

Briefing 039/23: Summary of our November 2023 Committee Meeting

Community Pharmacy England met in London for a full Committee Meeting on 22nd and 23rd November 2023.

Committee Members discussed important matters such as the implementation of the most significant new service for the sector in years, Pharmacy First, and their core asks for the upcoming negotiations on the 2024/25 Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF). They also considered longer-term influencing objectives being achieved through the Vision for Community Pharmacy and the development of Community Pharmacy England's strategy. Other regular work continued, such as taking time to reflect on what pharmacy owners have told us this month and making steps to improve governance.

Overview of the full Committee Meeting

The full Committee considered the following topics under the agenda for the November Meeting.

Pharmacy First Implementation

Over the last couple of weeks, a huge amount of information and guidance has been published on the [service developments announced following the Recovery Plan negotiations](#) and further documentation is still to come. Pharmacy owners and their teams will need to absorb this as part of preparing to start providing, or expand their offering of, these services.

The Committee heard about and helped feed into all the work that the Community Pharmacy England team is planning to help guide pharmacy owners and their teams on this journey. This has included liaising with NHS England on preparing key documentation, developing new resources and updating existing ones, and [organising a series of webinars](#). Committee Members considered what other support we could be providing, giving pharmacy owner input into the plans already underway, and discussed potential issues that may arise along the way and how they might be addressed.

Updates were also provided on the work of the tripartite implementation group – made up of representatives from Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS England and Community

Pharmacy England – to support the launch and roll-out of Pharmacy First and the revamped Contraception and Hypertension services. For example, the group has established the basic digital and IT criteria that must be met for the launch and will be monitoring activity in the first few months to help establish appropriate caps for the future. The Committee discussed how we might best collect self-care data that can be used to help monitor the service.

The Committee also discussed NHS England’s communication plans, which include a long-running multifaceted public-facing campaign. Launching in late February, the campaign aims to increase awareness of Pharmacy First and being to prompt long-term behavioural change. NHS England is also preparing specific communications aimed at GPs and primary care. Committee Members reviewed the initial design concepts for the public campaign, feeding back the importance of promoting the professional competence of pharmacy teams.

Gary Warner, Regional Representative (South East) for Community Pharmacy England and independent pharmacy owner, said:

“The work starts now. Although the deal is done and announced, there is plenty of detail underneath. We’re excited about the new Pharmacy First service but also recognise the amount of work that now needs to be done, especially during the Christmas period. I think there is going to be homework for all of us at a time when business is not great. The Committee recognises that as pharmacy owners ourselves, but we need the money that this new deal will provide as soon as possible.

The Committee had a presentation about the phenomenal amount of work that’s already being done by the team here. There are also new resources coming out, so watch out for those! As each new detail gets finalised over the coming weeks, information will be available at cpe.org.uk – all in one place so that you can find it.

We have to succeed in this service: one, our patients need it, and, two, we are now being recognised as part of primary care. It’s what the Government wants and it’s actually what the NHS needs to provide care for patients. It’s in line with the skills that we already have, it’s definitely in line with our ambitions over the last 10 to 15 years, and it could pave the way for bigger prizes in the future.”

[You can also watch a video blog from Gary here](#)



Negotiation Asks for 2024/25

The Committee considered the core asks, priorities and red lines for us to take into the upcoming negotiations on the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) for 2024/25. Recent polling of pharmacy owners as well as Committee Members' own experiences helped shape the discussion, which centred around themes, such as:

- Pushing for increased core funding (including issues around excess margin and the increasing number of price concessions);
- Developing new funding mechanisms;
- Improving funding distribution; and
- Easing workload through operational changes.

Our priorities and red lines will be revisited once we have received the mandate for these negotiations from DHSC and NHS England.

Vision and Influencing

Our Director of Communications and Public Affairs, Zoe Long, gave a comprehensive update on Community Pharmacy England's influencing and advocacy work. She described the work already undertaken to engage with the new Health Secretary as well as the considerable efforts being undertaken to increase and widen our stakeholder outreach, particularly around the Vision for Community Pharmacy and Recovery Plan Deal announcement.

The Committee also heard about how the office is supporting the Health Select Committee's Pharmacy Inquiry and fostering good relationships with the Chair, Steve Brine, and other members ahead of a series of evidence sessions. In the coming months we will continue to provide regular tailored briefing for MPs, support MPs taking part in Parliamentary debates, and advise LPCs on local engagement and media queries.

Strategy Development

The Committee considered the last stage of development for the strategy for Community Pharmacy England. Building on a strategy workshop facilitated by PR agency Luther Pendragon, they discussed some overarching themes and ambitions for the sector over the next few years as well as specific goals relating to what Community Pharmacy England needs to do. The discussions were informed by the opinions collected from pharmacy owners through our recent polling.

Our next steps for the strategy development are to determine what success will look like, explore barriers and risks, and identify any resource requirements ahead of February's Committee Meeting.



Governance Review

Work is continuing to improve Community Pharmacy England's governance arrangements, helping to better strengthen representation for pharmacy owners. This work is being led by an independent governance expert, Victoria Finney, who presented an update to the Committee on the latest changes made, including input from LPCs following their annual conference.

The Committee reviewed and fed back on the latest changes made to core governance documents, including Terms of Reference for the new Governance Subcommittees, policy and advisory subcommittees, role description, overall Governance Framework and Code of Conduct. Options for how the Negotiating Team operates were also considered, and it was agreed that a working group should look at the options in more detail and aim to draw up a draft terms of reference before bringing this back to the Committee.

The Committee unanimously agreed a revised constitution to reflect enhancements as part of the Governance Review.

