

ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 22 October 2024

PRESENT – Councillors Anderson (Chair), Crumbie, Layton, Mammolotti, M Nicholson, Toms and Tostevin.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Donoghue, Renton and Storr.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Joss Harbron (Assistant Director - Adult Social Care), Christine Shields (Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation), Lisa Holdsworth (Commissioning Officer), Jenni Wood (Chief Executive, Durham County Carers Support), Liz Johns (Operations Manager, Durham County Carers Support) and Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer).

AD15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

AD16 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 27TH AUGUST 2024

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 27 August 2024, be approved as a correct record.

AD17 CQC ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK - UPDATE

The Assistant Director, Adult Services, advised Members that there had been no further progress in relation to a date for this authority's inspection under the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance Framework. It was reported that Officers had attempted to confirm a date for the inspection, however no response had been received to date.

The Assistant Director, Adult Services, reassured Members that casework had been prepared in readiness for inspection, and that this was continually kept under review to ensure that it remained up to date.

RESOLVED – That the content of the update be noted.

AD18 DOMESTIC ABUSE

The Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an overview of the requirements of the Local Authority under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, and an update on how this authority is supporting victims of domestic abuse and adhere to the Act.

The submitted report outlined that the Domestic Abuse Act came into force in 2021 and introduced new requirements which Local Authorities must fulfil. It was stated that the Act created the first statutory definition of domestic abuse to ensure that "domestic abuse is properly understood, considered unacceptable and actively challenged across statutory agencies and in public attitudes". The submitted report identified examples of behaviour

which constituted domestic abuse; highlighted the statutory requirements placed on the local authority by the Act; and outlined the priorities contained within the 'Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy 2021-2024'.

Concerns were raised in relation to future funding of support services, and whilst it was noted that funding had previously been made available to the Local Authority via the Burdens Fund, Members sought to ascertain what contingency arrangements were in place should such future funding not be forthcoming. Members also sought reassurances in relation to the role of the Domestic Abuse Housing Options Officer, the level of actual housing stock available, the level of emergency accommodation available and provision under the sanctuary scheme.

Members were eager to learn more in relation to the actions undertaken in terms of early identification and intervention (Priority Two), the work undertaken to encourage reporting of domestic abuse and to understand the barriers to reporting domestic abuse, and establish what more could be done to ensure that the voices of the victims of unreported domestic abuse could be heard. Members were also keen to ensure that all reporting and disclosure of domestic abuse was correctly recorded to support any future action.

Members entered into discussion on the role that Adult Social Care staff play in identifying domestic abuse, the training provided to allow staff to identify the signs of domestic abuse, and how this identification was integrated into social work practice. Members also expressed an interest in scrutinising the performance data in relation to commissioned partners, specifically in terms of waiting times for dedicated one-2-one therapy, the sanctuary scheme and accommodation.

Discussion returned to the uncertainty around the future funding of services, with reference made to the funding of the refuge by Public Health. It was acknowledged that, whilst work was being undertaken to maximise charitable trusts and manage the existing resources, there were potential risks to services.

RESOLVED – (a) That the Adults Scrutiny Committee await the completion of the Needs Assessment and that this be provided to Scrutiny, where appropriate.

(b) That the services commissioned by Darlington be monitored and scrutinised by the Adult Scrutiny Committee, and that this Scrutiny Committee support the re-evaluation following completion of the Needs Assessment.

(c) That the joint working arrangements on domestic abuse be noted.

(d) That an annual update report be submitted to this Scrutiny Committee.

AD19 DARLINGTON CARE NETWORK FOR PROVIDERS

The Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation submitted a report (previously circulated) to review and consider the provider engagement arrangements that are in place for Adult Social Care Providers.

The submitted report stated that the Council's duties and responsibilities for Adult Social

Care were set out in key legislation such as the Care Act (2014), the Mental Health Act (1983) and the Mental Capacity Act (2005), and that commissioned services support and meet a wide range of adults needs such as frailty, learning disabilities or autism, mental illness and substance misuse. It was highlighted that the Care Act (2014) placed a legal duty on the Council to shape the care market and ensure that there was sufficient care provision to meet the care needs of the people in Darlington. In addition, the Council was obliged to “promote diversity and quality of provision of services”, and that these objectives could only be met through active engagement with care providers which promoted effective communication, consultation and co-production.

The submitted report outlined that the Council had a successful track record of effectively engaging, consulting and communicating with its independent and voluntary sectors, and utilised a number of key forums, programme areas and information sharing approaches that the Council to ensure that effective communication and engagement continued. The key objective of these engagement arrangements was to build and sustain positive and productive relationships, which in turn ensured that the Council and its partners were sighted on the whole system issues and challenges and how they affected vulnerable people in its care.

Members welcomed the report and noted the high level of work undertaken to develop and maintain the relationships with our care providers, and reflected on the value that these relationships had during the Coronavirus pandemic. A question was raised in relation to the support provided for grant applications.

A discussion took place on the level of influence the authority had in relation to our providers, and whilst it was acknowledged that the authority could not impose, shared social values were encouraged.

RESOLVED – That the effectiveness of the consultation and engagement arrangements with Adult Social Care Providers be noted.

AD20 DARLINGTON'S COMMITMENT TO CARERS 2023-28

The Assistant Director Commissioning, Performance and Transformation submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide information in relation to Darlington's Carers' Strategy ('Darlington's Commitment to Carers 2023-28') and progress in implementing the Strategy.

