**Healthwatch Bedford ISAB Meeting**

**Independent Strategic Advisory Board Minutes**

Minutes of the Independent Strategic Advisory Board meeting held at St Cuthberts Hall, Bedford on 15 July 2025 (6.30pm–8.30pm)

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| **Name** | **Title** | **Present** | **Apologies** |
| **Members:** |
| Aidan Vaughan | Chair | ü |  |
| Elizabeth Byrne  | Managing Director of Engaging Communities Solutions | ü |  |
| Jag Lehal | ISAB Board member | ü |  |
| Scarlett Broughton | ISAB Board member | ü |  |
| Sam Denness | ISAB Board member | ü |  |
| Nicola Beacon | ISAB Board member | ü |  |
| Emma Freda  | CEO of Healthwatch Bedford Borough | ü |  |
| Lawrence Fafowora  | ISAB Board member |  | ü |
| Gloria Chukwuji  | ISAB Board member (from agenda item 1.5) | ü |  |
| Ashok Khandelwal  | ISAB Board member |  | ü |
| Elaine Singaram | ISAB Board member | ü |  |
| **In Attendance:** |
| Diana Korotkova  | HBB Community Outreach and Volunteer Officer  | ü |  |
| **Minute taker:**  |
| Abbey Barlow | Clerk to the Board |

