

At a meeting of the HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in Committee Room 1 of the CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY, 4 JULY, 2023 at 5:30pm.

Present:-

Councillor Usher in the Chair

Councillors Graham-King, Hague, Hunter, Potts, Speding, Walton and M. Walker

Also in attendance:-

Nigel Cummings – Scrutiny Officer, Sunderland City Council

Pauline Fletcher – Senior Primary Care Manager – Dental Commissioning Lead

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

Graham King – Director of Adult Services and Chief Operating Officer of SCaS

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

Joanne Stewart – Principal Governance Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Gerry Taylor – Executive Director Health, Housing and Communities, Sunderland City Council

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 Bond, Burnicle, Heron and Jones

Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 28 March, 2023

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

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

Councillor Speding made an open declaration in Item 5 – Task and Finish Working Group : Challenges in Adult Social Care in Sunderland as his sister was a resident in a care home in the city.

NHS Dentistry Update

The Senior Primary Care Manager – Dental Commissioning Lead submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached a presentation that provided an overview of NHS Dentistry from national, regional and local perspectives.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Ms. Fletcher, Senior Primary Care Manager – Dental Commissioning Lead took Members through a presentation which covered a wide range of issues including:-

- NHS Commissioned Capacity;
- Pressures and Challenges;
- NHS Dental Contracts; and
- Local Actions.

(for copy presentation – see original minutes)

The Chairman thanked Ms. Fletcher for her informative presentation and invited questions and comments from Members.

In response to a query from Councillor Speding referring to the value of contracts and each Unit of Dental Activity (UDA) to practices, Ms. Fletcher advised that there was a legacy arrangement with a range of UDA rates across the city that averaged at around £30 per day; they also explained that this was not the only income that a dental practice received as they were paid a sum for a basket of services from the NHS. She commented that the sessional rates that they were looking to commission had been increased to try and improve the take-up.

Councillor Speding referred to the contracts that had been handed back to the NHS and commented that running as a private dental practice was much more lucrative to them than the NHS work. Ms. Fletcher explained that those that had been handed back were practices which had been delivering NHS services pre 2006 and had then been offered further contracts.

In response to how the NHS knew that children had free treatment, Ms. Fletcher advised that there had been a lot of media campaigns and the NHS website advised of this. She commented that the assumption was being made that because a lot of information was being published then it was reaching the right people; if there were other ways to get that communication to residents, she would welcome feedback from Members.

Councillor Speding commented that many years ago dental hygiene had been part of the school curriculum which he was not aware happened now and asked how the advice was now provided to young children; he also referred to the nineteen practices which provided an NHS service and asked where these were located? Ms. Fletcher informed the Committee that on the NHS UK website, users could enter their home postcode and it would bring up practices near to them; she was also happy to provide a list to Members for their information so that they could inform residents.

Ms. Gerry Taylor also commented that in relation to providing advice and guidance to school children; they were refreshing the dental health improvement strategy and they would be bringing a report to a future meeting of the Committee. They would be happy to work to prepare some dedicated communications around the issue.

Councillor Potts referred to the NHS website and commented that her colleague, Councillor Bond, had advised that it was very out of date with inaccurate information and asked if it would be possible to have a helpline for non-emergency queries. Ms. Fletcher advised that the best people to advise on their capacity and current position was the dental practices themselves which was why it had been a contractual requirement for them to update the system. She explained that there was a lot of

work ongoing behind the scenes so that the information was provided in a more user-friendly way.

In response to a further query from Councillor Potts regarding any success in Sunderland replacing the returned contracts, Ms. Fletcher advised that 9,000 of the UDA's handed back from the Washington contract had been commissioned between two other practices but there had been no interest in the other contract hand backs despite offering increased rates; this had been due to workforce recruitment and retention issues. The National Workforce Plan had been recently introduced and there was lots of work ongoing to try and get the workforce in place and then retain them on the NHS contract.

When asked if the money saved on the UDA's stayed local or if it was fed back to NHS England, Ms. Fletcher advised that the dental budget was ringfenced so money was retained within the region and was being used to support some of the shorter-term initiatives until they could recommission on the recurrent basis the activity needed.

Councillor Haque referred to attracting overseas dentists and asked if they required top up qualifications and the timeframe around providing that and was advised that a lot depended upon where the individual had undertaken their initial training. There had to be a performance list by equivalent assessment of the individual's skills and competency and if there were any gaps a support package was put in place to address them so that they would then meet the required standard.

In a follow up question, Councillor Haque asked if there were any incentives to retain staff once they had received top up training, and Ms. Fletcher advised that they had ran a pilot program in another area of the country offering a recruitment and retention premium to try and have staff remain for two to three years. The issue was being looked at nationally to see if there should be a tie-in, with an expectation for individuals to work within the NHS for a fixed time after any training, as currently this was not the case, and they were free to leave whenever they wished.

Councillor Walton commented on the alternatives that had been discussed for residents who found themselves unable to access NHS dental care and advised that he had direct experience of a practice that had stopped providing NHS care in 2022 and at that time he had not been provided with any information. He suggested that there could be quality information, almost a good practice guideline, that practices followed so that residents knew what their options were. Ms. Fletcher explained that when a full contract was returned they provided those communications but perhaps they needed to also provide it where there was only a reduction in an existing contract. This had been the situation at the Fulwell practice referred to and they could look to address this in future.

Councillor Walker reiterated that he would appreciate if dental practices could be asked to update the NHS website as it was not reflective of the services that were available to residents. Members were informed that practices had been required to update their website every 90 days but this had since changed and residents should be advised that calling their nearest practice was the best way to get the most up to date information, although she would raise the issue.

Councillor Hunter advised that a practice she was aware of had first of all agreed to hand back only the adult dental provision but then had taken the decision at the beginning of 2023 to also hand back the children provision and asked if contracts were separated between adult and children's services? Ms. Fletcher advised that there were no legacy contracts in Sunderland which were restricted, i.e. to only see children. The contract in question was a single contract for delivery over two sites and they had raised significant workforce recruitment and retention issues. Following extensive discussions, they agreed to hand back some of their general dental capacity so that they could try and recommission it but they continued to provide an urgent care service at their Fulwell site.

In response to a query from the Chairman as to who was responsible for ensuring that children were registered with a dentist, the Committee were informed that there was no registration and it was a demand led service; therefore it would be a case of any parent who wished for their child to be seen at a practice, contacting them directly.

When asked if there was an NHS requirement in terms of a dentist to population ratio, Ms. Fletcher advised there was not a standard ratio but that they had a responsibility to commission NHS dental care to meet the reasonable needs of the population. Dental Health colleagues were in the process of undertaking a refresh of the oral health needs assessment, which in conjunction with the ICB reviews, would inform commissioning priorities going forward.

In closing, Councillor Usher commented that it was obvious practices made more money through the private practice than through the NHS, irrespective of the increase in the UDA and Ms. Fletcher advised that private dentistry operated very differently. The NHS contract did need some reform and it was about more than just the money, such as some of the bureaucracy practices had to do and the level of oversight, etc. They were trying to understand what would incentivise practices to stay which could then inform local plans to improve retention and for the ICB to help influence the national dental reform.

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

2. RESOLVED that the information provided within the presentation be received and noted.

Task and Finish Working Group: Challenges in Adult Social Care in Sunderland

The Task and Finish Working Group submitted a report which set out the findings of the task and finish working group looking at the adult social care market in Sunderland.

(for copy report - see original minutes)

Mr. Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer took Members through the report which set out the context of the working group, the aims and terms of reference for the group and their findings and the eight recommendations to be agreed before the report was submitted to Cabinet.

Mr. Cummings also advised that subject to the Committee's agreement, Councillor Bond had requested the inclusion of a recommendation that the Council would consider the real living wage when tendering new contracts for social care services.

Mr. Graham King welcomed the report with the findings and recommendations from the Task and Finish Working Group. He commented that it was a good piece of work and a demonstration of the positive impact that scrutiny could have, showcasing what was available within social care in Sunderland. He looked forward to reporting back to the Scrutiny Committee at a future meeting as to how they were progressing against the recommendations.

Councillor Speding raised that social care was a statutory service provided by the Council, however, there were still some issues with the private sector and providers, and it was important how Councillors portray the social services picture to the public. Mr. King commented that the aim was to have as few people in residential care as possible, and therefore they would strive for alternatives, and extra care schemes were a good example of what else was available. One of the focuses, picked up as part of the review, was the funding arrangements for social care around commercial for profit, charitable and local trading companies, and Sunderland deliberately had a very mixed supply base so that they were not reliant on one sector provider.

Councillor Walton referred to discharge from hospital and asked if there were any formal protocols in place? Mr. King advised that there were a range of arrangements in place to handle the discharge to assess pathway, Sunderland followed the guidance and held weekly meetings to discuss customers on the pathway and the range of services to support that. In winter the service becomes extremely pressured, with people waiting in hospital to be discharged, but this was a national issue and not just one for Sunderland.

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

3. RESOLVED that the report be approved and submitted to Cabinet subject to the inclusion of the extra recommendation as discussed.

Work Programme 2023/2024

The Scrutiny, Mayoral and Members' Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which attached the proposed work programme for the year for consideration and agreement.

(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 2023/24. He informed the Committee that this was the first meeting of the Committee and topics could be continued to be added to the work programme as the year progressed.

Mr. Cummings advised he would email Members of the Committee for their views on the potential task and finish working groups; asking Members to indicate which

groups they would like to be included upon, before establishing the working group and making further arrangements.

Members having considered the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the range of topics and issues as set out in the development of the work programme for 2023/24, including task and finish topics, and any incorporated emerging issues as and when they arose throughout the forthcoming year, 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 14th and 20th June, 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) J. USHER,
Chair.