A GOOD-PRACTICE GUIDE TO VALUING, RESPECTING AND SUPPORTING SERVICE-USER ACTIVITY

together
WORKING FOR WELLBEING

Contents

It is a testament to the strength and commitment of service-users who often volunteer their time to positively influence in so many areas that this good-practice guide has become necessary. Simply put, service-user involvement adds value and our developing ideas and ways of working need to be positively encouraged and truly supported. The local voices of people are gathering strength as we network regionally and begin to participate at a national level. It is the efforts made by local people that need to be acknowledged as the crucial starting-point from which all else will grow. That is why we must get our good practice under way.

The issue of payment for service-users is a thorny one. Together's Directorate of Service-user Involvement regularly receives requests to assist with the setting up of payment policies, or to clarify how payments should be made to people who are active within the service-user movement. This is an area where there are no simple solutions, given the complexities of the benefits system, employment law and good practice principles – which are often open to interpretation.

We feel it is very important to provide some guidance on how to set up a process leading to the design and implementation of a payment policy. This will address safety and support issues, as people often experience high levels of stress around claiming their benefits. The threat of having your benefits 'reviewed' because of payment or involvement can lead to further distress. Such a wide range of issues exist (most of which do not have definite or easily accessible answers) that it is not possible simply to make a list or a specimen policy for others to adopt.

The need to value, reward and support service-user activity goes far beyond the issue of payment, so we have also examined evaluation, accountability, safety, support, supervision and mediation.

This publication will be useful to service-user groups, commissioners and providers of mental health services as they seek to work together in partnership to enable service-users who wish to contribute their expertise to do so in a valued and valuable way. Being paid as a service-user for even a small piece of work may be the first step on the road to substantial or full-time employment. Government policies encourage social inclusion and involvement. We need to ensure that this involvement is both meaningful and valued.

We hope that this guide helps everyone to understand more about the issues that need to be considered when designing a payment policy. The process requires that people get together and find their own local way forward. We also see this as an opportunity to raise awareness about the effectiveness of working as part of a group.

The Department of Health's best-practice publication Reward and recognition: The principles and practice of service-user payment and reimbursement in health and social care – a guide for service providers, service-users and carers (2006) contains much useful information, and should be read alongside this publication. See also Service-users Together: a guide for involvement (Together, 2006) for a more general exploration of service-user involvement. We plan to publish further titles on aspects of good practice around service-involvement.

Alongside the development of a payments policy, opportunities should be taken to establish principles and good practice around meaningful service-user involvement and leadership, as well as developing a partnership approach where everyone's contribution is valued.

We wish everyone success in designing their own policy.

Anne Beales, Director of Service-user Involvement, Together

2. Ownership

Ownership of a payments policy is important. It is essential that service-user-led groups are involved in the process of writing a payments policy as well as having a sense of ownership of the policy when it is applied in practice.

Issue	Potential action	By whom
The importance of group ownership of the policy and process It is important that each group/geographical area has a thorough understanding, involvement and ownership, not only of the payments policy itself but also of the process of writing it. If policies are written and implemented by one individual or by one organisation, this can result in resentment among people who either do not understand the reasoning and process behind it, or who experience discrepancies as a result of it. However, if a payment policy is worked through by all those affected by it, then it stands a good chance of making sense to all and, therefore, becoming established practice. Involving people raises understanding (which they can pass on to others) about complex issues such as the benefits system and the implication of payments to those in receipt of benefits, alongside the duty of employers to inform the Inland Revenue about payments made and good employment practice. There is also a fundamental need to address with every-one involved why service-user involvement is necessary and what all parties will get from involving service-users. **Managing change** It is important to bear in mind the impact any decisions may have, especially on those in receipt of payments in the past who may become disheartened once the reality of the system becomes apparent. Ensuring ownership of the process is particularly important when managing change to existing practice.	• Call meeting to work though the identified issues, covering the geographical area and groups for which the payment policy is intended (e.g. organisation, Local Implementation Team, regional). • Group work enables people to feel more comfortable to speak up and problem-solve. Consider the safety and support issues for members of this group (see page 22). • Some groups have found an anonymous, open-to-scrutiny voting system useful to obtain a genuine group decision and avoid the pitfall of a few powerful individuals making decisions for the group. • Draw up agreed terms of reference – the purpose of the group, its remit and authority. • Pay particular attention to ensuring the involvement in this process of people who already have some experience of receiving payments.	Local group including people who access services, service-user-led groups, commissioners and providers (with trade unions where appropriate)

OWNERSHIP
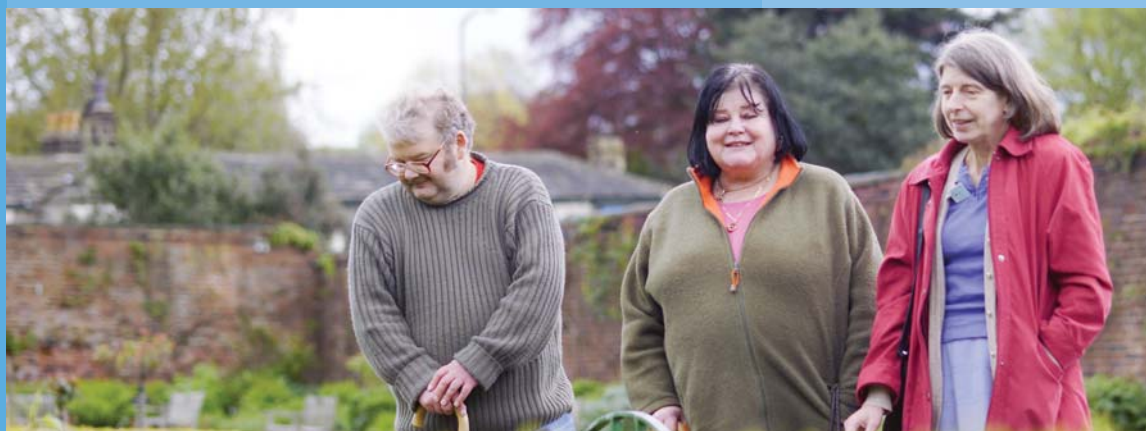
3. Independence

Independence is a central feature of service-user-led groups. It is important that any form of payment or reward does not compromise a group's ability to speak out, advocate and campaign.

Issue	Potential action	By whom
The impact of payment on the independence of involvement Direct payment from commissioners or providers to individuals, or even service-user-led groups, causes major dilemmas when addressing the ethics of maintaining the independence of views, training, advice, evaluations or research. As with advocacy, independence is a critical and defining factor, which adds real value to involving people. When independence from commissioners and providers is transparent, credibility can be gained for those who are involved. One way to maintain independence is to involve a 'host agency'. These are organisations within the voluntary sector that are independent of statutory services. They fulfil an important secondary role around financial accountability and good human resources practice. It is vital that service-user-led groups have ownership of the process of involving a host so that group members will have confidence in the host. Service-user-led groups and individuals should work with commissioners in drawing up any tender for a host. Also the initial service level agreement needs to be central to the recruitment process of a host. Another option to increase independence is for the group to become an organisation in its own right. This takes a lot of planning and a range of organisational statuses can be considered (e.g. registered charity, social enterprise, cooperative, limited company).	• Agree principles of independence. • Consider appointing a 'host agency'. • Draw up a tender for a 'host agency' based on the principles of best practice around service-user involvement and leadership. Aims to be agreed by all. • Appointment of a 'host agency' (must be led by those who will work within that arrangement). • Draw up an initial service level agreement which must include service-users and service-user-led groups together with the commissioners. • Consider organisational structure and status. Where appropriate set action plan to achieve this status, with interim measures if necessary.	Service-users, service-user-led groups, commissioners and providers Service-user-led groups and commissioners

INDEPENDENCE

4. Valuing involvement

Payment is a generally accepted and very clear way to demonstrate that an individual's or organisation's involvement is considered to be of value.

Issue

The impact of using payment to show the value of involvement

Many people see payment as a way of being valued. Service-users can feel more valued if they receive payment for their involvement, and providers can feel good about paying people for their involvement since they believe that this shows their commitment to the process and that they value individual input. We know that an additional £25, for example, can make a qualitative difference in lifestyle for people in receipt of benefits or on a low income.

There are ethical and practical issues around the appropriateness of using payment to show value (see page 14). Paying some people and not others, as defined by varying funding levels rather than individual choice, could be seen to demonstrate that some involvements have greater worth than others.

On a practical level, payment is not always an appropriate way to demonstrate value, as many people are in receipt of benefits which are affected by other income.

