

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of **Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 3 October 2022 at 9.30 am**

Present

Councillor P Jopling (Chair)

Members of the Committee

Councillors V Andrews, K Earley, D Haney, J Higgins, L Hovvells, K Robson, A Savory, M Simmons, T Stubbs, E Peeke, S Deinali and D Sutton-Lloyd

Co-opted Members

Mrs R Gott and Ms A Stobbart

Co-opted Employees/Officers

Project Lead G McGee, Healthwatch County Durham

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cochrane, Crute, Holmes, Howey, Kay and Martin.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor Deinali was present as substitute for Councillor Crute, Councillor Peeke was present as substitute for Councillor Howey and Councillor Sutton-Llyod was present as substitute for Councillor Holmes.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the chair.

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer announced that a provisional date for a meeting of the Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee MTFP 13 Working group had been agreed for Tuesday 25 October 2022.

4 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Haney declared an interest as he was a Public Governor on Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust.

5 Any Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

The Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that Ms Stobbart had submitted a question prior to the meeting regarding vaping and invited Ms Stobbart to ask her question.

Ms Stobbart stated that nationally vaping was viewed as a safer alternative to smoking and expressed concern regarding the number of young people who vaped with many who had previously never smoked and were under the age of licensing. She raised her concerns about second-hand vaping giving examples of vaping around children and whether this posed any health risk and was also concerned whether there were any links to respiratory diseases. She described the success of the stop smoking campaign and asked whether there were any plans to do something similar for vaping. She asked whether any research existed in County Durham and if there were plans to communicate messages to the public regarding any potential risks.

A Healy, the Director of Public Health emphasised that whilst vaping was important and a key area of work, smoking remained the biggest killer and was much more harmful than vaping due to the content of nicotine and tar. She explained that as smoking was an addictive habit, everything had to be done to tackle this area and to support those that smoked to give up. She confirmed that there was no evidence that second-hand vaping was a risk to health and informed the Committee that vaping was 95% safer than smoking although only 30% of adults were aware of this. She advised that a large piece of research had recently been published and that this would be shared with the Committee once the local data was known. She agreed that the number of young people that smoked and vaped was concerning and that information regarding this was to be circulated to Headteacher's following the results of the research. She gave assurances that they were being proactive with regards to vaping and suggested that an in-depth discussion regarding this topic be arranged for a future meeting of the Committee and that it would be helpful for the meeting to include someone from trading standards.

Councillor Jopling commented that she had observed many young people vaping and that the different flavours available attracted a younger audience. The Director of Public Health agreed but stated that as tobacco killed two in every three people, the priority was to ensure that young people did not smoke. She explained that locally there was the smokefree tobacco control alliance and Stoptober campaign, but that further work was being considered around schools to raise education and awareness.

Resolved

That a briefing be given to the Committee on the results of the national vaping research referenced once an analysis of the results had been undertaken.

6 Health Protection Annual Assurance Update

The Committee received a report which provided members of Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (AWH OSC) with an update on health protection assurance arrangements in County Durham and health protection activities over the course of the year (for copy see file of minutes).

The Director of Public Health explained that to ensure that satisfactory arrangements were in place to protect the health of the local population, the Health Protection Assurance and Development Group (HPADG) had developed a detailed action plan built on five pillars of health protection, in addition to data and communications, which were threaded throughout:

- Screening programmes;
- Immunisation programmes;
- Outbreaks and communicable diseases;
- Strategic regulation interventions;
- Preparedness and response to incidents and emergencies.

She explained the key achievements overseen by the HPADG in the last year which included the flu vaccination and the recovery of screenings and advised that an in-depth report regarding covid would be shared with the Committee at the end of the winter season.

Councillor Jopling commented that it was positive to see cervical screening back and asked whether there was a backlog with this area. The Director of Public Health confirmed that this was up to date. Councillor Jopling further asked if it was possible to have statistics on the number of deaths in care homes that related to COVID-19. The Director of Public Health confirmed that there had been a small number of COVID-19 outbreaks within care homes, but these had not developed into serious illness and advised that deaths had been extremely low.

With regards to the flu vaccination, Councillor Jopling asked if this vaccine was widely available. The Director of Public Health confirmed that a different model was to be used this year and informed that priority was to be given to care homes and those that were house bound. She advised that the level of supply for vaccinations was sufficient, and that people should wait until they are called.

Colin Stephenson, Primary Care lead, North East and North Cumbria ICB suggested that he obtain a list to identify all sites within County Durham that were administering vaccinations for COVID-19 and flu and agreed to share this with the Committee.

