

Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 25 September 2018

Attendance

Members of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Simon Bennett (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Linda Leach (Chair)
Cllr Asha Mattu
Cllr Susan Roberts MBE
Cllr Zee Russell

Employees

Louise Haughton
Joanne Keatley
Jennifer Rogers

Principal Social Worker
Head of Adult Education
Quality and Improvement Advanced
Practitioner
Director of Adult Services

David Watts

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following Cllrs:

Councillor Rupinderjit Kaur
Councillor Sandra Samuels

2 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

3 **Minutes of previous meetings (12 June 2018)**

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

5. Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel – Draft Work Programme

The Chair expressed disappointment about the late withdrawal by the Police and Crime Commissioner to attend the meeting. The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that no reply had been received to a request to suggest an alternative date to meet members of the panel.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that a response to questions sent to Police and Crime Commissioner had been circulated.

The Chair encouraged panel members to submit questions which will be sent to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

6. Modern Slavery – Update

The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that a link to the mobile app to check if a car wash is operating in a legitimate would be sent when received.

7. Safer Wolverhampton Partnership Performance Update

The Scrutiny Officer advised the panel that Karen Samuels, Head of Community Safety, had sent a briefing note summarising the range of initiatives aimed at reducing youth violence and knife crime to all Councillors.

- 5 **Adults Social Worker Health Check survey (report to follow)**
Louise Haughton, Principal Social Worker, gave an overview of the main findings of a Council survey to check the “health” of social workers. The survey is undertaken annually.

The Principal Social Worker presented the findings in the Social Work Health Check 2018 – Summary Report and gave details of five key themes based on the survey responses and the changes seen over the previous three years.

The Principal Social Worker explained that information collected and presented in the same way over this period does allow trends to be identified and comparisons made.

Jennifer Rogers, Advanced Practitioner Quality and Improvement, commented that the social workforce in Wolverhampton is considered to very stable over time. The Advanced Practitioner added the survey responses suggested that the employees considered the assessment forms were too long and in response changes were being made to the process.

The Advanced Practitioner commented on issues relating to topics ranging from current management vacancies, views on formal supervision. The Advanced Practitioner commented on the overall positive feedback from the survey responses and the high levels of reported job satisfaction.

The panel queried the response from more experienced social workers to different ways of working suggested in the report. The Principal Social Worker commented that experienced social workers would have seen different ways working over many years and have been able to adapt and learn new ways – some are very willing to change their practice and learn new skills; but accepted that they may need more time to adapt.

The Principal Social Worker commented that in the responses to the survey social workers there were references made to the number who referred to published articles to improve their practice had increased over time. The Principal Social Worker commented on the overall positive response to the use of observational practice as part efforts to improve the quality of social work practice. The Principal Social Worker commented on the need to get the balance right in supporting this work.

The panel discussed the findings about the levels of reported job satisfaction. The Principal Social Worker commented that the Council does perform well in terms of workforce stability. The Principal Social Worker added that having a stable workforce can respond to issues quickly and offer training in response to the specific issues or requests from social workers.

David Watts, Director of Adults Services, commented that the service was not complacent and highlighted areas of challenge such as meeting duties such as Advanced Mental Health Practitioner and there is recognition that this is also a national problem in helping social workers to meet their responsibilities. The Director of Adults Services commented on the challenge of the transition when social workers move from frontline practice to management and the need for extra support. This area is a focus for the council. The Director of Adults Services added that the Council has been successful in retaining front-line staff.

The Director of Adults Services commented on the range of work being done to make systems more efficient – the issue of paperwork has been identified as a concern in the survey responses. The aim is to reduce the amount of paperwork involved in the assessment process and free up the time of social workers. The evidence from pilot schemes intended to reduce bureaucracy and increase efficiency where this has been introduced is showing very positive results and the plan is this approach to be rolled out to other social work teams. The Director of Adults Services gave the example of work done to move away from the more repetitive aspects so that social workers can only need to record what is required. The Director of Adults Services commented on the work done to recognise the professionalism of social work practice.

The panel queried current levels of staffing and the circumstances where agency staff would be used. The Principal Social Worker commented that the Council is seen as an employer of choice and the work done to promote the offer at social work job fairs. The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that the Council does not have a high number of agency workers, but they are used as a temporary measure to cover periods of sickness or other absences.

The Director of Adults Services added that there are no current social work vacancies.

