



Northumberland County Council

County Council

Wednesday, 20 March 2024

Annual Portfolio Report - Caring for Adults

Report of Councillor(s) Councillor Wendy Pattison, Cabinet Member for Caring for Adults

Responsible Officer(s): Neil Bradley, Executive Director for Adults, Ageing & Wellbeing

1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

Achieving Value for Money – The Portfolio contributes to Value for Money by securing best value in contracting and commissioning. The portfolio also ensures value for money through continuous service improvement and transformation plans.

Tackling Inequalities – The portfolio plays a key role in tackling inequalities by maintaining safe and equitable service provision for all adults, regardless of age, background, illness, or disability.

Driving Economic Growth – The portfolio contributes to driving economic growth by implementing key initiatives to support the care sector in Northumberland.

2. **Purpose of report**

This is the Annual Portfolio Report from the Portfolio Holder for Caring for Adults. The Report contains issues that set the context for delivery of Adult Services within Northumberland. It highlights achievements over the past year and outlines the areas of focus for the coming year.

3. **Recommendations**

Council is recommended to: Note the Caring for Adults annual Portfolio Report.

4. **Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

Not applicable

5. Background

- 5.1 The Annual Portfolio reports from each of the Council's Cabinet Members provide a valuable opportunity for Council to consider and comment on the work of each Portfolio. This strengthens the important link and accountability between key decisions taken by the Cabinet and achievement of the three priorities of the Council as set out in the Corporate Plan.
- 5.2 The Council adopted the Corporate Plan at its Annual General Meeting on 17 May 2023. The Plan establishes three priorities for the Council, underpinned by our approach to tackling Climate Change. The Annual Council Achievements Report (reported to Council in March 2023) sets out overall progress against the three priorities whilst this Portfolio report provides an opportunity for Members to drill down further into the work of the Caring for Adults Portfolio.

Achievements

Integration and partnership working

- 5.3 Northumberland has a long history of innovative integration and partnership working with the NHS.
- 5.4 One such current example is the Homesafe Team who are a service made up of front-line social workers based in Northumbria Hospital sites across the county. The team support safe and timely discharge from hospital for those patients who have care and support needs, or who need information, advice, or guidance. The Homesafe team currently receive around 600 referrals per month. Over the past 12 months, the team have consistently been amongst the highest performers in the region on hospital discharge and delayed transfers of care. This is achieved through excellent integrated working with our health colleagues on the hospital sites.
- 5.5 Another example is our partnership working with CNTW, the regional Mental Health Trust. We have aligned service areas such as the Mental Health Inpatient Team and Social Work Approved Mental Health Professionals team in order to promote a collaborative seamless discharge process for those leaving acute mental health inpatient units. Northumberland has the lowest levels of delayed transfers of care from inpatient units in the North East. Similarly, we have co-located our staff within the CNTW Crisis Team, and the CNTW Learning Disability service operate within several of our adult social care sites to improve the links between professionals and provide a better holistic service for clients.
- 5.6 We continue to manage all Continuing Health Care (CHC), Free Nursing Care (FNC) and Section 117 mental health aftercare arrangements on behalf of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) through a partnership arrangement. This creates efficiency across both organisations and a much more seamless interaction for clients and providers irrespective of whether someone is Local Authority or Health funded for their care in Northumberland. We currently undertake this service for around 650 CHC clients and manage NHS funds in excess of £60m per year on their behalf.

Workforce pressures - domiciliary care

- 5.7 Since the summer of 2021 there have been challenges in supplying the volume of homecare services that our service users have needed as due to workforce shortages for our homecare providers. Attracting and retaining care staff is a national issue. For the period up to April 2023 there were typically around 200

people for whom we could not source homecare and at its most serious point that number was 270.

