
Community Wellbeing Champions round-up

Public Health Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 08/07/2025

Lead director: Rob Howard

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Nazira Vania, Project Manager, Public Health
- Author contact details:
- Report version number:

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Community Wellbeing Champions (CWC) project has now been underway for over three years. In this time, it has developed and delivered a number of initiatives and workstreams aimed at increasing engagement with residents, especially those most affected by health inequalities, improving understanding of health needs and challenges, and fostering closer working relationships between trusted community organisations and figures, Public Health (PH), and other partners for the benefit of the people of Leicester.
- 1.2 This report provides details of workstreams and initiatives currently underway across the CWC project, as follows.
- a. **CWC Network membership and management:** Current membership of the network 298. This represents a reduction from three months ago due to the introduction of a new sign-up system, but new members continue to join the network regularly. The new sign-up system has been introduced to support robust data management and governance. The new process includes Working Together Principles to help Champions, PH, and other partners work together in a safe and effective way for all. Introducing the new system has led to membership falling, as existing members must complete the sign-up form to stay on the Network, but it is expected numbers will recover. Data collected through the new system will be used to produce a profile network.
 - b. **Network communication and resources:** Established in October 2022, the CWC weekly email is one of three core channels for engaging with the network and sharing useful information with and from members. This includes the Help Leicester Stay Connected workbook, a key resource created to support information sharing in light of the cost-of-living crisis. The CWC team also produces an internal newsletter to help keep PH staff informed of Network news and promote members' services.
 - c. **Online CWC Network Forum:** the second of three core network engagement channels, the forum has been running monthly since October 2022, when early members voiced a request for an easily accessible platform through which to regularly connect, share, and learn. It is used to raise awareness of services, explore health topics, conduct consultations, and form connections.
 - d. **CWC Network Conferences:** the third core channel for engaging with the Network, the CWC conferences were established to provide PH, community organisations, partners, and other stakeholders time and space to connect and collaborate in-person over the city's health and wellbeing priorities. Five have been delivered in the past three years. All have received positive feedback. The next conference is being planned for November 2025.

- e. **PH Community Engagement Grants Programme:** With the purpose of supporting community engagement work aimed at improving health outcomes for underheard and underserved groups across Leicester, the PH Community Engagement Grants Programme provided 32 community organisations with grants up to £2,000 to undertake health and wellbeing events/activities tailored to the needs of their communities. All but one of the projects has completed delivery and an evaluation is underway.
- f. **PH Community Internships Pilot Project:** Developed in response to requests from CWC Network members and others (e.g., event attendees) for opportunities to gain work experience in PH, this initiative offered three paid Intern Project Support Officer placements of three months' duration, working 15 hours per week, to volunteers and staff from community organisations on the CWC Network. The interns have completed their placements, where they worked on a range of communities and social inclusion projects. An evaluation of the scheme is underway.
- g. **PH community engagement framework and alignment:** Engaging communities is a necessity and cross-cutting priority for PH, and its engagement with community organisations and the public happens extensively outside of the CWC Team and Network structure as well as through it. As a number of teams and projects across the service undertake community engagement activities, a new internal working group is being developed to help align and enhance this work. A framework is also being developed to help embed a holistic and strategic approach to inclusion and participation across PH, so the views, insights, and lived experiences of people affected by poor health and negative health inequalities are used in a more meaningful and impactful way in informing needs assessments, strategies, action plans, intervention programmes, services, and research as well as health promotion activities.

1.3 In addition to the above, the CWC team is involved in a number of other areas of PH work, such as the supporting the social inclusion portfolio, and informing the Prevention and Health Inequalities Steering Group priority task and finish workstreams with a VCSE and community engagement perspective.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny:

Public Health Scrutiny Commission are invited to support efforts to reach all communities across Leicester and address health inequalities by signposting VCSE organisations and other champions to the CWC Network (wellbeingchampions@leicester.gov.uk).

3. Detailed report

Introduction

3.1 The CWC project and network were created to bring community organisations and trusted community figures together with Public Health and other partners to share insight on health needs, barriers, and enablers for the residents of Leicester, reach communities with key messages and services, and collaborate on addressing health and wellbeing priorities for the city.

