

COUNCIL
1 FEBRUARY 2022

OVERVIEW OF ADULTS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Adults Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

Covid-19 Response

2. At an informal meeting on 21 December 2021, we received a verbal update on the ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically in relation to care providers. Members of the Committee were advised of one outbreak at Middleton Hall Care Home, though it was noted that this was being managed well, and that the last positive Covid test had been recorded on 9 December 2021, some twelve days earlier. It was reported that there were no staffing issues in relation to this outbreak.
3. Members were informed that there were no reported cases of Covid in terms of domiciliary care in relation to the Council's two main providers, though staff recruitment was proving to be slow. It was reported that both main providers had placed an embargo on annual leave for the remainder of 2021 to ensure that staffing levels were maintained. It was also pleasing to note that there were no outbreaks across day care settings.
4. We were informed that the visiting guidance for care homes had changed to permit only three named visitors per resident, and that care homes in Darlington were working with families directly to implement this.
5. We also received the latest figures in terms of vaccinations (First Vaccine, Second Vaccine and Booster), both for residents and staff working within care settings. We enquired as to the number of staff who had left roles after choosing not to have the Covid vaccine and entered into discussion on whether the booster would become mandatory for care staff.

Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

6. We received a report inviting Members of the Committee to give consideration to the draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2022/23 to 2025/26, which provided us with the opportunity to ask any questions relating to the remit of this Scrutiny Committee, and to forward any views or comments relating to the services and finances within the remit of this Committee to the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee for consideration on 20 January 2022.
7. The Committee received an update from the Group Director of Operations on the finance settlement received subsequent to the report being circulated, and the impact this had on the assumptions made within the draft MTFP. We were informed that the Council would be receiving £1.579M from the Services Grant announced in the Autumn Statement, and £1.162M from the Social Care Grant, which was slightly higher than initially included within the draft MTFP, however Members were advised that the Services Grant was a one-

off payment whilst a further review of Local Government funding was conducted. We were advised that Officers would need to give further consideration as to how this was reflected within the draft MTFP, and whether any further assumptions could be drawn going forward. Members were also advised that the New Homes Bonus had been extended for a further year, and that this would net a further £1.4M above anticipated levels. It was reported that there were also a number of deductions from initial draft figures, however overall there would be an additional £1.073M funding for 2022/23, over that which had been previously presented.

8. Members entered into discussion on the statutory nature of the majority of Adult Social Care services and the funding allocation and considered what further work the Committee could do to examine this. We sought clarification around the price inflation figure contained within the MTFP for 2025/26, and enquired about the rationale behind the increase in the external purchase of care, and the reasoning for the perceived reduction in funding for long-term physical disability and long-term mental disability.
9. Discussion took place on the potential to harness under-utilized Council assets and build a Council managed Care Home and further Sheltered Accommodation. Members also scrutinised whether the margin of error in relation to National Insurance contributions and the Employee pay award was sufficient. There was a desire from Members to see greater focus on honing services via the transformation agenda to reduce spending and produce greater efficiencies and encourage our partners to do likewise. We also considered whether tackling inequalities could be undertaken at a Council wide level to reduce specific service costs.

Adult Social Care Outcome Framework (ASCOF)

10. The Committee received a report to inform Members on the progress in determining a revised Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF), and to provide an overview of Darlington's performance against ASCOF over the past three years. We were informed that the ASCOF was first published in March 2011 and is reviewed annually to update the measures to reflect outcomes for adults and carers.
11. ASCOF measures how well care and support services achieve the outcomes that matter most to people, and that the ASCOF is used both locally and nationally to set priorities for care and support, measure progress and strengthen transparency and accountability. Performance against the ASCOF is published annually by NHS Digital, and that the Department of Health and Social Care also provides an annual report on the national picture. It was pleasing to note that Darlington performs well against the ASCOF measures, and in most cases performs better than the North East average.
12. We highlighted the reduction of support required within the reablement packages, and it was noted that there is a high success rate of people once receiving reablement when leaving hospital not requiring ongoing care and that the low numbers requiring reablement is a positive, as people return home with either their existing packages of care in place, or not requiring care.

13. The high percentage of adults with learning disabilities in employment in Hartlepool Borough Council was also noted, and Members asked if there were any lessons the Council could learn from Hartlepool Borough Council.
14. The Committee were keen to learn more in relation to the number of carers in receipt of direct payments and the different interpretation and approaches undertaken by other authorities to record this. Members were also eager to hear more in relation to the validity and integrity of the user and carer surveys.

Work Programme

15. Members gave consideration to the Work Programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/22 and to any additional areas that Members would like to be included.

Councillor Bob Donoghue
Chair of Adults Scrutiny Committee