

At a meeting of the HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in Committee Room 1 of the CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY, 28 MARCH, 2023 at 5:30pm.

Present:-

Councillor Chisnall in the Chair

Councillors Ayre, Bond, Heron, McDonough, Potts, Speding, D. Trueman and Usher

Also in attendance:-

Nigel Cummings – Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Andrea Hetherington - Director of Corporate Affairs and Legal, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

Gillian Robinson - Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members' Support Coordinator, Sunderland City Council

Joanne Stewart – Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Wendy Thompson – Head of Primary Care, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Scott Watson – Director of Place (Sunderland), North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were given on behalf of Councillors Butler, Mann and M. Walker

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 28th February, 2023

Councillor Bond referred to page three of the minutes and clarified that his comment regarding governance had been 'if it included the storage and use of prescription drugs and inadequate cross infection control?'.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 28th February, 2023 (copies circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record, subject to the above clarification.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest made.

Improving Access to General Practice

The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board Place Director for Sunderland submitted a report which updated the Committee on the work that was

being carried out by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) primary care team to improve access to General Practice (GP) in Sunderland.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Scott Watson, Place Director for Sunderland and Ms. Wendy Thompson, Head of Primary Care, took Members through the report advising that the NHS Long Term Plan commits to improving access to GP services. Following a letter published in 2022 by NHS England actions were identified locally to review and address some of the issues and areas of concern. A project group had been convened with partners from across the city and a number of key objectives were identified to focus on for the initial phase of the project as follows:-

- GP access data;
- Practice engagement;
- Patient engagement;
- Patient communications plan;
- Training; and
- Digital Support.

Ms. Thompson advised that the next phase of the access project would be to evaluate the various pilots underway and identify the areas which had worked and the evaluations and any best practice would be shared with partners. She advised that a patient communication exercise would also be carried out in the coming months to highlight the different roles available in general practice and the most appropriate use of service.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Watson and Ms. Thompson for their informative report and invited questions and comments from Members.

Councillor Heron commented that her GP had recently introduced a ring back service so that patients were not kept on hold for any length of time which was proving to be successful. She also referred to the lowest number of patients booking appointments online being from the Coalfields area and commented that this may be due to the aging population and broadband issues in the ward.

In response to a question from Councillor McDonough regarding what was being done to divert patients from going straight to their GP instead of using alternative provisions, Ms. Thompson advised that there were a number of projects being undertaken and one that would especially help relieve the pressure on GP services would be using the Community Pharmacists Consultancy Service. Pharmacists would be able to see patients and prescribe certain medications for them or refer them back to their GP if it was felt that was the more relevant diagnosis. The new service would be heavily promoted once everything was in place.

Other projects such as the minor ailments scheme and the UTI scheme would start to also help the pressure on GP services and as an ICB they had a number of pharmacy transformation schemes that were in the pipeline. In April, the ICB would take responsibility of commissioning the pharmacy, optometry and dental services and would then have more insight to the work these services were doing.

Giving an example of how the pharmacy consultancy service would work, Ms. Thompson advised that they were providing training on the care navigation process; so that patients were given a consistent message as to where they needed to be seen and by whom first. One of the targets that was coming out in the contracts soon would be that patients were not asked to ring back GP's; as they understood it was a real source of frustration for users.

In response to a further question from Councillor Bond regarding pharmacists already being under a lot of pressure and struggling with contracts they had going forward, Ms. Thompson advised that there was a mixture of contracts with pharmacists throughout the city but there was no limit to what they could dispense and funding was driven by the number of items that they did. She explained that there were also enhanced services that were commissioned by NHS England to provide things such as blood pressure monitoring, etc. but they did not commission those services as yet. Primary Care Networks were in a position to employ pharmacists to support them and carry out structured medication reviews of patients and they had 38 in Sunderland; one for each practice; offering an opportunity for pharmacists to work in a different way as highly skilled clinicians.

Councillor McDonough referred to a situation he had recently where a GP practice had been closed for training and patients were unable to be seen and asked if alternative provision could be made available in those instances. Ms. Thompson advised that it had been training in relation to safeguarding that had been city wide but there were alternative services available to residents such as the 111 service and there had been an alternative service which patients could access so she did not know how those had not been made available to patients on that day.

In response to comments from Councillor Usher regarding the use of app's, video, etc for the reordering of prescriptions and patient appointments, Ms. Thompson advised that they used E-Consult to undertake video appointments and this was available across all GP surgeries in the city. Patients could contact their surgery to discuss how to set up the E-Consult service.

Councillor Speding referred to a recent report by the Office for National Statistics which set out that residents were more likely to die from a respiratory disease in Sunderland than anywhere else in the country and asked if it was a hangover from CoVid or if it was down to residents not presenting at their GP early enough and whether it was a trend or something of concern that needed further investigation. Ms. Thompson commented that over the last few months they had set up specific respiratory hubs to direct patients to within the community. Mr. Watson commented that unfortunately Sunderland were at the wrong end of a lot of the indicators which could be linked to the historical heavy industry. He also advised that all of the plans that were now put in place had to demonstrate how they would impact on the health inequalities of the city and that hopefully through targeted investment they would see improvements being made.

In response to a query from Councillor Chisnall regarding the reliance on locums, Ms. Thompson explained that it was different in each practice but they had less reliance on them in Sunderland than other areas. She explained that they had carried out a lot of work to make practices, training practices, so they had more new GP's coming through the system.

Councillor Chisnall referred to the patient communication plan and asked how they planned to share that information and was informed that the ICB were developing a campaign at the moment around supporting patients to access the right care, giving information about which services they could access and offering alternatives to GP services. There was a lot of work promoting services available in Sunderland such as the enhanced access service and working with Healthwatch to try and get messages across, pitched at the right level, and not forgetting those who don't have access to online resources, so that residents could make an informed choice.

With regards to the Council's Local Plan and developments around the city, Councillor Speding asked if this was considered as part of the bigger picture and Ms. Thompson advised that it was an important part of looking at the GP landscape and the numbers of patient in areas. Where there were housing developments planned in an area they looked at the potential impact it could have on services but they did find that although there may be an increase in housing it was not relative to an increase in patients as they did not tend to move from the GP surgery they were already attending.

In a follow up question, Councillor Speding asked about other issues that had an impact on the health and wellbeing of residents in the city such as the numbers of takeaways in an area, etc. and was informed that a presentation was due to be given to the ICB from the Chief Executive of the Council on the new City Plan and what the proposals were for the city, where services needed to be located and help in raising issues they needed to take into future consideration. The first step was to link all of the plans from organisations and then agreeing an approach for the future.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Mr. Watson and Ms. Thompson for their attendance, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the progress to date as set out within the report be received and noted.

Annual Report 2022/23

The Scrutiny and Members' Support Coordinator submitted a report which attached the annual report of the Committee to be included as part of the overall Scrutiny Annual Report which was to be submitted to a future meeting of the Council.

(for copy report - see original minutes)

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer took Members through the report advising that the report provided a very brief snapshot of some of the main work undertaken by the Committee during the municipal year 2022/23.

He advised that the report had been written from the perspective of the Chairman of the Committee and would be submitted to a future meeting of the Council.

The Committee having fully considered the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that the report be approved to be included in the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2022/23 subject to the amendments as discussed.

Work Programme 2022/2023

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members' Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached the current work programme for the year and also provided an update on a number of potential topics, as raised by Members, for the Committee's consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr. Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, presented the report advising that the report included a number of potential topics to consider along with the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2022/23. He informed the Committee that this was the last meeting of the Committee

Members having considered the report and update, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the work programme, including amendments, and the update on topics for review during 2022/23, be received and noted.

Notice of Key Decisions

The Strategic Director of People, Communications and Partnerships submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28 day period from 15 March, 2023.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Cummings, Scrutiny Officer, having advised that if any further Members wished to receive further information on any of the items contained in the notice they should contact him directly, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that the Notice of Key Decisions be received and noted.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and participation.

(Signed) A. CHISNALL,
Chair.