In addition to the actual pressure of managing the payments (benefits, tax etc.), there can also be a perceived pressure of 'having' to undertake an activity. Some people feel that the pressure increases when receiving payment, as opposed to being involved in a voluntary capacity. This increase in pressure can have a negative impact on an individual's mental wellbeing, which counters the benefit for the individual of involvement. Payment, especially if this is through an ongoing 'contract', can feel like too much commitment for some people, who feel better disposed to participate if they feel no pressure.

So the cost of all aspects of a payment policy must be clear. This means not just in financial terms, but also in terms of equality of opportunity, insurance, how people's wellbeing is to be maintained, how a collective voice is given, and feedback and evaluation of the effectiveness of activities.

Potential action	By whom
• Group discussion about ways of valuing individuals.	Service-users, providers and commissioners
• Discussion around advantages and drawbacks of different ways of demonstrating value. The most up-to-date, accurate information about benefits and tax and employment law will need to be available and accessible.	
• Draw up a list of issues to include in a payment policy.	

5. Payment methods

There are both advantages and drawbacks to a variety of payment methods – including volunteering, sessional work and employment – and their impact on benefits and tax.

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Payment / reimbursement methods A wide range of funding, payment and reimbursement methods have been and continue to be used in service-user involvement across the country. All have advantages and drawbacks. If each method is fully explored within the group, this will demonstrate that it is not a lack of commitment or recognition of the value attached to individuals' contributions which prevent particular types of payment, but systems. It is also important to consider other indirect and non-monetary methods that could be used.	• Explore examples of how people benefit in various way from their involvement and are shown the value of their involvement. • Discuss the advantages and drawbacks of each method.	Service-user-led groups, providers and commissioners
Information sharing The provision of, and contribution to, written material and agendas in time for people to prepare properly is important. It is also important to plan meetings and agendas well in advance to give time for the group to discuss and consult widely before the meeting.	• Joint information-sharing protocol between service-users, providers and commissioners.	

Paying the group rather than the individual can be the most relevant thing to do. This encourages a collective rather than an individual prespective/agenda.

PAYMENT METHODS

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Training The provision of training is one way for organisations to demonstrate the value they place on involvement. This could be through internal training provision, funding to provide in-house training specifically for the group, or funding to pay for individuals to attend external training courses/events. It should be noted, however, that training must be relevant to the individual role/involvement for it not to constitute payment 'in kind'. For example, circus skills would most likely not be of much use in the course of involvement, but computer skills might! Training that carries some form of accreditation will be helpful to service-users who are seeking some formal recognition of their expertise. Other practical considerations that demonstrate that thought and attention to people's needs have been addressed are: • arranging transport • ensuring people are supported as they have requested • provision of refreshments (ensure that these meet people's dietary needs).	• Find out what training is available locally that service-users could attend. Make reciprocal arrangements where possible to extend the choice of training available. • Group of people who access services to design a list (charter) of what practical measures will assist them and get those who ask for their support to sign up to the list.	Service-user-led groups, providers and commissioners Service-user-led groups

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Effective systems Whatever payment or reimbursement method is agreed, it is important that effective delivery systems are in place and that all involved are clear about their own responsibilities within the system. For example, if you agree to reimburse in cash for travel expenses, ensure that you have enough cash on the day to do so and that people don't have to chase up their money.	• Develop written procedures for all systems so that these are clear to all.	Service-user-led groups, providers and commissioners
Volunteering Some people prefer to volunteer their time, as they are not ready or do not wish to undertake paid work. 'Giving back' in this way can be part of their recovery process. Often people who volunteer have used services very recently or have a tremendous wealth of experience. Their inclusion is vital if we are to embrace diversity. We have to ensure that those who volunteer their time are well-supported, trained and given supervision so their confidence to undertake activities is increased, and they are well-prepared and ready for the activities they wish to participate in.	• Good-quality training and ongoing support and supervision must be offered to volunteers.	Local groups

