

3<sup>rd</sup> June 2019

Via email

TO WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT COMMITTEE

*Dear Councilor Nunn*

**RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY AT THE HEART OF THE NEW NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
UNITARY AUTHORITIES**

I am writing on behalf of Healthwatch Northamptonshire, which is a statutory role, funded by central government through the county council, charged with the duty to speak on behalf of those who use all health and/or social care services in the county.

We have noted the announcement by the Secretary of State outlining his intention to lay orders for the creation of two unitary authorities to take over the responsibilities of Northamptonshire County Council and the seven borough and district authorities in the county. We have been pleased to be invited to several consultations about the formation of the new unitary authorities and we have been following developments closely. I was able to attend the first meeting of the joint committee of the proposed West Northamptonshire authority on 26 March.

Whilst we understand that the creation of new authorities takes time, and there are many matters to be considered, we have been concerned to observe very little discussion about the approach to be adopted by the new authorities to recognise the diversity of the population and the need for a different response to people with different needs, be they physical, cultural or social.

I commented on this specific issue in a plenary session at the consultation at the Kettering Conference Centre and asked whether I had missed a session on the importance of respecting diversity and promoting equalities. The consultant facilitating that plenary replied that this issue had indeed not been considered. Nobody in the session challenged that statement. Informal conversations have

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confirmed that councillors and officers do have an informed understanding of their responsibilities but Healthwatch Northamptonshire would hope that this commitment will become more visible in the planning and shaping of new services and arrangements.

Respecting diversity is important at all times but perhaps especially in health and social care services. This is clearly demonstrated in the recently published and widely praised annual report of the Director of Public Health which highlights differences in health and care needs and outcomes for different populations. Councils have statutory duties to uphold and promote equality of opportunity and respect for diversity and those principles are enshrined in the NHS Constitution.

Healthwatch Northamptonshire is therefore wishing to put a public question to both Joint Committees in the following terms:

What steps are the Joint Committees taking to ensure that the new unitary authorities put respect for diversity and equality of opportunity at the heart of their mission and values so that these principles clearly shape their approaches to developing health and social care services, in partnership with NHS colleagues and others?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

  
Dr David N Jones CQSW, RSW  
Chair, Healthwatch Northamptonshire

*With best wishes,*