

Appendix B

Priority 5 Case Study - Involvement of Service Users

Over recent years, input has been received from mental health service users in a number of different ways.

- A series of 'Thinking Together' events have been run, organised by Healthwatch, bringing together groups of around 60-90 people, made up of service users, voluntary organisations, commissioners and service providers. These enabled commissioners and providers of services to hear first-hand the issues being faced by service users. These range from matters which could be addressed quite simply to bigger issues requiring further investigation (such as help in crisis, the need for holistic support and how to reduce stigma).
- People with lived experience (sometimes also wearing other hats) have also been represented on the Mental Health Action Group and predecessor bodies.
- Ad hoc feedback is received directly and indirectly through conversations and events, which, while not representative, can give early warnings of issues arising. This has sometimes been through events organised by the Mental Health Action Group and sometimes those organised by other bodies.

Healthwatch no longer have the resources to organise the large, 'Thinking Together' events, so to fill that gap, the Mental Health Action Group resolved to establish a wider, more general group, building on the model of a Mental Health Forum which had run successfully for a number of years in the past.

While service users have been involved in local mental health bodies before, this has sometimes felt like them being invited to what is essentially a meeting for 'professionals' (whether from the public or voluntary sector). This can mean that the events are organised in ways in which it is difficult for service users to attend and contribute. Other issues related to service user involvement include out of pocket costs of getting to meetings, timing and location, nature of the agenda and use of specialist language and knowledge.

It was therefore decided to that the new Mental Health Forum should be established in a co-produced way. A first planning meeting was held in March 2024, with four service users and six 'professionals' (though with some of the latter also 'experts by experience'), from statutory and voluntary sector organisations. This established the sort of priorities the new Forum would have and started thinking about how it would work.

The Forum is to have three broad roles:

- Sharing information and good practice between members

- Developing ideas and proposals and feeding them through relevant processes (principally via MHAG)
- To respond to ideas from MHAG (or elsewhere)

Involving service users and people with lived experience will always be a continuing endeavour. However, it is an essential part of understanding current service delivery, gaps and opportunities for improvement.