

HELP (Healthwatch Engagement and Liaison Partnership)

Healthwatch Engagement & Liaison Partnership

Towards Healthwatch Together



Working in partnership, Nottingham Hostels Liaison Group (HLG), Self Help Nottingham, AWAAZ and Independent Voices for Engagement (IVE) have been contracted by NHS Nottingham City on behalf of Nottingham City Council to consult communities on the development of their local Healthwatch.

The Department of Health plans to establish local Healthwatch across the country by October 2012, with the aim of providing a collective voice for patients and carers, and advising clinical commissioning groups on the shape of local services, informed by the views of the local community. They will champion patients' views and experiences, promote the integration of local services and improve patient choice through advice and access to information.

The aim of the HELP partnership is to develop a minimum of three potential models for Healthwatch, which will be recommended to a steering group including Nottingham City Council, Nottingham City LINK and Public Health.

By the end of October 2012, each member of the HELP partnership will have engaged with communities in Nottingham and consulted stakeholders (including Nottingham City Council's elected officials), on how they want the final Healthwatch to work and be structured.

At the end of the consultation, which will embrace a cross section of community members by adopting a bottom-up approach, models for the Healthwatch structure and how it should be commissioned will be recommended to the local authority.

The main challenges for HELP are: uncertainty about what Healthwatch will look like, what it will deliver within its budget; how it will embody the needs and aspirations of the communities it represents; and how to engage those who are not clear about the goals and purposes of Healthwatch in the consultation.

The strengths of the partnership are the community-focussed approach it has adopted, which should encourage broader community buy-in, Council support for the project; the existence of strong VCS networks already embedded within communities in Nottingham; and increased knowledge VCS organisations and networks have of the health and social care agenda.

Although the final impact of the partnership will depend on which model is adopted, overall the consultation has the potential to increase the number of people involved in and participating with Healthwatch. This includes compiling a list of people who expressed an interest in getting involved in Healthwatch and, if it becomes a membership organisation, becoming a member.

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An unanticipated outcome of the project has been the discovery that the LINK had not reached a broad spectrum of people, whereby the HELP consultation has already embraced a cross-section of community groups. This means that the models recommended by the partnership are expected to be volunteer driven, with volunteers recruited from a range of community groups to increase public engagement.

For further information on HELP partners: Self Help Nottingham, which supports and promotes self-help groups, visit www.selfhelp.org.uk.

For further information on the HLG, which provides training, information and support services to organisations working with homeless people and those in need of supported housing across Nottinghamshire, visit www.hlg.org.uk.

For further information on the AWAAZ Asian Mental Health Resource Unit, which provides advocacy, one-to-one support and group therapy to members of the Asian community suffering from any form of mental health difficulties, email info@awaaznottingham.org.uk.

For further information on IVE, which supports vulnerable people to make informed choices to improve their quality of life, visit www.ivecic.com.