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people



Wessex Cancer Alliance Patient and Public Involvement Steering Group and Network Annual Report 2025 – 2026



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It's rewarding to know I am able to make a difference and see something positive come from a very negative time of my life fighting cancer.

Steering Group member



Introduction

Wessex Cancer Alliance commission 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 2025/26, acknowledging successes while highlighting areas requiring greater focus. We view this as a learning exercise that strengthens our collaborative partnership with the Alliance.

Some amazing work going on by the Wessex Cancer Alliance and partners, very inspiring. It was also amazing to meet amazing people with lived experience. Their contribution is incredibly rich.

Network 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 their public and patient involvement. We welcomed 3 new members this year, and currently have 11 on our Steering Group, chaired by Eileen and vice – chaired by Derek.

The SG met 6 times during 2025/26. Of the 6 meetings, 4 took place online in the evening and 2 were face to face away days.



I thoroughly enjoyed the meeting, and am really excited by the impact that the group seems to be having.

Steering Group volunteer



Steering Group, Network and Reader Panel

Network

The Network currently comprises 34 members – an increase of 11 from last year. 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 celebrated its first year anniversary in January 2025. We now have 18 panel members who 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. More on the impact the Panel is having further in this report.



I was a cancer patient for a five year period from 2017. This life experience has hopefully enabled me to bring the knowledge I gained to the Steering Group.

Steering Group volunteer



A message from the Steering Group Chair

Reflecting on the past year, with the continued and invaluable support of Involving People, as a team, we have strengthened our contribution to the work of Wessex Cancer Alliance. The Alliance's commitment to embracing experts by experience as true partners has ensured that the patient voice is not only heard but embedded across strategy, decision-making, and delivery in a meaningful and thoughtful way.



We continue to embrace and value our role in offering insight, shaping service development, and acting as a supportive critical friend—constructively questioning, challenging, and strengthening the work of the Alliance.

We look ahead to the next year with a strong focus on sustainability. Recognising the importance of continuity and resilience—as I prepare to step down from the Chair role—we are placing a strong emphasis on succession planning. This can be achieved by building confidence, clarity, and collective leadership so experts by experience are supported to step forward and sustain influence beyond any single chair.

Involving People's proactive support of our bi-monthly meetings with close collaboration shapes agendas that encourage rich, impactful, inclusive discussion as well as leadership development. By nurturing new voices, sharing knowledge and experience, exploring and making development opportunities, and recruiting to strengthen and diversify the group, together we're deliberately building confidence and capability for the future.

Looking forward, the ongoing guidance and support provided by Involving People will remain vital –whether through a listening ear, connection to meaningful involvement opportunities, or encouragement to develop skills.

Together, these foundations ensure the PPI Steering Group is well prepared for transition, resilient in its leadership, and sustainable in its ability to continue influencing the work of Wessex Cancer Alliance in the years ahead.

With thanks and gratitude to all, particularly members of the steering group for their expertise, commitment, and the openness they bring. Together we are making a difference to those who have and will experience cancer.

Eileen Stonock
Chair of WCA Involvement Steering Group



With experience of cancer, both as patient and carer, maybe I can help make things slightly easier for others in this position.

Network member

Looking back: 2025 – 2026

Over the past year, Wessex Cancer Alliance has made further 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...

11

Steering Group members

6

Steering Group meetings

34

Network members

2

In person Away Days

18

Reader Panel members

6

Ongoing project groups within the Alliance represented by our network

Achievements and Highlights

Throughout 2025/26, 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 6 regular project groups within the Alliance with up to 4 meetings a year each. These include the WCA Board (where the chair of the steering group provides an update), quarterly Patient and Public Involvement review meetings for each of the Alliance's work programmes and the Personalised Care Board.
- Volunteers have inputted into key service improvement initiatives such as reviewing the public facing website, developing an online support resource for people living with and beyond cancer, and several training courses for the cancer workforce.
- As well as regular workstreams, our Network and Steering Group are regularly sent opportunities for 'ad-hoc' involvement such as:
 - Ensuring the engagement plan for a project exploring the use of AI in skin cancer detection is patient friendly. Some of our volunteers also participated in the research.
 - Attending a range of focus groups with Southampton Clinical Trials Unit, ensuring the patient voice is heard on topics like using AI in cancer treatment.
 - Being invited to feedback further on the CAN-Empower resource developed with our key partner Southampton University - many of our volunteers have been involved on an ongoing basis.
 - Taking part in surveys, such as Cancer Research UK cancer prevention and suggesting priorities for our local Healthwatch.

Achievements and Highlights

- The 10 year National Cancer Plan was published. Volunteers have been key in discussions about how the plan will be embedded locally.
- We held two in person away days this year, where Alliance staff, Help & Care and Network volunteers came together to reflect on achievements and challenges. More on these below.
- We launched an online training directory for our volunteers to access, including things like Communication Skills, Understanding the NHS, Cancer Awareness and Wellbeing.
- We redesigned our leaflet alongside our volunteers. View it [here](#).
- The Reader Panel had its first birthday in January 2026 and continues to make a great impact on more accessible cancer related information.
- Several volunteers attended a caregivers focus group, generating a report about what worked well, what didn't, and what would make the biggest difference to carers in the future read the report [here](#).
- A member of our Steering Group recorded a podcast sharing reflections of the National Cancer plan from a patient perspective. Listen to it [here](#).
- Three volunteers agreed to be filmed sharing their experience of cancer treatment in terms of what could have been improved from their perspectives. The videos were used to deliver a session on patient experience to SACT nurses, sparking conversations about communication, getting to know patients and making adjustments for them. Nurses told us they will do the following after watching the video:

"Try to apply the updates to enhance patient experience".

