

COUNCIL
16 MAY 2024

OVERVIEW OF ADULTS PORTFOLIO

Purpose of the Report

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Adults Portfolio.

Operational Services

2. The waiting list for the Adult Contact Team continues to be reviewed and risk assessed weekly to ensure there is robust oversight. The waiting list currently stands at 65 with no high priority people waiting.
3. The OT waiting lists remains at 163, all those waiting are low priority, with 53 requiring minor level adaptations that are DBC housing stock resulting in ongoing work to consider individual approaches to support these people. Recruitment to the team has been successful and the new staff will be in post during April and May. Cases are prioritised based on need and risk.
4. The Sensory waiting list is currently at 35. Successful recruitment has taken place to support capacity within the team with the aim of reducing the waiting list across the upcoming months.
5. In addition, there are waiting lists for Blue Badge applications awaiting OT assessment, with 68 are over the 30-day turnaround target (as per our policy). We have had 752 applications since 1 April 2023. Blue Badge applications for 2023/2024 significantly increased since a change of criteria broadening eligibility in April 2023. This backlog is also impacted by the legacy from Covid and staff turnover. A task and finish group is reviewing the Policy to look to streamline the process and will update Cabinet on recommendations in due course.
6. The Darlington Commitment to Carers Strategy was launched on 17 April 2024. ASC have been part of this working group and have developed an action plan in response to the areas highlighted with in the strategy.
7. The Assistant Director has regular updates with the Carers Resource Service with some recent positive feedback that the Hospital Discharge Project is going well, fully supported via RIACT along with hospital staff. The Hospital Discharge Project aims to work on the wards with families of people preparing for discharge. There is an offer of support, advice and guidance for the families (carers).
8. The Social Workers are accessing the wards, promoting the service, and have arranged presentations within the community hospitals. An example of positive feedback from the Carers Support Service in relation to ASC is: "I raised a safeguarding (adults) and the team were fantastic, felt very supported and was kept updated and we worked together to put a good plan in place".

9. Between June and October 2023 Adult Social Care commissioned Healthwatch to undertake a study into the experiences of people, and their unpaid carers who access services from DBC Adult Social Care. The study will be published on the Healthwatch website with a link via the ASC website pages.
10. The completion of this commissioned study by Healthwatch has been a helpful opportunity for DBC to seek valuable feedback from those accessing our services, via an independent third party. That being said, the final number of those engaging with the study was markedly low meaning this is not necessarily representative of all of those accessing DBC services.
11. Key themes included:
 - (a) Most participants responded positively that workers took the time to get to know them as a person including their culture and beliefs, what was important to them, and their views and wishes.
 - (b) Most participants said their worker gave them relevant information or advice in a way that was suitable for them, or put them in touch with people who could, and felt supported to understand their choices and options. Most felt involved in developing their support plan and exploring how their needs could be met.
 - (c) Most participants felt that they understood what would happen next such as a review timeline, further contact, interventions, case closed or offer of a carers assessment.
 - (d) Concerns regarding getting in contact with or getting a response from DBC when they had a concern was a consistent theme from respondents. Further feedback related to not being kept up to date, not having what was happening fully explained to them and long delays in responses.
 - (e) Further feedback was that a step-by-step approach to the assessment rather than rushing through it would be more beneficial.
 - (f) Most people were not aware of the on line offer of undertaking an online self-assessment.
12. Various elements of learning have been taken away in terms of how the study was conducted, and what could be done differently in the future to support more meaningful and robust findings. For example, it not always being clear if participants feedback was related to DBC, or provider services.
13. It is recognised that this was a first attempt by DBC to seek feedback in this way, and that the learning gained throughout the process has been invaluable and would be utilised if repeated.
14. Since the commissioning of the study by Healthwatch various other new initiatives have been introduced such as:
 - (a) Case File Audits have been reintroduced, ensuring there is sufficient and robust oversight and challenge of the quality of social work practice. Further, auditors make

contact with people to seek their direct feedback alongside reviewing the case file and meeting with the allocated worker.

- (b) A process for capturing the feedback of people on our case file management system at various key points in their journey through our system has been introduced. This means that peoples feedback will be routinely captured in real time, allowing a responsive and engaging approach to our work with them.
- (c) A review of the online offer and webpages is being undertaken to develop how we improve the information, advice and guidance available to people through the DBC website.

15. Response to Healthwatch to be featured in the published report:

'Darlington Borough Council would like to thank Healthwatch for undertaking this study, and detailed report into the experiences of people and their unpaid carers, who have engaged with us, as well as those who gave their time to contribute and share their feedback.

It is recognised that such a small sample will only provide us with a snapshot as to people's experiences, and following a time of significant pressure as we emerge from the pandemic and increasing demand for support. However, as a service, it is vital that we hear the voices of those we support, and who access our services to understand their experiences, what we do well, and how we can improve. The report highlights a number of areas where we are doing well, but also areas where we can improve, which we will commit to doing so.

Since the completion of this study, we have implemented various measures to support the continued improvement of our service and the experience of those engaging with us, as well as identifying further opportunities for improvement within our ongoing transformation plan.

- 16. It was Autism Awareness Week beginning 1 April. We ensured there was a visible presence on social media to provide an opportunity to increase the publics knowledge of Autism.
- 17. ASC with Tees and Esk Wear Valley Foundation Trust (TEWV) and the Integrated Care Board are working together to produce an updated response to the National Autism Strategy 2021-2026. This will be shared in due course.

Commissioning and Contracts

- 18. The Commissioning and Contracts Team is making good progress in its contract re-procurement programme. The objective of the programme is to ensure that our strength-based and outcome- focused approach continues to be at forefront of care provision in Darlington. The revised arrangements will also support the Council in meeting its Care Act (2014) statutory duty of ensuring market oversight and shaping duties that there is a sufficient and diverse range of care and support services available.
- 19. To date the work has included: a relet of the Older Persons and Older Persons with Mental Health Residential Care contract which will commence on 1 April 2024; the Home Care and Supported Living contract which will become operational on 1 November 2024, and Working Age Adults residential care contracts which will become operational on 1 October 2024. Full-service reviews have been conducted in partnership with care

providers and adult services operational colleagues in order to develop refreshed Service Specifications.

Climate Change

20. Teams continue to work towards the aims of the ASC climate change action plan, ensuring climate change is on team meetings, and championing ways of reducing energy consumption.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

21. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group met on 27 February. The group was provided with an overview of safeguarding roles within the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and their multi-agency approach to safeguarding, the group welcomed the connectivity and is positive that representatives will join Partnership Groups.
22. The group received a presentation following a number of cases of self-neglect which have featured in learning reviews undertaken by the Partnership. The Partnership recognised there were a number of specific actions to take forward from a multi-agency perspective. A Task and Finish group has been established to take forward key pieces of work which will support practitioners working with individuals who self-neglect. The Partnership has developed a briefing document on self-neglect. A learning lessons review is ongoing and
23. The Director of Public Health provided an overview on their plan to strengthen partnership working on the domestic abuse agenda to help prevent, support and tackle those who cause harm. It will begin by strengthening representation on the Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) to enable local intelligence to be fed in.

Councillor Anne-Marie Curry
Cabinet Member with Portfolio for Adults