

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 14 July 2020

PRESENT – Councillor Curry (in the Chair), Councillors Crumbie, Mrs Culley, Curry, Holroyd, Laing, Layton, M Nicholson and Renton.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Bell, Preston and A J Scott.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Mills.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Paul Dalton (Elections Officer), Christine Shields (Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation) and James Stroyan (Assistant Director Adult Social Care) and Paul Dalton (Elections Officer).

AD7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AD8 RESPONSE OF ADULT SERVICES AND COMMISSIONING TO COVID-19

The Director of Children and Adults Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on the response of Adult Services and Strategic Commissioning to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The submitted report stated that Adult Social Care (ASC) had responded proactively to the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic since its emergence in early March 2020, that the service had ensured that service users and their families had been supported to remain as safe as possible, and continued to have their care needs met, during a fast moving and complex environment. The submitted report also highlighted that care providers had received the support needed to enable them to continue to provide care in extremely challenging circumstances.

The submitted report informed Members that service delivery had been developed, adapted or extended to anticipate and respond to demand, and that ASC had worked closely with key partners including the NHS, police and the voluntary sector to mobilise staff and resources to ensure that core service functions were maintained and individuals safeguarded, with those changes to working practices outlined within the report.

Members sought clarification on both the number of COVID-related deaths in Care Home settings, and the staff absence figures in the Home Care Sector, in comparison with those Home Care staff who had tested positive for COVID-19. It was noted that 70% of Care Home settings had experienced COVID-19, and Members were interested to discover whether lessons had been learned from the 30% of Care Home settings that had not experienced COVID-19, and requested further information on the support provided to the Care Home Sector.

Members were keen to explore plans to re-open day services, and learn how these could operate in a different way, and were pleased to discover that contact had been maintained with service users and their families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,

and that these would continue to be engaged with as service provision was reintroduced.

In terms of Care Homes, Members wanted to establish whether there were any outliers as regard the homes impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and were interested to know whether there were any shortages in terms of the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to Care Homes. Members heard that in the early stages of the pandemic PPE was distributed evenly across the sector, with some larger providers experiencing low stocks at times, but at no point ran out of PPE. It was asked why PPE was not distributed proportionately to service providers, and it was explained that mechanism for distribution was determined at a different point in the supply chain.

Discussion ensued on recruitment in the Care Sector, and Members enquired whether the COVID-19 pandemic, and the recent opening of a large retail employer in the town, had impacted on the recruitment of care staff. Members heard that the pandemic had generated a raised value and importance to those working in the Care Sector, and that a reduction in the care workforce had not been experienced in Darlington. Members raised the issue of staff working in more than one setting, and whether this might lead to cross-contamination, but were reassured to learn that those working in multiple settings was minimal in Darlington.

Members entered into discussion on local testing arrangements, and sought clarity around local and regional options, the testing arrangements in place upon hospital discharge, and testing by the County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust prior to admission.

Members' attention focused on the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and were informed that it was estimated that the cost to the local authority was anticipated to be in the region of £14m, however it was noted that the local authority had received funding of £6m, resulting in a deficit of £8m. Members were informed that further funding may be forthcoming, however there was no confirmation of this.

Concerns were raised about potential safeguarding issues, however Officers assured Members that they were not aware of any specific cases. Members were advised that there had been no increase in cases of domestic violence during the period, and there had been an initial drop in cases of self-neglect, however as the lockdown period eased and home visits increased, it was anticipated that the number of cases would return to expected levels.

Members expressed interest in the redeployment of staff to other roles, and the time taken to provide appropriate training, and were keen to ensure that dignity and emotional well-being were maintained as part of a more qualitative response.

Members concluded discussion by formally wishing to express their gratitude to all staff in the Children and Adults Department, and to those providers and workers within the wider Care Sector.

RECOMMENDATION – That the contents of the report be noted.