Original Pack Dispensing

The Committee considered a DHSC proposal to take the principle of Original Pack Dispensing (OPD), as one of the efficiency reforms agreed as part of the five-year CPCF, forward. The discussion covered the timing of the necessary regulatory changes, the practicalities for pharmacy teams doing the dispensing, and how the NHSBSA would handle reimbursement. Committee Members are keen to avoid extra burden on pharmacy owners whilst also minimising any risk to payments.

Engaging with Community Pharmacy Owners

Ahead of the November Committee Meeting, we sought pharmacy owners' thoughts about the future role(s) for their pharmacies and their preparedness for the winter season. More than 4,000 pharmacy premises are represented in the poll results.

We heard that pharmacy owners are motivated to take on new roles and activities in the future, with the majority (over 90%) of respondents telling us that they have a positive outlook on the [Vision for Community Pharmacy](#) and believe that it will have a positive impact on various aspects of their pharmacies and the healthcare system as a whole.

However, looking at what's happening now, the results also show that winter pressures have begun, with the highest workload increase relating to knock-on effects from General Practice. 79% report they are neutral to ill prepared for meeting the coming demands for the winter season and our



regular financial and operational pressures tracker indicated that medicine market instability has become the most intense pressure.

Key findings can be found in [Briefing 038/23: What pharmacy owners told us in November 2023](#).

The full polling results were considered by all of our Committee Members looking at what they mean for our current and future priorities, as well as drawing on this valuable information, augmented with feedback from the Regional Representatives and LPCs throughout the meeting.

Committee Members appreciated the opportunity to review and reflect on the opinions received directly from pharmacy owners, and were particularly interested in the impact of the ongoing pressures as we head into the winter season. It was suggested that these figures could perhaps be used alongside pharmacy closures data to help raise awareness of the plight of the sector. Given the undoubted value of this polling, the Committee are keen to increase uptake, particularly of independent pharmacy owners. It was suggested that LPCs could be enlisted to help support this.

We will continue to innovate and improve our pre-Committee polls and how we use the data, such as by developing a dashboard to visualise financial pressures over time. A demo of the dashboard was provided to the Committee who also provided further suggestions for using the data.

Discussions from our Subcommittees

Communications and Public Affairs (CPA) Subcommittee

CPA met at the end of the second day to consider both the outputs of the full Committee Meeting and to oversee our engagement, communications and influencing work. They considered the communications that will be needed as part of work to support the implementation of Pharmacy First, preparations for the 2024 Pharmacy Pressures Survey, and plans for a manifesto on the future of community pharmacy ahead of the next General Election. The subcommittee also discussed work to review the organisation's rebrand six months on and plans for further communication and engagement activities through 2024.

Legislation and Regulatory Affairs (LRA) Subcommittee

LRA is set to meet on 30th November. Agenda items include pending changes on Hub and spoke, Incident Reporting Approved Particulars, and the reporting process for temporary closures.

Funding and Contract (FunCon) Subcommittee, Service Development Subcommittee (SDS) and LPC and Contractor Support (LCS) Subcommittee



FunCon, SDS and LPCs did not meet on this occasion as their workstreams were addressed in the main Committee sessions.

Agendas and minutes of previous meetings are published on our website: cpe.org.uk/meetings

Next Steps

Reaching agreement on the launch of a new national Pharmacy First service as well as other changes to pharmacy funding and services is a significant moment for the community pharmacy sector.

Whilst this deal does not address the chronic sector underfunding, it does give pharmacy owners an opportunity to significantly improve their cashflow. It also gives hope for the future that Government is willing to pay for the solutions pharmacies can offer.

The delay in concluding the negotiations and the demand from Ministers that Pharmacy First be launched during the winter, will make the next few months extremely challenging. We are very aware that winter is a demanding time for community pharmacies, but we also heard from business owners that they wanted to access the new money as soon as possible. There is already a lot of work going on to support the launch during this period – some of this you have already seen but there is much more to come. If you haven't already done so, we would recommend that you take a look at the following:

- [News article: Pharmacy First service and other changes agreed as Recovery Plan negotiations conclude](#)
- [Briefing 029/23: Recovery Plan deal – Summary and FAQs for pharmacy owners and LPCs](#)
- [Briefing 030/23: Funding for Pharmacy First, and other funding-related changes in the Recovery Plan deal](#)
- [Pharmacy First and Recover Plan agreement Webinar \(on-demand recording\)](#)
- [Implementing Pharmacy First Webinars: Book your place now](#)

Alongside this we hope to be back in the negotiating room soon to start discussing what the CPCF will look like from April 2024. We continue to call for an increase to core funding to safeguard the sector's future health and we believe that building on the essential role of community pharmacy through a national Pharmacy First service helps strengthen our case, and the imperative for, sustainable funding in future.



Janet Morrison, Chief Executive of Community Pharmacy England, said:

“The Recovery Plan deal is a huge confidence boost for the sector, and we have been delighted to hear the positivity about it from so many pharmacy owners across the sector. But we know there is now a huge amount of information to absorb and implementation, especially over winter, will be extremely challenging. We do not underestimate the operational challenges and hard work that it will entail. We will all need to work together to make it a success and the team at Community Pharmacy England are keen to support pharmacy owners and their teams on this journey. There is already a lot of work going on to support the launch during this period – service specifications have been agreed, the tripartite implementation group has begun its work, and we’re busy updating resources and organising webinars.

Alongside this, we hope to be back in the negotiating room soon to start discussing what the CPCF will look like from April 2024. We have been clear that the £645m is not the panacea to reverse all of the pressures on pharmacy businesses and the sector needs an uplift to core funding. We continue to press for further investment through our influencing and programme and building on the essential role of community pharmacy through a national Pharmacy First service helps strengthen our case, and the imperative for, sustainable funding in future.”

If you have any queries or require more information, please contact: comms.team@cpe.org.uk