

Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday 9th December 2021 at. 6.00 p.m.

Town Hall, Walsall Council.

Committee Members Present

Councillor Hussain (Chair)
Councillor Gandham
Councillor Murphy
Councillor Sears
Councillor Waters

Portfolio Holders Present

Councillor K. Pedley– Adult Social Care

Officers

Mrs K. Allward	Executive Director Social Care for Adults
Seanna Lassetter	Principal Social Worker
Mrs N. Gough	Democratic Services Officer, Walsall Council

66/21

Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Ditta, Councillor Cooper, Councillor Coughlan and Councillor Craddock.

67/21

Substitutions

Councillor Sears substituted on behalf of Councillor Cooper for the duration of the meeting.

68/21

Declarations of Interest and party whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

69/21

Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting that took place on 1st November 2021 were discussed.

Resolved

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st November 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The Committee agreed to receive item 7 prior to item 6.

70/21

Walsall Adult Social Care Pause & Learn Report

The Executive Director introduced the report (annexed). The Principal Social Worker highlighted the salient points of the report, the Committee

was informed that the purpose of this report was to provide an update on the findings from the Walsall adult social care pause and learn process. This was part of West Midlands Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) comprehensive sector-led challenge and continuous improvement programme.

The key strengths identified by the report were discussed, the following areas were highlighted:

- Effective leaders in place.
- Strength of partnerships in place.
- Improvements have been made since 2018 (despite a pandemic).

Members were informed that case audits on mental health had been conducted, and good outcomes had been achieved, assurance was provided that the new practice model was effective. The report detailed opportunities to improve in the future.

The Executive Director highlighted that in 2018/19 Walsall Adult Social Care ranked 112th out of 152 (Local Authorities) and this position had vastly improved in 2020 with the Authority ranking 54th.

A Member questioned what the future challenges were for the adult social care service. The Executive Director stated that processes had been adjusted as a result of the pandemic and the challenges faced as a result of this had been considered, however the biggest challenge for the future was recruitment to the workforce (national and local shortage of social care workers) along with an increase in demand, and individuals entering the service with more complex needs.

A Member provided feedback that the distribution of PPE during the height of the pandemic had been handled excellently in Walsall. The Executive Director explained that a store of PPE had been set up in Walsall, and PPE was distributed to care homes. The Committee were informed that daily telephone calls were made to care homes to ensure early identification of issues. In response to a further question from a Member the Executive Director described work being carried out to encourage more innovative use of direct payments.

It was stressed that reducing demand on adult social care through preventative work was needed to ensure that individuals were empowered to recognise their need for assistance and the community support available to meet these needs. It was stressed that pay and conditions for care staff needed to be improved, alongside career development and for to be recognised as a desirable career.

Officers were asked what was planned in Walsall to support mental health needs in the Borough. Members were informed that nationally the direction of travel was for early intervention, work was being done with Partners to ensure that this happened and find solutions to the increased complexity and demand presenting.

A discussion was held around funding and investment in services. It was concluded that additional investment would be needed to deliver in this area. The work of Walsall Together was acknowledged and this allowed the Council to influence the Partnership to ensure efficient use of resources.

Resolved

That the Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the findings of this pause and learn report.

71/21

Review of Home Care Capacity and Demand in Walsall

The Executive Director presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The presentation highlighted the current issues facing home care in Walsall (and nationally), and the actions underway to mitigate these.

The national picture was that demand had increased, alongside a lack of available care hours, and this often meant that individuals were offered care options that would not have been their choice. Regionally the number of care hours that were needed (but that were not available) had doubled within the last six months.

In Walsall the picture (November 2021) was slightly improved compared to national and regional, however there were 739 people on waiting lists for assessments (across all teams and services), with just over 400 people have waited over 28 days, 70 people awaiting care due to a lack of market capacity, and a deficit of 675 average number of home care hours. It was noted that the care workforce was not a fixed capacity and supply often fluctuated. Members were assured that in Walsall social workers risk assessed individuals on a continual basis, and in order to manage this risk, a 'provider of last resort' could be used to provide care until a long term solution could be determined. Community and voluntary sector support could also be accessed to ensure that basic needs were met.

Members were informed that the care workforce was impacted by external factors such as employment opportunities in other industries which were offering increased rates of pay. Pay for a care worker was significantly under the average salary in Walsall, with no national body for control of pay and conditions and a lack of recognised career pathway.

The Committee were informed of the ongoing actions taking place to tackle these issues. This included:

- Utilising a workforce grant to provide retention bonuses.
- Payment on plan to care providers to allow flexibility and cash flow certainty.
- Use of Resilient Communities to increase capacity.

- Use of technology.
- Recruitment through Walsall Together.
- Prioritisation of hospital discharge to ensure that needs of individuals were correctly assessed.

A Member asked if there was a national body which coordinated training and development for care workers. The Executive Director responded to state that there was not, Skills for Care offered guidance but there were no recognised qualifications. The Portfolio Holder stated that in Walsall a Skills Passport was being discussed to avoid the need for individuals to repeat training and also to allow recognition of training in the sector. The opportunities within the community sector to prevent individuals needing social care were described.

A Member questioned if the Authority could signpost individuals to care providers when they were completing apprenticeships. The Executive Director stated that the Authority was looking to develop a framework to improve this process.

Officers were asked if there had been an increase in referrals from GP practices, the Executive Director stated that the proportion of referrals had not increased and GP's often discussed cases at multidisciplinary teams which helped to avoid unnecessary referrals.

In response to a question from a Member, the Executive Director stated that in Walsall there were 58 care homes, with around 35 - 50 care providers. It was agreed that the detail on this would be circulated to Members. It was clarified that there was a wide range of care providers within Walsall, and this proved to be a challenge, it was endeavoured to consolidate providers to achieve greater effectiveness and efficiency.

In response to Member queries, the Committee were informed that quality of care was assured in a range of ways, locally through social worker annual reviews, the contract review mechanism, surveys and also through Care Quality Commission inspections. The Clinical Commissioning Group and Healthcare Trust had mechanisms for concerns about care to be raised.

The Executive Director assured Members that those individuals in the highest risk would not be left waiting for care as there were mechanisms to avoid this. In response to a query raised by a Member, the Committee were informed that an impact assessment of BREXIT was completed at the time, and although there had not been an immediate exit in the care sector, the impact on other sectors had potentially drawn staff away from care. However it was difficult to make this correlation. The issue of staff burnout was raised, due to the demands of the job.

The importance of individuals remaining in their own home and communities was discussed, alongside access to community support to ensure that their wellbeing was enhanced.

Resolved

1. That the Review of Home Care Capacity and Demand in Walsall be noted and a further update be scheduled on the work programme.

2. That the Executive Director (Adult Social Care) writes to the care workforce to thank them for their continuing efforts during the Covid19 pandemic.

72/21

Areas of Focus

Members reviewed the areas of focus proposed for the committee.

Resolved

The areas of focus was agreed.

73/21

Date of the next meeting: 20th January 2022.

Termination of Meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....