

Health Policy Officers Network: taking stock

“The best bit is that there are no stupid questions”

30 May 2017

Background

The Health Policy Officers Network or HPON is a peer support network for health policy officers working in small to medium sized charities. The group is administered jointly by Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS), and the Queens Nursing Institute for Scotland (QNIS), and meets regularly to discuss key policy issues.

The network has a total of 32 individual members from 25 different organisations who attend meetings based on interest and relevance to their area of work. There are around 18 people who regularly attend meetings.

The network was set up in August 2016 and has convened a total of six times with content varying from group discussion on specific policy consultations or processes to hosting external speakers. VHS and QNIS scan the policy horizon to make sure the topics for discussion and speakers are relevant and up-to-date.

Meetings at a glance

26th April 2017 – Health and Social Care Delivery Plan

Invited Phil Raines, the Scottish Government Lead on the Health and Social Care Delivery Plan to come and give a presentation on the wider background and context of the Plan, the content and how it is intended to be used.

VHS produced a [Summary Report](#) on the Health and Social Care Delivery Plan.

15th February 2017 – Lobbying Act and its implications for third sector organisations

Invited Billy McLaren, the Scottish Parliament Lobbying Registrar and his colleague James Drummond to come and speak to the group regarding the Lobbying Act, what constitutes as lobbying and the process of registering your lobbying activity.

VHS produced a [briefing on Lobbying Act](#). Due to the engagement at this meeting, a member of the Network was able to secure a position on the Lobbying Act Working Group.

16th December 2016 – Discussion around the Consultation on the new National Health and Social Care Standards

Invited Fiona Wardell, Standards and Indicators Lead at Health Improvement Scotland to give more information about the Scottish Government consultation on the new National Health and Social Care Standards and how Healthcare Improvement Scotland and Care Inspectorate would monitor the standards. VHS extended the invitation to this meeting to member organisations and drafted a set of questions for group discussions. The presentation, discussion and group sessions helped inform [VHS's response to the consultation](#).

14th November 2016 – Meeting to discuss Cross Party Groups (CPG), what CPG membership there is in the network, if network members provide secretariat for any CPGs and what support the group could offer to newly registered CPGs.

VHS compiled a list of CPGs that would be relevant to policy officers working in health and QNIS wrote a [blog](#) about the discussion.

22nd September 2016 – Meeting to discuss the work of the Health and Sport Committee. The Clerk of the Health and Sport Committee invited us to the Scottish Parliament to discuss the different work streams the committee were involved in as well as ways in which third sector organisations could engage with the committee and the parliament. VHS produced a [blog](#) explaining the role and work of the Health and Sport Committee and their different areas of work. VHS were able to develop a positive working relationship with the committee Clerk and he is now delivering presentation on the committee report looking at Health Care in Prisons at our Health Inequalities Cross Party Group Meeting in June 2017.

3rd August 2016 – Initial Meeting of the Health Policy Officers Network

At this meeting QNIS and VHS agreed the terms of reference and remit for the network with the members.

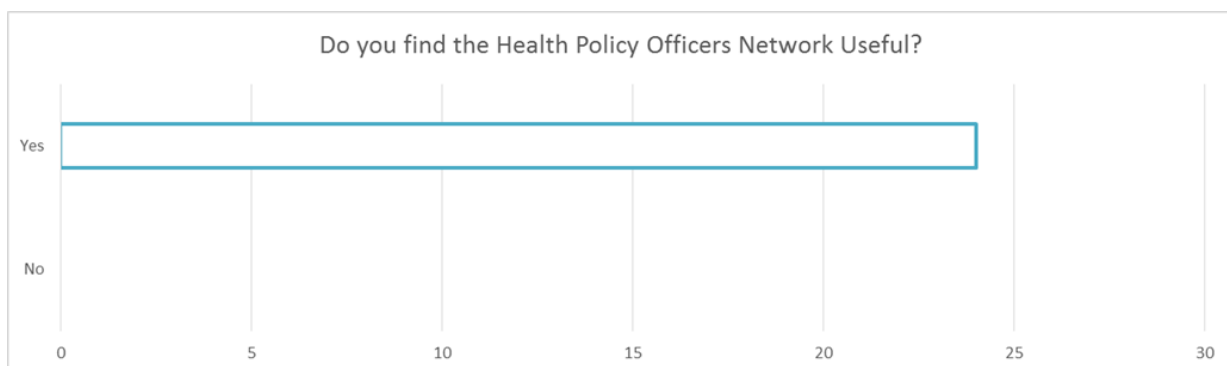
QNIS published a [blog](#) detailing the inaugural meeting of the group.

Survey Analysis

A Survey Monkey questionnaire was sent to the 32 individual members of the Health Policy Officers Network during May 2017. Within three weeks we received 24 responses, giving us a response rate of 75%. A full survey report is available on request.

Survey Analysis Content of the Network

100% of respondents think the Health Policy Officers Network is useful.



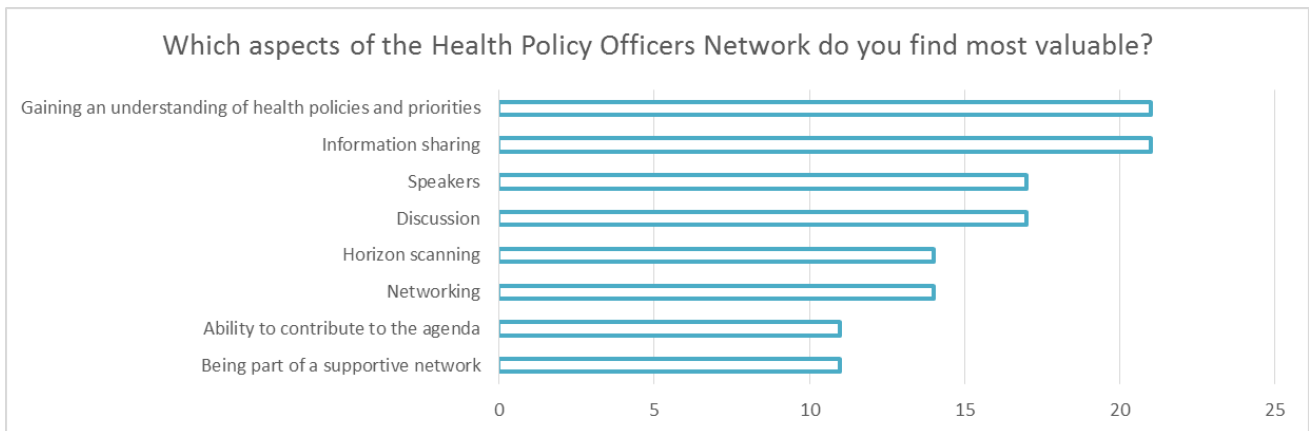
Some comments included:

“Great network the meetings are always relevant, topical and you seem to get there before anyone else! It is better than any other policy network.”

“The network provides a wonderful opportunity to get together in a supported environment to discuss different health policy areas. The best bit is that there are no stupid questions”

“I find the format of the recent meetings very useful indeed - i think it works best when Kiren has organised a speaker to come and talk to us about a particular topic and we can ask questions.”

Network members found, ‘information sharing’ and ‘gaining and understanding of health policies and priorities’ to be the most valuable aspects of the Health Policy Officers Network.

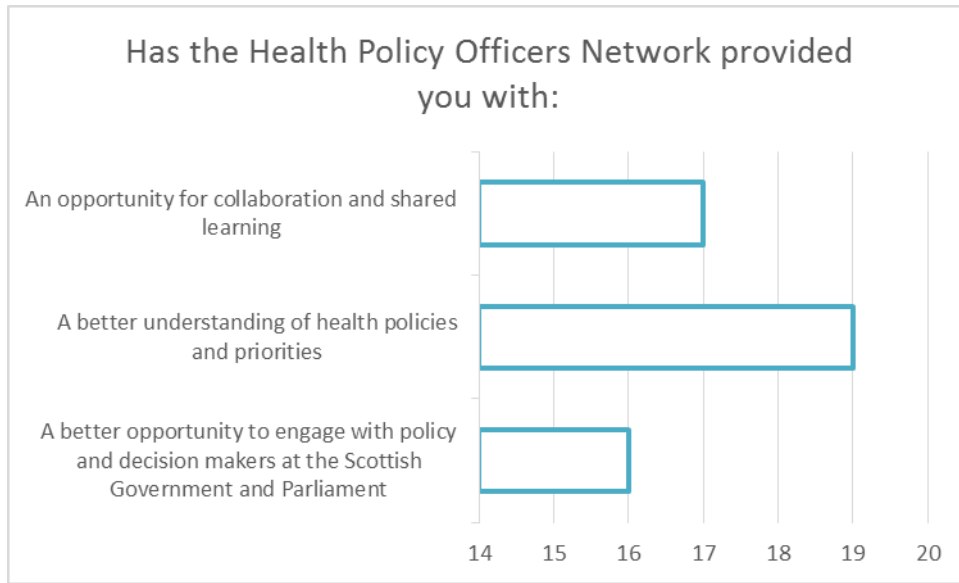


Some Comments included:

“I have attended every meeting because of the quality of the content and the discussion with other organisations.”

“I have found the group useful in a number of different ways. The advice, insight and experience of members of the group is particularly helpful.”

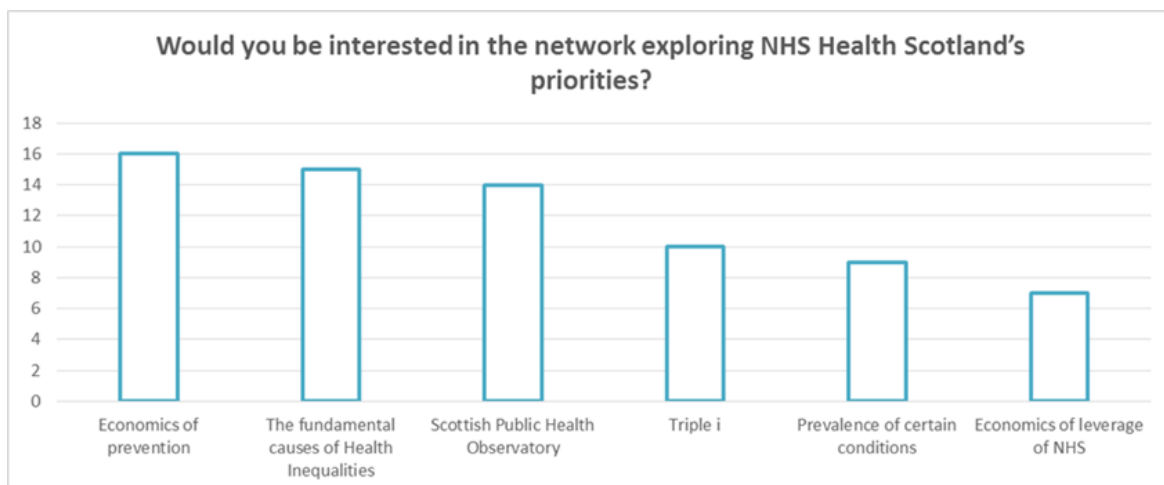
“The quality of the speakers has been fantastic. I came to the Lobbying Act meeting not knowing much about the Act and worrying about it. I left feeling very confident and completely know what we need to do going forward. I have also contacted the speakers since and worked with them to show them what a 3rd sector parliamentary reception looks like and have applied to be part of the Lobbying Act Working Group - something i would never have thought of being able to do before the HPON meeting”



Nearly 80% of respondents think that the Health Policy Officers Network has provided them with a better understanding health policies and priorities, this is also seen as the most valuable aspect of the Network. 70% think that the meetings provide them with an opportunity for collaboration and shared learning whilst two thirds of respondents feel the network gives them a better opportunity to engage with policy and decision makers at the Scottish Government and Parliament.

Network members were also asked to comment on aspects of the Health Policy Officers Network they would like to see more of. Majority of respondents felt they would like the network to keep its focus on the areas it was currently working on and deliver *“More of the same”*. There was also a suggestion for the network to submit joint consultations and develop into an influencing group.

VHS also asked the network members if they would be interested in exploring some of NHS Health Scotland’s priority policy areas. Economics of prevention, the fundamental causes of health inequalities and the Scottish Public Health Observatory where the most popular areas the network wanted to explore.

