

Catherine Mountford
Director of Governance
BOB ICB

Cllr Jane Hanna OBE
Chair, Oxfordshire Joint Health
Scrutiny Committee

18 May 2022

Dear Catherine

Re: BOB ICBs Strategy for Working With People and Communities

It was unfortunate timing that you, and no one else from the ICB, were able to join the Committee on 10 May to share and take questions on the above strategy. We shared early feedback prior to Committee that we had concerns about the absence of engagement with HOSC in advance of the first publication of this emerging document and that issue, and additional ones, were raised at Committee and shortly after by its Members.

The Committee remain disappointed at not having had advance sight of it until very recently or a little more time to consider and feedback to you given our shared statutory responsibilities and the spirit of the work and interests of this committee in relation to communications and engagement. We recognise that the BOB ICB will need to hit NHS England's deadlines in respect of this strategy but we are not assured that meeting their core requirements and principles of good practice, at the pace they have requested, will create a well-crafted, relevant and impactful strategy for Oxfordshire, and indeed, for the BOB area. As currently presented, the ICBs draft strategy reads as though boxes have been ticked and we want our ICB to be much more ambitious and understanding of its communities – even at this early stage.

We know that you will recognise that none of the Committee's Members are communications or engagement specialists, we are elected community leaders, so our feedback is shared with you in that vein.

The HOSC would like to be assured through this strategy and its eventual deployment that the ICB understands the whole of its geography; its people, democratic structures, strength of community engagement and ever-changing population health needs. Furthermore, this understanding should extend to how it will determine how best to tailor methods of engagement and participation across the varying levels of that geography to drive the delivery of improved and integrated health and care services.

We are keen to ensure that Oxfordshire County Council remains a key partner of the ICB given its statutory obligations and that it draws its authority from the democratic mandate that underpins it. As an organisation and as a HOSC we have a wealth of resources and tools to support a truly integrated system – we ask that the ICB draws on those and welcomes well meaning 'critical friend' challenge.

We were encouraged to see that the ICB will go beyond the obligations of the public sector engagement duty and create mechanisms which provide transparency, build trust and hold

decision makers to account. We ask the ICB to therefore ensure that information on its services and decisions to be made are accessible and understandable to the public and explore use of digital methods where possible. We note that there is a dedicated engagement site for BOB and that significant efforts have gone into that in recent months to refresh the content but we struggle to understand whether the public would indeed visit it with such a complex and unmemorable URL <https://bobics.uk.engagementhq.com>.

We would like to see in more detail a suite of metrics both qualitative and quantitative on how to assess the success or otherwise of this strategy, what steps the ICB will take to continuously improve it and who will form part of the evaluation.

Finally, the strategy as currently drafted states that it wishes to work closely, meaningfully and in a coproduced way with people and communities. However, you will recognise that this requires commitment, resources (both from within the ICB and communities themselves) and a culture to support it. I am encouraged to hear of the recent appointment to an Interim Communications and Engagement Director post but I would be interested to hear of your assessment on how ready the organisation is for working in this way and what resources the ICB are going to identify to deliver the final strategy successfully across a geography which spans c.1.8m people.

The Committee looks forward to hearing from you on the points raised above and receipt of further versions of the strategy including the agreed final one. While I write, Catherine, I am conscious that you and other colleagues are handling a great deal of change at the present time and I am of the view that there are opportunities to have some time with ICB colleagues to include James Kent, Javed Khan OBE and colleagues who will have close involvement in the Oxfordshire Place Based Partnership with a view to refreshing our relationship protocols. I will communicate separately on this to a longer timescale, but grateful for your suggestions on how best to facilitate and if there are any additional themes the ICB would find valuable to discuss.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Jane Hanna OBE
Chair, Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee