

# Briefing 013/24: Summary of June 2024 Committee Meeting

Community Pharmacy England met in Birmingham for a full Committee Meeting on 26th and 27th June 2024. The Committee were joined by LPC leaders from the West Midlands region for part of the meeting. LPC attendees had the chance to talk with Committee Members, observe subcommittee meetings and provide feedback from their local pharmacy owners and regions.

Committee discussions focused on the urgent challenges facing all community pharmacy owners. The Committee also re-evaluated Community Pharmacy England's immediate priorities for when the new Government is formed, continuing to deliver the strategy to build a better future for the sector.

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## Overview of the full Committee Meeting

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

### Political update and Community Pharmacy England positioning

A recap was given on the range of topics Community Pharmacy England had been discussing with DHSC and NHS England prior to the General Election being called and the resulting purdah period. Whilst negotiations have had to pause during the election campaign, much work continues in the form of informal discussions around important topics such as progress with Pharmacy First and the independent economic review. Meanwhile, preparations are also underway for briefing the next Government with the possibility of a speedy Spending Review that we must influence.

In terms of the 2024/25 Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) negotiations, the Committee reviewed the discussions to date, considering where we still have concerns and once again clarifying priorities in preparation for the next round of negotiations with a new Government.

### Party manifestos and policy positions

The Committee considered the detail contained in each of the main political party manifestos, as well as what the parties have said about healthcare in the lead up to and during the general election campaign. Members noted that, for the first time, the community pharmacy sector has been mentioned in multiple party manifestos, clearly showing the progress that has been made in pushing community pharmacy up the political agenda.



Members explored the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead, informed by analysis of our recent polling that asked pharmacy owners about their message for the next Government. There will be much work to be done after the election to build on the political recognition that the sector has and to press for the investment and support that the sector needs.

The Committee reviewed a revised list of priorities for community pharmacy service enhancements for patients, the NHS and Government. This incorporated elements from the [Vision for Community Pharmacy](#), the Committee's previous discussions on this topic, and the election pledges from political parties.

Group discussions were held on the positioning of how Community Pharmacy England should present itself to an incoming Government and our tone of voice as the sector representative body. Committee Members considered how to make the most of the opportunity of a new administration and stressed the importance of continuing to be evidence-based. Members were very cognisant of how stretched community pharmacy capacity currently is, as well as the ongoing funding and operational challenges, and of the need to be clear that any changes to pharmacy services to deliver solutions for patients must be underpinned by action to adequately support and fund the sector.

### **Community Pharmacy England Strategy**

The Committee was reminded of the Community Pharmacy England strategy, outlining how the objectives and priorities are feeding into current and upcoming workstreams. There was also an update about work with input from a professional consulting firm, PA Consulting, who are supporting work to enhance the negotiating approach and tactics, as well as working on an economic project aimed at influencing the next Government Spending Review.

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

"Community Pharmacy England's most recent Committee Meeting came at an important moment just before the General Election, providing a timely further chance to finalise our tactics for approaching the new Government. The discussions reflected on both the very critical state of community pharmacies and on our strategic plan to build a better future for the sector.

Community pharmacies remain in deep distress and the sector will have been relieved to see politicians recognising this during the General Election campaigning period. But the new Government has also been clear about the financial challenges that it faces, labelling the entire NHS as broken in its early days. It's critical that Community Pharmacy England positions itself to

work effectively with the new Government to urgently address the extreme pressures burdening pharmacy owners and their teams. This has been the focus of these first few weeks following the election and our Committee Meeting, during which we have written to both the Health Secretary and pharmacy Minister, as well as picking up urgent discussions with DHSC. We are ready to recommence CPCF negotiations.

We have also been working on our wider influencing work, which has been fundamental in raising awareness of community pharmacy's plight for many months, securing the sector's place in many parties' manifestos as well as helping to secure the critical Primary Care Recovery Plan funding last year. The next few months will be an important time for building supporters across the new Parliament – and key influencers outside of it – and we have already begun this work reaching out to many hundreds of MPs already. As this work continues, we will be looking to LPCs and pharmacy owners to help reach out to new MPs: new resources and guidance to help with this will be released very soon.

We're also continuing to travel around the country to talk to pharmacy owners about what lies ahead for community pharmacy, and how you can contribute to the ongoing work to get a better deal for community pharmacy."

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## Engaging with Pharmacy Owners

Ahead of the June Committee meeting we asked pharmacy owners what things their pharmacy businesses have had to stop doing due to the ongoing pressures and to share their messages for the incoming Government. More than 2,100 pharmacy premises were represented in the poll results.

