

Omicron Major Incident

The year started off with a significant challenge for the Directorate in relation to the Omicron Covid 19 variant. Following the rise in local Omicron cases and the associated fast emerging pressures on health and social care staffing levels, leading to concern regarding the ability to deliver services to vulnerable people, a strategic coordination group was held on the 6th January 2022 and a Major Incident declared.

This was in recognition that staffing pressures related to the Omicron were likely to impact on support and care services across the County.

Over the following 4 weeks the Councils adult social care and public health team took forward considerable activity to manage this impact. This involved increasing our capacity to support hospital discharges, working with the independent sector provider market to ensure people received the care and support they needed and increased support to our local providers around infection control.

Whilst the pressures in relation to staff absence have diminished, Covid remains a challenge which is likely to place ongoing stress on our services over the forthcoming year.

Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund

In December 2022, West Northamptonshire Council announced their Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund. This was an offer of up to £600 to all frontline care staff who were delivering CQC Regulated Activity up to 31st March 2022 or to new recruits coming into the care sector. The scheme was concluded successfully and generated 376 new recruits into the care sector, at a time when the sector was under tremendous pressure to meet demand.

Recruitment and retention will continue to be a real challenge for us over the next few years and the Directorate is looking at how we can create sustainable payrates for workers in the context of also a sustainable budget.

Integrated Care Partnership

In September 2021, the Government published Building Back Better: Our Plan for Health and Social Care. This included a commitment to develop a comprehensive national plan for supporting and enabling integration between health and social care, with a renewed focus on outcomes, empowering local leaders, and wider system reforms.

The subsequent 'Integration White Paper' (IWP) Joining Up Care for People, Places and Populations was published on 9 February 2022. The White paper sets out the Government's proposals for how NHS and local government partnerships can go 'further and faster' across the country, building on the joint-working that has been demonstrated during the pandemic and the legislative changes set out in the Health and Care Bill.

It has a particular focus on delivering integration at 'place' through the agreement and pursuit of shared outcomes across health and social care. Subject to legislation being agreed each ICS will comprise an:

- Integrated care partnership (ICP): the broad alliance of organisations and representatives concerned with improving the care, health, and wellbeing of the population, jointly convened by local authorities and the NHS.
- Integrated care board (ICB) bringing the NHS together locally to improve population health and care. Integrated Care Partnership will be statutory committees formed between (as a minimum) the ICB and the Local Authorities that provide social care services.

This will be built on existing partnerships arrangements and collaboration across the system. The ICP to be formed will be on the principle of equal partnership between the NHS and local government in delivering services.

Place for West Northants is really starting to become clearer. Our Health and Wellbeing Board is actively developing our local approach which will see the proposed creation of nine neighbourhoods across West Northants. These Neighbourhoods will have a population size of between 35000 and 55000 and will be based around groupings of local wards. Members will have an opportunity to influence how these Neighbourhood boundaries are agreed in an all member session in early May with a full report coming to full Council in June this year.

These neighbourhoods will really support us to integrate local services and deliver better outcomes for local people.

Social Care Remembrance and Reflection Day

West and North Northamptonshire Councils alongside local partners arranged a remembrance service at Abington park to mark the first national Social Care Day of Remembrance and Reflection Day taking on the 17th of March.

The day marked two years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when, despite overwhelming and unprecedented pressures, all those working across social care in our county continued to show incredible dedication, skill, and tenacity in supporting those who draw on social care and support. The purpose of the day of remembrance and reflection was to offer a huge thank you to those social care workers who provided crucial care and support during these tough times, and to remember those workers and individuals in care who sadly lost their lives to coronavirus.

The Registered Managers Network in Northamptonshire, a group who deliver adult social care in our county, settled on the tulip as a representative symbol of the day and a local artist has designed printable picture. We encouraged adults and children

to colour in the tulip, add a personal message on the back and to display in their windows at home or at school.

The service was attended by around 200 people which included local children and adults who live in some of our care homes alongside Council staff and wider members of the public. The service included

- Tributes led by local Cllrs, school children and Social Care staff
- In My Life, Beatles Song, sung by WNC Staff member and school children
- Memorial Book to sign/ Thank You wall: Stories and tributes from social care staff and family members.
- Tulip planting and laying of flowers

The event received considerable media interest and will be an event we take forward every year.

Social Care Reforms

In March we got sight of the detail related to the expected reforms to Adult Social Care which will significantly change the way people contribute to the cost of their care. The reforms which will be implemented in October 2023 will require significant work to ensure we can deliver the associated changes. I will be bringing a report to cabinet shortly which sets out the implications for the Council and the work we need to take forward.

Public Health

At the end of March Northamptonshire's Director of Public Health, Lucy Wightman left her role to join Essex County Council. I would like to thank Lucy for all of her support during her time with us and particularly the support she provided to local people during the pandemic.

In December last year both North and West Northants Councils agreed to disaggregate the county wide public health function. This will mean that each Council will have its own Public Health team. In order to take forward this change, we have appointed Sally Burnes as West Northants interim Director of Public Health. Sally was previously working in our Public team and will remain in post until we recruit a permanent Director of Public Health.

Councillor Matt Golby
Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health