



Corporate Strategy 2024 – 2029

Registered Charity Number: 211091
Registered Company Number: 463505



Introduction

This refreshed strategy sets out the priorities and next steps of Together for Mental Wellbeing to deliver on our ambitions that everyone who experiences mental distress is valued, make their own choices in life and can determine their own future.

We started our last strategy in celebratory mood, recognising our 140-year anniversary and the creation of our charity by our founder, the Reverend Henry Hawkins. We approached the end of 2023 with the re-launch of our thought leadership lectures in his name, on the hopeful and inspiring theme of the positive impact of art on our mental wellbeing.

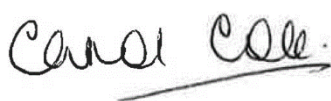
As we look ahead to the next five years, we acknowledge the turbulence that we have experienced over the recent months and years. This has included the impact of Brexit, the Covid pandemic, global conflicts and the of cost-of-living challenges, all of which continue to impact every aspect of life and society.

At Together, we are ready to face the uncertainties ahead. We will respond to the opportunities that are available and commit to delivering even better and more successful services for the people who want and need them, now and in the future. Over the last five years we have built firm foundations of operational resilience and risk management as well as robust integrated governance. We have invested in our infrastructure, giving ourselves the capacity to grow and develop and reconfirmed our commitment to service user leadership while actively engaging our stakeholders in our vision and mission.

While the experience of the pandemic was challenging, it highlighted the exceptional care, compassion and dedication of our workforce of staff and volunteers. It also showcased our strengths as a Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) provider in being adaptable, never giving up and stepping towards the people we work alongside to provide continuous care and support in the most adverse of circumstances.

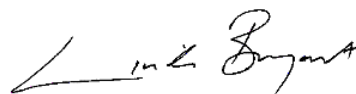
We have built a reputation as a reliable, responsive and safe provider of mental health social care services. We must and will continually evolve our thinking, approaches and practices as we have done for over 140 years. This will ensure our priorities remain relevant to the people we work alongside, to all our key stakeholders and are reflective of the environment in which we operate. To help us do that, we commit to regularly reviewing this strategy to ensure it remains forward-looking and relevant.

Dr Carol Cole

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Carol Cole'.

Chair of the Board

Linda Bryant

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Linda Bryant'.

Chief Executive

Who We Are

Together is the UK's oldest community mental health charity. Since we were formed in 1879 by the Reverend Henry Hawkins, a pioneering chaplain in a large Victorian asylum, we have believed that people who experience mental distress have the right and the abilities to lead independent, fulfilling lives as part of their communities.

Our charity originated from a principled attitude of challenging societal thinking, and we continue to be inspired by our founder. The Reverend Hawkins set about mobilising the community to offer practical and emotional support to people when they were leaving the asylum and to ease their reintegration into society. This enabled them to regain a sense of purpose and meaning, without risk of prejudice and without being defined by their mental distress. Today, we call this mental health social care – this means working alongside people in recognition that the causes of mental distress often reflect challenges in people's life circumstances, requiring a 'whole-person' approach to understanding their wants and needs.

We work hard to build resilience in our workforce as it is through our exceptionally talented and skilled staff and volunteers that we build trusting and consistent relationships with the people we work alongside. They provide relational support that enables the individuals who use our services to take control of the decisions that are important to them in their lives.

Our Purpose & Ambition

As a charity, Together has continued to emulate the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit of Henry Hawkins. Ahead of his time, he promoted equity of opportunities for people who were marginalised and disadvantaged by society. Today we strive for social justice and equality for people experiencing mental distress. We protect the rights of people to live without fear of prejudice and stigma, so that they feel valued and included, that their physical, spiritual and psychological needs are respected. Most importantly, we look to ensure their lived experience is at the centre of all decision making that impacts their lives, now and for the future.

To do that, we deliver high quality mental health, wellbeing and support services, empowering those experiencing mental distress to lead their own care and support. We enable and learn from their collective voice to create a positive change in the experience and quality of service provision.



Our Values

Our achievements and successes are driven by the beliefs and principles that are important to us in the way that we work alongside people in our services, our colleagues and wider stakeholders.

