

Adults Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 20 November 2023

Attendance

Members of the Adults Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Jenny Cockayne
Cllr Val Evans (Chair)
Cllr Christopher Haynes (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Linda Leach
Cllr Bob Maddox
Cllr Rohit Mistry
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Iqra Tahir

Employees

Courtney Abbott	Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner for Children and Adults
Sandra Ashton-Jones	Head of Mental Health
Lesley Johnson	Carer Support Manager
Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Jennifer Rogers	Principal Social Worker
Andrew Wolverson	Deputy Director of Commissioning and Transformation of Children's Services

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Val Evans, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was being live streamed to the press and public. A recording of the meeting would be available for viewing on the Council's website at a future date.

2 **Meeting procedures to be followed**

Cllr Evans explained the protocol to be followed during the meeting for asking questions.

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Linda Leach

Becky Wilkinson Director of Adult Services

4 **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of previous meeting (17 October 2023) (to follow)**

Minutes of Meeting 17 October 2023 approved as correct record.

6 **Adult Social Worker and Workforce Health Check Surveys 2022 - update on actions**

The Chair invited Courtney Abbott, Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner, to present the report on the findings of the Adult Service's social work and wider workforce health check for 2022 report actions.

The report was prepared in response to a request at the time from the panel who wanted a mid-year update of progress against actions. The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner briefed the panel on the progress of actions from the health check survey 2022.

A copy of the presentation is attached.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner commented that the progress on some of the actions, implementing a trauma informed practice may take some time to see the impact of the changes.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that work is in progress to analyse the findings of 2023 survey, which recently closed. The findings of the latest survey will be presented to the panel in March 2023. The survey findings will be presented to the Social Workers in September 2024 and the wider workforce in October 2024.

The Quality and Improvement Advanced Practitioner invited the panel to comment and provide challenge on the proposed future actions to improve practice conditions for, and the health of, social work and the wider workforce.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report and presentation. The panel were invited to comment and ask questions.

A panel member welcomed the work to improve social worker retention rates and manage case workloads. The panel member queried the issue of support for people with complex care needs who may find it difficult to manage changes in the person providing their care and or the social worker and wanted further details about what would be done in this situation.

Jenny Rogers, Principal Social Worker, commented on the importance of relationship-based practice and that in respect of care organisations providers there is a similar expectation that where possible the same person should be used to provide care.

The Principal Social Worker acknowledged the national staffing challenges affecting the care sector and the impact of turnover rates and reassured the panel that the aim is to keep staff changes to a minimum.

Sandra Ashton-Jones, Head of Adult Services, advised the panel that as regards changes in a social worker then the service aims to arrange a 'warm handoff' where the current social worker introduces the person who will be taking over their case to help reduce possible disruption in their care arrangements.

A panel member queried what meaningful support would be offered to a care worker or social worker who reports to their manager that they are feeling stressed and struggling with their case load.

The Principal Social Worker commented on the importance of regular supervision in identifying this early as an issue and added that it should not reach the situation where someone reports they are feeling overwhelmed. The Principal Social Worker highlighted the reference in the report about this issue of burnout and the action being taken in response, for example, trauma informed supervision. There is a recognition at the organisational level of the stressful and challenging nature of social work practice.

The Principal Social Worker commented on the range of employee assistance support available, which includes counselling and support cafes. In addition, workers are encouraged to access the range of other practical and personal support, for example, taking lunch breaks, yoga sessions and booking admin time, to help create reflective spaces.

A panel member queried the plans for and the cost of rebranding the position of Wolverhampton as an employer of choice service to support the recruitment and retention of social workers and care workers and asked if this work would be done in-house or involve the use of external consultants and details of costings.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that the rebranding work has largely been done in house and that some support has been provided by external specialists. The use of external specialist has been done through the Council's procurement process.

A panel member suggested that while welcoming the high levels of satisfaction among social workers in the survey responses that it would be helpful to also include negative comments from social workers who would not recommend CWC as an employer. The information would provide learning opportunity and help to improve future practice. A panel member suggested that negative comments should be included in the next annual report to the panel in March 2024.

The Principal Social Worker agreed to include the negative comments in the next annual report and suggested adding a reference in the action plan response to specific comments as part of the improvement plan for the service.

A panel member queried the take up rates among social workers of face-to-face training sessions since 2021.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that during the Covid 19 pandemic training was mainly delivered online and since then more face to face training has been offered and the numbers have increased but not yet returned to the same levels during this period. A possible reason for this is that online learning is more cost effective as it does not involve travel.

The Principal Social Worker accepted the necessity for face-to-face training and commented that people gain value from in person meetings and reassured the panel that there are plans to support this.

The Principal Social Worker agreed to provide details about the take up rates for face to face compared to online training sessions.

A panel member queried the statistics relating to the differences in response between social workers and social care workers to questions about opportunities for reflection within supervision sessions and for them to be observed during practice and asked for an explanation.

The Principal Social Worker agreed to investigate the matter and provide a more detailed response in a future report to the panel. The Principal Social Worker and accepted the need for the number of practice observations of social work practice to increase. The Principal Social Worker commented that observations are important and have been incorporated into social work practice week to improve the situation.

Andrew Wolverson, Deputy Director of Commissioning and Transformation of Childrens Services added that the findings should be treated with some caution as based on what people self-report.

Sandra Ashton-Jones, Head of Adult Services, added that social workers work in very complex or challenging situation, and they will sometimes visit a person with a colleague or manager to support them, but this would not be classed as a formal observation. There is a specific template for managers to complete and give formal feedback to social workers. The Head of Adult Services reassured the panel that there are other informal observations of social work practice.

The Chair suggested social workers should be invited to attend the panel meeting to respond directly to questions about issues arising from the 2023 Adult Social Worker and Workforce Health Check Survey.

The Head of Adult Services agreed to follow up the request and see if any social workers would accept the invite to attend the meeting.

The Chair thanked the presenters for the report and presenters.

Resolved:

1. The Principal Social Worker to note the comments of the panel about the actions from the findings of the Adult Social Work and Workforce Health Check 2022.
2. The Head of Adult Services to invite Social Workers to attend the panel meeting on 19 March 2024 when the 2023 Adult Social Work and Workforce Health Check 2023 report is presented.

7

Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance Preparation

The Chair invited Andrew Wolverson, Deputy Director of Commissioning and Transformation of Children's Services, to present report.

The Deputy Director gave a presentation about the preparation for the new adult services inspection regime introduced nationally. The inspection will be undertaken by the Care Quality Commission.

The Deputy Director advised the panel that the local authority has specific duties under the Care Act (2014) and there is now a duty announced in April 2023 to be independently reviewed in terms of how it is delivering against a core set of functions. At the end of the inspection a rating will be published outcome/rating (Inadequate, Requires Improvement, Good or Outstanding) as with Ofsted ratings against the core functions.

The Deputy Director commented on the progress of the Strategic Improvement Plan and advised the panel that the document will provide evidence actions against areas of development identified in the Self-Assessment.

A copy of the presentation is attached.

The panel were invited to comment on the report and presentation.

A panel member queried the impact on the assessment of not meeting one of nine listed categories and commented on those services which the Council delivers either jointly is reliant on partner organisation and the need to make clear which parts of the system are not working and give assurance that such issues are being addressed as a partnership.

The Deputy Director referred to care home provision where the majority of which is delivered by the private sector. The Council works with owners to try and influence and improve the quality of care provided. The Deputy Director commented separately on the work being done to support privately owned residential care home where there may not have the same dedicated roles compared to a larger care home organisation.

The Deputy Director commented that the care home sector is experiencing a high turnover of managers and several homes previously rated as 'good' are now being rated as either 'requires improvement or in a recent example, as 'inadequate'.

The Deputy Director commented on the impact of Covid 19 on care home providers and that the Council is supporting them with a focus on making sure Wolverhampton residents have access to the best care.

The Deputy Director reassured the panel that the Council has very good systems in place to monitor and this has been successful in helping a care provider improve their establishment home rating from 'inadequate' to 'good' in short period of time.

A panel suggested that it would be helpful to invite a representative of Occupational Therapy Service to a future meeting. The Deputy Director agreed to bring a report to a future meeting. The Deputy Director commented that there is a national shortage of Occupational Therapists and the longest waiting times are for people wanting to access this service.

The Deputy Director suggested that a report could also include work being done address the issue, for example, the introduction of an online self-assessment form and alternative shorter form when a person needs something specific such as a grab rail rather than a full care assessment. The Deputy Director stressed the important role of Occupational Therapist is assessing current and future care and support needs of a person.

The panel discussed the occupational therapy offer provided by RWHT hospital discharge team and the strong performance of the team, particularly during the previous winter pressures period. The Deputy Director highlighted the small numbers of people whose hospital discharge was delayed because they did not have the care package ready.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the presentation.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the presentation.
2. The Deputy Director of Commissioning and Transformation of Children's Services to present a future report on the performance of the Occupational Therapy service to the panel.

8 **Our Commitment to All Age Carers Update on Progress**

The Chair invited Sandra Ashton Jones, Head of Adult Services, to present the report.

The Head of Adult Services introduced Lesley Johnson, Carer & Community Support Manager, to answer specific questions on the work and performance of the care and support team referenced in the presentation.

The Head of Adult Services advised the panel that the presentation would provide an update on progress on the Council's commitment to all age carers strategy launched in December 2022 that was considered earlier in the year. At the time the panel requested an update on progress of work done against the objectives in the strategy be presented to a future meeting.

