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Wessex Cancer Alliance Patient and Public Involvement Steering Group and Network Annual Report 2024 - 2025



Introduction

Wessex Cancer Alliance commissioned the Involving People Team at Help & Care to ensure that lived experience is meaningfully embedded within the Alliance's work through a supported network of volunteers.

The network is made up of patients and caregivers who have been affected by cancer. They volunteer their time by sharing their experience, giving insight to shape and improve services.

Through the volunteer network we provide inclusive opportunities for patients, carers, and members of the public to shape cancer services across Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

This report reflects on the achievements of 2024/25, acknowledging successes while highlighting areas requiring greater focus. We view this as a learning exercise that strengthens our collaborative partnership with the Alliance.



It's very rewarding to be involved in shaping the same healthcare system of which you are a patient, ensuring better services for future generations. **Steering group member**



Who are we?

Wessex Cancer Alliance lead and inspire innovation and improvement in cancer care for all people in the Wessex region (Hampshire, Dorset and the Isle of Wight).

Help & Care have over 40 year's experience working within communities, with social justice at the heart of all we do. Our Involving People team lead on our community engagement work, including supporting the Alliance volunteer Steering Group and Network. Volunteers are an integral, valued part of our organisation.

Steering Group, Network & Reader Panel

Steering Group

The Steering Group is independent, enabling people across Wessex to share insights, influence service development, and hold the Alliance to account for the quality and impact of public and patient involvement. We currently have 9 members on our Steering Group, chaired by Eileen and vice – chaired by Derek.

The SG met four times during 2024/25 and agreed to move to bi-monthly meetings to enhance impact and communication. Of the 6 meetings a year, two are face to face away days.

Involving People are approachable, supportive and responsive.

Steering Group Volunteer



Steering Group, Network and Reader Panel

Network

The Network currently comprises 23 members and continues to steadily grow. Members are sent opportunities to participate or share experiences on a variety of cancer-related projects and activities. We make it clear that members can choose what they want to get involved in and when, understanding that people have other commitments and priorities.

Reader Panel

The Reader Panel was launched in January 2025. 14 panel members feedback on cancer related information produced for patients and care-givers to ensure it is clear and understandable. Information is sent once a month by email.



Volunteering makes everything I went through fighting cancer for 18 months have a purpose and a meaning.

Steering group member

A message from the Steering Group Chair

With the invaluable support of Involving People, we continue to contribute to the work of Wessex Cancer Alliance, who in turn, embrace 'experts by experience' influencing all their work, which is done in an insightful, meaningful way, working in partnership, ensuring the patient voice is embedded in all they do.



With Involving Peoples' continued presence we move forward as a confident, independent forum of people who embrace the opportunity to voice observations, participate in and contribute to service development, being that important critical friend and supportively questioning and challenging.

Involving People, pro-actively support our bi-monthly meetings, working closely with myself and the Alliance to create agendas that encourage rich, impactful conversations.

Importantly they offer us support and guidance as needed: a listening ear, keep us informed of involvement opportunities which embrace our skills, mindful also to explore any training opportunities and recruit others to enhance and develop the team.

With thanks and gratitude

Eileen Stonock. Chair. WCA PPI Steering Group



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Looking back: 2024 – 2025

Over the past year, Wessex Cancer Alliance has made significant progress in embedding patient, carer, and public voices into cancer care across the region.

From awareness campaigns to co-designed services, lived experience and community-led projects have supported more equitable, accessible, and person-centred cancer care.

These achievements would not have been possible without the dedication of Steering Group, Network and Reader Panel volunteers. Their expertise, constructive challenge, experience and advice continue to make a substantial contribution—not only to the Alliance but also to partner organisations and, most importantly, to people directly affected by cancer.

The year in numbers...

9

Steering Group members

4

Steering Group meetings

23

Network members

36

Opportunities for involvement

14

Reader Panel members

17

Ongoing project groups within the Alliance represented by our network



Achievements and Highlights

Throughout 2024/25, the Steering Group, Network and Reader Panel have made great progress in embedding the patient voice in cancer services, both nationally and locally.

Highlights include:

- Our Network and Steering group now attend 17 regular project groups within the Alliance. These include personalised care, frailty and cancer, early diagnosis and much more. The Network has inputted into key service improvement initiatives such as Cancer Care Reviews and a Psychological support report.
- As well as regular workstreams, our Network and Steering Group were sent 36 opportunities for 'ad-hoc' involvement across the year. These included providing invaluable feedback on engagement proposals like SkinVision, supporting funding applications and CRUK initiatives around bowel and breast cancer. They were also involved in national initiatives like the Covid Enquiry and surveys around Ovarian and Prostate cancer.
- Representatives also attended and spoke at groups, including Patient and Care-Giver workshops in Basingstoke, a personalised care conference and a national metastatic breast cancer conference.
- The Reader Panel was launched in January 2025 and it is amazing to see the impact it is having already.
- The Network have been instrumental in shaping the 5-year Wessex Cancer Alliance strategy from inception to publication.



