

Briefing 007/24: Summary of our April 2024 Committee Meeting

Community Pharmacy England met in London for a full Committee Meeting on 17th and 18th April 2024. The Committee were joined by LPC leaders from the South East region for part of the meeting. The LPC attendees had the chance to network with Committee Members, observe subcommittee meetings and provide feedback from their local pharmacy owners.

Committee Members discussed critical matters such as the intolerable pressures on the sector, the ongoing Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) negotiations, the Pharmacy First service and governance matters.

Overview of the full Committee Meeting

The full Committee considered the following topics at the April meeting.

CPCF Negotiations

Negotiations on the arrangements for the present financial year (2024/25) are still in progress between Community Pharmacy England, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England. The Committee considered the progress of these critical negotiations which are being led by the Negotiating Team (NT). The NT includes independent pharmacy owners and representatives of CCA and non-CCA multiples.

We have previously set out the need for an uplift to the core global sum reflecting the grave state of sector finances. We have been arguing both privately and in public for margin write-offs and for an agreed mechanism for regular funding increases linked to activity and inflation; for annual uplifts to service fees; and for more fundamental reform of the margin delivery framework and an economic review of the medicines supply chain.

Committee Members considered the detailed current negotiating position, including red lines and priorities, to inform the ongoing NT discussions.

Workforce Development Group

The Community Pharmacy Workforce Development Group (CPWDG) is a cross-sector working group, formed by the CCA, NPA and AIM, that brings together the expertise of education, training and professional workforce leads from across the community pharmacy sector. The group works to



ensure that the community pharmacy workforce is ready to meet the needs of an evolving NHS and its patients. Marc Donovan, a Community Pharmacy England Member and Chair of the CPWDG, gave an update to the Committee on workforce issues and the actions the group is taking to address these, working with NHS England and other organisations.

Governance Changes

A range of governance improvements came into effect from this meeting, including a new Code of Conduct and Governance Framework, which have also been adopted by LPCs. New Terms of Reference for our subcommittees came into effect from this meeting, with subcommittees being placed in one of two streams: Governance, or Policy and Advisory, to ensure clear separation and accountability. In addition to the subcommittees, there are several working groups of the Committee, the main one being the Negotiating Team.

TAPR Programme Update

A final update on the Transforming Pharmacy Representation (TAPR) programme was provided to the Committee as all of the Review Steering Group (RSG) recommendations have now been responded to. A final report of this work will be published shortly.

Political Update

Luther Pendragon, the communications and public affairs consultancy currently supporting some of Community Pharmacy England's influencing work, provided a political update to the Committee. This focused on the forthcoming General Election and expected future Spending Review cycle. The update covered the latest polling data as well as possible election timings. Luther also looked at likely future NHS policies, noting commitments made so far by the Labour leadership team indicating that post-election healthcare spending plans are likely to match existing plans.

2024 Pharmacy Pressures Survey Results

The third annual Pharmacy Pressures Survey was run during March and April, once again running as two surveys: one for business owners and the other for pharmacy team members. Our thanks go to the more than 2,000 pharmacy staff members, and over 900 pharmacy owners (representing more than 6,100 pharmacies), who took the time to respond to the survey.

The Committee considered the results of the survey. As expected, they paint a picture of a community pharmacy sector in deep distress, with direct knock-on impacts for patients, adding to the weight of evidence that we already have on this. The survey also provided an early insight into how the Pharmacy First service is going – for both pharmacies and their patients.



The results of the survey are now being processed ready for wider publication. They will remain confidential while we work to ensure that we can maximise their impact through the national media and across Parliament. This year we will also be working to put together case studies and to share stories in more detail, highlighting the severity of the pressures.

Thank you to all LPCs who have already volunteered to support this through regional media work; we will share further information on this in due course. We are also preparing resources to help any pharmacies who would like to act as media spokespeople on this topic and we are keen to hear from anyone willing to be interviewed for a case study. If you would like to help with this, please email comms.team@cpe.org.uk.

