

Connecting Surrey Heartlands and Surrey Youth Focus *Better Together*: Developing System Collaboration, and Learning from Practice.

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Executive Summary

As part of the Surrey Heartlands efforts and commitment to support cultural development and partnership across the ICS, Connecting Surrey Heartlands is seeking to explore the activities, experiences and attitudes of workforce and partners across the system. Building on previous research highlighting key principles for effective development of an integrated and collaborative culture, the *Better Together* programme run by Surrey Youth Focus (SYF) has been identified as a relevant case study. This research sought to understand the potential role of initiatives such as the *Better Together* programme in fostering cross-system collaboration. Findings from this research seek to support the development of evidence-based best practices to shape policies and interventions aimed at supporting integrated and collaborative ways of working in Surrey Heartlands ICS.

15 depth interviews were carried out with individuals who attended at least one of the *Better Together* initiatives, as well as members of the SYF *Better Together* delivery team.

Overall, the research highlighted the need and desire for more systematic approaches to cross-system collaboration and the creation of spaces and opportunities to do so in a way that is inclusive and representative of all workforce and partners across the system. The research has found that investing in intentional efforts to bring people together (i.e. focused and action-oriented networking) and improving awareness and navigability in the system (e.g. shared diaries; common resource and information packages; organisation and system charts) can facilitate effective collaboration and foster joint-working across the ICS. Moreover, by providing opportunities for staff to interact, share experiences, and work towards common goals, these types of initiatives can help break down barriers and build strong relationships across different organisations, essential to enable partnership working.

Initiatives like the *Better Together* programme have proven to be successful in creating spaces that facilitate collaboration and foster a shared purpose among people from across the system. Participants of the programme expressed strong support for the programme's aims and overall approach. Whilst initiatives such as *Better Together* can be instrumental in fostering partnership and engineering sustainable collaboration, there is still a key role to play for the system in addressing gaps, providing infrastructures, and supporting the development of a collaborative culture across the Integrated Care System.

In conclusion, SYF *Better Together* has been successful in promoting partnership working by leveraging on tangible benefits of fostering professional networking, connections and cooperative efforts. To ensure sustainability, it is important to establish coordination and connections with other initiatives, encourage personal accountability and engagement, and continue to cultivate opportunities and spaces for collaboration. The service reorganisation and the implementation of new delivery models brought about by the establishment of ICSs generated a need for new ways of working. By definition, collaborative, integrated working is at the core of a functioning ICS. In line with previous research, the findings in this report highlight the importance of investing in fostering relationships, understanding, and trust among partners within the ICS, key features of effective partnership working. In this regard, initiatives such as SYF *Better Together* have emerged to be a valuable, inclusive, and effective asset.



Report and Findings Summary

Collaboration and Cross-System Working in Surrey Heartlands ICS: System Views and Lessons Learned from the *Better Together* Programme.

The research conducted on the Surrey Youth Focus *Better Together* programme has shed light on the state and views on collaboration¹ across Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care System. Overall, this report reinforces the findings and recommendations of previous research, while incorporating perspectives from partners across the entire system, particularly the VSCE sector.

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews identified four themes shaping the views and experiences of collaboration in Surrey Heartlands, including lessons and views on how to bolster effective and efficient cross-system working. In summary:

- Initiatives such as the *Better Together* programme provide the space and opportunities needed to share the practical strategies teams, health and care organisations and practitioners have already used to deliver more joined-up care and effective services.
- Such spaces enable shared problem-solving and development of collaboration and good practice at a local and practitioner level.
- Participants' accounts emphasise the importance of relationships in getting integrated and collaborative service provision to work. They also stress the need to invest in bringing people together to break down organisational barriers and boundaries, which remain the main obstacle to effective cross-system and partnership working.
- There is a strong recognition of the need to overcome barriers to delivering integrated services and bolster cross-system collaboration, and the tangible benefits this entails for local people and staff.
- Knowledge and understanding of the ICS, as a statutory and partnership body, remains limited. Whilst this does not appear to hamper individual pockets of collaboration and good practice, it is recognised that greater knowledge and awareness may work as additional incentives to establish collaboration and cross-system partnership work as a business-as-usual practice across the ICS.

1. Compared to *integration*, the concept of *collaboration* appears to resonate more widely among participants. Integration appears to be perceived as a very statutory term, mostly relevant to ICB and the Council. On the other hand, collaboration emerged as a much more inclusive and accessible concept referring to the sharing and pooling of resources, talent and operations, as well as the presence of a common vision/goal.



The research emphasises the need for more systematic approaches to support and encourage cross-system collaboration and the creation of more spaces and opportunities for collaboration. These should be inclusive and representative of all workforce and partners across the system. It highlights the importance of leveraging human connections to achieve effective integration and collaboration, rather than solely relying on new structures and processes, which can create additional barriers. Initiatives like the *Better Together* programme have proven to be successful in creating spaces that facilitate collaboration and foster a shared purpose among individuals and partners across the system.

Importantly, initiatives of this kind provide participants with protected time dedicated to networking, seen as essential to foster partnership working and integration. By providing ad hoc, protected opportunities for staff to interact, share learnings, and work towards common goals, this kind of initiatives can help break down barriers and build strong relationships across different organisations. They appear to cultivate a collaborative and learning culture within and between organisations, addressing and countering behavioural barriers such as resistance to change, competition and blaming.