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Some activities people participate in will require that they work with others who are described as vulnerable. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) checks will need to be carried out and agreement reached about issues such as confidentiality and equality of opportunity. These are usually based on the provider's existing policies and will offer a basis for further training. Occupational health checks can also be necessary – for example to ensure volunteers are insured. The experience of health checks must be positive and supportive.	• Smooth process for CRB and POVA checks to be in place, together with occupational health checks where necessary. Supportive procedures are needed that recognise the additional support needs that service-users may have with in these processes.	Service-user-led groups, providers and commissioners
	• Volunteers would need to be attached to an organisation. Depending which organisation this is, this may compromise independence.	
Volunteers can be reimbursed for 'out-of-pocket' expenses – i.e. the actual amount of money they have spent in the course of carrying out their voluntary role. This could legitimately include: • travel expenses (public transport and taxis to and from place of volunteering with receipts for train tickets, car parking etc – and a record of mileage) • meal allowance • childcare costs • other costs paid out (e.g. stamps, phone, stationery).	• Put together expenses and reimbursement policy, including an agreed definition of out-of-pocket expenses and at what rates. Please note: this could be taxable.	Service-user-led groups and commissioners with advice from Inland Revenue
As long as these expenses are paid from a receipt and the exact amount given, reimbursing expenses does not affect benefits or tax. However, if a set amount is given 'in lieu' of expenses (to save on admin etc.) then this would constitute a payment and not reimbursement and could affect benefits and tax.		

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Under Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) regulations, it is not permitted for a volunteer to undertake work/activities they have previously been paid for. For example, if you can only receive an income of £20 you will still need to receive the national hourly minimum rate. If a meeting/event goes on all day, you can't attend half the meeting and get paid and the other half stay as a volunteer. Please see the Department of Health (2006) publication Reward and Recognition.	• Discuss advantages and drawbacks of this method of reimbursement.	Service-user-led groups, commissioners and DWP
Despite DWP Regulations, which state that volunteering will not necessarily bring on a 'review' of disability benefits or Job Seekers Allowance, in practice this is not always the case. There continues to be a lack of understanding from Benefits Agency staff around mental health and the benefits of volunteering, with localised decisions not always matching national policy.	• Problem-solving with DWP about benefits, payments and volunteering. • Local DWP offices (e.g. Jobcentre Plus) to ensure consistency in the implementation of benefits rules and mental health training for staff.	Nationally DWP locally with local service-users and providers

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Sessional work for individuals Previous or current arrangements for paying individuals for their involvement are often unsatisfactory and raise a number of issues. • The benefits regulations mean that the majority of people can only be paid around £20 or less per week and often the only way to link this amount to the number of hours they are actually working is to pay the minimum wage. Paying the minimum wage does not go along with the ethos of valuing people for their experiences. • People are paid but without going through a recruitment process. This means that this is done without sufficient regard to equal opportunities and is not inclusive practice. • There are benefit and tax implications for people being paid these sums of money. • There are implications for the organisation making these payments – changes to employment laws mean that sessional workers can now assume employment rights (sick and holiday pay) after one year. • People who are self-employed and being paid will invoice the organisation and have certain responsibilities (i.e. with the tax office), as with any other self-employed person. • Paying people as individuals raises the question of whether they are being paid for their own view and individual agenda, rather than to facilitate increased involvement. Paying individuals limits the number of people involved due to restricted resources. • Even when people do everything correctly they are still often subject to investigation from the Benefits Agency.	• To be discussed as a group. • Prepare support policy for those who are subject to investigation by the DWP.	Service-user-led groups, providers and commissioners Service-user-led groups

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Paying the group – finance/income generation The days of paying individuals £20 to £25 directly for their input are coming to a close. A key alternative is for organisations to pay service-user groups a set amount of money to carry out a piece of work. This encourages the involvement of more people, including those who have previously not been involved or who don't wish to/feel able to attend meetings. Set fees generate income or a funding agreement, which will fund the training, development and support of service-user-led groups, offering a safe way to include people and a chance for service-user leadership to develop. While individual views are important, it's now accepted that a group of people who are organised and have received training around participation can offer a joint view about issues and a 'collective' perspective. A group's collective perspective will not always give a consensus view. Indeed, the diversity of people involved within the service-user movement gives it strength.	• Explore how this has been done elsewhere. • Start discussion around service specifications, possible funding arrangements, group set-up.	Service-users and commissioners

6. Employing staff

It is important that service-user-led groups set and maintain high standards when they are in the position to employ their own staff.

