

Together We're Better STP Public Engagement – Key Issues

Over the past 5 weeks, Healthwatch Staffordshire and Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent have held 10 “Conversation” style public events to help explain the role of the STP, the key issues it is tackling and the way in which it proposes to take these forward. Over 300 members of the public attended these meetings.

It was stressed at every meeting that these were not consultation events, as formal consultation will happen once specific plans are formulated, but rather a chance for the public at this early stage to feed in their thoughts on the challenges facing our health and social care system.

Some of the key themes emerging from the events were:

Prevention

- Widespread consensus from the audiences that this was an important topic, and that people need help to understand what they can do to prevent ill-health.
- Ideas put forward included GPs prescribing exercise, removing unhealthy food outlets from hospitals, having health education in schools covering issues such as healthy eating, mental health and helping to educate parents through their children. People also said we need to use the voluntary and community sector better to support this agenda.
- People were also concerned about recent cuts to such as drug and alcohol funding, and about a lack of funding for social care.

Primary and Community Care

- What came across was that people value and trust their GP, but accept that in order to have better access to GP services, they may need to see a wider range of professionals through their GP surgery such as district nurses and pharmacists.
- Access was a key issue, and this included people being able to get continuity of care by seeing the same GP, particularly for those with long term conditions.
- Concerns were raised about the future of community hospitals, but people also spoke about the need to empower people to look after themselves – people want joined –up care with social care being included in this alongside health care.

Planned Care

- Generally, people agreed that there are improvements to be made in the way planned care is managed – particularly around the outpatient appointment systems which can be delayed/confusing, and the waiting times some people have experienced.
- Suggestions from the public included combining appointments to make the patient experience better, more use of digital communications, not automatically sending follow-up appointments where not needed, using alternatives to hospital settings, and better communications.
- People understood that they may have to travel further for some specialisms but said that Centres of Excellence need to be promoted as such to give people a reason for travelling further.

Urgent and Emergency Care

- People felt that solving the A&E problem is really difficult – people will use A&E as a means of easier access to specialist doctors and tests and it is difficult to stop that. However, people also said A&E should not be the place for poorly elderly people to go, and wanted to see changes to tackle this.
- People want greater clarity on the alternatives to hospital, and felt that there should be greater emphasis on the role of GPs. There was also a lot of talk about the role of care co-ordination, and how this can help people to go to the right place. People also asked how the 111 service could be more effective.

Mental Health

- The main concerns for people were lack of capacity, funding for mental health, and a perceived lack of joined-upness in the system.
- People want their mental and physical health to be seen together, and there was particular concern expressed about the impact of cuts on vulnerable groups, and about young people's mental health services.
- Suggestions included starting education on mental health in schools, and producing a directory of services including voluntary and community sector services so that people know where to go for help.

Digital

- There was good support for having shared care records, and generally people were happy for different clinicians to have access to their care information but wariness about others seeing this.
- People also saw uses for other technologies such as Skype, e-mail, and developing some specialist Apps for particular purposes such as managing long term conditions.

The above represents just a snapshot of the discussions, all of which have been recorded, and will be passed to the relevant workstreams of the programme so that they can be considered as further plans are developed.

This is the start not the end – we will continue to collect views and use our regular engagement as Healthwatch to gather people's concerns, suggestions and opinions to help inform the work of the STP.

