

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 5 January 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Curry (Chair), Crumbie, Mrs Culley, Holroyd, Laing, Layton, M Nicholson, Renton and A J Scott.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bell and Preston.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Elizabeth Davison (Assistant Director – Resources), Jeanette Crompton, Paul Dalton (Elections Officer), Christine Shields (Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation) and Thirkeld (Head of Adults), Jeanette Crompton (Strategic Commissioning Manager), Ann Baxter (Independent Chair, Darlington Safeguarding Partnership) and Paul Dalton (Elections Officer).

AD19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AD20 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 27 OCTOBER 2020

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 27 October 2020.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 27 October 2020, be approved as a correct record.

AD21 COVID RESPONSE - VERBAL UPDATE

The Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Transformation provided a verbal update on the ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically in relation to care providers.

It was reported that since 28 September 2020 to 4 January 2021, 219 care home staff had been diagnosed with Covid-19, with 213 care home residents receiving a positive diagnosis. During the same period, it was reported that 45 staff in domiciliary care had been positively diagnosed with Covid-19, and that 18 service users had contracted the virus.

The Committee was informed that there were ten ongoing outbreaks of Covid-19 within care home settings, and that the Outbreak Control Team were working closely with the managers of those homes to bring the outbreaks under control.

Members were informed that Covid vaccinations were being rolled out to larger care homes (those homes with more than 50 beds) by the South Tees Foundation Trust, and that since the start of the vaccination programme, 217 care home staff had received their initial vaccination, with 36 of those staff also receiving their second vaccination. This was across 31 care home settings in Darlington.

The Committee was advised that the Primary Care Network had mobilised three

teams to roll out vaccinations for all remaining care home staff, and care home residents, and that this would be done as soon as the vaccine was received within the Borough, which was anticipated to be no later than 11 or 12 January 2021.

Members entered into discussion on the timescales for the roll out of the Covid vaccination programme, the work of the Outbreak Control Team, Infection Control staff and Care Home staff in terms of outbreaks and the recently received second tranche of Infection Control funding.

RESOLVED – That the contents of the update be noted.

AD22 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Chief Officers Executive submitted a report (previously circulated) which proposed a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2021/22 to 2024/25, and which also included setting a budget and council tax increase for 2021/22, for consultation.

The submitted report stated that the Council had faced significant challenges over the last decade following the economic downturn and reduction in public sector spending, and highlighted that the Council had been successful in responding to these challenges to date, however noted that the challenges were becoming increasing difficult, particularly in respect of a growing elderly population, the pressure in the children's social care sector, and the major economic impact of Covid-19, which had had a direct impact on the Council's finances.

It was reported that in his 2020 Spending Review, delivered on 25 November 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had referenced a number of funding streams, which included Social Care Grant, Covid-19 support, the continuation of Revenue Support Grant and an Adult Social Care precept, and that, as the Local Government Finance Settlement had not been received at that point, a number of assumptions in relation to Government funding had been made in the preparation of the submitted report.

The submitted report outlined details of the Core Offer budget, which had been agreed following a significant consultation exercise in 2016, and which had reduced expenditure and services to a risk based minimum level, with a small investment fund of £2.5m per annum for services which the Council was not required to provide, but which it was felt added great value to Darlington, and its residents (Futures Fund).

It was also highlighted that subsequent good progress made on achieving savings, strong cost management, and innovative treasury initiatives had allowed the Council to add to the Futures Fund, and that unallocated balances of £6.5m were invested in key five areas which held great value to the community, namely Community Safety; Maintaining an attractive street scene environment; Maintaining a vibrant town centre; Developing an attractive visitor economy; and Neighbourhood renewal.

The submitted report further detailed some of the significant pressures on the Core Offer budget, in particular the pressures arising in social care and the ongoing impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's expenditure and income budgets, however it was determined that, should the expected funding streams identified above be received, and through tight financial management, innovative financial investments and increased income from economic growth successes, the Council could still

deliver the agreed balanced plan, finance the MTFP a further year to 2024/25, whilst retaining usable balances of £3.504m.

Members entered into discussion on the sustainability of Adult Social Care funding, the budget reductions in reablement, and the increasing costs associated with inflation and the increased National Living Wage costs associated with service providers, both of which it was highlighted were outside of the Council's control. Members also heard about the budget pressures associated with service provision for those with learning disabilities, and the increased costs associated with an ageing population.

