

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Budget Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

31 January 2023

Breakout Room – Adult & Children’s Social Care

Councillors

Councillor Fiona Baker, Lead Member for the Breakout Room

Councillor Sally Beardsworth (Chair)

Councillors Danielle Stone, Rupert Frost and Richard Solesbury-Timms.

Officers

Stuart Lackenby - Executive Director Adults, Communities & Wellbeing

Colin Foster - Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Children’s Trust

Andrew Tagg – Director of Finance and Resource, NCT

Gemma Foskett – Group Accountant

Emily Cooledge – Strategic Finance Business Partner

Tony Challinor – Assistant Director Commissioning & Partnerships

Maisie McInnes – Democratic Services Officer

The Breakout Room confirmed that Councillor Sally Beardsworth would chair this Group and would report back the recommendations of the Breakout Room to the main Task and Finish Group.

The Chair introduced the topic for the breakout room and shared they were interested to know what measures were in place for prevention, what was being done to manage costs for delivering the service and meet demand and if WNC were using the private sector and how this was being managed. The Chair invited members to share any questions or concerns. Members shared they wanted to know about how the quality of the service was being maintained, what was being done about the plethora of contracts in adult social care and cost measures.

The Chief Executive NCT and Director of Finance and Resource NCT then delivered a presentation on NCT Budget Scrutiny 2023/24. The Chief Executive shared the ambition statement which captured the aims which were to deliver the best quality services for the best possible price and making efficiencies through targeted investment. The Children’s Trust were keen to address legacy issues which drove additional costs and improve placements sufficiency and the overall process to reduce costs.

He explained the key principles underpinning the budget and emphasised the need to drive efficiencies through improving practice and mitigating placement costs. The Chief Executive then moved on to describe the key achievements of the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust and feedback

from Ofsted received in October 2022 which showed “inspectors are confident in the capacity to further improve” the service.

Key achievements to date

- 1) Delivered 6,000 more placement days using approx. same funds as 2019/20
- 2) Improved quality of social care practice and management oversight, which is helping to keep children safe, as evidenced in Ofsted visits and inspections, peer reviews and internal quality assurance
- 3) More of our social worker posts are filled 15.8% social worker vacancies in June 2022 (England average 17%) compared with 22.28% in October 2019 and no unallocated cases
- 4) Improved working with our partners and a stronger strategic approach to early help; improved early help assessment, step down process and timeliness of support
- 5) An embedded quality assurance framework working alongside practitioners to collaboratively reflect on practice, celebrate good practice and identify learning; which is ‘improving children’s experiences’
- 6) Achieved 100% supporting families PBR grant funds through improving practice 21/22 (previous best 37%)
- 7) Reducing pressures in the system in the context of increasing demand



The key achievements highlighted the trust was successfully recruiting more social workers on permanent basis and had delivered 6000 more placement days using the same funds as in 19/20. The trust was also reducing the number of children with a child protection plan (CPP) as demonstrated in the slides the number of children with a CPP had reduced from 812 to 676 in 2 years, despite the increase in population.

The Chief Executive summarised the financial and performance history of the former Northamptonshire County council and presented the national picture which showed issues with placements, transport and retaining social care staff. He concluded his presentation and invited members to ask questions.

Members asked for more information on care leavers and expressed concern regarding family therapies which were a good preventative tool. The Chief Executive NCT explained the valuing care model did have a therapeutic element, this was removed in the former NCC and has created challenges that the trust faces now. There is also support available to help children have more stable long-term placements. Council support care leavers, could be more creative solutions in terms of housing, active work with property colleagues.

The Director of Finance and Resources added that the Children’s Trust had made substantial developments. He thanked Rebecca Peck and her team for their work with the trust. They were looking into viable options for accommodation and were going to trial using accommodation from the University of Northampton. The Children’s Trust were continuing to grow partnership working and look at ways they can grow provision and ways to prevent exploitation.

