

MINUTES of the meeting of Health & Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber - Brockington on Friday 22 March 2013 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor JW Millar (Chairman)
Councillor SJ Robertson (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: PA Andrews, PL Bettington, KS Guthrie, JLV Kenyon, MD Lloyd-Hayes, A Seldon and J Stone

In attendance: Councillor PM Morgan (Cabinet Member, Health and Wellbeing)

Officers: G Hardy (Governance Services Manager), G Dean (Scrutiny Officer), K O'Mahony (Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services), J Rzezniczek (Interim Head of Improvement), J Roughton (Head of Children & Family Casework), D Penrose (Governance Services)

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors WLS Bowen MJK Cooper, PJ Watts and GA Vaughan-Powell.

12. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Councillor A Seldon substituted for Councillor GA Vaughan-Powell.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meetings held on the 1st and 7th of February were approved.

15. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

A member of the public suggested that the Committee should consider what the impact of the proposed housing developments in Herefordshire would be on the County Hospital and other social services. The Chairman thanked her for her suggestion, and said that the item would be considered in the Committee's Work Programme.

16. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

17. WEST MIDLANDS AMBULANCE NHS TRUST

The committee received a presentation on the work of the West Midlands Ambulance Trust from Mr Dug Holloway, Area Manager. During his presentation, Mr Holloway raised the following issues:

That the new 111 telephone number that had been introduced for non-emergency calls had gone live on the 19 March. There was concern about the amount of additional work it would generate for the Trust as some areas had seen an increase of up to 30% in workloads. To date, there had been little additional impact. The Trust had been running up to 30 different scenarios a day in order to ensure that the Service would be able to cope with calls. The staff who were operating the system had largely been working for NHS Direct, and had local knowledge of the County.

The Committee expressed concern that there was a potential for confusion amongst the public as to which phone numbers should be used in the future to deal with specific incidents. Mr Holloway concurred, and said that this matter, as well as the potential for escalation in calls to the Service, had been raised at the highest level by the Chief Executive of the West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust.

- That the Trust had gained Foundation status on the 28 January 2013. There would be no change to the service that patients received, but it would mean that the Trust would be able to target funds in a way that would both more effectively manage and maintain current services with which the public are familiar, whilst developing future improvements.
- Vehicles would be replaced on a rolling five year plan. Sixty new ambulances would be brought into service over this period. Thirty five Rapid Response Vehicles and major response vehicles were being updated, as well as new four wheel drive vehicles that were being especially customised for the Service and would allow for faster response rates in rural areas.
- That there were 250 paramedics across the West Midlands area and the Service was looking to recruit additional staff.
- That the transformation programme had ensured that, through the Make Ready service, there was increased cover throughout the County.

In reply to a question, Mr Holloway said that the main concern for the Service was the rising level of demand. There had been a total of 19,983 callouts in 2011-12, and this had risen to 22,212 to date in the present year. This represented an 11% increase to date. There was also a concern about the financial situation at the County Hospital.

The movement of patients from the County Hospital was also an issue, and work was in hand to encourage the Trust to discharge and transfer patients at times when there were the greatest number of ambulances available.

- That work with local GPs to encourage the treatment of patients in their own homes would be beneficial.
- That the Ambulance Hub system was performing well, and the Service had moved from a target of reaching 74% of calls within 8 minutes, to 79% over the previous six months. Turnaround at the hospital had been reduced to an average of 27.5 minutes per vehicle. Clinical performance stood at 87% against a national average of 75%. No formal complaints had been made against staff in 2012-2013.
- That paramedics were being encouraged to treat patients in their own home wherever appropriate, rather than bringing them into the hospital. This was as part of a drive across the County to prevent patients from going into hospital unless they needed to

In reply to the Chairman's question regarding the number of hospitals in the region that had been at Level 4 over the previous two weeks, Mr Holloway said that this was of concern both to the Ambulance Service and the NHS. The hospitals had declared major incidents for their own internal organisations, and this had meant that more patients had stayed in hospital for longer periods, and that there had been a number of vehicles waiting outside hospitals whilst space was being made available. Whilst the Wye Valley Trust was being diligent in ensuring that all patients were safe, patients had been taken off ambulances and placed in corridors until beds were available. There had been no impact on the Ambulance Services performance, and additional crews would be brought in to accommodate delays.

The Chairman thanked Mr Holloway for his presentation.

18. 2GETHER NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

The Committee noted that, as a result of an unfortunate diary clash, neither the Chief Executive nor the Director of Service Delivery of the 2gether NHS Trust had been available to attend this meeting. The Committee expressed its concern at this situation and the Chairman requested that the Chief Executive of the Trust be invited to the next meeting.

19. CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING - IMPROVEMENT NOTICE AND PROGRESS ON THE OFSTED RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee received a report on Children's Safeguarding from the Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services. In the ensuing discussion the following points were made:

- That following the Ofsted inspection of local authority arrangements for the protection of children in autumn 2012, the Council had received an Improvement Notice, which had been developed with the Council. This sets out the key areas of action which are essential to secure good child protection services within the next two years.
- The Improvement Board, which includes the Department for Education will drive the plan for improvement which has already been developed.
- One of the requirements of the Notice was a statement of expectation by the Council for safeguarding services in exercising of its lead role for Safeguarding and a plan of action, both of which had been endorsed by Cabinet.
- That the biggest risk was the recruitment and retention issues that the Council was experiencing, and the reliance on interim staff. Morale amongst social workers had been badly hit by the OFSTED judgement, and a number of staff had left the organisation.

In reply to a query from a Member, the Assistant Director went on to say that there is an apprenticeship scheme for newly qualified staff in place and the recruitment and retention group are considering a range of options to increase the number of permanent social workers employed. A career progression route was being developed to allow social workers to move to more senior levels of practice, as well as ways of making front line staff feel supported and rewarded.

- That referral rates were relatively constant, and a work flow analysis was in hand to ensure that no more cases were being taken in than should be, measured against a benchmark with other Local Authorities.

- That issues associated with Frameworki had not yet been sorted out, but that this was a major piece of work that was underway. The intention was to make the platform more user friendly, and this could take up to two years. There was a project plan in place with an order of priority of areas to address. A successful conclusion of this project would enhance the information available to managers, and enable more successful management of front line staff.
- That it was not clear that the £5k 'Golden Hello' initiative had been successful in attracting staff, although some staff had been successfully recruited through the initiative. It had only been available to the more experienced candidates with at least one years post qualifying experience. Of the fourteen social work vacancies, only one had been filled from the short list of candidates. This was a national issue, and the Council was competing with other authorities for a limited pool of staff.

In reply to a Member's question, the Assistant Director said that there was a sense of order, discipline and purpose within the improvement planning for the Service. The Improvement Board was working to ensure the implementation of the plan, and was the 'glue' to address the issues within the Improvement Notice, and oversaw the plan. The Service would be accountable through the Children's Safeguarding Board, which would also hold the Council's partners to account. The Improvement Board would shift responsibility back to the Safeguarding Board, which would be responsible for the adequacy of the safeguarding arrangements. This was a complex system, which was complex to repair.

A Member pointed out that the same issues kept arising, and that only three of twenty six local authorities across the region had been judged as being 'good'. All agencies needed to be accountable in order to ensure that there were no weak links. The Assistant Director Children & Young People Provider Services said that there were successive changes to the inspection system. She pointed to the Fostering Inspection Report, which read as though it was a good service, but the judgement overall was that it was adequate. The safeguarding aspect of the service was seen as adequate, together with leadership and management. Leadership and management was adequate due to shortfalls in the availability of management information. Quality of service and outcomes for children were both judged to be good.

In reply to a Member's question as to whether tablets would be given to staff to allow them to work remotely, the Assistant Director said that the Council was talking to other authorities that had been judged inadequate in order to share good practice and consider ways forward. Cambridgeshire had issued social workers with iPads, but as this was a considerable investment, a case would have to be made for such an initiative. It would be interesting to see whether this helped staff, and whether it aided staff retention issues.

In reply to a further question, she went on to say that substantial steps had already been taken in order to meet the timescale for the Improvement Notice. The audit of all cases had been a major task, and meant that the Service now knew exactly what was happening in each case, and that children were being seen in the requisite time scale. The Service was concentrating on a constant and steady improvement in order to ensure that it would meet the requisite targets.

Resolved

That:

- a) **The Improvement Notice from the Department of Education and the statement of expectation for children's safeguarding in Herefordshire be noted; and;**
- b) **The progress to date in addressing the recommendations from Ofsted be noted.**

20. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme. The Chairman stated that following the Independent Inquiry into care provided by Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Chaired by Robert Francis QC, it was important that there should be a fully functioning health scrutiny process in place that didn't fail the residents of Herefordshire.

It was noted that the Task and Finish Group on the Review of the Scrutiny of Children's Safeguarding in Herefordshire was underway, and would draft initial interim recommendations by April.

The Chairman reported that he had attended a meeting at the County hospital on the future governance of the Wye Valley NHS Trust. He had written to Jesse Norman MP and Bill Wiggins MP concerning the matter in his role as Chairman of this Committee.

It was noted that the Access to Services Task and Finish Group had met, and would have its first full meeting to look at evidence on the 2 May.

The meeting ended at 12.35 pm

CHAIRMAN