

REVIEW OF ADULT CARE SERVICES DURING COVID TASK AND FINISH GROUP

10:00am - Tuesday, 9th August 2022
Via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT – Councillor Holroyd (in the Chair); Councillor Curry and Councillor Layton.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Yvonne Hall, Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage, and Paul Dalton, Elections Officer (Democratic Services).

The following issues were discussed:-

Commissioned Services Staff Survey

- Members of the Task and Finish Group noted that only thirteen responses had been received from Commissioned Services Staff, that most responses had been received from Care Homes, and that it was evident that only Managers had responded, and therefore the response was not necessarily wholly representative, or reflect the views of 'grass roots' staff.
- The Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage suggested that this may have been due to the fact that the Survey was initially sent to Managers for distribution, who may have taken it upon themselves to complete the Survey, and there may have been a different response if paper copies had been sent to all staff.
- Councillor Holroyd stated that Members still needed to recognise the bias within the responses. Members analysed the respondents in terms of qualifications, job status and length of service.
- Question 8 – Members noted that only 15% of respondents identified a negative change to their role.
- In terms of Question 9, Members noted the benefits of reduced travelling times, however remained conscious of the emotional weight and stress borne out in two of the responses. Discussion ensued on the increased paperwork, with the Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage outlining the mandatory required functions in the Care Sector during the pandemic, including the daily ring around, which (although useful) was resource intensive. It was noted that this subsequently reduced to three times per week, and had now reduced to once per week. It was noted that there was also a degree of urgency attached to the provision of information which may have contributed to feelings of stress. It was mentioned that some staff looked forward to the calls and dialogue as this provided contact with others.
- It was suggested that Managers became support mechanisms for members of staff, but Managers themselves didn't have that support network.

- Question 10 – Members were concerned to learn that training was not being held, with speculation that some physical elements of training could have been missed. The Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage stated that she wasn't aware of any issues around training, noting that even during lockdown training was provided by technological solutions. The Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage stressed that training was monitored.
- Members were pleased to note that front line working enabled solutions to be found, noting that technological improvements played a large part in delivery. Concerns were expressed that non-ICT literate staff may not have been able to manage, however the Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage stated that she wasn't aware of any issues in this area as a lot of work had previously been undertaken, and there is an expectation that staff are ICT-literate.
- Members entered into discussion on the restrictions around family visitations and the end of life, and enquired as to what we did in Darlington. The Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage explained that there was no straight answer, with many responses taking place on a day-by-day basis. Again, it was noted that technological solutions played a great part in communication between relatives. There was much empathy in such situations from staff, recognising that it was not the same for relatives as physically being with one another, however it was pleasing to hear that there were no complaints to investigate.
- Councillor Curry asked whether it was possible to signpost services to assist those suffering from mental health issues following the loss of a family member in such circumstances, and Councillor Layton advised that St. Theresa's Hospice had started accessing 'Talking Therapy'. A suggestion was made to establish support groups.
- Councillor Layton enquired whether Officers were concerned about the current level of Covid cases, and the Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage observed that restrictions had been relaxed, not many people were wearing masks, and that it would be interesting to note any figures following the Commonwealth Games, however note that citizens were essentially now expected to live with Covid now, as they would with any other illness.
- Question 12 – Councillor Holroyd stated that it was unsurprising that workload was increasing.
- Question 13 – Members noted that 7/13 respondents felt that their workload was not manageable, speculating that policy changes, cover arrangements, a lack of time off all contributed to this feeling.
- Question 14 (Response No. 3) – The Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage highlighted that there were limited options in Care Homes for cover arrangements, with no extra staff available. Many homes worked as a family,

with some staff moving into the care home. It was stated that, essentially, staff had to rely on each other.

- Councillor Holroyd enquired as to whether any staff were furloughed within the Care Sector, and was assured by the Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage that none had been furloughed in Darlington.
- Question 15 – Councillor Holroyd felt that it was unsurprising that the changes to staff roles during the lockdown/pandemic period did not affect Service Users.
- Question 16 (Response 2) – It was noted that there were strict rules in relation to the grant funding allocated, with the grant conditions outlining what money could be spent on. It was not possible to distribute it to staff as a ‘thank you’. Councillor Holroyd enquired as to whether the monies could have been used to pay for additional shifts, and was advised that the grant funding could’ve have been used in different ways. Further discussion ensued on providing greater recognition and acknowledgement to staff for their efforts and support, with a suggestion that an article appear in the ‘One Darlington’ magazine. The Service Manager – Contracts and Brokerage outlined that comments had been made in staff PDRs. Councillor Holroyd enquired as to how we could ensure external providers acknowledged their staff.
- Question 17 – Councillor Holroyd observed that it was important to top up training that was missed.
- Question 18 – It was noted that this response was no worse than might have been expected given the circumstances.
- Question 19 – It was observed that it was reflective of the impact that 100% of respondents had you worked in their own time, or cancelled leave or training during the pandemic period.
- Members questioned the wording around Questions 20 and 21, noting that staff may have been sick for other reasons.
- Question 22 (Response 2) – Members expressed concern in terms of this response, however not sure what we could do to assist with the rebalancing of the work life balance.
- Question 24 – Members were disappointed to note that 40% of respondents felt overwhelmed in their job, and that 50% of respondents did not feel, or were unsure, that wider society valued their role. Members wondered whether a public acknowledgement in the ‘One Darlington’ magazine might improve people’s perceptions.
- Question 26 (Response 3) – It was noted that this issue was a national one.

- Question 27 – Members were pleased to read of the positive feedback in terms of providing Adult Social Care services on behalf of Darlington Borough Council.
- Question 28 – Members noted the emotional stress of managing Adult Social Care during the pandemic, and were concerned, but not surprised, to read of staff leaving the profession (Responses 5 and 7).

Adult Social Care End User Survey

- Question 2 – Members noted that more than 60% of respondents received in home carer assistance to complete the Survey.
- Question 3 – Members noted that 40% of respondents were not satisfied with the care and support services they received.
- Question 4 – Members noted comments around the lack of fluid provided (Response 1); the cleanliness of the commode (Response 3); the lack of communication (Response 4); the comments in relation to face masks, and the possibility that carers could have worn visors (though it was noted that these could have been less protective) (Response 6). Members were disappointed that the carer providing the sitting service in Response 6 did not engage with the person she was looking after. Councillor Layton noted that communication was one of the things residents missed more than anything during the pandemic. In terms of Response 6, Councillor Holroyd expressed particular frustration with the poor quality of the sitting service, and suggested that there should be an expectations / requirements list, as residents needed social interaction, highlighting that loneliness was a particular issue during the pandemic. It was observed that managers should be checking quality.
- In terms of Response 3, Members were keen to know whether incontinence checks were being carried out, and in terms of the non-attendance highlighted in Response 10, Members felt that it was appropriate that Carers should be letting people know.
- Members were concerned about the lack of information seemingly provided in Response 5, and questioned whether checkpoints could be outlined on the Council's website.
- In terms of Question 6, Members felt that the 61.54% of people who felt that care and support services helped them have a better quality of life during the Covid period was a little low, and requested that some feedback be built in. Councillor Layton stated that she felt that it might be difficult to tease out the strands as perceptions will depend on circumstances, which would inevitably colour judgement.

- Question 7 – Members were concerned by the apparent level of isolation reflected in the responses, and Councillor Curry observed that it may have been governed by the policy in the individual care home, noting some residents got regular checks whereas residents in other homes were left on their own. Councillor Holroyd suggested that we accentuate best practice.
- In terms of Question 7 (Response 3), Members felt that there was a miss in terms of providing care, and highlighted that there perhaps should have been a referral to the GP or a physiotherapist, or certainly some signposting to such services. Members were keen to ensure that a process support package was made available to client and family at contact points.
- Question 7 (Response 4) – Members felt that staff annual reviews should be used to address the disparities in professionalism.
- Question 8 – Members noted that four respondents felt that they didn't have enough choices over care and support services, and wondered whether they were aware of the choices that they have.
- Question 9 (Response 1) – Members were concerned about the amount of moving around outlined in the initial response.
- Question 9 (Response 2) – Members felt that the concerns expressed in Response 2 were worrying, and speculated as to the rights and individual had to refuse a carer or flag up concerns. Councillor Layton suggested that the autonomy should be with the individual.
- Question 10 – Concerns were expressed about 'Food and Drink', with Councillor Curry noting that sometimes a carer may not have time to cook meals, but just prepare a ready meal. Councillor Curry was interested to know whether alternatives have been offered (Age UK, for instance), which provided cooked meals. Members were also keen to know if an individual did not eat what was prepared, was this reported back anywhere.
- Members were also keen to know whether those residents who suggested that they did not 'Feel Safe' were receiving help. Councillor Curry suggested that any good carer should ask individuals how they feel, but was aware that some don't. Councillor Layton suggested that the same level of care as previous had been provided, with no thought to the fact that an informal carer or family member was unable to attend. It seemed that the normal care package didn't take into consideration the pandemic. Councillor Layton also asked whether people were aware of how to access extra or additional help, suggesting that an additional care fact sheet should be available on the Darlington Borough Council website.

- Question 11 – Councillor Layton noted that food and drink was not always provided in every package. Members were pleased to note that most of the responses were positive.
- Question 12 (Response 2) – Councillor Curry felt that it would be important to advertise the process wider, and build in checkpoints to ensure that individuals and relatives were kept informed.
- Question 12 (Response 3) – Councillor Curry felt that the carer involved was milking the situation, taking the user feedback into consideration.
- In terms of Questions 13 and 14, Members were concerned to note that two respondents sometimes felt undermined by the way in which they were helped and treated, though Members acknowledged that we needed to help people.
- Question 15 - Members recognised and echoed the sentiments expressed in by the respondents, feeling that both communication and training were fundamental the success of service delivery during the pandemic.
- Question 16 – Members were very concerned in terms of the responses to Question 16, and were very focused that we needed to improve access to information, suggesting Adult Social Care Call Handlers, or Fact Sheet. Members were keen to know whether a referral pathway was offered or available.
- Question 17 – Members were concerned to discover that 38% of respondents felt that they were kept badly informed, in too long a time, or had to chase up to find out information for themselves (or their carers). Members felt that this was another indication of a need to improve communication.
- Question 18 – Members found the outcome of this surprisingly positive, possibly expecting that a greater number of people would have stated that there were negatives to the changes made as a result of Covid.
- Question 19 (Response 4) – Members wondered how, if families were not able to visit loved ones, comments could be made. Members were keen to know what the situation was now in terms of families and care homes, and whether families could have greater involvement now.
- Question 22 – Based on the answers received, Members felt that the creation of a 'snag list' would be a good idea, and again the responses to this question echoed the need for a greater emphasis on communication and training (particularly in relation to Response 5). Members also like the suggestion of a checklist for visits.

- Question 26 – Members were concerned in relation to the number of respondents who had difficulty, or were not able, to deal with finances and paperwork, and wondered whether more help could be offered.
- Question 28 – Members acknowledged that there was little scope for interventions in terms of Private Homes, however expressed the view that more suitable homes should be built. Members felt that there was a role in terms of a change in Planning Policy. Councillor Layton commented that the Council had a good reputation for putting adaptations in place.
- Members felt that Question 29 demonstrated that respondents felt very isolated during the Covid pandemic.
- Members noted that all bar one respondent received additional practical help on a regular basis from someone else.
- Members were interested to note that five of the respondents (45.45%) to Question 32 paid for additional care or support privately from their own money. Members entered into discussion in relation to whether this was nice to have, or essential.

IT WAS AGREED – The key issues identified from the Surveys revolved around 'Communication' and 'Training'.

Members felt that more could be done to signpost End Users to the services that they required, and would like to receive more information about existing arrangements, together with thoughts around potential improvements.

Members were also concerned about certain incidents identified through the Surveys, and were keen to receive more information around the training provided to ensure a more consistent service.