



Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Chamber, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester, NN12 6AD on Wednesday 17 January 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Rosie Herring (Chair)
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Rufia Ashraf
Councillor Raymond Connolly
Councillor Julie Davenport
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Emma Roberts (Remote)

Also Present:

Councillor Matt Golby, Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Phil Bignell
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Anna King

Officers:

Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director People Services
Sally Burns, Director of Public Health
Belinda Green, Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits
Louise Webb, Interim Revenues and Benefits Manager
James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager
Maisie McInnes, Democratic Services Officer

19. **Declarations of Interest**

The Chair declared that she was appointed by West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) as a director of South Northants Volunteer Bureau.

20. **Minutes**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

21. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and wished them a happy new year. The Chair advised that the Director of Public Health and Councillor Roberts had asked to join the meeting remotely due to family commitments.

22. **Adult social care performance against key performance indicators**

The Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration introduced the agenda item and commented that a scorecard on adult social care performance was reported to Cabinet quarterly. There was recent activity in the directorate to review and enhance the key performance indicators (KPIs) in line with Care Quality Commission (CQC) guidance ahead of inspections. As part of his role as Cabinet Member he monitored the performance of adult social care and sought assurance from the Executive Director People Services where necessary. The high number of safeguarding referrals had been an area of significant attention that should start to have an impact.

The Cabinet Member highlighted the WNC Self-Assessment report and explained that it was a working document, produced by the Assistant Director Commissioning and Performance, and demonstrated the journey of WNC and helped it prepare for future CQC inspections. The report set out the challenges and strengths of WNC and explained the history and direction of services. WNC was experiencing many similar issues to other authorities. Its Self-Assessment had been identified as an exemplar within the region.

The Executive Director People Services went on to present the report and explained that the corporate dashboard was the basis for performance reporting. There were changes made last year to refresh the dashboard in line with the upcoming CQC inspections and to give a more meaningful depiction of areas for improvement and areas to celebrate. The KPIs included were all nationally reported indicators and when CQC inspected it would want to see that WNC had a good understanding of its situation. The dashboard also reflected a drive to reduce the number of residents going into care homes and a commitment to keeping people independent for longer.

The Executive Director People Services highlighted the following points relating to the KPI report:

- In terms of care assessments, the main statutory assessment that WNC was responsible for, members should expect to see an increase due to the level of demand for the service.
- One of the current challenges for WNC was carers assessments as previously this function was commissioned and although a good service was delivered, the separate service caused issues for WNC in relation to understanding users' needs and data collection.
- One of the main changes was a move towards client level data (CLD) across all adult social care data sets. This would mean that there would be 28 data fields relating to an individual's personal circumstances and would document their journey and show what support has been provided to them which would be shared with the NHS. WNC had begun collecting CLD for 6 months ago and would be able to review the impact of this in the short-term future.
- Reviews of support packages and placements were on an improvement trajectory as shown in the report.
- The KPI relating to reablement was one of the most significant indicators being monitored on how well the service was doing at keeping people at home following a discharge from hospital.

- The corporate indicators would be a starting point for conversations with CQC following an inspection.
- The speech and language therapy service (SALT) which was responsible for short term interventions, getting equipment and assisting with reablement work was concluding and a long term care package solution would replace this.
- The report included a selection of KPIs derived from the corporate dashboard, which encapsulated all performance management which covered public health, adult's, and children's social care. Each month at the Assurance Board the team would pick out and rate areas to celebrate and areas of concern that were not on target.
- The WNC Self-assessment had been recognised as good practice and demonstrated an honest depiction of where WNC was on its journey as well as a financial backdrop, an improvement plan, data set and explanatory narrative. This would further demonstrate to CQC that WNC knew its position well, its current priorities and had plans in place for further improvements.

