

## **REVIEW OF ADULT CARE SERVICES DURING COVID TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**2.00pm - Friday, 4 November 2022  
Via Microsoft Teams**

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

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Christine Shields, Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation, Phillipa Pacey, Quality Assurance Lead, and Paul Dalton, Elections Officer (Democratic Services).

The following issues were discussed:-

- Councillor Holroyd began by explaining that this session was to prepare some questions for those individuals who had expressed an interest in attending a hearing. Councillor Holroyd suggested that the first question should be “How do you feel overall?” (as more of a holistic question).
- Councillor Layton suggested that a potential follow on could be “If there was one thing that could have been done better, what would it be?”, or “Is there something else we could have done?” to elicit a more positive response rather than a negative one.
- The Quality Assurance Lead felt that obtaining individual experience was important, and that it would be a nicer gesture to make contact personally with open questions. In Phillipa’s experience, this provided much richer information. Phillipa stated that she would be happy to be involved in any work going forward.
- Councillor Holroyd was keen that we contacted everyone who left contact information, and that we put a Press Release out to thank those who took part. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation advised that thanks could be passed through the Providers Forum.
- Councillor Holroyd noted that the responses were mostly from Managers and felt that it would have been nice to have heard from staff on the front-line. Councillor Holroyd suggested that we could ask Managers how working during the pandemic affected the wider staff. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation suggested that staff would have learnt about continuity planning and infection prevention and control.
- Councillor Holroyd relayed her own experience of a family member who caught Covid whilst in a care home, and noted that staff seemed to be suffering from burn-out and being overworked.

- The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation highlighted that the biggest struggle currently was the recruitment and retention of staff, and that one of the impacts of the pandemic was that staff were initially buoyed up and considered keyworkers, however that status has been quickly forgotten. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation stated that the local authority were not in a position to remunerate staff how we might like to. Councillor Holroyd suggested that lack of funding might be considered similar to constructive dismissal.
- Councillor Curry speculated that payment of the minimum wage was the reason that many people were leaving the sector. Councillor Holroyd agreed, highlighting people get paid more working in supermarkets than Care Workers receive. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation reiterated that it wasn't within our gift to recognise the work of Care Workers financially, though Councillor Holroyd did suggest that there were other mechanisms for expressing gratitude for the work undertaken. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation stated that there was a National Enquiry taking place.
- Councillor Curry asked whether there were any charity organisations who were able to assist carers, noting that we now had two years of post-Covid poverty. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation stated that there was a volunteer cohort meeting, which pulled together and signposted to all services. Councillor Curry suggested that we should look to promote that further. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation advised that Margaret Vaughan sat on the CDDFT Working Group.
- Councillor Holroyd recapped the questions identified for Care Home Managers to this point:
  - Describe the affect of Covid within the environment;
  - What could have been done better?
  - How it affected staff?
- In terms of the End User Survey, it was noted that the majority of respondents were not the person who received care. Questions that may want to ask include 'How did the person feel?', 'How did the carer feel?', 'What was the impact?'
- Councillor Layton suggested that it might be difficult for care recipients, and that older people were more accepting. It was stated that care recipients may become dependent on the service received, and more accepting, especially as they wouldn't want to lose that service. Councillor Layton felt that it may, therefore, be difficult to get an authentic voice.
- Councillor Holroyd suggested that the Group contacted Darlington Borough Council's Care Staff to establish if they wanted to contribute (Care / Domiciliary / Extra / Sheltered). Councillor Curry stated that she felt that it was

important to hear the voices of those in domiciliary care. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation stated that those working in domiciliary care were moving from crisis to crisis, and that domiciliary care was much more pressurised. The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation felt that a written question to those working in domiciliary care would be much more appropriate.

- The Quality Assurance Lead again highlighted the benefits of personal contact, stating that she felt that you could get much more out of a conversation.
- The Assistant Director – Commissioning, Performance and Transformation stated that it was important to remember that continuity of care remained, that people were understanding of the difficulties faced, that staff and teams kept going and didn't stop working due to fear. It was also noted that, other than due to Covid, there was very little staff absence. It was acknowledged that visitation was initially an issue until funding was provided, however the actual continuity of care continued.
- The Quality Assurance Lead felt that whilst it was important to talk about experiences, it was also important to recognise that many elements were out of the hands of those staff dealing with the situation directly. Councillor Holroyd highlighted supply issues as an example, and noted that the Group had not really explored that aspect. Councillor Layton also highlighted delays in house modifications.
- Discussion continued on how best to engage with Darlington Borough Council staff, to establish whether the 'Your Social Care and Support Services' survey had been conducted within the last year, and whether the Group could e-mail Darlington Borough Council staff to talk about their experiences and answer questions. The structure of the Hearings was also discussed, with one hour set aside for Commissioned Staff, one hour set aside for Darlington Borough Council Staff, and one hour set aside for the End User respondents.
- Members of the Group determined questions that they may want to ask Darlington Borough Council staff – How working through the pandemic affected wider teams? Issues around PPE? How was staff morale? How integration was undertaken?
- Members were also keen to understand the impact on Day Care Centres, the impact of any closures, and whether any staff were furloughed. Members were also keen to understand the impact on Restart.
- The Quality Assurance Lead again reiterated that she felt that personal feedback was much richer, and more could be obtained via the personal touch. She felt that there were repeated themes.

**IT WAS AGREED** – (a) To establish Hearings with those respondents to the surveys who had expressed a willingness to attend a Hearing, preferably prior to Christmas 2022.

(b) To contact the Head of Performance and Transformation to establish whether a survey of Darlington Borough Council's own Adult Social Care staff had been undertaken within the last year, and the previous year it was undertaken to be able to compare back, and to compare that with the Commissioned Services staff questionnaire.

(c) To ask if Darlington Borough Council's Adult Social Care staff can be contacted to ask if they would wish to contribute to a Hearing session.