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| **Agenda Item No.** | **Introduction and Administration** | **Action** |
| 1.1 | Apologies: These were received from Ashok Khandelwal and Lawrence Fafowara   |  |
| 1.2 | Previous minutes: Due to the meeting (4 March 2025) not being quorate these were accepted as notes and not formal minutes.  |  |
| 1.3 | Action log: There were no actions |  |
| 1.4 | Matters arising from previous meeting: None |  |
| 1.5 | Items for immediate escalation to ISAB   The chair updated the board that as Bedford hospital did not include patient experience information regarding complaints and feedback in its quality account, HBB had written to the chief nurse for information. After not receiving a response, HBB issued a statutory letter requiring a formal response and action plan within 20 working days.  It was noted this was the first time HBB had had to issue a statutory notice letter to any providers.  |  |
| 1.6 | Chairs report  Mr Vaughan welcomed the new board members and the public, introduced the agenda, and shared reflections on Healthwatch’s role in championing patient voices.  Mr Vaughan gave an update on the recent government announcement of the disestablishment of Healthwatch England and therefore the Healthwatch network. No detail of the timescale or future model of patient voice has been given. However, the announcement has caused stress, anxiousness and uncertainty in the staff team and ECS is supporting staff through this.  Ms Byrne clarified ECS does not have a change policy but does have a redundancy policy which will be shared with staff. Ms Byrne confirmed future updates on future changes will be brought to board.  Mr Vaughan highlighted a momentum within the national Healthwatch network of ‘lobbying’ movement on the changes and a collectively-signed letter being sent to the secretary of state; and that HBB would not be signing this as it did not welcome overview and recognised the need for change to the current model – or the signatories had fiduciary interests in the current model.  Mr Vaughan provided an update on the induction meetings he has undertaken with local political and health leaders as an initial model of increasing visibility and accessibility of the organisation.    Mr Vaughan highlighted the local media story of the proposed closure by EEAST of its EOC which has the potential to impact approximately 100 jobs in the borough. While HBB recognises the need of the political stakeholders to ensure inward investment and citizen employment, HBB roles as patient experience champion will monitor about the number of ambulances and response times – which should not be adversely impacted by the changes.  | **0825.01 LB****0825.02 LB** |
| 1.7 | Chief executive report  Ms Freda confirmed that while the wider changes regarding the future of Healthwatch is unknown, HBB will continue to deliver for the patients of Bedford borough.  Ms Freda highlighted further changes in the ICB being merged with Cambridge and Peterborough ICB and Herts ICB into one large ICB cluster. While this supports government policy and cost saving, it is important that BLMK support each other and does not become a junior partner potentially inviting inequality in service investment.  |  |
| **2.0** | **Organisation Quality Performance** |  |
| 2.1 | Performance report  Ms Freda confirmed all the KPIs for 2024/2025 were met and the detail is included later in the meeting (agenda 5.1).   Within the current year the key priorities areas had been achieved as regards the organisational development. However, with staff changes and a focus on the improvements, operational work such as E&V and outreach has not been as intensive as would be welcome.  Ms Freda confirmed a more detailed overview would come to the August board meeting.  Ms Freda welcomed and introduced the new outreach and volunteer officer (Diana Korotkova).  Ms Freda informed the board the annual work plan was just being finalised and would come to the August board. The work programme is developed from patient and stakeholder feedback and will form the basis of the performance report for future board meetings.  Ms Lehal asked about how HBB gathers meaningful feedback from the public and stakeholders. Ms Freda explained that each year in quarter four HBB put out a priority listening survey to the public, offering a variety of different mechanisms for local residents to have their say. She explained that 2025s survey saw 461 participants take part. It was noted that HBB also sends out a stakeholder 360 survey to partners during quarter four. The feedback from these two surveys, the intelligence received through the enquiries service, social media platforms, outreach activity and subsequent horizon scanning monitor impact and inform next steps as well as strategic priorities for the year ahead. | **0825.03 EF****0825.04 EF****0825.05 EF** |
| **3.0** | **Governance reports** |  |
| 3.1 | Risk Report Ms Byrne introduced the risk report, explaining the purpose was to review the current risks, establish any new risks, agree escalation routes, and identify mitigations.The key points from the annex A paper focused on the future of Healthwatch and the risks associated with potential redundancies. Due to the lack of clear information, it remains difficult to fully assess these risks.Mr Vaughan emphasised the importance of understanding how to read and process risks. Low-level risks would be managed by Ms Byrne and Ms Freda, while high-level risks would be escalated to the board. He explained that probability relates to the likelihood of an event occurring, outcome relates to the impact, and the score reflects the overall risk level.Ms Byrne noted that not all risks would be for the board to manage directly, but scrutiny and oversight would remain their responsibility.Ms Lehal asked how the board should work through the risks. Mr Vaughan replied that Ms Byrne had provided a useful overview and that catastrophic risks should always be raised, while some lower-level risks might only need attention occasionally. Mr Vaughan explained that the upcoming board training would include a section on risk management. Ms Denness asked about horizon scanning. Ms Byrne explained that a five-year business plan is required and welcomed board input into this process. Mr Vaughan added that workforce, performance, and finance risks would be included in reporting, with potential impacts on Healthwatch Bedford Borough. Risks with lower scores would not require urgent discussion, while higher scores would be brought to the board for consideration.Ms Denness also asked how risks are considered geographically. Ms Freda confirmed that she meets regularly with the BLMK CEO and the ICB, attends monthly meetings, sits on various boards, and works regionally with other Healthwatch teams on a regular basis. |  |
| 3.2 | Finance Report  Ms Byrne confirmed HBB is funded through the local authority. Going into this year of 2025/26, HBB has a £14,000 surplus, due in the main from additional funding arising from the Denny review and other pieces of commissioned work undertaken during 2024/25.  Ms Freda highlighted that last year the team exceeded their income generation target, raising almost £58,000 against a £10,000 goal.  Mr Vaughan asked Ms Byrne about inconsistencies in expense pertaining to stationary costs. The actual spends totalled the exact same amount as the predicted spend, which members felt was unlikely. Ms Byrne advised she would check with the finance manager and provide more detail and assurance to the board.  | **0825.06 LB** |
| 3.3 | Volunteer oversight  Ms Freda updated the board on the current volunteer recruitment drive and the need for HBB to expand their volunteer base to meet current and future demand. In response to a question from the public, Ms Freda explained the current volunteer roles on offer at HBB and what these would entail. Mr Vaughan explained that there were no set hours and HBB would welcome applications from those able to offer minimal hours each month as well as those looking for more hours.  The board clerk was asked to send the board members the volunteer recruitment form. Ms Freda explained that a recent Year-10 work experience student from Bedford Academy was considering becoming a youth ambassador following her successful placement. Audience question: What about promoting volunteering opportunities at the local hospital?Answer (Mr Vaughan): We will come onto that later in the meeting.  | **0825.07 AB**  |
| **4.0** | **Enter and View**  |  |
|  | No reports were submitted. Volunteer capacity needs to be strengthened before these visits can resume. |  |
| **5.0** | **Spotlight**  |  |
| 5.1 | Annual report Mr Vaughan introduced the context of moving into the annual public meeting presenting an overview of the previous year’s achievements and publication of the annual report. Ms Freda and Ms Byrne presented the highlights of the annual report which included:* 5,141 people contacted HBB with feedback on their care or requesting information
* 17 reports were published following enter and view visits
* Facilitated focus groups and undertook quality visits across the borough to support the ‘Denny Review’ – a Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes (BLMK) review of healthcare related interpreting services
* Undertook an awareness review for ‘Pharmacy First’ which found 53% of respondents had not heard of the service, but that 82% of those that had, rated it ‘good’ or ‘very good’
* Developed awareness campaign and resources to support the oral health improvement team, there were 15,233 views of the campaign across HBB social media platforms

Board discussed the achievements from the previous year and recognising the informative aspect of the information congratulated Ms Freda and the team on a successful year. |  |
| 5.2 | Future volunteersMr Vaughan gave a presentation on the structure of Healthwatch Bedford Borough, the current health landscape of the borough and a horizon scan of the future health needs of a growing population.Mr Vaughan presented a contact for the need for volunteers to support the work of HBB is it was to ensure patient experiences and quality of health services was to improve for a growing population with complex health needs.Ms Broughton proposed using social media for recruitment including TikTok and Instagram to appeal to younger audiences. Ms Freda mentioned that prior to the pandemic HBB had 23 youth ambassadors from across the state and private education sector. These students were aged 16-19 and were recruited via face-to-face assemblies in schools and colleges. Ms Lehal advised that she had a 16-year-old nephew who would be a good youth ambassador, explaining that he was very good with technology and social media.   Ms Freda advised that if each board member were to take responsibility for sourcing a mere five volunteers each by Christmas, this would ensure that the staff team had adequate support. Mr Vaughan and board members felt this was an achievable target and asked for volunteer recruitment forms which were provided, along with details of the website volunteering portal for online applications.  |  |
| **6.0** | **Closing Administration** |  |
| 6.1 | Questions from the public Mr Vaughan invited questions from the public and, following the annual report presentation, the board was asked about measuring impact outside of data. Ms Freda explained that while some outcomes are hard to measure, contractual performance is monitored through data sets. While Mr Vaughan explained the difficulty in measuring experience and perceptions, Ms Freda informed board the work programme was being developed using measures of success so as to present in narrative achievements in 2025/26.Mr Vaughan noted a written question had been submitted prior to the board meeting and had been responded to – and a copy would be attached to the minutes for completeness.Questions from the publicSeveral questions were raised from members of the audience:Question 1: You’ve only had interaction with 1% of the Bedford population. Achievements like dentistry have been shared, but the impact has not changed, as you still wait 6 months for an appointment. Why?Answer (Ms Freda): We provide information to local families in a variety of formats including through our bespoke oral health website page, with includes animations, and we do regularly challenge in BLMK meetings where access remains an issue for Bedford residents. We have data showing that patients still face issues despite hearing otherwise, but this is a national picture and not solely reflective of Bedford. Some local improvements have been made and we’re working closely with primary and secondary care colleagues to reach more people. We use surveys, messaging, our monthly ebulletin, attendance at community events, promotion through our enquiries service and social media.Answer (Ms Byrne): Limitations exist as we rely on our board and volunteers to help promote everything we do. A large national Healthwatch dental campaign could help, but with the current news it’s unlikely.Answer (Ms Freda): Ultimately, we need volunteers to help us to improve our reach.Question 2: Will the slides be available online?Answer (Mr Vaughan): Yes, they can be shared.Question 3: The Universal Studios project will bring major changes. Has this project been broadcast anywhere, as there doesn’t seem to be much public interest?Answer (Ms Freda): It has been promoted quite extensively via the Local Authority. We will be attending a Health and Wellbeing Board informal Universal Studios workshop over the coming days to discuss the council’s response to the public consultation. HBB will also be submitting their own feedback on the public consultation in due course.Answer (Mr Vaughan): It has historically been hard to get the public to attend meetings. We have advertised online, in papers, and through outreach. By continuing this and touring the borough, we hope public interest will increase.Question 4: What’s the difference between a volunteer and an ambassador?Answer (Mr Vaughan): A volunteer is a volunteer, but we are all ambassadors.Answer (Ms Freda): Staff and board members promote HBBs volunteering opportunities daily as part of their roles. Ambassadors offer more of a wider promotional and supportive role.Question 5: The council does something similar. Could Bedford Borough Council be a good place for collaboration?Answer (Ms Freda): Around the table we have strong links with the Local Authority, as well as primary care, the wider NHS workforce, the local college, education settings and the PCCC. If each board member recruited 5 volunteers, it would not be a hard task and would support HBB greatly moving forward.Ms Freda and Mr Vaughan explained that while some outcomes are hard to measure, feedback helps prove the need for Healthwatch.Ms Byrne noted that board members should help promote awareness through their networks. |  |
| 6.2 | Any Other Business Ms Freda reminded new board members to send in headshots and bios of no more than two paragraphs for the website. She advised that as well as the board listing page, HBB had a duty to update the Enter & View list to reflect trained authorised representatives for visit safeguarding purposes. Ms Byrne confirmed Mr Vaughan had the list of outstanding information required and would be chasing board members.   | **0825.08 AV**  |
| 6.3 | Items for Escalation to ECS  Nothing to note.  |  |

**Future Meetings:**

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| **Date:** | Wednesday 17 September 2025 |
| **Time:** | 6.30pm – 8.30pm |
| **Location:** | Willington Peace Memorial Hall (Back Hall), Church Rd, Willington, Bedford MK44 3PY |
| **Duration:** | 2-hours |