EMPLOYING STAFF

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Employment issues Whether service-user-led groups employ people directly or this happens via host arrangements, the same rigorous standards around good human resources practice and support need to be applied. The posts that are created will naturally attract people who have accessed services. Most employers in this field understand that people with that personal experience are better placed to work within this area. This can act as an example to other employers as well as a stepping-stone for people who wish to return to work. The nature of support required by individuals will vary, as with all support offered to all employees, but there are some areas worth noting where reasonable 'adjustments' may be required (for example, people who experience agoraphobia and have difficulties using public transport). Within the service-user movement a distancing between paid staff and those who undertake activities on a voluntary basis should be minimised. People who have gained paid employment within a geographical area, for example, have often first volunteered, so there will need to be a managed change of roles in order that any isolation and separation from the membership they were part of is negligible.	• Service-user-led groups which become employers will need to gain expertise from within the service-user movement or from other employers as appropriate. • Service-user-led groups to undertake evaluations to dispel myths around employing people who have accessed services. • Action plan to ensure paid members do not become separated from the group and its membership or that voluntary members feel separate from those who have moved on to paid work. Plans must be developed and owned by all the membership, likewise with the development of posts and appointments and ongoing support issues.	Service-user-led groups which become employers and host organisations Employer and local service-user-led groups to design and implement this approach

Issue	Potential action	By whom
The members should be part of all the stages of job creation, appointment and ongoing support systems. As many of the post holders see this work as a stepping-stone, succession management (i.e. ensuring others who have less experience are trained, mentored and support-ed in carrying on the work) is another issue, which needs to be addressed. This also applies to the management and support of volunteers, as people do get to a stage in their recovery where moving on means their role within the service-user movement gets left behind.	• Succession management should be discussed by people in service-user-led groups and measures put in place to ensure that all members are constantly engaged in training, mentoring and supporting others to assist with their development.	Service-user-led groups and those with expertise in succession management
Many workers within the service-user movement will become role models and an additional responsibility must be borne in mind because of this, as people will question 'If they can do it then so can I'. While this can be used to promote a positive message, this should never be tokenistic or patronising.	• Planning around the messages given out about the positive benefits of employing people who have accessed services. This should include how to overcome challenges such as stigma and discrimination.	Local service-user-led groups and employers
Some activities people participate in will require that they work with others who are described as vulnerable, in which case CRB and POVA checks will need to be carried out (see page 12). Occupational health checks may also be a part of the recruitment process. The experience of health checks must be positive and supportive.	• Implement procedures to ensure that CRB, POVA and occupational health checks are done sensitively and supportively and minimise any potentially negative impact upon an individual's suitability for employment.	Employers with local service-user-led groups
Many of these issues will need to be considered when providers create posts that attract people who access services. Consideration also needs to be given to the fact that the status of the post in relation to closeness to real power and decision-making will model to others how valued people are by the employer.	• Providers with support of service-user-led groups will need to consider the message given when creating and employing people where it is specific that it is partly their experience of accessing services that will ensure their suitability for a post.	

7. Evaluation and accountability

Evaluation and accountability are essential activities for service-user-led groups so that they can demonstrate to others the value of the work that they do.

Issue	Potential action	By whom
### Effectiveness and accountability It is vital for their long-term survival that service-user-led groups ensure they are effective in what they set out to do. In the short term, this often becomes more of a priority when groups are looking for funding. Proof of what they have done or can do – being accountable to funders – is a key part of tender processes and service level agreements.		Local service-user-led groups
Being accountable to other members of the group is also important. To maintain the group's confidence in individuals who go to activities, representing the group as a whole rather than their own agenda, we need to think about using tools such as the Safe/Sell Out chart (found in Service-users Together: a guide to involvement – Together 2006). When people undertake valued activities, such as attending conferences, or very sensitive work around such topics as re-provision of services, the use of the Safe/Sell Out chart can really ensure inclusion. ### Training as a tool for effectiveness Training to support the input of people who access services adds value all round and assists with the development of a leadership within the service-user movement. Some service-user-led groups will need support from other groups who have put on training to design their own programme. Once programmes are designed and the cost is known then negotiations about funding from commissioners will have to take place (unless this aspect is already covered by the service level agreement).	• Look at what has already been designed and is in use by other service-user-led groups.	

