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## Inaugural Regional Conference

# Local Healthwatch: What next?

### The Conference

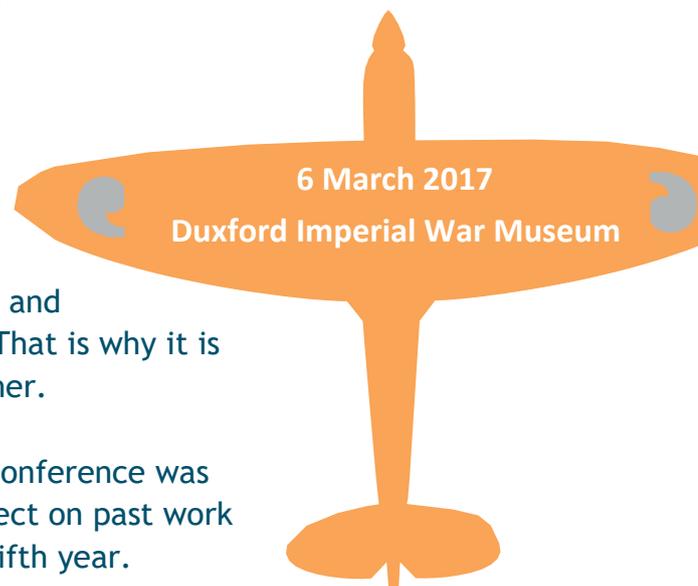
The role of local Healthwatch in changing health and care for the better grows ever more important. That is why it is important for our network to work closely together.

Organised by the five county Healthwatch, this conference was held for teams across the East of England to reflect on past work and learn from each other as we move into our fifth year.

56 Healthwatch staff from 11 Healthwatch attended the conference to talk about our work, the challenges we face and how we can learn from each other to better respond to these challenges.

We are a diverse network and know that these challenges are different for different areas, particularly for those Healthwatch in smaller Unitary Council areas, but we all have very much in common; the opportunities to share and support each other are significant. The conference was a way to get some off this sharing up and running.

The Healthwatch present took the opportunity to share their promotional materials and supplied a summary of their business priorities and staffing structures and contact details. We are now much better informed about how to contact at a neighbouring Healthwatch about various issues.



## Presentations

Healthwatch Essex and Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire set the scene for the day. Two very different Healthwatch serving very different populations. The similarities between the two were striking though. The complexity of the commissioning and provider landscape, the financial pressures on health and care services and the importance of an independent patient voice were the key factors for both Healthwatch. As were the opportunities for leadership, to do something differently and the 'size of the prize'. We can do more when we work together.

The conference also heard about Healthwatch England's role in supporting our work. Their focus will be around brand awareness, sharing learning and resources and developing policy responses.

## Workshops

Healthwatch colleagues led seven workshops: Communications, Volunteering, Engagement, Partnerships, Business Development, Research and Information and Signposting. Staff at the workshops suggested some ways in which we can have more cross-Healthwatch learning and support:

- A regional communications training day, to include a Board member from each Healthwatch
- An East of England Research and Evidence Network
- Managing Volunteers' Network
- Partnership Agreement template
- More cross-boundary engagement events
- HW England support for funding reduction impact assessments

*(Full workshop [notes are available here](#) on Healthwatch Cambridgeshire's website.)*

## Evaluation

During the day staff visited the Healthwatch Essex Chatty Cab to record their thoughts on the day. See what people [thought](#).

## What Next?

We will take the ideas and suggestions to the Regional Network meetings and develop an Action Plan to take forward.