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**Meeting 27.05.25**

**Welcome and opening remarks – Diana Crump**

Diana Crump welcomed everyone and outlined the meeting agenda, which includes presentations of case studies from five organisations.

She also mentioned that the ICB has confirmed they want a VCSE representative on their board. A recruitment process is being developed, with a goal to have someone in place by the September meeting. The government are continuing to consider changes to NHS England which will lead to local ICBs facing further budget cuts and possible changes including Devon and Cornwall combining, or even broader integrations with Somerset and Dorset. Diana also mentioned that the Assembly is advertising for a Deputy Independent Chair to assist Diana Crump for two days a month. The role is a paid freelance position, requiring local knowledge and leadership experience within the VCSE sector.

Gareth Dix raised a question about how VCSE involvement is being considered in potential boundary adjustments for the ICBs. Diana confirmed that she has been engaging with counterparts from Cornwall, Dorset, Somerset, and Gloucester to ensure VCSE perspectives are included in the conversations. Regular meetings with key decision-makers are happening, but no concrete proposals exist yet. She also emphasized that maintaining strong local VCSE representation is crucial. Darren Halifax highlighted the strong, independent nature of VCSE organizations, emphasizing that their local influence will remain vital even if ICBs merge.

**Presentations**

**Peter Collins NHS Medical Director - Update**

An update was given outlining key challenges and priorities around the uncertainty in healthcare, the shift towards assessing peoples’ needs and planning healthcare delivery and the growing emphasis on Integrated Neighbourhood Care and how its development is still unclear, also ongoing discussions about whether responsibility for neighbourhood care will remain with Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) or shift to local providers.

Priorities were mentioned including addressing national healthcare targets and managing emergency care demands, ensuring long-term sustainability and the potential changes to the service footprint. Peter also recognized the contributions of ICB staff who are facing uncertainty due to planned staff cuts.

There was a further discussion about the blueprint, highlighting that the blueprint aims to clarify the functions of the ICBs and the impact of NHS England’s abolishment. The document suggests a shift back to strategic commissioning, focusing on population needs and supporting local service delivery, whilst uncertainty around Neighbourhood Care and whose is responsibility it remains. The forthcoming 10-year NHS plan is expected to provide clearer direction on achieving key shifts in healthcare, emphasizing local and place-based care as a priority.

Gareth Dix emphasized the importance of prevention in healthcare, highlighting the tension between investment in prevention and financial pressures. He stressed that the VCSE sector in Devon is crucial in delivering prevention efforts across communities. Peter Collins acknowledged the long-standing challenges of prioritizing prevention amidst financial constraints. He expressed optimism that shifting financial responsibility away from ICBs could lead to strategic, multi-year investments rather than short-term funding cycles.

Richard Foxwell asked how Integrated Neighbourhood Teams fit within Local Care Partnerships (LCPs). Peter Collins admitted that the structure is still unclear, but suggested neighbourhood teams should be self-organizing, responsive to local needs, and supported by a broader coordinating entity.

**Case Study #1 – Devon Communities Together - Tim Sydenham, Deputy CEO -** [tim.sydenham@devoncommunities.org.uk](mailto:tim.sydenham@devoncommunities.org.uk)

This presentation was an overview of a research study on barriers to substance misuse treatment access in rural and coastal Devon, with an aim to identify challenges and propose solutions. Rising substance misuse deaths and anecdotal evidence of unique barriers in rural areas prompted the research, supported by Devon County Council and Public Health Devon.

The research included **Co-design workshops** with local partners, including GPs, pharmacies, and individuals with lived experience, **Focus groups** in Ilfracombe, Okehampton, Dawlish, and Dartmouth, 25 **interviews**, with 16 from people with lived experience. The VCSE sector’s deep community ties allowed access to hard-to-reach individuals, offering a trusted, whole-person approach.

**Challenges** Identified included, difficulty finding hidden service users—those needing help but not accessing services, lack of trust in the system, worsened by gaps in rural service provision, transport limitations, affecting access to crucial medication.

**Findings & Recommendations** mentioned were Community-led support models are vital, non-judgmental spaces, like community hubs and cafes, provide safe environments for accessing multiple services and better coordination between services improves accessibility and effectiveness.

The study highlighted gaps in treatment services and reinforced the need for VCSE involvement in service commissioning to address housing, mental health, debt, and transport barriers.