Councillor Hovvels expressed concern regarding the level of supply of the COVID-19 vaccine as she was aware of areas within County Durham that were short. With regards to cold winter deaths, she noted that there were many vulnerable people with some that would struggle to get to a warm hub. She asked for assurance on how these people would be cared for and requested further information regarding the warm hubs.

The Director of Public Health confirmed that any shortages needed to be communicated to the team so that these issues could be addressed. She accepted that this winter was going to be challenging but explained that a range of plans were in place to help and that these included information on warm spaces. She advised that support would be given to the local community response and that vulnerable people would include those who suffered from a health perspective and those that struggled financially. She explained that the team were working closely with Mary Readman and were hoping to join up areas to ensure a proactive approach moving into winter. A challenge currently faced was the sharing of data sets and she advised that permission for access to these had been requested.

Cllr Jopling advised that some residents were getting called for their vaccination but had to travel to receive it. The Director of Public Health confirmed that all GP surgeries should have the vaccines and that they were reaching out to care homes and to those residents that were housebound.

Michael Laing, Director of Integrated Community Services, County Durham Care Partnership advised that residents who were housebound would be vaccinated by community nurses. He stated there would not be a mass vaccination centre this year but that vaccinations at community pharmacists had increased. He accepted that the delivery of the vaccines had not always been consistent, and this explained the delay for some GP surgeries. In terms of vulnerable people who were housebound, he noted that the district nursing team was a good resource as they carried out frequent visits and knew people well. He advised that there were plans for the team to receive additional training and to ensure that information and advice about keeping warm was communicated to residents including information on grants that were available.

Councillor Earley referred to the Health Protection scorecards and asked if it was possible to obtain a list of local areas within County Durham where screening was higher or lower to address any issues with inequality. The Director of Public Health advised that screening programmes were led by NHS England and that it was difficult to obtain data that was lower than local authority level but advised that they would continue to seek this data and provide interventions to ensure fair access to screenings. In addition to this, she advised that this data would also provide clarity on what prevented people coming forward for their appointments.

Councillor Quinn supported care homes being a priority for vaccinations noting this helped staff and visitors. She agreed that COVID-19 related deaths in care homes had recently been low and had great praise for the work that had been done in County Durham.

Councillor Higgins also supported the targeting of vaccinations to care homes and to residents who were housebound. With regards to vaccinations at GP surgeries, he gave examples of residents who had to travel a considerable distance to get their vaccination which was difficult due to the rising costs of living. He informed the Committee that those who were diagnosed with COPD were advised to have an emergency pack within their house but was aware that these packs were no longer being supplied. Whilst appreciating the benefits of the warm hubs, people then had to return to a cold environment, and he suggested whether social services could provide feedback if they had visited a home that was cold.

Councillor Sutton-Llyod commented that the information was reassuring but felt work could still be done around community centres and could connect with various programmes to provide education and advice. With regards to the topic of vaping, he expressed that more education and awareness needed to be promoted.

The Director of Integrated Community Services, County Durham Care Partnership indicated that the vaccinations for residents who were housebound would start within the next two weeks and would include both the COVID-19 and flu vaccination. He stated that there were approximately 12,000 visits to make and the target date for completion was the end of November 2022.

Resolved

The Committee agreed:

- i. That the content of the report be noted;
- ii. That the performance in County Durham for all childhood immunisation programmes exceeds both national standards and national averages be noted;
- iii. That the report provided broad assurance that effective processes are in place for each of the key strands of health protection activity be noted;
- iv. That a further report be presented to a future meeting of AHS OSC which provided further assurance in respect to flu and COVID-19 vaccination, the ongoing work with CDDFT in relation to Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) be requested;
- v. That the development and delivery of the transition plan to 'Living with Covid' capturing the learning from Covid be supported;
- vi. That the review of the health protection governance arrangements aligning the robust Covid assurance arrangements with wider health protection governance be supported.

7 COVID-19 Transition Plan

The Committee received a report which provided Adults, Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (AWH OSC) with the progress of the Covid-19 Transition Plan and Health Protection governance arrangements stepping down from an enhanced public health response to business as usual, aligning the management of Covid-19 to the wider health protection arrangements (for copy see file of minutes).

Joy Evans, Strategic Manager Protecting Health, Public Health delivered the report and explained that the pandemic was one of the greatest public health challenges in living memory. It had affected every part of society throughout 2020, 2021 and 2022. Due to the response required for Covid-19 the Health Protection Assurance Board (HPAB) was set up in June 2020 as a dedicated board to oversee and co-ordinate the local Covid-19 response.