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Issue	Potential action	By whom
## Recording and evaluating what the group does Evaluations of activities need to be undertaken so people feel their work is valued. This is already common practice around training and should be extended to other activities. Many service-user-led groups can evidence their value by keeping records of all the activities they are involved in, along with copies of evaluations, using them to improve their input. This provides the group with concrete figures of what they achieve, adding weight and evidence to the phrase 'the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts'. This assists people to see the value they add to the group and increases people's confidence that their contribution does make a difference.	• Service-user-led groups should develop tools to assist with evaluation, feedback and the accountability of individuals who put forward a collective perspective on their behalf. • Service-user-led groups should record the activities of their group, as it is essential the group can share the success and quantity of activities undertaken.	Service-user-led groups and providers
## Status of participant 'advice' Each person's contribution should be given without fear of consequence if real independence is to be achieved. The status of the advice which is sought should be clear: will it be followed, or is it to get an impression? Might someone's work be changed as a result? Also, people may not wish to use services or be supported by staff they have given a 'view' about for fear of repercussions. Therefore, sensitivity where people require support from services they are engaged in working with needs to be demonstrated. Where possible, choice should be given to individuals to access services they have not been engaged in working with.	• Agreement between group and organisation the work is being done for – written into the terms of reference where available for long-term involvement (e.g. representation at ongoing meetings such as management boards).	Service-user-led groups and providers

EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Personal agendas People's personal agendas are important and need to be expressed. It must always be clear that where the 'collective' perspective is being given, personal agendas are left to one side. Care must be taken to prevent individuals from becoming burnt out if they are really only wanting to be active around personal or single issues. The support of a group is essential. The 'collective perspective' and clarity around role militates against the risk of one person's 'story' being told again and again. **Clarity on roles** The voices of those people who are currently receiving services and support are what we need to hear and this can seem a contradiction or a potential for conflict with safety issues for those who participate. Issues such as ECT can bring up very strong emotional responses in people, so it is extremely important that we find ways to manage this effectively and safely. Often the view from the collective will incorporate choice and articulate more than one way of looking at something (for example, some people want ECT as a treatment while others are opposed). In this instance a collective view would be about offering real choice. The individuals delegated to give the collective view will have authority greater than that of an individual's view. This also has the effect of managing very strong views and making it safe for individuals to express a range of views without entering into individual conflict, which can be damaging not only to individual wellbeing, but also to the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the group.	• Research existing tools/approaches in use by other groups and agree process for collating and feeding back diverse views. • Design and agree feedback process that not only confirms previous agreements have been adhered to, but feeds back important information to the group. This is especially important not only to continue to give others the opportunity to feed into the process, but also so that other people can attend the meeting if the existing representative is unable to attend.	Service-user-led groups

Issue	Potential action	By whom
A feedback process to the group will raise everyone's awareness about issues and offer a route to being transparent and accountable through feedback mechanisms. People who contribute but who do not wish actually to attend events are therefore also included.	• Develop and agree role descriptions and specifications. It can be helpful to have a standard one that can be made role-specific with agreed specifications for individual roles. Where individual roles are created, these should link to feedback and accountability processes and terms of reference (where available).	Service-users and involvement group
	• Feedback systems for valuing members should incorporate role descriptions.	Service-user-led groups

Role descriptions

To ensure clarity around personal agenda and collective perspective, it is important to design and produce role descriptions (like job descriptions) and role specifications to recruit members. These must be developed with a wider group of people who access services, not just group members, so what is produced is owned by the people 'served' not just the individuals attending meetings etc. This also gives people who access services the chance to see if an activity will suit them or if they have the experience and skills to play a positive role (usually people self-select and this is not seen as a 'recruitment' process but information sharing).

Role descriptions also increase equality of opportunity – people attend meetings/events according to their individual skills/expertise. This not only makes the group's involvement more effective but is also a tool for managing a fair selection of who goes to which events, especially where some events are more 'favoured' than others.

Role descriptions can also be used as a tool to give feedback to individuals. When they are designed and implemented alongside other safety issues, the result is that members will feel supported and valued.

8. Safety and support

Safety and support must underpin all service-user activity. There are a number of tools and approaches that help to develop an atmosphere of safety. Service-user-led groups give a high priority to the safety and support of their members.

