

Fit for the Future Engagement Report

- **Public Workshop**
- **Wednesday 15 July 2026, 11am-12.30pm**
- **Yemeni Community Association, Tildasley Street, West Bromwich, B70 9SJ**
- **Engagement Report Published on August 2026**

1. Background

Our Fit for the Future public workshop in Sandwell formed part of our programme of ongoing engagement with our patients, communities, staff and partners about the future of local NHS services. The workshop, held on 15 July 2026 at the Yemeni Community Association in West Bromwich, provided an opportunity for people and organisations from across Sandwell and West Birmingham to understand the direction of travel for local NHS services, share their experiences and priorities, and influence how we deliver our Group Strategy.

Our Group Strategy sets out our ambition to improve the health and life chances of the people we serve, while responding to increasing demand for healthcare, workforce pressures, financial constraints and the changing health needs of our population. We recognise that continuing to deliver services in the same way is not sustainable. Our strategy therefore sets out a direction towards stronger community-based care, prevention, greater use of digital technology and closer partnership working.

The introduction of our NHS Group Model provides an important context for these changes. The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust and Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust have been working closely together and formally began working as an NHS Group Model in April 2026. Through this model, we are working together where this can improve services, support our staff and make better use of public resources, while both Trusts remain separate statutory organisations with their own local identity and accountability.

The workshop provided an opportunity for us to introduce these new ways of working and explain why change is needed, while giving people from across Sandwell and West Birmingham an early opportunity to influence our thinking about how changes should be developed and delivered. We recognise the importance of involving our communities early, so that the experiences, priorities and concerns of patients, communities and partners can be considered alongside organisational and system priorities. We designed the workshop around listening and learning, encouraging participants to share what matters most to them, what is working well and what they believe needs to change.

Holding this workshop in Sandwell provided an opportunity for us to hear directly from people and organisations with knowledge and experience of the communities served by Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust. The workshop brought together a range of partners and community representatives, providing insight from organisations and individuals who work with and support local people. This included perspectives from across health, care, local government and the voluntary and community sector.

Our engagement is not intended to be a one-off exercise. We have committed to a programme of regular public workshops across Dudley, Sandwell and West Birmingham, providing ongoing opportunities for people to hear about progress against our strategy, understand upcoming changes, ask questions of decision-makers and influence future priorities and service developments. The feedback from this workshop will therefore contribute not only to the development of our future plans and service design, but also to the focus of our subsequent engagement activity.

The workshop had four principal objectives:

- to launch our Group Strategy and explain why change is needed;
- to provide context on the national NHS agenda and what this means locally;
- to give people from across Sandwell and West Birmingham an opportunity to influence our future plans and priorities; and
- to strengthen our relationships with partners and communities by creating space for meaningful discussion.

This report documents the engagement we undertook, the stakeholders who participated, the views and experiences they shared during the workshop, and the key themes arising from the discussions. It provides a transparent record of what we heard and how we will use this feedback to inform our ongoing engagement, planning and development of future services.

2. Purpose of the workshop

The purpose of the Fit for the Future workshop was to continue our conversation with patients, communities, staff and partners about the future of local NHS services and, in particular, to hear from people and organisations across Sandwell and West Birmingham.

The workshop provided an opportunity for us to introduce our new Group Strategy and explain the context for change, including the national NHS direction and the challenges facing our local services. We wanted to ensure that participants understood why we need to change the way we work and how our Group Strategy responds to the needs of our local population.

Importantly, the workshop was designed not simply to present our plans, but to create space for participants to share their experiences, priorities and ideas. We wanted to hear what matters most to people, what is working well and what needs to change, so that their views could help inform how we develop and deliver new ways of working and future services.

The workshop therefore had five key purposes:

- **To introduce our Group Strategy** and explain our ambition to improve the health and life chances of the people we serve.
- **To explain why change is needed**, including the increasing demand for healthcare and the workforce and financial pressures facing our NHS services.
- **To discuss future ways of working**, including our ambition to work more closely as a Group and move towards stronger community-based care, prevention, digital solutions and partnership working.
- **To gather the views, experiences and priorities of people and organisations across Sandwell and West Birmingham**, so that these can help inform future planning, service development and how we deliver change.
- **To build long-term relationships with our patients, communities and partners**, creating opportunities for continued dialogue and involvement as our strategy develops.

We were clear that this workshop was part of a longer-term conversation rather than a one-off engagement activity. We want to continue to listen, learn and work with our communities as we develop our plans, with future workshops providing opportunities to hear about progress, understand upcoming changes, ask questions and influence future priorities and service developments.

The discussions captured through this workshop therefore provide an important insight into what matters to people and organisations across Sandwell and West Birmingham. This report sets out what we heard and provides a record of the feedback that will help inform our ongoing engagement and the development of future services.

3. Who we spoke to?

Our workshop brought together a broad range of people and organisations with an interest in, and understanding of, local health and care services. As this was our first public workshop in Sandwell, the event provided an opportunity to hear specifically from people and organisations connected to the Sandwell and West Birmingham community, while also welcoming representatives from across the wider Black Country area.

The workshop was attended by representatives from our Trust, local government, NHS and health partners, community and voluntary organisations, local services and organisations that work directly with patients, carers and communities. We were able to hear from a wide range of community leaders and organisations that represent and support diverse communities across Sandwell and the wider area. These organisations have established relationships with local people and provide services and support to people who may experience health inequalities or face barriers in accessing health and care services.

This was particularly valuable in helping us understand the experiences and priorities of communities beyond those who were able to attend the workshop as individuals. We also heard from partners who work directly with our patients and communities across a range of settings.

3.1 Stakeholder groups represented

The workshop included representation from:

Local residents and community representatives

- Local residents
- Healthwatch
- Sandwell Pensioners Group
- Tipton Pensioners Group.

Statutory and NHS partners

- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC)
- NHS partners, including the Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Sandwell and West Birmingham (SWB) NHS Trust registered volunteers.

Voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector

- **Youth Space** – forum for people aged between 13 to 21 years, who are interested in health and would like to find out more about hospitals and community services in Sandwell and West Birmingham.
- **Agewell** - delivering services to support and encourage older people to age well in Sandwell.
- **Tipton Diabetes** – providing support, advice and guidance to people with diabetes in Sandwell.
- **Barnardo's Family Hub** - provide accessible, integrated early help support for families from antenatal to 19 years.
- **Chinese Community Centre** – based in Birmingham, providing support services such as wellbeing activities, carers support and health promotion.

- **Flourish** - works in partnership with the NHS and other care providers to reduce health inequalities across Perry Barr West Birmingham.
- **Sandwell Consortium** – provides services that alleviate poverty, improve health and wellbeing, connect and empower residents and build community resilience.
- **Sandwell Deaf Community Association** - supports deaf and hard of hearing communities.
- **William Taylor Foundation Trust** - directing grants and donations to directly support students, focussing funds toward areas that can make a real, tangible difference to young people.
- **Headway Birmingham and Sandwell** – provides help and support to people affected by brain injury.
- **Yew Tree and Tame Bridge.com** - local neighbourhood forum and voluntary-led community organisation, focused on the improvement of the health, social, economic and environmental well-being of people living in Sandwell.

Together, these organisations provide support across a wide range of health, care, community, wellbeing and social needs. Their involvement provided an opportunity to hear perspectives from organisations working directly with patients, carers and communities, including people who may not routinely engage with NHS engagement activity.

3.2 Attendance

A total of 47 people attended the workshop.

The table below sets out the stakeholder representation at the event. Where individual attendance numbers were captured, these are included to provide a clear record of who participated.

Stakeholder group	Number attending
Trust staff	3
NHS and health partners	6
Sandwell Council / local government	6
Voluntary, community and faith sector	8
Community and support organisations	4
Patients / members of the public	12
Other partners	8 (including Youth Space and SWB Registered volunteers)
Total	47

4. How we engaged?

We designed the Fit for the Future workshop to provide a balance between sharing information about our Group Strategy and, importantly, creating space for participants to share their experiences, priorities and views about the future of local NHS services.

The workshop used a combination of presentation, video, facilitated discussion and opportunities for feedback and questions. This approach enabled us to provide a shared understanding of the reasons for change and our future direction, before asking participants to consider what these changes could mean for patients, communities and services across Sandwell and West Birmingham.

4.1 Workshop format

The workshop comprised five main elements:

Presentation - We introduced the Fit for the Future programme and our new Group Strategy. The presentation provided context about our organisations, the challenges facing local NHS services and why we need to consider new ways of working. It also outlined our ambition to strengthen community-based care, focus on prevention, make effective use of digital technology and work more closely with partners and communities.

Video - A short animation was shown to provide participants with an overview of our Group Strategy and the changes we are seeking to make. This provided an accessible introduction to our future direction before the discussion sessions began.

Facilitated table discussions - The main engagement activity was a series of facilitated table discussions. Participants were invited to discuss the future of local health and care services and share their experiences, priorities and ideas in response to the questions provided.

Each table had a facilitator who introduced the discussion, encouraged participation and helped ensure that everyone had an opportunity to contribute. Facilitators were asked to encourage a broad range of views and capture the key themes emerging from the discussion rather than attributing comments to individual participants.

The discussions focused on five areas aligned to our Fit for the Future programme:

- **Community Care** – Health and care services provided outside of hospital, supporting people in their homes and local communities.

- **Elective Care** – Planned healthcare, including appointments, tests, procedures and treatment that are arranged in advance.
- **Outpatients** – Care provided without an overnight hospital stay, including consultations, assessments, follow-ups and ongoing management.
- **Diagnostics** – Tests and investigations used to understand a person's health, identify conditions and support decisions about treatment.
- **Neighbourhood Health** – Health and care services working together around the needs of people in a local area, with a focus on joined-up support and prevention.

Feedback session - Following the table discussions, facilitators were invited to share key reflections and themes from their tables with the wider group. This provided an opportunity to hear a range of perspectives and identify common issues emerging across the different discussions.

Open questions and reflections - The workshop also provided an opportunity for participants to ask questions and share further reflections. This allowed participants to raise issues that may not have been covered during the table discussions and seek clarification from members of the organisation.

4.2 How we captured feedback

The emphasis throughout the workshop was on listening and understanding what mattered to participants. Facilitators captured the key points and themes emerging from each table discussion rather than recording individual comments or attributing views to specific participants.

This approach encouraged participants to contribute openly and allowed a range of perspectives to be heard. Facilitators supported the discussions to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to contribute and that no single voice dominated.

The feedback presented in this report therefore reflects the themes and issues raised collectively during the workshop, rather than representing the views of every individual attendee or suggesting that there was consensus on every issue.

We have sought to reflect the feedback accurately and objectively, including areas where participants identified opportunities, raised concerns or highlighted issues that they felt needed further consideration.

5. Discussion topics

The table discussions provided an opportunity for participants to explore what our future ways of working could mean for patients, communities and local services.

Participants were encouraged to share their experiences, priorities and ideas, with facilitators capturing the key themes emerging from each discussion.

The discussions focused on five areas aligned to the themes within our Fit for the Future programme:

- **Transforming Community Care** - Participants considered the future of community-based care and what is needed to support people to receive more care closer to home. The discussion provided an opportunity to explore how services could work differently to better support people in the community and help people stay healthier for longer.
- **Transforming Planned Care (also referred to as elective care)** - This discussion focused on planned care and how we can improve the way patients move through planned services. Participants were invited to consider what is working well, what could be improved and what matters most to people when accessing planned care.
- **Transforming Outpatient Care** - Participants discussed how outpatient services could be transformed to provide more care in the community and make more effective use of NHS resources. The discussion explored what matters to people when accessing outpatient care and how services could be designed differently to improve access, experience and outcomes.
- **Transforming Diagnostic Care** - The diagnostics discussion explored how we can improve access to and delivery of diagnostic services as part of our future ways of working. Participants were invited to share their experiences and views on what matters when people need diagnostic tests and how services could be improved.
- **Transforming Neighbourhood Health** - The neighbourhoods discussion considered how health and care services can work more closely with communities and local partners. Participants explored the importance of understanding the needs of different neighbourhoods and working together to support healthier communities and reduce health inequalities.

Across all five areas, we were interested in hearing what participants felt was working well, what needed to change and what should be considered as we develop our plans. The discussions were intended to complement the wider Group Strategy and provide an opportunity for participants to influence how the strategy is translated into future service design and delivery.

These discussions also reflected our wider ambition to strengthen community-based care, focus more on prevention and work in partnership with local organisations and communities to improve health outcomes.

6. What we heard

The discussions provided an opportunity for participants to share their experiences of local health and care services and to consider what matters most as we develop new ways of working. Across the different discussion areas, several common themes emerged.

Participants recognised the strengths of our services, including caring and expert staff, examples of well-coordinated care and the important role played by local community organisations. At the same time, they highlighted a number of barriers to accessing care and called for services to be more joined up, accessible, personalised and connected to the communities they serve.

The following sections summarise the key themes that emerged in response to the four questions explored during the discussions.

Important note: The findings below represent the themes captured by facilitators during the workshop. They are not intended to suggest that every participant held the same view or that there was consensus on every issue.

6.1 What works well?

Theme 1 – Caring and skilled staff make a positive difference

Participants recognised the expertise and commitment of staff and highlighted positive experiences where services were well organised and coordinated. Examples included positive experiences of specialist clinical expertise, caring staff and well-organised pathways. Participants also highlighted examples of good practice within local services that they felt could be replicated more widely.

Theme 2 – Community organisations are a significant strength

Participants were clear that Sandwell has a rich and diverse community sector, with trusted organisations and places already supporting local people. Examples included community groups providing peer support, family hubs supporting access to maternity services and community organisations helping people navigate health and care. Participants felt these trusted relationships provide an important foundation for future neighbourhood health approaches.

Theme 3 – Some services already provide good access and coordination

Participants highlighted examples of rapid access to diagnostics, organised patient pathways and services where communication between teams worked well. The positive experiences shared provided useful examples of what participants would like to see more consistently across the wider system.

Key messages

Participants told us that there is a strong foundation to build on – particularly the commitment of staff, examples of coordinated care and the strength of Sandwell's community sector.

Question 2: What doesn't work well?

Theme 1 – Access can be difficult and inconsistent

Access was one of the strongest recurring themes. Participants described difficulties getting appointments and navigating services, including long waits, inconsistent access between services and difficulties getting through to services by telephone. There was concern that repeated difficulties accessing care can result in people losing confidence and, in some cases, giving up trying to seek help. Participants also highlighted barriers for people who work, study or have other commitments, and the need for greater flexibility around where and when care is provided.

Theme 2 – Communication is not consistently accessible

Participants told us that communication does not always meet people's needs. This included concerns about information not being available in accessible formats, difficulties for people who are deaf or visually impaired, inconsistent access to interpreters and information containing medical terminology that is difficult to understand. Participants wanted information to be clear, timely, available in different languages and formats, and appropriate to people's individual communication needs.

Theme 3 – Services do not always feel joined up

Participants highlighted gaps between different parts of the health and care system, including connections between General Practice, imaging and other diagnostic services. They wanted patient information to be available across healthcare settings and for systems to communicate more effectively with each other.

Theme 4 – People do not always know what support is available

Participants repeatedly highlighted a lack of awareness about local services and community support. They felt that good services and community assets already exist, but people do not always know where to find them or how to access them. This included examples such as “safe places” and other community-based support.

Key messages

Participants told us that access, communication and navigation need to be simpler and more consistent, with better connections between services and clearer information about what support is available.

Question 3: What matters most?

Theme 1 – Care that is accessible and closer to home

Participants wanted meaningful care to be available closer to where people live, work and spend their time. They highlighted the importance of local knowledge, convenience and choice, while recognising that people will have different needs and preferences. There was particular support for making better use of trusted community settings and organisations rather than expecting people to navigate unfamiliar services.

Theme 2 – Being listened to and involved in decisions

Participants told us that people want to feel listened to, respected and involved in decisions about their care. There was support for greater shared decision-making and more personalised care, with people having confidence to ask questions and challenge decisions where appropriate.

Theme 3 – Prevention and wellbeing

Prevention was a strong theme, particularly within the discussion about neighbourhood health. Participants supported building on existing community strengths to help people stay healthier for longer. They highlighted the role of community groups, peer support, education, screening and local organisations in supporting prevention and wellbeing. Participants also suggested that schools and education could play a greater role in helping people understand their health, conditions and how to access care.

Theme 4 – Choice without digital exclusion

Participants recognised that digital services can make access easier, particularly for people who are confident using them. However, they were clear that digital should be an option, not a requirement. They wanted people to be able to choose how they access care and communicate with services, with alternatives available for people who are digitally excluded or have accessibility needs.

Key messages

Participants told us that good care means being able to access the right support at the right time, close to home where appropriate, while feeling listened to, respected and involved in decisions.

Question 4: What would you change?

Theme 1 – Create clearer routes into services and support

Participants wanted a clearer way of understanding what services are available, where to go and who can help. Suggestions included a central directory of services, improved navigation tools and better information about community support. Participants also suggested that this information should be regularly reviewed and tested with local people to ensure it remains accurate and useful.

Theme 2 – Make better use of community organisations and trusted places

Participants wanted health and care services to work more closely with organisations that people already know and trust. The examples shared demonstrated how community organisations can provide support, information, peer networks and opportunities for prevention in places where people already feel comfortable. There was a strong message that future neighbourhood health services should wrap around existing community strengths, rather than creating entirely new structures without recognising what is already working.

Theme 3 – Improve continuity and coordination

Participants wanted greater continuity of care and better connections between professionals, services, carers and communities. They highlighted the importance of systems talking to each other, joined-up records, smoother transitions and clearer responsibility for supporting people throughout their care journey.

Theme 4 – Build trust through involvement, accountability and lived experience

Participants told us that future service development needs to be grounded in the experiences of local people. They called for greater involvement of communities in decisions, opportunities to monitor and review progress, greater diversity and lived experience within leadership, and a willingness to acknowledge concerns rather than becoming defensive. There was also a strong message about maintaining regular face-to-face relationships between professionals, communities and the public.

Key messages

Participants want us to move from simply providing services to working alongside communities, using local knowledge, trusted relationships and lived experience to design and improve services.

7. Cross-cutting themes

Across the different discussion areas, a number of common themes emerged. While participants were asked to consider different aspects of future service delivery, there were clear similarities in what they told us about their experiences and what they would like to see from future ways of working across Sandwell and West Birmingham.

People want services to be easier to access and navigate - Participants told us that accessing and navigating health and care services can be difficult. People described challenges with getting appointments, contacting services and understanding where to go for the right support. Participants wanted clearer information about available services and simpler routes into care, including better signposting to community-based support. There was also a strong message that services should be designed around people's lives, with greater flexibility around how, where and when they access care.

People want care to be more joined up - Participants told us that services need to work better together. People highlighted the importance of better communication and information sharing between services and professionals. They wanted greater continuity of care and smoother transitions between different parts of the health and care system. Participants also emphasised the importance of people not having to repeatedly explain their circumstances to different services and professionals.

Communication needs to work for everyone - Participants told us that clear, accessible communication is fundamental to good care. They highlighted the need for information to be easier to understand and available in appropriate formats and languages. Particular attention was drawn to the needs of people who are deaf, visually impaired or have other communication or accessibility requirements. Participants also recognised the benefits of digital communication but were clear that digital should provide choice rather than become a barrier to accessing care.

Local communities are an important part of the solution - Participants told us that we should build on the strengths already present within Sandwell's communities. The workshop highlighted the breadth of voluntary, community and faith organisations already supporting local people. Participants identified these organisations, alongside trusted community settings, as important assets that can contribute to prevention, wellbeing, information and support. There was a strong message that future neighbourhood approaches should build on these existing relationships and expertise rather than working in isolation from them.

Prevention and early support matter - Participants told us that we need to place greater emphasis on prevention and supporting people to stay well.

They highlighted the role of community organisations, education, screening, health information and peer support in helping people understand and manage their health. Participants felt that supporting people earlier could help reduce the need for more intensive health and care services later.

People want to be listened to and involved - Participants told us that involvement needs to continue beyond individual engagement events. People wanted their experiences and ideas to influence the development of future services and were interested in opportunities to be involved in shaping, testing and reviewing changes. There was also a message about building trust through regular communication, being open about progress and demonstrating what has changed as a result of people's feedback.