Commenting on the meeting, Janet Morrison, Chief Executive of Community Pharmacy England, said:

“This was another important meeting for the Community Pharmacy England Committee, with all members very sharply focused on the desperate state of the sector. As business owners themselves, the distressing findings of this year’s Pressures Survey came as no surprise, and all attention in the room was centred on how to find solutions and assure the sustainability of community pharmacies for this year and beyond.

“The ongoing CPCF negotiations are complex, taking place against a backdrop of challenging primary care funding settlements and constrained public spending. Our Negotiating Team is working hard to get the best deal on the table, we have also been working to prepare to make pharmacy’s case ahead of the Spending Review expected shortly after the upcoming General Election. This is alongside influencing work to build support for investment in pharmacy across all political parties and candidates.

“The efforts of all pharmacy teams to implement Pharmacy First have been phenomenal, and it was good to hear that the service is already having a positive impact for patients, with pharmacists also enjoying being able to offer the service. But we know that challenges remain – and we will continue to push DHSC and NHS England to address these and to drive awareness of this strategically important service.

“As part of this ongoing work we will be launching a Pharmacy Advice Audit in the coming months to measure the wider impact the service is having in driving people into pharmacies. And we of course remain focused on continuing to warn Government and the NHS that community pharmacy

businesses remain at crisis point, and raising red flags about the clear and present danger to pharmacies and to patient care.”

Discussions from Subcommittees

Resource, Development and Finance (RDF) Subcommittee

The subcommittee reviewed our Key Performance Indicators and how these could be developed in future, aiming to be more strategically focused by structuring them around the measures that contribute directly to our annual objectives.

Service Development Subcommittee (SDS) Subcommittee

The subcommittee spent time reviewing the initial phases of the rollout of the Pharmacy First service. Despite significant IT issues being experienced by pharmacy owners and their teams over the last two months, they have been able to launch the service successfully, with pharmacy teams reporting positive feedback from patients, and pharmacists noting how much they are enjoying providing the service.

The ability of pharmacy owners to pass the threshold levels for clinical pathways consultations to trigger the monthly payment of £1,000 continues to be an area of risk which we have been concerned about since the negotiations on the service. This will be kept under review, as NHS data on service provisions becomes available.

More communications activity is required to increase the public’s awareness of the availability of the service, and we will continue to push DHSC and NHS England to undertake more advertising, alongside further work that we have planned to continue to promote the service to the public.

The subcommittee were also briefed on plans to repeat our previous pharmacy advice audits so that updated data is available on the number of advice consultations which pharmacies are providing to patients and the public which are not directly funded by the NHS. The launch of Pharmacy First has inevitably increased the number of people seeking advice from pharmacies, so we hope pharmacy owners and their teams will support the audit to collect updated data on consultation numbers to support influencing work and future negotiations.

The subcommittee also spent time reviewing the results of an assessment of the priority service development options for the sector, which the Committee undertook at its meeting in January 2024. This is part of work to take forward the implementation of the Vision for Community Pharmacy,



developed for us by Nuffield Trust and The King's Fund. The subcommittee also considered additional service development options which had been identified by PA Consulting as part of the work they have been contracted to undertake to support our negotiations.

The subcommittee considered other topics, including NHS England's future plans for the COVID-19 vaccination service and were briefed on DHSC's plans to pilot a digital NHS Health Check for patients, which could include pharmacies providing blood pressure checks for patients via the Hypertension Case-finding Service.

Legislation and Regulatory Affairs (LRA) Subcommittee

The subcommittee discussed:

- Issues around some Distance Selling Premises (DSP) pharmacies, including the concern that many provide a local NHS pharmacy service that was not the intention of the NHS (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 2013 (PLPS) Regulations. Broadly, it is understood that the intention of the PLPS was that DSP pharmacies should provide services across England, on a national basis.
- Proposals to enable NHS pharmacies to make use of recent Human Medicines Regulations amendments that permit the supply of 10% more or less of the prescribed quantity of a POM medicine. NHS pharmacies cannot make use of the amendments until they are enabled in the PLPS.
- Proposals for Provider Assurance (Post-Payment Verification) of the Pharmacy First service, noting that data collected by the API (Application Programming Interface) should mean less information is requested from pharmacy owners. There was also consideration of concerns around the most recent NMS and Pandemic Medicines Delivery Service PPV exercises; generally, pharmacy owners are only required to keep relevant records for PPV purposes, for the time specified in the service specification or, if no time is specified, for as long as is reasonable in all the circumstances.

