Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative) Click here to watch Sarah speak

I apologise for missing the opening speeches, but I was chairing the Health Committee. I am delighted to have been here to hear my hon. Friend Richard Fuller. I absolutely agree with him, and am grateful to him for raising this issue of the tension that exists between localism and the decisions that are being made in good faith by clinical commissioners. There is a need for us to engage local people in decision-making to ensure that we get the best possible outcome for them.

I am sure that other Members have raised concerns about Healthwatch and the possibility of the local voice being squeezed out. Will the Minister address the issue of the time scale that is often given to local people to consider quite detailed proposals? Indeed, detailed proposals will be given to local health and wellbeing boards at Devon county council with only a day's notice, and there is no obligation to include local healthwatch. We need guidance in that area, especially if we are to have committees in common, which I support. I will support the regulatory reform order, as it is a good thing. Like my right hon. Friend Mr Lansley, I think that we could go further and involve other groups in these permissive arrangements. As he will know, for people living on the boundaries of clinical commissioning groups, such arrangements do not always appear to be logical. This will allow commissioning to take place over a wider area with better outcomes for patients and often with great saving. I absolutely support the measure, but the concerns expressed by Healthwatch, which have also been expressed to me, need to be addressed.

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