

## Healthwatch England and the Regional Network

### 1 Purpose of this report

This report, requested by the Healthwatch Hertfordshire Chair, provides:

- Context around the role of Healthwatch England, the different forms of local Healthwatch and the role of the Regional Network
- Themes that have recently been discussed at the regional meeting

### 2 Background

As Board members are aware Healthwatch was established as part of the 2012 legislation, with an umbrella organisation in Healthwatch England. Each top tier authority in England had funding for a Healthwatch. Funding by area took account of both population size and other factors such as geographic size and demography. This and different approaches and expectations led to some quite different models being established. Meetings were established across each region to share good practice and provide support and enable discussions if any differences needed to be resolved. The meeting in the East of England region is chaired by Healthwatch Hertfordshire and administered by Healthwatch England.

### 3 Context

#### Local Healthwatch in the Eastern Region

As indicated above, local Healthwatch are very different:

- The populations served by each local Healthwatch varies significantly: Healthwatch Essex serves a population of 1.8 million, Healthwatch Hertfordshire of 1.2 million whereas Healthwatch Bedford Borough, Healthwatch Southend on Sea and Healthwatch Thurrock each serve populations under 200,000.
- Demography and geography are all very diverse from the cultural diversity of Luton to the rural isolation of parts of the Fens, the small towns of central Bedfordshire and the proximity to London apparent in parts of Essex and Herts
- Models of governance include Community Interest Companies, Charitable Companies limited by guarantee though in our region, each Healthwatch has some local governance whereas elsewhere some Healthwatch have no local Board
- Four Healthwatch share one CCG; Essex are involved with 5 CCGs in their area!
- The strategy and approach varies considerably too. Healthwatch Essex has always been research driven, most larger Healthwatch have research as an increasing focus, some smaller Healthwatch are very locally focussed, with stalls at markets, talks and school assemblies etc. Holding to Account is probably better established in Hertfordshire than most other Healthwatch.

## Healthwatch England - approaches and roles

Healthwatch England describes its role with local Healthwatch as to *‘support local Healthwatch to find out what people like about services, and what could be improved, and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen’*. To deliver this role Healthwatch England has evolved its role reflecting national and local need. This can be seen as an initial focus on patient rights, before a move to more of a focus on being an enabler of local Healthwatch, and now the approach is about resource support, providing expertise particularly to smaller Healthwatch, standard setting and brand management.

Healthwatch England will also look to local Healthwatch as exemplars of good practice to help set standards. Healthwatch Hertfordshire has fulfilled this role for a number of areas including

- to help determine success factors for local Healthwatch;
- to give our advice on developing a template for the annual report
- to use research expertise to set standards for the network
- to demonstrate how we determine our project priorities

## Regional Meetings

Regional meetings happen on a quarterly basis and have agendas that have nationally and locally determined items. Meetings are currently held virtually. Items include concerns about services, national initiatives, and regional working. Updates from local Healthwatch are also included usually to focus on major pieces of work or areas they wish to explore.

During the last year, unsurprisingly, the focus has been on the pandemic and its impact.

## 4 Themes and agenda items

The next meeting is to take place in mid-May and the agenda includes speakers from NHS(E) on digital exclusion and health inequalities, and updates on the latest campaigns from Healthwatch England.

In addition to the Covid 19 and its impact, items in the last year have included:

## Health and Care themes

1. Dentistry
2. Cancer services and GP websites
3. Support for visual impairment
4. Digital Exclusion

## Regional Matters

5. East of England Citizen’s Senate
6. Identifying single East of England leads/points of contact for NHSE/I
7. Healthwatch attendance at the ADASS Regional Market Shaping

Operations and governance

8. Board Learning and Development
9. Staff health, working arrangements and fatigue
10. Data Protection arrangements

Healthwatch England regular and specific items

11. HWE policy update
12. Campaigns update
13. Update on Healthwatch England digital strategy

Geoff Brown  
08/05/2021