

General Purposes Group Report

Wednesday 10th September 2025 – 10.30am

1. Meeting Overview

- Chair: Ann
- Apologies: Chris and Jonathan
- Attendees: Ann, Frances, Jess, and Carole
- Previous Meeting: Notes were agreed, and updates from actions are captured in the HR report.

2. Finance and Budget Forecast

2.1 Financial Position

- The financial forecast to the end of August shows an improved position with a potential surplus of £25,000.
- However, this will reduce to approximately £7,500 due to the need to recruit the Head of Comms and Impact role. The forecast will be updated to reflect this on the board financial report.

2.2 Key Financial Decisions and Updates

- The focus remains on delivery and performance rather than significant cost-cutting, given the uncertainty surrounding Healthwatch's future.
- Investment in staff training has increased, covering areas such as co-production and trauma-informed engagement, ensuring team readiness for both current and future roles.
- While long-term projects are being avoided, the organisation continues to manage short-term commissioned projects, including one ICB project that may extend into April or June 2026.
- We do not expect Healthwatch to close in March 2026, as no date has been given. There is an estimate from Healthwatch England that it will be October 2026, however they have reported that it is likely to be a protracted process as the Health & Care Act will need to be rewritten and presented to the House of Lords.
- Deferred income from the South Place project is being held and will be utilised within the agreed terms.

- Ann emphasised that any significant expenditure must be pre-approved, especially where it may risk creating a budget deficit. This was agreed by all.
- As the expected closure date for Healthwatch has now shifted to October 2026, redundancy costs will not impact the 2025/26 financial year but have been budgeted for 2026/27.

3. Staff Salary Review (2025/26)

- A 3% salary increase is proposed, aligning with NHS and local authority pay uplifts.
- While future financial uncertainty remains, the Board recognises the need to retain staff and remain competitive within the sector.
- Assurance was provided that staff retention is being managed, and significant departures are not anticipated until redundancy processes are formally initiated.
- Action: The 3% staff salary proposal will be presented to the Board meeting on 1st October 2025.

4. HR and Policy Updates

4.1 Recruitment and Staffing Changes

- A self-employed minute taker has been engaged on a contract basis.
- Changes to staffing include:
 - A senior team member's departure.
 - An internal promotion to project manager for the partnership boards.
 - Appointment of a new assistant on a fixed-term contract until March 2026, with the view to extend to align with Healthwatch closure.
- Plans are in place to recruit a part-time Data Capture and Entry Officer to improve data quality and strengthen feedback collection, particularly for social care.
- Recruitment will also begin for a Head of Communication and Impact on a fixed-term contract to align with Healthwatch closure.

4.2 Policy Updates

- A question was raised regarding receipt management for expense claims, particularly due to increased online payments. The process is where receipts are unavailable (e.g. at public engagement events), digital alternatives are being used where possible.
- The financial controls policy has been updated to increase the CEO's spending authority from £10,000 to £15,000, reflecting current expenditure needs. This will be presented at Board.
- The organisation confirmed that the bank's authorised signatory requirements are currently met.

5. Risk Register

- The closure of Healthwatch remains a red-rated strategic risk until the government sets a formal legal closure date.
- A full closure plan will be developed and presented to the Board once timelines are confirmed.

6. Any Other Business

- Concerns were raised regarding the Deputy Chair role description, as current responsibilities are not aligned with the existing job specification.
- It was agreed that role descriptions should be reviewed and updated if needed in the future.