

Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 17 November 2020

Attendance

Members of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Simon Bennett (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Olivia Birch
Cllr Val Evans (Chair)
Cllr Sohail Khan
Cllr Lynne Moran
Cllr Anwen Muston
Cllr Zee Russell

In Attendance

Cllr Linda Leach

Cabinet Member for Adults

Employees

Sandra Ashton-Jones
James Barlow
Emma Bennett
Tom Denham
John Denley
Earl Piggott-Smith
Alison Shannon
Jin Takhar
Martin Stevens
Julia Cleary

Head of Mental Health
Senior Accounting Officer
Director of Children and Adult Services
Head of Adult Provision
Director of Public Health
Scrutiny Officer
Chief Accountant
Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager
Scrutiny Officer
Scrutiny and Systems Manager

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1 **Welcome and Introductions**

Cllr Val Evans, Chair, welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting and advised it was being live streamed to the press and public. Cllr Evans advised that she was not expecting any exempt or restricted items on the agenda. 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 and reminded everyone that microphones should be muted and cameras off, unless they have been invited to speak. Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, invited all attendees to introduce themselves to confirm they were present at the meeting.

Please note that the following offices were also in attendance at the meeting

James Barlow
Linda Stone and Ian Darch Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council
Sandra Ashton-Jones
Jin Takhar
Emma Bennett
Cllr Linda Leach - Cabinet Member for Adults
Martin Stevens
Earl Piggott Smith
Julia Cleary

3 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from the following member of the panel:

Cllr John Rowley

4 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of previous meeting (15.9.2020)**

The minutes to be corrected to show Cllr Simon Bennett as being in attendance.

The panel members voted and approved the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2020, subject to the amendment, as being a correct record.

6 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

7 **Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (report to follow)**

James Barlow, Finance Business Partner, presented the report and referred the panel to recommendations asking for comments on the draft budget medium term financial strategy and also the budget issues relevant to the remit of the panel. The comments will be included in a report to Scrutiny Board for their consideration after they have been approved by the Chair and Vice Chair as part of the response to the annual budget scrutiny.

The Finance Business Partner commented on the changes made to the layout of the budget report made in response to feedback from scrutiny panel members. The report is now more focused on the overall budget of areas within the remit of this panel and the extent to which they are aligned to the priorities of the Council. The feedback from the panel included in a report to Scrutiny Board for consideration before it is presented to Cabinet for approval in either January or February 2021.

The Finance Business Partner outlined the key parts of the draft budget medium term financial strategy report budget 2021-2022 to 2023-2024 and stated the Council has a legal requirement to set a balanced budget each year. The panel were advised that when the budget for this financial year was presented to Council on 4 March 2020 it was forecast that the Council would be facing a budget gap of around £15.5 million in 2021-2022 and rising to £20 million over the medium term. There is work ongoing to address the gap in funding. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Council finances and the operating environment.

The Finance Business Partner commented on strategy to address financial pressures in the medium term. The Finance Business Partner commented on the list of Government grants awarded to the Council to deal with financial pressures in the short term and the projected financial implications of Covid-19 in 2020-2021. A potential cost pressure of £324,000 has been estimated based on current predictions for 2020-2021.

The Finance Business Partner commented on the main assumptions underpinning this report and advised the panel that the Council is expecting an announcement in December 2020 about if it will provide sufficient funding to deal with any financial pressure related to Covid-19. If the Government awards a grant to cover these costs then the forecast deficit for next financial year in setting a balanced budget is £4.5 million, which is considered to be achievable. However, in the event that the Government does not provide sufficient funding, the Council would be faced with a budget deficit for 2021-2022 in the region of £23.2 million, rising to over £40 million over the medium term. This would result in the need to do a fundamental review of Council services to identify budget reduction measures needed to balance the budget.

