

The English Substance Use Commissioners' Group Annual Report 2022/23

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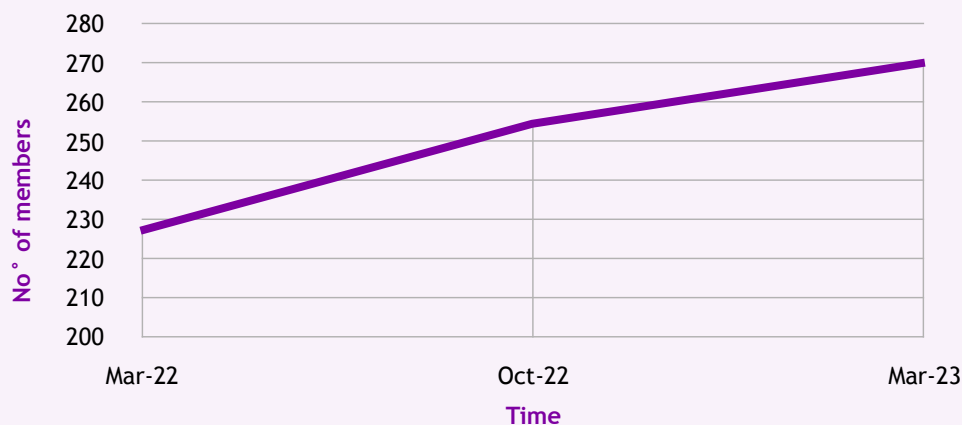
1. Foreword by the Chair

The last year has seen a significant upsurge of work undertaken by members of the group, as we continue to build as a network and membership numbers continue to increase, with 270 members covering 75% of local authorities at the end of 2022/23. National meetings have pulled together best practice to share, on a thematic basis, which members report as being positive. We continue to be supported by ADPH and we would struggle to maintain any progress without the invaluable support of the secretariat provided and Adam Frudenberg continues to pester, cajole and support us in ensuring we keep building on early successes.

There have been a few changes at the Executive Board level as we have seen individuals move on and, following regional processes defined in the Terms of Reference, new members have been elected to represent the regions. Members continue to commit time to the development of the work to support improvements in the field and inform some of the planned national work programmes.

We are also continuing to build our relationships with many of the relevant national bodies to ensure the voice of the commissioner is heard and considered in many of the elements of the agenda under development.

Increase in ESUCG membership, 2022/2023



This year we have been focussing on:

- Supporting work in relation to the vitally important area of reducing Drug Related Deaths and Harm Reduction and the two working groups have seen membership and interest grow and engagement in national development work increase.
- Working alongside colleagues at the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) to develop the webinars to support delivery of the newly launched Commissioning Quality Standard.
- Liaison with the Faculty of Public Health Special Interest Group to continue to focus on research and best practice as it relates to our agenda.
- Workforce development and the co-creation of several role profiles specifically relating to working in the substance misuse arena with a range of colleagues from across statutory and non-statutory organisations.

It has been, and continues to be, a challenging area of work with significant scrutiny and focus from the government associated with the new monies many of us have received and we are continuing to work with OHID to explore some of the processes implemented to monitor progress. We are also exploring how we can bring in some additional, dedicated capacity to the group to support much of the work we are currently and planning on developing. This will support the demands being placed on those within the network who give up huge amounts of time to build a network that feedback tells us is required to support the ongoing improvements we all know are needed.

For the coming years we are looking to focus activity around effective engagement with lived and living experience, building a support offer in partnership with OHID. We want to support commissioners who are new to the agenda and others who would welcome the opportunity for peer support options to build knowledge - developing a series of lunch and learn sessions to increase our ability to provide settings to share learning and best practice.

It promises to be another busy year and I hope we can count on each other's support to achieve what I think we all know is possible to achieve with the right resources in the right places.

Many thanks for all your support (and especially the two Vice Chairs supporting me in maintaining a smile).

Ben Hughes
Chair of English Substance Use
Commissioners' Group



2. About the ESUCG

The ESUCG is a peer network run by commissioners for commissioners.

Our aim is to provide a strategic forum for those with commissioning responsibility for substance use services, for improved population and patient level outcomes relating to the use of alcohol and other drugs in England.

The ESUCG provides an important space for commissioners to meet, network and work together to improve the commissioning and delivery of integrated services and strategies locally. As well as this, the ESUCG supports a practice improvement approach to commissioning by sharing information, challenges, ideas, models of good practice and supporting problem solving, in order to protect and improve health of local communities, families and individuals, reduce health inequalities and improve the quality and cost effectiveness of commissioned services.