The Head of Adult Services advised the panel that a carer is defined as someone who supports a person such as a family member or friend in an unpaid capacity.

In the most recent census, 24,000 people in Wolverhampton identified themselves as a carer and the locality teams are currently working with between 5000 to 7000 carers in the city and that includes carers under the age of 18 and parent carers.

The Head of Adult Services gave a summary of the presentation. A copy of the presentation is attached.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report.

The Chair invited the panel to comment on the presentation.

A panel thanked the presenter for the comprehensive report and queried the number of unpaid carers in Wolverhampton. The Head of Adult Services advised the panel that 84,000 people have identified themselves as carers this compares to 27,000 reported in the 2021 Census. The Head of Adult Services added that a finding from the census was that there has been a significant increase in the number of hours unpaid care provided.

A panel member queried the low take up of the offer of £100 one off payment in 2023/2024 to support carers with the increase in the cost of living.

At present 250 carers have received the offer which is equivalent to about 1 per cent of people who identified themselves as a carer.

The Head of Adult Services advised that the offer is promoted during the carer's conversation as part of the assessment and in addition carers have been given extra financial help through the Household Support Fund. The funding has been used by carers to purchase laptops and driving lessons. The Head of Adult Service acknowledged the low take up of the offer and reassured the panel of the efforts will continue to increase the numbers.

A panel member expressed the concern that based on the current rate of progress it was unlikely that all 24,000 carers would take up the offer of the one-off payment by the end of March 2024.

The Head of Adult Services advised the panel that the service is working with between 5,000 to 7,000 people and commented that some people may not identify themselves as carers and this is the group the service is trying to reach and provide with support.

Lesley Johnson, Carer and Community Support Manager, commented that the funding was awarded late in the financial year and reassured the panel that with every conversation with a carer they are offered the £100 payment and the work will continue as there is awareness of the financial pressures facing carers during the winter months.

A panel member queried the five broad priorities and the listed activities and whether some of them should be 'business as usual' work and wanted to better understand the rationale for their inclusion.

The Deputy Director commented that five priorities have been developed as part of co-production work with carers and professionals and accepted that some of them would be considered to be part of the Council's daily work. The Deputy Director added that the inclusion of these priorities in the strategy is to show that action has been taken by the Council to respond to issues raised by carers, against which the Council will be reporting progress.

A panel member queried if plans for future events to support carers would include all WV Active sites including Aldersley Leisure Stadium. The Carer & Community Support Manager confirmed that all WV Active sites will be involved in the promotion to carers who will be offered a free year's membership for WV Active that can be used at any of their sites.

A panel member expressed concern about the willingness of GP surgeries to actively work with the Council to help identify unpaid carers and to promote the offer of support available to them as suggested in the presentation. There was also concern that without clear guidance nationally from Government to get involved in identifying unpaid carers and promoting the support offered, that this will not be seen as a priority for some GP practices without the offer of a financial incentive. The importance of sharing best practice in promoting the offer to carers was highlighted.

The Head of Adult Services advised the panel that GP practices have been financially incentivised and get a payment of £100 per carer that they identify, and some GP practice have been very active and making regular referrals to the carers support team.

In addition, the service continues to raise awareness about the support offered to carers.

The Carer and Community Support Manager advised the panel that the service works continually with GP practices and highlighted the importance of the language used when approaching a carer and using the opportunities for example, when someone collects prescriptions from the surgery to have a conversation and to follow up on actions.

A panel member highlighted the experiences of examples when no receptionist is available who could help identify carers or the service is busy as a challenge.

The Head of Adult Services advised the panel about the use of carer information leaflets in GP practice to promote the offer to carers and highlighted the work of the Carers Team in raising awareness across Wolverhampton and in all the primary care networks. The Head of Adult Services acknowledged the challenges people may face when trying to speak to a GP.

The Deputy Director commented that in addition to using GP systems to identify carers, that the Carers Card (to identify the person as an unpaid carer) is also used to promote the offer and signpost people to help. The Deputy Director highlighted the importance of everyone in the GP in helping to identify carers, particular young carers and to respond appropriately.

A panel member queried how representative of different communities is the estimated population of 5000 – 7000 unpaid carers. The Head of Adult Services advised the panel that the service collects this information, and a dashboard is being developed to provide better demographic information. The Head of Adult Services reassured the panel that an analysis of the data shows that the figures of known unpaid carers accurately reflects the profile of different communities in the population. The Head of Adult Services offered to provide the results of the analysis.

The Chair thanked the presenters for the presentation.

Resolved:

The Head of Adult Services to note the comments of the panel and provide information as requested.

9 **Adults Scrutiny Panel - draft work programme 2023-2024**

The Chair invited Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, to present the report.

The Scrutiny Officer commented on the agenda for future meetings and invited members to suggest new topics or questions for report authors to ensure issues of interest are covered.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.