The research identifies several tangible interventions and approaches that, based on the feedback received, could facilitate cross-system working and collaboration. These include making collaborative spaces and opportunities available to practitioners at the frontline of service delivery, as well as leveraging the role senior managers can play to facilitate and promote engagement in such collaborative, learning spaces. Efforts should be made at system level to establish infrastructures that facilitate collaboration and connection on a larger scale, such as accessible organisational charts, shared diaries and system-wide repositories.

The research also highlighted limited knowledge and understanding of the ICS as a statutory and partnership body across most system partners. Whilst this does not appear to hamper collaboration, it is recognised that greater knowledge and awareness may work as additional incentives to ingrain collaboration and cross-system partnership work as business-as-usual across the ICS.

Overall, investing in intentional efforts to bring people together, creating collaborative spaces, and improving navigability within the system can foster effective integration and collaboration. Initiatives like *Better Together* appear to be filling a gap in terms of collaboration opportunities, learning, and shared problem-solving, particularly at practitioner level. Nevertheless, there is still a role for the system to address gaps, provide infrastructures, and support the development of a collaborative culture at scale across the Integrated Care System.

Surrey Youth Focus Better Together Evaluation

Overall, participants in the *Better Together* programme have expressed strong support for its aims and have found it to be a valuable resource that fills a gap in the available offerings for staff across the system. They recognise the importance of having dedicated spaces for collaboration and the need for increased collaboration across Surrey.

The approach taken by SYF in designing and delivering the programme has provided valuable networking opportunities, which resulted in more effective and streamlined cross-



organisational, collaborative working among partners. Participants have been able to showcase services, learn about the wider Children, Young People and Family (CYPF) space, engage in focused discussions, and connect with like-minded professionals. This approach has enabled some participants to streamline their work, reduce silos, and engage in collaborative solutions to shared problems - to the benefits of their service users. Overall, participants felt enabled and equipped with information, connections and tools to further collaboration and joint working.

The use of small group discussions, breakout rooms, and interactive tools for engagement has been well-received. These methods have allowed for targeted conversations, effective problem-solving, and inclusive engagement. They ensured that networking events were focused and action-oriented, fostering engaging and meaningful conversations.

Some participants suggested including more networking and discussion time as part of all the initiatives explored. While the design and structure of the sessions and events were generally well-received, some participants felt that there could have been more focused discussion time for shared problem-solving and more opportunities for smaller group interactions. These are key to facilitating meaningful conversations, supporting sustainable connections among participants, and generating tangible outcomes.

Participants emphasised the importance of linking initiatives like *Better Together* into existing work rather than treating them as standalone activities. They highlighted the need to ensure the sustainability and continuity of the programme and its impact. Cross-pollination of benefits and best practices from the *Better Together* programme emerged as a key aim among the delivery group as well. As such, further connections with similar initiatives and relevant spaces in Surrey could be a key feature of future developments of the programme.

Overall, SYF *Better Together* appears to be effectively supporting a system-wide cultural shift towards collaboration, aligning with the aims and objectives of Connecting Surrey Heartlands and the system's commitment to collaboration and partnership.

Introduction and Background

Connecting Surrey Heartlands

Recent research conducted in Surrey Heartlands highlighted four key principles underpinning the effective development of an integrated and collaborative culture and ways of working in the ICS, based on the real-life experiences and activities of teams and individuals. These are:

- Relationships & Trust: Building mutual understanding and collaboration across the system.
- Exposure and system-wide perspectives as necessary business as usual.
- Reconcile the ICS' espoused culture vs. Culture in practice.
- Engage the workforce as a key stakeholder.



Coupled with the above, there is a need to engage and connect with all partners and stakeholders part of the Surrey Heartlands system. This is key to pool the expertise and experience of the best functioning parts of the ICS and develop a comprehensive evidence base to support the development of collaborative ways of working in Surrey.

Connecting Surrey Heartlands sought to explore current activities, experiences and attitudes shaping Surrey Heartlands ICS's emerging culture to inform cross-system collaborative working at different levels within the ICS. Given the synergy between the principles outlined above and the stated aim of the initiative, SYF *Better Together* programme has been identified as a relevant case study of learning from practice. The evidence and insights produced in this research seek to inform an evidence base to support the development of recommendations to shape policies, culture and integrated ways of working in Surrey Heartlands ICS.

This research project has taken a case study approach to explore, in depth, the work undertaken by SYF as part of the *Better Together* programme. The scope of this research is to understand the role of initiatives such as the *Better Together* programme in fostering greater integration, cross-system collaboration and system-wide perspectives. An evaluation of the programme has also been carried out to identify learnings and inform best practices, rather than assess the quality and performance of the programme itself. As such, the aim of this study is to:

1. Understand the impact of the programme in fostering system-wide perspectives, understanding and relationships among participants and key stakeholders
2. Explore whether and how the programme provides a foundation for more integrated and collaborative ways of working in Surrey Heartlands
3. Identify key factors enabling and/or challenging the delivery of this programme based on the feedback and experience of participants

Surrey Youth Focus Better Together

The goal of the *Better Together* programme is to enable new ways of working, particularly at the practitioner level, bringing the third sector and public sectors closer together, forming new multi-agency relationships, enabling transformative conversations, developing collaboration skills and building trust across agencies. This programme is currently ongoing and is being developed iteratively.

Overall, Better Together seeks to generate a cultural shift towards intentional collaboration, flexible learning, and iterative approaches to meet the evolving needs of stakeholders in the CYPF in Surrey.

Methodology

The research was conducted via semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a total of fifteen (15) interviews. Twelve (12) of the participants were recruited on the basis they attended at least one of the initiatives that form the *Better Together* programme: the New Starters Network



and/or the Alumni events that include the Coffee & Chats and the *Better Together* in-person event held in Cobham. Some participants attended more than one initiative. Two (2) respondents had also attended a speed dating event run by SYF. The remaining three (3) participants were recruited on the basis they are involved in the SYF *Better Together* programme delivery team and can provide insight and a perspective into the design and implementation of the programme.

Initiative /event	No. of participants attending from the sample
New starters network	6
Better together event	7
Coffee and chat	3
Speed dating	2

All interviews were conducted online between two to four weeks after each event/initiative took place. This helped ensure the feedback was both accurate and detailed, whilst allowing space and time to reflect on their learnings.

Individual in-depth interviews were chosen to allow a deep exploration of topics in a setting that allows for openness and confidentiality. This approach also allowed us to appropriately tailor the discussion based on participants' experience, whilst providing flexibility when scheduling and conducting the interview.

Thematic analysis has been used to analyse the interview data, identifying the underlying themes and patterns. This allows for detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants to be drawn out.

The evaluation of the Better Together programme as a stand alone initiative has been guided by OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation framework. This defined six criteria to evaluate the programme against: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

Ethics

Participants were recruited voluntarily following an invitation to participate in the research. Informed consent was confirmed by each participant before their interview. All participants were briefed on their right to withdraw and confidentiality. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Recordings and transcription were stored on a Surrey County Council-secured server, accessible only by the researchers involved in the study. All findings included in this report have been fully anonymised.



Analysis and Findings

Collaboration and cross-system working in Surrey Heartlands ICS: System views and lessons learned from the *Better Together* programme.

a. A *One System* approach driven by people

The research illustrated the impact that cross-system programmes such as *Better Together* can have in fostering a sense of shared purpose among staff from different organisations. This is particularly important to address what participants have described as '*an environment of competition and mutual blaming*'. Such spaces appear to recognise, capitalise and deliver on the importance of building relationships and trust among individuals and partners across the system.

Based on the experiences of participants in this research, there exists a need and desire for more of such networking events and activities that allow individuals to connect professionally. Programmes like *Better Together* appear to support the emergence of a collaborative culture and a shared sense of purpose and belonging among participants, which are seen as essential factors for effective partnership working across the ICS.

By purposefully bringing people together, opportunities and spaces of this kind appear to be particularly valuable in developing shared problem-solving practices, allowing people to engage in joint working practices, connect and streamline programmes of work, share best practice and gain a deeper understanding of different sectors and organisations' perspectives. By providing a platform for networking, individuals can build relationships, exchange ideas, and collaborate on potential projects or initiatives transcending organisational boundaries, supporting a more seamless and effective delivery of integrated services.

"When we start talking about collaboration and relationship building a lot of people see them as a nice to have. But it's very tangible and pragmatic. It helps make the best use of the limited resources we have, because we are all very interconnected."

b. Spaces to nurturing relationships, joint working and overcoming barriers

In order to foster relationships, build trust, and overcome barriers to collaboration, participants in the research emphasised the importance of shared spaces and opportunities to come together. They recognised that integrating services and, more broadly, developing a collaborative, partnership-based culture and ways of working, require investing time and resources in actively bringing people together to break down institutional boundaries, which are often the main obstacles to effective collaboration across partner organisations in the ICS. The key barriers to effective collaboration identified in this research include:



- A system that, despite being a formal partnership, is perceived to be organised in a way that is siloed and fragmented, not conducive to facilitating collaboration across organisational/team boundaries.

“We aren’t really set up to do collaboration. We do collaboration in spite of the system that we have.”

- An over-reliance on structures to drive collaboration which, on the contrary, is inextricably linked with behavioural drivers, incentives and a shared sense of purpose (Chakkal et al., 2017²).
- Limited opportunities and spaces for networking and shared problem-solving, particularly at practitioner level, where these are felt to be the most needed.
- Presence of inadequate infrastructures and administrative barriers that do not facilitate cross-organisational working.
- Competition over limited funding and resources, both across different organisations in the system but also within the same organisation, and difficulties in navigating and identifying available resources.

“There’s an element of people wanting to protect their resources. What it takes is to get everybody around the table and say let’s put the family at the heart of this. We’re all in this together. Events like that [Better Together] will help to break this down.”

- A culture of blaming over service failures which hinders collaboration, sense of shared ownership and innovative thinking and practice.

“If one part of the system is struggling, they will blame another part of the system. And I don’t think that helps with collaboration. So I don’t think it’s just about competition, it’s blaming as well. But you are less likely to blame people if you know them and the work they do.”

Participants’ accounts emphasised the importance to capitalise and leverage on human connections to achieve effective integration and collaboration across the system, and the need to invest in bringing people together to break down the barriers identified above. Based on their experience of taking part in the *Better Together* programme, participants pointed to the benefits that creating spaces that proactively seek to facilitate collaboration, encourage active participation, and foster a sense of shared purpose can have in this regard.

