

ADULTS, CHILDREN AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 9 JUNE 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Maureen Hunt, Christine Bateson, Carole Da Costa, Amy Tisi and Julian Sharpe, Mark Jervis and Tony Wilson

Also in attendance: Councillors Gurpreet Bhangra, Mandy Brar and Donna Stimson

Officers: Andy Carswell, Lucy Kourpas, Michael Murphy, Hilary Hall, Lynne Lidster, Kevin McDaniel and David Birch

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Cllr da Costa proposed a motion to elect Cllr Tisi as Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Tisi and a named vote was carried out. Two members voted in favour of the motion and three members voted against; the motion therefore fell.

Cllr Hunt proposed a motion to elect herself as Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Bateson and a named vote was carried out. Three members voted in favour of the motion, one member voted against and there was one abstention. The motion was carried.

Cllr Tisi proposed a motion to elect Cllr da Costa as Vice Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr da Costa and a named vote was carried out. Two members voted in favour of the motion and three members voted against; the motion therefore fell.

Cllr Hunt proposed a motion to elect Cllr Sharpe as Vice Chairman of the Panel. This was seconded by Cllr Bateson and a named vote was carried out. Three members voted in favour of the motion, and two members voted against the motion. The motion was carried.

RESOLVED: That Cllr Hunt be appointed Chairman and Cllr Sharpe be appointed Vice Chairman for the 2021/22 municipal year.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Derek Moss.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on April 22nd 2021 be approved as an accurate record.

OPTALIS PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2020/21

Hilary Hall, Executive Director of Adults, Health and Housing, introduced the item and explained it was about the performance of Optalis over what had been a very challenging year. She introduced the Panel to David Birch, Chief Executive of Optalis, who would do the presentation.

David Birch began by stating Optalis and the Royal Borough had a shared vision for adult social care to allow people to lead independent and fulfilling lives, and explained the shared principles of prevention, community, choice and values. He explained the quote at the top of the presentation slide – “Thank you for keeping us safe” – came from an autistic user of one of the Optalis services, and it encapsulated the summary of the presentation and what Optalis hoped to achieve. The Panel was informed that Optalis operated more than 20 different care services in the Royal Borough.

In the presentation David Birch highlighted that over the last 15 months no customers or members of staff had been lost to a Covid infection picked up within Optalis’ services, which was a significant achievement. He said this was thanks to management’s expertise at interpreting the guidance from Public Health England regarding infection prevention control and ensuring there was adequate PPE resources. When the NHS was under the greatest amount of pressure in the New Year, staff in the social work, reablement and occupational therapy teams were able to help create much-needed capacity at Wexham and Frimley Park hospitals. A number of vulnerable groups of people had been identified and additional risk assessments and vaccine education sessions took place to help support them. The Panel was told that mandatory restrictions had prevented a number of day services from operating, and as many alternative methods of support as possible were brought in so as not to disadvantage people who used these services. David Birch said staff had shown a great willingness to try new things to assist service users.

Michael Murphy, Director of Statutory Services and Deputy DASS, said the ability to provide the required support was testament to the strong foundations that were already in place pre-Covid, highlighting that the most recent CQC inspection recorded all areas as good or outstanding. He stated his belief that the services would retain this rating. Michael Murphy also highlighted to the Panel that the percentage of users who received rehabilitation support on leaving hospital who subsequently were at home 91 days later stayed consistent, with more than 80 per cent of people not returning to hospital within three months of discharge. This had assisted with creating adequate hospital capacity during the second wave of Covid. There had been a 50 per cent increase in hospital discharges during the first three months of 2021 compared to the same period the year before. The Panel was told that although there were significant challenges services were delivered £500,000 under budget, thanks to efficiencies and grant funding. Daily and weekly meetings had taken place with various provider groups regarding outbreak control.

The Panel was told that during the pandemic Optalis took control of the Extra Care service at Lady Elizabeth House in Maidenhead and the Supported Employment service, which was previously delivered by Ways into Work. More investment was taking place into the specialist reablement service, so that more people would be able to live safely and independently for longer.

The presentation then went on to consider ways of transforming Optalis. David Birch explained that it had been hoped planned changes could have been brought in a year ago, but they had been delayed due to the pandemic. However during Covid there had been a growth in the number of community groups willing to engage with, and provide support for, people and Optalis had been looking at these offers of help and considering how they could be incorporated into their services. It was hoped that this would enable people to get the help they needed at an earlier stage; often it was the case a resident would only seek services when they were at crisis point. David Birch said providing preventative support for people would provide the biggest transformation for residents, but it would be the hardest aspect of the transformed care provision to get right. The Panel was told that a revision of day service provision was taking place, which included an ‘out and about’ service. This would take services to where they were required rather than being building based, although it was accepted some users may still prefer to use a building-based service. David Birch said the long-term hope was for Optalis and the Royal Borough to become a beacon of national excellence in terms of adult social care.

Cllr Hunt noted that traditional ways of providing services had been reviewed and amended, and asked how many of the changes had been brought in out of necessity due to the pandemic. David Birch said some of them had initially been discovered by accident and staff had thought creatively on how to make best use of alternative provision of services. He said Covid had allowed staff the opportunity to run a number of things differently, and looking at alternative strategies was being prioritised over introducing new ones. Responding to a question from Cllr Hunt, David Birch said the budget savings meant it had not been necessary to bring in agency staff to cover.

Regarding the 'out and about' service, the Panel was told that this had been trialled by Optalis in Wokingham and had been so successful it had been necessary to introduce a subscription service to prioritise users. David Birch said out and about allowed for greater provision of services in evenings and at weekends and was a self-funding service. Responding to a question from Cllr da Costa about how someone who did not have the finances to pay in to the service Lynne Lidster, Head of Commissioning – People, said a consultation on future provision of day services had begun following approval of the budget by Full Council. Creating a more diverse day opportunities offer was dependent on the closure of the Windsor and Oakbridge Day Centres, which would generate sufficient funds and savings for everyone to use the new out and about service whilst retaining some building-based services for those who wanted them.

Responding to a question from Cllr Tisi regarding discharges of patients from hospital during the period January-March, David Birch and Michael Murphy explained additional risk assessments and due diligence had taken place to ensure the patients were safe to be discharged. Additional protective measures were put in place in care homes where patients were to be discharged to. Cllr da Costa said she had had a family member discharged during this time period and this had been done very successfully. David Birch said Optalis provided support for 5,000 people across the Royal Borough and also in Wokingham, of whom around 2,500-3,000 lived in the Royal Borough. Responding to a question from Cllr Sharpe, he said the biggest challenge they faced was recruiting enough staff to be able to expand services as they wished to. Responding to a question from Cllr Tisi, David Birch said Brexit was unlikely to have an impact on recruitment as relatively few members of staff came from EU countries. It may be the case that applicants would be inexperienced but seeking to retrain or learn new skills.

Cllr Bateson noted that it was often difficult to get an appointment or speak to a doctor as many had been redeployed elsewhere due to Covid, and this was particularly an issue for people who lived alone. Hilary Hall said some GP surgeries were working closely with community groups to provide alternative support, although this was not possible to do on a consistent basis across the whole Borough. Michael Murphy said this tied in the priority of trying to identify needs at the earliest possible opportunity to avoid later crises. Referrals could be made using social prescribers, who worked closely with GP surgeries and adult social care.

END OF YEAR DATA AND PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Panel was asked a number of questions by Ed Wilson, a member of the public. He asked for confirmation that there were no areas of provision that required improvement, and asked what reassurance could be given to residents that there were no required improvements; whether there would be a post Covid catch-up plan to assist children who had missed learning during the pandemic; and how much money had been raised by the adult social care precept since it was introduced, and what was it being spent on. Regarding his second question, Cllr Hunt stated this had been covered in detail at the School Improvement Forum earlier in the week and Mr Wilson would be able to view a recording of the meeting. It was agreed that Mr Wilson would send in his questions in writing to the clerk for it to be passed to the relevant officers in order for a response to be generated.

Hilary Hall introduced the report and drew Members' attention to the key performance indicators relating to adult social care. Of the five indicators two were green and the others

were amber. The first indicator, relating to long-term care package reviews taking place within 12 months, was below target due to the diversion of resources during the pandemic. It had improved during the course of the year but more work was needed. The indicator relating to permanent admissions to care was off target as there had been a significant increase in the number of admissions during January and March, which related to the increase in discharges from hospital. Care home provision would be given in circumstances where it was not possible for someone to return to their own home. The indicator relating to reablement was off target but had held up creditably well given the challenging circumstances of the pandemic. The indicators relating to carers' assessments and adult safeguarding were both on target; for safeguarding it had been consistently high throughout the year. Carers' assessments had caught up after falling behind early in the year when Covid first hit.

Cllr da Costa asked for more clarity on the capacity tracker. Hilary Hall explained this had been introduced by the government during the pandemic to track capacity in the care market, and required each care home or domiciliary care provider to keep a track of vacancies. This was being monitored on a weekly basis. Regarding carers' reviews, Hilary Hall said these related to cases where someone would provide support for a family member as there was a duty to assess their carer's role. They did not relate to domiciliary care or any care provided by an agency.

Cllr Sharpe asked when the off-target performance indicators would be green. Hilary Hall said the target for care package reviews would be green this year. It was difficult to say in terms of the number of people living at home 91 days after discharge from hospital due to the number of variables in each individual case; there was little that could be done if an individual's needs were so complex they required further admission to hospital. Cllr Sharpe asked if there were any areas of concern. Hilary Hall said she had no specific worries, but there were unknowns over the long-term impact of Covid on residents' health and the ability to forecast future trends and how this would affect service demands.

Cllr Tisi stated that it had been mentioned previously Ofsted were unlikely to do any inspections before September. However their website now said inspections were starting up again and Cllr Tisi asked if it was anticipated if any of Achieving for Children's services would be inspected. Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of Children's Services, said the teacher training offer was due for imminent inspection, and he was aware that five schools in the Royal Borough were due for inspection. However no notice would be given for these and Kevin McDaniel said he was not expecting them to take place this term. Cllr Tisi asked how the Delta variant of Covid may impact on delivery of adult social care. Hilary Hall said that during previous waves of the pandemic there had been a focus on infection prevention and control and she expected that would continue if there was another wave due to the Delta variant. This would continue to be the key focus from an adult social care perspective. Cllr Tisi asked, from a safeguarding perspective, how confident staff were that social workers had the capacity to check this was being adequately delivered. Hilary Hall said there was an officer who had been assigned the role of managing and monitoring this and she said she was confident the appropriate checks and balances were in place.

Cllr da Costa asked when the CQC would be likely to restart inspections. Lynne Lidster, Head of Commissioning – People, said inspections had continued throughout the pandemic in cases where there had been concerns raised at a provider's ability to provide adequate infection control. These had not been formal written inspections however, and it was likely these would begin again soon. As there was a backlog, priority would be given to service providers where concerns had previously been raised.

Kevin McDaniel provided the Panel with an update on the performance indicators relating to children's services. The indicator relating to the percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training was now green thanks to the positive impact of the virtual college and the task and finish group that the Panel had set up on this topic area. It was hoped the improvement could be sustained. The indicator relating to the percentage of children receiving a 6-8 week health visitor review was also performing well as many more families were

choosing to engage with services. It was felt this was due to Covid impacting on families' childcare arrangements and inability to access other services such as in nurseries. There had been no change to the indicator relating to schools rated good or outstanding by Ofsted as inspections had been put on hold during the pandemic.

The Panel was told the indicators relating to percentage of children being re-referred to children's social care and the percentage of child protection plans lasting for two years or more were both off target. Regarding re-referrals to children's social care, Kevin McDaniel said this often related to families who had not engaged with schools or were directed to front door services, and were often families whose circumstances could be described as chaotic. Kevin McDaniel said services would try not to intervene unless essential, but there was a balancing act because if the figure of re-referrals dropped to zero then there would be concerns that services had been intervening too much. In relation to child protection plans, Kevin McDaniel said the figures related to a small cohort and many were children from the same family and this distorted the percentage figures. In this case, a care plan lasting for longer than two years was necessary to ensure the children's longer-term care. Kevin McDaniel said he did not have specific concerns over the two indicators that were not rated green. He said he was more concerned with an increase in demand for early help for families in crisis. More money had been invested into this but more needed to be done to ensure this was sustainable in the long term.

Cllr da Costa said the teams deserved to be congratulated for their work on care leavers not in education, employment or training. She asked if consideration had been given to continuing to have health visitor meetings done remotely rather than face to face as this had proved popular. Kevin McDaniel said the option had always been there but they had not been recorded as a formal visit, and it was important for health visitors to see mother and baby in person to do a proper assessment as often as possible.

Cllr da Costa asked if the FUEL programme was available to families in need and not just those who were eligible for free school meals. Kevin McDaniel said the scheme was predominantly for low income families and those with children with a special educational need, and would be run for as many people as there was capacity for. It was not possible for the Royal Borough to subsidise the service but schools had assisted in identifying children who were particularly in need and headteachers had been making specific referrals for certain children.

