

COMMUNITY HOUSING AND HEALTH (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

15 SEPTEMBER 2020

PRESENT:

Councillors Eagland (Chairman), Evans (Vice-Chair), S Wilcox (Vice-Chair), Baker, Ball, Birch, Leytham, Parton-Hughes, Silvester-Hall, Tapper and M Wilcox.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors Cox, Eadie, Lax and Pullen attended the meeting).

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Binney and Humphreys

31 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests.

32 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and subject to typographical amendments, were agreed as a correct record. It was asked if there had been any updates regarding the George Bryan Centre and it was noted that nothing had been received. It was also asked if there had been any progress regarding the poor communication between primary and secondary care. It was reported that these were matters that would be dealt with at County level at the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be signed as a correct record.

33 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was discussed and the Head of Regulatory Services, Housing & Wellbeing requested that an item be added on the Housing Assistance Policy that was due to be updated later in the year. It was noted that it had been agreed to consider an item on Stroke Pathways as the County Council had agreed for this to be dealt with at a local level and it was agreed for this to be investigated further and ask for the information from the County Council.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted and updated where required.

34 STANDING ITEMS

The Committee discussed the Healthy Staffordshire work programme and gave the District Council's representative, Councillor Leytham, requests for items to be raised and reported back.

The George Bryan centre and the uncertainty around its reopening was discussed and it was felt that the centre would be more vital as the mental health burden was increasing due to Covid-19. It was also felt that children were suffering more due to the effects of lockdown and now trying to return to school.

It was asked if updates on the changes to Samuel Johnson and Sir Robert Peel Community Hospitals could be requested as they too were vital for residents.

There were concerns that, due to the pandemic, there was a large backlog of hospital appointments for other treatments for example, asthma clinics, and there was concern there were no actions to change this. It was reported that GP surgeries were working a triage telephone service and seeing who needed to be seen. It was noted that Practice Nurses were doing all they could to reduce the backlog.

RESOLVED: That the items discussed be raised by the District Council representative at the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee

35 DELIVERY OF DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS (DFGS)

The Committee received a report updating them on the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), performance and expenditure of the budget in 2019/2020 plus an overview of delivery during quarter one of 2020/2021 and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. It also provided information on the work being done to drive performance and the improvements to date.

It was reported that Officers had been working with the countywide SILIS Partnership to ensure the contractor, Millbrook Healthcare Ltd delivered the service satisfactorily following a period of under-performance. It was noted that to help with performance management the Partnership commissioned the Director of Cherrywhite Consultancy Services as Project Manager to oversee the whole of the contract and support service improvement. It was also noted that Lichfield also retained Cherrywhite's services to continue to manage the cases and DFG delivery on its behalf, which means that cases could be closely monitored and any issues across the partnership can be escalated swiftly.

It was reported that Millbrook had brought in a number of improvement measures including a new IT case monitoring system which used by the majority of home improvement agencies as well as a staff restructure and revised complaints system.

There was a request to amend the first recommendation to reflect that the pandemic was still occurring and so suggested to be stated as 'ongoing challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic'. It was noted that it should reflect post-lockdown so was agreed to be amended to that. The Committee did feel that performance issues were being experienced before the pandemic and although a challenge, did not give just explanation for all the issues.

It was asked why performance figures showed LDC underperforming on larger grant applications and it was reported that it was dependant on who applied and for what. It was noted that the reporting of KPIs had not been completely accurate but it was hoped this would change with the new IT system. It was also reported that the grant process was more complex when applications are for larger home adaptations for children, such as extensions that often include additional works and are therefore more difficult to manage and contained elements outside of the contractor's control such as obtaining planning permission.

Members recognised the work Lichfield District Council had undertaken to try and improve performance and were also pleased that there was now a project manager overseeing the contract. When asked, it was confirmed that the cost of the project manager was being covered by the district council out of the grant funding from the Government to deliver DFGs. Some Members did not agree with this as it was not the fault of the District Council that performance was not as expected and felt it should be for Millbrook as well as Staffordshire County Council, who were party to the contract to bear the cost. It was confirmed that the Partnership had employed Cherrywhite to project manage the contract and the District Council had employed them further to manage the cases in Lichfield and the payment was not affecting the level of grants available. It was noted that there was no provision in the contract

to recover the costs. There was also the view that the project manager would be able to give quantifiable information and so would give value and was cost effective compared to continued low performance.

It was suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to better understand the whole process starting with the county council Front Door through to application and on to completion of work.

It was noted that, for adults, it was a stringent means test for DFGs so it was normal to get a high level of drop out of applications especially in affluent areas.

It was reported that both Millbrook have stated that they currently hope to be able to catch up with delivery to be able to commit the DFG budget this year.

There was a view expressed by a Committee Member that apologies should be received from the organisations that had shown poor performance and thorough questions asked before considering the contract again. There were also views that the Partnership should be investigating if there were any break clauses in the contract that could be enacted if clear performance outcomes were not met. It was noted that the Partnership had served Improvement Notices and that had instigated the measures put in place to date. It was felt that there should be an investigation as to why Millbrook did not action all audit recommendations before being served the Improvement Notice.

RESOLVED: (1) That views on the delivery of DFGs in 2019/20, the measures that the council and SILIS Partnership are taking to drive performance, and the improvements that have happened to date be noted; and

(2) That the challenges that Millbrook have encountered post lockdown, the high demand for the service and the volume of cases in the pipeline be noted.

(The Meeting closed at 7.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN