

**At a meeting of the HEALTH AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in Committee Room 1 of the CITY HALL, SUNDERLAND on TUESDAY, 27 FEBRUARY, 2024 at 5:30pm.**

**Present:-**

Councillor Usher in the Chair

Councillors Bond, Haque, Hunter, Jones, Speding, and Walton.

**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

Melanie Johnson, Director of Nursing Midwifery and Allied Health Professionals South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust,

David Noon – Principal Democratic Services Officer, Sunderland City Council

Boika Rechel – Public Health Consultant, Sunderland City Council

Karen Sheard – Deputy Director of Nursing, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

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

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Graham-King, Heron, and M. Walker.

**Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 30 January, 2024**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 30 January, 2024 (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

**Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)**

Item 4 – South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, CQC Action Plan.

Councillor Jones made an open declaration as an employee of the North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NECIC) and in her role as a commissioner of services identified in the report.

## **Change in Order of Business**

The Chair advised that he would be taking item 5 on the agenda (Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) Update and Review) at this juncture to allow the presenting Officer to leave thereafter.

## **Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) Update and Review**

The Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities submitted a report (copy circulated) which:-

- i) Presented the findings of the Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities (HHC) and Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) Steering Group in relation to Community Pharmacy provision, following the closure of three pharmacies and the reductions in opening hours of 100 hours pharmacies in Sunderland, in accordance with the NHS (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which added to and amended the 2013 Regulations.
- ii) Assured the Committee that the Executive Director of HHC, supported by the PNA Steering Group, had considered the potential implications of the closures and reduction in hours of pharmacies in Sunderland. Both were satisfied that the closures did not leave a significant gap in pharmaceutical services in Sunderland and therefore a supplementary statement to the PNA was not required.
- iii) Updated the Committee on the implications of recent pharmacy closures on the status of the current Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA), and subsequent recommendations following a recent PNA update at the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) in December 2023.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Boika Rechel took Members through the report and addressed questions and comments thereon.

Councillor Hunter referred to paragraph 3.3 of the report regarding the closure of the three pharmacies, and advised Ms Rechel that she was also aware of 2 additional closures during the last 12 months (Boots attached to the Springwell Health Centre and Lloyds at the Forge in Pallion). In response, and also in relation to a further enquiry from Councillor Haque, Ms Rechel advised that those closures probably postdated the most recent reporting period. The pharmacies were private business and would make business decisions on opening hours etc based on issues such as demand. It was true to say that business hours in relation to the pharmacies in the Barnes Ward had reduced significantly. One aspect picked up via Healthwatch was that the communications from pharmacies to customers in relation to any changes were generally poor. Gerry Taylor added that the Council had no control over the business decisions of the pharmacies. The pharmaceutical needs assessment was an ongoing process. If significant changes were occurring, she would, as the Council's Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities, supported by the PNA Steering Group, assess the potential impact on Sunderland residents and make a recommendation to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Walton, Ms Rechel advised that Healthwatch had confirmed that no significant concerns had been raised from residents in respect of the changes.

Councillors Bond and Speding referred to paragraph 4.7 and expressed concern that there was no access to community pharmacy services within the Coalfield during most of the extended GP hours on weekday evenings, and generally on Sunday and weekday evenings. Councillor Bond questioned what happened if people required urgent access to antibiotics during these periods. Councillor Speding stated that prior to this, the Coalfields had always enjoyed access to an out of hours services and believed that this Committee should have the ability to scrutinise the decisions of the Health and Wellbeing Board in this regard.

In response, the Committee was advised of the mitigating measures available in the Coalfield area as detailed in paragraphs 5.5 to 5.9 of the report. In addition, details of the nearest 24/7 pharmacy could be obtained by calling the 111 Service.

The Chairman referred to the statement in paragraph 5.2 of the report that Sunderland continued to have 4 former 100-hour pharmacies, all of which had reduced their hours, and were now delivering between 72 and 88 hours a week. He asked if this could be taken as an indication that there may have been an over provision? Ms Rechel replied that this was possible given that pharmacies operated in a self-regulating market.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Ms Rechel for her report, and it was:-

2. RESOLVED that the information within the report be received and noted.

### **South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust – CQC Action Plan**

The Deputy Director of Nursing, South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided the Committee with a further update on the Foundation Trust's action plan following inspection by the Care Quality Commission.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Melanie Johnson took Members through the report advising that the CQC identified 46 actions for the Trust in its final report in February 2023, following inspections undertaken in June and August 2022 which had resulted in the Trust receiving an overall rating of 'Requires Improvement' from the previous rating of 'Good'. As a result, the Trust developed an Action Plan which included must and should do actions to enable it to return to a position where it could re-establish its previous rating as 'Good'.

The Trust had taken a cautious approach in aiming to have completed all the outstanding actions by 31 March 2024, with no further extensions beyond this date. Ms Johnson stated that it was expected that all actions would be completed by this date. The report was fully set out and she would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Johnson and Ms Sheard for their report and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Walton, Ms Johnson advised that one to one maternity and neonatal care was extremely important. While the trust would continue to strive to reach 100% compliance, it was seen as acceptable that one to one care was now provided to over 90% of women. Compliancy would be dependent on staffing. There were currently only 4 vacant midwifery posts while this time last year that figure had been 20 posts.

In response to a further question from Councillor Walton regarding what 4 vacancies look like as a percentage of the workforce, Ms Johnson advised that she would need to provide the exact figure following the meeting however it was a case of 4 vacancies in an establishment of approximately 150 midwives.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Bond regarding whether the Care Quality Commission were planning to inspect any other aspects of the Trust's work, Ms Johnson advised that if they were she would be unaware as inspections by the CQC were unannounced. The Trust continued to have bi-monthly feedback meetings with the CQC who advised that they had no cause for concern. In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Bond, Ms Johnson confirmed that the CQC would definitely undertake an inspection if 'alarm bells were ringing' for them. The CQC retained the absolute right to inspect all Trusts or any of their particular departments.

Councillor Speding welcomed the report and the comprehensive implementation of the action plan. He noted however that the action that 'the trust must implement an effective system to ensure patients receive timely medicines reconciliation' was still in progress. Ms Johnson confirmed that at the time of writing the report, progress wasn't strong enough in terms of that aspect of the Action Plan.

The Chairman also welcomed the report together with the progress made and asked if the information was shared with the Trust's staff members. Ms Johnson confirmed that it was.

Councillor Jones referred to the Mental Health Strategy and asked who had it been developed for? Ms Johnson replied that it had been developed in response to the CQC's recommendation that 'the trust must ensure there is effective oversight of the quality and safety of care provided to patients with mental health needs.' The focus of its development had been the patients in the Trust's care, but it also needed to be both patient and staffing facing. As part of its development the Trust had been working with patients' groups in this regard.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Jones, Ms Johnson advised that the post of Learning Disabilities Team Manager was a recently established role, funded by the Trust, following recommendations arising from the Inspection. The Trust already had two Learning Disability Nurses on the establishment and the Team Manager post had been created to support the nurses in carrying out their role. It was an area of work that the Trust wanted to expand.

Councillor Jones stated she was mindful of the announce from the NHS Chief Executive of the rollout of 'Martha's Rule' in hospitals across England from April,

enabling patients and families to seek an urgent review if their condition deteriorated. The 'patient safety initiative' was set to be initially rolled out to at least 100 NHS sites and she asked Ms Jones if the Trust was likely to apply to be one of the sites? Ms Johnson replied that while the letter from the NHS Chief Executive had only just arrived, it was likely that the Trust would apply as it already operated a similar scheme called 'Call for Concern.'

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

3. RESOLVED that the report and the progress being made on the Foundation Trust's action plan following inspection by the Care Quality Commission be received and noted.

### **Water Quality in Sunderland**

The Executive Director of Health, Housing and Communities submitted a report (copy circulated) which following the recently published report by the UK Health Security Agency into the outbreak of gastro-intestinal illness in participants at the World Triathlon Event, provided the Committee with an overview of water management in the UK, including legislation governing water quality, the organisations involved and where responsibilities lay.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Nigel Cummings presented the report advising that its submission resulted from Councillor Bond's request to the Committee in the aftermath of the publication of the UK Health Security Agency report on the World Triathlon event held in Sunderland during summer 2023.

In summary, Mr Cummings advised that water quality and the management of waterways was extremely important and involved a raft of legislation and a number of regulatory bodies with specific roles in this. Importantly the Environment Agency were responsible for monitoring the quality of bathing water around the English coastline, including both Seaburn and Roker beaches.

The Council's primary role was around coastal protection and managing the risk of coastal change on its stretch of the coastline through inspection and maintenance. The outbreak of Norovirus at the World Triathlon Event had been attributed to the swim element of the event however swimming in open water was recognised as having risks attached to it. Even with testing this only provided a snapshot of a moment in time and with tidal movements could quickly change. Also, adverse weather conditions could impact on this.

The UKHSA report provided some recommendations including prompt notification of any participant illness, the importance of a coordinated media response, the risks of open water swimming should be made aware to all participants including guidance to minimise the risks, reminders around hand hygiene and not participating if suffering from a GI illness.

The Chairman thanked Mr Cummings for presenting the report and invited questions and comments from the Committee.

Councillor Bond commented that while the report referred specifically to the Triathlon, it should be noted that 3 days prior to the event, testing on Roker Beach showed that E.coli was 7 times the minimum level to get into the second lowest category and that Enterococcus was 'on the button'. Paragraph 2.1 of the report basically confirmed that competitors fell ill because they were swimming in the sea.

With regard to paragraph 3.3 and the reference to E.coli and Enterococci being significant indicators of sewage, Councillor Bond stated that this was confirmed on the Defra website and there were numerous papers over the years that confirmed the presence of Norovirus within sewage. Given that Norovirus was present in 95% of sewage samples, if you are testing for E.coli and Enterococci you are in effect also testing for Norovirus.

With regard to paragraph 3.4, Councillor Bond advised that Professor Ford of Leeds University, an international specialist on the effect of effluent on the marine environment, had contended that the samples taken on Roker Beach on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2023 had not been tested within the 24 hour period. As a result, the samples would have degraded and therefore the levels recorded for 27<sup>th</sup> July would not be accurate and in fact would likely have been much higher.

Councillor Bond stated that he found it difficult to understand paragraph 4.2. It made no reference to the testing undertaken on the 27<sup>th</sup> July. It was also unclear who had advised that bathing on the 11<sup>th</sup> September was not to be advised. He strongly suspected that it was Northumbria Water because the testing data on the last page of the report showed there was no testing undertaken on that date and presumably Northumbrian Water knew that they were discharging raw sewage at that time and had informed the Environment Agency accordingly. He also questioned whether given the high levels of E.coli and Enterococci in the tests taken on the 27<sup>th</sup> July, Northumbrian Water had also discharged sewage on this date and failed to inform the Environment Agency.

With regard to paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5, it was clear that triathletes had contracted Norovirus by swimming in the sea. The UK Health Security Agency reported that 50% of competitors "knew" that they had swallowed sea water at the event. Councillor Bond contended that it was more than likely that almost all competitors would have done so whilst swimming the 800metre course, therefore making recommendations regarding hand to mouth hygiene measures superfluous.

In conclusion Councillor Bond contended that the sole point of paragraph 4.7 was to claim that the Council had no responsibility regarding the undertaking of water quality testing. He believed that given the long-standing concerns regarding water quality, the Council should commission an independent survey of the whole system. He also expressed concern that the report failed to address the results of the testing undertaken on the 27<sup>th</sup> July and the case of two members of the rowing club who contracted E.coli through ingesting river water at South Hylton. If, as reported, there had been no discharge from the septic tank at South Hylton, then this would lead you to believe that it had come from the sewage works at Washington. Whilst the report was fine in as far as it went, Councillor Bond stated that it left him with more questions than answers.

Gerry Taylor replied that Councillor Bond made a valid point in that the report set out an overview of water management in the UK, the organisations involved and where responsibilities lay. It was intended as an introductory piece. It was for the Committee to decide now if they wanted further information or to speak to representatives of the organisations involved including Northumbrian Water or the Environment Agency.

Councillor Speding suggested that the Committee should form a working group to which these representatives were invited so that Members could ask questions and get answers in respect of the concerns over water quality which were long standing. The events around the Triathlon had only served to bring to issue to wider public attention.

Discussion ensued and it was acknowledged that the Council had no powers in the matter and could only invite the representatives of other agencies to attend in the hope that they would engage. Council Bond reiterated his belief that if the responsible bodies were not prepared to engage and provide answers, then the Council had its own responsibility to commission experts to undertake an independent survey of the whole system of water quality management. The Council had a duty of care to its residents and at the very least needed to understand the extent of the problem.

The Committee agreed to establish a working group to consider the issues raised, which given the time constraints around the impending local government elections was unlikely to be operational before the first meeting of the new municipal year. It was agreed however that in the meantime, approaches be made to the responsible bodies to assess the extent to which they would be willing to engage, with a view to them attending an initial meeting with the Committee prior to the new municipal year.

4. RESOLVED that the information within the report be received and noted and that a Working Group be established to further consider the issue of Water Quality in Sunderland

### **Work Programme 2023/24**

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which briefed members on the development of the Committee's work programme for the municipal year 2023/24 and appended a copy of the programme for Members' consideration.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Nigel Cummings, Scrutiny Officer presented the report and briefed the Committee on the current position regarding those items already scheduled on the work programme and those waiting to be programmed in on a suitable date.

Councillor Walton asked if any date had been set for the next meeting of the Integrated Care Working Group? Mr. Cummings advised that he was due to meet with representatives from the ICB the following day with a view to progressing the matter.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

### **Notice of Key Decisions**

The Scrutiny, Members and Mayoral Support Coordinator submitted a report (copy circulated) which provided Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Notice of Key Decisions for the 28-day period from the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2024.

(for copy report – see original minutes)

The Committee was advised that if Members had any issues to raise or required further detail on any of the items included in the notice, (that were within the purview of the Committee), they should contact Mr Cummings, Scrutiny Officer for initial assistance.

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

There being no further items of business, the Chairman closed the meeting having thanked members and officers for their attendance and contributions.

(Signed) J. USHER,  
Chairman.