

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

HEALTH AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At the Annual Meeting of the **Health & Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee** on Tuesday, 11 July 2023 at 1.00 p.m. at County Hall, Morpeth.

PRESENT

Councillor K. Nisbet
(Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Bowman, L.	Hill, G.
Dodd, R.	Hunter, I.
Hardy, C.	

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Angus, C.	Scrutiny Officer
Curry, A.	Head of Commissioning - Adults
Gerrard, S.	Director of Law and Corporate Governance (MO)
Nugent, D.	Northumberland Healthwatch
O'Neil, G.	Executive Director - Public Health, Inequalities, and Stronger Communities
Pattison, W.	Cabinet Member for Caring for Adults
Todd, A.	Democratic Services Officer

1 member of the press was also in attendance

1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The committee was asked to note the following membership and terms of reference for the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee which were agreed by Council on 17 May 2023 and subsequent changes.

10 Members (5:3:1 Ind Gp, 1 LD)

Quorum 3

Chair:

Vice Chair: K. Nisbet

Conservative	Labour	Independent Group	Liberal Democrats	Green Party	Ind Non-Grouped
E. Chicken	L. Bowman	G. Hill	I. Hunter		
R. Dodd	K. Nisbet				
C. Hardy	M. Richardson				
C. Humphrey					
TBC					

Terms of Reference:

- (a) To promote well-being and reduce health inequality, particularly in supporting those people who feel more vulnerable or are at risk.
- (b) To discharge the functions conferred by the Local Government Act 2000 of reviewing and scrutinising matters relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in Northumberland.
- (c) To take a holistic view of health in promoting the social, environmental and economic well-being of local people.
- (d) To act as a consultee as required by the relevant regulations in respect of those matters on which local NHS bodies must consult the Committee.
- (e) To monitor, review and make recommendations about:
 - Adult Care and Social Services
 - Adults Safeguarding
 - Welfare of Vulnerable People
 - Independent Living and Supported Housing
 - Carers Well Being
 - Mental Health and Emotional Well Being
 - Financial inclusion and fuel poverty
 - Adult Health Services
 - Healthy Eating and Physical Activity
 - Smoking Cessation
 - Alcohol and drugs misuse
 - Community Engagement and Empowerment
 - Social Inclusion
 - Equalities, diversity and community cohesion

RESOLVED that that the membership and terms of reference of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing year be noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E. Chicken, C. Humphrey and M. Richardson.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Health & Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 2 May 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

4. PRIMARY CARE APPLICATIONS WORKING GROUP

The Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee was asked to confirm the membership and refreshed terms of reference of the Primary Care Applications Working Group, which comprised four members including the Chair and Vice-chair of the Health and Wellbeing Overview Scrutiny Committee, plus two other members. The current membership was Councillors K. Nisbet (Chair), V. Jones (Chair of OSC), L. Bowman and I. Hunter.

Also, to note the monitoring report of the Primary Care Applications Working Group. (A copy of the monitoring report has been filed with the signed minutes).

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the terms of reference of the Primary Care Applications Working Group for the ensuing Council Year be noted;
- (b) the membership of the Primary Care Applications Working Group be agreed as Councillors K. Nisbet (Chair), the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing OSC (once elected), L. Bowman and I. Hunter for the ensuing year, and
- (c) the monitoring report of the Primary Care Applications Working Group be noted.

5. HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

RESOLVED the minutes of the Health & Wellbeing Board held on 13 April 2023 and 11 May 2023 be noted.

6. REPORTS OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CARING FOR ADULTS

(a) Update on Pressures in Adult Homecare Services

A. Curry, Head of Commissioning – Adults, presented the report which described the current difficulties facing adult homecare services in Northumberland, steps that had been taken to resolve those difficulties and the plans in place that aimed to resolve workforce shortages in that sector. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).

Members were advised that home care offered a vital service to people who were assessed as needing additional assistance to remain independent.

It was reported that there had been difficulties in arranging homecare services for a significant number of people due to workforce shortages and since the summer of 2021 there had typically been around 200 –220 people that the

council had assessed as requiring homecare who had not been able to source homecare. This number went as high as 270 at one point in 2022.

Workforce shortages in social care were a national problem and neighbouring local authorities were facing similar difficulties.

The problem appeared to be worse in more rural areas generally, including the most rural parts of Northumberland.

Northumberland County Council had implemented some initiatives over the past 18 months to try to resolve workforce shortages, including funding incentives to increase carer pay rates and work with providers on upskilling their management teams and improving their recruitment programmes. Whilst this support appeared to have arrested the growth in the shortfalls of available care, it had not increased the workforce enough to enable social care providers to pick up significantly more homecare packages.

It was noted that the council would be using additional funds from the latest Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund 2023/24 to attempt to make it more attractive to work in homecare and increase the size of the workforce.