The submitted report advised that Darlington's Commitment to Carers was launched on 17 April 2024 at a well-attended launch event, during which presentations were given by representatives from Darlington Carers Support, Family Action Darlington Young Carers and Darlington Borough Council, outlining Darlington's Commitment to Carers and the support available to all groups of carers in Darlington. It was reported that attendees were also asked to identify actions they would take as their own Commitment to Carers, including participation in the social media campaign, and good progress has already been made in implementing the actions identified.

Members also received a presentation from the Commissioning Officer, the Chief Executive, Durham County Carers Support, and the Operations Manager, Durham County Carers Support, which provided Members with an overview of the key objectives of the Darlington's

Carers' Strategy, the progress made under the Strategy to date, the focus of social media campaigns, and the support available for unpaid carers.

Discussion ensued on the reasons why someone may become an unpaid carer, with it noted that many might feel a 'loving obligation' to take on the caring responsibilities for a loved one or relative, with reference also made to those carers in full-time employment, child carers and elderly carers. Members were also keen to learn how Darlington Carers Support promoted the organisation, and whether there was scope for Councillors themselves to promote the organisation.

Members entered into discussion on the number of people who accessed the service, and the factors that qualified carers to receive Carers Allowance.

Members were also keen to learn more in relation to the Hospital Discharge Project, whether any work was undertaken with other hospitals in Darlington and whether the work undertaken with the Darlington Memorial Hospital facilitated a quicker discharge process. Focus was also given to individual needs, the sustainability of discharge and the safety of discharge, especially in light of potential winter pressures.

RESOLVED – (a) That the content of the report be noted.

(b) That Members give consideration as to how they can support the delivery of the actions identified in Darlington's Commitment to Carers.

AD21 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1 2024-25

The Assistant Director, Adult Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with performance data against key performance indicators for Quarter 1 of 2024-25.

The submitted report provided performance information in line with an indicator set and Scrutiny Committee distribution agreed by the Monitoring and Coordination Group on 4 June 2018, and subsequently agreed by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. It was stated that the indicators were aligned with key priorities. Twelve indicators were reported to this Committee, and the performance of eight of the twelve indicators as at the end of Quarter 1 2024/25, were reported on.

It was reported that, of the eight indicators reported at this point, one of the indicators showed performance better than at this time last year (ASC002); four indicators were comparable with the same time last year (ASC003, ASC019, ASC049 and ASC050); and three of the indicators were not comparable and were reviewed at a point in time (ASC208, ASC209 and ASC211).

It was reported that the two indicators recorded annually (ASC054 - The proportion of people who use Adult Care services who find it easy to find information about services – and ASC055 - The proportion of people who are carers who find it easy to find information about services) were not included within the report as the 2023-24 results would be released towards the end of the year, and would appear in the Mid-Year Scrutiny Report.

Discussion ensued on the number of younger adults (aged 18-64 years-old) who were placed in residential care and the challenging complex needs and comorbidities within this cohort. Members were informed that such placements were utilised as appropriate, however were not necessarily a placement for life, with regular reviews undertaken and alternative options explored. Members were keen to understand the complex needs of such individuals, and whether these were primarily physical or mental needs, with Members advised that it was a combination of both.

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

AD22 CLIMATE CHANGE

The Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Economy submitted a report (previously circulated) to encourage the Adults Scrutiny Committee to give consideration to the revised briefing note for Scrutiny Committees drafted by the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer, in relation to the Council's commitment to tackling climate change.

The submitted report stated that, following the Local Government elections in 2023, the Climate Emergency Declaration was re-affirmed, and the Council's carbon neutral target was brought forward to 2040. Further aims to increase engagement with residents and businesses were included with the intention of reducing wider borough emissions. It was noted that a revised briefing note had been drafted by the Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer, which reminded Members that tackling climate change was a shared responsibility, and that Scrutiny had a critical role to play in these cross-cutting issues.

The submitted report highlighted that climate change as a stand-alone issue sat within the remit of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, however it was stated that everything that the Council did either had an impact on, or was impacted by, climate change, so it was important that all Scrutiny Committees ensure that everything that came before them had considered this.

Members entered into discussion on the use of on-line meetings and whether this was a proactive decision to support tackling climate change or a legacy from the coronavirus pandemic; the attendance of Members at the recent Climate Change Conference; the potential for learning from providers in terms of climate change initiatives, and the influence the authority had in terms of encouraging providers to adopt climate change schemes and initiatives.

RESOLVED - a) That Members note the advice and guidance provided by Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer in the revised briefing note.

b) That the questions outlined in the revised briefing note appear as an appendix to our Agenda, and form part of any submitted Quad of Aims, to ensure that these questions remain in the forefront of Members' mind when scrutinising reports.

c) That all internal reports coming to this Committee have a small section at the end of each report entitled 'Climate Considerations', with a brief note about any considerations which have been given, where appropriate (this can come with the qualification that the staff

within the department are not qualified in climate action).

AD23 WORK PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Assistant Director, Law and Governance, submitted a report (previously circulated) which requested that Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during 2024/25, and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

It was noted that the Agenda for the next meeting of the Adults Scrutiny Committee had a number of substantial items, and it was suggested that those items involving the attendance of external partners be taken first at the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the content of the report be noted.