

ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SELECT COMMITTEE

A meeting of Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee was held on Tuesday 17 September 2024.

Present: Cllr Marc Besford (Chair), Cllr Nathan Gale (Vice-Chair), Cllr Stefan Barnes, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Lynn Hall, Cllr Hilary Vickers (sub for Cllr John Coulson), Cllr Marcus Vickers (sub for Cllr Vanessa Sewell).

Officers: Haleem Ghafoor, Carolyn Nice, Rob Papworth, Rebecca Saunders-Thompson (A,H&W); Gary Woods (CS).

Also in attendance: Cllr Pauline Beall (SBC Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care); Natasha Douglas (Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees).

Apologies: Cllr John Coulson, Cllr Ray Godwin, Cllr Vanessa Sewell.

ASCH/25/24 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

ASCH/26/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

ASCH/27/24 Minutes

Consideration was given to the minutes from the Committee meeting held on 23 July 2024.

AGREED that the minutes of the meeting on 23 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ASCH/28/24 Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees - Annual Report 2023-2024

The Committee considered the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees – Annual Report 2023-2024. Local Healthwatch organisations are required to produce an Annual Report setting out their aims and achievements, and this latest document, an overview of which was given by the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Project Lead who was in attendance, included the following:

- Message from our Chair
- About us
- Year in review
- How we've made a difference this year
- Your voice heard at a wider level
- Hearing from all communities
- Advice and information
- Volunteering
- Finance and future priorities
- Statutory statements

Attention was initially drawn to the 'Year in review' section which summarised the organisation's engagement with local people regarding health and social care matters. The publication of nine reports, containing a total of 47 recommendations, during the course of 2023-2024 was also highlighted (the most popular being the views and experiences of people accessing or requiring ADHD support services), as was the collation and sharing of four 'Word on the Street' reports which provided partners with timely feedback on intelligence received.

A summary of how Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees had made a difference throughout the year was outlined. Notable work involved the continued development of the Community Representatives network (including two non-voting seats on the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Board and an ongoing endeavour to ensure the right people were 'around the table'), the continued delivery of the coffee morning programme (promoting inclusion and reach), further development of the Youthwatch initiative (engaging with young people to gather their views on health services), and the completion of 'enter and view' visits to the Borough's pharmacies. In addition, one of the most challenging pieces of work undertaken was the engagement with people accessing drug and alcohol services, with recommendations made to inform future delivery models.

On a wider front, collaboration with other Healthwatch functions across the region to influence decisions made at a North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS) level had resulted in reviews around support for family, carers and older people with a learning disability (aged 40+), and in relation to NHS dentistry services. Work on the latter topic sought to make meaningful recommendations that would immediately impact the existing offer (not just consider recovery plans over a longer period), with the final report due to be published in September 2024.

The top three priorities for the 2024-2025 year were noted, namely to focus on tackling health inequalities (particularly the migrant community), to continue to develop engagement with young people, and to work across the Tees Valley to raise awareness and provide feedback in response to the local hospital group model of working. Recent facilitation of an anonymous survey to understand experiences and expectations of the broad range of North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (NEAS) was also highlighted.

Praising Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees for the content and layout of its latest Annual Report, the Committee began by expressing its thanks for the organisation's contribution to its recent review of Access to GPs and Primary Medical Care, as well as the subsequent publication of the '*Top Tips for Accessing your GP*' document (supporting one of the Committee's recommendations). Members also commended the stakeholder event which was held in February 2024 to discuss future priorities and determine the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees work plan for 2024-2025.

Reflecting on the work undertaken by Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees throughout 2023-2024, the Committee highlighted the importance of establishing what people expected of services (and when they expected it by), ascertaining feedback from the public / service-users and acting on it, and the value of peer support. In relation to the review of NHS dentistry, Members asked if there was any Borough-specific data to share as the state of NHS dental provision locally may be different to other parts of the region. It was reported that dentistry was one of the main issues that Healthwatch

Stockton-on-Tees was contacted about, with further work at a local level planned as there was a clear need for an open, honest conversation around dental contracts.

Reference was made to the 'Word on the Street' reports which Members felt were aptly titled and something that local people could easily tap into. The Committee was informed that these reports were not yet publicly accessible as it was the first year of production and Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees wanted to determine how useful they would be. Internal discussions would take place around making them available to a wider audience.

The Committee concluded its questions by querying whether a mechanism was in place to monitor progress on the recommendations made within a Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees report. Members were informed that relevant providers had to respond within 20 days of receiving a report, and that, moving forward, consideration was being given to re-visiting services which had been previously reviewed to see how / if recommended changes had been made (though this would involve lighter-touch engagement).

AGREED that the Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees – Annual Report 2023-2024 be noted.

