**Briefing:**
Local Healthwatch feedback regarding the East of England Ambulance Service 2015/16

#My9999 Story

We’re listening. Share your
Introduction

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) monitors, inspects and regulates services to make sure they meet fundamental standards of quality and safety. It has a legal duty to listen to the things Local Healthwatch say about services. It means Local Healthwatch are best placed to inform the work of the CQC with the experiences of local people.

From the 5th April 2016, the CQC will be inspecting the East of England Ambulance NHS Trust for the first time. As lead Local Healthwatch for this particular service, Healthwatch Suffolk was keen to ensure that a good body of evidence could be presented to the CQC on patient and carer experience.

The #My999Story campaign

A plan was developed to implement a short campaign that would engage people for their experiences. The concept was based on encouraging people to share their “999 story”, making use of the Healthwatch voice icon visual elements. A short communications plan was created that included:

- Supporting campaign graphics.
- Suggested Tweets.
- Suggested website content that could also be adapted for media releases.
- MailChimp graphics and suggested content.

The plan and associated materials was offered to Local Healthwatch across the East of England in the hope that a coordinated approach might yield more feedback from patients, carers and the public. A request was also made to share all intelligence held about the Trust for inclusion in this report.

The campaign proved useful in raising the profile of Local Healthwatch with some notable impacts as follows:

- Healthwatch Suffolk and other Local Healthwatch promoted the campaign on Twitter and the associated Tweets have been viewed over 24,000 times with over 450 Tweet engagements.
- Other Local Healthwatch supported the Twitter activity including Healthwatch Norfolk, Healthwatch Essex, Healthwatch Peterborough, Healthwatch Luton and Healthwatch Cambridgeshire but it is not known how many people their combined efforts reached.

- The campaign received good coverage in the media, which prompted a number of telephone comments and submissions to the Healthwatch Suffolk Feedback Centre.
- A number of partners in Suffolk supported and promoted the campaign including Suffolk Family Carers, Suffolk libraries, Community Action Suffolk and Public Health Suffolk.
- Community newsletter editors in Suffolk circulated a brief article to over 5,000 homes in the county.

This briefing aims to bring all of the feedback collated from Local Healthwatch together so that it can be shared with the CQC in advance of its inspection. It will also be shared with the Trust, commissioners and made available to the public via Local Healthwatch websites.

Please note:

This document reports on all feedback submitted to Healthwatch Suffolk and is intended to document the feedback submitted and the themes therein.

The quantities of feedback reported in this document are not sufficient to claim that the opinions expressed are representative of the entire population of East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust patients. It should be considered however that the feedback provided to the Healthwatch network is nonetheless significant and is likely to be a fair reflection of most patients.
In summary...

This report is not a full assessment of the performance of the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust. It is simply intended as a statement of patient experience data recorded by Local Healthwatch in the East of England. It does not include patient experience data recorded by the Trust or any other bodies with the exception of the NHS Choices feedback platform.

The #My999Story campaign has been successful in encouraging people to share their experiences with Local Healthwatch in the East of England. In total, over 120 stories were obtained from people across the region and three research projects have been completed by Local Healthwatch (during the year 2014/15). Within the research projects, over 750 comments were made in response to Local Healthwatch surveys.

What did people share?

In general, people have been positive about their overall experience of the service with the exception of a few particularly negative stories recorded within the various sections of this briefing.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there is little choice but to use the service in emergency situations, Friends and Family Test responses extracted from the Healthwatch Suffolk feedback Centre indicate that a majority of people would recommend the service to their friends or family.

High levels of positivity are very clearly evident within the feedback. Indeed, Healthwatch Suffolk Feedback Centre and NHS Choices data (up to 3rd March 2016) combined reveals a total of 59 five star reviews out of a possible 79. The current overall rating on the Healthwatch Suffolk feedback Centre is four stars.

In particular, analysis of the feedback obtained confirms an established understanding that people tend to be strongly positive about ambulance crews. People often described them as professional, reassuring and kind.

Examples include:

“The staff are always quick to arrive and very kind and helpful. Most of all they always treat him with sympathy and respect. And are most reassuring.” - Healthwatch Suffolk

“Called out the ambulance on behalf of an elderly neighbour. She was treated professionally but with great humanity and understanding.” - Healthwatch Norfolk

“The Emergency Ambulance teams/Paramedics were amazing on the 3 occasions I called them out for my Dad who was terminally ill. Their empathy, kindness, calmness and control of each situation made me feel confident in their abilities and in my care.” - Healthwatch Peterborough

“Helpful and friendly putting me at ease always chatting to me” - Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

The perceived professionalism of ambulance crews is also reflected within the research reports produced by Healthwatch Suffolk and Healthwatch Norfolk in 2014/15. Within the reports, 421 (88%) out of 479 comments regarding treatment by staff were positive in sentiment. The report completed by Healthwatch Norfolk particularly identifies that people’s comments on their treatment by ambulance crews were strongly complementary with many uses of the words ‘professional’, ‘caring’, ‘kind’ and ‘compassionate’ as echoed in the feedback recorded from Local Healthwatch across the region.

A few stories indicated that paramedics had made a particular effort to support patient and carer wellbeing under difficult circumstances.

Examples include:

“Paramedics made sure a sick child could see Santa before going to A&E. Both Santa and the paramedics were fab in making sure little man was safe but still saw Santa. They regularly need paramedic care and cannot fault any care received from the paramedics” - Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

“...was particularly impressed that one of the ambulance crew took the time to look out for my welfare too. They called me from the hospital to update me on my husband’s condition and progress to being admitted (it was slow because of the doctors strike). They advised me to take care and not rush in as my husband was stable and awaiting transfer to the hospital wards.” - Healthwatch Suffolk

Negativity within feedback is mostly attributed...
to waiting for an ambulance to arrive, sometimes compounded by issues with communication and call handling.

According to research conducted by Healthwatch Norfolk, 30 minutes was the absolute maximum amount of time people would be willing to wait for an ambulance to arrive. With most people opting for 10 or 15 minutes waiting. This may go some way to explaining why there is sometimes a real disparity between the expectations of the patient or their family and how the service actually operates.

People have reported various lengths of time waiting for an ambulance to arrive, from five minutes to three hours and, in one unusual instance, seven hours.

Examples include:

"...after 10 days mother was so ill doctor eventually came and called an ambulance however the call was not classed as an emergency and took seven hours to arrive. The callers mother passed away shortly after arrival in hospital." - Healthwatch Essex

"...the person expressed that they could do nothing except provide physical support to their son who was in shock and in pain. The person accepts that their son’s injury was not life threatening but was completely reliant on awaiting medical intervention just two miles away. They feel that two hours of waiting was simply too long given their sons level of discomfort." - Healthwatch Suffolk

Some people reported a negative impact on the subsequent outcome for the patient.

Examples include:

"...They have experienced waits of up to half an hour or more before the ambulance arrives and they feel that their daughter has nearly died on at least two occasions and one incident left her in critical care for three days. Their daughter has had a paramedic car, which then needed to call for an ambulance and once, because there was going to be a long delay, the paramedic considered calling the air ambulance..." - Healthwatch Suffolk

"In their opinion, delays in dispatching an appropriate ambulance may have contributed to their relative’s death." - Healthwatch Suffolk

"Commentator stated that the recovery from a stroke had been affected by a lack of speed and observation by the Ambulance service (and others). Family strongly suspected stroke at time due to indistinct speech and loss of movement on left side. Although the original response to the call was good, there was a long wait for an ambulance to take the patient to hospital (2 hours)." - Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

"Patient became very unwell and a doctor attended sometime after an initial request for a call out had been made to their GP practice. An ambulance was called however it was not classed as an emergency and took seven hours to arrive. The patient later passed away shortly after arriving at the hospital." - Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

Feeling that they had waited too long, a few individuals opted to cancel the ambulance in favour of a family member transporting them to hospital or to a GP practice instead.