Moreover, the research highlighted the significance of creating ad hoc spaces for collaboration and networking in a system that is typically seen as highly siloed and fragmented. This underscores the need for intentional efforts to allocate time and create opportunities for collaboration, especially for practitioners and frontline workers. Despite the desire and recognition of the importance of collaboration, this is often perceived as something that only

² Chakkal, M., Finne, M., Johnson, M. (2017) *Understanding the Psychology of Collaboration: What Makes an Effective Collaborator*. Institute for Collaborative Working.



happens at the senior or leadership level, regardless of the benefits of fostering collaboration and integrated ways of working at the frontline of our service delivery.

“Most cross-system working happens at senior level, and the benefits and knowledge do not trickle down. They are gatekeepers, which is why we should have forums where practitioners are coming to share and learn about each other's work.”

In this regard, the role of senior managers emerged as crucial in enabling and supporting active participation in collaborative spaces and initiatives, granting permission and providing the right resources and support, vital in a context where time and capacity can be severely restricted. Moreover, senior managers and leaders play an important role in communicating the benefits of these initiatives and opportunities in the day-to-day job, particularly for those who are new to their roles, setting the tone for and emphasis on collaborative work culture from the start.

Shared spaces, ICS-wide events and joint work programmes appear to also be working as a vehicle to circumvent very specific challenges to collaboration. Participants pointed to challenges in navigating the system due to a lack of shared infrastructures and information about the ICS, such as an accessible system-wide organisation chart, which would allow people to identify relevant stakeholders and contacts, and the inability to access partners' diaries – a key, and often perceived as an unnecessary, obstacle to carrying out daily tasks.

“I don't think that collaboration is often blocked by lack of will but more by structures and boundaries. Even in our own organisation structure is not easy to find people. And then I've got to try and apply that to Surrey Heartlands, Frimley and districts and boroughs. There's a lot to be thinking about in terms of helping us to find the right people.”

“I can't even access the calendar of my health colleagues to put in a joint meeting. It takes me like four or five emails back and forth or a couple of calls. Why can't we just look at each other's calendars?”

Whilst initiatives such as the *Better Together* programme aid in-person connections, there is a recognition of the need to have infrastructures in place to allow this to happen at scale. By improving the system's navigability and offering the necessary infrastructure, collaboration and connection can be facilitated.

c. Motivation, incentives, and opportunity

Motivation for collaboration varies among individuals, but factors such as a growth mindset, a desire to learn and improve, and recognition of the rationale and transactional benefits of collaboration can increase motivation.

While some individuals naturally seek out collaboration opportunities, others may benefit from encouragement and support by managers or leaders. Senior managers' support and encouragement can play a crucial role in motivating individuals to engage in collaborative



efforts. It is important that leaders and senior managers in the ICS actively support and promote collaboration among staff from different organisations. Leaders can set the tone by participating in cross-organisational initiatives, advocating for collaboration, and recognising and rewarding collaborative efforts. Leadership support can help break down barriers and create an environment conducive to building strong relationships.

Recognising the rational and transactional benefits of collaboration can also motivate individuals to actively engage in collaborative efforts. Rational benefits such as opportunities for problem solving and knowledge sharing allows for increased efficiency and a chance to utilise what are often quite limited resources. Transactional benefits go beyond these and can consider the wider networking and relationship building opportunities. Motivation for this collaborative way of working can grow once people recognise both the short term and long term benefits that will support them in achieving their shared goals.

“If you have connections within the third sector and if you look at it purely from a business, money perspective across the system, if we get this bit right, other people’s budgets get better because they’ve got less families at crisis point.”

While initiatives such as *Better Together* provide valuable opportunities and spaces, participants also reflected on their individual responsibility to actively seek out collaboration and networking opportunities to the betterment of their work. However, remaining updated with system changes and knowledge of new and existing spaces for collaboration can be further encouraged from managerial positions, supporting and encouraging new starters to begin a practice of continuous learning and development.

“If we can give managers this understanding and skills, then it should cascade and be the values of the whole team.”

d. Awareness and knowledge about ICS

The research pointed to different levels of understanding and awareness regarding Surrey Heartlands as an Integrated Care System among participants. Although some participants were aware it has a role in supporting the delivery of health and care services across Surrey, many still view the ICS as a complex, unknown system, distant from their day-to-day work. This perceived complexity is typically fuelled by the use of specific terminology and an uncertainty around ‘*who does what*’ within the system. The lack of resources available to answer the question ‘who does what’ further drives the system away from the ICS aim of creating a “*unified Surrey Workforce able to collaborate and share knowledge and experiences across the system*”. A deeper understanding of the ICS’ function, including its roles and responsibilities can be supportive in providing access to opportunities for collaborative work through links to the relevant teams. Without this structural knowledge, more siloed ways of working and increased duplication are at risk of evolving.

“Whilst it would be great if the system did work as a system, it doesn’t, it works in silos instead.”



