



Sustainability and Transformation Plans – a UNISON briefing

What are Sustainability and Transformation Plans?

Sustainability and transformation plans (STPs) are local plans for health and care services. They are to be developed by 44 geographical areas, or 'footprints', covering England.

NHS providers, clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), local authorities and other health and care services that fall within the footprint must come together to develop regionally specific five year plans (covering October 2016-March 2021) that set out how they will meet the broad aims of: improving quality and developing new models of care; improving health and wellbeing; and delivering financial balance and stability.

The plans will focus mainly on NHS services, but will also cover better integration with local authority services.

What do the 'footprints' look like?

The 44 footprints come in all shapes and sizes, but cover on average a population of 1.2 million people and five clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). Each footprint has a chosen lead – most of who come from CCGs, NHS trusts, foundation trusts and a few from local government.

STP footprints are not statutory bodies, but collective discussion forums, where health and care leaders in an area will come together to facilitate policy directives across organisational boundaries or further integration of services.

Ultimately they are there to deliver NHS England's Five Year Forward View.

What's happened so far?

STPs were meant to be submitted in June 2016 with a formal assessment in July 2016. This timetable has slipped.

In May the Social Partnership Forum (SPF) wrote to STP leads to highlight the need to fully engage with the trade unions, with evidence from around the country suggesting that engagement with unions had been extremely variable. The letter also reminded the leads about the NHS Constitution, which emphasises the importance of staff engagement and partnership working.

The SPF has also produced clear guidance for social partnership working in developing and implementing new care models and system transformation. The guidance reinforces that staff and their trade unions should be fully involved in any changes which may have an impact on them. It also spells out the role of regional SPFs who are encouraged to link with the STP footprints in their regions and engage with groups responsible for developing STP workforce plans.

Following concerns about the secrecy and lack of consultation surrounding STPs, NHS England has produced guidance “Engaging local people: A guide for local areas developing Sustainability and Transformation Plans” which sets out useful guidance for how organisations involved in STPs should be consulting and engaging with local people and staff.

Draft plans for 2017-19 were submitted in June this year. Since then, plans have been further developed with the aim for the final STP submission by 21 October 2016.

NHS Operational Planning and Contracting Guidance was published in September 2016. This requires NHS organisations to submit a full draft of 2017/18 to 2018/19 operational plans by 24 November 2016. The default will now be for two-year contracts in place of those negotiated annually. The deadline for signing of contracts is 23 December 2016.

Once the STPs have been submitted in October they will be scrutinised by the Department of Health and, following consultation, must be finalised by the end of December 2016.

What is UNISON’s view?

UNISON supports closer integration between health and care services, and anything that would help service users and patients to have a more seamless experience of using health and social care services is a positive move.

STPs are also intended to bring commissioners and providers together and to encourage collaboration between providers requiring them “to spend less of their time locked in adversarial and transactional relationships”. UNISON believes that if this were to occur it would have a positive impact on services for patients and service users.

However, STPs are expected to indicate how they will make £5bn of efficiency savings by 2020 through service reconfigurations and system changes. UNISON is concerned that this level of savings cannot be achieved through greater integration between health and care and that the savings will have to be achieved through cuts to services, hospital closures or pay cuts for staff. Also this level of cost cutting will have an impact on collaboration with commissioners driving down costs and may encourage competition between providers rather than collaboration as they compete to offer the lowest bid.

Initial drafts of STPs that have been made public indicate that some STPs are reliant on assumptions that there will be financial savings from moving care closer to home; reducing A&E attendances and emergency admissions; centralisation of some hospital services; and making services better integrated. While some of these areas have the

potential to produce benefits for patients – at least in theory – they have traditionally proved very hard to deliver and are unlikely to produce substantial costs savings, even in the longer term.

The big problem remains the lack of money. As a result, there is a serious risk that the plans are seen merely as the vehicle for delivering cuts to services that the government's ongoing underfunding of the NHS has made inevitable.

UNISON is also concerned about the lack of transparency so far with the development of STPs. As non-statutory bodies, STP footprints must not be allowed to bypass proper consultation with staff, service users and the public.

NHS England's "Engaging local people: A guide for local areas developing Sustainability and Transformation Plans" contains useful information for UNISON branches about the levels of consultation that should be taking place on the STPs. This is welcome guidance but only if the statutory bodies within the footprints adhere to the recommendations within it and consult fully with staff and the public about plans – something made increasingly difficult with the very tight timescales.

What can branches do?

It's important to find out as much as possible about your local STP as soon as possible. The timescale for the publication of STPs has left little time for consultation but NHS England's engagement guide provides a strong case for proper engagement by the statutory bodies with local people and staff.

Branches should ask for engagement and discussion around the development of STP plans, up to the end of October and beyond. Any information should be shared with UNISON regional offices as the STP areas will cross multiple branches.

Branches should also ask employers what public engagement around the plans will take place and when it will happen.

NHS England's engagement guide cites the Gunning Principles as a "helpful overview of what constitutes a fair consultation process". These are:

1. Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage

Consultation cannot take place on a decision that has already been made. Decision makers can consult on a 'preferred option' (of which those being consulted should be informed) and even a 'decision in principle' as long as they are genuinely open to influence.

2. Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response

Those being consulted should be made aware of the basis on which a proposal for consultation has been considered and will be considered thereafter, including any criteria to be applied or factors to be considered.

3. Adequate time must be given for consideration and response

There is no automatically required time frame within which the consultation must take place unless statutory time requirements are prescribed. A rationale must be set out for any departure from that expected timeframe.

4. The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account

Decision makers must properly consider the material produced by the consultation.

These can be used during discussions with employers or when campaigning for better consultation at a wider level.