- 5.8 Adult Services introduced a range of measures to try to address this challenge. These include financial incentives and practical support. The first financial measures were introduced across all commissioned adult care services and started in April 2022 with an offer to increase care fees for those providers that agreed to link care workers pay to the Real Living Wage. In July 2023 further investment was made to the homecare sector rather than the wider social care market which enhanced rates to those providers who agreed to pay staff £12.00 per hour for delivered care and travel between calls. The Council also supported providers financially to improve mileage reimbursement rates to carers.
- 5.9 These measures were followed later in the year with the introduction of the homecare guarantee which offered employees of those participating organisations further increased rates and guaranteed terms and conditions including employment contracts, training and induction.
- 5.10 Since April 2023 there has been a gradual improvement in the numbers of people who do not have their full homecare packages supplied immediately and since December 2023 the number has been around 50. There is more work required here to reduce further and stabilise these numbers, but the achievements are significant against the backdrop of a challenging workforce environment generally in Northumberland.

Reablement offer

- 5.11 We provide high quality and responsive care and reablement services to enable people to return to their optimal independence. This is an integrated health and social care service receiving around 11,500 referrals per year. National performance data for 2022/23 ranks us 17th out of 151 local authorities for the proportion of people receiving a short-term service where the outcome was either no ongoing support or support at a lower level. We show a result of 93.5% of cases in this category compared with 81.7% for the North East region and 77.5% for England as a whole. Our January 2023 Annual Conversation with an external peer identified that "it is clear that ASC's reablement offer is highly effective for the people who receive it".

Joint Equipment Loans (JELs)

- 5.12 JELs on average deliver 1,000 pieces of equipment every week to residents of Northumberland. This supports individuals to remain safer and independent in their home environment improving quality of life. Some larger items are issued to support professionals, care staff and family members to look after the individual in their own homes or care homes keeping all involved safe. Equipment is also issued to prevent hospital admissions as well as speed up hospital discharges.
- 5.13 Since the installation of the Aquaphase industrial washing machine approximately 12 months ago, which was funded by the ICB and supported by the Council, the service has been able to clean, service and recycle on average 90% of returned stock. The introduction of Aquaphase has not only sped up the turnaround of stock so it can be issued to other clients who need it, but it has also helped to manage how much new stock needs to be purchased.

- 5.14 In 2022 we delivered 56,045 items; the number of items returned in the same period was 35,737 with 88% of these items reused.

Home Improvement Service (HIS)

- 5.15 The HIS team have developed a fast-track process to support those individuals who sadly have a terminal prognosis. This means that the first £6,500 is awarded under the discretionary grant to enable essential adaptations to be installed quickly to support the individual with the difficulties they are experiencing and enable them to stay in their own homes.

Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

- 5.16 Our Safeguarding partnership demonstrates best practice and leads on regional and national initiatives, and our innovative Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) provides an integrated children and adults services response. All decisions on referrals must be made within a maximum of 8 hours via a dedicated multi agency team which includes staff from Adult and Children services; Police (including police civilian staff); Education; CNTW; safeguarding health nurses; and a domestic abuse worker. There are also links with other stakeholders who can be contacted when required from Northumberland Fire and Rescue, Probation, Housing and DWP. The co-location of MASH partners and their safeguarding expertise enables and ensures robust decision making and safety planning.
- 5.17 Cases referred to MASH meet a significant or critical harm threshold for both adults and children services and are rag rated in relation to response time required according to the level of risk and protective factors as below:

Red - 2 hour response; Amber - 4 hour response; Green - 8 hour response.

- 5.18 To give an idea of scale, in November 2023 there were 45 MASH referrals completed and 23 progressed to a formal Section 42 enquiry; in December 2023 there were 34 MASH referrals and 23 progressed to a formal Section 42 enquiry and in January 2024 there were 56 MASH referrals and 42 progressed to a formal Section 42 enquiry.

Mental Health Services, Safe Haven Café

- 5.19 CNTW, in partnership with the voluntary sector and Adult Services, are developing a 'Safe Haven' in Ashington; a non-clinical environment to support people who are experiencing psychological distress. The project involves multi agency partnership working to ensure inclusivity and accessibility across the county. The new hub will be offering out-of-hours care and in-person support to those in need and is expected to open in April 2024.

