

Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 20 July 2021

Attendance

Members of the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Qaiser Azeem
Cllr Harman Banger
Cllr Simon Bennett
Cllr Olivia Birch
Cllr Val Evans (Chair)
Cllr Stephanie Haynes
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Sohail Khan (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Lynne Moran
Cllr Anwen Muston
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman

Members of Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel that attended via Teams

Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Harman Banger
Cllr Qaiser Azeem

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. 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.
- 3 **Apologies**
Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:
 - Councillor Rupinderjit Kaur
 - Councillor Rashpal Kaur

4 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Anwen Muston declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 7 as a relative receives personal care arranged by the local authority.

5 Minutes of previous meeting

The panel members voted and approved the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2021 as being a correct record.

6 Principal Social Worker Annual Report 2020 - 2021

The Chair invited Jennifer Rogers, Principal Social Worker, to present her report to the panel. The Principal Social Worker (PSW) advised the panel that the 2020 -21 annual report sets out the progress made during the year and key priorities identified for 2021-2022. The report details the work of the PSW in improving the quality of social work practice across both children's and adult's services.

The PSW commented that a key area of work has been the response of the service to the Covid-19 pandemic and maintaining the safety and wellbeing of social workers. The PSW advised the panel that new policies were developed in response to the pandemic.

The PSW was responsible for leading the Council's response to Care Act easements, which allowed adult social care providers to re-prioritise their resources if there was a spike in demand for lower priority needs and if met would mean the Council being unable to meet their statutory duties.

The panel were advised that local guidance was drafted after a short public consultation which had positive responses, including an easy read version, however it was not necessary to implement to any changes to the process.

The PSW advised the panel that she supported social work teams to consider legal and human rights challenges for people living in care home and the need to reduce the risk of infection by restricting visits by their carers and relatives.

A key role of the PSW is ensuring the quality of social work practice and support continual learning and improvement of social workers. The PSW led on quality assurance activity in adults during 2020-2021. The percentage of audited case files rated as 'good' or above decreased slightly from 83 percent (2019-2020) to 78 percent (2020-2021). The reduction in quality may have been due to the early impact of the pandemic as social workers adjusted to different ways of working.

The PSW advised the panel the situation has since improved and in January 2021, 90 percent of case files were rated as being 'good' or 'outstanding' as result of changes in social work practice. The PSW advised the panel of the findings from an external peer review challenge of social work practice completed in October 2020. The case files examined during the review were consistently rated as 'good' and there were no causes for concern.

The PSW commented on the work done to develop and deliver the recruitment and retention plan with colleagues in Human Resources, Organisations Development and Communications Team. The PSW outlined a range of other initiatives aimed at supporting the current and future workforce and to further embed good practice.

The Chair invited the panel to comment on the report.

The panel thanked the PSW for the report, which was well presented, and covered progress made during the year in response to the challenges, particularly the pandemic.

The panel queried reasoning for the conclusions about the quality of social work practice based on sample of 80 cases which represents about two percent of people who received a service from adult social care.

The PSW accepted that the number of case files audited included is low compared to previous years and added that in a normal year about five percent of cases would be audited. The PSW explained that impact of Covid 19 has limited some of the planned audit activities during the first part of year.

The PSW reassured the panel that the number of cases audited is expected to increase for the rest of the year and there are other changes planned to get a more accurate picture of the quality of social work practice.

The panel queried the individual case workload of social workers and asked for explanation in future reports of the term 'strength based' social work practice. The PSW accepted the point about the term and agreed to give an explanation in future reports to the panel. The PSW reassured the panel that social worker case workloads are closely monitored to check that they are manageable, while accepting that this is a constant challenge in managing demand for support with the resources available.

The PSW advised the panel that members of the independent children's review team have been invited to meet with social workers to give feedback on what they think is working and not working and share this learning. The information will help to shape future recommendations for the service.

Emma Bennett, Director of Children and Adults, added that there is a major independent review ongoing on the recruitment programme for social workers. The findings will be published in 2022 and will comment on the balance between early intervention and the number of child protection investigations.

The Director commented on the contributions of the PSW to the review. The Director advised the panel that she currently chairs the West Midlands DCS network and a small group of members meet regularly with the lead reviewer working in Wolverhampton and the PSW also contributes to the discussion about how current system works.

The panel welcomed the different routes to becoming a social worker and the support for people with different life experiences to join the profession in recognition of the national shortage.

The panel queried if the PSW had any concerns about the extent to which she can meet the responsibilities of the role as detailed in the report and also if the appointment of a deputy would make the workload more manageable, if it was an issue. The PSW accepted the demanding workload of the role but this reflected the importance of the role in helping to drive improvements in social work practice in both children's and adults. The PSW also highlighted the quality of support offered by her team in helping to manage the workload.

The panel queried how social workers currently working remotely who may be concerned about a possible return to the office, would be supported.

The PSW commented that as the country moves into a different phase of response to the pandemic working arrangements may change. There is an acceptance of the limits of remote work for social workers, which is traditionally based on face to face meetings.