The ESUCG offers commissioners:

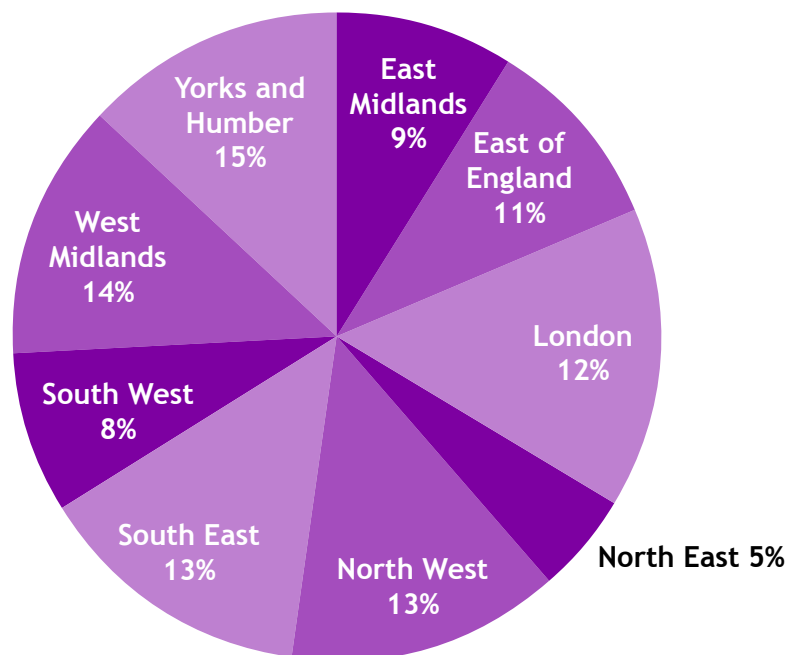
- A dedicated space for drug and alcohol commissioners to share ideas, learning, best practice and peer support.
- An online, secure forum for members' use.
- Three national meetings a year.
- The opportunity to influence drug and alcohol policy and strategy development at a national, regional and local level.

The ESUCG is steered by an Executive Board, made up of a maximum of 18 local authority commissioners who are elected by their peers to represent their region. The Executive Board members are not remunerated, and their participation is supported by the commissioning organisations which employ them. The ESUCG is supported by funding from the local authorities and secretarial support from the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH).

3. Group Membership and Coverage

Membership is open and free to all commissioners of substance use services in local authorities in England. As of March 2023, the ESUCG had **270 members representing 75% of local authorities across all regions of England**. Representation is split across regions as seen below.

Regional representation of ESUCG membership



4. Executive Board and Meetings

The ESUCG Executive Board meets every two months to take forward the group’s workplan (shaped by its members through our annual membership survey) and to discuss and act on issues being faced by the drug and alcohol treatment and recovery sector, and commissioners specifically. The Executive Board has met six times over 2022/23. These meetings have been held virtually due to the geographical spread of membership across England and they have ensured we have maintained contact, reviewed progress against priorities, upheld the ethos of mutual support and learning amongst the group and wider network, and continued to build our approach to supporting the commissioning community - building better links to national policy makers. Executive Board members are supporting the group as well as managing increasingly busy day jobs. Their commitment and effort have resulted in the views of commissioners being considered more in the work done to develop the substance use agenda.

Being a member of the Executive Board is a rewarding role, as this testimony from one of our new Executive members for 2022/23, Lisa, shows:

“I’m very proud to have had the opportunity to sit as an ESUCG executive committee member particularly in its first term at such a significant time with the publication of the Dame Carol Black report. Having the chance to input towards the implementation of the recommendations and the development of the strategy at national level has been a rewarding experience and doing so alongside a fantastic bunch of passionate and diligent commissioners from around the country has been a privilege.”

5. National ESUCG Events

The ESUCG holds quarterly national events for its members. The events run for two hours and are intended to provide opportunities for commissioners to hear insights and updates from academic, policy, provider, practitioner and lived experience voices in the drug and alcohol sector.

Throughout 2022/23, these events continued to provide a safe space for commissioners to receive updates as well as peer support from both local and national colleagues, supporting commissioners in their practice.

Content and Speakers

Each national event agenda is usually composed of:

- An update from the ESUCG **Executive Board** on recent projects and representation on national groups, to ensure the wider membership are informed and able to feed into all workstreams the group is involved in.
- A round of updates from the chairs of the ESUCG's **working groups** (see section VI) on projects they are seeking to take forward, as well as ways for members to get involved.
- Presentations from **guest speakers**.

During the 2022/23 events programme, the following speakers have delivered presentations to the ESUCG :

- **Will Haydock and Richard Chidwick (JCDU)**, Update from JCDU and Q&A.
- **Katherine Brown and Nigel Lloyd (PHIRST Connect, University of Hertfordshire)**, Findings from the evaluation of the move to remote delivery of drug and alcohol services in Leeds during Covid-19.
- **Mark Bowles (The Training Effect) and Helen Gregory (Essex County Council)**, Risk-Avert: An evidence-based intervention addressing adolescent risk-taking behaviours and emotional health.
- **Niamh Eastwood and Shayla Schlossenberg (Release)**, Introduction to Release and Q&A.

Ratings showed a high level of satisfaction with individual agenda items and relevance to attendees' work:

4.4

Individual sessions had an average rating of **4.4 out of 5**

3.7

In response to the statement "I have created links with peers" there was an average score of **3.7 out of 5**

4.2

In response to the statement "I have received important information relevant to my work" there was an average score of **4.2 out of 5**

3.7

In response to the statement "I have identified ways to develop and improve my commissioning practice" there was an average score of **3.7 out of 5**

Key Feedback

Ongoing feedback from our members is highly important to us. Here is what some of them had to say after attending our national webinars:

“Have been to 3 of these meetings as a new commissioner. Bit intimidating when confronted with such experience but joining a subgroup definitely helped ease me in. Very interesting perspectives to be found and totally worthwhile.”

“Really useful way to network and share good practice.”

“Awesome network!”

“This meeting is so useful and really needed.”

“It is really valuable and worth investing time to attend, thank you”

“Was excellent as usual”

6. Working Groups

Harm Reduction

Chair: Alistair Flowers

The aim of the group is to bring together drug and alcohol commissioners, from across the country, to discuss evidence-based actions and interventions that support the delivery of harm reduction initiatives in local communities across England. The group provides a space for commissioners to share information, learning and good practice from across the country and to develop resources for the sector.

In December 2022 before the Harm Reduction working group was formally established, ESUCG Board member Lisa Byrne chaired the first steering group meeting with the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and other partners to begin a needle and syringe provision (NSP) monitoring pilot project, supporting the National Hepatitis C Elimination programme and to inform the ongoing Commissioning Quality Standards Project.

In March 2023, Lisa attended the Hepatitis C National Conference at Oval London. Lisa provided a presentation alongside UKHSA, OHID, and other partners around Hepatitis C Elimination programmes and NSP issues over the last few years. This included a picture of issues pre-Covid, the impact of Covid-19, and a picture post Covid-19, as well as an overview of the potential benefits of developing a monitoring system.

The Harm Reduction working group was then formally established in March 2023 and have met monthly since. During the first two months of operation, the group supported the dissemination of the REACT ‘Improving Vein Care & Reducing Pain’ toolkit for people who inject drugs. The toolkit was co-produced by researchers from the University of Bristol, people who inject drugs, the Bristol Drugs Project and other partners. To date the toolkit has been downloaded more than 150 times with 11% of those downloads originating from a local authority.

The Harm Reduction Group felt that the toolkit was engaging and able to be used in a variety of settings from clinical and outreach settings, through to use by, and for, peer networks. The ESUCG supports a sector-led improvement approach to commissioning and the Harm Reduction Group support its promotion as a model of good practice. The toolkit supports problem solving conversations and can be a useful resource to protect and improve the health of people who inject drugs.

Looking Ahead:

The group is developing its agenda for 2023/24 and has agreed that the next area of focus is developing a template 'Letter of Comfort' that could be used by local authority commissioners with local police forces, to enable the commissioning and dissemination of safer-inhalation kits for people who smoke drugs. Not only will the kits prevent the spread of smoking related harms, but the kits themselves can act as engagement tools for practitioners working to meet the needs of people who use drugs.

Following this piece of work, the group is considering a focus on drug analysis across England, conducting a baseline audit which will summarise and establish current practice, identifying trends and gaps for the group to address. In addition, it is proposed the Harm Reduction group forms a closer link with the Preventing Drug and Alcohol Related Death group with regard to promoting the uptake of Nalox.

