

Breakout session: Developing a London wide-advice strategy break-out session

To begin **James Sandbach** and **Natalie King** introduced **Helen Lang**, the consultant who had been working on creating the roadmap for a London wide advice strategy.

James outlined that the strategy wished to create a coherent and strategic approach to tackle the common issues faced by the advice sector. He went on to describe the process behind the strategy, which included introducing the steering group created by himself and Lizzie.

James began the discussion by creating a Mentimeter, asking the participants how they believed the strategy could help the advice sector. Various points were raised including stakeholder work and sharing.

James outlined the vision of the strategy – *“By 2030 all Londoners will have improved access to the help they need by improving the quality, reach and access to [social welfare/specialist] advice. We want to empower individuals to manage their own needs and to know where to go to access support when they need it.”*

James welcomed a discussion of the vision’s wording – acknowledging that it was a starting point and feedback to date pointed towards it needing to be slightly more realistic to ensure the widespread buy-in it needed.

Helen then outlined the roadmap process:

1. Establish an understanding on the desk research that has already been carried out, so that this can be built on.
2. Defining through drafting purpose questions and working on a draft problem statement.
3. Speaking to people in the sector to understand what is needed and the current climate – focus groups and survey
4. Mapping dependencies and validating vision and problem statement
5. Drafted roadmap

The questions explored in the process of creating the strategy:

- What socio-political factors impact the sector?
- What are the issues impacting user needs?
- What are the needs and gaps?
- What opportunities can be taken to tackle these issues?
- Is the strategy needed – is there a common consensus on its necessity?
 - Overall people felt that it was necessary.

The focus groups included:

- Funders, umbrella and membership bodies, frontline advice providers (x2), ICS and health stakeholder, and local authorities.

The discussions with the focus groups created common themes that should be explored within the strategy.

The focus groups outlined the challenges faced including funding, changes to policy landscape and capacity.

The key findings from the focus groups and desktop research undertaken by Helen could be categorised within the following 12 themes:

1. Access and Inclusion
2. Collaboration
3. Connecting Services
4. Data & Digital
5. Funding
6. Local support pathways
7. Needs driven support
8. Policy & Advocacy
9. Prevention & early intervention
10. Recruitment skills & retention
11. Standards
12. Vision & Strategy

Participants were tasked to prioritise importance of different activities for the next steps of the strategy. James reminded the groups that this is a strategy to tackle the challenges faced by London.

Small-group flipchart notes

1. **Strategy development**

Refine 12 identified themes + map needs to opportunities. Aligning themes with stakeholders' priorities with a focus on underrepresented communities.

- Please include integration with NHS + local authorities.
- Integrated care systems are an opportunity!

Develop strategy vision + success measures

- With the NHS + local authorities

Develop a comprehensive strategy framework + outcomes model

Develop thematic pillars (e.g. funding, digital, workforce)

Define KPI's, resourcing plan defining what will happen + who will lead it

Validate strategic direction by engaging the wider sector (online + in person)

Targeted funder + wider advice sector feedback, secure formal support refine priorities + language

- Underpinning

Define roles, delivery plans, resourcing + comms plan

- Incl. funders and audience + boards
- With NHS + local authority

Launch the first phrase of the strategy

To increase awareness and influence the advice sector in the public sphere by improving awareness of what advice work is, what it covers + how it makes a difference

Mapping the financial value of the sector – making a case for increased funding levels

- Cost of funding
- Impact for people
- Financial value to the NHS and local authorities.
- Please co funding by NHS + local authorities of the advice sector – with each borough

Engage funders to shape coordinated investment plan

- Requires understanding of the above `financial value`
 - Strategy could provide this context for funders
- Coordination of approach to funding from applicant side as well

2. ***Need: Joined up services – systems + practices to achieve client centred services***

- Difference between those who have unrestricted funding vs restricted funding
- Legal aid influencing re: process.
 - Overcome some of the barriers
- Funder priorities
- System vs client journey/experience
 - Holistic support
- Research – already known
- Digital – not the focus for most disadvantaged
 - Use of digital to target support
- Client journey: front facing access
 - One stop shop?
 - Lost post COVID/through digital
 - Pathways into advice
- Targeting awareness of what is there, route into it.
- Capacity
- Making case for support
- Multiyear funding
 - Impact on the strategy

3. ***Fostering client-centred services***

Support client/services sooner

Develop the processing systems to improve cross sector working to improve early intervention engagement, awareness + support.

Develop improved referral pathways plan to better to connect services, tackle advice deserts.

Undertake research to understand the structured inequalities + barriers (social/cultural/economic) preventing those from marginalised communities engaging with support.

Develop a plan to target + tackle communities who are key gaps (re needs or levels of deprivation)

Using roadmap needs assessment to understand what effective partnership working would mean across the sector. Develop a career pathway plan to tackle immediate pressing issues facing the advice sector. Co-design workforce resilience plan.

Develop a plan to better understand how to deploy digital to support advice work.

4. ***Joined up systems + practice***

To deliver a data system plan to enable the sector to better understand what it wants to do with its data, what it has, where the gaps are and where it needs to develop.

Identify shared tools, templates or standards already in use.

Developing common standards and best practice for the sector.

To increase awareness and influence of the advice sector in the public sphere by improving awareness of what advice work is, what it covers and how it makes a difference

- Integrating the advice services into healthcare 2 LAs (and how to integrate and models for integration)
- Data systems – local authority?
 - NHS data systems & integration of the systems
- Where does the growing provision of “advice” delivered by local authority sit?
- It’s often about “revenue protection” isn’t quality assured or independent?
- How does the advice sector present itself as the “answer” to the problems faced by the NHS and local authority?
- Address power imbalances
- Can we please continue to involve the NHS and local authorities in the process!
- It is important to consider different aspects of the social welfare system into the strategy, such as social housing and the healthcare system.
- One should consider the benefits of linking small organisations with larger accredited organisations, so that the smaller organisation is able to develop and offer stronger advice and services.
- One of the biggest issues currently is the lack of understanding on what social welfare advice is, by those outside of the sector.
 - A lack of knowledge by local councils on the work carried out by advice agencies and the vast number of those available.
 - There is a need to create relationships between local authorities and advice agencies.
- The importance of collaborative work in allowing people to understand other sides of the sector.
- Public awareness sessions have created a stronger understanding.
- The need to use data from different parts of the social welfare to draw links and identify where people need help. Here there is lack of collaborative work.

To conclude Helen outlined the next steps on the roadmap. She further noted that it is important that the strategy is owned by the sector itself and is created by those operating in it.