Examples include:

"...An ambulance is called. After 45 minutes, the ambulance has not arrived and so the patient asks to be taken home. A by-stander cancels the ambulance and the patient visits his GP who sends them immediately to Ipswich A&E, where he is subsequently admitted and receiving further medical tests for a slow heartbeat." - Healthwatch Suffolk

"...continually told that a ‘clinical technician’ would ring back within 2 hours’. Not prepared for this I took my friend to A&E at West Suffolk (BSE), where we were treated in an excellent fashion. It transpires that my friend has sepsis (potentially a life threatening condition), was admitted and remains in hospital..." - NHS Choices

"...my husband was found to be suffering from septic shock & we called 999 requesting an emergency ambulance. The call taker took the details & then explained our call would be triaged & we would be called back within the hour. We explained that a matron had requested an ambulance however we were told that medical information can only be supplied by a patient's GP & we would therefore be triaged within the hour. Within 15mins of that call, my husband deteriorated & so we called 999 again to request an ambulance. Again we were told we would be called back within the hour. This was unacceptable & we began the process of getting my husband into a car to drive him the 30mins to the nearest hospital..." - Healthwatch Suffolk

"Patient had a TIA at midnight and called for
an ambulance. She was advised that there would be a 45 minute wait because of the rural location of their home. Her husband was able to come home and drive her to the hospital." - Healthwatch Norfolk

It is important to acknowledge that there are also a significant number of positive stories relating to a prompt response from the service.

Examples include:

"We have always had help within ten to fifteen minutes. Either by paramedic rapid response or an ambulance. I cannot praise them highly enough." - Healthwatch Suffolk

"...More recently I had to call for an ambulance for one of my elderly customers as he had a bad fall they arrived quickly dealt with him brilliantly & took him to A&E..." - Healthwatch Cambridgeshire

"...called 999 when my child had an epileptic fit. We live in a rural area but they arrived within 5 mins and the lady remained on the telephone until the paramedic arrived." - Healthwatch Suffolk

Issues with waiting for an ambulance to arrive are sometimes compounded by problems with communication that increase frustration for patients.

Examples include:

"The information from the doctor’s call was not passed from call handler to dispatch, resulting in the call being downgraded." - Healthwatch Suffolk

"...our experience with the call handler/s was incredibly frustrating as they were unable to accept medical information given by a healthcare professional on scene." - Healthwatch Suffolk

An operator told her an ambulance would be with me as soon as possible... When the paramedic arrived my manager explained that we had been waiting for an ambulance to arrive for an hour. The paramedic informed us that there was no record of the two previous calls made to the service." - Healthwatch Suffolk

In summary, it seems patient experience of the Trust is, for the most part, positive, particularly about staff. The conflict between service performance and patient/relative expectations remains an issue.

Issues with communication indicate that more could be done to keep those waiting for an ambulance updated on when their designated ambulance or first responder is likely to arrive. This may help people to feel reassured and to understand why an ambulance may not be immediately available.

This briefing has been shared with the Care Quality Commission to inform its inspection of the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust due to take place in April 2016. The report has also been made available to Local Healthwatch in the East of England and can be downloaded from the Healthwatch Suffolk website.

The CQC has received copies of the full research reports compiled by Healthwatch Suffolk and Healthwatch Norfolk. An Excel database of all individual comments collated as a part of this campaign has also been shared. It is hoped that the CQC will make use of the data to inform its overall understanding of the experiences people have when accessing services provided by this Trust.

“The Care Quality Commission is committed to including service user’s views when we inspect health and social care services. Healthwatch has been instrumental in ensuring we understand patients’ use of and opinion of East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST). The nature of ambulance services makes obtaining the views of patients more difficult whilst on inspection. This valuable and important information will be given to the inspection team (inspectors and specialist advisors) to inform inspection planning and for focussing on any areas of concern as well as areas of good performance and will be used to give the patients’ perspective in the final report of EEAST”. - Mark Heath (Care Quality Commission Inspection Manager East Anglia team)
Your Voice Counts

We want to hear about your experiences of NHS and social care services in Suffolk including hospitals, care homes, GP practices and other services.

Please share your views with us (good or bad). We will use your feedback to make a difference and improve services in the county.

Your spotlight on local services

Visit www.healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk to anonymously rate and review your local services now. You can also feedback by calling 01449 703949.
If you have something to say about a health or social care service in your local area, please contact your Local Healthwatch. You can find contact details by visiting the Healthwatch England website.

www.healthwatch.co.uk/find-local-healthwatch