

**Portfolio Brief – Adult Social Care
Councillor Keir Pedley**

1. Directorate/Walsall Together response to COVID

The Directorate has worked as a key system player at this unprecedented time. Core business priorities have continued to be reshaped/refocussed, but throughout this time, there has remained a strong emphasis on the resident and establishing ways in which we all remain safe whilst continuing to deliver our statutory duties.

Whilst for much of the year the language has been about ‘reset’, Adult Social Care has continued to meet the challenges faced from a fragile health and care system and the continual, now growing, threat of Covid.

Adult Social Care staff have, in the main, continued virtual working. Frontline staff have returned to physical visits and assessments. Regular online meetings have continued to support high productivity in the face of increasing demand, whilst ensuring staff wellbeing. There has continued to be a strong emphasis on robust risk assessments when both working at home and visiting service users. Where staff members have required access to an onsite office base for their own wellbeing, or due to any inability to work from home, this has been facilitated.

The safeguarding of vulnerable residents is a key responsibility for the directorate. Safeguarding referrals have increased significantly during the year as services have reopened. This is thought to be due to increased self-neglect where vulnerable people have been reluctant to ask for help and resumed family/professional contact after a prolonged period of reduced contact during the pandemic.

Adult Social Care continues to support the broader health system as part of The Walsall Together Partnership. Despite challenges in terms of hospital admissions and workforce, the partnership continues to lead as a good national example of integrated working at a local level.

2. ASC Service Transformation Plan

The work in progress of the Adult Social Care Transformation Plan is key as part of the preparation for future national reforms in social care planned for 2023.

The Adult Social Care ambition through our Service Transformation Plan is:

1. To improve the health and wellbeing of residents in Walsall, supporting them to maximise their independence, and building on their strengths and those of the community they live in.
2. To work in partnership including Walsall Together, the community and voluntary sector and statutory partners

3. Ensuring that the council meets its statutory duties as outlined in the Care Act 2014 and related legislation and guidance services as effectively and efficiently as possible.

The Adult Social Care Transformational 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.
- 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, in order 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.
- 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.

3. All Age Disability (AAD)

The development of the AAD approach has continued. The aim of the AAD approach is to ensure that we, as a council, along with our key stakeholders and partners, maximise the opportunities to plan with a young person and their family in a timely way for their pathway to adulthood.

The AAD approach focusses on enablement, ensuring that we are maximising and promoting independence and ensuring that local people are able to continue to live safely, irrespective of needs, working with the person and their network of support to build on their existing and aspiring strengths.

The All Age Disability Hub will represent this in a way that promotes therapies, assistive technology, employment and enablement. Statutory and non-statutory functions strongly linked with community initiatives that reduce dependency on Adult Social Care longer term and support people to receive timely and time limited support to continue to be as independent as possible.

It will promote a “whole family approach” by working collaboratively across directorates and the delivery of timely and proportionate support means that communities will be more resilient and people will, over time, start to depend less on statutory services and will be an active engaged member of the community.

4. Infection Prevention Control (IPC), Rapid Testing and Workforce funding

The Department of Health and Social Care continues to ring fence grant funding for each local authority to administer to social care providers. The purpose of these grants are to help cover the cost of implementing measures to reduce transmission of COVID-19 and support with additional recruitment and/or retention costs. To date we have administered over £8.4M, primarily to domiciliary care, residential and nursing care providers with smaller contributions to Supported Living and Extra Care schemes. A further £2.4M will be distributed to domiciliary care, residential and nursing care providers to be spend by March 2022

5. ASC Provider Market

We continue to actively engage our Provider market and support them as required.

To date we have not had any Provider failure and have had limited backlog or delayed start for care packages; where packages have been delayed to support system flow from an acute setting we have placed a small number of people into a care home setting pending package commencement.

We use our local and national monitoring tools and regular Provider meetings to proactively support our providers and analyse trends/focus support eg, Covid vaccination take up.

In addition to the grants detailed in section 4, we also implemented an ‘Additional Expenses’ process in March 2020. The Additional Expense process was a mechanism the council used to support Adult Social Care providers to deal with additional financial burdens as a result of the pandemic eg increased insurance premiums, travel and inflated PPE costs. The Additional Expenses process was superseded by the grants covered in section 4 however, between March 20 and July 2021 we reimbursed over 280 claims to providers totalling £1.9M.

We continue to work in partnership with ASC Providers to support each other with a number of continuing concerns:

- Long-standing workforce challenges; mandatory vaccination, Brexit and pay all impact on Providers ability to retain and recruit to the ASC workforce. Whilst national recruitment campaigns have largely failed to bring additional capacity to the sector we are working across Walsall Together to develop a joint Workforce and OD strategy.
- Occupancy levels in care homes remains a concern with 405 vacancies (24%) in the borough. Vacancies are due to some reluctance from families/individuals to move into the residential/nursing setting and a refocus by CQC to cancel registration of homes where there has been prolonged delivery of inadequate/requires improvement ratings. There is likely to be more home closures requiring extensive engagement with residents, family and staff to re-provide alternative placements.

