

PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday 8 December 2022

Present virtually: Councillors Sayonara Luxton (Chairman), Maureen Hunt (Vice-Chairman), Clive Baskerville, Catherine Del Campo, Carole Da Costa, Julian Sharpe, John Story, Amy Tisi and Greg Jones

Also in attendance virtually: Councillors Mandy Brar, Ewan Larcombe and Gurch Singh

Officers in attendance virtually: Becky Oates, Kevin McDaniel, Lin Ferguson, Vanessa Faulkner, Alex Tilley, Katharine Willmette and Chelsea Bridges

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Tony Wilson, Mark Jervis and Councillor Muir. Councillor Greg Jones acted as a substitute for the latter.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Carole Da Costa declared that one of the complaints made within the Annual Complaints and Compliments Report was made by herself, though not in her capacity as a Councillor.

Minutes

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2022 be a true and accurate record.

Adult Social Care Reforms

Kevin McDaniel, Executive Director of People Services, introduced the item by stating that this item was proposed for the September meeting which was cancelled due to the arrangements of HM The Queen's funeral. At this point this item included reforms that would have been brought in in October 2023, but this had been affected by the Chancellor's Autumn statement. The statement included the proposal that the social care funding reforms would go back until at least October 2025 and as a result, the presentation had been changed to remove a large chunk of this element. There were still some changes in adult social care that were relevant, particularly the way the service would be reviewed by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Katharine Willmette stated that the charging reforms had been pushed back so no work was ongoing on this area at either a local or national level. The big reform agenda was now centred around the CQC which currently regulated and inspected both health services and provider services which provided personal care. For the last 10-12 years, statutory adult social services hadn't been inspected, and the proposal was to reintroduce regular inspection. The CQC were currently working through an assessment framework which would be used when the inspection regime started, with an expected start date of April 2023. This wouldn't mean that RBWM wouldn't necessarily be inspected in April 2023, but the process would begin at this point. A large amount of work was currently being undertaken to ensure that the council was focused on quality improvement and making sure that services were the best they could be. A quality assurance process had been put in place which Optalis were working through, which would ensure that RBWM were as prepared as possible for when inspections began.

There were two main points that the Panel should be made aware of. The first was that when RBWM was inspected by the CQC, the date of which was unknown, it would result in a single word rating of either adequate, inadequate, good, or outstanding. Katharine Willmette highlighted the importance for RBWM and its residents to get the best possible outcome. The second point was that it would be useful for the Panel to be updated in either February or March 2023 on where the borough was in terms of the inspection process, the areas that needed to be improved upon and what the expected strengths would be.

Kevin McDaniel highlighted that this was a new process for all councils, not just RBWM, and it would be important to include regular updates on the work programme going forward. RBWM were working towards being ready for an inspection in April, though it may be two more years before the inspection occurred.

Councillor Carole Da Costa asked if the inspection featured a list of categories that would have to be met to receive a particular rating, and if RBWM knew what those categories were.

Kevin McDaniel confirmed that there would be, but the framework was still under development.

Katharine Willmette confirmed that this framework was in draft and had been delayed in getting signed off because of changes at the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). The draft framework set out the various themes that would be inspected and the kind of evidence expected to be seen. The DHSC had been working with local authorities over the past year to get feedback on the framework and to get an understanding of any issues surrounding clarity.

ACTION: Katharine Willmette to share the draft framework with the Panel.

Councillor Del Campo asked if there was any anticipated additional administrative burden that this inspection would place on RBWM, and asked for written updates if possible in advance.

Katharine Willmette stated that there probably would be an additional burden in terms of the inspection itself. Everything that RBWM were doing should be happening anyway, and this service and quality improvement was now happening in a more systematic way which was thanks to the hard work of Optalis. In the long term, it would be hard to say but the burden would depend on how the inspection framework rolled out over time. The framework would be likely to evolve over time, and DHSC had recognised that local authorities were under enormous pressure and didn't want to make the process any more administratively onerous than it needed to be. DHSC had discussed using performance data that was already publicly available as part of the evidence used in the inspection.

Kevin McDaniel stated that it was officers' intention to provide written updates against the framework to enable the Panel to scrutinise how well things were working. With regards to resource implications, the reality of a scheme such as this by the CQC was that it would have an impact on the capacity of the council to deliver it. The council's experience in children's services over the last number of years was that in order to be securely good in this process, it was important to ensure that the council were focused and asking the right questions. The framework gave a helpful way of structuring this, but there would be added burdens. However, these were appropriate, and it was not unreasonable for a regulator to take a view at the council's strategic work.

