

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### HEALTH AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Health & Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee** on Tuesday, 12 September 2023 at 1.00 p.m. at County Hall, Morpeth.

#### PRESENT

Councillor R. Dodd  
(Chair, in the Chair)

#### MEMBERS

Bowman, L.	Hunter, I.
Hardy, C.	Nisbet, K.
Hill, G.	Richardson, M.

#### ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Angus, C.	Scrutiny Officer
Bradley, N.	Executive Director - Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing
Burke, A.	Work Experience – Community Services
Everden, A.	Pharmacy Consultant to Public Health
Heatherington, A.	Senior Coroner for Northumberland
Jones, V.	Cabinet Member for Improving Public Health and Wellbeing
Lee, P.	Public Health Consultant
Lounton, K.	Interim Head of Community Services
Nugent, D.	Northumberland Healthwatch
Pattison, W.	Cabinet Member for Caring for Adults
Todd, A.	Democratic Services Officer

1 member of the press was also in attendance.

#### 9. MEMBERSHIP

To note the following changes in membership of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- To add Councillor C. Seymour to the committee.
- Councillor R. Dodd elected as Chair.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

#### 10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

## **11. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Health & Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 11 July 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## **12. HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**

**RESOLVED** the minutes of the Health & Wellbeing Board held on 8 June 2023 and 10 August 2023 be noted.

## **13. NOTIFICATION OF CLOSURE OF 100-HOUR PHARMACY IN CRAMLINGTON**

Members were informed of a report which was considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board on 11 August 2023 which advised of the closure of the 100-hour pharmacy, located in Sainsburys supermarket, Manor Walk, Cramlington. The pharmacy closed on 13 June 2023. (A copy of the report has been filed with the signed minutes).

Since the August Health and Wellbeing Board meeting news of further pharmacy closures and reductions in opening hours have continued, not just in Northumberland but nationally. (A copy of the update briefing has been filed with the signed minutes).

A. Everden, Pharmacy Consultant to Public Health drew members' attention to the main points of the reports and highlighted the following: -

- This issue was fast moving, and further closures and reductions had been made since the update briefing was drafted.
- Pharmacies within Tesco stores at Hexham and Berwick had indicated that they were to reduce their hours.
- Ashington was the only 100 hours pharmacy available although it was not known how sustainable this was in the current financial climate.
- There were rumours of other pharmacies in Northumberland either going into receivership or being put up for sale as the financial crisis in community pharmacy funding continued.
- Haydon Bridge Pharmacy had gone into administration, and it was unclear how many services would remain once the business was sold.
- Rural areas of the county would be the worst affected by these changes.

The following comments were made:-

- Discussion about the many reasons why people needed to access a pharmacy outside of the normal working day hours.

- The consequences of losing pharmaceutical services and what options would be available in an emergency.
- A concern that there would be an increase of patients at A&E departments if they could not access prescriptions at their local pharmacy.
- Unless a pharmacy was financially viable then there was a risk that it might close.
- Lloyds Pharmacies within Sainsburys stores had closed. Worryingly companies such as Boots, Asda and Tesco had all given notice to close some of their 100 hour pharmacies or reduced opening times.
- The pressures that would be faced by smaller pharmacies, particularly in Blyth due to all the recent changes.
- The changes across the county in pharmaceutical services would impact those patients and carers who worked shift patterns, did not have access to transport or needed access to urgent prescription medication.
- Bank holidays would become more of an issue when trying to access services.
- Confirmation that there may be a pharmacy at the new Berwick Hospital, but this would only be to provide medications to patients and assist doctors with prescribing medications within the hospital.
- Healthwatch suggested that there needed to be a strategic look across the whole of the county on this issue to understand fully the impact on patients and carers.
- Community pharmacy needed to meet the needs of the patient and carer. Issues associated with access to services, the range of services to be available, the supply of drugs and not being able to get prescriptions filled all needed to be investigated further.
- Some pharmacies offered a delivery service, but this was often at a cost to the pharmacy or the patient. Royal Mail also had a free delivery service available. However, all delivery services available had restrictions for the user such as needing to be at the address to sign for delivery of the medication.
- Northumbria Healthcare had been trialling a scheme where electrical drones would transport clinical supplies, prescriptions, blood packs and mail between hospitals.
- It was noted that the ICB was responsible for pharmacy.
- The current funding of community pharmacy implied that 100 hour pharmacies were unlikely to be commercially viable going forward.
- Community pharmacy was a restricted market with a contract needing to be awarded before a site could be established. There would be no advantage to having government run pharmacies as the current system was much cheaper.