LRA also noted ongoing work related to the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's proposed Greener Pharmacies Scheme, and hub and spoke dispensing between separate legal entities.

Funding and Contract (FunCon) Subcommittee

FunCon approved its workplan for the year. It was reported that 2023/24 fees delivery was close to expectations and that an initial meeting had been held on the Independent Economic Review of the



sector. The subcommittee considered complicated report papers on retained margin and the recent changes to Category A pricing. All subcommittee members expressed their concerns over DHSC's recent decision to squeeze concession prices for this quarter.

LPC and Contractor Support (LCS) Subcommittee

Subcommittee members reviewed the draft Terms of Reference for a new Forum of LPC Chairs and it was agreed to seek feedback and input from LPCs to incorporate into a final version. The forum will provide an opportunity for collective engagement and discussion with Community Pharmacy England on emerging issues or areas of concern, along with input into our plans and policies during their development and testing. Ongoing support for LPCs around HR, finance and governance were discussed, along with support for local policy work with Integrated Care Systems.

Communications and Public Affairs (CPA) Subcommittee

CPA will meet early in May to consider the detailed public affairs and national media plans for the coming year; to review progress on the engagement and communications strategy which was implemented alongside the rebrand to Community Pharmacy England last year; and to look at any further communications or public affairs issues coming out of the Committee meeting.

At its meeting in February, the subcommittee considered progress on Parliamentary and communications work, including looking at the plans for a further sector engagement event. This briefing event has now been scheduled for 7th May and pharmacy owners are encouraged to [register to attend this](#) for an update on key topics affecting community pharmacy, to share their views, and to learn more about our work and progress in critical areas.

Governance and People (G&P) Subcommittee

This is a new subcommittee introduced to support and advise the Committee and Chief Executive on governance and risk matters, including committee appointments and structure, oversight of financial, audit, risk management, internal control matters, nominations and remuneration, and the complaints process. The subcommittee will meet for the first time later in April and has some members drawn from the LPC network who are independent of the Committee and bring relevant external perspective and knowledge.

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



Next Steps

Highlighting the intolerable pressures on community pharmacy owners remains a top priority and we will share more information about how pharmacy owners and LPCs can support this – linked to the Pharmacy Pressures Survey – and our wider influencing work in the lead-up to a General Election soon. Information on the upcoming Pharmacy Advice Audit, which will support future negotiations, will also be available soon.

Pharmacy owners and LPCs are also invited to register to attend our upcoming [Briefing Event](#) for an update on key topics affecting community pharmacy, to share their views, and to learn more about our work and progress in critical areas.

As [previously communicated](#), until the CPCF negotiations on 2024/25 have concluded, fee levels will remain the same and existing service arrangements will continue as previously announced. Any adjustments to fees or margin needed to deliver the total funding sum for 2024/25 will be made later in the year once these critical negotiations have concluded. It is not yet clear when the negotiations will conclude but we will announce details to pharmacy owners as soon as possible.

Alongside the ongoing CPCF negotiations, our focus remains on supporting Pharmacy First and increasing its visibility to the public. Resources to promote the service to [GPs](#) and [patients](#) are already available, with more to follow, and we will continue to push for increased advertising from DHSC and NHS England.

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

“Community pharmacy businesses are in deep distress. They are working in crisis mode while the current pharmacy funding levels are quite simply driving them out of business. We are continuing to warn Government and NHS England both privately and publicly of the very dire consequences – to both pharmacies and their patients – should they continue along this path of attrition. Our Negotiating Team is very cognisant of the urgent need for pharmacy businesses to have clarity about the future, but at the same time are focused on getting the best deal for pharmacy owners on the table as soon as we possibly can.”

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