

COUNCIL
25 JANUARY 2024

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.

Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 - 2027/28

2. The Committee received a report which invited Members to give consideration to the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, and forward any views, in particular those in relation to the services and finances which were specifically within the remit of this Scrutiny Committee.
3. We heard that the MTFP had been agreed by Cabinet on 5 December 2023 as the basis for consultation, and Members were asked to discuss and consider the overall contents of the MTFP, however, with particular emphasis on those services and finances within the MTFP which specifically related to those areas within their remit, and forward any views to a Special Meeting of the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee, to be held on 18 January 2023, for consideration. We were informed that the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee would then agree a formal response to Cabinet on behalf of all the Scrutiny Committees, as part of the consultation.
4. We entered into discussion on the costs associated with children transitioning to Adults Services and the arrangements in place to plan for transitions, and the work being undertaken to promote Discretionary Housing Payments, and how we could best to maximise receipt of this funding to ensure that there is no underspend. Members were interested to know the percentage of the Adult Social Care budget spent on statutory services and how the funding is utilised, and whether a cost benefit analysis has been undertaken in terms of commissioned services and the scope for the development of an in-house solution (Care Cooperative).
5. We sought clarification around the assumptions made around the continuation of the Social Care Grant, and enquired on the purpose of the £71,000 of non-allocated, non-construction funding attributed to Adult Social Care within the submitted report. There was agreement that there was a need for greater funding for Mental Health services, and Members questioned the proposed reduced increase in Council Tax outlined for future years.

Social Care Reforms - Update

6. We received an update on the reforms to Adult Social Care, and were informed that since the previous update the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection ratings for the five Local Authority pilot areas had been published.

7. We were informed that the CQC had now updated their guidance on how they will assess local authorities, as required by the Health and Care Act 2022. Members heard that the CQC would be starting assessments from January 2024 onwards, with assessments being undertaken in cohorts of 20 authorities every three months, which would enable the CQC to assess all authorities within two years.
8. It was also highlighted that the proposed reforms to the Mental Health Act 2022 had been delayed and would not be enacted prior to the next UK Parliamentary (General) Election.
9. The Committee were keen to learn how much notice the CQC would provide ahead of an inspection, and welcomed the proactive approach adopted by this authority in terms of readiness for inspection.

Substance Misuse Service Update: Support Treatment and Recovery in Darlington Through Empowering (STRIDE)

10. Members received a report from the Interim Director of Public Health which provided the Committee with an update on the current performance, provision and composition of STRIDE specialist substance misuse treatment and recovery services delivered within Darlington.
11. Following the publication of the National Drugs Strategy, 'From Harm to Hope', in December 2021, the Government had published guidance for local delivery partners in May 2022, which outlined the recommended steps that local areas should take to help deliver the three main priorities of the Strategy - breaking drug supply chains, delivering a world-class treatment and recovery system, and achieving a generational shift in the demand for drugs. It was reported that to support the improvements described in the National Drug Strategy, three years of additional ring-fenced funding for treatment and recovery had been allocated to local areas as the Supplemental Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant (SSMTRG) from 2022 until 2025.
12. Members were notified that this increased funding had enabled a step change in increasing both clinical and non-clinical treatment capacity, and had also supported the provision of a comprehensive recovery offer and greater capacity for both drugs and alcohol detoxification, planned for 2024.
13. Members were pleased that, whilst progress on numbers in treatment had been slower than expected, primarily due to recruitment, training and the retention of an expanded workforce, performance in Darlington had improved from the baseline and was consistent with progress both regionally and nationally.
14. Discussion ensued on the period of time that services were commissioned for, the historic lack of rehabilitation provision within the community and acknowledgement of the programmes currently delivered. Recognition was given to the potential for dual referrals and diagnosis within mental health services, and Members enquired about the training required in care homes to support staff in assisting residents with addictions. The balance between engaging people in services with the right to decide not to access services was explored, and Members were keen to learn more about the services available to those with a gambling addiction.

Councillor Helen Crumbie
Chair of Adults Scrutiny Committee