The Chairman thanked Kevin and Katharine and stated that she looked forward to regular updates.

Sunningdale Health Hub

Alex Tilley, Director of Operations, RBWM, at NHS Frimley, introduced herself and stated that as part of her role, she was responsible for the population of RBWM in relation to a wide section of health services.

Planning permission had been granted in March 2022 and since then, the NHS had been working with the landowners and the developers. This work would result in a business case being submitted to NHS England by mid-2023, which was a critical milestone. Work was ongoing to gather insights and information from residents through either the practices or services that those individuals were using. Frimley Health Foundation Trust's maternity services and the community provider in Berkshire Healthcare Trust were supportive of this service and would come into this service to provide a wide range of clinical and community-based services that had been set out in the original planning application.

More recently, the relationship with the current landowners had been progressing and they had been considering a full offer on a commercial case which was being taken to their board in December 2022. Alex Tilley stated that they hoped to have an outcome of that case within the next six to eight weeks.

The project had faced a delay in relation to national capital investment as a result of the Autumn budget statement in relation to NHS capital, but Alex Tilley stated that she was confident that NHS Frimley were continuing with the programme. NHS Frimley were committed to keeping the website regularly updated.

Councillor Del Campo asked about provisions for parking and whether there would be sufficient parking spaces at the Hub.

Alex Tilley stated that parking was a big issue in relation to the planning application and a lot of work had been undertaken to ensure that the ratio of parking spaces was adequate, which she hoped would be used on other developments. In total, there would be 125 spaces as well as bicycle parking.

Councillor Del Campo asked if any GP surgeries would be closing down and if people would be moved to this site. Councillor Del Campo also asked about the maximum distance patients would have to travel to the Hub.

Alex Tilley stated that this development affected two particular practices, with the site of the new Hub being directly between these two practices and less than two miles away from the current sites, which was the standard for levels of consultation and reasonableness around access for residents. Maternity and community services would be moved into this hub from locations in Bracknell and Frimley and would serve the needs of the local population.

The Chairman asked how often surgeries were updated on progression of the site, as she currently sat on a patient meeting and was frequently asked questions on the progress of the Hub.

Alex Tilley stated that it took time to get through the complexity of such a scheme so understood the frustration. The website was updated with anything that could be shared, and feedback was welcome on the website.

The Chairman asked if updates were being published in the local media or other avenues for people to keep updated.

Alex Tilley confirmed that updates were available through practice websites which linked to the main Frimley Health and Care website which contained all the information on the Hub.

Councillor Carole Da Costa stated that she had previously worked in maternity services in the area and the new Hub would be a really positive change for both the surgeries involved and the residents in the area.

Councillor Sharpe asked why the process was such a long one, and the steps required in this process.

Alex Tilley explained that the point at which planning permission was granted was the point at which an outline business case was submitted to NHS England via the integrated care system. The full business case was submitted on completion of all commercial arrangements, including planning permission. There was also a commercial and procurement situation that needed to take place, and national capital investment in the NHS was included in the Autumn statement. Alex Tilley understood Councillor Sharpe's frustration, but the development was being worked on within frameworks that NHS Frimley were not fully in control over.

The Chairman asked if there was any way that RBWM could support the funding of this project.

Alex Tilley stated that the council had supported the project at every juncture so far and welcomed the Chairman's support.

Annual Complaints and Compliments Report

Kevin McDaniel introduced the report and stated that it was a requirement for the local authority to publish data on adults and children's complaints. The report, which was originally scheduled for the cancelled September meeting, was based on data from 2021-22.

RBWM had seen a 30% reduction in contacts over the year compared to 2020-21 but there were still around 400 complaints, which was consistent with the year before. 97% of those complaints related to adults and children.

It was worth noting that there was a technicality in the way children's complaints were reported. There were two types of complaints: statutory complaints, which covered children in need, looked after children and issues relating to social care, including post adoption support, and corporate complaints, which related to education and SEND.

Positive trends included that while there was a similar number of complaints, fewer were upheld in full or partially upheld, which suggested that RBWM were learning and improving. The timeliness in response to complaints across adults and children's corporate had fallen year on year, particularly in adults, while there was a good improvement in the children's statutory complaints. This reflected the complexity of complaints coming through and the interconnection of some of the services RBWM delivered.

