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Hosted by  **CAPITAL**

2026 Strategy

Learning Together
Shifting Power
Working Collaboratively

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1. Foreword

1.1 Reflection from Tasha Barefield, Former Co-production Lead for the West Sussex Lived Experience Advisory Group (WSX LEAG):

“It’s a real privilege to introduce the West Sussex LEAG Strategy.

When I reflect on how the LEAG has grown over recent years, I feel incredibly proud. What started as a space for conversation has developed into something much deeper - a trusted forum where lived experience genuinely shapes thinking, where challenge is welcomed, and where relationships between people and services are built on honesty and mutual respect.

What makes the West Sussex LEAG special is the people. Members show up with courage, generosity and a strong sense of purpose. They share experiences that are not always easy to talk about, and they do so because they want things to improve for others. That commitment has influenced decisions, shifted conversations and helped embed co-production more meaningfully within the Community Mental Health Transformation Programme.

I’ve seen first-hand how change often happens quietly; through consistent presence, thoughtful questions and a willingness to hold on to values even when systems feel complex or pressured. The LEAG has played that role with integrity and determination.

This strategy reflects both how far the group has come and where they want to go next. The ambition is to deepen the impact, widen participation and continue strengthening the voice of lived experience across West Sussex. It is essential in this next stage, for the LEAG to remain a safe, inclusive and purposeful space; one that builds confidence, supports growth and drives meaningful change.

None of this happens by accident. It happens because people care and because relationships matter. When co-production is done well, it makes services better for everyone. I’m excited to see what comes next”.

1.2 Reflection from Sara Shepherd, former Co-production Lead for the West Sussex Lived Experience Advisory Group (WSX LEAG):

“Looking back on my year as the West Sussex Co-production Lead, the most meaningful part of the role was supporting our WS LEAG members. Ensuring they felt confident, informed, and genuinely able to shape decisions was always my priority. One of the most important steps we took during that time was introducing payment for members’ contributions. Recognising their expertise in this way strengthened the integrity of our co-production work and helped remove barriers to participation.

Some of my proudest moments were seeing LEAG members find their voice and

grow in confidence. Over the year, many began to speak up with increasing clarity, challenge assumptions, and recognise the value of their lived experience. Working alongside partner organisations and closely with commissioners helped embed this approach more widely. By building strong relationships and modelling consistent, respectful collaboration, we created space for lived experience to influence decisions across the system. It was a year of steady progress, shared learning, and genuine partnership.

It has been especially rewarding to see how the WS LEAG has continued to grow since I left the role. The foundations that we have been building together have helped the group become more confident, more active, and more influential across the system, with members now shaping work in ways that go far beyond where we started.”

2. Executive Summary

The West Sussex Lived Experience Advisory Group (WSX LEAG) enters 2026 with a strengthened commitment to embedding lived, living and learned experience at the heart of Mental Health Support Services (MHSS) across West Sussex. Established in 2022 and hosted by CAPITAL, the group has grown into a respected and influential voice within the mental health system; shaping service transformation, championing co-production, and amplifying the insights of people with lived experience.

Backed by new commissioning from BHT Sussex, this strategy sets a clear direction for the year ahead, focusing on learning together, shifting power, and working collaboratively. It builds on a strong legacy of impact, including expanded membership, influential contributions to strategic governance, delivery of Sussex-wide co-production events, development of the SCALE network, and the launch of trauma-informed peer support initiatives.

Guided by its values (LEGACIE) and principles, WSX LEAG’s mission is to champion lived experience leadership and co-produce meaningful change with communities, services, and partners. Three strategic priorities will shape delivery: growing and diversifying membership; strengthening communications and visibility; and enhancing independence through consistent co-production frameworks and governance presence. These priorities are supported by opportunities identified by members, including deeper community outreach, improved internal structures, refreshed branding, and enhanced collaboration with partners across Sussex.

A robust member support framework underpins this approach, ensuring accessible induction, high-quality training, trauma-informed support, and opportunities for reflective peer connection. The strategy also sets out the group’s commitment to fostering inclusion, sustainability, and transparent,

accountable governance—while retaining an independent lived experience voice within its hosting and commissioning arrangements.

Overall, this strategy positions WSX LEAG to continue influencing system change, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring that lived experience remains central to the ongoing transformation of mental health services in West Sussex.

