

Notes on the West Berkshire Patient Panel Draft Strategy

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Summary

The Steering Committee met on 10 April 2026 to develop a strategic and communications plan for the Patient Panel, facilitated by Dynamic Communications.

Key Strategic Aim

The strongest element of the draft is its recognition that the Panel's future influence will depend less on representing patients in general and more on becoming a trusted organisation that can provide **evidence-based, consolidated patient insight** to decision-makers. The most important next step is therefore to define clearly **what unique value the Panel provides that no other organisation currently provides**, and then build communications, partnerships and branding around that role.

The group wants to become the primary forum for gathering and amplifying patient feedback, acting as a trusted link between patients, Patient Participation Groups (PPGs), GP practices, commissioners, and other health and care organisations. **The Panel aims to influence local healthcare strategy, support service improvement, and help monitor implementation of priorities set by the Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (ICB).**

Context and Challenges

The health and social care environment is undergoing significant change, including:

- Expansion of the Thames Valley ICB across eight local authorities.
- Organisational restructuring and loss of key contacts within the ICB.
- Closure of Healthwatch in March 2027.
- Possible local authority boundary changes.
- Growing emphasis on neighbourhood health, local services, prevention, digital solutions, and patient self-management.

Strategic Direction

The Panel believes it can play a leading role in neighbourhood health by:

- Understanding and responding to the differing needs of stakeholders.
- Providing consolidated patient feedback across West Berkshire.
- Demonstrating how patient involvement has already improved services.
- Strengthening engagement with PPGs, GP practices, commissioners and local communities.

Communications Plan

A tailored communications pack will be developed for different stakeholder groups, highlighting:

- What the Panel has achieved to date.
- Examples of service improvements influenced by patient feedback.
- Why stakeholder engagement and information sharing are important.
- The specific benefits the Panel can provide to each audience.

Examples of stakeholder priorities identified include:

- **Patients:** easier access to services and information.
- **PPGs:** evidence that patient feedback leads to action and opportunities to share best practice.
- **GPs and Practice Managers:** support for service improvement, patient communication, and performance targets.
- **Commissioners:** a single representative patient voice and consolidated feedback across the region.

Next Steps

- Seek feedback on the draft strategic plan from PPGs and wider stakeholders.
- Discuss and refine the plan at the face-to-face Patient Panel meeting at Shaw House in July 2026.

Branding and Social Media

- Review the group's name and branding, potentially adopting a title similar to "Patient Voice".
- Seek feedback from PPG Chairs on branding options.
- Explore recruiting a volunteer to strengthen social media activity, improve patient engagement, and raise awareness of local PPGs.

Goals

The Steering Committee agreed to reposition the Patient Panel as a stronger, more influential regional patient voice by improving stakeholder engagement, demonstrating the impact of patient feedback, strengthening communications, and supporting the emerging neighbourhood health agenda.

Key Ideas

1. Establish the Panel as the recognised patient voice

The central ambition is for the Patient Panel to become the primary forum through which patients, PPGs, GP practices and commissioners can gather, share and act upon patient feedback. The Panel wants to be seen as a credible and influential partner in shaping healthcare services.

2. Respond to a changing health and care landscape

The strategy recognises major system changes, including:

- Expansion of the Thames Valley ICB.
- Organisational restructuring and loss of established relationships.
- The planned closure of Healthwatch.
- The move towards neighbourhood health and integrated care.

These changes create both risks and opportunities for the Panel to strengthen its role.

3. Focus on stakeholder needs

A recurring theme is that different stakeholders want different things:

- Patients want better access and services.
- PPGs want evidence that feedback leads to change.
- Practices want support in improving outcomes and reducing workload.
- Commissioners want representative, consolidated patient insight.

Success depends on understanding and responding to these differing priorities.

4. Demonstrate the value of patient involvement

The group believes there are many examples where patient feedback has led to tangible improvements. These successes should be collected, documented and promoted to demonstrate the value of engagement and encourage wider participation.

5. Strengthen communications and visibility

The strategy recognises that the Panel needs a clearer identity, stronger branding, more effective communications and greater use of social media if it is to increase its influence and reach.

Key Recommendations

Strategic Recommendations

- 1. Adopt a clear vision statement**
 - o Position the Panel as the representative patient voice for West Berkshire and a key partner in neighbourhood health development.
- 2. Develop a stakeholder engagement strategy**
 - o Identify priority stakeholder groups.
 - o Define what each group values.
 - o Tailor communications and engagement activities accordingly.
- 3. Strengthen relationships with the ICB and local partners**
 - o Seek formal recognition as a source of patient insight.
 - o Build links with neighbourhood health initiatives and local authorities.
- 4. Prepare for the loss of Healthwatch**

- o Consider how the Panel can fill parts of the engagement and feedback gap that may emerge after 2027.
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Communication Recommendations

- 5. Create stakeholder-specific communication packs**
 - o Explain who the Panel is.
 - o Showcase achievements and case studies.
 - o Demonstrate the benefits of participation.
 - o Clearly state what support or information is being sought.
 - 6. Develop a portfolio of impact stories**
 - o Create concise case studies showing where patient feedback has improved services.
 - o Use these in presentations, meetings, newsletters and social media.
 - 7. Improve awareness among patients and PPGs**
 - o Encourage local PPGs to explain how local concerns can influence wider policy and service decisions.
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Organisational Recommendations

- 8. Review branding and identity**
 - o Consider adopting a clearer and more accessible name, such as "Patient Voice".
 - o Refresh branding and visual identity.
- 9. Improve digital infrastructure**
 - o Establish a simple shared document repository with appropriate access controls.
 - o Store agendas, minutes, presentations and key documents centrally.
- 10. Strengthen social media capability**
 - o Recruit a volunteer or communications lead.
 - o Use social media to engage residents, promote PPGs and share achievements.