

Minutes of the Adult Care and Well Being

Overview and Scrutiny Panel

County Hall, Worcester

Tuesday, 5 December 2023, 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Shirley Webb (Chairman), Cllr Jo Monk (Vice Chairman), Cllr Alan Amos, Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Andy Fry, Cllr Paul Harrison, Cllr Matt Jenkins and Cllr James Stanley

Also attended:

Karen Edwards, Worcestershire Association of Carers
Kim Terry, Worcestershire Association of Carers
John Taylor, Healthwatch Worcestershire

Mark Fitton, Strategic Director for People
Rebecca Wassell, Assistant Director for People Commissioning
Steven Medley, Lead Commissioner
Steph Simcox, Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Sally Baldry, Principal Management Information Analyst
Paul Harbison, Consumer Relations Officer
Kate Griffiths, Interim Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Manager
Jo Weston, Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Available Papers

The members had before them:

- A. The Agenda papers (previously circulated);
- B. The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 October 2023 (previously circulated).

(A Copy of document A will be attached to the signed Minutes).

496 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies had been received from Cllr Adrian Kriss and Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Adult Social Care Cllr Adrian Hardman.

497 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Andy Fry declared a pecuniary interest regarding his employment for a Learning Disabilities provider which had connections to the Council.

498 Public Participation

Mr Brendan Young asked questions in relation to the Agenda Item on How the Council Works with Carers.

The Chairman thanked Mr Young for his questions and confirmed he would receive a written response.

499 Confirmation of the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 October 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

500 How the Council Works with Carers

The Chairman welcomed Officers, representatives from Worcestershire Association of Carers (WAC) and two Carers to the meeting. To introduce the Item, the Panel heard from the Carers who shared their own experiences of being a carer and their interaction with WAC. A further statement was read out from a carer who was unable to attend the meeting and all 3 accounts highlighted the valuable support that WAC gave, especially the opportunities to meet other carers.

The Chairman invited questions and during the discussion, the following points were made:

- When asked how the Council assesses the quality of care agencies, it was reported that quality improvement was an integral part of the new contract framework for independent focussed domiciliary care providers
- Traditionally, agency activity nationally was broadly time and task based activity, however, the new arrangements allowed scope for flexibility and was based on outcomes – with services tailored to the individual
- Officers reminded the Panel that there was a finite workforce available and the tailored response was more effective. Carers were very supportive of the ability to tailor care to their own needs as it provided greater flexibility
- The Panel supported the vision for all carers in Worcestershire and commended the Council's mission to ensure actions were informed by lived experience
- A recent survey of 280 carers in Worcestershire found that 21.5% of them reported having little social contact and feeling socially isolated. In response to how this could be overcome, Carers outlined their experience of WAC organised activities, highlighting that the role of WAC was vital and it was important that the Council ensured that resources were available to make it happen

- When asked whether WAC was under the radar if 21.5% of carers felt isolated, it was explained that all carers had to be first identified. A GP referral was one way of signposting, but more could always be done to identify carers
- WAC was seeing an increase in carers who were further into crisis as it was thought they needed to be in crisis in order to get any support
- A Member asked about the differences between commissioning of Social Care and NHS Continuing Healthcare (CHC). It was agreed to provide Members with further information after the meeting
- In response to a query as to the level of scrutiny undertaken by Officers, there was ongoing monitoring through the Commissioning Team, Quality Assurance Team, Care Quality Commission and the NHS. In addition, there was a statutory duty on the Council to collect carer feedback
- Clarity was given that employees of care agencies were contracted by their Agency, not the Council, and therefore any terms, such as travel time, was an agreement between the Agency and the employee
- In relation to the funding arrangement between the Council and WAC, the Council commissioned the Carers Hub
- A Member asked how the figure of 53,000 unpaid carers in Worcestershire was known, to be informed that census data was used, however there had been a drop since the last census, which had recorded around 60,000 carers, due to a change in census wording
- Furthermore, although WAC undertook a lot of outreach, it was important for all agencies to make every contact count to identify carers. It was reported that historically GPs had received payment to build a register of unpaid carers
- In relation to the Public Participation, a Member asked what could be done to ensure the quality of service was maintained for carers of stroke patients and how WAC could gain awareness of stroke services
- Although the Council had delegated the statutory duty of carer assessments to WAC, the Council was ultimately accountable. Performance data was provided to the Council on a quarterly basis and regular meetings took place. It was agreed to provide information to Members after the meeting
- It was reported that one of the main challenges for carers was the hospital discharge process. Officers highlighted that social workers had an active role in Pathway 1 discharge (home with reablement support) and would expect conversations to happen with carers with all discharges. WAC was aware of real examples when care was assumed, however, Officers reminded the Panel that discharged patients may not be known to social care, particularly if discharged home with no further support (Pathway 0)
- Clarity was provided that young carers were included in the All-Age Carers Strategy and were supported by Worcestershire Children First
- A Member asked about Redditch Carers Careline, to be advised that WAC worked closely with them and would signpost and refer carers to them.

The Director from Healthwatch Worcestershire was invited to comment on the discussion and agreed that hospital discharge continued to be an issue for carers.

501 Performance and 2023/24 In-Year Budget Monitoring

The Panel had received performance information for Quarter 2 (July to September 2023) and financial information for Quarter 2 (Period 6).

The Principal Management Information Analyst highlighted that the number of admissions to permanent care per 100,000 (aged 18-64) was reducing and Members should see a fall in the total annual figure in the next report. In comparison, admissions to permanent care per 100,000 (aged 65+) were rising. The Strategic Director commented that contributing factors included the increased number of older adults experiencing falls. Nationally, Public Health was concerned that since the Covid pandemic there was an increase in people with fractured hips.

In response to the Panel's request for the age profile of people admitted to long term care, the average age of adults aged 18 to 64 entering permanent care was 51 and 84.5 for those aged over 65. This was positive and a good indication that reablement services were working well.

Although the number of Annual Care Package Reviews completed had risen to 85.7% in September, compared to 80.2% in June, it was still underperforming on the target rate for 2023/24 of 95%. The Strategic Director highlighted that despite the target not being met, Worcestershire had the best performance in the West Midlands region.

In relation to the more detailed information requested at the last meeting, (admissions by primary support reason, 18-64), a Member asked whether there could be overlap in some of the categories. It was clarified that the reasons were set nationally, however a clinical diagnosis would be used as the main reason, for example Learning Disability Support. It was further clarified that the data provided was only for admission to bed based care.

The Director of Healthwatch Worcestershire highlighted a possible link with the level of carer support to the level of residential care.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer referred to the corporate budget position as reported to Cabinet on 23 November 2023 which was an overall outturn forecast at Period 6 for a net overspend of £21.9m after the use of budgeted risk reserves. Demand was rising in three key areas, adult social care, children's social care and home to school transport leading to significant pressures.

In relation to Adult Services, a £8.9m gross overspend on placements was forecast, mitigated in part by use of a £3.6m additional grant. Not only was the number of placements rising but the unit cost of placements was also rising. Concern was raised that figures could escalate during the Winter period.

Questions were invited and in the ensuing discussion, main points included:

- A Member asked about the progress of the Council's voluntary redundancy programme, to be advised that the programme was still open, so it was difficult to speculate on the outcome
- Although statutory services had to be met, all Officers had a requirement to check and challenge the market to ensure the Council was not overpaying for any service
- The Strategic Director advised that choice was still a vital element of a placement, with families able to top up the Council's contribution if a particular placement was desired
- For clarity, the Council did not purchase any care from a Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspected inadequate provider
- By the end of September 2023, an additional 366 care packages had been approved, a growth of 5.5%. The 2023/24 budget was based on a 4% growth in clients
- Clarity was given that the £3.6m additional grant was a one off Government Grant for 2023/24 relating to the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund, however, a further £2.2m one off Government Grant for this had been included within the Provisional Local Government Settlement for 2024/25
- A Member asked whether the Council could foresee care companies leaving Worcestershire due to their own costs rising, for example agency staffing had around a 30% mark up on their own staffing costs. Officers reported that Commissioners did look at market pressures, but were not able to authorise all of the uplifts which were requested by providers. Of around 600 providers, 2 were known to have withdrawn provision and further changes could not be ruled out
- The Council was working with providers to adapt to changing need, for example skills and resources to accommodate dementia patients or accommodating a much older frail resident
- The Strategic Director advised that if a Care Home had a good Registered Manager, it was likely that it was a Good Care Home.

The Director of Healthwatch Worcestershire asked about the length of stay in a Care Home to be advised that it was around 2 years, which was no different to the figure nationally. Clarity was given that if a self funding client's assets fell below the £23,250 threshold, they would have a financial assessment and if the care received was meeting their needs, the impact of moving the resident would be taken into account.

In relation to Care Homes which were rated by CQC as requiring improvement or had safeguarding concerns, Officers advised that inspection visits had only recently started after the Covid pandemic. Safeguarding concerns were investigated by the Council's Quality Assurance Team and the NHS Quality Assurance Team and providers were held to account. Members were assured that Teams would notify CQC and any other local authority that had a client in the particular home. The Panel learned that nationally, the number of safeguarding concerns was rising.

502 Compliments and Complaints for Adult Services

The Consumer Relations Officer briefly outlined the Agenda Report, highlighting that learning from complaints was vital for continued development. For the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 there had been 250 complaints, an increase of 7% from 233 in the previous twelve months. During 2022/23, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) had received 15 complaints and 16 were determined, of which 6 were upheld.

In the ensuing discussion, the following main points arose:

- A Member asked about trends over time, to be informed that there had been an increase year on year. Around 100 complaints had been received 5 years ago, in comparison to 250 in 2022/23
- There had been an increase in the number of complaints that related to the standard of service received in the complainant's view (65% in 2022/23, compared to 58% in 2021/22)
- Complaints received about external care providers could be referred to the Council's Quality Assurance Team
- The Panel was pleased to learn that the number of compliments received had increased and was proportionate to the additional 1,500 people entering the system
- The Report referred to examples of concerns that may be raised, including a lack of empathy or compassion shown to service users. Members were advised that the category of staff attitude and behaviour was often more difficult to determine due to a lack of witnesses. It was agreed that further explanation of the types of complaints would be provided after the meeting
- A Member referred to the previous discussion on 28 September 2022 and was disappointed that a request for further narrative was not included in the Report. Members acknowledged the need for anonymity and Officers agreed to determine a suitable level of information in future reports
- Of the total number of complaints received in 2022/23, 6% had been escalated to the LGO. For 2023/24, it was currently around 4% and figures were not dissimilar to national figures
- A large scale safeguarding concern had led to the Directorate updating its Provider Concerns Process. When asked how many people had been affected by the concern, it was agreed to provide Members with further detail
- The Chairman thanked everyone present and requested a further report in 12 months time.

503 Work Programme

The Panel considered the Work Programme and no additional Items were added.

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm

Chairman