Social Work Academy

- 5.20 We established a social work academy within Adult Services approximately 18 months ago. This provides dedicated and consistent support for all newly qualified social workers and social work apprentices. In March 2023 we received an independent external quality assurance visit from Skills for Care who, via a series of interviews, assessed the quality and implementation of our ASYE programme (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) in Northumberland. The feedback was extremely positive and demonstrated that Northumberland is a national exemplar of best practice, with plans to share our approach more widely. One of the assessors stated, 'It was the most positive visit that I have ever had'. Each year

there are two intakes of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) in September and March - in 2023 there was a total intake of 12 NQSWS. They are supported by three team managers, whose role is to nurture them through the transition from academic study to social work practice. The NQSWS spend the first six months working together as a newly qualified team where they can share learning and benefit from tailored support. In the second six months they move into community teams where they continue to receive support and supervision from their academy team managers.

Social Work Awards

- 5.21 Three of our social workers were shortlisted for the Social Worker of the Year Awards 2023, and one of the social workers went on to win the top award in her category. Hannah Dawson, who works in the North Mental Health Team, won the Mental Health Social Worker of the Year award. The award recognises qualified social workers who have made a positive impact through their outstanding work with adults or children. Louise Gray, who works in Central Northumberland Care and Support Team, was shortlisted for the Adult Social Worker of the Year award. The award recognises qualified social workers who have made a positive impact through their outstanding work with adults. Katie Anderson, who works in the countywide Emergency Duty Team, was shortlisted for the Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) of the Year award. This is a new award category which recognises AMHPs who excel in delivering positive outcomes for the people they support in the context of mental health act assessments.
- 5.22 Our Northumberland social work academy was a finalist for the Local Government Chronicle award for the best next generation employer.

Recruitment, In-house Provider Services

- 5.23 A key challenge for in-house services since the Covid 19 crisis has been recruitment and retention of staff. Through the last 12 months the position has steadily improved as we have worked closely with our colleagues in the Recruitment Team. We maximise our promotions through both electronic advertisement and word of mouth through our current workforce who are best able to promote social care and working for the council than those who work for us.

Internal Services - CQC inspection ratings

- 5.24 Four of our CQC registered services have recently been inspected. Short Term Support Service (STSS) Berwick, STSS West and STSS Central have all retained their Outstanding rating from CQC. Our Shared Lives service was inspected in October/November 2023 and received a good rating overall, with Outstanding in the Caring Domain. Lessons learnt from the inspections are shared with all other services.

Inspection readiness

- 5.25 Preparation work has continued over the past year for the introduction of CQC Inspections of Adult Social Care and a full governance framework has been developed to support this work. This included beginning a continuous programme of assurance visits taking place throughout the county which aims to replicate parts of the inspection process and provide an action plan to support services in areas which require improvement; and plans will be developed for a follow up inspection review process.

- 5.26 The first version of our LASAIR documentation was completed in late 2023. This is our self-assessment as a local authority on how we are delivering our Adult Social Care functions. A library of documentation to support the self-assessment was also collated. There have been and continue to be further reviews taking place with external support from the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) and peers to further assess adult social care in Northumberland and our readiness for inspection.

Market position statement

- 5.27 Our Market Position Statement was published in May 2023. It sets out our vision for commissioning adult care services to support adults with social care needs in Northumberland. It highlights our priorities, gives a sense of direction for care and support in Northumberland, and highlights potential business opportunities during a time of uncertainty and significant change. In response to the care and support needs of our communities, tender opportunities are presented to providers to shape and develop a resilient market in order to introduce new and varied services that are required, an example being the current Dementia Service Tender initiated due to the identified need for dementia nursing beds in Northumberland.

