



Together for Mental Wellbeing

Five Year Strategy 2019-2024



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Introduction

Our previous five year strategy ended on 31 March 2019. At the start of 2018, we commissioned the Centre for Charity Effectiveness at Cass Business School to help facilitate the development of our new strategy that would take us through until 2024. We were determined to involve the whole of the organisation in conversations about what success should look like for Together in five years' time. Importantly, this involved service users across our organisation along with staff, volunteers and trustees and we gained indispensable insights during this process.

We asked ourselves many questions, including:

- What do we want to change in society if we work hand-in-hand with others?
- Why are we here as an organisation and who do we exist for?
- What do we want to be known for and why?
- What are the values that will drive all that we do in Together?

In developing our new strategy, we were keen to recognise and build on our incredible heritage that has supported thousands of people to achieve greater wellbeing and ensure they can access all life has to offer. We strive to enable people who use our services to go about their lives, being part of their communities, connecting with people and making their own choices with individuality and independence. Our founder Henry Hawkins called these "Life's ordinary associations" and felt they were key for people to be supported to be part of society and to avoid them from becoming marginalised or institutionalised from repeated hospital admissions. Today this could be referred to as living 'ordinary lives' and we believe all of the extraordinary people we support now and in the future, who live with mental distress have this fundamental right.

140 Years of Together

We are celebrating 140 years since our founding by Henry Hawkins. Born in 1825, the Reverend Hawkins worked for over 40 years as a Chaplain in asylums, supporting the emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of patients. Driven by his belief in the common humanity of all people, he worked tirelessly to improve the lives of people in asylums. He introduced new ideas and inspired like-minded people to volunteer to connect patients with their families, communities and the wider world.

In 1879, through his foresight and perseverance, the Reverend Hawkins founded our charity with the aim of breaking the cycle of recovery and re-admission. He looked to support people who seemed well, left the asylum and then were re-admitted because of a lack of support or purpose in life. He did that by offering people practical and emotional support to prevent them becoming unwell again.



Through the founding principles of the charity, Reverend Hawkins challenged societal thinking. He proved that with the right practical and emotional support, people could lead fulfilling lives without prejudice and without being defined by their mental distress.

Developing Our Legacy

We are deeply proud of what Henry Hawkins achieved and his unique legacy continues to drive and influence our beliefs and aspirations for the future. This strategy represents the next stage in the life cycle of Together. This is why it was important at the start of the development of this strategy, that we identified 'legacy' strengths. They are the areas that we are proud of and are important to us, which we wanted to take into the future. These included:

- Service user leadership through involvement
- A focus on what people can do, rather than what people can't do
- Expertise of working alongside people who experience complex mental distress and multiple disadvantages; who are often excluded from help and support
- A vision that holds true to and is inspired by our long history that is still relevant today, one that also evolves and embraces change in response to the modern-day
- Our deeply committed and engaged workforce of staff and volunteers who embody our values and vision

Defining Service User Leadership

As part of our new strategy we needed to clearly define the terms 'involvement' and 'leadership', what we mean by 'lived experience' of mental distress and why this is important to service users. By establishing these definitions, we have ensured that the people we work alongside can lead their own care and support and inform and influence every level of the organisation.

This is the first time we have identified a corporate understanding of what we mean by service user leadership and lived experience of mental distress to access the potential knowledge that those insights bring to Together. Establishing these definitions is the first step on our path to embedding service user leadership at all levels of Together, and using the collective voice to inform and influence both within the charity and externally.

In order to complete this work, we carried out initial scoping work to shape possible definitions and identify the benefits of service user involvement and leadership. Those early definitions were informed by people with lived experience, some of whom use our services and others who do not. They included the views of Peer Support Coordinators across the organisation, all of whom have lived experience of mental distress and work closely with service users.

For full details of the definitions work see appendix 2. Our final definition of service user leadership is as follows:

Service user leadership empowers people to make choices that affect their lives, lead their journey to wellbeing on their own terms and to collectively influence and improve services, organisations and society.

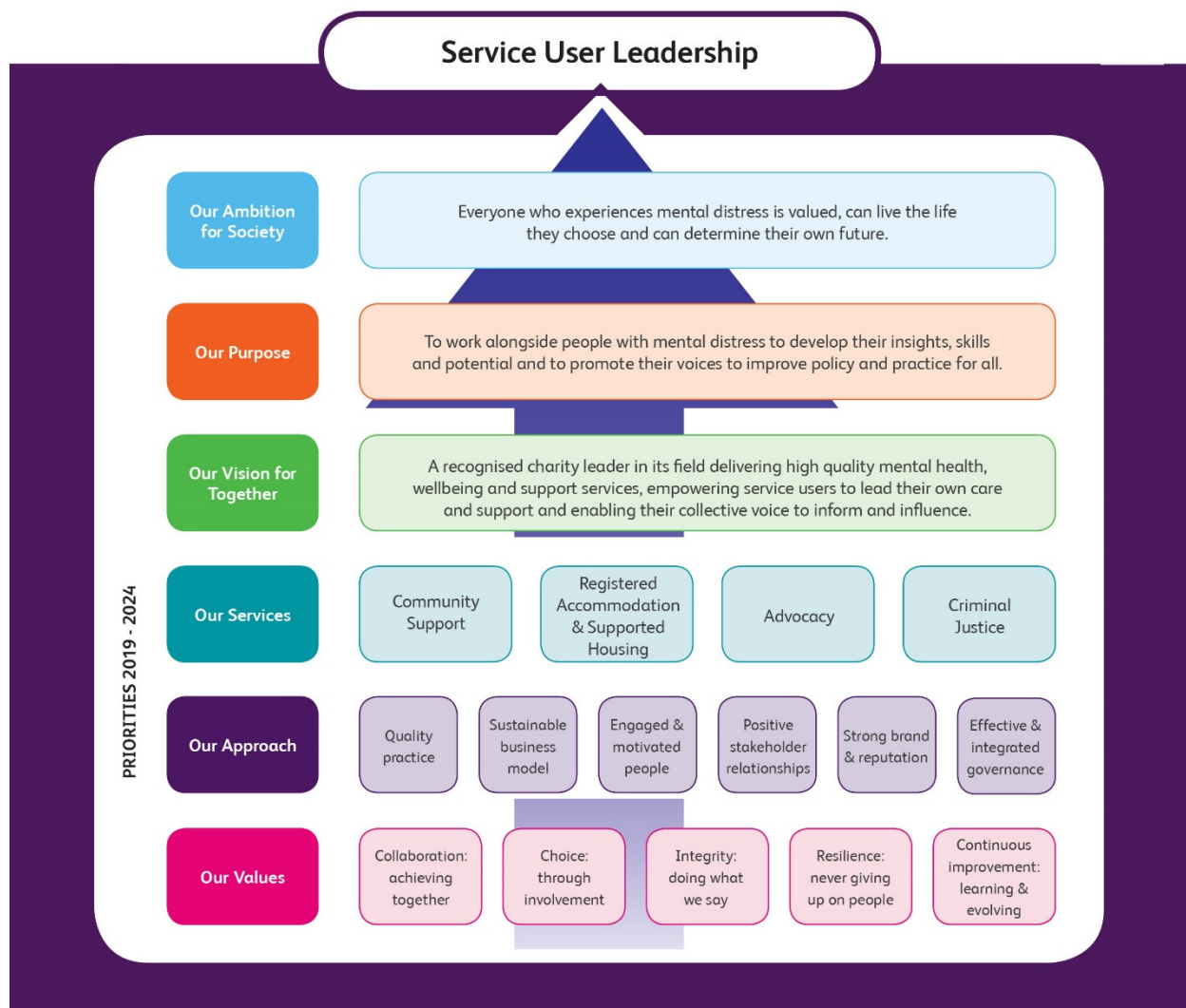
Our definition of lived experience is:

A person who has experienced mental distress, and who can draw on their unique knowledge and personal insights to connect with others, influencing and informing from a lived experience perspective

Our 2019-2024 Strategy

To effectively communicate our new strategy, we have developed a strategy map which is our roadmap for the future. It is a new way of presenting our strategic and operational ambitions for the next five years and brings clarity about what the organisation is here to do. Within the map, Together staff and volunteers will see their roles and responsibilities represented, how they support the vision for the organisation, and how this creates better outcomes for the people who use our services.

Our 2019-2024 strategy is shown below and was developed from the top down as we defined our ambition, purpose and vision. When reading the map it is designed to be read from the bottom up, starting at the foundation with the drivers of our behaviours and attitudes, our values.