ASCH/29/24 SBC Community Spaces

Following a commitment made to the Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) Executive Scrutiny Committee in January 2024 to bring a report to a future SBC Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee meeting, consideration was given to an update on the SBC Community Spaces initiative. Presented by the SBC Strategic Lead – A Fairer Stockton-on-Tees & Community Engagement, and supported by a SBC Project Co-ordinator, information included:

- Background (to the scheme)
- 2024 Monitoring Evaluation and Feedback
- Case Studies – The Warm Welcome
- Community Spaces: Thank You and Network Launch Event (27 June 2024)
- Conclusion and Recommendations

With specific reference to the report's 'Executive Summary' section, an overview of the scheme (which involved almost 70 venues registered as Community Spaces, a number which included all five 'Bread and Butter Thing' hubs) and the main issues highlighted through monitoring conversations were relayed. Regarding the latter element, it was noted that the majority of the 87% of respondents to the annual monitoring process stated that they were content with the scheme and would like to remain part of it for 2024-2025.

Attention was also drawn to the June 2024 launch of the Community Spaces Network, the two key reasons why people attended the registered venues (which remained social isolation and the cost of living), the range of advice and support services (e.g. debt management, employment and training, etc.) connected to these settings, and the highly regarded Winter Warm Boxes. The successful development of the 'Warm Welcome' weekly drop-in sessions in Thornaby had prompted the creation of a similar offer in Billingham – it was hoped to roll this out to other parts of the Borough in the future.

Challenges associated with maintaining provision were raised by existing providers, principally the lack of additional funding which prevented venues from increasing / enhancing their offer. Support to access further finance was desired, with requests also made for training and development opportunities such as mental health first aid, food hygiene, and welfare and benefits guidance. In addition, it was stated that, whilst these spaces were a lifeline for some, there was a heavy reliance on volunteers.

The conclusion to the report noted that £60,000 of Public Health funding had secured the continuation of the Community Spaces initiative for 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 – this had enabled venues to build on what was achieved in the first phase of the ‘Warm Spaces’ scheme and work towards long-term sustainability. Considering the increasing financial pressures on Local Authorities and the Council’s *Powering Our Future* transformation programme, it was felt imperative that Community Spaces venues were empowered to achieve this long-term sustainability by accessing wider funding and were supported with funding bid applications. To this end, a number of recommendations for the 2024-2025 period were included.

Speaking from experience of attending some of the Borough’s Community Spaces to offer assistance, Members began their response to the report by emphasising the positive environment within these venues, as well as cases where individuals paid for their own food / drink (demonstrating that the scheme was not just a ‘one-way ticket’). The idea of live music was supported, though the potential financial burden of this was acknowledged (SBC officers stated that the ongoing development of the Community Spaces Network may help in the sharing of activities (e.g. music) between venues), whilst limitations on the availability of the Winter Warm Boxes was highlighted, mainly due to the amount of new people attending these settings.

Mindful of the main reasons why individuals continued to access Community Spaces, the Committee noted that loneliness can affect people in all parts of the Borough – as such, provision in every Ward within Stockton-on-Tees would be welcomed (SBC officers subsequently notified Members of a recent expression of interest to provide a venue in one of the four Wards that did not currently have such a space). The Committee also expressed concern that further pressure would be put on this initiative as a result of the recent national decisions on winter fuel allowance payments.

SBC officers were thanked for presenting the update to the Committee, with all those involved in the initiative commended for the work which had gone into it.

AGREED that the SBC Community Spaces Annual Evaluation report be noted.

ASCH/30/24 SBC LGA Assurance Peer Challenge Update

Further to a briefing the Committee received in June 2024 outlining Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) preparations for the anticipated assessment of its adult social care services, Members were provided with feedback on the Council’s involvement in a recent Local Government Association (LGA) Assurance Peer Challenge (undertaken ahead of the forthcoming Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection). Presented by the SBC Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing, and supported by the SBC Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, key information included:

- This independent peer review was commissioned to assess the ability of the SBC adult social care service to deliver good care and support to people.

- An experienced LGA team conducted the review in July 2024 – this included an on-site visit and engagement with over 150 people including the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Leaders, staff, partners, people with lived experience, carers and stakeholders. The three-day assessment was thorough and provided a snapshot of current practice (this included consideration of the Council’s Local Authority Information Return (LAIR), a draft of which was shared with the Committee in June 2024).
- Feedback following the review was very positive (reflected within the formal report submitted to SBC which was attached to this briefing), with some strong practice, a supportive and committed workforce, and effective leadership and partnership arrangements all identified. Opportunities for the Council to develop were also outlined – these included strengthening processes and pathways so people did not have to tell their story more than once, and addressing the multiple hand-off points that the existing ‘front door’ to services currently had. Other elements for improvement involved better integrated working for those requiring a higher level of support, strategic leadership around transitions from children’s to adult services, housing, and workforce sustainability.
- A number of ‘next steps’ following the peer review were outlined – these included the re-instatement of the CQC Programme Steering Group which would provide assurance oversight and monitor progress against the Action Plan which had been updated to reflect feedback from the review. A separate six-week plan to prepare for the on-site visit had been developed to be implemented once SBC received notification from the CQC – this included key preparation activities which were being progressed with immediate effect. In addition, a communication plan was being finalised with the SBC Communications Team – this included key messaging for all stakeholders and specific support for staff which would be developed and progressed with SBC Quality Assurance and SBC Workforce Development colleagues.

Responding to the briefing, the Committee thanked all SBC staff involved in the recent LGA Assurance Peer Challenge and were pleased to see the numerous positive aspects identified by the review team. Members praised the decision to undertake such an exercise in advance of the CQCs anticipated visit later this year, and welcomed the honest, and at times blunt, final report from the LGA which had accompanied the briefing.

Whilst there was encouraging feedback about the current SBC adult social care offer, the Committee was keen on understanding how those areas which required strengthening were going to be addressed. Members stated that they were not surprised to learn of the ‘front door’ issues identified by the LGA review team and expressed concern about residents being passed from ‘pillar to post’ – indeed, it was felt that this was a Council-wide problem rather than just an Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate one. SBC officers acknowledged that this was an area which needed attention and had already been identified as an area of focus, with work ongoing and assurances given that it would be tackled via the Council’s *Powering Our Future* initiative – a plan would be in place which was due to be shared with all relevant Committees for views.

Noting the timing of the recent SBC press release about the LGA peer review feedback (which was published prior to the Committee being able to consider its contents), Members sought further clarity around other issues with regards the time

taken to get support into people's homes following discharge from hospital, the repeated need for improvements to transitioning from children's to adult services (highlighted previously by the Committee), and the future of the workforce. Taking these in turn, SBC officers stated that the Council was looking at how it supported its Reablement Service (in terms of 'investing to save') and was using the *Powering Our Future* initiative to address transition experiences. Regarding the latter point, workforce issues were a national problem, and a recent strategy launched by Skills for Care (the strategic workforce development and planning body for adult social care in England) was attempting to address concerns – there was also a focus on succession planning for the adult social care staffing structure. Furthermore, it was felt that there was a need to keep valuing existing, experienced staff as well as attract new professionals into the sector.

The SBC Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care brought this item to a close by commenting that the peer review had been a reassuring process which reinforced the good things SBC already knew and identified elements where work was required (much of which the service was already addressing). The SBC Director of Adults, Health and Wellbeing added that there was a desire for the Committee to be assured that the Council was prepared for its inspection and were on the right track, and that SBC's inspection was expected to be in December 2024 (other Tees Valley Local Authorities were due to be visited by mid-November 2024).

AGREED that the Local Government Association Assurance Challenge and Preparation for CQC Framework Assurance update be noted.

ASCH/31/24 Scrutiny Review of Reablement Service

Consideration was given to the draft scope and project plan for the Scrutiny Review of Reablement Service, the proposed aims of which would be to identify whether the service offered by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) was:

- 1) maximising independence for people being discharged from hospital and living in the community.
- 2) reducing the need for ongoing, more intensive support in people's own homes and reducing the need for admission into 24-hour care.
- 3) working effectively with NHS provision that supports people on a reablement pathway.
- 4) using technology as effectively as possible.

A number of contributors had been identified in relation to this scrutiny topic, including relevant teams / officers from the SBC Adults, Health and Wellbeing directorate, the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB), local NHS Trusts, the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, and service-users and their families / carers. It was anticipated that the Committee's final report would be presented to the SBC Cabinet in March 2025.

With reference to the ongoing SBC *Powering Our Future* work which was also considering these services, Members sought confirmation that any developments would be relayed to Committee so it could factor this into its findings. SBC officers stated that the scope of the *Powering Our Future* focus around the Reablement offer would be reviewed to align with the Committee's work.

AGREED that the draft scope and project plan for the Reablement Service review be approved.

ASCH/32/24 Chair's Update and Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025

Chair's Update

The Chair referenced a number of recent health-related developments, including:

- Winter Health Conference: This was taking place on 1 October 2024 – further details would be circulated to the Committee shortly.
- Social Care Guides for Councillors: Members were reminded of the circulation of three new short guides to help Councillors think about the unique role that they can play within the adult social care system. These guides were relevant for all Elected Members depending on their specific role (i.e. executive / scrutiny / all Councillors).
- Wellbeing Hub: Based in Wellington Square, this had now opened. Members may wish to conduct a visit at some point in the future.
- CQC Engagement: An informal meeting between the Chair and the local CQC lead inspector was held last week to discuss engagement between the regulator and the Committee. It was agreed to re-establish the annual 'State of Care' presentation, accompanied by reflections on local provision.
- Tees Valley Joint Health Scrutiny Committee: The first meeting of the 2024-2025 municipal year was scheduled to take place later this week (19 September 2024) – items included a Respite Care / Adult Learning Disability Service update, a Community Mental Health Transformation update, and a Community Diagnostic Centre update.

Work Programme 2024-2025

Consideration was given to the Committee's current work programme. The next meeting was due to take place on 22 October 2024 and would include the first evidence-gathering session for the Reablement Service review following approval of the scope. Other agenda items would be confirmed in due course following discussion with the Committee Chair and relevant officers.

AGREED that the Chair's Update and Adult Social Care and Health Select Committee Work Programme 2024-2025 be noted.

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