

Appendix 11 – Board Proposal: Strategic Workforce Development Programme

Meeting: Healthwatch Cambridgeshire & Peterborough – Board of Non-Executive Directors

Date: 17th December 2025

Presented by: Jess Slater, CEO

Purpose: For decision

Linked papers: Board Direction of Travel Proposal (Organisational Positioning)

Executive Summary

This proposal seeks Board approval to establish a Staff Development and Workforce Strengthening Programme, allocating £5,000 per Full Time Employee (FTE, pro rata for part time staff) to support structured professional development from January 2026 to March 2027. This represents 8.8% of annual turnover (£59,730 total) and can be funded within existing financial forecasts without risk to operational delivery.

This proposal is a strategic driver to future-proof organisational capability, build specialist expertise, and place the organisation in a position of strength during a changing commissioning landscape.

This approach aligns directly with the Direction of Travel Board Proposal, which highlights the need to prepare proactively for future models of public voice delivery and maintain organisational value, identity and relevance beyond Healthwatch branding.

In addition, the proposal is consistent with Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council strategies which emphasise:

- skilled workforces capable of collaboration, co-production and community-centred practice.
- prevention, engagement, lived experience leadership and system partnership working.
- future-focused service models built on strong local capacity and capability.

1. Purpose

To secure Board approval for an enhanced strategic staff development investment programme, supporting core workforce development through 2025/26 – 2026/27. The programme aims to:

- strengthen organisational capability.
- ensure workforce resilience during transition.
- equip staff with skills aligned to future public engagement, health and care systems, VCSE leadership and research practice.
- enhance our credibility and value as an independent community voice organisation.

This positions staff, and therefore the organisation, strongly for continuity, growth and future commissioning.

2. Strategic Context

The changing national landscape and the potential move of public voice commissioning into local authority and ICS structures requires proactive preparation. The Direction of Travel proposal recommends steps to safeguard independence, identity and readiness for future opportunities.

A skilled workforce is central to this. Developing talent now ensures:

- we remain competitive and contract-ready, post-Healthwatch.
- we retain staff morale, stability and intellectual capital.
- we amplify our reputation as a high performing, insight driven community engagement body.

This aligns to local system ambitions around capacity building, co-production and reducing inequalities, reflecting partner priorities to strengthen resident voice, improve engagement practice and invest in workforce capability.

3. Proposal

- Allocate £5,000 per FTE for structured professional development over 12-15 months.
- Development to focus on areas including: co-production, engagement, community research, digital innovation, leadership, evaluation, health and care policy, and voluntary sector management.
- Development activities approval linked to strategic relevance and capability strengthening.
- Spend monitored quarterly with Board visibility.

4. Strategic Benefits

Strengthens Workforce Capability.

Builds a skilled, confident, adaptable team equipped to operate within evolving health and care systems.

- Future-proofs the organisation.
- Enhances our ability to deliver independent public voice functions beyond Healthwatch, aligning to Direction of Travel.
- Improves system credibility and competitiveness.
- Upskilling in core areas boosts our future contracting potential and organisational reputation.
- Contributes to local authority strategic aims.
- Reinforces co-production, prevention, community engagement and reducing inequalities priorities set by PCC and CCC.
- Ethical and values-led approach to transition.
- Supports staff wellbeing, retention and professional progression during uncertainty.

Budget and Forecast

Over the past two financial years (2024/25 and 2025/26), the Board approved budgets that anticipated deficits of approximately £40k per year. Through careful financial management, reduced recruitment expenditure, and operational efficiencies, we not only avoided those deficits but delivered surpluses in both years.

As a result, we have generated a combined financial improvement of £152k, with an additional £75,483 cash held in unrestricted reserves. This puts us in a stronger financial position than budgeted and enables us to make this strategic investment responsibly.

Only unrestricted reserves owned by Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will be used to fund this staff development proposal, ensuring that contracted delivery funding remains protected

Development Session – Early 2026

Recommendation to utilise the early 2026 development session as a strategic planning session, bringing together Board skills and expertise, aligning our future direction with statutory community engagement requirements, and reviewing an initial draft budget for 2026–2027 to inform forward decision making.

Risks and Mitigations

The proposal carries several risks which have been assessed with corresponding mitigation strategies to ensure the investment remains responsible and deliverable.

Risk	Potential Impact	Mitigation
Staff may leave during or after receiving training	Loss of investment and reduced immediate organisational return	Training agreements will be implemented prior to expenditure including repayment clauses (proportionate to cost and time remaining). Lower-value development will not trigger repayment expectations to ensure fairness. Training selected will prioritise skills that enhance current delivery as well as future employability.
Future funding may not be secured post-Healthwatch contract	Risk of workforce downsizing and inability to deliver future contracts if emerging funding streams do not materialise	Investment supports staff transition readiness while also strengthening capability that makes us more competitive for external funding. The development creates future-proof skills that can secure alternative VCSE, ICS, research and engagement work. Early dialogue with PCC/CCC and ICS partners continues to mitigate uncertainty.
Funding levels may be reduced in 2026–27 or beyond	Reserves may need to prioritise core salary protection and redundancy rather than development	The initial allocation for this financial year is covered by existing reserves and forecast surplus. Spend is phased and flexible, enabling pause or reduction should income drop materially. Funding decisions will be reviewed when 2026–27 allocations are confirmed.