Commissioning quality assurance process

- 5.28 We have further developed our commissioning quality assurance process, which sets out our approach to assuring the standards of commissioned adult social care services in Northumberland including out of area services. Support to providers is critical to our social care market to continually develop the quality of services. Some examples of this include contracted social care providers and their staff are offered access to the council's training courses to improve the quality of the services that they deliver. This includes training on Safeguarding, Mental Capacity Act, and an Excellence Course to enhance the skills and knowledge of care service managers.
- 5.29 We also provide programmes and events to facilitate the sharing of good practice of care providers rated as "outstanding" and supporting providers with their most difficult structural challenges such as recruitment and retention. In January 2024, 78 care homes (82.1%) in Northumberland were rated as good or outstanding (an increase from 77.3% in December 2022), 84.5% of beds in care homes in Northumberland were rated as good or outstanding (an increase from 74.7% in December 2022). We are benchmarking nationally with all Northumberland Care Homes and are performing above average for community-based locations rated as outstanding or good across the 5 CQC domains.

Information systems and digital technology

- 5.30 The procurement of a replacement system for Swift, our main Adult Social Care recording system, continued throughout 2022-23 (this was completed in May 2023). The next step, which is currently underway, is the implementation project to ensure a safe transfer to the new system, which is expected to take approximately 20 months in total.
- 5.31 The One Call telephony service (single point of access) have recently completed a project to move to the corporate system which will give us better business continuity and detailed reporting functions.

Key areas of focus

Prevention

- 5.32 We have a range of well-established services in Northumberland focused on helping people to stay healthy and independent. Over the next period we will be working to strengthen our focus on the benefits of prevention and early intervention. This will include further development of our relationship with NCT under the Communities First model which will help to stimulate service development in the community and voluntary sector whilst maintaining a flexible and responsive service that acknowledges the unique challenges of a large and diverse county.

Strength based approach

- 5.33 We are working towards a strengths-based approach to the assessment of client needs. Our Quality of Practice Framework has recently been reviewed in collaboration with our workforce and there has been a renewed commitment to adopting strength-based approaches within Adult Services.

Unpaid Carers

- 5.34 As part of our commitment to supporting carers, we have co-produced with the Carers Partnership Board a comprehensive Carers Strategy: Northumberland's Commitment to Carers Strategy 2022-24 to support the health and wellbeing of all carers living in Northumberland. We are working with our stakeholders/partners in delivering this strategy.
- 5.35 Following positive feedback from colleagues in other local authorities, we have recently commissioned a new online platform, Mobilise, initially for one year. The purpose of Mobilise is to further support our carers, including those harder to reach carer groups, whilst complementing the work currently undertaken by Carers Northumberland.

Direct Payments

- 5.36 We have recently undertaken a comprehensive review of our approach to Direct Payments via our Adult Services Transformation Board. Direct payments have always been available as a solution to enable clients and their families to take more control over their lives, but we recognise that comparatively our take up of direct payments in Northumberland is lower than many other Councils. This BEST project has identified key actions which are aimed at increasing the take up of direct payments over the coming period.

Feedback from Service Users

- 5.37 Feedback from service users is a vital measure of how we are meeting the needs of our residents. We have recently implemented a new 'People's Advisory Group', in collaboration with Healthwatch Northumberland; the first meeting of which took place on 14 November 2023. The purpose of this group is for adults who draw on care and support and adult services staff to work together in equal partnership to advise upon the development and embedding of a culture of co-production and to identify areas for improvement.
- 5.38 In addition, our Shared Lives service are setting up carer and user forums to achieve co-production of processes, training and how we engage with our stakeholders. We aim to continue to build on and develop new methods of engaging with our service users as well as improving information, guidance, and recruitment of carers. This is currently progressing through the Best-in-Class Commissioning project within the council.

Extra care and supported living

- 5.39 Our extra care and supported living strategy has recently been updated. It sets out the background that housing pressures for vulnerable individuals is presenting to the Council and what we aim to do to enable people to live the best lives they can. It reflects our commitment to ensuring that high quality accommodation with care and support is available for older and vulnerable people; both to meet current needs and to support the next generation of people who will need care and support where they choose to live.

Information provision

- 5.40 We recognise the importance of keeping our residents informed and providing effective information. We are working with IT to update our pages on the corporate website to a more user-friendly platform. This will include signposting to other services or organisations where appropriate. We will also be exploring the potential to provide more self-service functionality so people can plan for their future. This will include interactive transactions such as online assessments and referrals to maximise efficiency and provide better value for money.

Digital technology

- 5.41 We continually scan the digital marketplace for advancing technology which will support with service provision. As such, we are about to start a digital pilot using Amazon Show. It is anticipated that the pilot will focus on several distinct areas. To support hospital discharge for those patients nervous about coming home; for some STSS care calls which could be facilitated remotely; for some proactive outbound calls/messages for those Telecare clients who are frequent callers e.g. those who continually ring to ask the time, where the system could be pre-programmed to respond to the question; for welfare checks to clients. Feedback from the pilot will inform strategic decisions on where similar/additional technology can support services.

Development of social enterprises

- 5.42 Work is due to commence to develop one of our existing social enterprises - Centre of Recycling and Enterprise (CORE) based in our Tynedale Centre day centre in Hexham. The aim of the project is to reinvest income that will create employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Operational performance (national and local benchmarking)

- 5.43 The Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) measures how well care and support services achieve the outcomes that matter most to people. There are 22 indicators, seven of the indicators are calculated from the Adult Social Care Survey (the user survey), five are from the biennial Survey of Adult Carers in England (SACE) and the other ten are from other published data including the year-end Short and Long-Term Services (SALT) return.
- 5.44 For the period 2022-23 Northumberland ranked above the North East and England averages in 10 out of the 17 indicators that were reviewed in that year (note, the 5 indicators linked to the Carers survey are biennial). Only 1 indicator was below the North East and England averages. 8 out of the 17 ranked in the top 25% of the 151 local authorities with adult social care responsibilities.
- 5.45 Within the User survey the following two indicators ranked particularly highly:

- a) 4A – “Proportion of people who use services who feel safe” is ranked 4th in England. Note: the lower the ranking number the better
- b) 1A – “Social care-related quality of life” is ranked 7th in England. Note: the lower the ranking number the better.

5.46 In 2021-22 all 5 indicators from the Biennial Carers Survey were ranked within the top 8 out of the 151 local authorities with adult social care responsibilities:

- a) Carer-reported quality of life – 2nd
- b) Proportion of carers who reported that they had as much social contact as they would like – 3rd
- c) Proportion of carers who report that they have been included or consulted in discussion about the person they care for – 4th
- d) Proportion of carers who find it easy to find information about services – 6th
- e) Proportion of people who use services who feel safe – 8th.

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

This report provides a valuable opportunity for Council to consider and comment on the work of each Portfolio. The recommendation to Council is to note the Cabinet Member for Caring for Adults Annual Portfolio Report.

7. Implications

Policy	This report supports delivery of all three priorities of the Corporate Plan.
Finance and value for money	Value for money is a priority for the Council. This report contains no direct financial implications. The ongoing delivery of the individual actions within the Leader of Council’s portfolio may have financial implications which would form separate reports as these arise.
Legal	No implications to note.
Procurement	N/A
Human resources	N/A
Property	N/A
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - no equalities issues identified N/A

Risk assessment	None at this stage.
Crime and disorder	N/A
Customer considerations	N/A
Carbon reduction	N/A
Health and wellbeing	The achievements and areas of focus outlined in the report are all essential for the health and wellbeing of our residents.
Wards	(All Wards);

8. Background papers

Not applicable.

9. Links to other key reports already published

Corporate Plan 2023-26

Corporate Plan Achievements Report March 2023

10. Author and Contact Details

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