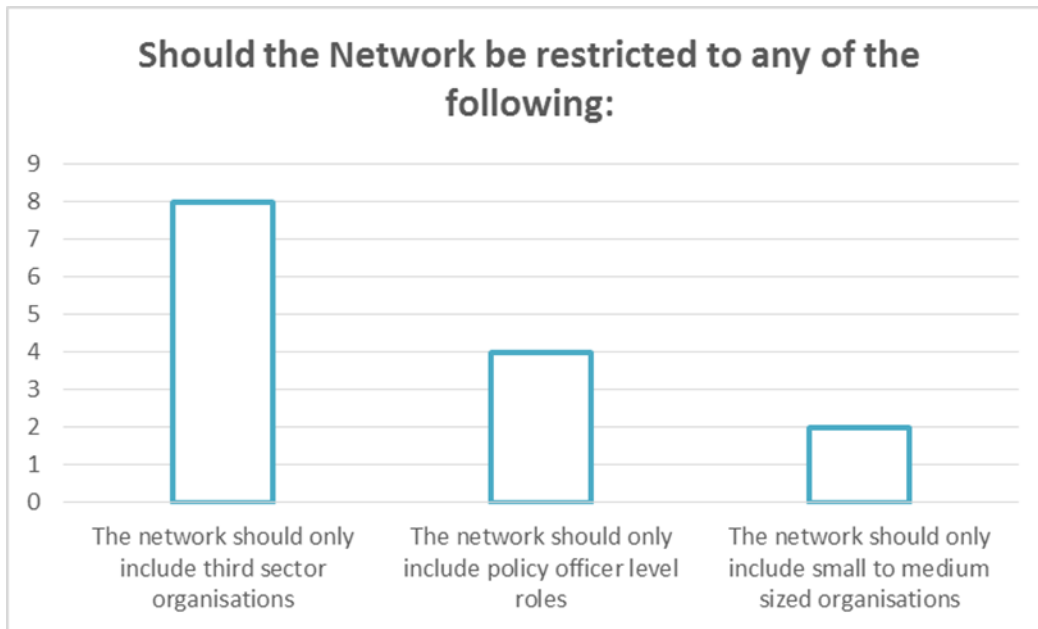


A network member also suggested that it would be useful to explore “*some of the new models of healthcare - House of Care, Community Links Workers, Realistic Medicines*” discussing “*the evidence base, or medium/long term future of the particular approach*”.

None of the 24 respondents felt that they would like to change anything about the network and some commented that “*The network works really well*”.

Terms of Reference of the Network

100% of the network members who responded to the question regarding the regularity of meetings, felt that the frequency of meetings was appropriate. When asked about the terms of reference for the network¹, it was difficult to find consensus as there were only 10 responses.



The comments provide a little more information. Although 8 out of the 10 people who responded felt that the network should only include third sector organisations the comments tell a different story. People commented that the network should not be restricted “*but the agenda/points for discussion should be clear about the purpose (of the group)*” and that “*including only third sector would potentially exclude orgs which have a useful contribution to make to the network.*”

Regarding limiting the membership to Policy Officer level roles, respondents aligned with the comment that the “*quality of speakers has plenty to offer experienced health policy professionals at all levels*”. However, one of the respondents highlighted an equally important point stating that, “*the peer element of the network allows people a bit of freedom and opportunity to speak in a way they might not do with more senior colleagues present.*”

¹ ‘The Health Policy Officers Network is a peer support network for new health policy officers or policy officers from small to medium sized organisations.’

One respondent also commented on the subjective nature of the term ‘small to medium sized organisations’ and respondents highlighted the positives of having a broader memberships, such as access to resources including meeting room spaces.

It would be useful to have a more in depth discussion with the network members regarding the terms of reference and membership of the network.

Conclusion

The Survey has provided VHS and QNIS with an excellent opportunity to take stock of member’s views of the Health Policy Officers Network, highlight areas of good practice and also identify any areas of improvement or concern that need to be addressed. The overall feedback from the network members has been very positive and has provided VHS and QNIS with the confidence and support to continue to administer the group as well as ideas for future content.

Some Comments include:

“It is a very useful network and you work very hard on making sure it is relevant and helping to keep us updated on upcoming policy issues”

“Great network that is administered really well. Hats off to kiren and rob for all the great work.”

“Thank you to Kiren - you've really brought this group alive, made it relevant and have great ideas about speakers. Carry on the good work!”

Voluntary health is a diverse sector and continually generating content that is relevant and interesting for such a large constituency of members can be difficult. We will take all the feedback we have received endeavour to continue to share policy updates, hold meetings that continue to support members in gaining a better understanding of current policy issues and help create a supportive environment for health policy officers to develop.

For information about Health Policy Officers Network please contact:

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