The PSW commented on the difficulty some social workers have experienced from home working and who were keen to work directly with people. However, the experience of the response to the pandemic has highlighted how well social workers can adapt to changes in working practices and the service has learned valuable lessons about what things can be done successfully remotely.

The PSW highlighted the benefits of remote working such as reduced travelling time, getting better and attendance and conversations at virtual team meetings. The PSW added that if there are social workers concerned about a return to the office setting then work will be done to develop guidance and provide the level of support needed. The PSW reassured the panel that there would be no rush to make changes and social workers would be consulted about any planned changes to the current working arrangements.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report and invited panel members to ask question

The panel welcomed the report and the focus on offering different career opportunities for both young people and mature students to become social workers. The panel welcomed the opportunity for people to gain skills and knowledge through workplace learning.

The panel queried the feedback from the survey which reported similar levels of satisfaction with learning opportunities from social workers in children's and adults and wanted further details.

The panel also queried what further work is done to increase the levels of satisfaction in the future.

The PSW commented on the range of career and learning opportunities available to social workers and the encouragement and support offered. The PSW commented on the specific learning and development offer to new and aspiring managers and the work being done to include this work as part of the professional conversations and supervision sessions. The work is being done in recognition of the challenge when social workers or senior social workers want to move into a management role.

The PSW commented on the work being done to listen to and respond to what social work staff say about what they need to help their learning and development and to offer more practice based sessions, for example training in preparation for changes to Liberty Protection Safeguards which is due to be introduced on 2022.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to endorse the report of the Principal Social Worker and the priorities identified for 2021-2022.

7 **Mandatory Vaccinations for Social Care Homes**

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's and Adult Services, introduced the report to the panel on behalf of Becky Wilkinson, Deputy Director Adult Services, who had submitted apologies for the meeting.

The Director outlined the progress from earlier consultation on Government proposals to make it mandatory for care home staff, volunteers, ancillary and visiting professionals to receive the COVID vaccination. The consultation was done between April and May 2021 and included staff, residents, providers and families.

The Director advised the panel that following the consultation the Government announced that the proposal would be implemented. The proposal was approved in Parliament last week and will be considered by the House of Lords. If the proposal is approved, it will be implemented in October 2021.

The Director advised that any worker entering a care home will need to have received double vaccination and the Government are also considering extending the mandatory vaccines rule to include the flu vaccination.

The Director updated the panel on the current vaccine situation in Wolverhampton care homes.

The Director advised that the number of care home staff who have refused to be vaccinated has reduced from 500 to 310 since the report was published. The number of care home residents who have been vaccinated has increased to about 94 percent. It is estimated that 85 percent of care home staff have now been double vaccinated. The Director advised the panel that it is unlikely that the percentage of residents vaccinated will increase any further, this may be due to a small cohort of residents either refusing or who have a medical exemption.

The service is working with those care homes where they have less than 100% staff vaccination rate.

The Director briefed the panel on the most common reasons given for 'outright refusals' when asked, for example concerns about the impact of the vaccine on fertility. There is work being done to better understand the concerns of people in the group who are not medically exempt, and focus efforts on persuading them about the safety of the vaccine.

The Director briefed the panel on the potential impact on the Council and the care market of the proposed changes. The Director highlighted the risk that the change will reduce the supply of care workers at the time when the sector is recovering from the impact of the pandemic and shortage of workers in retail and hospitality services. This development has led to care workers moving away from the sector as lockdown measures ease attracted by higher wages. The Director also highlighted the increased costs for the sector as fewer people are working in the sector, which has led to an increase in the hourly rate and agency costs. These changes will increase costs for the Council and the fees paid by residents if there are fewer permanent staff in the market and the greater use of agency staff.

The Director briefed the panel about the work being done across the Council and with the care home sector on vaccination plans for other professional groups that will be visiting care homes, such as therapists who will also need to double vaccinated to work in these settings.

The Director commented on the possible lengthy HR and legal processes that will have to be followed for managing care home staff who refuse to be vaccinated. The Director briefed the panel on the range of work being done to prepare for the changes.

A project team has been created and has representation from colleagues in public health, adult services, HR and legal services. The Director advised the panel that some dedicated support has been given to care home providers where there is a low vaccine uptake. This work has been supported by the offer of site visits to care homes from quality and safety nurse who will be available to speak care staff about their concerns.

The Director advised the panel that the care home providers have been asked to review their continuity and contingency arrangements in preparation for the change and to include having a risk assessment plan for unvaccinated care staff.

The panel discussed the timeline for the new arrangements and when care staff would need to have had their first vaccination asap in order to have their second jab in time to meet the October deadline. The Director advised the panel that the Council is working closely with the trade union representatives to discuss the implications of the change and to encourage affected staff to get vaccinated.

The Chair thanked the presenter for the report and invited panel members for comments and questions.

The panel queried the process for identifying those care staff who have and who not yet been vaccinated and what proof, if any, would they need to provide to confirm this.

The Director advised the panel that the checking the vaccine status of a care worker would be based on partly on conversations and information collected via the Government's national capacity tracker. The information includes details about vaccination rates, which can be used to have further conversations with the care home providers if there are concerns about care staff vaccination rates.

