

## Developing the Leadership Capability of Health and Wellbeing Boards Learning from the journey so far – Evaluation Summary

### Why Health and Wellbeing Boards?

Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs) came into being in shadow form in April 2012, taking on their full statutory responsibilities from April 2013. As a key component of the government's health and social care reforms, HWBs are expected to:

- **strengthen democratic legitimacy** by involving democratically elected representatives and patient representatives in commissioning decisions alongside commissioners across health and social care
- **improve working relationships between health and social care** by bringing together clinical commissioning groups and councils to address the health and wellbeing needs of the community
- **drive the development of more integrated commissioning of services** through a more strategic and coordinated whole-system approach

**To do this effectively HWBs need more than just technical knowledge and skills.** HWBs have a crucial role in providing leadership across a complex system; involving many organisations, groups and individuals with differing perspectives and priorities. They therefore need to develop and exhibit leadership behaviours that will enable them to influence effectively across the system; securing effective joint working to deliver better health outcomes for the population they serve.

### Support from the NHS Leadership Academy

In view of this, the NHS Leadership Academy funded developmental support for 35 HWBs in 2013, working in partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA). Boards were matched with facilitators depending on their needs, and typically received four days of support. Facilitators delivered a range of types of support, including individual board member interviews/coaching and group development events.

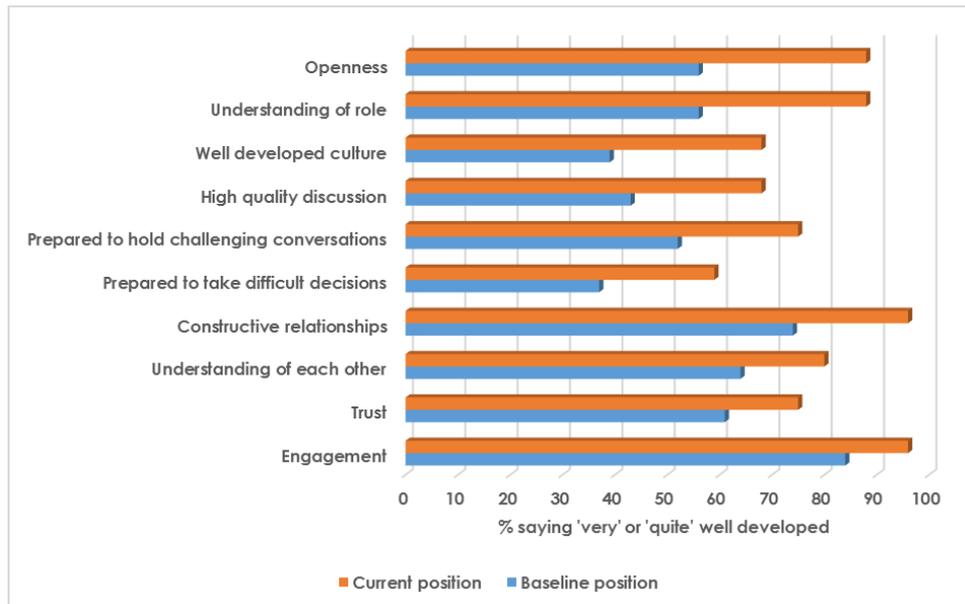
The Academy commissioned Frontline to carry out an evaluation of the support programme to establish the extent to which it had been successful and to enable lessons to be learned. This paper summarises the key learning from the evaluation.

### Key learning from the evaluation

**HWBs started from a low baseline with regards the effectiveness of their culture and their ability to take difficult decisions.** Prior to support being provided, only 39% of HWBs said that their culture was 'very' or 'quite' well developed, and only 37% said they were 'very' or 'quite' well prepared to take difficult decisions. However, relationships among board members and the level of engagement with the board were generally considered to be good even prior to support.

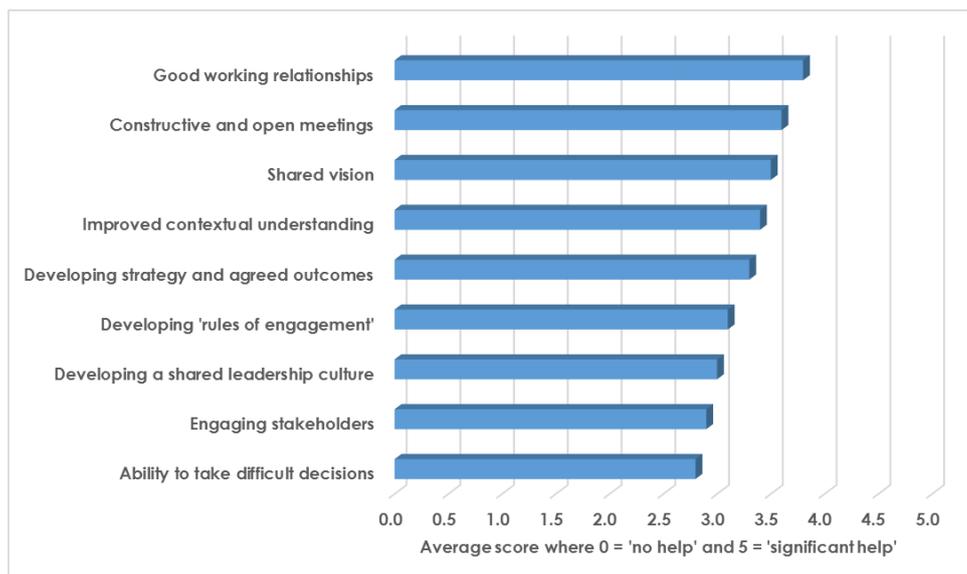
**HWBs demonstrated good progress against key indicators of leadership culture and behaviours following receipt of the developmental support, compared with the baseline position.** Figure 1 overleaf shows the distance travelled by HWBs against the baseline. HWB self-assessments of progress show on average a 23% improvement in ratings of 'very well developed' or 'quite well developed' against the key evaluation measures. The areas which saw the greatest improvement were in levels of openness (improved from 56% to 88%), understanding of role (also improved from 56% to 88%) and level of development of the culture (improved from 39% to 68%).

**Figure 1: Distance travelled against key evaluation measures**



The support was assessed by HWBs as having made a relatively good contribution to achieving the overall objectives for the programme. Figure 2 below shows that the areas where facilitation had the greatest impact for HWBs was on building relationships, developing constructive and open meetings, and forming a shared vision.

**Figure 2: Contribution of support to delivery of programme objectives**



However, delivery against the specific objectives that were agreed locally between boards and facilitators presented a varied picture. Over a third of boards felt objectives were 'not really' met or only 'partially' met. Some boards expressed frustration that they didn't get as far as they wanted to, for various reasons including lack of continuity in facilitators or commitment in attendance of board members.

Whilst the facilitation laid some of the foundations for cultural change within HWBs, the evaluation found that this takes considerable time, and the journey could only be started within the timeframe for which the support was available: "We are moving in the right direction; but would like to have more successes under our belts".

**Developing greater levels of trust is central to this process:** *“There is more trust now but there is more to be done – for example around joint funding”*. Building an effective culture is particularly challenging for HWBs that have experienced a high level of turnover in membership.

**Although HWBs feel they are better equipped to hold challenging conversations as a result of the facilitation, many board members note that this is yet to be tested in earnest:** *“We have not had many challenging conversations yet – feels like we are doing the ground work to deal with them though”*.

We found that the **key success factors** in achieving good outcomes from developmental work with the HWBs are:

- **tailored approach and flexibility** – the group dynamics and stage of development of HWBs varies significantly and therefore ‘one size fits all’ will not work
- **clear objectives and focus** – facilitators found that some HWBs lacked clarity on what they really wanted to get out of the support, and this hindered progress
- **the work that is done outside of the boardroom** – both participants and facilitators stressed the importance of work done outside formal meetings to achieving a good outcome, including diagnostic work, one-to-one relationship building, and keeping the chair of the board involved
- **readiness of the board to engage** – the level of engagement varied significantly between boards and this was viewed by both participants and facilitators as being a key success factor
- **the skill and credibility of the facilitator** – the nature of the work and the seniority of the people in the room requires a facilitator who is credible and able to challenge where required

We found that the main **barriers** to achieving successful outcomes in developmental work with HWBs are:

- **lack of engagement** – including in some cases a lack of continuity or commitment in attendance, causing facilitators to question: a) whether the timing was right given a lot of boards were grappling with governance structures; b) whether HWBs were selected in a robust manner; and c) whether providing free support lessened the commitment from the receivers of support
- **lack of joint working** – such as entrenched barriers between the local government and health ‘views of the world’, or power dynamics coming into play
- **lack of clarity around purpose of the board** – a lack of clarity on purpose and their sphere of influence within the system was observed by facilitators at some HWBs, but did not appear to be recognised by the boards themselves

We found that HWBs have on-going developmental support needs in three key areas:

- building a **stronger sense of purpose** that will enable them to take people with them in leading transformational change
- continued **team building** to further develop trust, openness and willingness to challenge
- developing their ability to **influence within the system** in which they do not hold the ‘purse strings’

## The implications going forward

Future developmental work with HWBs or similar boards should:

- **consider carefully the timing of the intervention**, ensuring it is driven by when the intervention is likely to have maximum benefit as opposed to the constraints of a planning cycle
- **concentrate resource on a smaller number of carefully selected boards** and use these to spread learning and best practice, rather than spreading resource thinly
- **ensure there is continuity of facilitator working with each group** throughout the project lifespan
- **facilitate closer working and sharing of knowledge between different organisations providing similar kinds of support** and communicate clearly to potential participants the range of support that is available
- **ground leadership development activity in hard examples and real issues** and not just theoretical frameworks
- **continue to focus on the development of shared leadership across localities** with a particular emphasis on how to influence outside of formal structures

Health and wellbeing boards maintain a pivotal role in their local communities and now, with their role in implementation of the Better Care Fund, they provide a means to redefine and reshape care for the benefit of users and communities.