**Case Study #2 – DYS Space Ltd - Matt Bakall, Senior Youth Support Worker in Charge -** [matt.bakall@spacepsm.org](mailto:matt.bakall@spacepsm.org)

Space Youth Services is a charity that operates nine youth centres, a school for at-risk students, street-based projects, and supports 74 voluntary-sector youth clubs.

Digital Youth Work Focus is a project that Matt leads engaging young people through digital spaces. During their 2023 Case Study with Exeter University, they conducted podcasts on youth well-being and mental health and revisited it in 2025 to reassess relevance.

The **key Themes** Explored in 2025 were Mental health & gaming/social media—gaming as escapism, skill-building, and connection, Mental health & family/belonging—young people moving away from COVID’s impact and Mental health & sports/hobbies/education.

**Data Challenges** highlighted included different demographic—65% of online youth club members are neurodivergent, and the online format meant polls and text-based responses, limiting deeper conversations.

Their findings were, young people in 2025 are more self-reliant than in 2023, Neurodivergent youths feel under supported in schools, mental health issues remain prevalent with over 1,200 instances raised in 2024 youth club sessions.

The conclusion of this study provided a valuable snapshot of digitally connected young people and emphasized the need for better mental health and well-being support. The report can be found at this link: <https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/sites/default/files/users/SarahNewman/Case%2BStudy%2B-%2BSpace%2B(2)-compressed.pdf>

**Case Study #3 – Torbay CDT - Marianne Parker, Community Builder -** [**marianneparker@torbaycdt.org.uk**](mailto:marianneparker@torbaycdt.org.uk)

This project introduced research on palliative care, conducted with Exeter University.

**Engagement Method** was the use of a suitcase which contained interactive tools to facilitate conversations on people’s experiences with end-of-life care in participants’ homes.

The **Key Research** Questions Explored included to identify personal reflections on end-of-life care, circle of support and who provides care and emotional support, the impact of location - how where someone lives influences their experience, the types of support needed whether that is physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and practical and their wishes for future care improvements in the community.

**Creative Engagement**: Participants were encouraged to reflect deeply using object-based prompts and activities but felt free to choose their own level of participation and how much they wished to discuss.

**Video Reconstruction**: A video was created to showcase how the suitcase tool worked and to fully capture the engagement method. Here is the link for that report and Torbay Communities website <https://www.torbaycommunities.com/stories-from-the-end-of-life/>.

**Case Study #4 – Waymakers - Alex Kelly, Founder & Director**

Waymakers are based in Barnstaple and focuses on neurodiversity, accessibility, and inclusion. This case study cantered on a co-designed training program with young people who participated in the Kailo research project on mental health, well-being, and career pathways.

**Identified Need** included the need for accurate, up-to-date training for professionals working with neurodivergent children and teens, due to the feeling of experiences often being misunderstood.

**Workshop Development & Pilot** was over a five-month period where young participants designed and delivered a training workshop, which was piloted in December. Attendees included professionals from schools, the Youth Justice Service, Young Devon, and forest school practitioners. The concept of the workshop was for participants to recreate a typical school day, adding challenges neurodivergent students face, such as sensory overload, unclear rules, friendship conflicts, and routine disruptions. This helped professionals understand the additional processing burdens neurodivergent students experience.

The impact that was that young people involved received validation and reassurance, knowing their voices were heard. They presented their work at an Exeter launch event in April, showcasing their experiences through a film documenting the project, which was produced by North Devon Moving Image, involving young filmmakers. Here is the link to the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-mBps1qe4Q&t=3s> .

The project helped secure three years of funding to expand the initiative and future plans include developing similar "day in our lives" scenarios for experiences like medical visits (GP appointments, blood tests, and smear tests). Efforts will focus on recruiting more young people and engaging additional organizations and professionals.

**Case Study #5 – Wellmoor – Richard Foxwell Trustee**

This was a collaborative research effort involving University of Exeter’s Psychology Department.

The community engagement approach was built upon a Friday drop-in warm hub event, with additional participants recruited to create a more representative demographic.

Findings confirmed that the evidence gathered is valuable for a larger international research project spanning Europe and North America.

**Diana Crump – Meeting Conclusion.**

Diana highlighted how the voluntary and community sector (VCSE) is not just an added value but an essential component of research, ensuring direct engagement with communities.

**No action points noted.**

**Date of next meeting (online via Teams): Thursday 3rd July 2025 1:30-3pm**