

**Public and Patient Involvement in Health and
Social Care**

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HEALTHWATCH AND PUBLIC
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BRUTAL CUTS IN HEALTHWATCH BUDGETS

Brutal cuts to Local Healthwatch budgets in Manchester, North Yorkshire and Newcastle are revealed in a HAPIA report published today - they provide an ominous precedent for 20 other local authorities that have cut budgets for the new health and social care watchdog. Current budget allocations for LHWs compared with the LINKs budgets for the same areas in 2008-9 show the bald truth that despite significant increases in government funding intended for LHW, these local authorities chose to slash budgets. They have chosen to use LHW money for other unspecified purposes, robbing the patients and users of health and social care they were supposed to empower, and restricting their ability to campaign for better local services.

Astonishingly and incomprehensibly, 17% was cut from the budget of Staffordshire Healthwatch, despite the sickening events revealed by the Francis Inquiry. Thirteen local authorities have made tiny increases to LHW budgets (up to £15,000) which are too small to have any real significance in terms of capacity to monitor the H&SC system. LAs that have substantially increased budgets for LHW are conspicuously in London (£4m) South East/Central (£2.3m) and East of England (£1m).

The length of LHW contracts is similarly inconsistent though most are for 2 years (76) and 3 years (49).

Ruth Marsden, HAPIA North said: "Empowerment is not achieved by making paupers of the people's champions. Local authorities picking at the cash-carcass of LHW is a shameful spectacle. Events have proved all too graphically, tragically and frequently, that neither the NHS, Regulators, local authorities nor the government adequately protect the sick and the vulnerable. It's long past time to ensure the public, through Healthwatch, will be the eyes and ears - after all, that exactly what LHW was enshrined in law to do."

Malcolm Alexander, HAPIA South said: "We applaud those LAs that have increased budgets for LHW and are leading the way to create powerful and effective LHW - a critical development post-Francis. Massive budget cuts by 23 local authorities are truly shocking. LHW is the public's statutory voice in health and social care and will be muzzled without adequate funding. LHW must have resources to monitor all health and social care services within their area and hold providers and commissioners to account for the safety, effectiveness and accessibility of local services. Local authorities that starve LHW of funds will be complicit if services fail and harm those in need of care. We deplore the lower funding levels in the north of England".

Malcolm Alexander, HAPIA SOUTH

Ruth Marsden, HAPIA NORTH

HAPIA IS:

HAPIA (formerly NALM) is a national body of local Healthwatch and individuals who are active in campaigning to create effective public involvement and the best possible health and social care services.

HAPIA WILL:

- **Investigate, challenge and influence health, social care and public health bodies, which fail to provide safe, effective, compassionate and accessible services.**
- **Advise on effective ways of learning from complaints, incidents, accidents and systemic successes and failures that occur in health and social care services.**
- **Challenge government, NHS, health and social care providers on any failure to provide the highest standards of care**

Notes for editors:

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- 2) Ruth Marsden can be contacted on: 01482 849 980 or 07807519933 or Ruth@myford.karoo.co.uk
- 3) Local Healthwatch (LHW) was set up by government from April 1st 2013 to be the voice of local people and to make sure that health and social care services are safe, effective and designed to meet the needs of patients, social care users and carers. It is intended to be a powerful and influential body, led by local people and able to influence and challenge the effectiveness of health and social care services and ensure that action is taken when services fail to meet local need.
- 4) LHW has a legal duty to monitor services, obtain the views of people about their experiences of care and make recommendations about how services should be improved, to persons responsible for commissioning, providing, managing or scrutinising local care services. LHW is the people's watchdog in the NHS and social care.

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