Discussion ensued on the potential of using the Futures Fund to contribute to the cost of Adult Social Care, the use of discretionary spending, and the likelihood of further Government funding to assist with the costs of the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED –That this Scrutiny Committee

- (a) Supports the Council Tax increase of 1.99 per cent plus the 3.00 per cent Adult Social Care Precept to help fund social care for 2021/22, totalling a 4.99 per cent increase;
- (b) Has no comment to make on the proposed Schedule of Fees and Charges for those services within its remit; and
- (c) Supports the Futures Fund continuation into 2024/25.

AD23 DARLINGTON SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT - 2019/2020

The Acting Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated), together with the Annual Report 2019/20 of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) (also previously circulated).

The submitted report outlined the requirement for the DSP to produce an Annual Report to account for the Partnerships achievements over the previous year and to make an assessment of the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements within the local area, and the Independent Chair, Ann Baxter, attended the meeting and provided an overview of the key messages and challenges faced.

Members were informed that the Annual Report was the first produced by the Partnership under the new safeguarding arrangements, and outlined what the Partnership had done over the period 2019/20.

Members entered into discussion on how the Partnership monitored the effectiveness of training and personal development, how the Partnership's Learning and Development Group identified best practice and how it worked in partnership with other organisations, the recognition of partners to the importance of embedded and effective multiagency working, the management of large volumes of enquiries and referrals, and the potential for increased domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic, however it was highlighted that there was no evidence that this was the case in Darlington.

Further discussion ensued on the locations of abuse and the areas of risk. Members felt that it would be useful to see the number of cases being dealt with, rather than percentages, in future reports, and the Independent Chair agreed to take this forward.

Members expressed disappointment that volunteer support had been vastly reduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, which potentially reduced sight on vulnerable residents, and discussed providing the appropriate environment for safeguarding.

RESOLVED – That the DSP Annual Report for 2019/20 be noted.

AD24 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QTR 2 2020/21

The Acting Assistant Director – Adult Services submitted a report (previously circulated) which provided Members with performance information against key performance indicators for 2020/21 at Quarter 2.

The submitted report provided performance information in line with an indicator set and Scrutiny Committee distribution agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 4 June 2018, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. The indicators scrutinised by this Scrutiny Committee are aligned with key priorities, the majority of which are used to monitor the Corporate Plan.

The submitted report highlighted that twelve indicators are reported to this Committee, ten on a six-monthly basis, and two annually. Of the ten indicators reported on a six-monthly basis, four indicators showed performance better or the same compared to this point last year (ASC002, ASC003, ASC049 and ASC050); three indicators showed a performance not as good as that recorded at this time last year (ASC019, ASC045 and ASC046), and will continue to be monitored and managed; and three indicators were not comparable and were reviewed at a point in time (ASC208, ASC209 and ASC211).

Whilst acknowledging that the figure was gradually increasing once again, Members were keen to determine the reasons for the decrease in the number of people who had no on-going care needs following completion of provision of a reablement package (ASC19).

Members were also interested in the immediate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the reablement packages available, and what impact 'Long Covid' may have on reablement packages going forward.

Discussion ensued on the family engagement and advocacy arrangements in place for those patients hospitalised with Covid-19, and their role in arranging ongoing support to meet patient needs.

RESOLVED – That the performance information provided in the submitted report be noted.

AD25 COMMUNITY EQUIPMENT SERVICE

The Acting Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously

circulated) to update Members on the Community Equipment Service available to residents, and provide information as to how the service worked and plans for future re-procurement.

The submitted report stated that the contract for the provision of Community Equipment had been held by Medequip since 2015, following a procurement exercise carried out in 2014 by North East Commissioning Services (NECS), and that during the term of the contract a number of developments had taken place to improve service delivery to residents. The submitted report advised that the current contract was now coming to an end, and that plans were underway to re procure the contract.

Members were pleased to learn of an amnesty on equipment distributed, which has led to the reuse and recycling of equipment. Members were also pleased to hear that a review of buffer stores had taken place; that a Clinical Advisor had been appointed to advise on specialist equipment; and that an Equipment Review Group had been established to ensure that stock held was as cost effective as possible.

RESOLVED – (a) That the development of the Community Equipment Service during the contract term be noted.

(b) That the plans for re procurement be noted.

AD26 WORK PROGRAMME

The Managing Director submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during 2020/21, and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

RESOLVED – That the current status of the Work Programme be noted.