

ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on Wednesday 30 March 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors J Platt (Chair), T Higgins, D Rooney and G Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: J Bryson – Recovery Connections; and K May – Streets Ahead for Information.

OFFICERS: S Bonner, C Lunn and E Scollay.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors D Davison and J Walker.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

MINUTES - ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL - 2 MARCH 2022

The minutes of the Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 2 March 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

INTEGRATION OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE - VERBAL UPDATE

The Director of Adult Social Care and Health Integration provided Members with an update regarding the integration of Health and Social Care; the following points were made:

- Discussions regarding the establishment of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS) had been continuing. Significant operational work had been taking place around continuing healthcare and negotiations held around how this would be funded through Local Authority and NHS channels. Consultation work was also underway in relation to Section 117 aftercare arrangements, and various technical issues pertaining to the ICS were also being explored by sub groups.
- The Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) for the ICS had recently met with Stockton on Tees Borough Council's Director of Adults and Health (Public Health and Environmental Health). The Chief Executive had been invited to attend a future meeting of North East ADASS, an Association that brought together the region's 12 Directors of Adult Social Care.

During the discussion that followed, a Member queried the current COVID-19 position. In response, the Director indicated that he felt the NHS continued to be under remarkable pressure. There continued to be a large volume of cases within local communities, and deaths continued to occur nationally. As people began to return to a sense of 'normality', it was felt that national guidance and testing arrangements were scattered and in a state of fracture (Adult Social Care within the Council had a commitment to provide testing for staff). The situation remained serious and the Director expressed concerns regarding the level of uncertainty at present. It was felt that increased focus ought to be being given towards the high number of COVID-19 cases currently within local communities.

The Chair thanked the Director for the information presented.

NOTED**THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS) IN SUPPORTING ADULT SOCIAL CARE (WITH A FOCUS ON COVID-19 RECOVERY) - FURTHER INFORMATION**

Representatives from various VCS organisations had been invited to attend the meeting to provide the panel with further information regarding the current topic. Present at the meeting were Kim May, Operations Manager for Streets Ahead for Information, and Jenny Bryson, Regional Services Manager for Recovery Connections.

The representative for Streets Ahead for Information provided the following details to the panel:

- With regards to the present COVID-19 situation, it was felt that things were returning to a state of

- 'normality', but exactly what that entailed had caused confusion for people.
- Streets Ahead for Information provided a one stop service for residents to receive advice and support. It was indicated that since the start of the pandemic, the organisation had worked far closer with other VCS partners to help support residents' needs, which had become significantly more complex. Membership of the COVID-19 Champions Network had brought VCS organisations together and encouraged them to share information and work together, which had been very useful.
 - A variety of work was taking place in supporting residents, with particular reference being made towards the cost of living crisis and the impact that this would have on vulnerable groups.
 - One of the VCS' strengths was the ability to provide support to 'hard to reach' groups; the example of holding two vaccination sessions in a community hub and successfully reaching out to individuals, who would never have been contacted previously, was provided.
 - Streets Ahead for Information had received sustainability grant funding during the pandemic to assist with projects, which included providing people with tablets to remain connected and able to access support. It was explained to Members that many residents in the Newport and Gresham areas were not readily connected to digital services, either because they did not want to be, did not know how to be, or did not have accessibility: broadband accessibility was an issue. A further project involved the employment of an Outreach Officer to door knock and check on peoples' wellbeing. The panel heard that following the announcement of the first national lockdown, some individuals took to their homes and had not re-emerged. Work was currently taking place to reintegrate these individuals back into local communities.
 - Street Wise was a monthly newsletter and web information source that was produced by Streets Ahead for Information in collaboration with Middlesbrough Council and Cleveland Police. The newsletter, which informed about a wide range of Newport issues, was delivered to every residence in the area, circa. 3500 homes. Generally comprising 4-8 pages, the resource had been acknowledged as an excellent way of reaching residents, as technology was not always available or the most appropriate method. It was indicated that language barriers had posed an issue in some instances.
 - COVID-19 flyers had been produced to provide information to residents in respect of such matters as current guidance and regulations; vaccination advice; and reminders that Streets Ahead for Information was available for other support services, such as collecting prescriptions and running errands. It was highlighted that as a member of the COVID-19 Champions Network, representatives could approach other VCS organisations for information / advice where required.
 - A Community Connectors group with a purpose of conveying information to all in the locality had been planned to commence just as COVID-19 hit. However, it had since launched and was working well. It was explained to Members that the group operated on a recurring six-person contact basis, i.e. initial contact was made with six people, who then subsequently linked to a further six people, who then subsequently linked to a further six people and so on. The group continued to grow.
 - The issue of resuming "normality" had resulted in a project working closely with Public Health. This had commenced very recently and therefore no feedback was available as of yet. The project focused on vaccinations and encouraging people to get vaccinated, as it appeared that many felt this was no longer important. It was felt that a particular strength of the VCS was to make contact with groups and individuals that others had found it difficult to do so.

