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David Behan,
Director General of Social Care, Local Government and Care Partnerships
Department of Health
Room 213
Richmond House
Whitehall
SW1A 2NS

Copied: Earl Howe, Malcolm Alexander (NALM)

15th December 2011

Dear David,

I am writing in support of the National Association of LINKs Members (NALM) which has – through its Chair, Malcolm Alexander – written letters to yourself and David Behan explaining concerns over the current government reforms of health and social care and the new structures that are due to replace Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) in October 2012.

As Spokesperson of Bradford LINK's Advisory Group, I wish to take this opportunity to comment on these letters and echo **four** of the concerns that the group have specifically asked me to highlight as a result of their recent meeting on 8th December 2011. The Advisory Group is the steering group of our LINK, and is made up of volunteers and activists drawn from the general public who live and work in Bradford and its district.

1. We are very happy to note, as informed by NALM on 14th December, that you have agreed to provide some additional funding to LINKs for HealthWatch Pathfinder projects. We now urge you to consider an appropriate and realistic level of funding to ensure that LINKs can deliver on the challenge of fulfilling these projects and sharing the learning points from them.
2. Whilst we appreciate David Behan's comments in his reply to Malcolm Alexander's letter on 1st December that Local HealthWatch should have strong and collaborative links to their local areas, we share some of Malcolm's original concerns over local authority responsibility for Local HealthWatch funding. Specifically, we are very concerned that this local authority funding has not been adequately ring fenced.
3. The position of HealthWatch England, as a part of the Care Quality Commission, is also a matter of concern to us. The Care Quality Commission is already under scrutiny through separate inquiries from the Department of Health, National Audit

Office and Commons Public Accounts Committee, prompted by a series of criticisms of that organisation's ability to do its job.

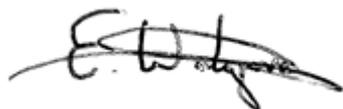
HealthWatch England needs to be independent; responsible to the community it serves - through being elected by Local HealthWatch and other relevant community organisations, and able to hold health and social service providers to account.

4. Finally, we are particularly worried about the 6 month gap between LINKs and Local HealthWatch. Losing the local champion for health and social care in Bradford will lead to a loss of accountability for local health and social care services, and the disempowering of our highly valued volunteers in the area.

We suggest therefore that you insist that every local authority area has proper provision in place to plug the gap between the end of LINKs on 31st March and the formal establishment of HealthWatch on 1st October 2012, and that you provide us with the support and training needed to fulfil the additional responsibilities held by Local HealthWatch so we feel empowered to continue and build upon the good work carried out by LINKs.

Please bring to an end the uncertainties caused by the points I have outlined, and provide effective resources and support to Local HealthWatch. I urge that the details of this support be made available for volunteers to note and consult upon well in advance so that they feel that they are part of the process of reform, rather than a passive force who might feel they are being taken for granted.

Yours sincerely,



Emmerson Walgrove

Spokesperson – Bradford LINK Advisory Group

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The Bradford Local Involvement Network works with [Keighley & Ilkley Voluntary & Community Action](#)