The report covered the views from the local government and social care ombudsman which was the external body residents could go to after exhausting RBWM's complaints process. While there were more decisions from the Ombudsman last year, this was no reflection on an increasing measure of quality but was rather a range of more people being prepared to take complaints through.

Kevin McDaniel concluded by recognising that this was both a complaints and compliments report and noted that while there were a similar number of compliments for adults as in previous years, there was almost over threefold increase in the number of compliments for children's services in the year. This reflected positively on the increased communication and the effort that colleagues, particularly in Achieving for Children, had put into increasing the quality of communications with families.

Councillor Tisi asked how complaints were categorised when reporting these through the council's website, and whether the terminology of a corporate or statutory complaint was included or if this was a simpler choice between adult's or children's services.

Vanessa Faulkner, Service Lead for HR People Services, confirmed that it was both of these options. Complainants could select the area of either adults or children and also the type of complaint.

Councillor Tisi asked if the terminology of these categories was explained on the website as it was not day-to-day language that somebody would necessarily know.

Vanessa Faulkner stated that guidance was provided on the form surrounding the complaints process.

Councillor Tisi asked if there was anything RBWM could be doing with regards to areas such as SEND in order to avoid complaints from happening, such as signposting parents better to other areas to get advice.

Kevin McDaniel stated that a lot of signposting already occurred, particularly in relation to SEND. One thing that was being noticed was that because of the complexity of trying to find places for many young people with additional needs, families would often start a number of conversations if they hadn't had the responsiveness they wanted from RBWM. Often, the council would hear about the independent advice and guidance service talking to the same families who came through the complaints process which could result in confusion due to multiple pieces of advice being given through different channels.

Lin Ferguson, Director of Children's Services at Achieving for Children, stated that from a children's services perspective, one of the key reasons a family would tick when making a complaint was that a particular situation or incident had occurred which they felt wasn't handled appropriately by officers. Another frequent complaint was that a family was unhappy with a decision, which may be a decision that a child needs to go to a child protection conference. Communication and failing to take information on board were also seen as reasons for frequent complaints.

Lin Ferguson stated that it was important to note that RBWM and AfC tried to learn from information that was given by families in order to do better. Over the last year, a lot of work had been ongoing in children's services to improve the timeliness of the complaints process which had resulted in an improvement, though not to the full extent of the goal. Relationships between officers in social care and the complaints team had been strengthened so that complaints were talked through. Additionally, a large amount of training with staff had occurred on key issues that come up in complaints, such as clearly stating the difference between fact and personal opinion on assessments that were completed on families. Training had also been ongoing around evidencing statements and ensuring that social workers were clear on what their statements meant, as well as quality assurance to ensure that all documents had correct spelling and grammar.

The Vice-Chairman asked who makes statutory children's complaints and whether the children themselves made the complaints. If this was the case, the Vice-Chairman asked how many children had made complaints on their own behalf.

Lin Ferguson stated that very few formal complaints were received from children and young people. This was probably for a variety of reasons, the main one being that young people had a 'gripe corner' which was an informal way of raising concerns with the team that worked with them.

Vanessa Faulkner stated that she didn't have the data on the number of children who had raised complaints but could distribute this number afterward.

ACTION POINT: Vanessa Faulkner to share the number of children who had raised statutory children's complaints with the Panel.

Councillor Sharpe asked what the key findings from this report were.

Kevin McDaniel stated that the ability and willingness to learn was a positive finding from the report. Furthermore, when families and young people were caught between several council services RBWM did itself a disservice of not getting these joint up, and there was room to improve on these complex cases. Finally, it was important to make sure that the mechanics were in place to respond to complaints promptly so that complainants felt cared for and believed that RBWM were interested in listening.

Vanessa Faulkner added that from an internal perspective, the compliments and complaints team were liaising with services much earlier and having regular meetings to learn and share information. This ensured that they were involved in all aspects of the complaint so RBWM could try and progress them as quickly as possible. The engagement with the compliments and complaints team had been really good over the last year and it was hoped that this would improve.

Lin Ferguson added that timeliness was a key issue to improve and whilst it had improved, it wasn't improving quick enough. Work was ongoing to improve this process.

Councillor Carole Da Costa asked if historical complaints within children's services were recorded amongst the current data or if this was recorded elsewhere, and whether this was a particular issue that the council faced.

Lin Ferguson confirmed that historical allegations and disclosures would be dealt with separately. The council had a robust process in place to process these allegations.

