

healthwatch

Stockton-on-Tees



Strengthening Voices Report

11th July 2016

Introduction

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees held their annual event on 11th July 2016 at North Shore Academy. The main purpose of the event was to present Healthwatch's third annual report and to gather opinions from the public through workshop activities on how they wanted to engage with the providers of health and social care services. The 'Strengthening Voices' event attracted over 60 people ranging from service users, family members, carers, service providers and staff from the Clinical Commissioning Groups, Local Authority and NHS England.

Attendees heard three presentations on developments to health and social care in the area. Tony Beckwith, Chair of Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees gave an overview of Healthwatch's work and developments over the last year. Edmund Lovell gave an update on 'The Better Health Programme' and Peter Smith gave a presentation on 'Adult Social Care - Intervention and Prevention'. Attendees also had the opportunity to ask questions following each of the presentations.



Tony Beckwith -
Chair of
Healthwatch
Stockton-on-Tees



Edmund Lovell -
Communications Lead
Better Health
Programme
NHS North of England
Commissioning Support



Peter Smith - Service
Manager
Stockton-on-Tees
Borough Council

Following the presentations, attendees took part in some workshop activities discussing and feeding back information on how they wanted to receive information and be informed of changes as well as how they wanted to feedback their views and experiences to service providers, commissioners etc.

Workshop Activity 1 - How do you want to receive information & be informed of changes?

The most reoccurring theme discussed amongst the attendees at the event was the importance of tailoring communication strategies to the target audience e.g. older people or individuals who use a specific service. This may involve identifying different ways to inform individuals of changes and developments to local health and social care services. For example; a large proportion of the older population do not have access to or know how to use computers and mobile phones therefore emails and information on websites etc. is not easily accessible. For these individuals, preferred methods of communication include; simplified literature including leaflets in the post, adverts and posters in Doctors waiting rooms as well as individual phone calls.



It was also highlighted that the use of slogans which are recognisable to the public and captures attention would be a good method to use. It is important that information provided to individuals is simplified and reader friendly without medical jargon and overwhelming amounts of information as this would make individuals less likely to read / listen to.

The importance of using current resources in the community to target individuals is also vital to inform individuals of changes to services. The use of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector would be of huge benefit to circulate information and messages so the development of relationships and links with this sector is imperative. By linking in with the VCSE sector, information can easily be passed on by trusted groups and individuals to service users and the public through their services, community groups, newsletters and events.



It is also important to consider advertising and promoting information in areas which members of the public frequently visit which may not directly involve health and social care services including; shopping centres, large chain supermarkets, cafes, libraries, schools, youth clubs, churches, community

centres and bus stations. In addition to this, the use of adverts and publications in free newspapers and magazines would also be of benefit when trying to reach the public e.g. Herald & Post / The Gossip.

When looking to share information and engage through public events, individuals stressed the importance of choosing the most appropriate venue and time. Individuals who do not drive would require a venue which is on a local bus route and those who work during the day would only be able to attend if these events are planned on an evening.

Better use of GP surgeries and pharmacies was also discussed, highlighting that the use of TV's often found in the waiting areas, is needed to advertise and provide information to patients. In addition to this, better utilisation of frontline staff was also recommended e.g. when a patient visits the GP surgery to pick up a prescription or book an appointment, the receptionist could use this as an opportunity to discuss any relevant changes and provide information and leaflets to patients.

When using emails, texts and social media to send and promote information, a method which is highly preferred by young people, it is important that the content is direct and specific to the changes. The information provided should be concise and appropriate to the target audience without the need to follow links to other webpages. Individuals do not like receiving junk or multiple emails about the same topic as this will likely result in individuals unsubscribing from updates preventing them from finding out about important information in the future.

Members of the public like to hear of success and good practice at their local health and social care services. By sharing positive feedback, individuals are more likely to engage and listen to any proposed changes or updated information.



It is hugely important for members of the public to hear information from individuals they trust. This may be their social worker, community group lead or family member so targeting these individuals would be of huge benefit when sharing information.

Another option to consider when looking to engage with the public would be to use their place of work to promote information or hold an event. Sending emails via organisation networks and links are more likely to be read as they are felt to be more important and trusted. In addition to this, holding an event in an individual's place of work is likely to have a higher attendance due to the ease of access and convenience.

Engagement with the public must ensure that the needs of the audience are met. Individuals who are visually impaired require information in large print or brail and individuals who are hearing impaired would benefit from a British Sign Language (BSL) speaker visiting community groups to share information and changes.

Workshop Activity 2 - How do you want to feedback your views and experiences?

Members of the public described various ways in which they would like to feedback their views and experiences of local health and social care services, which highlighted that preferences varied depending upon the age group of the individual.

Young people tend to prefer giving feedback online and via social media. Emails and links to online surveys are popular along with up to date mobile technologies with access to free Wi-Fi in venues to complete questionnaires and provide feedback. In addition

to this young people would also recommended using youth clubs and schools to share views and experiences. Examples given included; using assemblies to give and receive information as well as using links and relationships with school health programmes and the school nurse. In addition to this the school may wish to hold parent groups or share information via stalls on parent's evenings.



Older people tend to prefer to share their views and experiences during public consultations. However, the ideal time to hold these would be during the day as older, vulnerable people are much less likely to attend on an evening. The ability to share feedback in venues such as garden centres, churches, mosques, supermarkets and community centres was also popular with older people.

Postal feedback was also considered to be popular amongst the individuals who attended the event. This allows for people to provide feedback as and when they feel necessary and at a time that is convenient to them. In addition to this, providing feedback through the VCSE sector was also an avenue which should be used to gather feedback. Community groups and regular coffee mornings are ideal opportunities to gather feedback from the public with the attendance of

‘influential people’ and organisations to facilitate and encourage discussions on certain topics.



An ideal opportunity to gather patient feedback is through the Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) in GP surgeries as these groups meet regularly to discuss information, issues and concerns which could then be shared with the appropriate people via meeting minutes or asking commissioners, services providers etc. to attend a scheduled meeting.

It was also felt that there needs to be more opportunities for individuals to feedback information including workshops and public events. With a heightened presence of these in the community, it would encourage more people to attend. In addition to this, it is of great importance to instil confidence in the public that their feedback, good or bad, is welcomed and acted upon appropriately.

Conclusion

Effective communication and engagement with the public is vital in informing, influencing, and proposing changes to local health and social care services. Engaging with the public must involve varying methods of two-way communication and ensuring relationships are built and maintained resulting in a positive impact on public knowledge, involvement and confidence as well as strengthening the reputation of an organisation.

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