The Finance Business Partner commented in more detail on the budget breakdown relating to the remit of Adult Services and Safer City. Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adult Services commented on the statutory responsibilities of Adult Services and the link to priorities in the Council Plan particularly the priority of achieving strong resilient and healthy communities. The Director of Children's and Adult Services commented on the work done to support the vulnerable people during the pandemic. The work will continue as part of the Project Relight plan to identify and support people identified as either clinically or socially at risk.

The Director of Children's and Adult Services commented on changes to adult social care programme which is focused on improving outcomes for people and promoting independence. In addition, the service is building on current work across Adult Services to enable people to live at home longer and more independently. The findings from evaluation shows that the approach is having a positive impact.

The service is working with health partners locally and regionally to improve the quality of services and to deliver more specialist health services to a larger population. The aim being to work together to support people living independently or to be supported by their families rather than having to have expensive care packages to wrap around them or to go into residential care provision for example.

The panel queried when a decision about grant funding would be made by Government. The Finance Business Partner responded that we will get an indication when the Government spending review is announced.

The Council is modelling different scenarios so we have plans to react to whatever happens, but the service is working on the assumption that we will be funded for financial pressures arising from Covid 19.

The panel requested more details about the grants awarded to the Council by Government. The Chief Accountant referred the panel to the appendix in the report which details grants awarded to the Council and the criteria for using the funds.

Further grants have been announced since the report was produced and an updated list could be provided.

The panel discussed the possible financial implications of Brexit on the Council. The panel were advised that there is lot of work done being done across the authority and the region to prepare for different Brexit outcomes and that the impact would be seen mainly across our businesses and providers.

Resolved:

The panel accepted the recommendations in the report.

8 **WVSC Social Prescribing Support to Connect project**

Ian Darch, Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council, introduced Linda Stone and explained that this would be joint presentation on the work of the Social Prescribing Support to Connect project. Ian Darch explained the background to the project and that the main aim was to support customers referred to the service and develop an action plan that will help them to tackle issues of isolation and loneliness. Ian Darch advised that the project was not a substitute for medical interventions but was intended to reduce demand for them and there was national evidence that people will go to the hospital and their GP much less if they get support.

Ian Darch explained the other social activities provided by WVSC aimed at bringing people together that are isolated and lonely together, such as book and breakfast clubs. Linda Stone explained the different reasons that could lead someone feeling lonely or isolated, such as health or debt issues. The service can refer people to specialist organisations that can offer more support if needed. Ian Darch commented on the link between the work of the project with other NHS services locally and also across the region.

Ian Darch explained that referrals are received from Health and Social care workers and also workers linked to GPs. The service started in in 2017 as a pilot project funded by CCG and then later funding from Department of Health and NHS enabled the service to expand and work in partnership with all of the Primary Care Networks. Funding from the National Lottery Building Connections fund has provided money to run their own groups where gaps have been identified.

Ian Darch commented on how the service responded to challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and the effect on the number of referrals received, estimated to be about 150 a month (before Covid-19). However, there is concern that the number of community services is not enough to meet the level of need for such services. In addition, the service has also set up a volunteer phone befriending service to increase the link workers capacity so they could keep taking on new people and where possible face-to-face meetings for groups have been arranged.

Ian Darch commented that it was estimated that 35,000 people in Wolverhampton do not have access to digital technology and the impact that this has had on accessing a range of benefits, support and education services available online. The issues range from not having Wi-Fi connectivity or the laptops or phones or not being able to use the technology.

Ian Darch commented on the challenge of getting people connected who also have additional needs, such as sensory challenges or where English is the second

language which presents a further barrier. The current focus of the project is helping people who already own equipment to become confident in using it so that they can access groups support and information and also encouraging them to join existing online discussion groups.

The service has received 72 referrals since May 2020. Ian Darch commented on the positive outcomes from people who were having no social interactions before the project started and now have been able to get into groups which has been life-changing for them and increased their independence and resilience.