"Consider thoughts and feelings of service users and reflect on own practices".

"Don't assume everyone wants the same thing. Take time to assess thoroughly".

"Consider feedback from patient experience".

"Have more awareness of how my patients may be feeling."

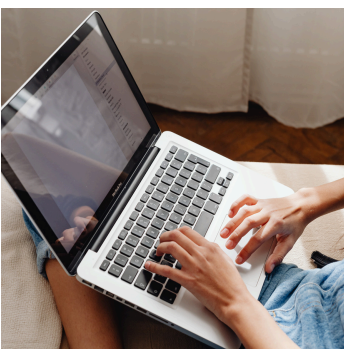
A spotlight on our Reader Panel

As part of this annual report, we wanted to shine a light on our Reader Panel and the impact it has been having.

Since launching 18 months ago, the Panel of 18 have reviewed 13 pieces of information, ranging from videos to text messages and webpages to leaflets. Their task is to ensure information is clear, patient friendly and accessible. Key piece of work include:

- Reviewing webpages for lung screening, PSA testing, cancer and menopause, mouth and throat cancer and the HPV vaccine.
- Reviewing text messages on cervical screening and lung screening.
- Reviewing the proposed text for the new online support resource for living with and beyond cancer.

The Panel reviewed a text message about Cervical Screening. A report evidenced that 9% of patients who had never previously attended cervical screening, were successfully screened after receiving this text message. A real testament to the difference our Panel are making, ensuring public facing information is accessible and understandable.



A highlight for me has been knowing that my input contributes to making a positive, real-world impact.

Reader Panel volunteer

A spotlight on our Reader Panel

We often receive great feedback about the impact our Reader Panel have. Below, The Digital Communications Lead at the Alliance shares the difference working with the panel has made.



Following a discussion with the Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) Steering Group, we decided to improve our public-facing cancer information website Cancer Matters Wessex. Several members of the PPI group volunteered to join the review team, along with healthcare staff from hospitals and GP surgeries. We meet online every few weeks to discuss different aspects of the website including governance, the home page, menu headings and the clarity of written information.

Everyone is highly engaged with the process, asking thoughtful questions and offering constructive suggestions. Improvements have been made to various aspects of the website - our cancer information is clearer and more relevant because of the insight and commitment from members of the group. The work continues in partnership with the Reader Panel, who review new documents and web pages to ensure that new information is accurate and accessible.

I would like to thank members of the PPI group and Reader Panel for making the whole process not only productive but genuinely enjoyable.



Interested in joining the panel?
Email involvingpeople@helpandcare.org.uk

Away Days 2025-2026

Twice a year we hold an in person away day as an opportunity for our volunteers, and staff from the Alliance and Help & Care, to come together as a team. Our next date is in September 2026 - if you would like to join us as a volunteer, email involvingpeople@helpandcare.org.uk.



At our September away day, we reflected on how our Alliance compares to others nationally in terms of cancer waiting times performance. We had presentations on two new developments which formed much of our work this year: the new online support resource and SACT (Systemic Anti-Cancer Treatment). We heard about current projects around inequalities in access to cancer care, and designed our new leaflet as a team.

In March, we talked about the new 10 year cancer plan and what this might mean for us locally in Wessex. We shared our highlights and challenges from the last year, and talked about how we might do things differently in the future. We had a really interesting presentation around Clinical Trials, and we heard about how our volunteers have influenced some great changes to the Cancer Matters Wessex website.



Looking ahead: 2026 – 2027

As we move into the next financial year, the team remain committed and focused with clear priorities in mind.

Priorities for 2025/26 include:

- Consider how we ensure patient voice is positively influencing the changes recommended in the 10 year National Cancer Plan and local Alliance strategy.
- Ensure that people are not left behind and are involved in shaping the move to digital services.
- Identify what neighbourhood cancer care might mean for people (cancer care closer to home).
- Understanding support needs of care-givers of cancer patients.
- Continuing to support the development of the online support resource and information supporting people living with and beyond cancer.
- Succession planning for the Steering Group as we look to appoint a new chair in 2027.
- 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.
- Continuing to support Cancer Matters Wessex with a website review working group.
- Away days in September and March to come together and celebrate achievements as well as focus on priorities for the future.

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



Thank you all – as ever really appreciate your time and insights... you are so kind to help us and make a real difference.

Managing 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 chair.
- 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.



Having steering group members involved in our quarterly patient involvement review meetings has been so helpful in providing additional independent scrutiny and challenge of our work and the relationships built have supported Alliance colleagues to increase their patient participation.

Engagement Lead, WCA



Contact and further information



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www.helpandcare.org.uk



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