The panel queried if vaccinated care staff working alongside unvaccinated care staff was creating any issue. The Director responded that she was not aware of any issues and the expectation is that this would hopefully be picked up through HR processes the closer to the date when new changes are made.

The panel discussed the issue of respecting the choices of care staff who do not want to be vaccinated and the need to protect care home residents from risk.

The panel queried the testing arrangements for care home staff. The Director reassured the panel that testing for Covid 19 is done regularly – care home staff undertake daily lateral flow tests and a weekly PCR test. At present an estimated 15 per cent of care staff are unvaccinated who are either refusing the vaccine or who have a medical exemption.

The panel proposed that the current figure of 310 people who are refusing a vaccine as a benchmark against which progress can be assessed and the also how well current efforts to persuade staff are working. The panel requested a rolling monthly update on the numbers.

The Director advised that the panel that there was a plan to provide an update to the panel at the end of August 2021 on progress.

The panel queried the vaccine update figures, and specifically the 69 per cent of home care staff who have vaccinated and if this also included care staff from other commissioned care providers. The Director confirmed that this figure includes both groups of care workers.

The panel expressed concern about the lack of information about the planned changes for people receiving home care and queried if the communication plan also covered people in this situation and not just home care providers.

The Director responded that mandatory Covid 19 vaccinations for the wider care sector will be part of future Government plans. The plan will include a consultation on mandatory flu vaccine for care sector workers. The service will continue to encourage all care staff working with vulnerable people to get vaccinated.

The panel queried current data on how many elderly people in need of care and the number of care homes that would be needed in the future to meet expected demand. The panel also queried how this figure compares to the number of people who are cared for at home.

The Director responded that over the last over the last 18 months there has the been a reduction in the number of people moving into residential care settings. The care home sector has experienced a high proportion of deaths among the elderly population as a result of Covid – 19. The specific figures were not currently available. The Director agreed to investigate the impact matter further and report the findings to a future meeting.

The panel expressed concerns about local reports of increasing numbers of people being taken out of residential care homes to receive care at home and the likely impact on the need for more health and social care sector workers to support them.

The panel discussed the risks to residents contracting Covid 19 when care workers are moving between different homes to support people in the community. The panel commented on the importance of care workers being vaccinated to protect vulnerable people in such circumstances and wanted reassurance the lessons from the past had been learnt.

The panel acknowledged the important and valuable work of care home staff particularly during the pandemic. The panel expressed concern that with areas of employment such as hospitality experiencing severe job shortages that current care home staff may choose to move to in response to the requirement to be vaccinated, which may lead to future workforce challenges.

The Director accepted the risk of current staff leaving and explained that the approach taken by the service has been to work closely with the care home sector to support people who have concerns.

To support this work, a tender for an occupational health professional is being prepared which will offer an extra source of support to care home providers. The Director added that there are also discussions between the local university and health colleagues around giving people the skills needed and developing a succession plan.

The panel discussed the issue of low pay and working conditions of care home staff and the link to possible reasons for their reluctance to be vaccinated.

The Director acknowledged the concerns of the panel and offered reassurance that in view of this the service is seeking to persuade care home staff to choose to accept the offer to be vaccinated.

The panel thanked the Director for the presentation.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the actions and progress made in the presentation to prepare for a planned introduction by Government for the mandatory vaccination of care home staff in October 2021.
2. The panel agreed to receive an update from the Director of Children's and Adult Services in September 2021 on the number of unvaccinated care home staff.
3. The panel to be briefed on any progress updates on the preparation for the mandatory vaccination of care home staff to the panel meeting on 19.10.21.

8 **Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel 2021-2022 Draft Work Programme**

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

The Scrutiny Officer outlined the criteria for suggesting topics for the work programme and the opportunity to add extra meeting dates, if needed. The Scrutiny Officer added that there was also the opportunity for panel members to meet informally with lead officers on matters of interest and report findings to a future meeting. The Scrutiny Officer briefed the panel about future work programme items and invited panel members to comment on the draft document.

The panel discussed the issue of increased cases of domestic violence during the pandemic and suggested this should be included as part of the report on safer city theme for the panel meeting in October 2021. The panel requested details of the support for people in Wolverhampton and suggested inviting representatives of community organisations to also share their experiences at the meeting. The panel agreed to invite representatives of The Haven to the panel meeting.

The panel welcomed the future agenda item on the care home fees in view of the comments made about the impact of the pandemic on the finances of care home and evidence to suggest people are looking at alternative forms of care.

The panel requested details of the membership and remit of the Safety Advisory Group. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to investigate and arrange for the information to be sent to panel members.

The panel agreed to add an extra panel meeting in March 2022 to the schedule.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report.
2. The panel agreed to add the 16 March 2022 to the schedule of meetings for 2021- 2022.
3. The panel work programme to be updated to include suggested additional items and comments from the panel.
4. The Scrutiny Officer to send panel members details of the membership and terms of reference of the Safety Advisory Group.