Multiple concurrent Provider failures would quickly absorb available Council capacity and threaten councils' ability to ensure continuity of care.

The council previously agreed a 3-year budget for Provider uplifts. Whilst the Directorate is working hard to mitigate the challenges of recruitment and retention, and the need to transform social care, it should be noted that the budgeted 1.5% rate increase in 22/23 is unlikely to improve these challenges as the sector is currently being heavily supported through additional short-term grant funding.

During 2021, we have seen a decline in the mortality rates for people receiving care, meaning that they are requiring care packages longer than before the pandemic. This has also been noted nationally by the British Medical Journal who have reported a 45% reduction in the mortality rate for people over 85 plus in certain care settings.

All of this whilst carers have increased employment opportunities as other industries return to business offering increased rates of pay.

Care providers are also facing additional pressures including:

- Increased Insurance premiums
- Transport costs - fuel, insurance & car maintenance increased with inflation
- Recruitment costs
- Shortage of nurses
- Substantial increases in agency fees for both temporary nurses and care staff

The Government has announced that funding to support Infection Prevention will continue until the end of March 2022, which is welcomed, however, there still remains a significant risk when this funding does cease. Care providers are currently able to access free PPE, however should this stop the average home care provider will be facing increased costs for the required equipment.

6. Finance and Performance

Adult Social Care – Financial Budget Monitoring Position 2021/22 – as at October 2021.

The current net forecast position, after the net use of reserves is a projected over spend of £4.09m. The main reasons are:

- (£220k) – Discharges through the intermediate care service are currently funded through the hospital discharge process for a maximum of 6 weeks until end of June 2021 and for a maximum of 4 weeks until the end of the financial year and the impact of this has been included in this position. This additional funding is partly offset by a net increase in demand management placements above expected business as usual numbers for April to August.

The increase in costs is mainly associated with the impact of accelerated hospital discharges and transition into longer-term care packages from intermediate care services and offset by joint funding income and client contributions. The domiciliary

care projection for the remainder of the year has been revised based on the trend for the first 5 months.

- £390k – the Procure to Pay saving carried forward from 2019/20 was £1.29m of which £210k has been validated to date on an ongoing basis and is included in the current forecast position. This is partially offset by additional direct payments refunds of (£690k). Further work is underway to mitigate the remaining pressure including a review of existing provider payments.
- (£340k) – Under spend on core services within Adult social Care due to vacant posts across the directorate, one off use of improved better care fund and Covid19 funding partially offset by one-off costs to support Service Transformation Plan (STP) delivery.
- (£150k) – Under spend within Communications, Brand and Marketing primarily due to the one-off use of Covid-19 funding.
- £4.52m of savings within the directorate STP's not being fully achieved. To note there are currently £890k of savings identified as amber and require further work (including some of the above). Should the achievement of these savings not materialise, the over spend position would increase to £4.98m.

The Adult Social Care Directorate continues to perform well against National performance measures, with no areas of concern to report.

7. Summary

Adult Social Care have been at the frontline in the Borough's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the significant shift in expectations from National government on local delivery, it has continued to meet its statutory duties in safeguarding and meeting the needs of its service users and ensuring continuity of care.

The Directorate has worked tirelessly with the Adult Social Care sector so that they are supported to provide essential services to our residents and have worked in partnership with our health, housing, community and voluntary sector, through our Walsall Together Partnership to target our collective support to those who are most vulnerable.

The current pressures in Adult Social Care are a national problem and we are awaiting further details from the Government on how these will be mitigated. We are aware from the recent White Paper that the following areas are key intentions:

- introduce a cap on personal care costs;
- provide financial assistance to those without substantial assets;
- deliver wider support for the social care system, which includes:
 - CQC oversight of Adult Social Care and ICS's
 - Developing the social care workforce
 - Supporting unpaid carers
 - Investing in Disabled Facilities Grants and Supported Housing
 - Improving information and advice for service users
- Improve the integration of health and social care systems

The new Health and Social Care levy of 1.25% will raise £36 Billion pounds over 3 years. However, it should be noted that in the first 3 years, only £5.4 billion pounds of that is

allocated to social care, with the rest supporting the recovery of the NHS. Furthermore, the plan presented, whilst going some way to addressing equity of access to social care support for those with moderate savings, it also sets out a number of clear additional burdens for the local authority, without clarity on if Councils will be fully recompensed for these. Certainly, in the short to medium term, the additional levy will not ease the profound and escalating demand and unit cost pressures on the Adult Social Care budget.

Adult Social Care therefore continues to face high demands along with other local authorities as explained, one of the reasons is the difficulty in getting enough home care to meet increasing demands:-

Over the last months the number of people medically fit for discharge from hospital has increased by 250%. The number of people awaiting a package of care in the community and hospital settings has increased by 400%.

Our officers in Adult Social Care will work closely with regional, national colleagues and the Department of Health and Social Care over the forthcoming months to seek further clarity on the reforms and the impact for Walsall and will provide a full report to members on this in due course.

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Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care

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