Ian Darch commented on the challenge to delivering the project when people were having problems using a mobile phone and the different solutions that have been used to overcome them. A key finding from the project is that people need varying amounts of practice to embed the skills and to support this the service is currently exploring the use of volunteers as IT buddies who can help in these situations.

Ian commented on the challenges to sustaining the project in the future and in particular helping people who are unable to afford to buy phones or laptop equipment.

The project has been able to get donations of tablets and have been able to fund the cost of getting data bundle, but more help is needed to meet current demand.

In response to this the service is considering approaching local businesses who might want to donate second-hand equipment and also meeting the costs of getting people connected. Ian Darch commented on other ideas being developed to help people who have similar barriers such as lack of skills, connectivity and equipment.

The panel commented on the excellent work of the project which is focusing on try to reach people who are lonely and isolated, while at the same time managing the challenges presented by Covid 19. The panel commented that this project is a really good example of the public sector and private sector coming together to deliver something that helps people in need.

The panel discussed ideas for publicising the work of project to people in need and also encourage possible volunteers. The panel suggested promoting the project on the Council's website and also social media sites. The panel agreed to ask the Director of Communication to consider this idea and report back progress to a future meeting.

The panel invited Ian Darch and Linda Stone to present an update on progress of the project to a future meeting.

The panel discussed the issue of connectivity and the challenge of people not having mobile data to access the internet. Ian Darch suggested working with internet providers to make sure the people have free access to data and that they can go online to address the issue of the digital divide in the City. Ian Darch commented on discussions with advisors planning the rollout of 5G and the need to find innovative solutions that could provide free access, where possible, to the internet.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to invite Ian Darch and Linda Stone, Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council, to present an update on progress of the Social Prescribing Support to Connect project, to a future meeting of the panel.

2. The Director of Communication to be asked to consider ideas for promoting the work Social Prescribing Support to Connect project on the Council website and also its social media sites and report findings to a future meeting of the panel.

9 **Community and digital solutions to tackle issues of loneliness and social isolation**

Sandra Ashton Jones, Head of Service – Mental Health, introduced Tom Denham, Head of Service, and explained that this would be joint presentation to the panel about some of the work being done across the City by the Council and partner agencies to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst adults using both community and digital initiatives. The Head of Service advised the panel the issues of loneliness and social isolation is not a phenomenon specific to Wolverhampton and there is growing awareness of the problem across the UK. Recent studies have suggested that around 1.2 million older people in the UK are believed to be struggling with severe loneliness and chronic isolation.

The Head of Service listed examples of ordinary life events that could be triggers for loneliness such as being an informal carer, becoming new parents or relationship breakdown. The Head of Service (Mental Health) outlined the preparation work done at a multi-agency level to map levels of social isolation and loneliness in the city. The initial plan was to focus on Low Hill/Bushbury areas initially then roll out to other parts of the city. However, the start of the project was delayed due to Covid-19 outbreak. However, agencies have continued to develop ways to respond to and reduce loneliness and social isolation in Wolverhampton.

The Head of Service (Mental Health) added that during the period the service completed over a thousand carers conversations. The support was offered either online or in person, with appropriate safety measures and wearing PPE.

The support ranged from online library services, virtually coffee and chat meetings via Zoom, yoga sessions, quizzes and online computer training. In addition, videos have been updated to the Council YouTube channel specifically for adults with a learning disability who would have previously attended a day centre, which are currently closed during to Covid 19 restrictions.

The change to online provision has helped people to remain connected through the zoom sessions, in some situations people have been able to use direct payments to meet their connection costs. In other examples, people have used their direct payments to employ a personal assistant to go on walks or in some cases to enable them to get out of the house. The Council's social media platforms are updated daily with information for carers and in addition newsletters and regular briefings are emailed and posted in recognition that not everyone has access information via the internet.

The Head of Service (Mental Health) commented on the positive impact that the different activities have had on the lives of people who have taken part. Tom Denham, Head of Adult Service – Service Provision, presented a PowerPoint presentation. The Head of Service commented that when the Council had to close all of its day services in response to the pandemic it affected over a 120 people. The main priority at the time was to support the NHS.

