

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health
39 Victoria St
London SW1H 0EU
By email only:

27 April 2022

Dear Secretary of State

I write to give you notice of my intention to stand down from my role as non-executive Director of the Care Quality Commission, consequent on my decision to retire as Chair of the Healthwatch England Committee, both with effect from 15 November 2022. As you may know my appointment to the CQC Board was extended beyond the normal two terms to enable me to take on the latter role. I have decided I need to take this step in order to make sufficient time to honour my forthcoming commitments to my own profession. The appointment of a new National Director of HWE and a new Chair of CQC makes this appropriate time to hand over to someone to support refreshed directions of travel.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve on the CQC Board since 2014 and to support its development as the quality and safety regulator of the health and social care system. It has been a pleasure to work with so many skilled and dedicated professionals committed to the protection of the public and the maintenance of high standards in services. I believe CQC has successfully shown the way in ensuring increasing transparency for the public, and in focussing on the issues which really matter to patients, service users and those close to them. Above all CQC has brought to light issues of concern, and enabled these to be addressed before failures of the scale of Mid-Staffordshire occur. I believe this has largely been due to the CQC's inspection methodology as performed by its excellent inspectors. Therefore, while I fully support the current transformation programme to introduce a more intelligence led system, I also commend the caution adopted in retaining crossing the threshold as an essential part of the regulatory toolbox.

It has also been rewarding to support the development of the National Freedom to Speak Up Guardian's office and the network of local guardians who work so hard to support staff in voicing their concerns and to ensure that positive action is taken as a result. No system as complex as our health and social care system can work properly unless its leadership, from the top of government down to ward level, demonstrates the value of listening to the workforce and supporting them to learn from each other and to strive for continuous improvement in standards of care.

Finally it has been a great pleasure to support Healthwatch England, the Committee and its dedicated staff in bringing the voice and experience of patients and service users to the table to inform national and local decisions about health and social care provision. I believe HWE has proved its worth to your Department and the system more generally and is now in an ideal

position to help you take forward your agenda for improving the patient's voice. It is quite clear to me from my own experience of listening to those voices that they often hold the key to knowledge about what is going wrong and what changes should be made. Healthwatch England and the local network have been and remain at the forefront of enabling that voice to be heard, and they stand ready to contribute to the opportunities that integrated care systems offer in this regard. However, if I have one regret about my time as Chair, it is that we have been unable as yet to find a way of reversing the alarming decline in the resources available to Healthwatch – I am afraid there is a growing risk the network will be unable to fulfil its vital role unless urgent attention is paid to this issue.

In conclusion I must thank you and your predecessors for allowing me to help support these remarkable organisations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Francis', written in a cursive style.

Sir Robert Francis QC

CC: Ian Dilks OBE, Chair, Care Quality Commission.