Responding to a question from Cllr Tisi, Kevin McDaniel said the Covid restrictions had presented challenges in terms of the number of people being allowed to meet indoors together when it had been necessary to do so. This had led to more one-to-one work being conducted. Kevin McDaniel said the biggest issue had been the increased number of families seeking help. In the most recent period the Family Hub had received referrals from 40 new families, when typically it might be 10-12 in the past. However it was thought this was partly down to the Family Hub making its services known, and it was not known at this stage if those figures would be sustained. In response to a question from Cllr Tisi, Kevin McDaniel said there were sufficient staff to cope with current demand. There were two current job vacancies and it was expected these could be filled on a permanent basis, but consideration was being given to using agency staff to fill the positions temporarily.

Cllr Sharpe asked if it had been noticed if particular cohorts of children had suffered with their education as a result of Covid. Kevin McDaniel said some children had fallen behind but others had thrived through the lockdown period. Some schools had asked the Council for assistance in supporting those children who had fallen behind in their education. Mark Jervis asked if future reports would have a performance indicator relating to the Covid catch-up. Kevin McDaniel said the catch-up would be done on an individual school by school basis using an action plan devised by link advisors. However it was anticipated that a common performance indicator would not be required and the performance would be considered in the overall education report on the workplan for January 2022.

CIPFA REVIEW UPDATE

Lynne Lidster introduced the item and explained it would update Members on the recommendations made following the CIPFA review of the Royal Borough's arrangements with Optalis and Achieving for Children. The report showed progress against the action plan. Lynne Lidster stated that all the actions had either been completed or were on track to be delivered by the target date at the end of September. A review of the capacity and skills in the Borough's finance and strategic commissioning teams had been conducted and new structures were to be put in place soon. Additional budget had come forward for the strategic commissioning service. Lynne Lidster said one of the key action points to be completed was ensuring there was a shared understanding between Achieving for Children and the Royal Borough regarding the cost of children's services. The business plan and medium term financial plan had both been approved by Cabinet, with the sufficiency strategy due to be considered by Cabinet later in the month. A detailed data pack had been developed, which included management and financial information. The first of these was due to be delivered at the end of the month and would give the Royal Borough a greater overview of information. With regards to Optalis, Lynne Lidster said a business plan through to 2023 had been agreed with the company's co-owners, Wokingham Borough Council, and a revised shareholder agreement plan was progressing well. She said Optalis was a key player in adult social care and were key to the transformation programme, including the reconfiguration of front door services and enhanced reablement.

The Panel was told that the Royal Borough was represented on the Achieving for Children Board of Directors by Kevin McDaniel and Nikki Craig, Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT. Two independent non-executive directors had recently been appointed to the Board and the Royal Borough had been involved in the recruitment process for this. Lucy Kourpas, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Finance for Achieving for Children, said one of the new recruits had a strong background in finance and risk management and would be the new chairman of the Audit and Risk Committee. The other new recruit had a background in education and youth services and would be the vice chairman of the Board. Responding to a question from Cllr Hunt, Lucy Kourpas said the Board's constitution did not allow elected Councillors to be on the Board, but there was an Ownership Board that met twice a year that had three RBWM Councillors as members. Hilary Hall said the Royal Borough held 45 per cent of the shares in Optalis and Wokingham the remaining 55 per cent. It had been intended to move to an even split after two years, but Covid had delayed the implementation of this.

Cllr Tisi asked if the target to deliver the entirety of the action plan by the end of September was the original target. Lynne Lidster said the original target had been to complete the action plan by the end of March 2021. There was ongoing work taking place to complete the service level agreement and revised shareholder agreement between all parties. However Lynne Lidster said this was on track to meet the revised target of September.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Panel noted the report and noted the progress made to implement the recommendations made by CIPFA following the reviews undertaken of Achieving for Children and Optalis in 2020.

WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted that dates had been agreed for the items that had been suggested at the previous meeting. It was agreed that suggestions for other agenda items could be proposed via email, and given final agreement at an agenda setting briefing with the Chairman.

Cllr Tisi noted that in the minutes of the last meeting two suggested task and finish groups had been proposed, relating to recommissioning of domiciliary care services and value for money for creating care packages. Hilary Hall said recommissioning of domiciliary care was about to begin and the creation of a task and finish group relating to this had been noted as part of the process. She and Lynne Lidster would work on a timetable for this to be produced. Regarding

value for money, Hilary Hall said she would liaise with Cllr Sharpe to work out the scope of the task and finish group and create a terms of reference that could be shared with the Panel.

The meeting, which began at 6.15 pm, finished at 8.20 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....