Surrey Youth Focus *Better Together* Evaluation

Relevance

Relevance: *The extent to which the Better Together programme as a whole, and its individual initiatives, are designed and delivered to best respond to the needs of their intended audience.*

Overall, participants have expressed support and interest in the programme, which appears to be filling a gap in the offer available to staff across the system. They recognise the importance of dedicated spaces for collaboration and the need for increased collaboration across Surrey.

a. Provision of an inclusive space for learning and networking

The approach and design undertaken by *Better Together* appears to have provided valuable opportunities for participants to showcase their services, learn about other services operating in their field, engage in focused discussions, and network with like-minded professionals. The use of small group discussions, breakout rooms, and interactive tools has been particularly well-received, as they allow for targeted conversations, effective problem-solving, and inclusive networking.

However, some participants have expressed the desire to include more networking and discussion time across all the initiatives explored. While the design and structure of the sessions and events were generally well-received, some participants felt that there could have been more focused discussion time and smaller group interactions which are key to facilitating meaningful conversations, supporting sustainable connections among participants, and generating tangible outcomes.

“We were quite pressed for time at our table. I wanted to hear what they were doing and I felt that was important but there wasn’t enough time.”

b. Protected time for collaboration and learning

The programme has provided participants with protected time dedicated to networking, seen as an essential vehicle to foster partnership working and integration – and yet, as participants pointed out, often constrained and limited by limited capacity and resources. The provision of an ad hoc place, specifically designed to foster relationships, generate knowledge and share learnings, appears to allow people to prioritise such practices without distractions.

“I was quite blown away because I learned so much about the layout of Surrey. You can be in your little bubble and not always up to date with changes with everything that’s going on. It’s almost needs to be something that’s encouraged to do annually, because there are always so many changes.”

Participants have valued this dedicated time as it seems to facilitate meaningful interactions and strengthen professional bonds. Importantly, the provision of such a space appears to



match the appetite and need from people across the ICS for more opportunities of this kind, particularly at practitioner level.

“It was protected time. Especially for us as a small charity where everything comes out of funding, we have to be really careful on our time management. So it's important to have protected time.”

c. Approach focused on creating tools for collaboration in practice

Based on the interviews carried out with the *Better Together* delivery group and participants, another notable aspect of the programme which felt particularly relevant to the needs and expectations of participants was the fact that events and sessions had been deliberately designed and delivered to facilitate meaningful conversations and address specific discussion points.

“We don't just want people to come to our events and learn about relationships. We want them to take away tools to do things differently.”

This approach appears to ensure that networking events are focused and action-oriented, rather than mere socialising platforms, fostering engaging and meaningful conversations, and allowing participants to delve deeper into subject matters relevant to their daily work. It also serves as a catalyst for further exploration and the initiation of new ideas and connections, whereby people feel enabled and equipped with connections and tools to further collaboration and joint working.

“The way Surrey Youth Focus put their events together is really good. You don't sit at a table without a point, there's always a question, a discussion point, which is good because that leads you on to other things quite practically.”

The feedback received highlighted the importance of having a clear question or topic for discussion to create a structured and focused environment where participants can engage in deeper conversations. It encourages attendees to think critically, share their perspectives, and explore different ideas related to the topic at hand. This intentional design and approach ensure that the discussions are not superficial, but rather purpose-driven, thought-provoking and relevant to the audience. Moreover, having a clear question or topic helps to facilitate networking and connection-building among participants. When everyone is focused on a specific subject, it becomes easier for like-minded individuals to identify with each other and engage in conversations that are relevant to their interests or work. It provides a common ground for participants to connect, exchange knowledge, and generate practical opportunities for collaboration.



Coffee & Chat

- For participants who also attended the New Starters Network, the Coffee and Chats were regarded as a welcomed 'next step' in networking.
- These sessions appeared to support more subject-matter focused collaboration and discussion, supporting targeted and shared problem-solving among a relevant/more targeted audience.
- Participants would welcome the inclusion of more time dedicated to networking, discussion and shared problem-solving.

New Starters Network

- Overall, the initiative is seen as accessible and beneficial for new starters, providing them with an understanding of what is otherwise perceived as a complex system, as well as opportunities to connect with and get an initial introduction to key agencies and partners.
- Participants believe that understanding the complexities and boundaries of the CYPF space, as well as the broader system, was especially important for them when joining a new role.
- The New Starters Network (and the related Alumni initiative) is also seen as a valuable opportunity to refresh and keep their knowledge up-to-date. For some, this Network went to inform part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
- Participants also discussed the importance of capitalising on the first month/weeks of being in a new role, as a crucial time when people can dedicate themselves to networking and learning, but also a time when people expressed concerns about feeling isolated and experiencing less collaboration.
- Participants found the information provided in slides and descriptions of the wider services available to be helpful, although not always relevant to their specific role, thus serving more as background to the wider system.
- There was also a recognition of the need to keep the material up to date, as public sector organisations/systems tend to change regularly.
- Participants also welcomed the opportunity for group conversations and networking, particularly in smaller settings (i.e. breakout rooms).
- Participants valued the set-up of the sessions, which included both presentations and dedicated networking time, which made it feel inclusive and collaborative.