By delivering our services in accordance with our new values, which are set out in more detail later in this document, we will aim to achieve our vision for Together. This will fulfil the reason that we exist as an organisation and contribute, in partnership with others, to our ambition for society. Central to this is involving people who use our services – the core principle that runs through all that we do.

We know that people experiencing mental distress are at risk of not getting the support they need in society, not being empowered to be in control of that support, and not having a voice in service and system design. We have gained many insights about what is important to our own service users, staff, volunteers and trustees during this process.

During the next five years, success will mean that we have:

- Ensured that the people we work alongside consistently lead the way – not just in their own support, but at every level of the organisation.
- Been active in informing policy and practice, within Together and externally, for the mental wellbeing of all. We have done this through listening to the voices of people who use our services.
- Delivered high-quality, safe services that reach more service users who have unmet needs as a result of experiencing mental distress and complex lives, and which navigates people along a pathway towards the life they wish to live.

The different elements of our new strategy will now be outlined on the following pages – beginning with our values and including our approach, our services, our vision, our purpose and our ambition.

“I am very grateful to all at Together’s Elva Court Accommodation Service for investing in me, and seeing my strengths and skills over and above my diagnosis and my history. They have helped me to be the best person I can be, and to help me make what may seem like small achievements, but to me they are giant strides.”

Jess, service user, Elva Court Accommodation Service



Our Values

As part of developing this new strategy, we reviewed and refreshed our organisational values. We have a value statement and a set of 5 values that are the behaviours which guide the way we work.

Our Value Statement

“We work together to facilitate choice through involvement, by doing what we say, never giving up on people, and looking to constantly improve how we work.”

Together’s new values are as follows:

Collaboration: achieving together

- We work with communities, advocating and increasing awareness of the interests that matter most to service users.
- We utilise the knowledge, skills and experience of everybody to achieve the best outcomes.
- We create meaningful internal and external connections to ensure everyone can access the support they require.
- We actively raise awareness of mental wellbeing and the benefits of service user leadership, supporting people to participate in local society.

Choice: through involvement

- We champion knowledge gained through lived experience and embrace the positive impact this brings on creating options and supporting choice.
- We work with compassion, respect and creativity to encourage people to solve problems and find solutions.
- We listen and empathise to understand the issues that matter to people, in order to support their choices and aspirations.
- We are responsive and empowering, focusing on what can be achieved.

Integrity: doing what we say

- We create trusting relationships and environments by considering the whole person, individual situations and not over-promising.
- We are fair, reliable, open-minded, punctual and agree realistic expectations, which we are trusted to deliver.
- We ensure that we always say what we mean.
- We communicate with consistency and clarity.
- We are committed to making decisions transparently

Resilience: never giving up on people

- We care passionately about empowering people to use their knowledge and experiences to lead their journeys to better wellbeing.
- We use flexible and innovative approaches to achieve goals.
- We are brave and resolute when facing challenges.
- We don't let people's future be defined by their past.
- We are passionate about everyone's access to better wellbeing and hold the hope for a better future.

Continuous Improvement: learning and evolving

- We are curious and deeply inquisitive about people and our work.
- We consider the whole-person and recognise that genuine interest in each person enables us to support people with their aspirations.
- We create a safe environment for people to be who they want to be.
- We are conscious of our actions, decisions, and their impact.
- We actively seek and learn from feedback and make changes to deliver the best we can.

"Being involved with York Pathways has saved me in more ways than I thought was possible. They gave me hope when I had none and they have done everything in their power to help me to stay well. I will be eternally grateful for all the help, care, support and guidance that they have given me over the last 17 months (ish) and had they not been involved in my care, I honestly don't think I'd still be alive."

Sophie, Service User, York Pathways



Our Approach

It matters to us how we go about delivering our strategic priorities for the next five years. We have set ourselves standards and goals in the following six areas that will focus our efforts on achieving the best outcomes for the people we work alongside in our services:

- **Quality Practice** – We want to deliver high-quality, evidenced-based services which are designed and informed by the experiences of those who use our services. As a result, our future service users will be able to lead better and more sustainable lives and will want to access our services. This will mean that staff and volunteers will want to work in our services and commissioners will want to invest in them.
- **Sustainable Business Model** – We want an organisation that is both sustainable and financially viable; that enables investment in our services for the benefit of service users and our workforce. We will achieve an optimal finance and service mix that can predict and respond to commissioning trends and evidences value for money.
- **Engaged and Motivated People** – We need a fully integrated workforce, whereby all staff and volunteers are valued. Within that workforce, everyone has a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities, behaviours, culture and values. As a result, people who work for us can contribute to the success of Together for the benefit of the people we work alongside.
- **Positive Stakeholder Relationships** – We will understand who our stakeholders are, to be able to influence and work effectively with them. We will benefit the people we support and the communities around them, which will enable us to run our services successfully and develop new and innovative delivery models.
- **Strong Brand and Reputation** – We will be a recognised national provider in our own field, known for the high quality of our services. Service users will tell us that we are their preferred choice for support. We will be seen as the ‘go to’ organisation for the voices of lived experience of mental distress.
- **Effective and Integrated Governance** – Good governance will be threaded throughout the charity, wherein there is transparency and clarity of purpose for the board and organisation. We will be fit for purpose, confident and assured in the decisions that we make to the benefit of our service users.

“I now have a more clear idea of who I am and what I want out of my life. I know there will be ups and downs, but I now feel much more equipped to manage them as they occur.”

Service User, Tamworth, Lichfield and East Staffordshire Your Way



Our Services

Our strategic priorities for the next five years focus on our four service areas of; community support, registered accommodation and supported housing, advocacy and criminal justice.

Community Support

How we help – We look to ensure people experiencing mental distress can live fulfilling lives as part of their communities, with the support of our services. This was a founding principle when Henry Hawkins set up the charity and remains a deeply held belief today. In doing this, we contribute to combating isolation, helping people to develop the confidence to deal with the practical matters of daily life, and establishing informal networks to support their emotional wellbeing. Our models of personalised community support provide person-centred, flexible services with an emphasis on ensuring that those accessing our services are in control of their support.

Why we do it – We look to reach the most in need – including children and young people – who experience the greatest stigma in the community as a result of multiple disadvantages. Our blended approach of practical and emotional support creates opportunities that lead to like-minded people sharing coping strategies, building more resilient communities, and developing safe services that divert people away from statutory and emergency support – while navigating those with the most significant needs towards appropriate services. Our consistent and respected offer of volunteering in our community services adds significant value to the service delivery, including peer support and a vocational pathway for people using our services

What next – As our community support services develop in the coming years, we will strive to provide innovative models that adapt to the needs of our service users and cover new areas such as crisis care. We will aspire to facilitate people's journey towards independence from formal support services, and provide the same support to those who don't qualify for them. We will provide clear pathways so that people can connect with and be part of their communities.

"I've come so far. I know I'm getting support from other services now, but none of that would have happened if it had not been for Berkshire West Your Way helping me to find them. I want to thank all of you."

Service user from Berkshire West Your Way

Registered Accommodation and Supported Housing Services

How we help – Our accommodation services help people recovering from severe mental distress by giving them the opportunity to live in communities with support, as part of a pathway from environments such as hospitals. In our registered accommodation services we provide tailored, round-the-clock practical and emotional support which empowers service users to set their own personal recovery goals and to work towards achieving them. Our supported housing services focus on enabling people to manage their own tenancies with their local housing provider. This means they can develop the confidence to maintain a home of their own in the future, whilst we provide support that helps them manage general housing issues, benefits and finances. All of our CQC services are rated 'Good' overall and deliver high standards of care and support in working alongside service users.

Why we do it – The people who live in our services are often living with complex needs that require high levels of care and with our range of accommodation we look to ensure they don't need to return to clinical settings. Avoiding people returning to institutions and enabling them to reintegrate into society and live independently was a key aim when our charity was founded, we're proud to continue that today. Our models of care are responsive to the needs of each individual and allow people to manage their personal care. We have a supported living branch which is registered with the CQC to provide this type of support to individuals across our services. We have developed our expertise in working alongside people who experience mental distress and complex needs, including people who struggle with the impact of substance and alcohol use on their wellbeing.

What next – Our accommodation services are market leading, we aim to maintain that standing and uphold the quality of the support provided. We will look to achieve positive move-on for everyone who uses our services in a timely manner so they can live independently as part of their local communities. We will ensure all our services have enabling environments accreditation and apply trauma-informed approaches.

"They are always ready to support you when needed and always put the clients' needs first. It doesn't feel like a barrier between them and clients, as they mix with the clients well and don't act pompous. They are very professional and work well as a team. If you have any concerns, they are quick to listen and will act accordingly. On a more personal note, they have helped me in my recovery by getting me connected with local services and taking me for a hot chocolate if I'm struggling. Thank you."

