

Q1 Open Referral UK Steering Group Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome & Introductions

Apologies from:

- Laura Sato, NHS England
- Chris Storey, DWP
- Kate Cooper, LGA
- Kathryn Reynolds, Scottish Government

Present:

Name	Job Title (role)	Organisation (Team)
Sheldon Ferguson	(Interim ORUK Chair)	MHCLG (Local Digital)
Tom Latham	Head of Data Design	NHS England
Shona Nichol	Head of Technical Data Policy and Team Leader for Data Standards.	Scottish Government (Data Division of the Digital Directorate)
Linda Vernon	Head of Digital Transformation	NHS England (NorthWest Regional Team)
Firoze Salim	Head of Frameworks and Standards	DSIT (Data Standards Authority within GDS)
Mike Thacker	ORUK Advisor	Porism (iStandUK team member)
Paul Davidson	Director of Standards (ORUK & SAVI Product Owner)	iStandUK

Michelle Kern	Partnership Office Manager	iStandUK
Mevish Khalid	Communications & Social Media Manager	iStandUK
Shelley Heckman	iNetwork & iStandUK Partnership Director (ORUK & SAVVI Programme Manager)	iNetwork & iStandUK
Nicholas Oughtibridge	Standards Specialist	iStandUK
Kate Parker	Deputy Chief Executive	Community Action Network

2. Steward Update: transition to iStandUK

The group received an update on the transition of Open Referral UK stewardship from TPXimpact to iStandUK, including progress on handover and the future development of the standard.

A timeline of stewardship transition was outlined, starting in November 2025, with formal handover from TPXimpact occurring April 2026. A period of planning is underway to determine how the standard will be developed and taken forward. It is expected that a new “incubation” phase will begin in October, during which iStandUK will actively promote and track adoption of Open Referral UK (ORUK).

Key areas of focus during this transition include:

- resourcing and the formation of the iStandUK team
- technical handover and website management
- establishing international relationships with Open Referral partners
- interaction with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole ORUK and SAVVI pilots

3. Developing a Vision

The group reviewed the outcomes of a recent visioning session, which set out a collective vision for Open Referral UK and resulted in agreement on ten key areas of benefit:

- Common UK Digital Data Architecture
- Better Service Discovery
- Coordinated Service Pathways for Better Citizen Journey
- Removal of Geographical Boundaries & Inequity
- The Right Support at the Right Time
- Sustainable, Empowered & Effective VCFSE sector
- Reducing the Cost of Public Services
- Using Data & Analytics Effectively to Support Better Decision Making
- Evaluation of services driving accountability, improvements & trust
- Enabled Innovation & Constructive Disruption.

It was agreed that further work is needed to broaden stakeholder representation, particularly from the technology and VCFSE sectors. Further visioning sessions will be undertaken to support this and to continue developing the shared vision.

ACTION 3.1. All members to support socialising the outputs of the visioning session with colleagues for feedback.

ACTION 3.2. A further visioning session to be scheduled to explore ORUK's role in delivering the shared vision.

4. Forward Plans for ORUK

The group was provided with an overview of upcoming technical and strategic initiatives for Open Referral UK, including a range of technical and delivery initiatives covering schema development, platform improvements, training and adoption support. These included:

- **Schema and standard updates:** including consideration of international schema improvements and proposed technical workshops.
- **Website and validator improvements:** for better engagement and enhancement of the validator tool.

- **Academy training and playbook development:** to establish an Open Referral UK Academy and develop a playbook providing step-by-step guidance for publishing and using service information.
- **Supplier engagement and market shaping:** including collaboration with Tech UK, to encourage adoption of Open Referral UK.
- **National content integration and adoption tracking:** making use of national datasets at a local level.
- **Component architecture and AI integration:** detailing system roles such as service directories, publishers, finders, aggregators, and AI interfaces, and discussed prototyping efforts to enable AI-powered service discovery and data quality improvements.

Key Discussion Points:

National Alignment & Ambition:

The group discussed the potential to align Open Referral UK with wider cross-government data and digital initiatives. Members noted that there is growing interest in improving how service information is structured and shared across local and national systems. There was agreement on the importance of developing a shared strategic direction for Open Referral UK, including how it supports collaboration across organisations and contributes to more joined-up service delivery.

Barriers to Adoption:

The group discussed barriers to adoption, including reluctance to be early adopters, concerns about changes to the standard, limited awareness at senior levels, and variation in local approaches. Trust in data quality was also identified as a significant factor.

The pilots in Greater Manchester and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole are intended to address these challenges by demonstrating the collective benefits and network effects of adopting Open Referral UK across groups of councils.

5. MHCLG Funded GMCA & BCP Pilots Update

The group was briefed on how the pilot projects aim to create network effects, demonstrate practical benefits, and produce artefacts and case studies to support wider adoption, with a focus on strategic outcomes and lessons learned.

The role of the SAVVI framework in enabling more proactive and coordinated support was outlined, including its alignment with Open Referral UK to support earlier intervention.

Members were invited to attend regular iStandUK show and tell sessions to share progress, challenges and insights as the pilots develop.

6. Steering Board: purpose, role & membership review

Members discussed revising the terms of reference for the Open Referral UK Steering Group. It was noted that the existing terms of reference are out of date and no longer reflect changes in secretariat, membership and objectives.

There was recognition that the group may need to evolve from an advisory body towards a stewardship and governance role, supporting ongoing development, maintenance and alignment with wider data sharing approaches such as SAVVI.

The group discussed expanding its remit to include sustainability, future hosting, governance and funding considerations, reflecting a shift from advocacy towards longer-term stewardship.

Members agreed on the importance of the steering group in championing the shared vision, engaging with technical and architectural discussions, and promoting a common mission across the public sector.

<p>ACTION 6.1. A revised set of terms of reference for the Steering Group to be prepared for review at the next meeting.</p>