Kevin McDaniel encouraged people who were unsure about what had happened to them in their past to talk to RBWM. It wouldn't be treated as a complaint but would be explored together with the individual.

RESOLVED: That the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel notes the report and agrees:

- i) That the report is published on the Council's website.**
- ii) That the annual report continues to be produced and presented at future Overview and Scrutiny panels**

Work Programme

Becky Oates, Democratic Services Officer and Clerk to the Panel explained that a scoping document on air pollution had been produced by Councillors Sharpe and Davies who sat on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel. The scoping document had been referred to the People Overview and Scrutiny Panel as it sat under the directorate of People Services. The document required approval from the Panel, with members able to make any amendments to the document as they saw fit.

Kevin McDaniel stated that there was an additional scoping document on domestic abuse which also needed approval from the Panel. Kevin McDaniel had sought advice on the air pollution scoping document as the topic cut across both the People and Place Panels. The Panel would be well served to set up a task and finish group to explore this issue rather than bring it just to the People Panel. This would enable members from other panels to be involved in the work, rather than leaving this issue to only be explored by the People Panel.

The Chairman stated that this sounded like a good idea.

Councillor Davies, member of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel, agreed that this was an excellent suggestion. This was an important topic which had been considered by each Overview and Scrutiny Panel, so would be a good starting point.

Councillor Del Campo commented that it seemed there were two parts to this paper, with the ongoing monitoring of air quality most likely not relevant to a task and finish group. Councillor Del Campo stated that she didn't wish to lose regular updates as part of this task and finish group.

Kevin McDaniel agreed and stated that one of the measures that might want to be put in the scope of the task and finish group would be to agree what that regular monitoring looks like in order to satisfy the needs of all panels.

Councillor Sharpe agreed that it was an issue that would be best served by regular updates to the Panel in order to understand the progress that was being made.

Councillor Del asked what the next steps would be as the next meeting would be in January 2023 with Christmas in between.

The Chairman commented that the work would likely begin after Christmas due to time constraints.

Becky Oates stated that in its current form, the air quality scoping document would mean officers attending the next January meeting to discuss how this would move forward. However, with a task and finish group being established, this attendance would not occur.

Kevin McDaniel stated that changing the scoping document to include a task and finish group would mean that work would be able to begin.

Councillor Tisi agreed with Kevin McDaniel's point.

Councillor Carole Da Costa asked if all members of the Panel were required to be part of a task and finish group or whether it was a smaller group of members and officers.

The Chairman asked how the choice would be made with regards to who would want to participate.

Becky Oates confirmed that it would be up to members, and anyone who wanted to get involved from the People Panel was welcome.

Kevin McDaniel explained that it would be a working group, with those members who volunteered driving the scrutiny.

The scoping document was agreed by the Panel, with the addition of a task and finish group.

Becky Oates explained that there was a further scoping document on domestic abuse which also needed the agreement of the Panel in order for work to begin. The document was informed by the Domestic Abuse Strategy which was agreed by Cabinet in September 2022, and suggested the establishment of a task and finish group to speak with victims of domestic abuse.

Councillor Del Campo, who drafted the document, stated that she felt very strongly on this issue. She felt the paper presented to Cabinet was a really good paper, with the fact that it was so good making it worth scrutinising in order to ensure that the council delivered on it and to ensure that the experiences of residents in the borough match what was proposed in this document.

An additional aspect of this scoping document was looking at the Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA), which was good at identifying issues that people with protected characteristics might face. This needed to be linked back to the main body of the document in

order to evidence the statement that services were available to all who were victims of domestic abuse.

Councillor Del Campo stated that she hoped lots of members would get involved as it was an important issue that impacted on so much work that the council did.

Councillor Tisi agreed that it was a really good idea, and asked what kind of steps would need to be taken in terms of safeguarding and confidentiality with regards to meetings.

Lin Ferguson stated that she chaired the domestic abuse executive group and expressed her appreciation for Councillor Del Campo for the idea of this scoping document and task and finish group. The topic of EQIAs would be discussed at the next domestic abuse executive group.

Lin Ferguson confirmed that any task and finish groups which met with victims of domestic abuse would be closed groups, with the people involved having volunteered to discuss their experiences. All participants would agree to confidentiality within the room, and members involved would be asked to be mindful of the kinds of questions that would be asked. If the Panel were happy to proceed, work could begin.

The Panel agreed with the proposals set out in the scoping document.

The Chairman thanked all for their attendance and closed the meeting.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 8.15 pm

Chair.....

Date.....