



HEALTHWATCH REPORT FOR PATHFINDER WEST SUSSEX

February 2018

Introduction

As we approach the end of the Healthwatch West Sussex People with Lived Experience (PLEs) contract, we wanted to provide some feedback on progress so far and ideas for future development of Pathfinder West Sussex.

Overall the PLEs have appreciated being involved in the process and have felt they have been listened to and given a voice. They have felt treated as equals, helped by being remunerated for their time and expenses. They wish the Pathfinder Alliance continued success in providing greater care for people with mental health needs across the whole of West Sussex.

Feedback and areas to consider for the future

Potential for loss of momentum in improving services

It is recognised that the Pathfinder partners have had to operate under difficult circumstances such as having an imperfect model / structure, lack of project office support from the outset, difficulties in maximising the use of the incentive payments and limited engagement of partners in some Pathfinder areas.

It is understandable for the need to focus on a few key areas over the next year such as developing a more effective structure for Pathfinder. However, there is concern that for many people in the county, particularly in the northern areas of West Sussex, that there have been relatively limited improvements to the service offered over the last 12-18 months. With what is effectively a 'pause' in service development it could be there will be limited improvement for the foreseeable future. It is recognised that in some areas there are more comprehensive mental health services, but the concern is there is a possibility of a loss in the momentum for improving services in other areas.

Co-production

With the loss of the business manager role and end of the PLE contract there is potential for a loss of scrutiny, independent feedback and input of the service users' voice. For the short term we would recommend there continues to be a level of PLE / service user involvement at steering group / board, work streams and local area planning groups. It is positive that co-production has been embraced and continues to be on the agenda for the future proposed structure / model for Pathfinder. It is recommended that co-production is an integral part of how Pathfinder moves forward. This will help the continued development and growth of a culture amongst Pathfinder members of trust and co-operation with co-production at the heart of working, rather than a tick box exercise.

The development of new alliance working, if accepted, may provide future opportunities for key lived experience input. For example: pooled funding (which may result in the development of a panel that considers business cases), would benefit from PLE input to reduce the risk of bias and inappropriate business development.

It is also worth considering a form of Governing Body whereby independent individuals can monitor the transparency of the process. We feel it would be essential that service users should form part of such a body.

Getting the best from involving local people, communities and people who use services

Below are a number of recommendations for help getting the best from any future local people and local community involvement. Without this involvement and the active listening and questioning this brings, there is a fear the Alliance could become too clinical and technical for service users, family and friend carers and support workers to understand.

It is important to be clear on the roles, responsibilities and expectations of future involvement. A short document detailing this and shared with all partners, local area leads and other key stakeholders would help to provide clarification. We would suggest the following is included:

- who PLEs are and what they represent, e.g. recognising that PLEs need to come from the wider community, not just from the people using the Alliance member's services. That they should also be linked to family and friend carers and people who are not currently engaged with services.
- Your members should be encouraged and understand that PLEs have an important voice and need to be supported to be heard.
- Members need support to recognise that the PLEs will be challenging, but this is as a "critical friend" and vital to the ongoing development of Pathfinder services becoming transformational
- Recruitment process
- Support mechanisms/process
- The structure for enabling the local people and communities to work together

The planned introduction of a permanent Chair should have a very positive effect on the steering meetings and we would recommend that the chair's role is to ensure that there is an introduction and purpose of the discussion on the topic (for example: information only, for action, a detailed discussion point or a high-level strategic discussion). The Chair may also wish to adopt the use of tools such as a 'discussion [carpark](#)' and room-scanning to ensure all organisational and service user voices have had a chance to share ideas.

We would also see the Chair's role is to take the time to brief local people and communities, who are involved, on the big picture of what Pathfinder is trying to achieve, enabling them to be informed and knowledgeable participants. Without this, people will not necessarily know how to bring a wider reference point and default to speaking to their own personal experiences. It took time to brief the contracted team of PLEs. This knowledge will now be lost from the project so recommend time is invested to properly brief any local people or communities that are involved in discussions and development of services.

Having said this, it should be recognised that PLE's are not just individuals with their own experience of mental health but come with expertise in their own fields. The same will apply to any future involvement of local people and communities. It is important to make use of this knowledge, including the contacts and information they can bring to the development of future services. This would also ensure that people are treated more equally.

Ideally, future involvement should have at least two non-members involved in any particular meeting/work stream. It can be intimidating for PLEs at meetings and means PLEs will be able to provide support to each other, update each other on meetings missed etc.

When appropriate, the Alliance members may wish to consider how Pathfinder provides independent support to local people and communities who are involved in the strategic development. Service users, for example, may be experiencing ongoing mental health issues and support will help them to continue making a valuable contribution.

In the meantime, each organisation should continue to listen to the voices of the people who use their services and their local communities. In addition, the members should seek to find the best way to enable service users to provide feedback. For example, in meetings there could be an agenda item for local peoples' feedback.

Communication

It is recognised the service offered across the county is variable and partners may have concerns about being overwhelmed with demand if there is too much promotion of Pathfinder West Sussex. However, at some stage there is a need to 'bite the bullet' and start promoting what is in place. If someone is struggling to find any help with their mental health issues, being on a waiting list for support is likely to be better than not being able to find any support at all. Referrals/information of critical and non-critical partners should be discussed as interim measures.

It is recommended Pathfinder is upfront about what is available and transparent in what is not available (rather than saying the service is in development but actually unlikely to be offered for the foreseeable future). We recognise the need not to over-promise on the local offer but also the concern that local health providers, for example GPs, may have greater expectations on what is changing as a result of the Pathfinder initiative.

The website is going to be an important component of the communication activity. There will need to be a significant focus from all partner organisations to provide content for the website. There may need to be a phased approach with getting the basics up and then adding more content over time (otherwise it may take months to launch).

Pathfinder's Local Planning Groups (LPGs)

It is recognised that these operate differently across the county and in some areas it has been hard to engage partners and other local organisations. However, there will be real benefits for a continued drive to link up with partners and other local groups and hence provide a more comprehensive service. A monthly meeting request may not be the best way to engage with all groups and perhaps more work needs to be done directly with partners and other organisations.

It feels as though some of the LPGs are operating in a vacuum and there could be a real opportunity to share best practice / ideas by getting the area leads together from time to time. This would also provide an opportunity to ensure they are all briefed to the same level of what is required etc.

With a sizable incentive fund available it would be great to see this being used directly to improve the service available to people with mental health needs, particularly where there are gaps in the service or an opportunity for some development work.

What the PLEs have achieved

The PLEs have worked to keep bringing the voice of service users as well as those finding it hard to access services to the Pathfinder work. They have contributed at steering group meetings, area meetings, at work streams including the paperwork and communication activity, as well as involved in two rounds of interviewing for the Project Manager / Business Manager.

The Locality Manager for Healthwatch West Sussex observed the contribution of the PLEs at February's steering group meeting, along with the positive way organisational representatives acknowledged this. She noted, that in the main, the PLE members worked at the strategic level during the meeting, resulting in their input being accepted and leading to key Pathfinder developmental documentation being amended accordingly.

Examples of this are:

- the amendment of the Pathfinder West Sussex vision, which takes into account the PLE's comments on not over-promising
- the move away from using the word 'hubs' for the nine Pathfinder areas, taking account of the PLEs comments that 'hubs' could confuse people where there is not a physical location.

The PLE team feel they have been supported and supervised well by Healthwatch West Sussex, which has enabled them to feel empowered to keep bringing the PLE voice to decision making and discussions, especially during periods of uncertainty about their role and expectations among Pathfinder members