The Committee considered the report, asked questions and had discussion as follows:

- Members felt it would be useful to receive the items of concern and dialogue that went with the KPIs for the Committee's agenda planning meetings. This would signpost to areas where scrutiny might be able to assist or look at in more detail. The Executive Director People Services suggested that 5 priorities could be brought to each meeting for oversight and assurance and evidence provided.
- Members sought further understanding of the position regarding carers assessments. The Committee was advised that WNC had a statutory responsibility to undertake carers assessments. Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) had previously commissioned Northamptonshire Carers to carry out this function, which reduced the ability for WNC to work holistically and to develop good data. WNC was now moving towards taking more direct responsibility and a new Carers Strategy was also being developed. The Support for Unpaid Carers Task and Finish Panel would contribute to work in this area.
- The 10 KPIs in the areas of concern were highlighted and it was asked how many KPIs in the dashboard had a red RAG rating. The Committee was advised that 35%-40% were currently rated red. Members asked if this could be included at future meetings so scrutiny could monitor the improvement of this.
- Members questioned what an outstanding rating from the CQC would involve and the Executive Director People Services advised that it required an authority to be in the upper quartile for all nationally reported KPIs, although this was only part of the CQC's focus. The pilot authorities for the new inspection process had reported that it was based on going through case records, speaking to service users, partners and those working in the service area. This would be used to see whether the dialogue from those CQC engaged with matched the position documented by the authority. CQC expected authorities to have a comprehensive understanding of how they performed and areas that required improvement. The Executive Director People Services had applied for WNC to be part of the pilot period and the next group of authorities to be part of the pilot sites had been identified. He was encouraging CQC to come to inspect WNC as soon as possible so that it had a clear understanding of areas it needed to address. He expected that WNC's rating would be between requires improvement and good.

- Members welcomed the move to CLD and asked when the Executive Director People Services anticipated that scrutiny could be able to review the progress. The Committee was advised that the Executive Director People Services would approach the performance lead. The current position was that 98% data matched and it was exciting that this would be overlaid with NHS data in the future to strengthen adult social care as they moved towards a partnership working approach.
- Members welcomed the safeguarding referral response rate and discussed a personal experience of using the service on behalf of a resident.
- Members discussed discharges from hospitals and how this was communicated with GPs. The Committee was advised that there would be a shared care record and GPs would be more informed about a person's entire medical and care history in the future.
- Members expressed concern at funding being cut in the voluntary sector and the impact of this on local area partnerships (LAPs). The Executive Director People Services responded that he was not aware of a reduction in funding for the voluntary sector in the Medium Term Financial Plan and the People Services directorate had not taken any action to this effect. The Committee was further advised that there was an aspiration to have devolved budgets for LAPs but this was not possible within the WNC constitution at this point.
- Members sought reassurance about performance on respite care. The Executive Director People Services advised that much of the respite capacity formerly used by NCC was in North Northamptonshire. WNC did have plans to convert Eleanor house but CQC had not agreed to changing its use. WNC was currently looking at cost exercise to procure a number of respite care beds within homes to give allocation to people on an annual basis or to use for those in crisis.
- Members asked if there was a triage process in place for care plans that had not been finalised. The Committee was advised that there were triggers that alerted officers if plans had not been signed off and for ongoing social involvement there was a handover process in place. However, this was dependent on resourcing and social workers in place to take over the care provision.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director People Services for presenting the report and agreed with the suggestion for 5 priorities to come to future agenda planning meetings and if necessary be brought to the Committee for further scrutiny input. The Chair thanked members for the important points raised and suggested that respite care could be considered as part of the scrutiny review of support for unpaid carers. The Chair also reminded the Executive Director People Services that the Committee were awaiting a date for a briefing session on the adult social care, public health and wellbeing operating environment.

RESOLVED: That the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the reports, KPIs and information relating to the performance of adult social care and requested that:

- **The Executive Director People Services highlight 5 key priority areas to the agenda planning meetings for Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny for oversight and scrutiny to consider potential areas for further scrutiny input.**

- **The KPI performance RAG ratings be monitored and brought to future agenda planning meetings so that scrutiny could monitor the percentage of red ratings.**
- **A review of client level data and the impact of this be brought to scrutiny in the next 6 months.**
- **Respite care be considered by the Support for Unpaid Carers Task and Finish Panel as part of its work.**

[The Executive Director People Services left the meeting at this point].