The panel discussed the plans for improving the opportunities for people wanting a career in social services through the apprenticeship offer. The Director of Adults Services added that there is a standard suite of training which is delivered in-house – in addition there are external providers of training and support provided by the council. The Director of Adults Services commented on an initiative to share and improve practice through an exchange programme where adult social workers are moved to work in a children's social work team. The Director of Adults Services commented that the aim is to help social workers to develop their skills and gain a better understanding across the life course of a person – despite some initial reservations the response has been very positive. The quality of the work was recognised in recent visit by the Chief Social Worker who made reference to the initiative at a conference speech.

The panel welcomed the progress made and agreed to the note the findings.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.

6 **Update on adult case file audits: one year on (report to follow)**

Jennifer Rogers, Advanced Practitioner for Quality and Improvement, introduced the report about the quality assurance programme and the findings of a mental capacity assessment audit.

The Advanced Practitioner advised the panel that the audit findings were based a detailed analysis of a selection of cases completed on 2017-18. The results of the thematic audit examining the quality of mental capacity assessments completed during the same period.

The Advanced Practitioner explained the principals that have informed the approach and how the work links to efforts to improve the quality of performance and identify areas for improvement.

The Advanced Practitioner commented on the progress and the main findings from the review of case files since the previous report was presented to the panel.

The Advanced Practitioner commented on the work done to embed reflective practice and critical analysis approach to social work practice. To support this, work the service is working with the carers champion. The carers champion was invited to meet with social workers to share their experiences.

The Advanced Practitioner briefed the panel about the findings from the thematic mental capacity care audits which are intended to assess the quality of the work in this area. There was acceptance of the need to improve current performance. The Advanced Practitioner outlined the range of work being done to improve performance – for example, the introduction of online training resources. A second audit is planned for January 2019 to review progress against areas identified in the report as requiring improvement.

The panel agreed to note the report and the progress made.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report and the findings.

7 **Overview of the Adult Education Offer and Outcomes for Residents**

Joanne Keatley, Head of Adult Education, gave a report and presentation about the current adult education offer and an assessment of the possible implications for the service of the Adult Skills Budget being devolved to the West Midlands Combined Authority. The annual Adult Education budget is £9 million.

The Head of Adult Education outlined in a presentation to the panel the background the current provision, the priorities of the service, and range of courses on offer to residents. The focus of the provision is aimed at older adults – only a small percentage of people attending courses are under 18 years.

The Head of Adult Education explained the proposed changes to the government funding which will mean the responsibility for the management of the budget for community learning providers will be transferred to WMCA. The Head of Adult Education commented on the different approaches to encouraging and supporting people who want to gain qualifications or learn new skills. The Head of Adult Education added that education should be seen as a way out of poverty and commented on the profile of students.

The Head of Adult Education commented on the positive impact of changes made by Government to change the rules that people can complete an ESOL course if they are earning less than £16,700 previously the assessment would include the total income for the household. The cost of attending the course was considered to be a barrier to people learning new skills and increase their employment opportunities. The current fee for ESOL course is £350 a term.

A further positive change made by Government is the removal of course fees for people wanting to gain GSCE in English or Maths. The Head of Adult Education commented on the work done with Like Minds – an organisation that supports people with learning difficulties

The service scores highly on FE student satisfaction surveys and recently an adult learner was a national winner at the Festival of Learning Awards. The Head of Adult Education showed a short video clip of the learner and their experiences.

The Head of Adult Education commented on the changes in 2019/20 when responsibility for funding for adult education will be transferred to the WMCA. The decision is likely to lead to changes in priorities, with perhaps a further narrowing, as improving skills is high on the agenda for the WMCA.

The Head of Adult Education commented on the vision for the City Learning Quarter and the different services that will be based on the site.

The Head of Adult Education commented the importance of effective marketing and word of mouth in promoting the service in addition to adverts on radio. The service also has a mobile promotional display that can be used in different venues. The panel queried what would happen when someone came into the centre interested in attending a course. The Head of Adult Education explained that the service has open days where people can get advice and help, in addition to course enrolment days - if people get over any concerns about studying then based on experience they will be ok when they start.

The panel discussed the possibility of a visit to the adult education service. The Head of Adult Education agreed to agree some possible dates for a tour of the site and the opportunity to observe a class.

The panel thanked the Head of Adult Education for the excellent report and presentation.

Resolved:

The Scrutiny Officer to arrange a date for a visit by panel members to the adult education service.

The meeting closed at 7.15pm