8. What this means?

The feedback from the Sandwell and West Birmingham workshop provides us with an important early insight into what local people, communities and partners value and where they see opportunities to improve health and care services. The feedback highlighted the following:

Strong support for:

- **Building on the strengths of our staff and existing services** - Participants recognised the commitment and expertise of staff and shared examples of services and pathways that work well. There was a clear message that future change should build on these strengths and share good practice more widely.
- **Working with communities and local partners** - Participants recognised the important role of voluntary, community and faith organisations in supporting local people. There was support for stronger partnership working and making better use of trusted community organisations and local assets.
- **More joined-up, personalised care** - Participants supported the ambition to make care more coordinated and responsive to individual needs, with better connections between services and greater continuity throughout people's care.

Concerns regarding:

- **Access to services** - Participants highlighted difficulties accessing appointments and contacting services, alongside concerns about waiting times and inconsistencies between services. They wanted simpler routes into care and greater flexibility around how and when services can be accessed.

- **Communication and accessibility** - Participants raised concerns that information is not always clear, timely or accessible to everyone. They highlighted the need to consider different communication needs, languages and accessibility requirements.
- **Fragmentation between services** - Participants described experiences where different parts of the health and care system do not always work together effectively. They wanted better communication and information sharing between professionals and services.
- **Digital exclusion** - While participants recognised the benefits of digital services, they were clear that digital approaches should not become a barrier for people who cannot or do not want to use them.

Opportunities to:

- **Make services easier to navigate** - There is an opportunity to provide clearer information about services, improve signposting and strengthen care navigation so that people know where to go for the right support.
- **Build on community assets** - Participants identified a wide range of local organisations, groups and trusted places that already support health and wellbeing. There is an opportunity to strengthen relationships with these organisations and consider how they can contribute to future neighbourhood approaches.
- **Strengthen prevention and early support** - Participants identified opportunities to make better use of health education, screening, peer support and community-based interventions to help people stay well and access support earlier.
- **Increase choice and flexibility** - There is an opportunity to provide greater choice around how, where and when people access services, while ensuring that services remain accessible to people with different needs.
- **Strengthen co-production** - Participants expressed an interest in being involved not only in discussing change but in helping to shape and review future services. There is an opportunity to build this into the next stages of service development.

Areas requiring further engagement:

The workshop provided an important starting point, but participants' feedback also highlighted areas where further engagement would be valuable.

Further engagement will be important to understand:

- how people want services to be delivered closer to home.
- what good communication and accessible information looks like for different communities.
- how people experiencing barriers to access can be better supported.
- how voluntary, community and faith organisations can contribute to future models of care.

- how neighbourhood approaches can build on existing community strengths.
- how digital and non-digital routes can work alongside each other.
- how we can improve continuity between different parts of the health and care system.
- how patients, residents and communities can be involved in co-producing future services.

We will use future engagement activity to explore these issues in greater depth and to hear from a wider range of people and communities across Sandwell and West Birmingham.

9. What happens next

Following the workshop, we reviewed and analysed the feedback captured across all discussion groups. We have then produced this report detailing the key themes, opportunities and concerns raised by participants.

We will now share a summary of what we heard with attendees and consider the feedback alongside our existing knowledge, evidence and service information.

Where we have identified areas for further engagement, we will use this to inform the focus of our future workshops.

We will also raise the specific issues raised by participants that require further exploration. This will be done via the Trust's Patient Experience Group.

9.1 How we will use the feedback

The feedback will be used to:

- inform the development of our plans and priorities.
- identify opportunities to improve the patient and community experience.
- highlight issues that require further consideration.
- identify areas where further engagement is needed.
- inform the design of future engagement activity.
- help us test and refine proposals as they develop.

9.2 Future engagement

We are committed to continuing the conversation with patients, communities, staff and partners. Future engagement will provide opportunities to explore the insights raised at this workshop in more depth and to involve people in the development of future services.

We will seek to broaden participation and hear from people and communities who may not have been represented, or who may face particular barriers to engaging with NHS services.

This will allow us to move from understanding what matters to people towards working with people to explore how future services could work in practice.

We will keep listening, keep people informed and keep communities involved as our plans develop. We will share what we have heard, explain what happens next and show how engagement has influenced our thinking.

If you would like to keep in touch and receive updates on opportunities to be involved, please contact the involvement team via 0121 507 2671 or email swbh.engagement@nhs.net.