SAFETY AND SUPPORT

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Safety and support structures		
Group agreements		
These are often known as 'ground rules' at training events. People who work together because of a shared experience of mental distress will benefit from having time together as a group to look at what will assist them to feel included and what may hinder this. These can then be re-visited if the group goes through a difficult patch.	• Development of group agreements.	Service-user-led groups
Objectives of activity		
Clear aims and objectives for involvement must be worked out and service-user-led groups should be commited to developing tools to evaluate and feed back the added value gained by involvement. The added value that people who use their expertise can bring to an activity must be made clear, as must the good use of their time. This can be achieved by ensuring that individuals' roles are clarified before undertaking activities.	• Design role descriptions and identify objectives for the activity and ways of showing how service-users' expertise adds value.	Service-user-led groups
Working in pairs		
If people are to offer a collective perspective, it is always useful to have another person around who has been party to discussions for clarification. Also, more accountability can be achieved. On some occasions it is important to have instant feedback about your contribution, how the objectives for the activity were achieved, and impressions about next steps. If two or more people attend an event the pressure to contribute feels less. At some events people will need support/ solidarity to feel able to contribute fully.	• Design and implement policy on lone and accompanied working.	Service-user-led groups

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Knowledge about people Including people means bearing in mind a variety of practical, cultural and emotional considerations. Knowledge about what people find supportive in order that they can participate will be essential so people are matched with suitable and appropriate activities. CRB and POVA checks will have to be activated as they would with any other worker (see page 12). Some individuals will have preferences about who they undertake activities with. All of the practical support necessary (for example, to accommodate someone who can only travel with a friend in a taxi) will need to be costed and charges to commissioners made accordingly. **Supporting people who are experiencing higher levels of distress** It is important for the effectiveness of the group and the wellbeing of its members that people whose wellbeing decreases still have the option to continue their involvement in some manner, even if their input is less than it has been previously. However, the option to 'step out' of the group temporarily must also be given and supported so that the individual does not feel that their commitment to the process is in doubt or that there is any pressure to continue, if this is adversely affecting their mental wellbeing.	• Design and implement self-assessment around what activities and support people require. Design and implement diary of activity taking into account people's wishes and preferences. Both will need to be regularly updated. A co-ordinator will need to be responsible for actioning the above and supported by the group to do so. The cost implication will need to be transparent. • Individual support – asking people when they are well what would help when they are in distress	Service-user-led groups, providers and commissioners Service-user-led groups

Issue	Potential action	By whom
Safe, supportive ways to challenge behaviour To ensure the safety of the group as a whole, within the group there should be agreed ways to challenge inappropriate or offensive behaviour from anyone in the group. This is particularly important both to ensure respect for individuals, and to challenge views which discriminate against people because of their ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, disability or social status. Views which contradict this should be challenged in a safe, supportive way so that people learn from the experience rather than being ostracised. The group should have ownership of the process. This also relates to instances where providers take issue with an individual's contributions. When the group has ownership and has developed tools around accountability and the collective perspective, this should ensure that issues can be dealt with by the group itself and solutions found.	• Development and application of group agreements. • Development of policies and structures to challenge behaviour.	Service-user-led groups, then to be agreed with service providers

9. Mediation

It is important to have systems in place so that constructive ways forward can be found when things go wrong or don't work out as well as hoped.

Issue

Along with putting in place safety measures, supervision and other forms of support, consideration must be given to constructive ways forward when things go wrong. Service-user-led groups should design and implement complaints systems that will resolve conflict between individuals within their group.

The complaints system should be supportive. It is important that such a system exists in the early stage of a developing group because this indicates that the group takes its responsibilities seriously.

Effective complaint systems within service-user-led groups are often centred around group agreements. In some areas, it has to be said that it is rare for individuals to be asked to leave groups either on a temporary or permanent basis. However, where this action has had to be taken, a robust complaints package ensures that a recognised and supported process can be followed. It also allows groups to deal with their own members in an agreed way should people from outside agencies complain about either individuals or the group itself. A host agency should be expected to support the service-user-led groups with its expertise and experience in this area.

Where a service-user-led group or individuals cannot agree a way forward, or an agency feels its complaint has not been dealt with properly, the use of mediation can be very helpful. Many mediation services now exist which support individuals, or groups of individuals, to resolve issues. An agreement can be reached with such mediation services, which can be briefed appropriately to intervene in an independent manner.

Conflict resolution has to be considered by service-user-led groups, and it is hoped that by dealing with such difficult issues early on in their development they will model positive approaches. Also, discussing the issue alongside group agreements and other safety measures may well act as a preventative tool.

MEDIATION

Potential action	By whom
• Group discussion about how to proceed in a holistic way with complaints.	Service-user-led groups
• Design and implement a complaints system that dovetails with evaluations and group agreements.	Service-user-led groups plus host agency where appropriate
• Agreement with an independent mediation service to be formed at the earliest stage.	To be agreed by all who commission work from the service-user-led group
	The service-user-led group and all who work and commission activity from the service-user-led group