Achievements and Highlights

- Held an away day where Alliance staff, Help & Care and Network volunteers came together to talk about things like the 5-year Cancer Strategy and future developments.
- The Network has been represented nationally, both in national Alliance meetings and as part of the National 10 year Cancer Plan with NHS England.
- The Network have supported several campaigns, including the successful 'Know the Signs' early diagnosis and awareness campaign.
- Several members attended a Valuing Cancer Support in the Community event in Dorset this year and continue to network with cancer support groups and organisations.
- Wessex Cancer Alliance launched a quarterly patient involvement newsletter. The Network has contributed to this, and it has been a great way of sharing all we do.
- We marked national volunteer day by sending a personal thank you to everyone who volunteers with us.

You are influencing our thinking, and collectively very much holding us to account. Exactly as I hoped you would. **Sally Rickard, Managing Director WCA**



Supporting our volunteers

At our away day in January, we talked about the personal challenges sharing lived experience can bring. We are committed to supporting our volunteers in a safe and enabling environment.

A skills audit was undertaken; to find out what volunteers needed in terms of support and development, including any skills they'd be willing to share with others.

Areas for development include:

- Health inequalities.
- Understanding NHS structures and systems.
- Cancer knowledge (types, treatment, symptoms).
- Psychological safety and story-sharing.
- Peer support and buddying for volunteers.

In 2025/2026 we will be bringing together training opportunities based on these areas, such as:

- Health Inequalities Training (123).
- The NHS Explained (King's Fund).
- Macmillan e-learning and oncology webinars.
- LEAF (Lived Experience Accredited Facilitator) training.

In addition, the induction process has been reviewed in response to volunteer feedback. A new WCA Volunteer Handbook will be launched in 2025 to provide clearer guidance and a more robust induction.

Looking ahead: 2025 – 2026

While significant progress has been made, there is always more to do. It has been a challenging year with funding pressures and an ever-changing landscape, but the team remain committed and focused.

Priorities for 2025/26 include:

- Continuing to review and shape engagement approaches and hold the Alliance to account for effective public, patient and care-giver involvement, including around improvements to National Cancer Patient Experience Survey results.
- Expanding and diversifying Steering Group, Network and Reader Panel.
- A full redesign of our leaflet and web pages, led by volunteers.
- Supporting Cancer Matters Wessex with a website review working group.
- Personalised Care and Treatment developments such as SACT (Systemic Anti-Cancer Treatment) and a Well Being Hub.
- Away days in September and March to come together and celebrate achievements as well as focus on priorities for the future.
- Launching and embedding the WCA Volunteer Handbook.
- Delivering tailored training and development for volunteers.
- Linking with the Children, Teenagers, & Young Adults (CTYA) programme.
- Improving systems for recording and measuring impact.
- Strengthening internal and external communications.

What can you do?

If you would like to be part of our volunteer Network, or support us, we would love to have you onboard. You can:

- **Contact us** at involvingpeople@helpandcare.org.uk if you are interested in being a part of our network, whether that is the Steering Group, Network, Reader Panel or a combination.
- **Sign up** to receive the quarterly participation newsletter by emailing involvingpeople@helpandcare.org.uk.
- Could you help to **promote our network**? Get in touch and we will be happy to post you some leaflets and information, or alternatively you can share this report or our website:
<https://involvingpeople.org/project/wessex-cancer-alliance-patient-and-public-involvement-steering-group-and-network/>



The Steering Group does an excellent job, providing Wessex Cancer Alliance with constructive challenge and meaningful stakeholder views.

Medical Director, WCA

Thanks and acknowledgements

- Thank you to our Steering Group, who give their time to steer the strategic direction of our work. Special thanks to our chair Eileen, and Derek, our vice who was elected in this year.
- Thank you to our network volunteers, who give valuable time when they can. Your insight and experience are always appreciated.
- Thank you to the Reader Panel, who have been instrumental in ensuring information is patient friendly and easy to understand.
- Thank you to the Alliance for being transparent and supportive – it is clear you value the work of the network and are committed to hearing the patient voice.



Thanks once again to the Reader Panel, I really appreciate the time they take to help and their valuable input.

**Keith Withers, Digital Comms
(Cancer Matters Wessex)**



Contact and further information



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