The results confirmed some of the impossible business decisions that pharmacy owners are having to make due to the challenges they are facing. The poll found that the vast majority of pharmacies represented had to reduce locally commissioned service delivery, with others also reducing the use of locums and extended opening hours. Pharmacy owners issued a 'Call for Action' to the new Government to address the sector's issues urgently with increased investment and support. The regular pressures tracker found that an unpredictable revenue stream is the most intense pressure for pharmacy owners at the moment, with workforce coming in second this time.

Key findings can be found in [Briefing 012/24: What pharmacy owners told us in June 2024](#).



The full polling results were considered by Committee Members, feeding into discussions on current and future priorities, as well as drawing on this valuable information, augmented with feedback from the Regional Representatives and LPCs, throughout the meeting. The findings were also fed into discussions at the Communications and Public Affairs Subcommittee.

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## **Discussions from Governance Subcommittees**

### **Audit and Risk (A&R) Subcommittee**

The new A&R Subcommittee reviewed draft end of year accounts for 2023/24. They considered the new KPI framework to ensure these were correctly targeted and manageable. The subcommittee also commented on the revised Risk Register, adding risks and suggesting improvements to format.

### **Governance and People Subcommittee**

The subcommittee will meet during the summer to consider the Committee's composition, revisiting the existing policy to reassess composition in relation to sector ownership in 2025/26 (i.e. in line with the Committee's election cycle) and exploring a way forward to advise the whole Committee. The subcommittee includes some members drawn from the LPC network who are independent of the Committee and bring relevant external perspective and knowledge.

## **Discussions from Advisory and Policy Subcommittees**

### **Service Development Subcommittee (SDS)**

The subcommittee spent a lot of its meeting considering the current position on the rollout of the Pharmacy First service and other clinical services. This included the challenges that pharmacy owners are having passing the clinical pathways consultation thresholds to receive the monthly payment, and concern about how that would worsen for many pharmacies as the thresholds increase later in the year.

This issue has already been raised in discussions with DHSC and NHS England – including as part of the initial negotiations on the Pharmacy First service, when Community Pharmacy England successfully argued for the inclusion of a monthly fixed payment and pushed thresholds back as far as possible – and potential solutions were considered by the subcommittee to ensure the success of the service. These potential solutions will be discussed with DHSC and NHS England, alongside the need for further action from them to effectively promote the service to patients and to support general practices to make more referrals into the service.

### Commenting on Pharmacy First Janet Morrison, Chief Executive of Community Pharmacy England, said:

“Pharmacy First is a critical service for community pharmacy: it is evidence of the growing recognition of the sector’s integral role in primary care, and it is a major clinical service development upon which others can be built. Community pharmacies have done an amazing job providing the service, despite the very tight implementation timeline and early battles with IT issues.

“Frustratingly, the ability of pharmacy owners to reach the monthly payment thresholds is a major ongoing concern. Pharmacies are reliant on NHS England and the Department to drive people to the service, but following an underwhelming public marketing campaign, we don’t think we are seeing the numbers of walk-ins or referrals needed.

“Many questions remain – including about the full impact of seasonality – and we are working through these at pace with the NHS and Department. During the original negotiations on Pharmacy First we had to argue very strongly for the upfront and monthly payments and we will continue to stress to the new Government just how critical these payments are. It is completely unreasonable to penalise pharmacies financially for the NHS’ failure to drive public and general practice behaviour changes.

“Discussions with the Department and NHS England are ongoing, looking to find solutions, as we all share an objective to make the service a success.”

[You can also watch a video message from CEO Janet Morrison on Pharmacy First here](#)

The subcommittee also undertook a detailed consideration of the list of service development priorities for the sector which will be discussed with the new Government. The development of this list started earlier in the year with a prioritisation of the long list of service development opportunities set out in the Nuffield Trust and The King’s Fund’s Vision for Community Pharmacy. It also considered an assessment of new service opportunities undertaken for us by PA Consulting, current NHS policy priorities and those set out in the election manifestos of the major political parties. Early priorities we will be arguing for – if they can be commissioned alongside sustainable funding for the sector – include enhancement of the Pharmacy First service, including expansion of the range of conditions included in the clinical pathways, and a focus on prevention services, such as expanded commissioning of vaccination services from community pharmacy and an expanded



Smoking Cessation Service. The rollout of independent prescribing within the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework will be a key priority, building on the learning from the NHS England independent prescribing pathfinder programme.

The subcommittee were also updated on discussions with NHS England on the seasonal vaccination programmes and the proposal to commission Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) vaccinations from some pharmacies.

### **Legislation and Regulatory Subcommittee (LRS)**

Recommendations were made to the full Committee about the revised regulatory provision for Original Pack Dispensing to enable the NHS dispensing of +/- 10% more or less of the prescribed quantity and the removal of the need for referees/references in pharmacy contract applications (both only once the relevant regulations are introduced, and in force).

Discussions on hub and spoke dispensing are ongoing and Community Pharmacy England facilitated a meeting of an external group of experts (from or related to existing intra-company hub and spoke dispensing arrangements) to meet with DHSC officials, to discuss how they make their existing intra-company hub and spoke arrangements as safe and effective as possible.

There were also discussions around those Distance Selling Premises (DSP) pharmacies providing local rather than national pharmaceutical services as intended by the NHS (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations and the similarities between this and the potential for the proliferation of hub pharmacies once changes to the Human Medicines Regulations enable hub and spoke dispensing between different legal entities (inter-company hub and spoke dispensing). Both are of concern to Community Pharmacy England.

### **Funding and Contract (FunCon) Subcommittee**

The subcommittee reviewed how plans for the independent economic review are progressing following feedback from Community Pharmacy England and pharmacy owners who sit on the project's Advisory Board and Working Group. Community Pharmacy England has been involved with this project since the NHS England tender process and are continuing to provide an important sense-check for Frontier Economics and IQVIA as they establish their methodology. Ensuring a rigorous and robust approach takes time, but it is vital for the future of the sector that this process is right.

The subcommittee discussed a range of DHSC proposals for margin survey improvements and validations, carefully considering the pros and cons of each, including any potential unintended



consequences. An update was given on plans to introduce Original Pack Dispensing, and the subcommittee raised strong concerns about one aspect that members believe would be impractical to implement.

### **LPC and Contractor Support (LCS) Subcommittee**

The Subcommittee reviewed a final draft of the Terms of Reference for the Forum of LPC Chairs, which included amendments to incorporate feedback from LPCs. These were then signed off by the full committee. The Terms of Reference are effective from the first meeting of the Forum of LPC Chairs – a national meeting on Wednesday 25 September 2024 in London.

The subcommittee reviewed feedback on and potential improvements for the Community Pharmacy England and LPC Operations Team (CLOT) meetings, which is a fortnightly meeting forum for discussion and information-exchange on local and national issues between LPCs and Community Pharmacy England.

Consideration was given to the plan for meeting with LPCs on the afternoons prior to pharmacy owner events programme in each region. It was noted that these sessions will be used for LPCs to share local and regional developments with Community Pharmacy England as well as opportunity for a detailed discussions on joint issues and work to support pharmacy owners.

### **Communications and Public Affairs (CPA) Subcommittee**

CPA met at the end of the Committee meeting and focussed on the important communications and public affairs activity due to take place in the coming weeks. Post-election work to build support across the new Parliament will be critically important, and the subcommittee asked that LPCs be involved in this due to their constituency link. The subcommittee felt it would be particularly useful to use the results of the Committee's pharmacy owner polling that highlight pressures or can help make the case for community pharmacy during this time.

Preparations for Community Pharmacy England's [pharmacy owner events programme](#) were also discussed, noting that this is an untested format and that the team would need to fully evaluate the events and implement learnings between each event. The plan to include polling was welcomed, and a further suggestion to include interactive exercises/group discussions was made to give attendees maximum opportunity for sharing feedback. The events will cover the political landscape and Community Pharmacy England strategy, with lots of opportunity for pharmacy owner questions.

Agendas and minutes of previous meetings are published on our website: [cpe.org.uk/meetings](https://cpe.org.uk/meetings)



## Next Steps

The immediate focus following the General Election will be to engage with new Government Ministers to recommence discussions on critical issues, including the 2024/25 CCPF negotiations.

With the significant turnover of MPs, there will also be a big job to do to rebuild our network of advocates across the new Parliament. We have increased our influencing programme over the past two years to help fight pharmacy's corner, and that work will need to continue as we look to strengthen relationships with decision makers, policy advisors, and other people of influence following the General Election. This is all part of the strategy to improve the outlook for community pharmacy. Pharmacy teams are asked to support this work where they can by taking part in surveys and audits, helping to deliver pharmacy MP visits, and perhaps considering becoming media spokespeople.

You can hear more about what lies ahead for community pharmacy, and how Community Pharmacy England will be working to improve the outlook following the election in our [July events programme](#).

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**If you have any questions or require more information, please contact: [comms.team@cpe.org.uk](mailto:comms.team@cpe.org.uk)**