

MINUTES
of a meeting of the Governance Board
23 September 2025
(13:30-16:00)
At Queen's Court

Present:

Anne-Marie Dean, Chairman

Ian Buckmaster, Company Secretary

Ron Wright, Non-Executive Director (for part of the meeting)

Carol Dennis, Jenny Gregory, Dawn Ladbrook, Di Old and Val Perry, Members

1 Carole Howard

The Chairman referred to the recent death of Carole Howard, Office Administrator, and all present observed a moment of silence as a mark of respect.

2 Welcome and apologies

Apologies were received for the absence of Jenny Douglass

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations.

4 Minutes of meeting held 15 July 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2025 were agreed as a correct record and the Chairman was authorised to sign them.

There were no matters arising.

5 Finance Report

(a) Finance Report for July

Expenditure for the month has been £8,705, which was below the current monthly average, and brought the average monthly spend this year to £9,378.

The bank balances at the end of the month were noted. At the beginning of August, £1,075 had been transferred to the Savings account.

(b) Finance Report for August

Expenditure for the month had been £7,303, which was significantly below the current monthly average, and had brought the average monthly spend this year to £8,985. The Board were sad to note that this was largely a consequence of Carole Howard's passing.

The bank balances at the end of the month were noted, and at the beginning of September, £2,635 had been transferred to the Savings account, and £45 interest was credited to the account.

(c) NHSNEL funding

Following receipt of a Purchase Order from NHSNEL, an invoice had been raised for payment of this year's payment of £5,000, which was expected to be received by the end of September.

6 Staff restructure

Following the unexpected passing of Carole Howard, the position of Office Administrator had been considered by the Directors, who had concluded that, given that less than 7 months remain of the current contract, it was unlikely to be possible to recruit a suitable successor for her, on reasonable terms for such a short period. Moreover, any such recruit would need training before being able to be fully effective, further reducing the time for which they could be beneficially employed (and that would also distract the other staff too).

The Directors had accordingly decided instead to share the essential duties of the Office Administrator post between existing staff, with increased remuneration to reflect that, and easier access to overtime where needed to ensure that the work gets done.

7 Healthwatch office - relocation

The relocation to St James House was to take place on 30 September. The Company Secretary would arrange with Companies House for the Registered Office to be transferred to there with effect from 1 October and all relevant parties would be told of the new address as soon as possible.

8 Future of Healthwatch

(a) National position

Following the announcement that the Government intended to abolish Healthwatch England and to reallocate the work of local Healthwatch to the ICBs (for NHS activity) and local authorities (for social care), most local Healthwatch organisations had joined together to form a Network to persuade the government to retain the independence of the patient voice currently provided by Healthwatch (whether or not the name “Healthwatch” remained).

The principal point being made was that the Government’s proposals suggested that Healthwatch would be replaced by in-house systems within the NHS and local authorities (although there was some thought that the NHS and local authorities might have an option to delegate the responsibility to contractors). Some local Healthwatch had evidence that strongly suggested that “in-house” systems would not be seen by users as “independent” and that they would be reluctant to report concerns via the NHS App because of concerns that criticism could be used against them by service providers such as GP practices or hospital clinics.

The Secretary of State had made comments that suggested he had fundamentally misunderstood Healthwatch activities and a meeting with him was being sought to explain the role to him in greater depth.

The Chairman had recently attended a meeting of the Chairs of all Healthwatch in London, at which there were mixed views and mixed understanding. It was also clear that some Healthwatch were nearing the re-commissioning of their contracts while others had three or four years yet to run. This simple comparison demonstrated how difficult it would be to determine an approach to the way forward. Another simple comparison was that some Healthwatch organisations had three or four contracts with different boroughs and perhaps had more of a commercial approach.

Outcomes centred on three areas:

- The importance of knowledge sharing – understanding the range of different models and arrangements
- An appetite to continue to connect as a London Chairs network – establishing a mailing list
- Influencing the future – safeguarding the independent voice – maintaining a person centred integrated approach – ensuring security of investment for this agenda – recognising the collective wisdom and strength of a voice as London LHW Chairs.

In the meantime, the government had confirmed that existing Healthwatch arrangements would continue to apply until new legislation came into force and,

most importantly, the funding arrangements were unchanged. The current indications were that the legislation was unlikely to come into force before April 2027 at the earliest.

