

Cllr Brenda Jones

Norfolk Health Overview Select Committee

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Ref HOSC/BJ

18 August 2025

**The Rt Hon. Wes Streeting MP**
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
*By Email*

Dear Minister,

**Subject:** **Proposed Closure of Healthwatch Norfolk**

I write on behalf of the Norfolk Health Overview Select Committee following our meeting on 24th July 2025 to express our serious reservations regarding the proposals outlined in the Government’s “Fit for the Future: 10-year Health Plan for England,” which would see the disbanding of Healthwatch England and, by extension, Healthwatch Norfolk.

Healthwatch Norfolk has, since its inception in 2012, provided an impartial, trusted forum for patients and service users to share their experiences of health and social care. It has acted as a critical friend to NHS providers and commissioners, ensuring that the voices of Norfolk’s residents are not only heard but acted upon.

Importantly, Healthwatch Norfolk is the only independent statutory body in the county that scrutinises all aspects of NHS and social care provision. While other patient advocacy groups exist, none offer the same breadth of coverage or statutory independence.

In the last financial year alone, Healthwatch Norfolk has:
- Gathered over 5,299 pieces of feedback from patients and service users.
- Provided direct support to 200 individuals seeking help and advice.
- Published 40 reports on key aspects of health and social care.

These achievements are not merely numbers—they represent lives improved, services shaped, and accountability upheld. The proposed closure of Healthwatch Norfolk threatens to silence this independent voice. Moving its functions in-house risks filtering feedback through institutional lenses, potentially softening critical insights and undermining public trust. Healthwatch’s statutory independence is not a bureaucratic luxury—it is a safeguard born from the lessons of Mid Staffordshire.

The service is also exceptional value for money. Committee members are concerned that procuring a similar external scrutiny service would likely cost significantly more, especially when factoring in staffing, infrastructure, and statutory compliance. The potential disbanding of Healthwatch Norfolk creates upheaval for its dedicated staff, who have built an efficient organisation with deep local knowledge. The team has consistently demonstrated their commitment to amplifying underrepresented voices and shaping services that reflect community needs.

The NHS is undergoing a period of significant transformation, and now more than ever, Norfolk residents need the assurance and independence that Healthwatch provides. Its ability to challenge, question, and advocate without fear or favour is what gives the public confidence that their voices are being heard and acted upon.

While we acknowledge that the contract between Norfolk County Council and Healthwatch Norfolk has been extended, the long-term aim to disband Healthwatch remains unchanged. Members of the Committee wish to formally record their concerns about the erosion of independent scrutiny and the risks this poses to public confidence and service quality.

We urge you to reconsider this proposal and protect the integrity of patient advocacy in Norfolk and across the country. Healthwatch Norfolk is not just a feedback mechanism; it is a cornerstone of democratic accountability in health and social care.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and explore how Healthwatch’s vital role can be preserved and strengthened.

Yours sincerely,

**Councillor Brenda Jones**
Chair, Norfolk Health Overview Select Committee