The Head of Service commented on the challenge of delivering the service by workers some of whom were shielding because of Covid 19 and the switch to allow services to be delivered online. The Head of Service commented that 35 videos posted online has had about 2000 views.

The panel discussed the questions listed on presentation slide. The panel agreed to consider them further and send their comments to the scrutiny officer.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the presentation.

10

Corporate Guidance on Equalities Monitoring of Public Services

Jin Takhar, Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager, presented the briefing paper which details the actions taken to date to embed equality's monitoring arrangements in Adult Services. The Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager explained the review of equality data within Adult Services was part of a wider review of monitoring arrangements being conducted across the Council. The Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager, reassured members that there is a strong commitment to move the work forward.

The Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager, advised the panel that since her appointment in January 2020 there has been agreement of the importance to collecting good quality data on all our service users across all protected characteristics and using this information to design and evaluate the delivery of services. The Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager commented on the progress made to date and the new guidance for managers setting out the importance of why they should be collecting equalities monitoring data and acting upon the information that they have. In addition, managers are asked to analyse and to look at service outcomes and delivery and the impact this is having on our service users. The guidance has been widely circulated and discussed at various leadership team meetings. In July 2020, a detailed desktop assessment was done across all 52 areas of the business across the Council with a focus on understanding of whether data is collected across all the protected characteristics.

The Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager, commented that the Council collects a lot of equality data which is recorded in 24 different systems and there was concern about the quality of the data and how it is used. The Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager, advised that the service is reviewing systems in terms of their capacity and functionality to record data across all protected characteristics and this includes looking at the adult care system. There is a plan to support each of the directorates over the next 12 months to review their data systems.

The Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager commented on plans to develop an understanding of what service user data is being collected and to better understand any gaps in information across all protected characteristics. There is an expectation that an action plan would have been agreed in the next three months which will set out exactly how any missing data will be collected.

The quality of the data collected will be reviewed in March 2021 to assess if there is enough robust data available to determine that all sections of our communities are

being supported. A series of workshops are planned which will target staff in adult social care about respecting people's identity.

This will cover asking appropriate questions when inviting our service users due to disclose information about their protected characteristics and hopefully this will go some way towards building confidence in our colleagues and moving forward also help to improve our disclosure rates.

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services, commented that she supports the aims of the report and the issue is considered in the weekly management meetings. The need to consider the issues from a children's perspective was also highlighted. There is work ongoing to draft a pledge which the service will consider picking up the challenges detailed in the briefing paper. The service is engaging with frontline childcare practitioners in terms of capturing their experiences of working for Council and consideration given to how this learning could be used to improve the collection of monitoring data in adult services.

The Director of Children's Services is committed to getting the data right and then using this to inform how the service might use it to identify areas for further action, where there is evidence of disproportionality.

The panel discussed whether the need for a question giving people the option not to provide personal information about themselves given that the survey itself is optional. The Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Manager explained that non-responses to questions about their personal life will tell the Council something of value, as it will show that more work is needed to offer reassurance that this information can be shared with confidence.

The panel agreed to receive an update report on progress to a future meeting. The panel also suggested that Equalities Champion be invited to a future meeting of the panel to contribute to the discussion on the issues highlighted in the briefing paper.

The panel wanted to formally place on record its thanks to David Watts, Director of Adults, who has now left the Council. The panel welcomed Emma Bennett in her interim role as Director of Children's and Adults.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the briefing paper.

The panel agreed to receive an update on the briefing paper to a future meeting of the panel. The Equalities Champion to be invited to attend the meeting.

11

Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel 2019 20 - Draft Work Programme

Earl Piggott-Smith, Scrutiny Officer, presented the draft work programme and invited to comment on the draft work programme and to suggest ideas, following the guidance, of topics that could be added.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the report.