(b) Havering contract

Havering Council had not yet issued a contract specification or invitation to tender for the new contract.

9 Havering Place-based Partnership (HPbP)

No report was submitted.

10 NHS North East London/North East London Health and Care Partnership

No report was submitted.

11 Safeguarding and Quality - update

Ms Old reported that:

- Police enquiries into a suspicious death at a care home were continuing
- There had been reports of bullying by the management of two homes in Romford, which were being investigated
- Problems with the running of a group of homes in Hornchurch now appeared to have been resolved satisfactorily

12 Engagement projects - update

- **Long COVID**
 - A suggestion that the original Peer Support Group proposal be replaced by enhanced working with the Long COVID Cafes held by Everyone Active (the borough's Leisure Services provider) had been proposed and was being pursued. A Long COVID Café was being held at the Hornchurch Sportcentre a few days after the meeting at which the proposal would be discussed with people living with Long COVID.
- **Enter & View visits**
 - The reports on the visits to Maylands GP practice, Spa Medica Eye Clinic, the unannounced visit to Glebe House and the follow-up visits

to the Greenwood GP practice and The Farmhouse (ELIFAR) had all been published.

Several expressions of thanks for these reports had since been received: the Safeguarding Adults Board had commented about the Farmhouse that it was good to see that staff there had now had training in dealing with residents who had an epileptic episode, and the Manager of that home had been happy for the report to be published without any amendment.

- The visit to the Frailty Ward and SDEC at Queen's Hospital and follow up visits to A&E at Queen's and Harold Wood Polyclinic, and the visit to the Billet Lane Medical Practice had been arranged for early October. A comment that the population served by A&E had grown greatly since the Hospital was planned, and the rate of growth was continuing.

- **Defibrillators in Havering**

- The report was being finalised.

- **Survey of Same Day Access Hubs (GP Hubs) users**

- The report of the survey was being finalised. Discussion about the findings of the survey was taking place with NHS NEL staff.

- **Superloop bus route SL12 – proposed alternative route**

TfL had rejected the proposal for the new bus service to be routed via St George's Hub, citing "*the need to maintain express journey times and route reliability, balanced with the additional operational costs associated with these requests*". The Board noted, however, that the proposal was referenced numerous times in the TfL report, and had been supported by several key stakeholders.

The Board agreed that TfL should be urged to look at ways in which the service to the Hub could be improved, building on the suggestions for improving bus links to the Hub within the original proposal.

It was also agreed that the possibility of exploring improvements in bus links the locations of the Same Day Access Hubs should be raised with TfL at the same time.

- **End of Life Care in Havering**

- It was agreed that this proposed project should no longer be pursued.

- **Safer Surgeries**

- It had been proposed that a "mystery shopping" exercise be carried out in late 2025 or early 2026 across North East London to identify which surgeries are compliant with the Safer Surgeries protocol. Further details were awaited.

- **Wards providing care of the elderly**

- HW Redbridge had proposed a joint project with HW B&D and HW Waltham Forest looking at the wards providing care for the Elderly at King George Hospital, Queen's and Whipps Cross Hospital. This would involve volunteers visiting the wards in question to look into concerns raised with HW Rb about medication management, access and confusion about reablement services, hospital discharge and continuity of care, confusion over cost and care hours and people not being provided with a full allocation of carer visits/hours. The Whipps Cross Patient Panel had raised this, and HW Rb had heard additionally from relatives. They would like to gather further insight and evidence.

BHRUT had indicated that they would be happy for the visit to take place during the week beginning 24 November.

The visits would not be Enter & View but concentrating on speaking to patients; hospital staff would not be spoken with.

This project was separate from, but tied in with, the forthcoming E&V visit to the Frailty Wards and the follow-up visit to last year's E&V at E&E at Queen's.

- **Maternity Services review**

- The Government had announced a review of Maternity Services at 14 acute hospital trusts, one of which would be BHRUT. The review, being led by Baroness Amos, "wants to capture experience and learning from a wide range of trusts" and would "look at trusts with a different case mix; at the provision of care to people from diverse backgrounds; and at trusts where previous investigations have taken place."

Healthwatch was not directly involved in this but, given the previous work on Maternity Care, would be observing the progress of the review.

13 Next meeting

The next meeting would be on 14 October 2025, at the office.

_____ Chairman