23. **Public Health Grant**

The Chair commented that the agenda item was intended to consider how Public Health funding was used in West Northamptonshire and whether there were further opportunities to maximise the benefit obtained from these resources.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration commented that the current position was significantly informed by the legacy from NCC, which had created a Public Health reserve to pay back resources that had not been used correctly. As Cabinet Member he had sought to make the Public Health function more outward looking than in the past. The annual budget was £9.7m, with a majority of this used on specific contracts. WNC was currently working on disaggregation and procurement of future services for functions such as Healthwatch and 0-19 services. There was a focus on how WNC delivered better use of contracts for residents.

The Director of Public Health presented the report and gave a further overview of key areas of work supported by Public Health funding, highlighting the following points:

- The Public Health grant increased by a small amount each year. The Director considered that the funding received by WNC was fairly low relative to the size of the authority.
- The Cabinet in January 2023 had agreed the Public Health Framework setting out the approach and key priorities for use of the Public Health grant to 2024.
- 75% of Public Health grant funding was used through contracts.
- The disaggregation of previous countywide contracts for functions such as sexual health services and 0-19 services would increase the opportunity to shape future services to meet the needs of West Northamptonshire.
- The Public Health reserve established had been used to support significant projects that had produced a benefit for West Northamptonshire: for example, £2m had been used to support projects under the Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- It was likely to take several years to align the Public Health budget exactly as wanted, given the percentage of it that was used on existing contracts.

The Committee considered the report, asked questions and had discussion as follows:

- Members discussed the need for a joined-up working approach, promoting the use of the LAPs, for example with drugs misuse there could be small scale projects taking place at a local level that could feed into the overall approach. The Director of Public Health responded that a lot of substance misuse work was

delivered through contracts, but this could be passed onto the LAP project managers in the future for consideration.

- Members emphasised the need for school nurse and mental health advice and asked if this was incorporated in current provision. The Committee was advised that there was an opportunity for WNC to join up services more in the new 0-19 contract. There were funds allocated for mental health and a process about to start on how these funds could be used better to meet the voluntary and community sector needs joining forces with the LAPs. Members asked supplementary questions relating to provision of school nurses and the number of contracts with the private sector as individual academies may have their own placements. The Committee was advised that a lot of provision was with the voluntary sector and there was minimal spend in the private sector.
- Members highlighted the work done as part of the former People Scrutiny Committee scrutiny review on child and adolescent mental health and suggested that this could help inform the disaggregation work.
- The Director of Public Health highlighted that the demographic of the West Northamptonshire area had changed in 10 years but the Public Health grant was not reflective of this change or in line with inflation. Members raised the need for WNC to make a case to the government for a review of Public Health funding to reflect this situation.
- Members asked if school meals could be provided in the budget. The Director of Public Health advised that there was not the headroom in the budget but support for vulnerable families needed to be reviewed.
- Members sought reassurance about what benefits WNC should be able to achieve from disaggregating services. The Committee was advised that it would help with inequality between different areas as the LAPs had an effective structure to help maximise public access to services. It would also benefit West Northamptonshire as contracts could be reviewed to tailor services to the area.
- The Chair encouraged that the disaggregation of sexual health services should give sufficient consideration to rural areas, as the service was historically focussed on Northampton and outreach into rural areas was needed. The Director of Public Health gave assurance that a sexual health needs assessment had been finalised that accounted for an overview of West Northamptonshire.

RESOLVED: That the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Recommended to the Cabinet that joint working between LAPs and Public Health be accelerated to drive improvements and partnership working to benefit residents.**
- b) Recommended to the Cabinet that it makes a case to the government for a review of Public Health funding to recognise demographic changes in West Northamptonshire.**

24. **Individual debt and health and wellbeing**

The Chair commented that the agenda item was intended to enable the Committee to consider WNC's approaches to Council Tax collection and recovery in the context of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the impact of debt on individual wellbeing.

The Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits and Interim Revenues and Benefits Manager presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- WNC's approach to Council Tax collection needed to reflect that Council Tax paid for vital local services.
- WNC aimed for a 98% collection rate. It had achieved just under 97% last year, which was a significant improvement on the previous year and was above the national average.
- There was a hierarchy of liability for Council Tax and WNC applied discounts or exemptions where individuals met criteria to qualify for this.
- WNC sought to avoid using court processes to recover Council Tax as far as possible due to the extra cost to the customer this involved.
- WNC had a vulnerable person's policy that it followed when considering how to approach recovery action or whether an individual may require some support in paying Council Tax. Options for assistance included Council Tax reduction and Council Tax hardship payments. Hardship payments were discretionary. WNC had a £500K budget provision for this purpose at vesting day, which had since reduced and could benefit from being topped up again. Sources of advice included the WNC debt and money advice service and the voluntary sector.

The Committee considered the report, asked questions and had discussion as follows:

- Members raised concern that in a scenario where a resident chose to pay Council Tax on the first day of the month this could result in a quicker court summons for non-payment compared to a payment date at the end of the month.
- Members asked how long the Council Tax reduction scheme process took to come into effect. The Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits advised that the aim was for the process to operate as quickly as possible but there were some incomplete applications which caused delays. There was also a month allocated for individuals to complete the application.
- Members praised the Revenues and Benefits service and the Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits for her hard work and excellent response time to queries from councillors.
- Members discussed support for those in debt and asked if there was a dedicated phone line for debt advice for residents who needed help. The Assistant Director Revenues and Benefits urged that residents in need should contact WNC as soon as they could. The debt and money advice service would be key in future as it would have a direct line and would link up with the Council Tax team. It would be a confidential free service for residents.
- Members suggested that they could assist in reviewing the language used in letters relating to Council Tax sent out to residents, including to ensure that these informed people about sources of support.
- Members emphasised the benefit of Council Tax hardship payments and the potential for demand to increase in future. It was proposed that the Committee should recommend to the Cabinet the need to top up the existing budget provision. The Committee noted that this matter might be raised through the current budget scrutiny process in the first instance. This would not prevent a recommendation from subsequently being made to the Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That the Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) **Recommended that Committee members be involved in reviewing the language used in standard letters relating to Council Tax sent to residents to identify any opportunities for improvement including in relation to informing residents about support services.**
- b) **Recommended the need to secure the future of the Council Tax hardship payments scheme and agreed to highlight this matter to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee so that it could be raised as part of the current budget scrutiny review.**

25. **Review of Committee Work Programme**

The Chair invited the Committee to review the current work programme and consider any modifications, including any points arising from the current meeting. The Chair noted that the Support for Unpaid Carers Task and Finish Panel was due to have its first meeting on 23 January 2024.

The Chair subsequently invited the Committee to consider its response to a proposal for scrutiny work on the relationship between the University Hospitals of Northamptonshire (UHN) and WNC, in light of joint management arrangements between UHN and University Hospitals of Leicester. The Chair proposed that the UHN Chief Executive could be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee to deal with this matter.

A member raised the need for further scrutiny of other matters for which WNC was responsible that could contribute to individual debt, such as highway fines. The Democratic Services Assistant Manager emphasised that the Committee should have regard to its remit. The Chair offered to raise this matter with the Triangulation Group.

RESOLVED: That the Committee reviewed its work programme for 2023/24 and agreed that:

- **The proposal received relating to the relationship between the University Hospitals of Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire Council be added to the work programme as a topic for the Committee meeting on 17 April 2024.**
- **The Chair would highlight individual debt as a potential topic for scrutiny for consideration at the next Overview and Scrutiny Triangulation Group meeting.**

26. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 20:30

Chair: _____

Date: _____