Better Together in-person event

- Participants valued the opportunity to form connections via a 'bottom up' approach, based around current projects, and in a more informal setting.
- The presence of different organisations across different sectors was also welcomed as it allowed people to gain valuable insights and understanding of work happening in the CYPF space and be exposed to different perspectives.
- Those in more community facing and frontline roles welcomed the opportunity to engage with a broad range of stakeholders who in their daily role would be less likely to interact with.
- Participant mentioned that allocating more time dedicated to networking, discussion and shared problem-solving would have been welcome and beneficial to the overall purposes of the event. Some felt their table conversations were cut short and would have welcomed longer time dedicated to table discussion. Others mentioned that, whilst the table discussions were helpful and extremely insightful, it would be helpful to provide time and space to ensure each table can feedback or network with other groups.
- There was an interesting exercise that stood out. At the end of the session, themes were displayed on the wall, inviting participants to connect with specific areas of work or interest. Participants mentioned that such an exercise created a visual representation of the topics discussed and encouraged attendees to make connections and engage further. It provided an opportunity for individuals to explore specific areas of interest and connect with like-minded individuals or relevant projects. Whilst the concept of this exercise was generally well-received, some participants felt unsure as to how the content generated would be disseminated and taken forward.

Coherence

Coherence: *The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions*

Ensuring coherence of the programme emerged as an essential factor in ensuring its effectiveness and impact. This involves aligning interventions and initiatives with people's ways of working and their specific areas of expertise. Additionally, it requires supporting and connecting similar initiatives to promote sustainability, continuity, and the sharing of good practices.

Participants' accounts emphasised the importance of linking such initiatives into existing, similar work rather than treating them as standalone activities. They pointed to a greater need for sustainability, continuity, and sharing of good practices.

"[Talking about linking up to other, place-based initiatives] Once you have that wider induction to the whole of Surrey, it won't end there. We've got another space to step into."



Nevertheless, the research pointed to a perceived lack of similar initiatives in Surrey, especially at the practitioner level. When present, opportunities for collaboration and cross-system working are often limited to more senior individuals, often perceived as acting as gatekeepers. Moreover, colleagues working in the voluntary and charity sector pointed to even more limited opportunities for regular, system-wide face-to-face networking compared to their counterparts in statutory services, health in particular. This perceived disparity in opportunities risks hindering the exchange of ideas, collaboration, and the sharing of good practices emerged from the *Better Together*. Cross-pollination of the benefits and impact of the *Better Together* programme appear to be a key aim among the delivery group. As such, further linkages and connection with similar initiatives across Surrey could represent a key feature of future developments of the programme.

Participants suggested a number of approaches to support broader reach and stronger linkages with other relevant initiatives and networks:

- Promote the *Better Together* programme, particularly the New Starter Network, as part of the early help workforce induction.
- Signpost individuals in the New Starter Network to quadrant and/or place-based Networks, facilitating connections and targeted conversations at the local level.
- Share the benefits and approach taken as part of the *Better Together* programme with other sectors, such Adult Social Care particularly if considering their link and relevance to the CYPF space.
- Explore how the New Starters Network and Coffee and Chat initiatives can be framed to contribute to continuing professional development (CPD) requirements.

Although this may be beyond the remit of SYF, there is a need for concerted, system-wide efforts to streamline programmes such as *Better Together* with other relevant initiatives (where these are in place) to reduce silos and duplications. This is also key to enhancing the effectiveness and share learnings and best practices across the system and ensuring such initiatives and related benefits do not represent a one-off, but are embedded within the ways of working of the system.

Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effectiveness: *The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives and goals.* **Efficiency:** *The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results*

Participants express the importance of networking, sharing learning across teams, and increasing shared problem-solving capabilities and opportunities. They believe that such events can help spread best practices, inform future actions, and support collaboration between different agencies and teams.

Based on the interviews with participants, the programme has been shown to successfully deliver results as intended, with reports of individuals putting into practice key learnings from the programme. This appears to demonstrate its real-world application and efficiency (see



section *Impact* for more). Furthermore, the intentionality of the design and delivery of the programme can further support its efficacy in delivering results. The clarity of information shared, as well as the specific cohort of attendees (e.g. new starters working in the CYPF sector), is crucial in ensuring the relevance of the programme as well as the ease to build on current knowledge for all attendees.

Attendance to and experience of the programme appear to be incentivising individuals to seek and realise the benefits of wider collaboration. However, the desire to join the programme often comes from a place of individual motivation which can be difficult to warrant. Attending events such as *Better Together* allows participants to experience and understand how this way of working can function as a business-as-usual model and is a necessary first step to achieving meaningful change. Leveraging and capitalising on individual motivation is essential to ensure the ongoing successful delivery of the programme.

To ensure the effectiveness of the programme it is also important to maintain continuity and provide ongoing support. Regular follow-up events and updates can help keep connections alive and foster long-term collaboration (see section *Sustainability* for more).

"The slide decks from the New Starters Network are a precious resource but it's only good if it's current knowledge. Follow up events to keep them current would be really important."

Impact

Impact: *The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.*

a. Strengthen a sense of shared purpose

Overall, the programme and its various initiatives appear to have had a positive impact in fostering a sense of shared purpose among participants.

"We all want the same thing, don't we? We all want to give the families the best support and the best start possible. I think sometimes we're all working in our own lanes, but actually we all want the same outcome. I went away [from the Better Together event] feeling like I'm part of something big."