Service user at Hopewell House, CQC-registered accommodation

Advocacy

How we help – Often people experiencing mental distress, and other wellbeing needs such as end-of-life care, require help to make their views heard and break down the prejudice they can encounter. We will work with people in a range of environments – using approaches that ensure people feel safe and comfortable, and trust us to represent them in a way that is respectful and dignified.

Why we do it – We have a strong reputation in delivering statutory and community advocacy services which we carry out according to the latest best practice guidelines, so that service users receive the highest quality support available. We have highly trained staff who are committed to using their expertise for the benefit of the people they work alongside and the other agencies involved in the person's care and support.

What next – Together's advocacy services are based in locations around England, we will look to expand these and increase the regions we cover in the next five years. We are recognised as an influencer in shaping and developing national policy and legislation, we will continue to represent the best interests of the people that use our services. We take part in national accreditation processes and will further develop our position as an authority in the sector.

"Avenues to support the person had been exhausted by many professionals. The advocate cut through a lot of misunderstandings and confusion, supporting the person at the centre of the issue to enable an agreement to be put in place to create positive communications. I will not hesitate to recommend the Advocacy Hub to service users in the future."

Mental Health Practitioner commenting on Advocacy Together Hub Knowsley

Criminal Justice

How we help – Too many people pass through the criminal justice system without their mental distress being recognised and without receiving the appropriate support. This can result in people ending up in prison, which further exacerbates their mental distress and fails to address the causes of their offending. We will deliver services that aim to better identify and respond to the needs of people with a range of vulnerabilities who come into contact with justice services or are at risk of contact with the justice system, and divert them away from custodial settings.

Why we do it – For over 20 years, Together has been developing services in criminal justice settings to benefit people experiencing mental distress who have backgrounds and circumstances that are highly complex and characterised by multiple disadvantages. We are highly regarded as a national provider of liaison and diversion services in police and court settings, and for our innovative approaches to supporting people under the offender management of probation. Our delivery models use collaborative learning approaches to working within the criminal justice, health and social care systems, and we share our expertise to bring about change with people in mental distress, with the services supporting them and with the systems surrounding them.

What next – We plan to increase the coverage of criminal justice services nationally, ensuring that we are present in more prison and court settings to represent people living with mental distress. We will look to share our expertise and knowledge with others in the criminal justice sector through a national training service and by diversifying the use of our models to create innovative services.

“I’m very grateful, trust me. I felt like I was in hell & then Paul (the Community Link Worker) came along & heaven seemed to be opening up a little bit and stress seems to disappear. Which is good, because I was really stressed.”

Karen, Service user’s mother, referring to the Criminal Justice Liaison and Diversion team



Vision, Purpose and Ambition

Our Vision for Together

A recognised charity leader in its field delivering high-quality mental health and support services, empowering service users to lead their own care and support, and enabling their collective voice to inform and influence.

Our Purpose

To work alongside people with mental distress to develop their insights, skills and potential and to promote their voices to improve policy and practice for all.