Members asked if there was family planning prevention in place for women who had multiple births with children removed from the home. The Chief Executive NCT explained that there were a number of interventions and the Assistant Director Commissioning and Partnerships worked with public health around this. The Pause project in Northampton was an example of good work in this area. The Assistant Director Commissioning and Partnerships added that they were linking initiatives such as 0-

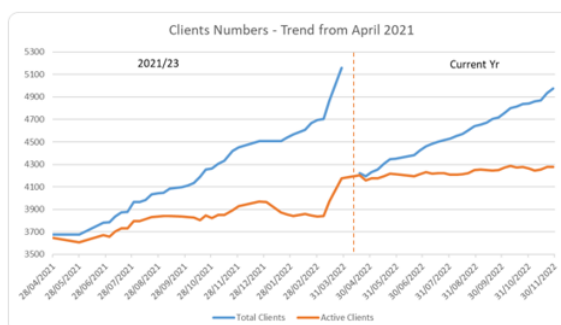
19 contracts (NHFT), family hubs, reducing parental conflict training in conjunction with the Children's Trust.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities & Wellbeing then delivered a presentation on Adult Social Care Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 – 2026/27.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities & Wellbeing gave background to the presentation on the circumstances of local government reorganisation and WNC being a new council during the pandemic. Originally Adults Social Care were expected to support 3483 people, but this increased to 4265 as a result of covid-19 and hospitals not being able to perform medical procedures such as hip replacements in the pandemic. He emphasised that the council had a statutory duty to support residents and ensure there were enough carers available to provide support.

2022/23 Independent care budget £97,724,480

- Demand is levelling off.
- Original budget build built on 3483 people receiving ongoing support.
- Currently delivering ongoing support to 4265 people.
- 782 additional people – 22% increase - **£16m pressure.**
- Real risk around contract inflation
- Significant risk of increased cost from provider failure



He celebrated that WNC was the most cost efficient unitary council in the country which was detailed in the table in the presentation.

Adult Social Care Services	Total LA Budget	Adult Social Care Services	336 - Support with memory and cognition - adults (18-64)
West Northamptonshire UA - Total Budget (£k)	£527,524.00	£113,851.00	£1,855.00
West Northamptonshire UA - £ per Head	£1,239.19	£267.44	£4.36
Average - Unitary Authorities	£1,481.27	£360.74	£1.67
West Northants - UA Difference	-£242.08	-£93.29	£2.69
West Northants Rank Position (all UAs)	48	58	2
Total Authorities Included (UA & budget >£0)	59	59	52

Impact of H1 programme funded for the first 4 week from National discharge fund

In terms of the 23/24 growth proposals, Adult Social Care had managed to get the budget gap from £16m to £14.5m, and £9.2m of this was pressure from inflation and for the previous 2 years the council did not pass on inflation costs or increase working wages and this budget reflected the 9.7% increase in the national living wage. He explained that there were a few additional grants announced for WNC Adult Social care which included a discharge funding allocation of £1.412m and a market sustainability and improvement fund of £3.406m.

Finally, the Executive Director Adults, Communities & Wellbeing shared that in addition to the budget proposals, to maintain robust financial control in this area there were a number of measures put in place such as market oversight meetings which meant that all care packages had to be agreed at one of two weekly meetings. He explained that although this was time intensive it ensured the

appropriate level of care was being commissioned and this delivered value for money. There were also weekly finance and performance meetings with the SLT to track expenditure.

The Chair thanked the team for their informative presentations and attending the meeting.

Members expressed they felt anxious when looking at Adult Social Care and Children's Trust budgets as they were aware the budgets were always overspent as it was a national problem. They asked how the budget was determined and if there was a way of using zero base budgeting. Members asked about the voluntary sector and how this could be made more robust so they could be more supportive in aiding the council to deliver their statutory duties.

The Executive Director Adults, Communities & Wellbeing responded that himself and the Chief Executive NCT had the challenge of setting the budget as the behaviour of people and needs of children and adults were not predictable and there was not enough data and trends from Summer and Winter to help the Council. They did have previous NCC data to use but they did not have data to help inform activity, so part of the challenge was moving forward delivering the statutory requirement and continuing to understand growth so they can deliver a balanced budget. He explained that in terms of the voluntary sector what do we define a robust voluntary as? Now there was a plethora of voluntary organisations with so many that focused on a niche area, and this led to organisations competing with one another and it was a case of looking at how the council could encourage them to collaborate in different ways with one another to create sustainability.

Members asked a question regarding zero hours contracts and the Executive Director Adults, Communities & Wellbeing explained that the team needed to look at ways to make sure they had enough staff in place for those requiring support and historically zero hours contracts were viewed negatively but in recent trends some individuals preferred this, but zero hours contracts were not viewed favourably by the public. The Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration resounded his support for the Executive Director Adults, Communities & Wellbeing for the robustness of the Adult Social care budget and his determination to explore more ideas and ways the council could manage the demand and make more savings and efficiencies and gave his assurance to members as he was reassured by the work that was being done in this area.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and shared they would be re-joining the main meeting momentarily.

Following the Breakout Session for Adults and Children's Social Care, Councillor Beardsworth reported back to the Task and Finish Group and summarised the above presentations and discussion.