3.2 CWC is being delivered through a combination of ongoing workstreams and standalone initiatives that align with PH's community engagement objectives. This report provides a summary of the various activities currently underway, as follows:

- a. CWC Network membership and management
- b. Network communication and resources
- c. Online CWC Network Forum
- d. CWC Network Conferences
- e. PH Community Engagement Grants Programme
- f. PH Community Internships Pilot Project
- g. PH community engagement framework and alignment

CWC Network membership and management

3.3 As of 25.06.25, there are 298 members on the CWC Network, representing around 160 organisations/services from across different sectors (VCSE, health, education, etc.) and 40 individuals. However, at the end of March 2025, membership was around the 600 mark. The reduction is due to a change to the sign-up system for the network (see 3.4 for details). While many members have migrated to the new system, some are yet to sign up, and others have left due to a change in their circumstances (e.g., moving to a different job role). Although the overall membership level has dropped, however, since the new system was introduced, there are signs that the network is healthy and growing, with new people joining regularly – e.g., between January to March 2025, the network gained nearly 100 new members.

3.4 The new sign-up system for the CWC Network was introduced in February 2025. Under the previous system, interested parties who asked to join the Network were added directly to a mailing list in Excel and Outlook. Data collection was inconsistent and unstructured and management of information about members was at a very basic level, which made it difficult to understand the make-up, activities, and reach of network members. There was also no framework for terms of engagement or shared understanding of the purpose, roles, and responsibilities of the Champions and Public Health. To address this, a new process was introduced with clear information about the Network and the criteria and procedure for joining it. A new Microsoft Forms e-form was developed, enabling consistent, secure, and structured data collection. In addition to mandatory information (name, email address, etc.), the form asks Champions to provide (optional) information on their organisation, work, areas of interest, and community reach. This will facilitate better profiling of the network and more targeted engagement.

3.5 The new framework also includes Working Together Principles and a Concerns Review and Resolution Process, which have been introduced to provide guiding standards and values so all parties involved in the CWC Network work together in a way that is safe, consistent, and effective for themselves, each other, and communities we collectively serve. This is an important reason underpinning the introduction of the new sign-up system, as there would be no framework for addressing concerns about member if had arisen under the previous process.

3.6 Outreach will be undertaken with members on the former mailing list and selected communication – e.g., promotion for conferences and funding opportunities – will be sent periodically to encourage them to re-join the network. Insight will also be sought from anyone leaving the network to understand if improvements can be made.

3.7 The PH Data and Intelligence Team helped create the sign-up form to ensure information provided by members is collected and stored in a format that lends itself to analysis. Work to analyse member data and produce a profile of the Network and its reach is getting underway.

Network communication and resources

3.8 The CWC weekly email is one of three core channels for engaging with the network. The email was established in October 2022 as a vehicle for sharing information with and across network members that might be of use to them and their communities.

This includes information about:

- Services and support
- Events and activities
- Consultations and research
- Jobs and volunteering
- Funding opportunities
- Training, workshops, and webinars
- Health priorities and key messages

3.9 Information for the emails is contributed by PH, services across the council, VCSE and community members, NHS organisations, service providers, and other partners. The criterion for inclusion is content must be related to health and wellbeing, whether directly on in a broader sense. For example, information about free or low-cost council-run cultural events will be shared to help promote social inclusion, whereas promotion for more commercial events at entertainment venues will not.

3.10 Standalone emails are also sent occasionally to Network members in addition to weekly emails if particularly urgent or important need to be shared information – for example, in response to flooding across the city earlier in the year.

3.11 The email is well used by many internal and external partners and has come to be seen as a go-to channel for getting information out to communities as well as the Network. As a result, content has grown significantly over the years, and whereas early emails sometimes contained only one or two pieces of information or were not sent out in some weeks due to lack of content, the emails now regularly contain at least 10 to 12 items. The format of the emails has, therefore, also evolved to help make it easier for recipients to navigate the content and discern what is of particular relevance to them and the people they support.

3.12 The weekly email also includes Help Leicester Stay Connected (HLSC), an information sharing resource created to support organisations with their response to the cost-of-living crisis. HLSC is an MS Excel workbook containing information on warm spaces to go, no- and low-cost things to do, and other support and resources available to help people manage the increased cost of living (e.g., free period products). Like the emails, information contained in the is drawn from a range of sources, including community organisations, council services, and other projects.

3.13 Both the emails and the HLSC workbook receive positive feedback from Network members. For example, some social prescribers use them to identify local activities to which they can signpost their patients. Feedback is also used to shape CWC communications and resources so they are user friendly and relevant.

3.14 The CWC team also produces an internal newsletter ('CWC Wrap-Up') to help keep PH staff informed of Network news and promote members' services.

Monthly Online Forum

3.15 The CWC Network Forum is the second of three core network engagement channels. The Forum has been running monthly since October 2022, when early members voiced a request for an easily accessible platform through which to regularly connect, share, and learn.

3.16 The sessions last around 90 minutes and cover three to four topics each month, delivered by PH, council services, Network members, and other organisations. Recordings and notes from Forums are shared via the CWC weekly email so people that cannot attend can catch up with content when convenient.

