

## **Healthwatch Essex update**

Report for: Essex County Council, Health Oversight and Scrutiny Committee

Report by: Thomas Nutt, Chief Executive Officer, Healthwatch Essex

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### **Introduction and background**

Healthwatch Essex is a locally-based charity that aims to be ‘an independent voice for the people of Essex, helping to shape and improve health and social care’. It was created by Essex County Council (ECC) in 2013 under the terms of the Health and Social Care Act, 2012, following the Government’s aim of ‘putting patients and the public first’ through strengthening their collective voice. The Act requires top-tier local authorities to commission the functions of a local Healthwatch organisation within their locality, and gives Healthwatch organisations powers in law as well as obligations. This means that local Healthwatch organisations are required to:

- promote and support the involvement of people in the commissioning, provision and scrutiny of local care services;
- obtain the views of people about their needs for, and their experiences of, local care services
- make reports and recommendations about how local care services could or ought to be improved, to persons responsible for commissioning, providing, managing or scrutinising local care services
- provide advice and information about access to local care services and about choices that may be made with respect to aspects of those services.

Healthwatch Essex meets these obligations through a blend of research and engagement activities, and through provision of an Information Service that helps people to understand, access and navigate health and social care. In recent years, Healthwatch Essex has covered topics as diverse as cancer, hospital discharge, learning disabilities, young people’s experience of health and care, dementia, mental health services, carers and people’s lived experiences of seeking full-time social care. This work has taken the form of reports, films, podcasts and poems. Its innovation and impact has been recognised through national awards made to Healthwatch Essex by the Royal Society for Public Health and Compact Voice, whilst volunteers for Healthwatch Essex have won both local and national awards. The media profile of Healthwatch Essex has also grown, with the charity having a regular column in the Essex Chronicle, and making regular contributions to the printed press and local TV and radio. The Information Service helps thousands of people each year through its telephone line (0300 500 1895) and its innovative partnership with Essex County Council to create the Living Well Essex website.

Healthwatch Essex is funded by an annual grant agreement from Essex Council Council, using funds from the Department of Health. ECC regularly reviews the activities and outcomes of Healthwatch Essex, through quarterly meetings. The annual grant from ECC to Healthwatch Essex has been £780k per annum, although from 2017-18, this will be reduced by £100k.

In 2015-16, Healthwatch Essex undertook a review of governance, which led to a number of changes relating to the structure of the organisation, and the creation of *HWE Insights* Ltd, which is a trading subsidiary of Healthwatch Essex.

The creation of *HWE Insights* was a direct response to organisations approaching Healthwatch Essex and seeking to commission, on a paid-for basis, research or engagement activities. The Board of Healthwatch Essex felt strongly that the independence of the charity should not be seen to be compromised by taking on paid-for activities, hence all commissioned activity is routed through *HWE Insights*. These changes were fully approved by ECC under the terms of the grant agreement. The Boards of Healthwatch Essex and *HWE Insights* have both adopted policies to ensure that any paid-for activities should provide additional benefit to the overall work of the charity.

### **STP engagement and collaboration – a Healthwatch Essex perspective**

The introduction of the 'Success Regime' to Essex in 2015, and subsequently the national introduction of Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs) have been broadly welcomed by Healthwatch Essex. These initiatives aim to improve the quality of health and care, whilst ensuring that services are financially sustainable. As Healthwatch Essex has long advocated that people's lived experience of health and care should be used as a driver for change, it is entirely consistent with Healthwatch Essex's overall strategy that the charity would be supportive of NHS and local authority-led change programmes such as the Essex Success Regime (ESR) and STPs.

However, this support is conditional on the health and care system using the opportunity for change as a chance to reform health and care to make it more person-centred, and more closely oriented around people's health and care needs. In order to achieve this, commissioners and providers need to engage closely with their service users and local populations, so as to understand how lived experience can inform service change. In this regard, Healthwatch Essex aims to show 'system leadership' by putting people first. An example of this constructive approach is the conference jointly hosted by Healthwatch Essex and ECC's HOSC, in spring 2016, which promoted the principles and values of engagement as part of the STP process. Through media outlets, Healthwatch Essex also strongly encourages people to get involved in statutory engagement and consultation processes.

Each STP in Essex is different, however. As such, Healthwatch Essex has contributed in varying ways to each programme, as follows:

**North East Essex and Suffolk STP:** Healthwatch Essex sits on the Programme Board for the STP, as well as the local NE Essex equivalent Board. The CEO of Healthwatch Essex is also the (informally) designated Engagement Lead for the STP, and is a member of the Communication and Engagement Group which is overseeing comms and engagement for the STP. The NE Essex and Suffolk STP is based around plans that have been under development for a number of years, and hence fresh engagement has (to date) been relatively limited. However, an extensive public and service-user engagement plan is under development, and Healthwatch Essex has contributed to this by creating the nationally-recognised 'Healthwatch Harriet' film which seeks to explain STPs in terms a 10-year old would understand!

**Mid and South Essex Success Regime, or STP:** Healthwatch Essex sits on the Programme Board of the ESR, and comms and engagement activities are led by NHS England. However, HWE Insights has been commissioned by NHS England to deliver a number of research and engagement activities, including films, podcasts, events and a research project on people's experience of urgent and emergency care. These activities aim to either promote an understanding of people's lived experience of health and care, or to inform the design of future care services. This work is ongoing and timetabled to run through summer 2017 and beyond, pending the formal consultation on changes to acute services.

**West Essex and Hertfordshire:** Healthwatch Essex has had very limited involvement with the development of this STP, although has been in regular contact with both Healthwatch Hertfordshire (due to the lead role played by the Hertfordshire CCGs) and with the Accountable Officer of West Essex CCG and CEO of Princess Alexandra Hospital. A closer role for Healthwatch Essex has been welcomed by the STP, although to date this has not materialised in practical form. However, Healthwatch Essex does recognise that the STP plans are based (for example) on West Essex CCG's extensive public engagement on a number of service areas over the last few years.

### **Engagement and collaboration on other local health projects – a Healthwatch Essex perspective**

**Mental Health Trust (SEPT/NEP) merger:** Healthwatch Essex has had relatively limited direct engagement with this merger, although regular contact is maintained between the CEOs of each respective organisation. However, this is not of undue concern to Healthwatch Essex, because *HWE Insights* had been commissioned by mental health commissioners to support the development of a new mental health strategy for Essex, and Healthwatch Essex Ambassadors are involved in co-production of both the strategy and new services specifications for secondary mental health services.

**NE Essex Walk-In-Centre/Urgent Care Consultation:** In common with many areas of service-change, Healthwatch Essex is kept informed by statutory organisations, without undertaking any direct form of engagement specifically related to that change. This is in-line with our strategy, which ensures that, as an independent organisation, we do not undertake other organisations' statutory responsibilities to engage and consult. As such – in this example – Healthwatch Essex has supported NE Essex CCG, and promoted their engagement activities, but has not undertaken any specific engagement.

### **Reflections, and future work planning**

In the year ahead, there remains a considerable task ahead for both statutory bodies seeking to introduce service change and, increasingly, service restrictions.

Healthwatch Essex will continue to support those changes when there is a good commitment to engagement and involvement, and to putting people first. In addition, Healthwatch Essex will continue to support a programme of independent research and engagement, with the aim of giving the people of Essex a voice. Over the course of 2017-18, this will include research and engagement activities in the following areas:

- Mental health self-care
- End of Life care
- Homeless people, and vulnerable populations
- Self-care and long-term conditions
- Sensory impairments
- Young people's experience of health and care, related to 1) Tendring locality, 2) in-patient mental health and 3) Public health
- Dementia – community resilience
- Carers
- Residential and domiciliary care
- General Practice
- Young people and safeguarding
- Maternity and Peri-natal mental health

The Information Service aims to respond to 4,000+ enquiries, and to enhance its sharing of intelligence with commissioners and providers of health and care, and to support local and county-wide Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) provision through strategic work with partners and through an Essex Community Foundation grants programme.

Thomas Nutt

10<sup>th</sup> March 2017.