

LGA Action Learning Set – 12th June

This was the first Action Learning Set (ALS) for cohort two of our health and wellbeing peer challenge programme. Participants came from the Isles of Scilly, Cornwall, Sunderland, Blackpool, Sefton, Peterborough and Bristol providing a great mix of urban and rural challenges and perspectives

We had asked participants to come prepared with local issues and structured the day into three broad themes:

- Leading the whole system
- Upstream and downstream
- Implementation

Here is where the conversation took us:

Leading the whole system

- ‘Managing the Committee Process’ and people who control it continues to be an issue for many Health and Wellbeing Board managers. Two delegates reflected on their experiences in using <http://www.moderngov.co.uk/> which lightens the administrative burden. There was a general consensus that Health and Wellbeing Boards felt more dynamic and creative during the shadow period and a common challenge was to manage and deflect the procedural ‘grip’.
- Some participants had moved Board meetings away from Council buildings and into the community. Participants reflected that the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting is the ‘tip of the iceberg’ and a lot of work will (and will need to) be conducted outside formal meetings.
- Creating joint accountabilities for decisions that affect the health and wellbeing system was identified as essential and challenging. This requires partnerships and initiatives across the system to be mapped and co-ordinated where possible, balancing the need for formal structure (and accountabilities) but also informal and flexible arrangements. Clarity of vision and outcomes is key and acts as the ‘destination’ for the ‘flock of activity’ that may change and reconfigure along the way.
- A common theme was that Health and Wellbeing Board feel as if they are ‘hovering around the cliff edge’ – but have not yet jumped. Local and particular the general election in May 2015 can exacerbate this.
- Having shared accountability requires all partners to understand each other’s’ operational challenges and constraints as well as values and norms. It requires enthusiastic and energetic leadership from Leaders and Chief Executives of all partners well as awareness and kindness. The use of informal

meetings continues to be crucial in developing this. It was felt that all partners should make financial contributions to maintaining the Board infrastructure and its development.

Insights from the LGA's system leadership programme identify 'top tips' as:

- Shared ambitions need to be the starting point for any shared leadership
- It requires 'freeing people up' and creating space for conversations. They are crucial to identifying new ways of working – many will not have 'linear implementation paths' – there is a need to tolerate and embrace deliberation
- Relationships need to be kept strong
- The role of the DPH – spanning local government and health – is crucial and needs to be that of catalyst, enabler and broker of people and organisations within the system

Upstream and downstream

- Many partners acknowledged how difficult it is to achieve a balance between the integration of health and social care to deal with immediate financial pressures and quality issues and promoting well-being. One partner said that their Health and Wellbeing Board is sighted exclusively on the Better Care Fund, while others felt that there was a reasonable parity of focus and Health and Wellbeing Boards recognised the importance of tackling social determinants as a key means to reduce future pressures on health services.
- The advent of the Better Care Fund was generally seen as welcome in that it provided Health and Wellbeing Boards with a tangible focus for their work. Participants acknowledged that the pressure on the Board agendas is immense.
- Successful agenda management requires good cooperation between the Chair, Director of Public Health and other Directors – with the Health and Wellbeing Board manager/support officer initiating, steering and managing agenda and issues management. Having a good Forward Plan process is crucial.
- How to raise healthy life expectancy was a key concern for one participant. There was recognition of complexity and wider determinants such as planning, housing, poverty, living wage and emotional stress as key contributors. One participant shared their Council's rebranding of its focus to 'the health of the workforce is holding back the health of the economy' as impactful narrative. In her case Council priorities are about Education – Economy and Health and with strategic partnerships for each of these.
- There was some scepticism about the impact and validity of Public Health England campaigns and the need for Public Health England and the LGA to do more and better influence ministers and local members about the impact of poverty on health.

- Participants shared experiences of work with their local voluntary and community sectors as a key means to build local resilience. This requires investment in building infrastructure.
- Building strong links with school – which can become more challenging with the advent of Academies – is crucial and will require system leadership and influencing skills.

Implementation

- The need to ‘get traction’ was a key theme in this strand. One participant spoke about his council creating a ‘health and wellbeing movement’ with a focus on key outcomes owned by multiple stakeholders as opposed to single organisations. In their case, senior managers have signed up to ‘pledges’ of what they will do for the HWB.
- It was felt that Children and Young People have to feature more prominently in the work of the HWB and that it needs to engage with schools that are instrumental in helping children to develop high expectations and achieve.
- In asking participants to think about the future – there were some ambitious voices who saw the future Health and Wellbeing Board as an integrated commissioning board who can manage the entire spend across health and care and the civic face and accountable for the conversation about better health and wellbeing for local people.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”- Margret Mead