

# NEL VCFSE Collaborative update

## April 2026



### ICB Board update – 31 March 2026

The VCFSE is represented on the [ICB Board](#) which convened on 31 March 2026. The Board opened with a powerful resident story from Alex, a parent carer from Havering, who shared a detailed account of the difficulties faced by families with children with mental health conditions and/ or neurodivergences.

Alex described significant and ongoing challenges in accessing appropriate diagnoses, social care assessments for his daughters, including lack of support by schools, poor crisis responses in paediatric A&E, and limited communication from health and care professionals despite high needs. The emotional strain was noted and Members recognised the need for a more integrated, coordinated approach shaped by lived experience, clearer communication, continuity of care, and trauma-informed and personalised support. They also stressed the importance of community “safe spaces” and using resident insight to inform commissioning and service design. We thank Alex for sharing his story and will be discussing how the Collaborative can use this experience to influence discussions on VCFSE support services.

Babies, Children and Young People (BCYP) mental health was discussed as a major strategic priority. National data was presented showing rising demand, complexity and that current CAMHS investment has not kept pace with demand or complexity. We highlighted the need for local data, particularly ethnicity data to give us a better understanding of NEL context. We reinforced the value in strengthening workforce roles to include peer support, youth voice, community outreach, trusted conversations, supporting transitions, and shaping neighbourhood models alongside schools, family hubs and early help services.

The Board will be implementing a new NEL BCYP Strategic Commissioning Group and co-design of a 0–25 commissioning strategy with a stronger prevention, early intervention and whole system approach. We advocated for collaborative models with youth voice such as the HealthSpot model, which works closely with Spotlight and co produces with young people to shape support offers.

[National neighbourhood guidance](#) was issued on 17 March 2026 and there is some funding available through a Neighbourhood Transformation Fund at place based level to work towards this. VCFSE place based representatives are working hard to make as much of this funding available for the VCFSE sector.

The Board papers are available [here](#) and we will brief further following the next meeting taking place on 11 June 2026.

### NEL VCFSE Collaborative Leadership Group (7 April 2026)

We convened our monthly Leadership Group to discuss the recent updates on [Better Care Fund](#) and the recent [Neighbourhood Health Framework](#). Representatives agreed an updated Integrated Neighbourhood Teams briefing is needed in context of the framework and will work to implement VCFSE insight locally. If you would like to learn more about neighbourhood developments in your borough please contact [nelvcse@thcvs.org.uk](mailto:nelvcse@thcvs.org.uk) and we will connect you to the appropriate representative.



## New Barking & Dagenham representative announcement: Abigail Thomas

We are delighted that Abigail Thomas is the new Barking & Dagenham (B&D) representative on the Collaborative. Abigail serves as the Community & Neighbourhood Development Lead at [Harmony House Dagenham](#), and is highly connected to neighbourhood development across B&D and is working closely with partners through the [National Neighbourhood Health Implementation Programme \(NNHIP\)](#).



## FREE training opportunities for VCFSE workforce

Two free training offers delivered as part of a wider programme funded by the NEL ICB Health Equity Academy and supported by the NEL VCFSE Collaborative, the sessions are aimed at grassroots organisations across North East London.

### 1. Turning conversations into data – Superhighways training session

This interactive online session will support VCFSE organisations to turn community voices and everyday conversations into meaningful qualitative evidence that can influence services and local health priorities. Participants will gain practical skills to capture, organise and interpret insights from engagement activities such as focus groups and co-design work, and learn how to present this evidence effectively to funders, policymakers and system partners.

**Date:** 20 May 2026 | **Time:** 10:00 – 13:00 | **Location:** Online | **Cost:** Free

[Register here](#)

### 2. Analysing and interpreting data – Superhighways training session

This interactive online session will support VCFSE organisations to build confidence in working with data, from understanding key health datasets to combining them with community insight. Participants will learn how to draw meaningful conclusions from data to inform decision-making, strengthen funding applications, and demonstrate measurable impact on health inequalities.

**Date:** 10 June 2026 | **Time:** 10:00 – 13:00 | **Location:** Online | **Cost:** Free

[Register here](#)

If you have any questions about the updates above, please email [nelvcse@thcvs.org.uk](mailto:nelvcse@thcvs.org.uk).

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