

HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Chair: Cllr John Usher

Vice-Chair: Cllr Beth Jones

Committee Members: Councillors Malcolm Bond, Chris Burnicle, Adele Graham-King, Ehtesham Haque, Juliana Heron, Catherine Hunter, Mel Speding, Peter Walton and Michael Walker.

As Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee I am delighted to be able to share with you the work the committee has undertaken during the year. People's health and wellbeing are extremely important as are the services that provide support and guidance and assist us all when we are unwell. With global events continuing to impact on everyday life and rising costs for fuel, utilities and food, pressures remain on health and social care services across the city. The annual report provides a summary of some of the issues looked at by the committee through its wide and varied work programme.

The Committee once again received the Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for 2022/23. The report explores the concept of the commercial determinants of health, its impact on health outcomes, and recommendations to address them. The report focuses on the main unhealthy commodity industries which impact on health, including food and drink, tobacco, alcohol, gambling, working conditions and benefits. The report provides several recommendations for a local public health approach and the committee will be interested to monitor progress in several areas detailed within the report. To this end the Committee received an update on the recently developed alcohol strategy looking at progress against key objectives.

The Sunderland Alcohol Strategy had been launched in July 2023 and sets out three objectives around strategy, prevention and early intervention and from that seven key priorities which have formed the basis of the partnership action plan. The Committee acknowledged that the action plan was a living document which would allow adjustment for emerging trends and allow partners to continually develop the action plan. On this Members queried the social changes post-covid and the rise in drinking at home, rather than in the more traditional public house setting, and if the strategy would be able to capture this, it was something our public health professionals would look to follow up on.

With access to NHS dentist services in the news over the last year, the Committee continues to monitor the NHS dentistry situation in Sunderland with the Dental Commissioning Lead in attendance at our meeting in July 2023. A wide range of issues were covered including NHS commissioned capacity, pressures and challenges, the NHS dental contract and local actions. Members raised concerns around access to NHS dentists in Sunderland and raised important issues around ensuring that quality information was provided to residents when practices ceased NHS provision. The Committee also requested that dental practices be asked to update the NHS website to ensure the information was up-to-date and accurate.

Suicide prevention is an extremely important issue, and the committee received an update on the whole systems approach to prevention in Sunderland. The development of a local Suicide Prevention Action Plan is recommended by government and the responsibility for such a plan and strategy lies with the local authority, through Sunderland's Health and Wellbeing Board. Members discussed a number of issues relating to suicide prevention including the suicide prevention partnership, learning from suicide attempts data, raising the profile of suicide prevention in the city and ensuring that new public building projects involved discussions around suicide prevention at the planning stages. Members of the Committee also had the opportunity to undertake suicide prevention training conducted by

Sunderland MIND as part of the further action on this issue, and this offer remains open to all Members.

From 31 January 2024 health scrutiny committees will no longer be able to formally refer matters to the Secretary of State for Health that relate to reconfigurations of local health services, as this power is removed. The Committee were briefed on the broader powers for the Secretary of State to intervene in local service reconfigurations and the process that replaces the former arrangements. Despite this change other aspects of health scrutiny remain unchanged, and Members were informed that the Committee's status as a statutory consultee on substantial variations still exists. Health and care providers will also still be required to engage with scrutiny committees as they currently do. It will be important that we continue to work both collaboratively and proactively with our health colleagues to observe the principles of best practice set out by the Department of Health and Social Care to ensure that the benefits of scrutiny continue to be realised.

With Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) now abolished and replaced with Integrated Care Partnerships, the Committee is keen to continue to foster the positive working relationships and dialogue with the local Integrated Care Board (ICB). The Committee, therefore, continues to receive performance updates from the ICB covering a range of issues including indicators relating to the key areas of Urgent Care; Planned Care; Cancer; and Mental Health. Members highlighted a number of issues around expansion of the Mental Health Support Team, performance against national indicators, waiting times and the proposed developments in urgent care. The Committee continues to acknowledge the fundamental role that Sunderland ICB has in the delivery of health services across the area and will continue to monitor and challenge, where appropriate, around performance.

The winter period remains a challenge for all facets of the health service and the Committee continues to take a critical interest in the winter resilience plans for the city. Members welcomed the establishment of 'Transfer of Care Hub' which looked to enable the quick discharge of patients from hospital to home or a community setting. Members also acknowledged the Covid and Flu vaccination programmes including cohort eligibility and campaign timings, as well as the interdependencies of the winter plan with other service developments. Winter planning will continue to feature on the Committee's work programme as an important issue to provide assurances that plans remain robust and fit for purpose.

Following inspection in June and August 2022 by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust (STSFT) was given an overall rating of 'Requires Improvement' from the previous rating of 'Good'. The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee were interested in seeking assurances from STFT that steps had been taken to address the actions highlighted in the CQC inspection report. Members received an initial presentation which provided information around the Trust's action plan and progress to date but Members felt that this did not provide the assurances required and requested more detailed information be submitted to the committee.

It is important that members, and the committee as a whole, are satisfied with the information provided and sometimes follow-up actions are required to fully scrutinise the issue under consideration. STFT submitted a more detailed action plan to the committee, and members were pleased to recognise the progress that had been made. STFT had made significant progress with only nine outstanding actions from 46 identifiable actions from the CQC, and the expectation was that these actions would be completed by 31 March 2024.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of myself and the committee, to thank Members, officers, partners and stakeholders who have continued to contribute and work with the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee. The City Plan and the Director of Public Health's Annual Report highlight the importance of health and the challenges that we face as

a city in addressing those fundamental health issues. The Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee will continue in its role to act as a critical friend to monitor and challenge service providers in the delivery of health provision across Sunderland.

Councillor John Usher
Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee

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