As described in our strategy map at appendix 1, our values differentiate us by having their origins firmly rooted in our history and taken collectively and interdependently sets out what can be expected of us:-

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.

For full details go to [Our Values page](#) on our website.

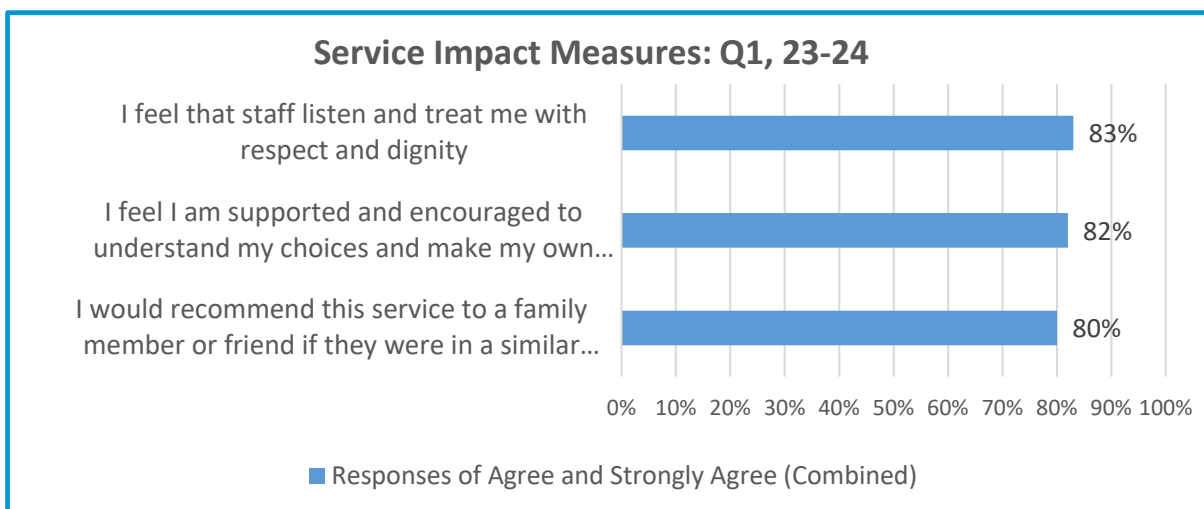
Our Impact

Our dedicated workforce of 470 staff and 60 volunteers, based in 70 locations across the north and midlands, east of England and the southeast and coast, work alongside around 11,500 people per year, including:-

- ❖ Our accommodation-based services being home to nearly 400 people
- ❖ Supporting around 3,300 people in contact with the criminal justice system, in probation, court and community settings
- ❖ Reaching out to 4000 people through our advocacy and community support teams

Developed with and by people with lived experience of mental distress, our Service Impact Measures give us feedback and insights from people using our services. This provides evidence and assurance that we are supporting them in the way that they want and need, and in line with our values and service user leadership principles.

In Quarter 1 of 2023-2024, we heard the following from the people using Together services:-



Setting The Scene

Together's last five-year strategy was delivered against the backdrop of unprecedented disruption and uncertainty, resulting in significant change to people's daily lives across the world, including for the people we work alongside and for our workforce.

During this time, there have also been far-reaching changes to the health and social care system, including the creation of the new Health and Social Care Act in 2021, as well as new integrated care systems (ICS) and the community mental health framework (CMHF). At Together, we welcome the fact that at the heart of these changes is the drive to deliver accessible and responsive care predicated on cooperation and collaboration between social care, health and the voluntary community sector.

Financial and market sustainability must remain a priority to ensure a sufficiently resourced mental health social care sector to support people experiencing mental distress and to provide personalised, practical and emotional support with the activities of everyday life. We have a track record of working creatively and in partnership with commissioners and funders to meet the challenges of delivering high quality responsive mental health and social care services in response to increasing demand, and against a backdrop of year-on-year cost pressures.

It is predicted that 8.5 million adults will require either new or additional mental health support as a direct consequence of the pandemic during the next three to five years with expected levels of demand being two to three times than that of current NHS mental health capacity (source: [Centre for Mental Health](#)). We understand that without the necessary investment, health inequalities will continue to widen, and it will become increasingly difficult to work alongside people who will need more intensive care and support to enable them to live safely and well in the community. This drives us to establish collaborations with other providers and critical stakeholders to provide sufficient and high-quality accommodation-based housing as well as looking to invest in technology to improve IT infrastructure and make available the necessary IT resources that give people choice in how they want to engage with care and support.

Sustainability of service provision is also dependent on a sustainable workforce: recruiting and retaining people who are motivated by working in mental health social care and can see the opportunities of a long-term career path. This remains an area of challenge across the public, voluntary and independent healthcare sector, but one that Together is meeting through a People Strategy that looks to build capacity and mobilise an inclusive and diverse workforce. This includes members of the workforce who have lived experience of mental distress and the recognition of the value and breadth of their expertise and skills.

What Will we do Over the Next Five Years

Objective 1

Sustain and improve our existing services, whilst growing and expanding our offers to reach more people experiencing mental distress

We will:

- Grow and develop our care and support offers through delivering integrated services at the interface of the state systems of criminal justice, health and social care.
- Develop our service models and practice to be inclusive and responsive to the wider needs of people experiencing mental distress, including overcoming substance misuse and support with living with neurodiversity.
- Ensure that our service offers are based on providing strengths-based, relational support that responds to the wider health, social and economic needs of the individual.
- Diversify our delivery into new geographic areas with a focus on partnership and collaboration with other stakeholders and agencies.
- Improve the way we evidence, demonstrate and promote the impact of our work to lever more funding to both reach more people and to meet the changing diversity of need of the people we work alongside.

How: our priorities

- Establish solution-focused, creative partnerships, including with Housing Associations and Local Authorities, that develop and expand our accommodation-based services to support people's journeys towards more independent living.
- Futureproof our existing accommodation services by focussing on the buildings and environments we provide. We will utilise the expertise and resources across operations, business development and property to deliver on the accommodation and property strategies.
- Design and adapt services that specifically reach people more likely to be marginalised and disadvantaged by state systems, including people in the

criminal justice system, people from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities, asylum seekers and refugees.

- Develop our organisational capacity and capability to demonstrate the impact of our work across all services.
- Identify new funding opportunities and income streams that support the diversification of our mental healthcare support, including helping people to overcome substance misuse and adapting service models to work alongside people with neurodiversity needs.
- Develop our 'prevention' services to support people to self-manage in times of high levels of distress through establishing more partnerships with NHS Trusts and other emergency services providers.
- Ensure we have a strong employment offer that attracts and retains staff and volunteers who are committed to our mission. Being creative and inclusive in our recruitment approach, strengthening our reward and benefits offer to the workforce and enhancing learning & development opportunities with a focus on progression.



Objective 2

Use our national coverage, regional infrastructure, and knowledge to be adaptable and innovative in working with funding partners in the promotion and transformation of community mental health social care

We will:

- Continue to develop and grow care and support models that place equal value on the role of non-clinical care in the community and reduce demand on emergency services and the NHS while also addressing gaps in statutory mental health services.
- Build and learn from our successes to apply our knowledge, expertise and skills of evidence-based practice to test and deliver new models of care across our portfolio including housing, criminal justice and community support services.
- Advocate and champion for the mental health social care VCSE sector as a recognised and valued strategic partner in the provision of transformative care and support services, responsive to the needs and priorities of local and regional populations.

How: our priorities

- Search out diverse partnerships in new geographic locations, with providers and commissioners, that replicate and build on our successes in delivering care and support in the community with the aim of avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions, reducing the length of hospital stays and minimising out-of-area placements.
- Use external networks to join with other sector leaders, membership bodies and government agencies to inform and influence policy change and funding capacity of the mental health and VCSE sector.
- Advocate for and engage with research initiatives that build capacity and better research awareness in the VCSE that, in turn, generates better evidence of the impact of the sector.
- Actively partner with others to support and develop the resilience of smaller, local VCSE organisations and networks, particularly those led by people with lived experience of mental distress.

Objective 3

Realise the potential and positive impacts Service User Leadership has on the people who use our services, on the organisation and wider society

We will:

- Constantly question, rethink, and reshape the design of our support offers to maximise quality and impact by understanding the experiences of, and working in partnership with, people who use our services.
- Replicate the successes of people using Together services by drawing on their unique knowledge and personal insights to effect positive change in national policy and local commissioning.
- Promote and amplify peer support in the delivery of mental health social care services.
- Be a sector ambassador of the benefits and value of the voice of lived experience in the design of systems and services that enable people to lead their own care and support.

How: our priorities

- Continue to develop consistent mechanisms to both understand and be responsive to what people tell us about their experience of our services.
- Utilise people's lived experience in the design of new and existing care and support offers to improve the outcomes of the people who need services.
- Ensure the voice of lived experience informs and influences the governance of our organisation through leadership roles and integrated networks.
- Provide expert lived experience consultancy and training packages in service user leadership and peer support to other providers, professionals and stakeholders.
- Develop our external networks, connections and communications, including thought leadership conference presentations and publications on the topic.

Enablers

We will continue to invest our time and resources in what is important to us, the priorities that will help us transform our thinking and ways of working to support the delivery of this strategy.

For us that means:-

Quality practice that delivers evidence-based, impactful services that are focussed on outcomes and informed by the experiences of people living with mental distress, including those who use our services.

A sustainable business model that develops and grows our core operations through a strong funder mix, diversifies income streams and provides for continuous internal investment.

An equitable and inclusive approach in all that we do, creating cultures and spaces where everyone feels they belong and are valued, and where our differences are celebrated.

A positive people culture that reflects a diverse and caring workplace, for both staff and volunteers, and which attracts and retains a workforce with the skills and experience to deliver exceptional relational and person-centred care and support.

Strong brand and reputation so that we are recognised for high quality, responsive services that provide value for money. We will measure and demonstrate our impact of providing service user led services which value lived experience and create positive change.

Partnerships and collaboration, at a local, regional and national level, to achieve sustainable change through relational, transparent and strategic dialogue with commissioners and other providers. We will utilise our national status to develop relationships to influence policy and advocate for reform and funding for mental health social care.

Connecting with communities by reaching out and engaging with them to learn from and respond to changing local priorities. We will play our part in developing collective community resilience – improving the lives of people experiencing mental distress through building on existing strengths, values, and resources and finding meaningful connections with others in order to grow and succeed.

Strengthening our Financial Resilience: Funding our Strategy

Decisions about how much money is spent on mental health social care and support, what services are funded and who provides them are largely now in the hands of commissioners, notably Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), with each distributing funding in different ways. Local Authorities have specific statutory responsibilities for public health and social care but are now facing unprecedented fiscal challenges and escalating competing priorities.

Coupled with increased competition, changes to provider procurement regulations, commissioner expectations and service complexity due to higher levels of mental health need, there are new challenges for Together.

To sustain our core business and grow organically, we will ensure that we develop strong provider alliances in our operational regions and that our services demonstrate they are delivering the best possible care and value for money. We will continue to focus on building positive commissioner relationships to increase the likelihood of retaining tenders and securing new contracts.

Additionally, we will use our considerable expertise, knowledge and insights to diversify our income streams by shaping new and existing markets in partnership with commissioners and other key stakeholders, including corporate partners.

Innovative and flexible approaches to our core costs, both central and frontline, will help to ensure we remain financially competitive and able to withstand any unforeseen financial stressors and shocks to the sustainability of the organisation.



