthy eating, including the provision of fresh fruit;
- Recruit additional volunteers/befrienders to address loneliness;
- Actively seek feedback and increase user involvement, potentially by establishing a residents committee;
- Reviewing the range of activities available; and
- Increasing community engagement.²

² Healthwatch England, *What's it like to live in a care home?*
<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2017-08-10/whats-it-live-care-home-findings-healthwatch-network>

The common factor across all of these recommendations is the importance of collecting and responding to feedback. As part of the Quality Matters commitment, we worked with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to develop the Single Complaints Statement which was designed to be used by people who use services as well social care professionals and providers to ensure that we have a common understanding of our rights and responsibilities around making and responding to complaints in social care.³

5. What evidence or examples can you provide, if any, that demonstrate the funding challenges in adult social care and support in recent years in local areas?

There is a substantial and growing body of evidence which shows the scale of the funding, and demand driven, challenges that the social care sector faces.

One issue has been patient flow and the pressures at the interface between the NHS and social care, namely in the form of delayed discharges from hospital.

Local government and the social care sector more broadly has worked effectively to redress this issue, and as a result we have seen the rates of delayed transfers of care attributable to social care decrease significantly.

However, one issue that we believe has been overlooked and not effectively monitored, is the waiting times people accessing social care assessments and services via a community referral route.

We collected data from councils on this subject. The table below provides the weighted average of the mean values reported to us by councils.

	Discharge from hospital		Diversion from hospital		Community	
	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17
Request to assessment (days)	22	19	35	27	36	36
Assessment to care package (days)	12	15	13	11	23	25
Total	34	34	48	38	59	61

³ Single Complaints Statement for Adult Social Care: <https://www.lgo.org.uk/adult-social-care/adult-social-care-resources>

The table shows that people accessing services via the community route wait the longest time for support, while those awaiting discharge wait a comparatively short time.

We believe that this is indicative of issues around patient flow and prevention. While a great deal is being done to facilitate a timely discharge, services that may prevent admission or readmission to hospital are comparatively harder to access.

6. What, if anything, has been the impact of funding challenges on local government's efforts to improve adult social care?

As in our response to Q5, our research suggests that one impact of funding pressures has been on waiting times and access to assessments and support services, particularly for people accessing social care via a community referral route.

Our data also suggests that many councils do not hold this data, this is a problem as it may undermine councils ability to make an evidenced based case for additional investment from central government.

7. Do you agree or disagree that the Care Act 2014 remains fit for purpose?

Strongly agree. The Care Act remains fit for purpose, the spirit and intention of the legislation remain important and relevant. The issues that the Act faces centre around its implementation.

8. What, if any, do you believe are the main barriers to fully implementing the Care Act 2014?

People have told us of issues around accessing and understanding social care, we believe that these issues have been compounded by the resource and demand side pressures that social care is under.

There are clear issues here around the implementation of the Care Act, though we are not able to comment on the cause.

9. Beyond the issue of funding what, if any, are the other key issues which must be resolved to improve the adult social care and support system?

Through our recent research on people's experiences of social care, we heard that the public often do not understand or want to engage with our social care system.⁴

⁴ Healthwatch England, *What do people want from social care?*

<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2018-09-18/what-do-people-want-social-care>

There are very few incentives to plan or prepare for social care, as such people tend not to, and adopt a ‘wait and see’ attitude toward their future social care.

Councils and other external organisations, including local Healthwatch, have a role to play in providing accessible information advice, as well as support to plan for social care.

We recommend that councils work closely with their local Healthwatch to develop high quality information and advice services, which can provide expert guidance on local social care options.

10. Of the above options for changing the system for the better, which, if any, do you think are the most urgent to implement now?

In the short to medium term, the most pressing issue should be addressing unmet need for both older and working age people.

11. Of the above options for changing the system for the better, which, if any, do you think are the most important to implement for 2024/25?

In the longer term, the ambition should be to have in place protections from ‘catastrophic care costs’ – this could be via a ‘cap and floor model’ or via the provision of free personal care. We do not have an expressed preference for any particular funding model, but in principle we believe it should be clear, fair and accessible.

12. Thinking longer-term, and about the type of changes to the system that the above options would help deliver, which options do you think are most important for the future?

For the public to have an understanding of social care, so that they may be empowered users of care should they need it.

13. Aside from the options given for improving the adult social care and support system in local areas, do you have any other suggestions to add?

Yes, through our research people explained to us that they were unsure about how social care was funded or what steps they should take to plan for their future social care needs.

Very few people have adequate plans in place to meet their future social care needs. Only 5% of people we surveyed on this topic said that they were ‘fully prepared’ to meet their future care needs. While over one quarter (27%) of people we surveyed said that they did not believe that people should plan for their social care at any time.

This lack of awareness and engagement is a significant barrier to reforming social care.⁵

To address this, we believe that councils should develop and signpost people towards effective information and advice services. This is a key Care Act duty, though evidence suggests that public awareness of such services is low and that their quality is variable.

14. What is the role of individuals, families and communities in supporting people's wellbeing, in your opinion?

These three groups have a considerable role to play in the present and future of social care.

- **Individuals:** the individual should be at the centre of a personalised care plan, people who use social care should be the lead partner in the planning and provision of their care. This is a key aspiration of the Care Act.
 - **Families:** the 6 million carers in England play an invaluable role in sustaining our current social care system. As a group they will continue to grow in number over the coming years, and will most likely continue to deliver the vital support they do. However, councils must be able to provide the support that carers are entitled to.
 - **Communities:** community involvement is something that can help people who use services achieve the outcomes that they want. Social care must do more in the coming years to make the most out of community assets, and ensure people who use services can be as involved in their local community as they want to be.
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15. What are your views on the suggested tests for judging the merits of any solution/s the Government puts forward in its green paper?

The tests put forward by the LGA are appropriate.

16. What evidence or examples, if any, can you provide that demonstrate the impact of other local services (both council services outside of adult social care and support, and those provided by other organisations) on improving health and wellbeing?

⁵ Healthwatch England, *What do people want from social care?*
<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2018-09-18/what-do-people-want-social-care>

In a recent Enter and View report, Healthwatch Warrington reported on the positive outcomes achieved by one local care home which used 'I would if I could...' statements to find out about the unfulfilled hopes and wishes of their residents.

Using this approach, the residents were supported to engage with a wide range of community resources, including:

- A 99 year old resident wanted to go swimming again, when contacted the local health club was happy to raise the temperature of the pool by a few degrees to enable this;
- One resident who was a cat lover was able to visit a local animal rescue centre;
- One resident was unable to visit London in person, so staff arranged guide book and took her on a virtual tour using interactive technology.⁶

17. What principles, if any, do you believe should underpin the way the adult social care and support service and the NHS work together?

- Planning and service delivery should be person-centred;
- Commissioning and service delivery should be planned strategically in consultation with local populations;
- Commissioning should be outcome focussed;
- Decision making processes should be public and transparent; and
- Prevention and early intervention should be strategic priorities of any joint working.

18. In your opinion, how important or unimportant is it that decisions made by local health services are understood by local people, and the decision-makers are answerable to them?

Very important.

19. Do you think the role of health and wellbeing boards should be strengthened or not?

Informal feedback from the Healthwatch Network indicates that the effectiveness of Health and Wellbeing Boards is variable between local areas.

⁶ Healthwatch England, *What's it like to live in a care home?*

<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2017-08-10/whats-it-live-care-home-findings-healthwatch-network>

Where they are working well and effectively, they are strong agent of system reform and integration.

As such, there is a clear argument to be made that the role of HWBs should be strengthened, however more must be done to ensure that it is understood and executed consistently.

20. Which, if any, of the options for strengthening the role of health and wellbeing boards do you support?

All the options are workable, we do not have any preference at this stage.

21. Do you have any suggestions as to how the accountability of the health service locally could be strengthened?

Yes, local Healthwatch have a leading role to play in this, engaging the voice and views of people to shape service delivery at a local level.

About us

Healthwatch is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We exist to ensure that people are at the heart of care.

We listen to what people like about services, and what could be improved, and we share their views with those with the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area.

We have the power to ensure that people's voices are heard by the government and those running services. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them. Our sole purpose is to help make care better for people.



Role of local Healthwatch

There is a local Healthwatch in every area of England. They provide information and advice about publicly-funded health and care services.

They also go out and speak to local people about what they think of local care, and share what people like and what could be improved with those running services.

They share feedback with us at Healthwatch England so that we can spot patterns in people's experiences, and ensure that people's voices are heard on a national level.

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