Our Ambition for Society

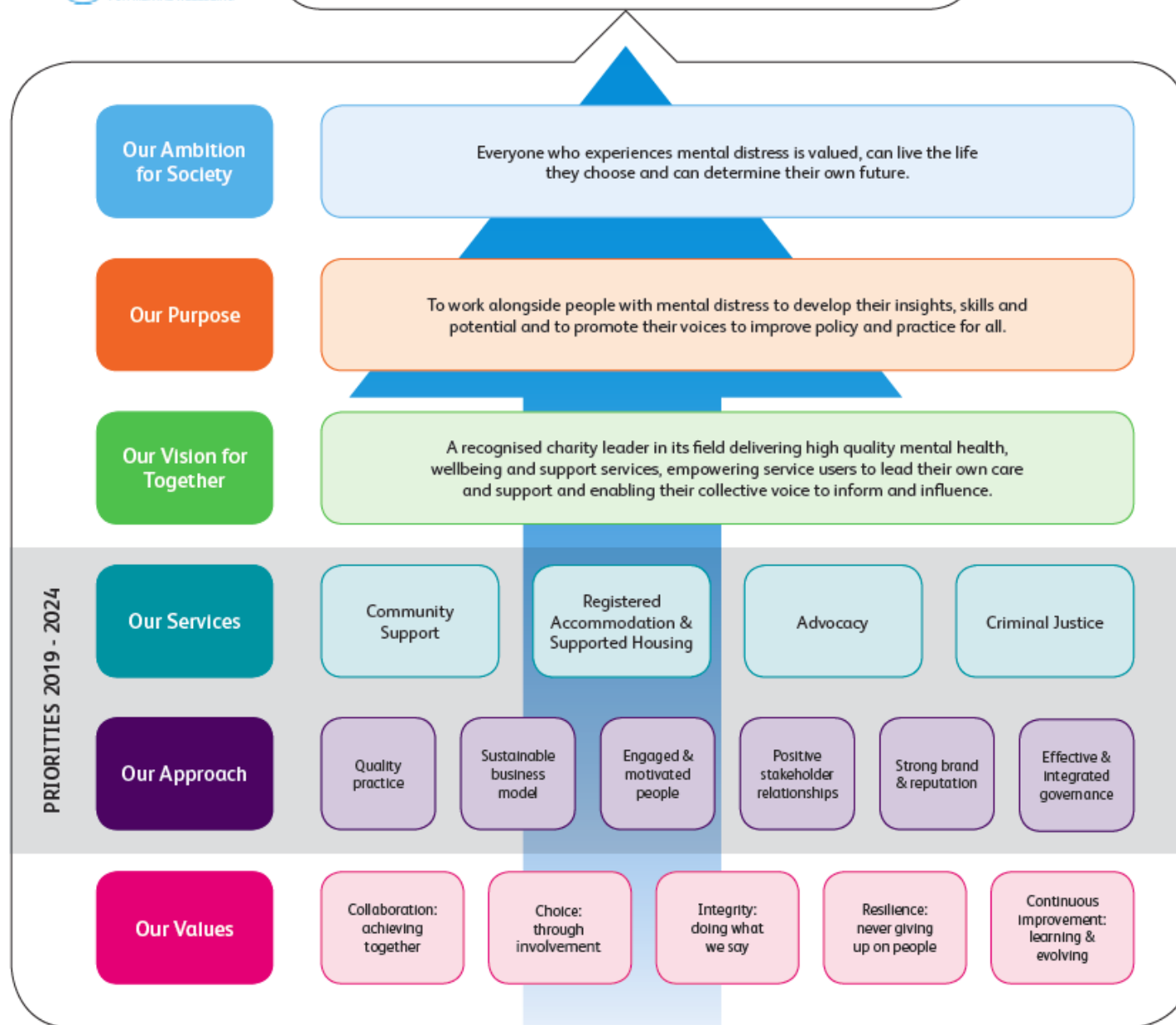
Everyone who experiences mental distress is valued, can live the life they choose and determine their own future.

The Future: 2024

Together is excited about its future and the future for mental health. We are in a time of new commitments and new ways of thinking about mental health and wellbeing, with the introduction of the NHS Long Term Plan and a renewed focus on talking about mental health that fights stigma and prejudice. However, challenges remain with funding pressures across health and social care – against a backdrop of the increasing needs for those seeking mental health care and support.

Our plans outlined in this five year strategy focus on continuing to deliver and develop the services we feel are vital for people living with mental distress. Our values, approaches and services will enable the people we support to lead the way, to inform wider policy and practice, and to determine their own future – this is what we see as our vision and purpose for Together and what we will seek to achieve in partnership with others.

Service User Leadership



Appendix 2

Defining Service User Leadership and Lived Experience of Mental Distress In Together

Background

This is the first time we have attempted to identify a corporate understanding of what we mean by Service User Involvement and Leadership and its benefits, and how we describe and understand lived experience of mental distress and access the potential knowledge that lived experience brings to Together. It is a vital first step in our path to embedding Service User Leadership at all levels in Together, and using the collective voice to inform and influence both within Together and externally

Methodology

In order to complete this work, we carried out initial scoping work to shape some possible definitions and to identify the benefits of service user involvement and leadership. These early definitions were informed by people with lived experience, some of whom use our services and others who do not, and included the views of Peer Support Coordinators across the organisation, all of whom have lived experience of mental distress and work closely with service users in our services.