The HPAB was responsible for the development and delivery of the statutory Local Outbreak Control Plan 2020/21 (LOCP) and the Local Outbreak Management Plan 2021/22 (LOMP). These plans provided the framework for leading, controlling, co-ordinating and managing the transmission of Covid-19.

The Covid-19 Transition Plan was recently developed to enable the strategic level co-ordination of the transitional arrangements for Covid-19 to step down from an enhanced public health response to business as usual.

Resolved

The Committee agreed:

- i. That the content of the report be noted;
- ii. That the extensive work undertaken collaboratively by a range of partners within robust governance arrangements be noted;
- iii. That a future report detailing the surge planning proposals be received.

8 Quarter 1 2022/23 Performance Management Report

The Committee received a report which presented an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework and highlight key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes. The report covered performance in and to the end of quarter one 2022/23, April to June 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

A Harrington, Strategy Team Leader delivered the report and advised that performance was reported against the following five thematic areas within the Council Plan 2022-2026:

- Our economy;
- Our environment;
- Our people;
- Our communities;
- Our council.

Councillor Higgins referred to suicide prevention and whilst appreciating the statistics had not increased, he had concerns that they had also not reduced and asked whether there was anything further that could be done. The Director of Public Health agreed and gave assurances that suicide prevention was a priority area. She explained that work surrounding mental health was ongoing, in addition to work with the media and a raft of interventions, but that they were continually looking for further ways to expand on this.

Resolved

That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter one performance, the continuing impact of COVID-19 and the increased cost of living on the council's performance, and the actions being taken to address areas of underperformance including the significant economic and wellbeing challenges because of the pandemic be noted.

9 2021/22 Q4 and 2022/23 Q1 Adults and Health Services Budget Outturn

The Committee received a report which provided details of the 2021/22 revenue and capital budget outturn position for the Adult and Health Services (AHS) service grouping, which highlighted major variances in comparison with the budget for the year. A further report was received which provided the Committee with details of the initial forecast outturn budget position for the Adult and Health Services (AHS) service grouping, which highlighted major variances in comparison with the budget for the year, based on the position to the end of June 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

A. Gilmore, Finance Manager gave a detailed presentation which provided an overview of the following:

- 2021/22 Revenue Outturn and Variance Explanations;
- 2021/22 Outturn Capital Position;
- 2022/23 Quarter 1 Revenue Forecast Outturn and Variance Explanations;
- 2022/23 Quarter 1 Capital Position.

Responding to a question from Councillor Earley regarding whether the year in terms of spending was going to plan, the Finance Manager commented that whilst he thought the outturn was comfortable, there were challenges ahead with inflation

and that this could impact on care which was sourced externally. He explained that there were pressures on the Council as a whole and was hopeful that Government would provide support.

With regards to vacancies, Councillor Andrews asked if these would continue to roll over. The Finance Manager noted the considerable number of vacancies, and that this was increasing the pressure on staff. The Director of Integrated Community Services, County Durham Care Partnership clarified that vacancies were not being held to ensure that the budget balanced, and that recruitment was active. He advised that agency staff were being used to help with the shortage of staff particularly social workers but that this was an expensive resource.

Councillor Earley expressed concern regarding agency staff and the subsequent impact on the budget and asked whether there was a county wide approach to agency staff. The Director of Integrated Community Services, County Durham Care Partnership confirmed that there was a regional approach to this.

Mrs R Gott asked whether there were vacancies for approved social workers. The Director of Integrated Community Services, County Durham Care Partnership confirmed that this was a highly pressurised area and that they were working hard to recruit staff.

With regards to agency staff, Councillor Higgins agreed that it was an expensive resource. He expressed concern with the level of vacancies especially social workers and the impact this would have on mental health and suicide rates. He also expressed concern regarding the pressure and stress this would have on current staff due to the increase in workload. He further added that a shortage of staff could increase waiting lists for patients and put their health at risk and it was therefore vital that vacancies were filled.

Councillor Jopling understood that recruitment was difficult when people did not come forward. The Director of Integrated Community Services, County Durham Care Partnership highlighted that staff, and their workloads were closely monitored to ensure that they were not under too much pressure.

In response to a question from Councillor Stubbs regarding the cost of agency staff, The Director of Integrated Community Services, County Durham Care Partnership clarified that the cost of agency staff had been considered and there remained an underspend.

Resolved

That the financial position included in the report be noted.