

Cabinet Member Briefing - The Adult Social Care portfolio



Introduction

'Our Council Plan' – Priorities

It is very challenging times for Adult Social Care (ASC) Nationally, Regionally and Locally. ASC has seen unprecedented growth in demand, teamed with significantly increased costs and workforce pressures. That said, despite these significant challenges, great progress has been made since the last ASC Portfolio holder report.

Walsall ASC has bucked regional and national trends and has had successful Social Work and Occupational Therapy recruitment campaigns. Waiting lists for services have more than halved and statutory, annual reviews are on schedule to be completed. Discharge from hospital, for people with care and support needs, continues to be an area of outstanding practice, this is cited in the recently published 'NHSE Good Practice Guidance' and the health and care integration arrangements have been shortlisted for a Health Service Journal (HSJ) Award to be judged next month.

There is good progress against the 6 key projects in the ASC Continuous Improvement programme. Additional capacity had helped to support the transformational work and financial and other benefits are being realised. The Programme infrastructure is now well established providing clear and appropriate governance to the programme. Other Directorates from across the council are engaged in the CIP and are providing additional challenge and support where required.

ASC budgets for 23/24 and projections for 25/25 are showing significant overspends. This is largely due to less people leaving the service, a higher number than projected starting a service and increased costs of providing a service to individuals due to complexity of need and higher provider costs. Measures are being taken to mitigate this overspend, such as the creation of a Community Reablement and Enablement service who will support people to achieve a greater level of independence, the use of technology in individual support plans and revised commissioning arrangements for provision for Adults with a Learning Disability.

Cabinet Member Briefing - The Adult Social Care portfolio

Our Service Delivery

Locality Social Care Teams

Since the height of the Covid 19 Pandemic, locality teams have seen a year-on-year increase in the number of referrals into the service. In 2021/22 there were 1517 referrals received for social workers, which increase in 2022/23 by 14.75%. The first half of 2023/24 has already seen an increase of 6.25% based on the previous year's figures.

Whilst the number of referrals has increased in the past three years, the number of conversions to s9 Care Act Assessments has been low; 36% in 21/22, 41.5% in 22/23 and in the first 6 months on 23/24 it is 40.75%. This can be attributed to the strengths-based conversations practitioners are having with clients and their families, providing the right advice at the right time. The launch of the Wellbeing later this year will also provide citizens of Walsall and practitioners with additional resource to support of Care Act duties to prevent, reduce and delay individuals to remain in the community for longer.

Due to the high demand and reduced staffing capacity in 2022/23, the focus was on new referrals, unscheduled reviews and safeguarding enquiries, therefore planned reviews were not prioritised. To support the teams, 150 of the oldest annual reviews were undertaken by an external organisation. These have now been completed.

As most teams now have all vacant posts filled, they have been able to focus on all areas of statutory responsibility. This means they are on target to complete all annual reviews in 2023/24.

At the beginning of the year, ASC undertook a successful recruitment campaign for social workers and social care facilitators, with all successful candidates now in post. Recruiting to these vacancies has supported locality teams to reduce number of individuals waiting and the timescales for a Care Act Assessment.

Commissioning

With the ongoing financial pressures that many Providers and Councils face, we have recently seen ASC Providers hand back contracts or stop trading. The Council has a Provider Failure Procedure that was enacted to ensure everyone impacted was moved safely and in a timely way to other support providers. We are developing arrangements to have closer oversight on the sector as intelligence is indicating financial pressures are becoming more problematic for providers. This is a complicated landscape and is impacted by overall funding to the sector, fees and cost of living pressures.

Cabinet Member Briefing - The Adult Social Care portfolio

We continue to see an increase in demand and complexity in the level of support and this will form the basis for discussions with providers. Capacity availability in the market remains in a very positive position, with Walsall continuing to perform well around hospital discharges and intermediate care, however, we are seeing a pressure around the costs associated with care home beds that are used in this service which contributes to wider system financial challenges.

The nationally directed 'Fair Cost of Care' exercise, undertaken as part of ASC reform to better understand provider costs, as reported previously at Cabinet, continues to be a focus for commissioning as we keen to strike the right balance between quality and costs. Quality will be a key area of focus over the next period, and we will work with health colleagues on this.

Occupational Therapy

The Principal Occupational Therapist was appointed in March 2023. Since then, the Trusted Assessor approach for low level equipment and minor adaptations has been re-introduced. The training programme has been updated along with a supporting handbook. The occupational therapy assistants have delivered training to 41 Locality based social workers and social care facilitators. This staff group are now able to prescribe and provide equipment and minor adaptations meaning that there are less hand offs across different professions within the teams and individuals are receiving the equipment and minor adaptations they need in a much timelier manner. Plans are now in place for this to be extended to the Learning Disabilities and Mental Health teams. To support this, a clinic-based approach to assessment for low level equipment and minor adaptations has been introduced at the Goscote Centre for those people approaching ASC for the first time. Staff within the Customer Experience Centre screen incoming calls and where appropriate can book a clinic-based assessment for the individual at their first point of contact. The clinics are run by the occupational therapy assistants. A review of this service is planned for the end of October with a view to identifying other community locations for clinics to be held.

Work has been completed on major adaptations pathways provided via the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and therapy teams within our Intermediate Care Service. This service is now able to refer directly to our Housing Standards and Improvement Team rather than having to go via ASC occupational therapy. This has removed duplication of assessment and provided a more streamlined service to those in need of adaptations to their home.

ASC recently concluded a successful campaign for Occupational Therapy recruitment. We know there is a national shortage of Occupational Therapists, and this is an area we have struggled to recruit to; therefore, it is a great achievement to have recruited to all 6 vacancies. It is hoped they will all be in post before Christmas.

Cabinet Member Briefing - The Adult Social Care portfolio

This time last year, there were approximately 290 individuals waiting for an assessment, with some waiting nearly 10 months before seeing a social care worker. Since then, the teams have reduced the number of individuals waiting to 141, of which only 54 have been waiting over 28 days for an assessment. Going forward, we are developing opportunities to schedule appointments sooner to ensure everyone is seen within 28 days.

An Assessed and Supported Year in Practice programme has been developed for newly qualified OTs alongside an enhanced induction programme for OTs new to ASC or returning to practice after a break. These new programmes have proven to be immensely popular with 6 new OTs (including 3 newly qualified and 2 new to ASC) being recruited at a time when most local authorities are struggling to recruit OT staff. In addition, we have recruited 3 Advanced Practitioner OTs to support our Locality Teams. Further OT recruitment to support our Learning Disabilities and Mental Health teams is now being considered.

Today (6th November) marks the start of National Occupation Therapy week, please see our Social Media pages to see the fantastic work of our Occupational Therapists in Walsall.

Mental Health Services & Approved Mental Health Professional

Mental Health Services continue to make sound improvements following a period of instability within its overall staffing structure with successful recruitment to the Mental Health Team Manager and Advanced Practitioner posts, coupled with a change in senior management it can demonstrate marked improvements in both staffing moral and service user engagement.

Additional progress is being made with its partnership arrangements with NHS Partners with reconciliation work gaining traction within its financial governance processes particularly within the context of S117 and joint funding arrangements.

The service continues to develop in response to national Mental Health Agendas and Priorities and is forging positive working relationships at a local and regional level following a period of instability.

Walsall Council in response to its statutory responsibilities provides a 24hr Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) Hub carrying out the full range of statutory mental health practice.

This service continues to develop and is supported by additional AMHP capacity with AMHPs co located across Adult and Childrens Services. Whilst there continues to be a national shortage with AMHP's Walsall Council has 16 AMHPs in practice and a regular intake of AMHP candidates with partnership arrangements with Wolverhampton University and service level agreements with Birmingham Council for ongoing refresher Training for existing AMHP practitioners

Walsall Council within the context of its Continuous Improvement Programme is looking at a range of options in terms of smarter ways of working and this is in collaboration with range of partners, service users and carers in order to build upon the success to date.

Cabinet Member Briefing - The Adult Social Care portfolio

Our Projects

The Adult Social Care Continuous Improvement Programme (CIP) is central to our ongoing improvement journey; delivering change; adapting and adopting to national reforms including the introduction of CQC assurance regime and of course delivering benefits aligned to wider council savings and transformation.

We are currently ensuring our current programme continues to underpin the evolving national landscape and that our deliverables continue to underpin the aspirations described in the last portfolio briefing.

The Adult Social Care CIP objectives are:

- Strength based assessment/approach in all service areas, including positive risk-taking approach.
- Improve joint working and co-production with residents, voluntary and community sector to develop strengths-based outcome focused services. (Resilient Communities).
- Increase the numbers of residents who self-assess or are able to make informed choices about their care and support needs at the first point of contact with the Council. By ensuring the right information support and advice is accessible to all.
- All new individuals in the community coming into Adult Social Care will be assessed to determine reablement/enablement potential and if appropriate will receive reablement care before receiving a long-term service.
- A joint carers strategy will be developed and implemented to provide the right level of care and support for carers.
- Develop leaders across the organisation that encourage a positive attitude to risk and empowers the workforce to take control and ownership over the provision of social care support, to facilitate innovation and creativity.
- Increase the use of assistive technology to maximise independence and reduce the need for long-term care.
- Reduce the number of adults and young people with a learning disability or mental health in long-term institutional settings including residential education placements.
- Increase in residents accessing community-based opportunities through the development of more resilient communities.
- Increase the number of people with mental health and learning disabilities living in their own accommodation or shared accommodation via a tenancy agreement.
- Increase the opportunity for more people to access 'shared lives' support.
- Commissioning of services which are outcome based. The Development of a new Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy that focuses on "outcomes" for service user groups in our community.



Cabinet Member Briefing - The Adult Social Care portfolio

Future works

Further work with Housing colleagues is being planned to look at how DFG can be used more effectively and imaginatively to support people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible.

Work is also underway to develop a community based re-ablement and enablement service, Pathways to Independence, which again will support people to remain in their own homes and live as independently as possible.

Safeguarding adults is a priority function for the directorate, and due to demand increasing year on year, we have established a safeguarding adult's team, which has been running since August 2023. A Safeguarding Adults Improvement Plan is being developed and will focus on developing a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), as well as a focus on Making Safeguarding more Personal and implementing a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF).

Adult Social Care continues to support the broader health system as part of The Walsall Together Partnership. Despite workforce challenges, the partnership continues to lead as a good national example of integrated working at a local level. Work has commenced exploring opportunities for further joined up working with health colleagues including integrated services where appropriate.

Thank you

The Adult Social Care sector is seeing unprecedented pressures in both demand and implementation of government reforms, however, despite these, teams work alongside informal carers, partners and providers to ensure that the most vulnerable people in Walsall are supported and safeguarded. I would like to extend my thanks to all staff who work across Adult Social Care, our Colleagues in finance and across the Council.



Councillor Keir Pedley
Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care