Based on participants' accounts, having a clear, shared vision and alignment of common goals is crucial to support inclusivity and provide the basis and rationale for collaborative working. The programme provides a clear space to confidently develop this shared vision and purpose. Importantly, and in line with previous research, collaboration is not just about aligning operations and structures, but is underpinned and its efficiency determined by the presence (or lack) of a shared vision and purpose.

b. Shared problem-solving and multi-organisation approach to work



Participants in the *Better Together* initiatives found that opportunities for shared problem-solving and learning from different perspectives were the most valuable and impactful part of the programme. By connecting with others in the same space, participants were able to identify areas where collaboration would lead to better outcomes in service delivery and less siloed approaches. The interactions with peers and colleagues across the system appear to have resulted in new opportunities for partnerships and collaboration, as well as shared problem-solving to what have been identified as common issues and goals.

“It’s not just meeting other people, but realising that people come up against some of the same issues as you. That’s really helpful. People see it from different points of view. They might have already found a solution, or you might have already found a solution.”

“From that event there was hope. [Name redacted] was talking about that group that she started running. So I went last Friday and sat with the mums and we were just having a chat, sharing with them things they could access through their nursery providers. It’s not just about meeting people, it’s about how we work to deliver better services.”

Some participants discussed the actions they have taken based on the learnings and connections gained by attending *Better Together* initiatives. For example, after attending a New Starters Network session, one participant mentioned organising virtual marketplace events where they invited over 20 partners to present their services in short 10-minute slots. This allowed their team to learn about different services and gather resources in a time-efficient manner. The presentations were recorded and saved for future reference, ensuring that the team could access the information whenever needed.

It was not only the networking opportunities that generated tangible impact and more collaborative ways of working. Participants also pointed out the importance and benefits of the resources provided as part of some initiatives. For example, one participant to the New Starters Network recalled using the information included in the resource package received as part of the session to signpost families and school as part of her role.

“I’ve already started [using the information]. I signposted schools to some of those services on the back of meeting the family worker in one of the breakout rooms. I felt confident to do that straight away after meeting and talking to them. I’ve been able to send schools and families information by going through the slide deck. That’s been great, the slides are a precious resource for me now.”

These examples highlight how the resources and networking opportunities provided by the *Better Together* event have led to concrete actions and joint work. However, some participants expressed the need for additional support and incentives to follow up on these networking opportunities, indicating the importance of continuous, intentional efforts to foster collaboration and realise its benefits across the system.

c. Break down system siloes and systemic barriers to collaboration



The *Better Together* events also helped to break down barriers and promote collaboration across systems, encouraging a shift from siloed thinking to a more integrated approach. In this regard, attendees found the networking sessions particularly valuable, as they allowed for meaningful connections and the exchange of ideas and solutions to common challenges. This emphasises how culture change can be most impactful when it is being driven by relationships and supported by access to shared physical spaces. The programme appears to facilitate and support partnerships and collaborations among attendees, leading to ongoing work and a broader, whole-system approach.

“Silos can often gatekeep rather than help us to work as one system. At the Better Together event, we were able to speak with people who are driving change. In person, you can see that everyone wants to drive change in the same direction. Online feels a little further removed. It would be great if we could work from each other's buildings because it removes that initial physical barrier. I could just turn up and work from the family centre, maybe I would overhear a health visitor talking about a family with an issue that I can help with.”

“You can have any structure and you could probably work in an integrated way. Structures often enable or prevent integrated ways of working but they're not really the thing that brings about a change, instead this comes from culture and relationships.”

Sustainability

Sustainability: *The extent to which the benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.*

Considerations around the sustainability of the learnings and benefits derived from the *Better Together* programme show the need to further embed such initiatives and ways of working into the business as usual of the system in Surrey. The research highlighted three key factors determining the sustainability of the benefits, impact and learnings emerged from the *Better Together*.

1. The importance of coordination and linkages with other spaces and initiatives: This is key to effectively support the continuity and sustainability of learning and maximise benefits. This involves connecting with similar programmes or projects to exchange knowledge and experiences, as well as adapting and scaling successful approaches to different contexts. (see *Coherence* section for more)

2. Individual responsibility and engagement incentives: Participants noted the role that individual drive and responsibility have in supporting the sustainability of the benefits and impact of the *Better Together* programme and, more broadly, driving culture change across and collaborative working across the system.

Participants emphasised their own, individual role in driving collaboration and ensuring the learnings received from their attendance to *Better Together* initiatives are translated into practice.



"[Talking about the New Starters Network and resources received] That's been great. Long term it will be down to me to keep that up to date. That deck is only as good as it is if it's up to date, and that's on me to ensure that."

In general, participants recognised the role they, as individuals, play in fostering sustainable change. Individuals' behaviours are crucial for the long-term success of interventions as it ensures that learnings and actions become ingrained in individuals' daily lives.

Incentives can play a significant role in engaging stakeholders and partners across the system in the longer-term (see section *Motivation, incentives and opportunity* for more). Engagement enhances sustainability by ensuring that stakeholders remain committed and involved in its implementation in the longer term. This is particularly important amid a system with limited resources and increased pressures.

'The biggest thing is probably people's time to be able to commit to it. We all get tied into our business as usual and actually change and collaboration is part of business as usual, but it's not prioritised when you've got someone saying, hey, we got 300 statutory obligations. But if you develop trust and relationships with your colleagues, you will get to the solution much quicker. So I think the barrier is about people having the time to be able to do it. And doing it as part of our business as usual.'

