

Public Voice Forum: 16 September 2026

Summary meeting notes

Public Voice Forum (PVF) members came together for the third substantive meeting of 2026.

Main agenda items were:

- 1. Remembering Mary Ballantyne, PVF member**
- 2. *Right Referral, Right Place* – project update and user-testing opportunity**
- 3. Public Engagement Framework – member input and feedback**

Overview

This was the third Public Voice Forum meeting of 2026.

Substantive agenda items included user-testing opportunities for the *Right Referral Right Place* project, and the development of the NMC's Public Engagement Framework.

The meeting opened with reflections on the contribution of Mary Ballantyne, Forum member, following news of her passing.

1. Remembering Mary Ballantyne, PVF member

The meeting opened with members reflecting on the contribution of founding member, Mary Ballantyne, following news of her passing. Members recognised her long-standing commitment to the Public Voice Forum and the valuable lived experience she brought to discussions. Her insights were seen as helping to strengthen the public perspective within the NMC's work.

The discussion also highlighted the importance individuals place on relationship building, and the sense of community that has been created. Some commented on how important in-person meetings are in supporting this and welcome the next opportunity. This will likely be next year.

Overall, the discussion served as both a tribute to Mary Ballantyne and a reminder of the value of lived experience, relationships, and the meaningful public involvement in shaping the NMC's work.

2. *Right Referral, Right Place* – project update and user-testing opportunity

Members were updated on *Right Referral, Right Place* project progress. This work aims to improve the experience of people contacting the NMC by helping them identify the appropriate organisation to deal with their concern and, where this is not the NMC, directing them to right place.

Members are supportive of the project's aims and its potential to improve the public's experience of navigating the complex health and care complaints and regulatory landscape. Discussion focused on ensuring the service is easy to access, understand and use, particularly for people who may already be distressed, vulnerable, and unfamiliar with the NMC's role.

Key feedback from members

Members highlighted several important considerations for the development and testing of the service:

- Information should be presented in clear, plain English and avoid regulatory terminology that may be difficult for members of the public to understand.
- The service should be accessible to people with different needs, including those experiencing digital exclusion, language barriers or accessibility challenges.
- Safeguarding considerations should be built into the user journey to ensure people raising concerns receive appropriate support and guidance.
- People whose concerns do not fall within the NMC's remit should be clearly signposted to the most appropriate organisation and should not feel abandoned or simply passed between agencies.
- Public understanding of the NMC's role remains limited, and the service should help people better understand what the NMC can and cannot do.

User-testing opportunity

- Members welcomed the opportunity to take part in user-testing and recognised the importance of testing the service with a diverse range of people.
- Key user-testing is being carried out by the external agency supporting this work, who will reach people less familiar with regulation and the NMC.
- The NMC will run a bespoke, smaller user-testing exercise with up to five members of the Forum. Members can register their interest to take part by sending an email to PublicEngagement@nmc-uk.org.

Actions

- **Members to send email to register their interest in taking part in user-testing**
- **Testing will take place w/c 21/09/2026**

3. Public Engagement Framework – member input and feedback

The Public Engagement Framework is intended to detail a consistent approach to how the NMC involves members of the public in its work. It sets out a shared vision and the principles which should underpin engagement. These will help ensure that public views, experiences and perspectives are considered when developing policy, improving services and making decisions.

The framework focusses on two principal areas:

- *How should the NMC engage and involve the public – what does quality engagement look like?*
- *How will the NMC know if that public engagement is effective and has impact?*

The presentation, delivered by the Website Lead, introduced four proposed principles that will underpin public engagement activity:

- **Inclusive:** actively involving a diverse range of people and communities.
- **Early and Proportionate:** engaging people at the right time and in ways that are proportionate to the issue being considered.
- **Collaborative:** working with key partners in the health and social care space
- **Evaluated:** assessing the quality and impact of engagement activities and using learning to improve future practice.

The presentation also explored how success might be measured, moving beyond simply counting activities or participants to understanding whether engagement has influenced decisions, improved outcomes and increased public confidence.

Members were then invited to test the framework and provide feedback on:

- Whether the proposed principles reflected what good public engagement should look and feel like.
- The clarity of language used.
- How success should be measured and reported.
- If the group think anything important has been omitted.

The session was designed to shape the framework before it is finalised, ensuring it reflects the expectations and experiences of Forum members.

Key findings and themes from discussions

1. Members strongly supported the framework

Overall, members were supportive of the framework and agreed it provided a strong foundation for future public engagement. However, they identified several areas where the framework could be strengthened and provided detailed feedback on both the principles and the proposed measures of success.