What We Will Have Achieved at the End of Five Years

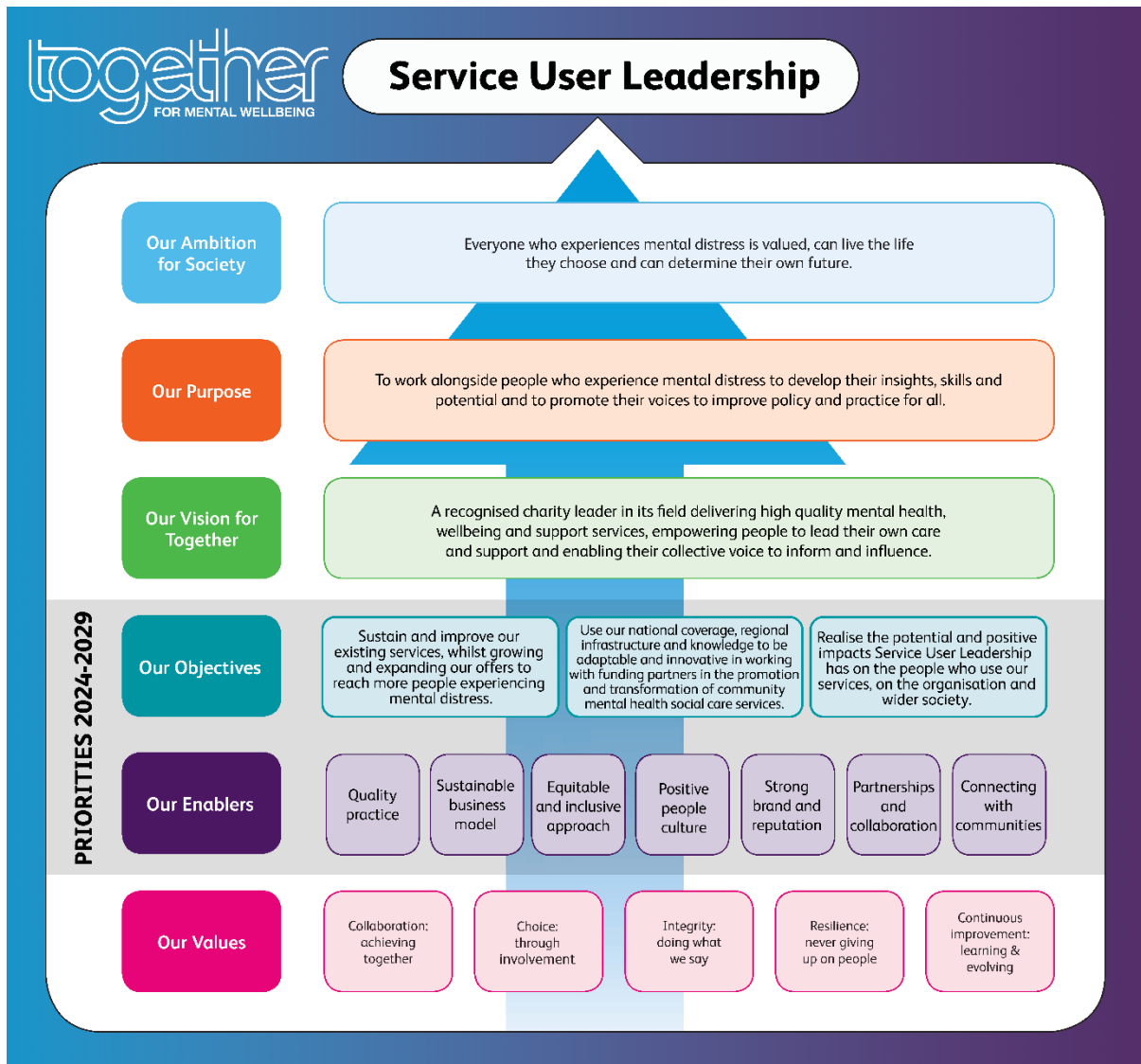
In five years' time, we will be able to evidence that we have:-

- ✓ Learned from people using our services, to grow the income and reach of our organisation through person-centred support offers within our existing service portfolios and through the delivery of new models of care - to empower more people to lead their journey to wellbeing on their own terms.
- ✓ Developed and improved the quality of our care and support services across our portfolio through the provision of nurturing environments that keep people safe and well in the places where they want to live.
- ✓ Worked in cooperation with membership and campaigning organisations, research networks and professional bodies to advocate for the essential role that mental health social care plays in addressing health inequalities and as part of an individual's journey to better wellbeing.
- ✓ Established partnerships and collaborations with others, including ICBs, Local Authorities and healthcare providers, that have achieved greater sustainability of the VCSE sector at a local and national level and influenced more informed, insightful and impactful funding and commissioning of mental health social care services.
- ✓ Demonstrated our value and commitment to the communities in which we operate through increasing our local stakeholder relationships and creating new community initiatives through building long-term partnerships.



Appendix

Strategy map



[View larger version online.](#)



together
FOR MENTAL WELLBEING