3. Introduction

3.1 Story

The West Sussex Lived Experience Advisory Group (WSX LEAG) was established by CAPITAL in 2022 as part of the Adults West Sussex Community Mental Health Transformation Programme. Over the past three years, growing from strength to strength, the group has championed the power of lived experience to shape and inform better mental health services.

The deeply rooted ethos of the group has utilised equity, honesty, and collaboration. By bringing together people with lived, living, and learned experience, spaces continue to be created where voices matter, decisions are shared, and communities thrive.

Over the past three years, the WSX LEAG has delivered significant impact by embedding lived experience at the heart of mental health transformation.

3.2 Aspirations

This strategy marks the start of an exciting new chapter. With the initial one-year funding from Brighton Housing Trust (BHT) Sussex, the group's strategy keenly focuses to continue building the legacy of the group's impact, but also CAPITALS's foundations to focus on setting bold ambitions for the year ahead.

Here's the themes which will drive the group:

- Embed lived experience at the heart of Mental Health Support Services (MHSS) across West Sussex.
- Strengthen collaboration between partners, communities, and people with lived experience.
- Promote continuous learning and improvement, ensuring services evolve with the voices they serve.
- Shift power by creating opportunities for shared decision-making and co-production.

Together, the group will continue to challenge, innovate, and celebrate progress. Because when lived experience leads, mental health services become stronger, fairer, and more responsive.

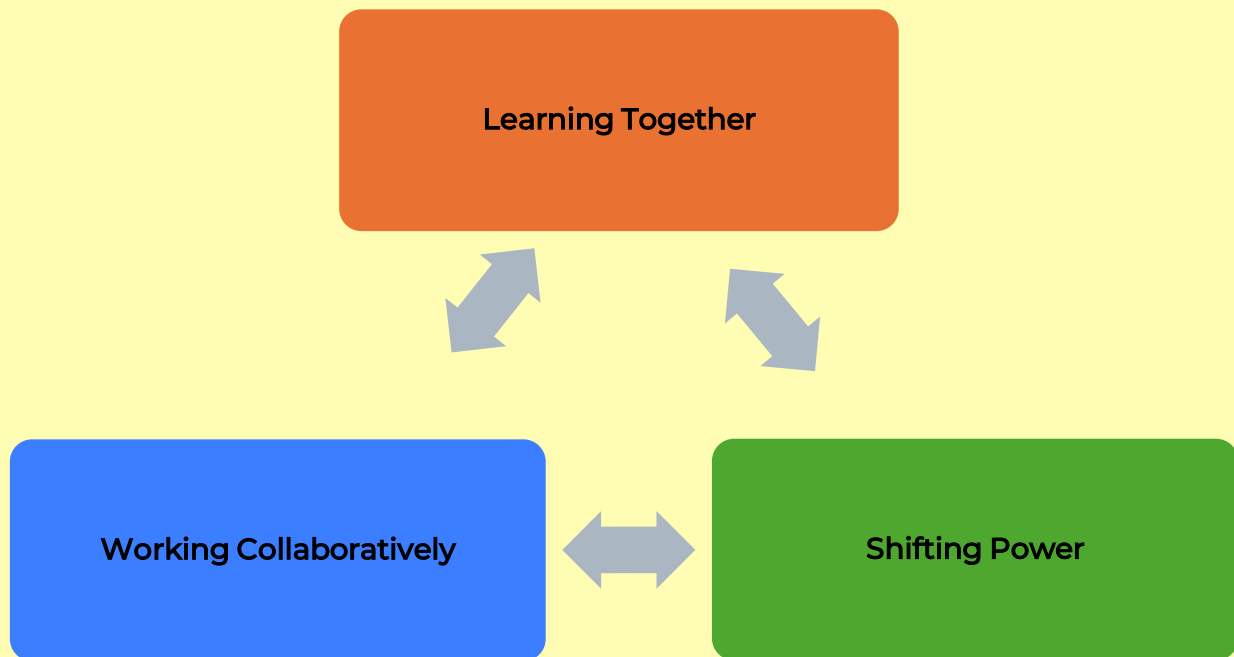
3.3 Impact so far

Over the past three years, the WSX LEAG has delivered significant impact by embedding lived experience at the heart of mental health transformation.

