

ADULT SOCIAL CARE & SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on 26 March 2024.

PRESENT: Councillors: J Walker (Chair), Jackson (Vice Chair), Nugent, Tranter and Wilson.

OFFICERS: J Dixon and E Scollay.

AN APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE was submitted on behalf of Councillor Grainge.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 19 DECEMBER 2023, 9 JANUARY AND 27 FEBRUARY 2024

The minutes of the previous meetings of the Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 19 December 2023, 9 January and 27 February 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

INTEGRATION OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE – VERBAL UPDATE

The Director of Social Care and Health Integration advised the Panel that this had been a standard item at a time when Health and Adult Social Care Services were initially integrating and, therefore, more relevant.

In terms of providing an update it was highlighted that one key issue to note was a restructuring of the ICB (Integrated Care Board) which would result in a new link person for Middlesbrough Council in terms of contact between the Council and ICB.

NOTED

RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT OF STAFF WITHIN ADULT SOCIAL CARE – UPDATE ON PREVIOUS REVIEW

E Scollay, Director of Adult Social Care and Health Integration, was in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with an update on progress on recommendations of a previous review undertaken by the Panel in 2022 – “Retention and Recruitment of Staff within Adult Social Care”.

A copy of the Scrutiny Panel’s Final Report and the subsequent Service Response had been circulated with the agenda.

By way of background, the Panel was advised that recruitment and retention remained a challenge nationally across a range of social care fields. At the time of the review, a number of Social Workers had retired and initially when recruiting replacements to the roles, Assessed, Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) Social Workers were coming through. This meant that whilst they were qualified Social Workers through the ASYE programme, they required additional supervision and time for learning and could only be allocated limited caseloads.

The Director provided a summary of the Panel’s recommendations, together with an update in relation to the action taken/progress made in respect of each, as follows:-

1. Consideration of a ‘Golden Hello’ for new staff in shortage areas.

Following further exploration with LMT and HR, it was decided that the salary and conditions of employment needed to be more attractive to suitable applicants, rather than a one-off payment.

Conversations with Social Workers were held and it was ascertained that their main concerns were starting salary and career progression. As a result, the scale point on which Social Workers commenced employment was increased, which brought Middlesbrough in-line with neighbouring local authorities.

In addition, Advanced Practitioners were previously employed at Grade 'L' and could not progress beyond the grade so a system was devised whereby a newly qualified Social Worker could start at Grade 'I', complete their ASYE, then be allowed to work their way up through the scale points. A Panel was in place to progress this without the need for a vacancy to come up for a Social Worker to move in to. Once they reached Grade 'K' and were ready to progress to Advanced Practitioner at Grade 'L', the Panel would consider whether they were suitably experienced to progress. This had been successful and ensured improved career progression plus the workforce feeling valued.

2. Exploration of Recruitment and Retention payments for key job roles.

In March 2023, a recruitment and retention payment was introduced. It was considered that this measure, in conjunction with the measures taken in 1. above, had helped to stabilise the workforce. Between April 2022 and March 2023 there had been a 17.8% turnover in the workforce, however, between April 2023 and March 2024, turnover had reduced to 10.9%. The vacancy rate had also reduced. There were currently nine vacant Social Worker posts in Adult Social Care, which was approximately half of the number of vacancies at the time the review was undertaken. The measures had also resulted in a more experienced workforce.

The recruitment and retention payments were in place for all Adult Social Care Social Workers, Advancer Practitioners and Team Managers, and were approximately 10% of the individual's salary. The recruitment and retention policy was closely monitored and reviewed by LMT and would remain in place for 2024/25. The policy had reduced the salary gap between Team Managers and Service Managers and there were currently no vacancies in these posts. An exit strategy for recruitment and retention payments would be considered and explored as part of the Council's wider transformation plans.

3. Consideration of restructuring of Social Work and Occupational Therapy roles to support priority areas.

The Panel was informed that this had not been necessary to date as the introduction of the recruitment and retention policy and changes regarding career progression had resulted in adequate stabilisation of the workforce. It was acknowledged that there may be some potential changes as part of the Council's wider transformation programme.

4. Development of awareness-raising activities and work with Universities to promote social work roles.

There had been increased focus on joint working with Universities, particularly Teesside and Northumbria, and Social Work apprenticeships. Work continued on raising awareness of social work roles and increasing interest from newly qualified Social Workers/ASYE to come and work in Middlesbrough.

5. Promote social care roles in media outlets.

Promotional articles on adult social care roles had been run in Love Middlesbrough and on various social media platforms. It did not appear that this had made a tangible impact on recruitment, however, the Service had begun to use the LinkedIn platform for adverts and this appeared to be making progress.

6. Create e-learning opportunities for staff and Elected Members to better understand adult social care.

A range of new learning opportunities had been developed and were available to all Council staff and Elected Members on Middlesbrough Learns (The Council's e-learning platform). In addition, Adult Social Care elements now formed part of the Council's corporate induction.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query around staffing, the Director advised that staff had been surveyed and the main pressures they identified were in relation to the increasing complexity of cases. It was hoped that some of these pressures would be eased through measures that would form part of the transformation plans.
- A Panel Member made reference to Social Worker apprenticeships. The Director advised that there were some apprentice Social Workers and where staff were in Social Care roles if it was felt that they were able to progress towards training they would be selected to go forward for an apprenticeship. Apprenticeship places were generally given to people already working within the authority rather than external placements.
- In response to a query regarding home-care care workers and their terms and conditions of employment, it was confirmed that the Council operated with a number of domiciliary care agencies following a procurement process which gave weight to a number of regulations and contract stipulations built in by the Council. All of the Companies must be registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and were inspected and regulated by them. Some terms and conditions of the Agencies' employees would be set by the Council within the contract and others would be set by the CQC. It was highlighted that they were independent businesses and required a degree of flexibility in order to operate.
- A query was raised in relation to whether some residential care home operators also operated domiciliary care. The Director stated he was not aware of any residential care homes in Middlesbrough that also provided domiciliary care. Independent supported living may be provided by some domiciliary care companies. Residential care home operators were required to hold a specific registration with the CQC and be appropriately staffed.
- In response to a query it was confirmed that the Council operated one residential care home.

The Director was thanked for his attendance and for the information provided.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

PREVENTION SERVICES IN MIDDLESBROUGH – NEXT STEPS

The Chair highlighted that the Panel would commence a review of Prevention Services in Middlesbrough and that the Council's transformation programme would be relevant to the review.

The Chair would discuss possible lines of enquiry for future meetings with the Director of Adult Social Care and Health Integration.

NOTED

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 7 and 28 February and 6 March 2024, namely:

Each meeting considered:-

- Executive Forward Work Programme
- Scrutiny Chairs' Updates

7 February 2024

- Ward Boundary Update
- OSB Work Programme discussion

28 February 2024

- Executive Member Update – Environment
- Local Government Boundary Review Update

6 March 2024

- Executive Member Update – Community Safety

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 23 April 2024 at 4.00pm.