Preventing Drug and Alcohol-Related Deaths (DARD)

Chairs: Dan Burn and Angela Hall

The aim of the group is to bring together drug and alcohol commissioners, from across the country, to discuss action to prevent drug and alcohol related deaths, share information, learning, good practice and develop resources for the sector. The group meets quarterly. Having initially prioritised naloxone provision, the group collated a series of case studies, from across the UK, on innovative naloxone projects and initiatives happening in a wide variety of settings including community outreach, family and peer to peer support, housing, police and criminal justice, and treatment and recovery services. The case studies have been published on the [ESUCG Preventing DARDs webpage](#), as a means of sharing learning and good practice.

The group then focused on drug and alcohol-related deaths surveillance systems and review processes, in the September 2022 and January 2023 meetings. Quality Education Solutions (QES) and Integrated Monitoring System (IMS) presented their drug and alcohol related death review and surveillance systems, including considerations for local authorities who had adopted, or were considering adopting, such management information systems and associated support offers. Dr Caroline Copeland, Lecturer in Pharmaceutical Medicine, also presented on the National Programme of Substance Abuse Deaths, managed by Kings College London. As well as this, the group conducted a baseline audit to establish and summarise current

practice across member local authorities and their partnerships.

The group continues to influence Government and submitted a response to the 'preventing drug and alcohol related deaths: guidance for partnership review processes' consultation, on behalf of the ESUCG. In addition, the Chairs meet with OHID, on a monthly basis, to learn about, and influence, their DARD work programme and national action plan, and are members of the Drugs National Intelligence Network - feeding in the views of the group, and reporting back to them, at their quarterly meetings.

Tier 4: Inpatient Detox and Residential Rehabilitation

Chairs: Lisa Luhman and Steve O'Neill

The Tier 4 Sub-Group aims to provide a space for commissioners to come together and strategically discuss how we commission, procure, monitor and evaluate Tier 4 provision. With the introduction of the 2% RR/IPD target these discussions have increased in importance and value. The initial objective of the group was to produce a Residential Rehab commissioning/procurement guidance document, this was achieved this year. The group is now being used as an informal networking meeting and we encourage members to share local issues that we can jointly discuss and offer advice/support with.

The sub-group have continued to meet on a regular basis and have welcomed a number of new members from across the country. The subgroup meetings have been used as an opportunity to discuss national, regional and local Tier 4 issues, challenges and successes and has been a great space for networking and sharing of good practice.

The sub-group has achieved the following this year:

- Successfully published [guidance](#) for new commissioners on commissioning/procuring Tier 4 services.
- Ongoing work with OHID/Drug and Alcohol Improvement Support (DAIST) leads to inform system thinking and change.
- Continuing to share best practice around Tier 4 frameworks within Commissioning.
- Engaging with specialist providers to develop best mutual understanding of the agenda.

- Chairs also met with Rehab Online, which provides an opportunity to share the commissioner perspective on the advertised publicly available information for people who want to go to rehab.
- Chairs are members of the DAIST Expert Reference Group focussing on residential rehab provision and will represent the sub-group at these meetings.

Multiple Disadvantage and Complex Needs Working Group

Chairs: Kim Hager, Lisa Byrne, Niamh Cullen

The Drug Strategy pledged to “build upon learning from the [Changing Futures Programme](#) to improve access to treatment and support for adults experiencing multiple disadvantage - including combinations of homelessness, addiction, mental ill health, domestic abuse and contact with the criminal justice system”. The strategy acknowledges that “...mental health problems and trauma are often central to an individual’s dependency on drugs and alcohol, and all too often people fall through the gap between services”. The aim of this working group is for commissioners to share learning and good practice, and to embed the learning from initiatives such as Changing Futures and Fulfilling Lives when providing appropriate support services to this vulnerable population. The group’s TORs are being developed and they meet quarterly.

In January 2023, work began collaborating with MEAM to develop the policy briefing: ‘Effective commissioning of Substance Use related services for people experiencing *multiple disadvantage*’. The paper is currently in development and is due to be published following ongoing consultation with the working group.

In March 2023, it was agreed by the Executive Board that the Dual Diagnosis and Co-Occurring Conditions working group would merge with the Multiple Disadvantage and Complex Needs working group to address the needs of commissioners’ capacities. Dual Diagnosis and Co-Occurring conditions will become a key focus area for this group, and the group will be consulting with OHID/DHSC on their Co-Occurring Action Plan due to be published in January 2024.