3. Continuity and BAU: Continuity has emerged as an essential factor fostering a culture of collaboration across the system, providing platforms for knowledge sharing and learning, and promoting long-term engagement and cooperation among stakeholders. In this regard, it is important to ensure the sustained provision of and investment in spaces for collaboration and communities of practice to foster sustainable, long-term collaboration, ingrained into the business as usual of the working of the ICS.

"One off events can be extremely powerful. But to maintain those connections, then there have to be follow up events and more opportunities because people do move on."

For example, the New Starters Network Alumni was seen as a helpful initiative as it seeks to build on the initial Network, providing an ad hoc space and incentive for people to regroup. The intentional provision of such spaces is particularly important for those who struggle to actively seek further collaboration and networking opportunities.

"I wouldn't know where to go to actively seek further collaboration outside of this [Better Together]."

The research also highlighted the need to refresh knowledge and skills periodically, given the frequency at which systems often change. In this regard, some participants suggested repeating the New Starters Networks (albeit under a more appropriate title) or the Coffee and Chat periodically, to match the pace and frequency at which systems change and re-organise.



Conclusion

Collaboration and cross-system working in Surrey Heartlands ICS: System views and lessons learned from the *Better Together* programme.

The research into and evaluation of the *Better Together* programme run by Surrey Youth Focus has provided insights into system collaboration and the current level of awareness around Surrey Heartlands as an Integrated Care System. It also provided the opportunity to explore views and experiences of cross-system working. This work reinforces findings and recommendations from previous ICB-focused research, whilst including views and perspectives from partners across the entire system.

The research on the *Better Together* programme by Surrey Youth Focus highlights the importance of fostering collaboration and supporting the emergence and recognition of a sense of shared purpose among individuals and organisations in Surrey Heartlands ICS. Creating spaces for networking and shared problem-solving can break down barriers and facilitate more effective cross-system working. This includes developing shared problem-solving practices, encouraging cross-organisational learning activities, and addressing barriers to collaboration such as siloed structures and limited resources.

The research emphasised the importance of understanding and capitalising on individuals' motivation, identifying incentives, and providing proactive leadership support to effectively promote collaboration. Improving awareness and knowledge about the Integrated Care System can further enhance collaboration efforts. Whilst pockets of good practice already exist within the system, greater awareness of the role and purpose of an ICS may represent an additional incentive and rationale for individuals to enhance joint-working and embed this in the business as usual of their ways of working. In fact, motivation for collaboration can be enhanced by recognising the rational and transactional benefits of the same.

Based on participants' accounts, experiences and reported outcomes from taking part in collaborative spaces such as *Better Together*, such initiatives appear to be directly contributing to the realisation of the founding principles of ICSs – seen as a key partnership to help health and care organisations tackle complex challenges, collaboratively.

Surrey Youth Focus *Better Together* Evaluation

The evaluation of the *Better Together* programme, aimed at identifying learning and best practices, points to the success of the initiative in creating an inclusive space for learning, networking, and collaboration among participants. The programme effectively addressed the need for more spaces to network and promote shared problem-solving practices among all partners within the ICS. Importantly, participants' experience highlighted the benefits of having protected time for collaboration and joint working which, despite being essential for effective service delivery, often represent a challenge due to system structures and pressures.



The programme's design and approach appear to have facilitated meaningful interactions and strengthened professional bonds, leading to shared problem-solving and generating joint-working opportunities. Participants have been able to showcase services, learn about the wider CYPF space, engage in focused discussions, and connect with like-minded professionals. This approach not only supported the emergence of a shared sense of purpose among its attendees, but appears to have provided a much-needed opportunity and platform for people to engage in collaborative solutions to shared problems. Overall, participants felt enabled and equipped with connections and tools to further collaboration and joint work in practice.

Whilst the resources and networking opportunities provided have led to concrete actions and partnerships, ongoing support and incentives are needed to further foster collaboration. Moreover, some participants felt unsure as to how the content generated from the *Better Together* sessions would be disseminated and taken forward, emphasising the need to ensure the continuity of the work.

Below are some recommendations for future developments based on the feedback received from participants in this research:

- Dedicate more time to planned networking: Provide more opportunities for participants to network, discuss, and engage in shared problem-solving during sessions.
- Foster active engagement and inclusivity: Incorporate engaging elements such as small group discussions, breakout rooms, and interactive tools to encourage participation and connection.
- Aims and objectives and clear focus on shared problem solving: Design events and sessions with intentional focus and purpose, providing opportunities for meaningful discussions and addressing specific questions, allowing for practical solutions to emerge.
- Increase linkages with similar initiatives to support long-term sustainability and coherence of the programme and its benefits.
 - Promote the *Better Together* programme, particularly the New Starter Network, as part of the early help workforce induction.
 - Signpost individuals in the New Starter Network to quadrant and/or place-based Networks, facilitating connections and targeted conversations at the local level.
 - Share the benefits and approach taken as part of the *Better Together* programme with other sectors, such as Adult Social Care.
 - Explore how the New Starters Network and Coffee and Chat initiatives can be framed to contribute to continuing professional development (CPD) requirements.

In conclusion, the *Better Together* programme has been successful in breaking down siloes and promoting collaboration by leveraging on tangible benefits of fostering professional networking, connections and cooperative efforts. To ensure sustainability, it is important to establish coordination and connections with other initiatives, encourage personal accountability and engagement, and continue to cultivate opportunities and spaces for collaboration.