Members agreed that this issue needed further scrutiny. It was suggested that a task and finish group be established with input from Healthwatch, Public Health and Northumberland ICB.

**RESOLVED** that:

- (a) the report and comments made be noted.

- (b) a Task and Finish Group be established to examine pharmaceutical services in the county.

**14. HM SENIOR CORONER ANDREW HETHERINGTON SENIOR CORONER FOR NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND AND ACTING SENIOR CORONER FOR SOUTH NORTHUMBERLAND ANNUAL REPORT**

The report provided an overview of the current position with regard to the coroner service in Northumberland following the last review in 2021 with a comparison of neighbouring areas, the number of deaths referred to Northumberland over the period, notable trends and patterns, an update on the area and the road ahead. (A copy of the report and powerpoint presentation has been filed with the signed minutes).

A. Hetherington, HM Senior Coroner and K. Lounton, Interim Head of Community Services raised the following key issues from the report:-

- The Coroner was an independent judicial officer appointed by, but not employed, by the County Council. This enabled total impartiality.
- The role of the Coroner was to investigate and possibly hold an inquest into violent or unnatural deaths, where the cause was unknown or a death which happened in custody or state detention.
- It was good practice to produce an Annual Report outlining the work, the challenges and achievements.
- In 2022, 2,023 cases were referred to the Coroner although many cases were discontinued when the death was found to be from natural causes. 270 open inquests had been held and 732 postmortems.
- There had been a slight increase in the number of deaths since 2019.
- NSECH at Cramlington received seriously unwell people from all over the region which had led to increased demand for the service as it was the place of death rather than the home address of the deceased which determined where the death was registered.
- There had been an increase in the number of suicide conclusions. One explanation could be the consequence of a change in the standard of proof from 'beyond reasonable doubt' to 'on the balance of probability'.
- It was not clear to what extent the COVID 19 pandemic may have affected the figures produced within the report.
- There were a number of areas of Review including the Lucy Letby Inquiry, Statutory Medical Examiner Scheme and Independent Review into patient safety concerns and governance processes related to the North East Ambulance Services (NEAS).

The following comments were made:-

- There was nothing to indicate that road traffic collisions were unduly high in Northumberland.
- The trends seen in Northumberland mirrored that of national trends.
- There did not seem to be link regarding suicides and access to mental health provision or that this trend seemed to be high in certain areas of the county. However, there did seem to be a link with misuse of drugs and suicides.

- A member gave their personal account of past struggles with mental health and attempted suicide. The Coroner expressed their sorrow about the challenges the councillor had previously faced.
- It was asked whether the issues identified within the report were taken up and acted upon. In response it was reported that under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 a coroner was allowed to issue a Regulation 28 Report to an individual, organisations, local authorities or government departments and their agencies where the coroner believed that action should be taken to prevent further deaths. The Coroner had issued Regulation 28 Reports in the past and would continue to do so where he felt it necessary to do so.
- A worry that people struggling with debt or rising household bills could be more likely to develop mental health problems. The rise in online gambling addiction was also discussed.
- The purpose of an inquest was not to determine civil or criminal liability but who determine who the person was, where, when and how they died. Unfortunately understanding why there had been a death was often a question that a coroner could not provide.
- A comment that the farming industry often had a higher number of deaths due to it being a high-risk job, the dangerous equipment used, the isolation and financial pressures faced by the community.
- The number of deaths reported within the county each year and equating that to the size of an electoral ward within the county.

The Chair thanked A. Hetherington and K. Lounton for presenting the Annual Report of the Senior Coroner.

**RESOLVED** that the report be received.

## **15. 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 2023/24 council year (a copy of the work programme has been filed with the signed minutes).

**RESOLVED** that the Work Programme and comments made be noted.

### **(c) Task and Finish Groups**

To consider the Health and Wellbeing OSC Task and Finish Group Work Programme.

The following were put forward as topics for inclusion in future task and finish groups:

- Pharmaceutical Services.
- Defibrillators.
- Dentistry.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

**16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED** that the date of the next meeting be scheduled for Tuesday, 7 November 2023 at 1.00 p.m.

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_