Highlights and achievements include:

- **Building a strong network:** Membership grew to 43 individuals with lived experience, including 15 new members in 2023–24. Monthly meetings maintained excellent attendance and featured guest speakers from commissioning, VCSE partners, and service providers.
- **Influencing system change:** Co-produced the Crawley Community Transformation Pilot, shaping priorities around navigation, staff awareness, and infrastructure. LEAG members contributed to strategic groups such as Eating Disorders, Complex Emotional Needs (CEN), and the Sussex Mental Health Language Guide Task & Finish Group.
- **Driving co-production culture:** Delivered four Sussex-wide Co-production Conferences (2023, 2024, 2025, 2026) with over 170 attendees combined, showcasing best practice and enabling cross-sector collaboration. Launched monthly online discussion forums on topics like trauma-informed co-production and diversity, attracting 15–20 participants each month.
- **Launching Sussex Co-production And Lived Experience Mental Health Network (SCALE):** Established a Sussex-wide platform connecting LEAG members across regions to share insights, scrutinize services, and influence system-wide improvements.
- **Supporting trauma recovery:** Piloted a peer-facilitated trauma support group with 8 members and 2 facilitators, integrating mindfulness techniques and achieving positive feedback on improved wellbeing and reduced isolation.
- **Strengthening partnerships:** Worked collaboratively with BHT Sussex, West Sussex County Council, Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, and VCSE partners to embed lived experience in service planning and governance, including Pathfinder Alliance boards.
- **Public Mental Health Needs Assessment:** Co-produced engagement events with 67 participants, shaping five key themes for future service design and influencing county-wide mental health priorities.
- **Expanding representation:** LEAG members attended over 30 strategic meetings and workshops across Sussex, ensuring lived experience voices were heard in decision-making at every level.

3.4 How



4. The Next Chapter

As the group start's it's new chapter, all the group's work will align with these Values, Principles and Mission.

4.1 Values – **LEGACIE**

- **L** – Lived Experience Leadership
- **E** – Evolution
- **G** – Growth
- **A** – Authenticity
- **C** – Co-production
- **I** – Inclusion
- **E** – Environment.

4.2 Principles

- Learning Together
- Shifting Power
- Working Collaboratively.

4.3 Mission

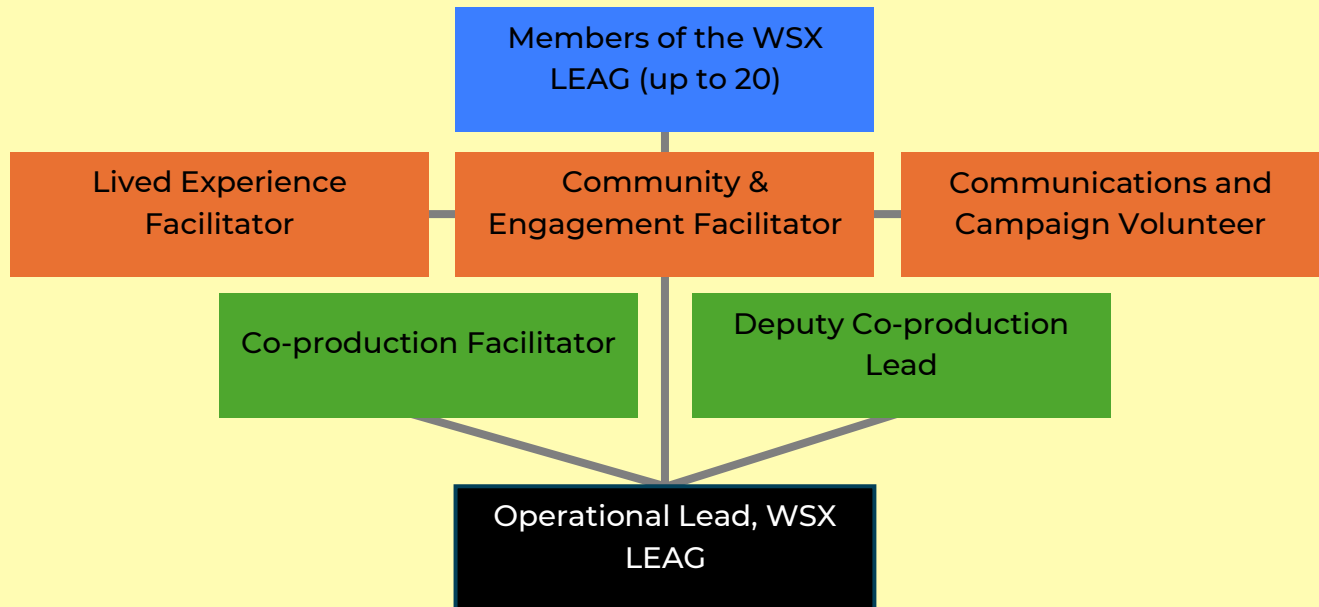
To champion the voices of carers and people with lived, living and learned experiences of mental health challenges across West Sussex. The group are committed to co-producing meaningful change by working in partnership with communities, services and organisations. Through advocacy, collaboration and leadership, members strive to ensure that lived experience is at the heart of

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mental health transformation, creating inclusive, compassionate and effective support for all.

