

Learning from event preparation

The focus of this event was the **Sussex children and young peoples' emotional and mental wellbeing strategy** (linked to the [Foundations For Our Future](#).)

Reflecting on the preparation for this event, we need to consider planning for joint engagement that ensures we support young people who are involved in such events. It would be useful to have a *standard* for engagement, e.g. introductions, the story so far. There needs to be meeting descriptions (for example, a briefing document), so those newly involved know what to expect, and if their attendance is required. A work plan that clearly shows who needs to be communicated with alongside a time plan.

There were a lot of technical difficulties on the day – noise quality, inability to share slides, and comments being switched off half way through. It was a credit to the presenters as they were able to continue without the visual support. However, whilst people have some sympathy for technical issues, these were distracting to the audience and may have switched people off from attending future events?

Learning:

We need to:

- Have an agreed technical assessment and communication plan for future Healthwatch in Sussex events;
- Have a confident and briefed 'host' as back-up, who can step in when there are technical difficulties;
- Carry out risk assessments that outline possible issues and quick ways to over come them, including a technical run-through;
- Understand and share what created the sharing issues and how the chat was turned off mid-event.

Learning from participants

Risk of exclusion: As the event progressed, people started to add questions in the Zoom chat to identify gaps within the strategy. We would suggest that in attempting to cover all elements (rather than narrating a direction of travel) it now risks making individuals and support organisations feeling excluded or forgotten about.

Audience members also pointed out the use of jargon and acronyms, which also creates a sense of exclusion.



Mis-alignment of narrative and what is happening in West Sussex: There appears to be a mis-alignment of the strategy's ambition to have early help and access, and the closure/reduction of early help and Find It Out Centres across the County. This also came up in the breakout room with the closure of a domestic violence service. Short-term-ism needs to be addressed.

People are willing to support: There was a clear appetite from participants to offer access to existing children and young peoples' networks to discuss the strategy. However, we must recognise the need to frame questions and to make sure network members understand why they should get involved.

Also need to celebrate successes, particularly those children and young people say work for them.

Identifying barriers: It has been suggested there are many different aspects of organisations that need to be looked at, including: the differing levels of service accessibility, and organisational bureaucracies.

It was mentioned that organisations are triaging based on whether the person is a refugee, experienced sexual trauma, or have an addiction and how this is not helpful at all, particularly with extensive waiting lists.

Learning from participants

Framing CAMHS: Whilst this strategy is much more than the specialist support offered through Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS). *“Some [staff] are killing it in CAMHS.” “Some people see it as such a negative thing if they are referred to CAMHS.”*

It was further suggested that there should be a review of why the reputation is so damaged.

Involving schools: Schools seem to be missing from the conversation. These means the strategy’s priorities may not line-up with top-down educational pressures (such as attendance/attainment targets.) It was commented that school pastoral staff must have up-to-date information, as they are often the first and consistent contact point for pupils who have emotional or mental health needs.

Missing focus: There needs to be a recognition of bullying (as the legacy of this carries over into adulthood).

A quick search of the strategy for *drugs* and *alcohol* produced little. It was stressed that services need to have open access and not exclude people because have an addiction or dependency. Similarly, not exclude whilst waiting for support for other trauma (such as sexual violence), as the waiting times are long (Survivors’ network is currently 27 months). It was suggested that there needs to be a recognition that young people who are struggling with their mental health may be a substance-user because of this.

There is a research project being carried out by students locally into the use of benzos and self-medication in 18-25 year olds. The collection of anonymous testimonies will finish at the end of June, with reporting over the summer. (@benzoresearchproject on Instagram)

Learning from participants

Emotional literacy: How are young people supported to develop their emotional literacy and understanding of mental health. Experience from a young person was that they have no information to recognise depression or manage anxiety.

Is there enough focus on recognising conditions, such as ADHD in women?

Learning:

- Need to look closely at the language we use during events to create inclusivity (banish jargon and 'system speak'.)
- Ask organisations to register their support and what they need from the programme to start their strategy conversations.
- Look at Thrive and commissioning to address bureaucracy issues etc.
- Address the negative image/reputation of CAMHS face-on and up front in the strategy. And, consider a review as to why this reputation exists.
- Reflect on what is happening in West Sussex and the potential for mis-alignment of current decommissioning activities with the wider strategy.
- Reflect on what needs to be added to the strategy so ambitions can be achieved alongside competing agendas, such as school targets.
- Has the strategy address gaps enough or should it be simplified to create a more inclusive approach?