3.17 27 Forum meetings have been held since their inception, featuring around 80 speakers. The Forum has helped to link organisations and services and increased awareness of work being undertaken on a wide range of health needs and issues across different sectors. The Forum has helped facilitate connections and promote opportunities for collaboration. For example, the Forum provided a platform for the Fuel Poverty Programme to raise awareness of NEA, promote their energy advisor training opportunities to VCSE organisations, and recruit participants from target communities. The Forum has also been used to conduct focus groups and consultations.

Conferences

3.18 CWC conferences form the third of three core channels for engaging with the Network. They were established to provide PH, community organisations, partners, and other stakeholders time and space to connect and collaborate in-person over the city's health and wellbeing priorities.

3.19 The first CWC conference in June 2022 served as the point where the network was formally established. The most recent was held in December 2024, with the theme of 'Raising Healthy Children and Young People: It Takes a City'. The conference brought together representatives from different organisations and sectors to consider how we can achieve more equitable health outcomes for children, young people, and their families in Leicester through closer partnership working. The first session of the event focused on the current picture of children and young people's health in Leicester. The second session explored four key health challenges raised in the earlier presentation: oral health, healthy weight, childhood vaccinations, and adversity and resilience. The event also featured twenty information stalls and nine Service Showcase 'open mic' speakers. Around 135 delegates attended, including a number of people and organisations that were new to the CWC Network, and positive feedback was received both on the day and in the evaluation forms.

3.20 The December conference was the fifth such event held by Public Health since the CWC project was implemented. Over the course of these five conferences, valuable experience and insight has been gained into what works well, what hasn't worked as well, and what can be done to strengthen and sustain future events. Each event has received positive feedback from attendees and helped foster stronger working relationships between VCSE and faith organisations, Public Health, NHS partners, wider Leicester City Council services, and other individuals and organisations. They have helped raise Public

Health's profile amongst and build relationships with the VCSE sector and sparked new connections with people and services not worked with before.

3.21 For this reason, the conferences will remain one of the central elements and outputs of the CWC project, and events are being planned for 2025-2026 and beyond. However, given the financial climate and possibly needing to make savings within the CWC budget down the line, it may be necessary to take a new approach to future events. For example, if the CWC budget is reduced, one approach might be for CWC to organise and deliver one 'annual Public Health conference' as its core output per year, and for themed or subject-specific conferences to be arranged if funding is available from the budget for the given health priority, thus sharing the cost of the conferences across the service.

3.22 The next event (the proposed annual public health conference) will be held in November 2025, and it is anticipated a further conference will be held in early 2026 on a topic either not covered in previous conferences, or that would benefit from being revisited (for example, because of new developments).

PH Community Engagement Grants Programme

3.23 The Public Health Community Engagement Grant Programme was set up in 2024 to support community engagement work aimed at improving health outcomes for underheard and underserved groups across Leicester. The grant programme provided community organisations with grants up to £2,000 to undertake health and wellbeing events/activities tailored to the needs of their communities that will help to help tackle health inequalities, raise awareness of support/services available within Leicester, and/or gather insight into needs and barriers to better health.

3.24 The total amount of funding for the programme was £60,000: £20,000 drawn from the government Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) grant for community vaccine work, £30,000 awarded from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) grant for community substance use work, and £10,000 awarded from the Household Support Fund to run community warm spaces.

3.25 50 applications were received for the grants, 20 of which came from organisations new to the CWC Network. This helped meet wider aims of the grant programme to raise awareness of PH and our role in reducing health inequalities, boost Public Health's profile, and fostering closer relationships with community organisations.

3.26 Of the 50 applications, 32 were awarded funding. Activities approved included warm spaces, workshops, community events, health and wellbeing fairs, weekly physical activity sessions, and consultations. Projects were spread across the Leicester, with around half being focused on particular localities within priority health areas. Some events focused on specific conditions or needs (e.g. sickle cell anaemia), while others addressed a variety of health topics. Mental health and social isolation were identified as priority health topics by two-thirds of the funded project; other health priorities included substance use, long term conditions, and vaccinations.

3.27 All but one of the projects has completed delivery, and most organisations have provided end of project reports setting out their activities and impact. For monitoring purposes, the CWC Team also undertook visits to a number of projects to observe funded

activities. Findings from the end of project reports and monitoring visits are now being used to produce an overall programme evaluation.

PH Community Internships Pilot Project

3.28 The PH Community Internships Pilot Project (CIPP) was developed in response to requests from CWC Network members and others (e.g., event attendees) for opportunities to gain work experience in Public Health. The scheme offered three paid Intern Project Support Officer placements of three months' duration, working 15 hours per week, to volunteers and staff from community organisations on the CWC Network.