4.4 Structure and Team



5. Strategic Priorities

5.1 Summary

These priorities were formed following three workshops held with the group across summer of 2025.

These will enable the group to deliver both the key specification priorities and important areas to the members.

Priority 1 - Membership	
The Group will:	So that:
Increase the groups' membership.	Equitability is strengthened and build insight into a wider diverse range of experiences.
Engage in community and partnership outreach, including connecting with other lived experience forums across MHSS in WSX.	The presence and awareness of the group's work with MHSS is clear, consistent and community focused.

Priority 2 - Communications	
The Group will:	So that:
Strengthen information and promotion of the group and SCALE network.	The work of the members is proudly showcased consistently.
Create a communications plan.	Opportunities, updates and progresses are shared and promoted.
Priority 3 – Independence	
The Group will:	So that:
Co-produce a Sussex Co-production Charter.	There is a consistent independent framework for true Co-production across Sussex.
Build presence across strategic governance within WSX MHSS.	The group's focus is continuous improvement within MHSS across WSX.

5.2 Opportunities

During the workshops, attendees reflected on the strengths and opportunities for the group. The strengths were articulated within the values, principles and mission. Here are the opportunities the group has, to deliver the strategy over the next year. Further, these align to each of the group's strategic priorities.

To keep the group on track, each opportunity has been linked to the strategic priorities.

1. Develop relationships with WSX communities and Pathfinder Partners.
Membership & Communications.
2. Implement structure within the group and introduce staffing roles made available from the increased year funding. **Communications & Independence.**
3. Utilise SCALE network opportunities and spaces to ensure equitability across the three areas of Sussex, creating consistent and efficiently aligned opportunities. **Membership and Independence.**
4. Collaborate with BHT Sussex to refresh the group's Terms of Reference.
Membership and Independence.
5. Continuously improve the branding and materials of the WSX LEAG.
Communications.

5.3 Member Support Framework

Alongside the future planning and growth of independent lived, living and learned experience, we are committed and dedicated to continually support our members, enabling and promoting new opportunities for current members and further with peer support and training opportunities.

Induction	
Members can expect:	So that:
Streamlined onboarding paperwork upon point of enquiry.	The paperwork is relevant, efficient and an encouraging process to welcome new members.
The invitation to observe one member's meeting.	Any potential members have all the information and insight to ensure the group is right for them.
Training	
Members can expect:	So that:
Improved opportunities for training, including training for new members.	Members have all the skills and understandings to get the most out of their memberships.
Utilised SCALE spaces for streamlined training.	Consistent approaches and opportunities for training across all three Sussex groups.
Support	
Members can expect:	So that:
1:1 support from the staffing team.	Any development needs or wellbeing support can be explored together.
The opportunity for a monthly peer support group.	Members are supported with a regular reflective space.
Trauma-informed approaches.	Members have positive and constructive opportunities whilst utilising their lived experience and insights.

6. Inclusion and Sustainability

6.1 Inclusion Approach

The WSX LEAG is committed to creating an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable approach for all members, supporters, staff and peers.

The group ensures everyone can participate, reducing barriers and championing diverse lived, living, and learned experience. The work is rooted in trauma-informed practice, shared decision-making, and accessible communication, so all voices are respected and valued.

6.2 Sustainability Approach

The group promotes long-term sustainability by supporting member wellbeing, developing strong governance, and building consistent, collaborative partnerships. The group uses resources responsibly, adopt digital-first approaches where appropriate, and work with partners to reduce environmental impact.

7. Governance and Partners

7.1 Governance Summary

The WSX LEAG operates within a transparent, collaborative governance structure designed to promote independence, strengthen accountability, and ensure lived experience is responsibly embedded across West Sussex Mental Health Support Services (MHSS).