Good Practice in Commissioning

Chairs: Kim Hager, Mary Bailey and Sarah Quilty

The CQS is a tool designed to support partnerships in the planning and delivery of high-quality treatment and recovery systems. The working group’s aim is to support commissioners to complete the self-assessment and utilise the tool towards local planning and delivery. Since the development of the working group during 2022, the group has worked with OHID to develop and design a series of national webinars to build commissioner confidence, provide a space to share insight and identify working examples of how to address challenges.

To date, two national webinars have been delivered and the third, scheduled for September 2023, is currently in development:

- An introduction to the alcohol and drug Commissioning Quality Standard.
- Strand 1 - Partnerships & Governance.

The webinars have engaged speakers from across the country to share their experiences and learning including North East & Cumbria ICS, Northumbria Police, and LERO Recovery Connections.

Future focus now includes the design and delivery of further webinars covering the remaining strands of the CQS, running alongside development of follow-up regional workshops, including regional OHID and ESUCG leads, to further develop and build on the national webinar series. A survey to ascertain commissioner use and experience of the CQS tool is also currently underway to help understand and refine delivery of future webinars.

7. Wider Engagement

Over the last year, having worked with OHID on the development of the Commissioning Quality Standard, ESUCG members have been working closely with OHID on the content and approach to a series of webinars to support the launch of the CQS that are being rolled out in 2023/24. We also continue to ensure that the voice of the commissioner is effectively represented across the multiple national workstreams relating to implementing the recommendations from the Dame Carol Black review.

As a group we are now meeting monthly with OHID to:

- Define and develop the part we can play in a future support offer to commissioners.
- Continue to lobby for a refinement to the grant reporting requirement.
- Develop a more effective approach to producing guidance and best practice provision in partnership with national bodies.

We have and will continue to meet with the Joint Combatting Drugs Unit to ensure we are linked into developments in relation to wider delivery of the National Drug Strategy.

In addition, and together with ADPH, we are also exploring opportunities to work through DsPH regionally and locally, to maintain a focus on the specialist needs of the agenda and its delivery networks.

Members of the Executive Board have also been represented at the National Expert Advisory Group in relation to Workforce development and to date we have been contributing to the role profiles for frontline worker provision with a view that the *proposed developments around commissioners will involve significant input from us in 2023/24.*

8. Looking Ahead

As we reflect on the past year's progress, the ESUCG Executive would like to take the opportunity to thank all its members and partners for their ongoing hard work, support, and engagement.

While the ESUCG has achieved some great successes in 2022/23, we acknowledge that the work does not stop here.

Looking ahead to 2023/24, the ESUCG is looking to:

- Work collaboratively with the English HIV and Sexual Health Commissioners' Group (EHSHCG) to deliver a masterclass on the topic of Chemsex.
- Work with OHID to support the development of a support offer in relation to commissioners nationally, to ensure it fits with the needs of those on the ground.
- Work with key national stakeholders, at the earliest possible time, to develop guidance documents for commissioners which are currently being produced by OHID and others to support the delivery of the National Drug Strategy.
- Build the capacity of the ESUCG to enable us to influence the agenda at the most appropriate level and with the most appropriate partners.
- Build relationships across the network of national stakeholders (policy, provision and commissioning) to better act collaboratively across the agenda.

9. Acknowledgements

Executive Committee members 2022/23

Alistair Flowers | Islington Borough Council

Andy Brown | Brent Council

Angela Hall | North Yorkshire Council

Anthony Bullock | Staffordshire Council

Benham Khazaeli | North Tyneside Council

Ben Hughes (Chair) | Essex County Council

Cavelle Lynch | Buckinghamshire Council

Daniel Burn | Leeds City Council

John Liddell | Northumberland County Council

Karen Wood | Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Pool Council

Kim Hager (Vice Chair) | Cornwall Council

Lisa Byrne | Surrey County Council

Maggie Boreham | City of London and Hackney Council

Mark Knight | Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Mary Bailey | Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Niamh Cullen (Vice Chair) | Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council

Sarah Quilty | Nottinghamshire County Council

Secretariat 2022/23

Adam Frudenberg | Association of Directors of Public Health

Katarzyna Arendt | Association of Directors of Public Health

Katla Arnarsdottir | Association of Directors of Public Health

10. Contact

The Association of Directors of Public Health (UK)

Hamilton House

1 Temple Avenue

London EC4Y 0HA

www.adph.org.uk

Secretariat: commissioners@adph.org.uk

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