The principles, (inclusion, early and proportionate involvement, collaborative, evaluated) were generally viewed as appropriate and aligned with good public involvement practice.

However, members felt the framework could be strengthened by placing greater emphasis on:

- accessibility
- transparency
- accountability
- public influence on decisions
- equal partnership with the public.

2. Inclusion must go beyond participation

Members argued that inclusion should not simply mean inviting people to engage.

Participants highlighted some potential barriers to inclusive involvement:

- digital exclusion
- language barriers
- cultural barriers
- disability-related barriers
- lack of confidence
- belonging to communities that may not traditionally take part in public involvement activity.

There was strong support for the phrase "**actively engaging**" within the framework, with members emphasising that NMC should actively seek out voices that are currently absent from engagement activities.

Several members suggested the NMC should demonstrate the following in relation to inclusion in public engagement:

- Who it reached.
- Who it did not reach.
- What action was taken to reduce barriers.
- Evidence that a diverse range of communities had been involved.

3. Public involvement must happen before decisions are made

This was one of the strongest points raised across all breakout groups.

Members described experiences where organisations sought public input *after* decisions had effectively been made, creating a perception of tokenism or "tick-box" engagement.

Participants felt genuine involvement means:

- Engaging before policies are finalised.
- Bringing people into projects from the beginning.
- Maintaining engagement throughout projects.
- Creating opportunities for feedback as projects evolve.

Several members also questioned whether the term "**proportionate**" would be easily understood by the public and suggested clearer language or practical examples may be needed. "Appropriate and reasonable" may be a suitable alternative.

4. Public influence must be visible

Another consistent message from members was that they want to see evidence of impact.

Participants repeatedly stated that success is demonstrated by:

- Showing what people said.
- Explaining what changed.
- Explaining why decisions were made.
- Demonstrating where feedback influenced outcomes.
- Explaining where feedback could not be acted upon and why.

5. Stories matter more than statistics

A clear theme relating to reporting and evaluation was the use of stories.

Across all groups, members expressed a preference for:

- Real-life examples and personal stories.
- *Narratives of change*: case studies showing influence and how it came about.

Many felt that focusing primarily on performance data or participation metrics was not enough or as engaging.

Members acknowledged that numbers have value but felt stories are:

- Easier to understand.
- More relatable.
- More credible.
- Better at showing impact.

Several members suggested an evidence model based on:

What we heard → What we did → What changed → What difference it made.

6. Measure impact, not activity

Members supported measuring engagement but stressed that activity measures alone are not enough.

Participants distinguished between:

- Inputs (feedback received).
- Outputs (activities completed).
- Outcomes and Impact (what difference was made).

There was strong support for measuring:

- Changes resulting from engagement.
- Level of public confidence.
- Perceptions of whether NMC listens.
- Longer-term impact of those changes

7. Members want stronger collaboration

In drafting the framework, the *collaboration* principle was about ensuring the NMC does not work alone and seeks support and joint working opportunities from other public facing organisations and health charities. This allows us to learn from others, share our communications with wider public networks, and reach more people.

But members focussed more on collaboration between the forum and with the NMC.

Members expressed interest in:

- More opportunities to contribute to strategic work.
- Better connections between public engagement and wider NMC programmes.
- Greater collaboration with professional groups.
- Learning from approaches used by other regulators.

Specific examples included:

- Greater crossover with Code and Revalidation work.
- Opportunities for public and professional groups to share perspectives.
- Learning from organisations such as the GMC and other regulators.

8. Public awareness of the NMC remains low

Although the framework's aim is not to set out the NMC's overarching activity, many members reflected on the fact that awareness of the NMC is very low among the public.

Members felt there is:

- Low awareness and understanding of the NMC and what we do
- and public information is not always sufficiently visible or accessible.

Members were keen to understand what progress has been made, being aware of this being a central goal of the 2020-25 strategy.

Suggestions on how we can raise awareness included:

- Greater use of social media which reaches members of the public.
- Plain English communications.
- Community-based communications.
- Information in healthcare settings.
- More regular updates about NMC activities and changes.

Actions

- Feedback about the framework will be considered in full
- At the next meeting we will share the updated version and highlight what was changed following today's discussion.
- We will also provide feedback on any areas where points were not taken forward.
- Public Engagement Lead to invite appropriate NMC colleague(s) to attend December meeting and update members on our public awareness raising work.

END