During the discussion that followed, Members raised a number of queries. In response, the following information was provided:

- With regards to the type of support provided to people experiencing financial issues, it was explained that an advice drop-in centre was operated by Welfare Rights. Work was currently taking place to determine how a referral service could be established. The Street Wise publication had recently focused on rising utility bills and provided advice regarding this. It was commented that vulnerable people did not always know how or where to access information. Financial-related advice and support would be a key focus for Streets Ahead for Information over the next three-to-six months.
- In terms of issues with language barriers, Members heard that English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes were being undertaken in order to help overcome these. Classes had been held via social media channels during the pandemic. Close links had also been formed with Nite light CIC to assist with the provision of help and support (meal and drink provision) to vulnerable groups. It was indicated that Eastern European communities were structurally different to other communities in that there were no specific individuals or leaders that could be approached in order to link in, therefore work was continually being undertaken to approach using different methods. It was highlighted that Streets Ahead for Information would do their utmost to

- provide help and support to vulnerable individuals and groups.
- Regarding lessons learned from the pandemic, the representative indicated that, as a VCS organisation, if a need had been identified then it was vital to step-up. During the first lockdown, for example, when the building was closed for three weeks Streets Ahead for Information staff dealt with enquiries and provided support from home. In terms of the VCS, it was felt that there was a requirement for organisations to work closer together and improve communications between themselves and other sectors. The strength of the community was a key benefit and the Community Connectors group was working well. It was highlighted that electronic communication methods did not work in every community – print material was preferable and more successful. It was important that organisations remained flexible in their approach to reaching out to residents; Streets Ahead for Information provided as much information as possible within their print publications, but did use social media channels too.
 - A Member commented that the coordination between VCS organisations had improved and it was important to keep the momentum going and continue to develop that. It was queried whether there were any current forums that allowed organisations to come together. In response, it was explained that volunteers at Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA) operated a meet-up group, but those sessions tended to focus on one key issue. It was indicated that the COVID-19 Champions Network had allowed representatives to meet together for discussion, with meetings being operated virtually (which provided flexibility and saved travel time). Members heard that the VCS sector was underfunded and short staffed. Reference was made to National Lottery funding, which had been difficult to acquire due to the number of organisations (in particular larger voluntary agencies which had needed to close retail outlets during the pandemic), seeking sustainability funding – and sustainability continued to be a problem.
 - In terms of potential ways forward, the representative indicated that the grant funding provided by the government / Council had been invaluable. It was felt vital to maintain the links between the different VCS sector organisations that had been created during the course of the pandemic; creation of a forum to facilitate meetings and provision of funding to continue ‘grass root’ activities would also assist.