The paper was also drafted collating views from a variety of other sources:-

- The work that was undertaken with service users on defining and refreshing our organisational values
- Developing our 5 year strategy and the 18 months of consulting across the organisation, including people who use our services
- Real Insight report which looked at Together's approach to service user involvement and was informed by a number of service users
- Information gathered from service user feedback from past surveys
- Previous recommendations by the NSG which were included in our first service user involvement and leadership report – these recommendations included how we ensure service users are leading their own support

As a result of this initial scoping work, meetings were held with the National Steering Group (NSG), members of which all have lived experience of mental distress and, as a group, acts as a 'critical friend' to support the organisation through sharing their expert insights and knowledge.

As a result of energetic and informed discussions with the NSG a further version was produced and tested again with service users, and staff. The work below is the summation of this work. The NSG also proposed that any definition should have a stronger and explicit focus on leadership, as any leadership would necessarily include involvement – for example, in order for a person using a Together service to lead their own care and support, they would need to be actively involved in their own support planning.

The word 'leadership' is also a powerful reminder of our ambitions as an organisation for the people whom we work alongside – they can take control of their lives and determine their own futures.

Proposed Definition

What is Service User Leadership?

Service user leadership empowers people to make choices that affect their lives, lead their journey to wellbeing on their own terms and to collectively influence and improve services, organisations and society.

Our Commitment

To realise the benefits of service user leadership we will ensure that models, policies and practices which have a direct impact on the support and wellbeing of service users are developed and led by the views of people with lived experience of mental distress

Benefits

What became apparent through the scoping and consultation was that service user leadership does not only benefit those people who are accessing support; the benefits can have a positive impact on all aspects of Together, and wider society. We set these benefits out below:

Benefits for all service users

- Increases personal confidence, helping people to recognise, value and build on their own personal strengths, knowledge and experiences and using their insights to improve their ability to cope with and manage their mental wellbeing
- Develops a range of transferable skills; as well as a sense of meaning, hope and purpose, feeling valued and being empowered.

Benefits for service users who share their experiences to influence and improve services, organisations or society

- Feeling part of something bigger (solidarity), using personal experiences to positively impact on other people and effect change
- Provides the opportunity for people to connect with and support each other, improving wellbeing for all involved
- Amplifies the voice of service users to maximise the impact through a like-minded collective

Benefits for the workforce

- Develops a unique understanding and empathy between and among staff, volunteers and service users.
- Increases the ability to find creative ways of working together that enables staff to learn through the knowledge and experiences of service users
- Increases job satisfaction and creates a happy, cohesive workforce with a shared purpose which offers hope to the people we work alongside

Benefits for the service

- Creates welcoming, positive and kinder environments by building and developing services with equality of power and mutual respect and are adaptable to a range of needs

Benefits for organisations

- Develops organisational systems and processes based on the collective voice of service users, to collaboratively impact the quality of support, and to drive the evolution of the organisation

Society

- Influences wider thinking on the benefits of leadership, promoting the fundamental right of service users to lead their own lives as they choose
- Reduces stigma and discrimination by valuing service users' knowledge and strengths, and demonstrating the value that people with lived experience bring.
- Improved services leads to better wellbeing for people using those services, the communities they live in and society in general.

Lived Experience of Mental Distress

We want to be able to learn from people who have a range of views and who have experienced mental distress in different ways and whose lives have been affected in different ways to inform and influence Together from a Lived Experience perspective

Running parallel with our work to define service user involvement & leadership, accessing the same sources of information and in collaboration with the NSG, we arrived at the following proposed definition of lived experience:

We propose defining Lived Experience as:

A person who has experienced mental distress, and who can draw on their unique knowledge and personal insights to connect with others, influencing and informing from a lived experience perspective

We also present the following to support the definition;

- The individual determines whether or not they have lived experience.
- The knowledge and understanding based on a person's lived experience is valued
- One person's lived experience is no more or is no less important than any other persons.
- Each person's lived experience and knowledge is unique and personal to them
- Each person can draw on the unique insights that their lived experience gives them to help others, themselves, the organisation and wider society
- Each person's experiences of mental distress are unique and are more often than not responses to relationship factors such as abuse, bereavement, bullying and other forms of victimisation and to social circumstances, for example, poverty, unemployment, poor housing and isolation. We will identify the different experiences that are relevant to the circumstances of the knowledge we are seeking.
- We will also support people to connect together and share their experiences collectively, so that a range of voices are represented and heard from a lived experience perspective, with the aim of amplifying those voices to have a stronger impact.