The following comments were made:

- It was felt that those who worked in the care sector were highly skilled but underpaid. Even with the revised hourly rate of pay it would not be enough to resolve the problem of staffing levels.
- It was suggested that Northumberland needed to be more radical and lead the way for the rest of the county in its thinking to fix this national problem.
- A query as to whether members should be monitoring this issue further. There were initiatives in place and further planned schemes to try and help with the pressures being seen in homecare. It was thought a report in six months' time to see if those initiatives had resulted in progress being made was needed.
- A comment that the problems being faced by adult homecare services needed more than simply more money being put into the sector.
- Confirmation that the number of people whom homecare could not be sourced for had reduced in numbers recently, but work was needed to understand why there had been a reduction.
- An acknowledgment that the cost of living, energy prices and fuel costs had further impacted on the workforce and added to the pressures being faced.
- Members were informed that initiatives to help the workforce and encourage recruitment continued.
- Making the caring profession attractive as a career was needed, whether that be improved salary, shift patterns instead of number of visits, incentives or better working conditions.
- It was reported that there was an ageing workforce and it continued to be a struggle to recruit. Various initiatives had taken place, and it was generally felt that they had assisted in stabilising a deteriorating position.

The next group of measures would be put in place in October, and it was hoped this would further improve the situation.

- It was noted that traditionally the more rural areas of the county were more difficult to source services for. Distance and travel times particularly in the north and west of the county further added to workforce issues.
- The difficulties of attracting younger carers into the profession was discussed. It was advised that due to the rurality of the county many needed to finance a car and pay for fuel but with the cost of household bills and food prices going up the salary being offered was not covering their bills, making it not a financially viable career choice.
- A member discussed the difficulties and struggles they had faced in trying to access care. He felt there was a shortfall in provision and often care was left to family/friends to cope with which was a huge pressure to place on them. Often care was held up as equipment or adaptations needed were not in place to assist resulting in people not being cared for properly which was not acceptable. In response it was confirmed that carer assessments of family members were taken, monitored and where necessary welfare checks carried out. It was reported officers were aware of this individual case.
- The potential development of a care academy and the possible benefits of establish one in Northumberland. It was noted that officers were monitoring the impact of existing care academies before deciding whether to recommend that resources be committed to this. Members suggested that a report on care academies be prepared for a future meeting.
- Discussion on the LA7 devolution deal and how that would impact on public sector reform. It was hoped issues such as care academies, pay structures, pay conditions, aging populations and promoting attractive career options in care would form part of the devolution discussions.

RESOLVED the

- (a) the report on the current issues with homecare in Northumberland be received for information, and
- (b) the initiatives proposed to try to resolve workforce shortages be noted.

(b) Contingency Plans and Management Arrangements for Commissioned Adult Social Care Services

A. Curry, Head of Commissioning – Adults presented the report which described contingency and management arrangements that Northumberland County Council would enact in the event of a social care provider ceasing to operate. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).

It was noted that social care offered a vital service to people who were assessed as needing additional assistance and providers offered care and support in regulated care home settings and through regular visits to the homes of older people and others who were ill or disabled. Services were facing challenges, often linked to workforce shortages. Northumberland County

Council had implemented some initiatives over the past 18 months to try to resolve workforce shortages, including funding incentives to increase carer pay rates and work with providers on upskilling their management teams and improving their recruitment programmes.

It was reported that the Council would be using additional funds from the latest Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund (MSIF) 2023/24 to help social care providers meet the challenges they faced.

The following comments were made:

- Confirmation that the preferred contingency plan for managing the situation where a home care provider left the market would be to transfer service users and staff to an alternative provider who could incorporate the service into their business. There were currently 50 homecare operators on the council's contract and officers were confident that they would be able to take on another provider's business if required.
- There was the option of transferring a service 'in house' but this would only be discussed if the risks of transferring care packages to a new provider were deemed too high.
- The financial risks associated with bringing a service 'in house' were discussed including the transferring of staff under TUPE.
- A comment was made about the council's pension scheme and the inclusion of care workers. In response it was confirmed that pension schemes were not a top priority with providers and staff, however salaries and pay conditions were. Therefore, the focus had been on incentives to help with fuel and transport costs and the introduction of a higher rate of pay.
- Confirmation that the priority was to always try and meet the care needs of an individual as locally as possible.
- It was reported that the biggest gap in older persons care homes was for those with complex dementia. Members suggested that this should be examined in more detail at a future meeting.
- It was confirmed that where possible people would be supported to stay in their own home and disability funding was available to help adapt homes to assist with their wishes.

RESOLVED the report be received for information.

7. REPORTS OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

(a) Forward Plan

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (a copy of the Forward Plan has been filed with the signed minutes).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(b) Health and Wellbeing OSC Work Programme

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2022/23 council year. (A copy of the work programme has been filed with the signed minutes).

Members asked for the following items/issues to be considered for the Work Programme:

- Adult Home Care data and progress monitoring.
- Care Academy.
- Newcastle Oncology Services – waiting times.
- Dentistry.
- NEAS – local data.
- Older Persons Care Homes – specialised complex dementia services in Northumberland.
- Water Fluoridation.

RESOLVED that the work programme and comments made be noted.

8. SCHEDULED DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

It was suggested that the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be moved from 5 September to 12 September 2023.

RESOLVED that the following dates be noted:

OSC Meetings starting at 1 p.m. - 12 September 2023, 7 November 2023, 9 January 2024, 5 March 2024, 2 April 2024 and 7 May 2024.

Task and Finish Group Meetings starting at 1 p.m. – 3 October 2023, 5 December 2023 and 6 February 2024.

Members took a few minutes to recognise and celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the National Health Service which took place on 5 July 2023.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____