WSX LEAG's governance model is grounded in the principles of shared decision-making, co-production, and equitable partnership working. It ensures that lived, living and learned experience influences decisions at every level while maintaining safe, supportive and accountable structures for members. This includes developing resources to support members in better understanding their roles in activities and governance meetings. The group will support the continued collaborative working between organisations to maintain independence and increasing presence across MHSS in West Sussex.

7.2 Partners Summary

BHT Sussex commissions CAPITAL to host, facilitate, and operationally support the WSX LEAG.

This commissioning arrangement provides financial resources, structural stability and organisational oversight to enable the LEAG to function effectively.

7.2.1 Roles

Role of CAPITAL

CAPITAL acts as the hosting organisation—responsible for staffing, administration, safeguarding, financial governance, and operational delivery of the WSX LEAG.

CAPITAL upholds the group's independence by enabling lived experience leadership while ensuring members have a safe, supported, well-governed environment in which to contribute.

CAPITAL provides strategic guidance while ensuring that decisions affecting the WSX LEAG remain rooted in lived experience.

7.2.2 Role of BHT Sussex

BHT Sussex holds overall commissioning accountability, ensuring the WSX LEAG meets agreed objectives and contributes meaningfully to the continuous improvement of MHSS in West Sussex, with a keen focus on enabling, resourcing and supporting.

7.3 WSX LEAG's Independent Voice

Although hosted by CAPITAL and commissioned by BHT Sussex, WSX LEAG maintains an independent lived experience voice. This means:

- Members shape priorities, feedback, and recommendations without organisational influence.
- Lived experience insight is shared honestly, transparently and collaboratively with partners.
- The group's contributions to West Sussex MHSS remain independent, unbiased, and grounded in authentic lived experience.

7.3.1 Possability People

The WSX LEAG and the wider CAPITAL team collaborate with Possability People to host SCALE. Through this partnership, they are able to align Sussex-wide priorities and strengthen collective influence. The joint work has previously included partnership activity with the Changing Futures Sussex programme.

8 Monitoring and Evaluation

WSX LEAG will operate within an accountability framework that includes:

- Regular reporting to CAPITAL and BHT Sussex on activity, impact, and progress.
- Clear Terms of Reference, co-produced with members and reviewed annually.
- Collaboration across Sussex systems, including the SCALE network, to ensure alignment and consistency.

- Ongoing evaluation and reflective learning to continuously improve governance, accessibility and impact.

8.1 Commitment

WSX LEAG, CAPITAL and BHT Sussex are collectively committed to a governance approach that is:

- Independent – protecting the integrity of lived experience leadership
- Transparent – ensuring clarity, honesty and shared understanding
- Collaborative – strengthening relationships across systems
- Supportive – enabling safe, inclusive participation
- Accountable – delivering meaningful, measurable impact.

Together, this model ensures that lived experience continues to be embedded across MHSS in West Sussex.

9. Closing Reflections

“How people feel about the service they use is an essential test of the success of that service.

Pathfinder Mental Health Support Service in West Sussex has committed to embedding this test in its everyday operations and planning as the service develops. Everyone - people with lived experience, our staff, our commissioners, our colleagues in core and aligned services and the wider community have a role in continual improvement of Pathfinder . The LEAG strategy reflects the ongoing conversation between BHT Sussex, as Lead provider and Capital and LEAG members about coproduction and amplifying the voice of lived experience in all that we do. We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively to improve the accessibility and quality of community mental health services in West Sussex “.

Rachael Kenny, Director of Mental Health and Support Services, BHT Sussex

“It has been a privilege to lead the WSX LEAG over the past year. The determination, passion and resilience shown by members has shaped every part of this strategy, and it continues to guide the direction of the group’s work.

This strategy represents the momentum members have built together, as well as the opportunities ahead to grow, strengthen and refine our approaches. Above all, it is a member-led strategy, created through lived experience, collaboration and a shared commitment to shifting power and learning together. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all members for your honesty, your challenge, and your dedication to excellence. Your determination is what ensures this work remains meaningful, accountable and grounded in real lived, living and learned experiences.

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As we move forward, I am excited to continue working alongside partners at BHT Sussex, West Sussex Mind, Pathfinder organisations, Possability People, and through our established relationships with Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and the NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board.

Together, we are building a stronger, more compassionate and more inclusive way of working, and this strategy marks the next step in that journey”.

Lydia Taylor, WSX LEAG Operational Lead, CAPITAL