Risk	Potential Impact	Mitigation
Not all staff use allocated budget	Underspend and uneven development benefit	A central training tracker will monitor spend and access. Staff 1:1s will incorporate development planning to encourage uptake. Any unspent allocation can be redirected to shared training, group development or specialist commissioning needs.
Skills developed may not be utilised if organisational activity reduces	Reduced return on development investment	Training has been prioritised around transferable skills, research, engagement and partnership development, supporting both current delivery and staff futures. Knowledge sharing sessions and peer learning will increase internal return even if individuals leave.
If funding cuts force earlier organisational restructure, reserves may be needed for notice periods instead of training	Programme may stop early to protect salaries and statutory costs	Expenditure is front-loaded where possible. A stop mechanism will be applied if significant contract reductions occur, safeguarding organisational duties first.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to:

1. Approve the Staff Development and Workforce Strengthening Programme at £5,000 per FTE (total £59,730).
2. Delegate implementation authority to the CEO with quarterly reporting.
3. Endorse workforce development as a strategic enabler of future organisational identity, independence and readiness for new commissioning models.

Appendix to Proposal

Workforce Development Framework 2026–2027

Strengthening capability, future-proofing the organisation, and growing influence through skills, knowledge and leadership.

Purpose

To develop a confident, skilled and future ready workforce capable of delivering high quality community voice, engagement, research and insight, aligned with system priorities in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough. This framework operationalises the approved Staff Development Investment Programme, translating funding allocation into clear development pathways, competencies, monitoring mechanisms, and outcomes.

Strategic Objectives

1. Strengthen workforce capability to deliver high quality public voice, engagement, research and advocacy.
2. Prepare the organisation for future commissioning models, enabling agility, competitiveness and capacity.
3. Invest in personal and professional development, improving resilience, morale, retention and talent growth.
4. Build specialist skills linked to emerging health & care and VCSE system requirements.
5. Align learning to local authority and ICS priorities, including co-production, community engagement, reducing inequalities, and digital innovation.

Core Development Priority Areas

Priority	Description	Target Outcomes
Engagement & Co-Production Excellence	Skills for community-centred approaches, involvement methods, lived experience leadership	Stronger relationships, more impactful insight, wider reach into seldom-heard groups
Research, Evidence & Intelligence	Training in qualitative/quantitative methods, evaluation, data analysis, insight generation	Higher quality reports, increased credibility, stronger evidence for impact

Priority	Description	Target Outcomes
Health & Social Care Systems Knowledge	Policy awareness, ICS governance, care pathways, commissioning models	Workforce able to influence, navigate and partner within system confidently
VCSE Leadership & Future Service Development	Bid writing, project design, partnership building, governance, charity operations	Future ready leadership capacity, organisational growth potential
Digital & Innovation Skills	AI use, digital engagement tools, data platforms, comms technologies	Efficiency, improved productivity, future fit engagement approaches
Personal Growth & Professional Identity	Coaching, management development, personal accreditation, reflective practice	Confident workforce, retention, progression, a people-centred culture

Priority Skills Matrix

The following identifies priority skills linked to role types. Individuals select development modules with line manager approval.

Role	Priority Focus Areas
Engagement & Community Officers	Co-production, facilitation, outreach, trauma-informed practice, equalities
Research & Insight Team	Data analysis, evaluation, research methods, report writing, ethics
Managers & Leads	Leadership, strategic planning, commissioning, partnership influence
Communications & Influence	Behaviour-change messaging, digital campaigning, accessible comms
All Staff	Digital uplift, safeguarding, lived experience-centred practice, systems awareness

Training Pathways & Opportunities

Each staff member receives an allocation of £5,000 (FTE), used flexibly for development such as:

- Accredited qualifications (e.g. Leadership & Management, research certs, social care leadership).
- Conferences, specialist events, masterclasses.
- Coaching or professional mentoring.
- Technical skills training (evaluation tools, AI, data tools).
- Shadowing within councils/ICS/VCSE.
- Secondments and stretch assignments.
- Collaborative learning projects.

Development must demonstrate:

- ✓ relevance to role & organisational mission
- ✓ value for money
- ✓ measurable improvement in capability

Monitoring & Governance

Measure	Evidence
Take-up and spend	Quarterly report to GPG & Board
Improvements in capability	Skills self-assessment before/after training
Impact on delivery	KPI outcomes, report quality, engagement reach
Staff experience	Pulse surveys, exit interviews, wellbeing feedback
Strategic positioning	Tenders won, partnerships, recognition in system

Expected Outcomes

By March 2027- October 2027 we expect to have:

- A more skilled, resilient and agile staff team.
- Enhanced capacity to deliver independent public voice at scale.
- Strengthened reputation and influence across system partners.
- Improved competitive readiness for future commissioning.