

County watch



Hilary Trevorah, chief executive at Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, explains why its health project makes such a unique and valuable contribution to its local community and to council life, and additionally led to the association being victorious in the category of Star Councils' Outstanding Project of the Year 2016

Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) won NALC's Star Councils' County Association Outstanding Project of the Year for the way it has worked with the NHS to encourage hard-to-reach groups to get involved in changes to health services.

NHS Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) used the association's communication network with local councils to get information out to communities, especially in the more remote areas of the county. Methods of communication ranged from meetings to digital media.

The project supports the CCG's engagement principle of: "Recognising that the CCG needs to be proactive in its approach and wherever possible will attend existing meetings and go to where people are rather than expect people to come to the CCG".

Improving the services

The CCG strives to lead continuous improvements to health and care services in Dorset. Improvements to services must reflect a continually changing economy and society. The values of the CCG include working openly with the public, its patients and all other stakeholders to build a mutual level of trust and understanding. It wants to make sure that changes to local health services are informed by the views and experiences of local people, patients and family carers.

However obtaining feedback from certain hard-to-reach groups, such as residents of geographically remote areas, can be challenging.

DAPTC gives a two-way and proactive communication link with local councils and clerks. It offers CCG representatives access

to events that are regularly attended by their members. Councillors are influencers, who are activists in their communities, with large networks of contacts. They supply information to the CCG but they can also communicate information, for example, access to services, engagement opportunities and access to health advice.

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The project provides:

- a two-way and proactive communication process with community representatives;
- improved community engagement;
- the opportunity for effective engagement with geographically hard-to-reach groups or people with other priorities, such as new mothers.

Health service provision is an important issue for every community. Participating in shaping future services is hugely beneficial for local councils of all sizes. Changes in health service delivery have an impact on sparsely populated areas but are also important to larger towns which often act as hubs for current and future services.

Cllr Haydn White, chairman of the Dorset association, said: "Local council councillors are very close to their immediate communities. Everyone feels very passionately about their local health services, so our association was very

pleased to help get the message across about how people could get involved in plans for future NHS services."

Hearing presentations from CCG representatives increases the understanding of pressures facing the NHS and allows DAPTC members to give feedback and ideas for innovative and cost-effective changes that reflect the needs of their communities. CCG input to DAPTC events gives a bigger picture of public services.

Forbes Watson, chairman of NHS Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, said: "NHS Dorset CCG is pleased to have forged a new relationship with local councils through the DAPTC. The DAPTC has been critical in our efforts to involve local people in our work and in disseminating information about proposals for major changes to NHS services. We value the relationship highly and have seen the benefits it brings to local communities."

Worthy winner

NALC decided it was the top project of the year by a county association. A judging panel including representatives from the DCLG, the LGA and the SLCC felt that: "The DAPTC stood out as a winner because of its innovative engagement and communications support for the CCG for its clinical services review.

"The DAPTC acts as a gateway for local councils and local councillors to feed their views into the CCG to help improve health and care services in the county, which reflect the changing economy and society. The county association was particularly proactive in helping to obtain feedback from certain hard-to-reach groups such as councils and communities in more remote areas."