The representative for Recovery Connections provided the following information to the panel:

- A background of Recovery Connections and the work undertaken in relation to the recovery element of drug and alcohol addiction was provided. It was explained that the organisation operated a quasi-residential rehabilitation facility in Middlesbrough; the contract for services was awarded to Middlesbrough Council in April 2021.
- During the pandemic, the client intake number had been reduced from eight to six, as two of the facility’s rooms were double occupancy. The building closed its doors and the café, event space and florist temporarily closed. However, although the community element of the centre did close for a short while, rehabilitation work continued on a fully staffed basis. Recovery Connections had been flexible in adapting activities quickly, reacting to government guidance and transferring to online delivery within two days of the first lockdown.
- Receipt of grant funding allowed for provision of tablets and telephones, although groups did need to be restricted as not enough devices could be procured.
- Recovery Connections was part of the COVID-19 Champions Network, which had been very positive for opening up communications.
- As food banks had not been readily available during the pandemic, 5000 meals had been delivered through social enterprise.

During the discussion that followed, Members raised a number of queries / comments. In response, the following information was provided:

- Regarding the number of individuals accessing services and the success rate, Members heard that Recovery Connections worked with partners in the Local Authority to receive referrals. It was indicated that the number of people requiring short term intervention, particularly in relation to alcohol use, was increasing. The most recent measurement for the rate of success was taken immediately prior to the pandemic, and stood at 55%. This was similar to other areas. It was explained that a new system had been implemented during the pandemic in order to provide data on how lives had improved.
- In relation to barriers, adapting to new ways of working, following guidance to maximise use of the organisation and whether anything would change going forward, the representative explained that during the pandemic, services had been led by those being supported. Reference was made to the compilation of an online timetable for activities - although individuals had stated that this was what they wanted, the actual participation figures had dropped day on day. It was indicated that

face-to-face contact with individuals in recovery was better than virtual connection; technology was not the way forward in this regard.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

NOTED

THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS) IN SUPPORTING ADULT SOCIAL CARE (WITH A FOCUS ON COVID-19 RECOVERY) - TERMS OF REFERENCE AND NEXT STEPS

Members were invited to consider, discuss and agree the terms of reference that had been proposed for the review; the Chair conveyed these to the panel. These were as follows:

- a) To understand the impact that COVID-19 has had on local communities, the Local Authority, VCS organisations and how services are delivered.
- b) To examine how the Local Authority has worked with the VCS during the pandemic and how support has been provided.
- c) To explore effective strategies and projects to further develop support provision in a post-pandemic environment.

Members agreed the terms of reference as proposed.

Members discussed progress of the review to date and potential next steps. Consideration was given to effective strategies and the ways in which the Council could support organisations in delivering services. Matters discussed included the benefits of both in-person and electronic contact in reaching out to vulnerable individuals and groups; holding partnership / collective meetings for organisations to come together and participate in discussion; the role and size of VCS organisations and the importance of ensuring that all became involved in collective activities, irrespective of their size; and the impact of administrative tasks on resources and how these could be undertaken in future.

A short discussion ensued with regards to funding, in particular funding from the National Lottery and how this was allocated. A Member made reference to an assessment undertaken several years previously which looked at amounts allocated to the Tees Valley. Members suggested that information pertaining to the distribution of funding and how the Tees Valley had been supported could be considered.

Members discussed the use of technology and the effectiveness of this, particularly in relation to some 'hard to reach' groups. Consideration was given to Council expenditure in respect of electronic devices, such as tablets and laptops, and achievement of value for money in this regard. The panel also considered potential ways in which the Council could support the VCS, including administrative support; provision of an IT hub in central buildings; and provision of meeting rooms and facilities. The remit of the Scrutiny Panel was noted, with the promotion of health and wellbeing forging the link between potential recommendations and the VCS sector.

AGREED that the terms of reference be agreed as follows:

- a) **To understand the impact that COVID-19 has had on local communities, the Local Authority, VCS organisations and how services are delivered.**
- b) **To examine how the Local Authority has worked with the VCS during the pandemic and how support has been provided.**
- c) **To explore effective strategies and projects to further develop support provision in a post-pandemic environment.**

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on the matters that were considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) meeting on 23 March 2022.

NOTED