

Minutes of a meeting of the EAP Active Communities

At 10.00 am on Friday 4th October, 2024 in the Council Chamber, The Cube, George St, Corby NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Gill Mercer (Chair)
Councillor Paul Marks
Councillor John McGhee

Councillor Russell Roberts
Councillor Geoff Shacklock

Officers

David Watts - Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing
Shirley Plenderleith - Assistant Director, Public Health
Matthew Jenkins - Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance
Sarah Morris - Principal Social Worker for Adults
David Pope – Executive Manager

71 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the co-Chair, Cllr Helen Howell as well as Cllrs Ken Harrington and King Lawal.

72 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

73 Minutes of the meeting held on 2nd August 2024

RESOLVED that:-

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd August 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

74 Care Quality Commission Assurance Preparation

The panel received a presentation from the Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance, Matthew Jenkins that sought to provide an overview of preparatory work undertaken ahead of forthcoming assessment by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

It was heard that the Health and Care Act 2022 provided a fundamental change for local authorities providing care, placing Integrated Care Systems on a statutory footing and providing powers to the CQC to seek assurance that such authorities were delivering their statutory adult social care functions as outlined in the act.

To that end, the CQC had been inspecting local authorities since April 2023 with all authorities set to receive their initial assessment by September 2025. The inspection visit would see CQC engaging with service users, officers and elected members to explore how functions were delivered across the following four themes:

- Working with people
- Providing support
- Ensuring safety
- Leadership and workforce

Following inspection, a report would be produced by the CQC and a service rating provided and published on its website. To date, five local authorities had received pilot inspections with one requiring improvement and four rated good, a further five authorities had received assurance following full rollout of the inspection programme.

Regarding the Council's own preparation for assurance, a self-assessment had been drafted in 2023 and subsequently reviewed and updated with the involvement of the Council's senior management team, care providers and service users. The initial assessment had highlighted areas of good practice and areas requiring improvement, while the refreshed version detailed improvements made and areas of good practice the Council wished to highlight. The panel noted that preparation undertaken was not solely focussed on CQC assurance but was part of a consistent drive to provide the best possible service for users.

The meeting heard from the Principal Social Worker for Adults, Sarah Morris who provided additional detail regarding the four CQC assessment themes detailed above, with a focus on strengths, areas for focus and responses to assist in improving these areas.

The Panel heard acknowledgement that there remained significant work to be undertaken prior to assurance, with annual review completion for those receiving services not being as high as desired and ongoing challenges faced in regard to capacity, demand and workloads. Details of a number of other preparatory priorities ahead of assessment were outlined to the meeting.

Details of The Annual Conversation were provided, in effect a mock CQC assessment undertaken by Dr Carol Tozer, a former Director of Adult Social Services, it was heard that the outcome from this independent assessment indicated that the Council's internal assessment was accurate and reflective of its current position with an understanding of areas required for improvement. It was considered that this feedback was both positive and reassuring ahead of the CQC assessment.

The Panel heard that it was likely that elected members would be spoken to as part of CQC inspection, with approximately three months' notice of intention to inspect provided by the CQC. It was anticipated that the election period in May 2025 would be avoided, although it was noted that the intention to inspect all authorities by September 2025 was ambitious.

The Chair thanked the officers for their presentation and comments before inviting members to comment and ask questions.

Cllr Russell Roberts queried how the adult social care service connected with housing, specifically referencing adaptations. In response it was heard that the Council had capital funding available to adapt private properties, with the Housing Revenue Account capital programme available for adaptations for council properties. It was noted that there was currently a £40,000 limit for the Disabled Facilities Grant with a further £10,000 of discretionary funding possible. It was heard that a review was likely regarding this statutory upper limit given that it had been in place for 15 years and no longer accurately reflected the cost of certain adaptations. In addition, discussions were ongoing between commissioning and housing services regarding specialist accommodation.

Cllr John McGhee spoke to acknowledge the level of work that had gone into the preparatory work ahead of the CQC assessment and welcomed the self-assessment as honest and open. Cllr McGhee referred to the need for leadership and trust building with service users and the voluntary sector and suggested improving telephone communications between users and the Council.

The Executive Director of Adults, Health Partnerships and Housing, David Watts, spoke to note that the Council was supportive of Local Area Partnerships being able to solve some of the issues the Council had, particularly in more isolated areas where it was difficult to access public services. Continuity in funding and a wider consideration as to how the Council did business with the voluntary sector was required as the Council needed to take chances in investing in this area to assist in reducing service demand.

Further discussion was held regarding Local Area Partnerships, with it being noted that a multi-agency approach could assist in keeping people out of the care system and in their own homes for as long as possible. Cllr McGhee noted the need for the voluntary sector to be kept informed and included and hoped that, given the hard work of officers, the Council would receive a good rating following the CQC inspection. The Chair noted that the voluntary sector was so vast and fragmented it was important to have the right people involved to cascade information downwards.

The Assistant Director of Public Health, Shirley Plenderleith concluded debate by noting that due to the voluntary sector being so disparate, development of the Local Area Partnerships had offered more coherence across the sector with increased awareness of what was going on that would drive positive change in future. It was heard that early intervention and prevention would also have a beneficial impact on services inside and outside the Council.

75 Commissioning and Performance - North Northamptonshire Care Market Quality

The panel received a further presentation from the Assistant Director for Commissioning and Performance that sought to provide an overview of the North Northamptonshire Care Quality Market.

It was heard that the update provided a focus on independent care providers using Care Quality Commission (CQC) ratings as a proxy for quality that had resulted in an

observation of positive changes to ratings. A reflection on the national position with the CQC, its inspection priorities and approach to transformation was also provided.

It was reported that in March 2020, CQC had paused its inspections as a result of the Covid pandemic, a regime that featured set frequencies for provider inspections based on rating levels. A new strategy had subsequently been adopted, moving towards a more data and intelligence led regime, moving away from frequency rules for inspections, with inspections prioritised based on risk. This had resulted a downturn in the rating profile within the sector as there was no longer a priority for CQC to go back and reflect improvements made. A recently published national review commenting on CQC's implementation of its new strategy was critical of that approach and CQC was currently reflecting upon that approach to inspections.

The Panel noted the current position of the local provider market, the Council's approach to quality assurance and supporting improvement in both the in-house and external care market. It was reported that there were 278 CQC registered locations providing regulated care activities (residential, nursing or community) in North Northamptonshire. It was further noted that day care services were not registered with the CQC.

The meeting heard that the Provider Quality Assurance Team visited contracted providers to complete quality assurance visits, with people receiving care providing their observations and experiences of service provision as well as looking at processes, procedures and ways of working. The team worked in partnership with local care providers who were mostly smaller or independent providers, with confidence that such working was the reason for the improved ratings profile. It was heard that a new quality framework had been implemented towards the end 2022, that had subsequently been reviewed with providers and positive feedback received.

The Council currently had a number of internal services that were supported in an intensive manner by the Quality Team, with each service allocated a Quality Officer that visited the service on a monthly basis as detailed below:

- Thackley Green (Building-based Reablement) – GOOD (inherited rating)
- Reablement North (Community-based Reablement) – GOOD
- Specialist Support Services for Younger Adults / Da Vinci Court (Community Support) – GOOD
- Pine Lodge (WAA Respite & Transitions) – Requires Improvement

It was reported that the Council held one large block PPP contract with Shaw, an independent provider that offered 250 residential care beds across six services with all of these rated as "Good" by the CQC. The Council worked closely with this provider to support the quality of service.

The Independent Care Market locally had 352 providers the Council contracted with, each Quality Officer holding a portfolio of providers enabling relationship building and service support as a result of this partnership approach. It was heard that between May and July 2024, 123 visits had been undertaken to contracted providers with a mix of welcome visits, intensive monitoring visits, action plan reviews and those where high risk or welfare checks had been identified to ensure service user safety.

The meeting was advised that ratings for providers were improving positively, with the Council's rating profile increasing at the most rapid rate across the East Midlands and

seeing a rise to a ranking of 35th among unitary authorities in the country up from a position of 56th 12-months previously.

It was reported that across community care quality services that provided regulated personal care activity, 42% of services were rated as “Good” or “Outstanding”, although 49% of service providers were yet to receive a rating due to being newly registered and not having yet received an inspection. The Council was confident that the rating profile would increase yet further once those inspections were undertaken.

It was noted that a provider feedback questionnaire had been sent to contracted providers at the end of 2023, with 107 respondents providing positive feedback, with most providers strongly agreeing that the Council provided a supportive and informative service, rooted in partnership working. Feedback also highlighted that providers had regular engagement with their allocated Quality Officer and that the Council was good at sharing resources that helped them to provide better quality care and support. The Council also worked closely with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to ensure consistent partnership working.

The Chair queried whether there was a capacity issue at CQC in terms of inspections given the number of authorities it was required to inspect. In response it was noted that new inspection methodology, significant changes to the technology employed by CQC and staffing issues had resulted in it being unable to maintain inspection rates or clear the backlog accrued as a result of the Covid pandemic, however the commission was aware of the challenges and was actively seeking ways to mitigate these.

Cllr John McGhee queried how many unitary authorities the Council was benchmarked against and raised the issue of having the right people involved with the ICB meetings to ensure correct feedback. In response it was noted that there were 62 unitary authorities that the Council was benchmarked against for performance in this sector.

A brief discussion was held regarding the Shared Lives service, akin to fostering for adults as an alternative to longer term forms of care and the need to grow this offer. It was heard there were currently around 30 people supported through this service and details were provided regarding the types of assistance and support received to both service users and those families who welcomed the users into their homes.

76 Executive Forward Plan

The Executive Forward Plan for October 2024 to January 2025 was noted.

77 Forward List of Items for the EAP

The forward list of items for the EAP was considered and noted.

78 Close of Meeting

There being no further business, the Chair thanked Members and Officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 11.11 am