3.29 Eight applications were received during the recruitment stage, out of which six candidates were interviewed, and three were appointed. Two of the appointees were volunteers – one with a mental health organisation and another with an organisation that supports parents – and one appointment was a casual employee with a sports organisation that runs mental health support sessions for men.

3.30 The interns have now completed their placements and worked on a range of communities and social inclusion projects. They also:

- Learned about how the PH service identifies and addresses health inequalities in Leicester.
- Explored their respective areas of interest.
- Took part in partnership meetings.
- Attended community events and supporting community engagement.
- Participated in learning and development activities.
- Shared their knowledge and insight.

3.31 The aim of the project was to help build PH's profile in communities, 'demystify' PH and make it feel more accessible, encourage more people from diverse communities to choose PH careers, and serve as a form of knowledge exchange, with us potentially learning as much from the interns as they learn from us. An evaluation of the project is underway. If considered successful, and further funding can be secured, the scheme could be repeated and also further developed to target particular cohorts – for example, priority health inclusion groups such as care experienced young people.

PH community engagement framework and alignment.

3.32 Engaging communities is a necessity and cross-cutting priority for PH, and its engagement with community organisations and the public happens extensively outside of the CWC Team and Network structure as well as through it. As a number of teams and projects across the service undertake community engagement activities, a new internal working group is being developed to help align and enhance this work.

3.33 A framework is also being developed to help embed a holistic and strategic approach to inclusion and participation across PH, so the views, insights, and lived experiences of people experiencing poor health and more greatly affected by health inequity are used in a more meaningful and impactful way in informing needs assessments, strategies, action plans, intervention programmes, services, and research as well as health promotion activities.

Other CWC business

3.34 In addition to the above, the CWC team is involved in a number of other areas of PH work, such as the supporting the social inclusion portfolio, and informing the Prevention and Health Inequalities Steering Group priority task and finish workstreams with a VCSE and community engagement perspective

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1 Financial Implications

The original source of funding for the CWC project was from earmarked reserves. However, as part of the 2024/25 review of reserves exercise, the allocated pot of reserves to fund CWC project was withdrawn. The outturn cost, in 2024/25, was £149k and this was offset by underspends in other service areas.

For the CWC project to continue in 2025/26 and beyond, DMT is requested to identify funding source. One option is to submit a budget growth proposal for funding from the £1.6m increase in PH grant in 2025/26. The amount of budget growth to propose would depend on the structure of the CWC team going forward. DMT to advise of the structure and other associated costs to be incurred/allowed in 2025/26, which would then allow for costings to be produced. This will form the basis for the budget growth proposal.

Signed: Rohit Rughani

Dated: 17 April 2025

4.2 Legal Implications

There are various strands for consideration and therefore each project/element will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis for arising implications. General comments are any procurement/commissioning should be undertaken in accordance with procurement legislation and alternative models of delivery such as subsidy/funding, likewise any partnership initiatives will need to be considered on a project-by-project basis therefore early Legal and Procurement advice should be sought as required.

Signed: Mannah Begum, Principal Solicitor (Commercial and Contracts Legal) Ext: 1423

Dated: 22 April 2025

4.3 Equalities Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The paper provides details of workstreams and initiatives currently underway across the Community Wellbeing Champions project,

The project's aim is to make sure that health and wellbeing services are accessible to all residents in Leicester, taking into account any challenges different communities might face.

Champions can act as a voice for their communities, ensuring that the perspectives and needs of often unheard or underserved groups are considered by health and wellbeing service providers.

Having champions from diverse backgrounds, these programmes can build trust and improve engagement with communities that might otherwise be hesitant to interact with mainstream services. The Champions help ensure that service providers are aware of the barriers that prevent some communities from having their health needs met, which can lead to health disparities. By actively promoting equality, these programmes strive to create a healthier and more inclusive community for all.

Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated: 23 April 2025

4.4 Climate Emergency Implications

The CWC activities outlined in the report don't have major climate emergency implications, but there may be opportunities to:

- a. Ensure that activities which might generate carbon emissions, such as the conferences and grant-funded activities, are planned in such a way as to minimise their impact. For example, this could involve looking for venues which are energy efficient or minimising the need for travel.
- b. Highlight how actions to promote health and to address climate change can be mutually supportive, such as through making homes cheaper to heat and improving air quality.

Signed: Duncan Bell, Change Manager (Climate Emergency). Ext. 37 2249

Dated: 24 April 2025

4.5 Other Implications

n/a

Signed:

Dated:

5. Background information and other papers:

6. Summary of appendices: