



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

21st October 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

**Protecting the Independent Public Voice in Health and Social Care**

Both Healthwatch Lincolnshire and Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) have raised serious concerns about proposals within the NHS Ten-Year Plan to abolish Healthwatch England and merge local Healthwatch organisations with Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities.

As you will know, Healthwatch was created to ensure the public voice in health and social care is independent, trusted, and fearless in raising concerns. It is the only statutory mechanism that enables residents to feedback directly on the care they receive, without influence from providers or commissioners. Its independence is not an administrative detail – it is the very reason people trust it.

Bringing Healthwatch functions under NHS or Local Authority control risks filtering public feedback and weakening the accountability built up over the last decade. When people feel unheard by the system, Healthwatch often provides the only safe space to speak openly about failings or frustrations. Removing that separation would erode confidence at a time when trust in public institutions must be rebuilt, not diluted.

In my own community, both Healthwatch Lincolnshire and Healthwatch LLR play a vital role in identifying inequalities and supporting improvements in access and quality of care. Their work often highlights issues that would otherwise go unseen, particularly for those whose voices are least heard across our communities. The importance of an independent patient voice has been recognised repeatedly in public inquiries, most notably after the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust scandal, which exposed the devastating consequences of ignoring patient concerns and lacking effective local scrutiny. A lesson which must not be forgotten.

Recently, the work of Healthwatch Rutland has shown just how essential an independent voice remains in our health system. During the consultation on same-day treatment services, the public were presented with what appeared to be a modernisation plan promising clearer pathways and improved facilities. Healthwatch's analysis highlighted what the consultation materials did not make immediately clear: the proposal would in fact reduce opening hours from 75 to 56 each week and remove all morning cover.

Similarly, Healthwatch Lincolnshire's work across Stamford and the surrounding villages has repeatedly identified gaps in rural transport to medical appointments, delays in access to diagnostic tests, and poor communication for patients awaiting follow-up care. In each case, their independence meant these warnings reached decision-makers before harm occurred. Without that separation from the system, these realities would have remained buried in internal reporting.



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I appreciate the Government's ambition to create more integrated systems, but accountability cannot be integrated into the very structures it is intended to oversee. The strength of our NHS depends not only on the quality of care it delivers but also on the openness with which it faces challenges and learns from them. Healthwatch's independence ensures this voice continues to be heard nationally.

I therefore urge you to protect Healthwatch's independence, which underpins accountability and trust in our health and care services. An honest, independent voice for patients is not a luxury but a safeguard, and without it the system risks speaking only to itself.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alicia Kearns'.

**Alicia Kearns MP**  
**Member of Parliament for Rutland and Stamford**