

Minutes of the Adult Social Care Select Committee

**Thursday 7th March, 2024 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2, at the Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor L Johnson (Chair)

Councillor J Elliott (Vice-Chair)

Councillors A Aston, S Bothul, R Collins, A Davies, M Hanif, A Hopwood, A Qayyum and C Sullivan.

Dudley MBC Officers:

M Bowsher (Director of Adult Social Care), M Spittle (Head of Service (Access and Prevention)), N Boerm-Hammond (Call Centre Manager) and H Mills (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillor M Rogers (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care)

41 **Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor T Crumpton.

42 **Appointment of Substitute Member**

No substitutes were appointed for this meeting.

43 **Declaration of Interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

44 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 2024, be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

45 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

46 **Service Update from Dudley Telecare**

A report of the Director of Adult Social Care was submitted to provide an update regarding the implementation and impact of the Telecare Charging Policy and the procurement of the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) as part of the analogue to digital switchover.

An overview of the work that had been undertaken over the last twelve-month period was outlined, which included the implementation of the new charging strategy, the office move from Harbour Buildings to Parsons Street, and the procurement of the new alarm receiving centre.

In referring to the new charging system it was reported that this had been conducted in two phases. Phase one was implemented from 1st April 2023 which saw the cost of the service rise from £16.30 to £21.30. Phase two was implemented from October 2023, which saw the implementation of charging for council tenants, with a reduction of 50% until 31st March 2024. It was reported that there had been a 29% decrease in connections to date since the implementation of the charging strategy. However, it was advised that this figure included the removal of telecare hardwired from council properties that had never been used.

It was reported that for 2024/25 a maximum shortfall of £421k in income was predicted and savings would be achieved from the price increase and from actively promoting the service to new customers, which had not previously been undertaken. There were currently two vacant posts within the team, which due to the recruitment freeze would not be filled and would therefore achieve a further saving.

An update on the procurement process was provided. Members were advised that the aborted tender in December had increased the delay to the Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) upgrade and new authorisation to procure, with optional appraisal, had now been completed and considered by the Spending Controls Group and procurement was envisaged to be completed by the end of April 2024.

The risks as a result of the analogue to digital switchover were highlighted, in particular the need to ensure customers remained connected at all times and to upskill the workforce ahead of the switchover in portal management, equipment and peripherals. A knowledge hub had been introduced to engage with the workforce, external professionals, and carers to upskill and educate them in Dudley's offer. Work continued to support independence through technology, with the support of the Integrated Care Board and three neighbouring LA's and funding had been granted to commission Connected Care Services (Ethelcare) as the contracted supplier of the new TEC to support people to remain living independently at home.

The support that was provided to other Council services was outlined together with proposed future developments for the Telecare Service.

Following the presentation, Members of the Select Committee asked questions, made comments and responses were provided where necessary as follows:-

- Arising from a question raised by the Chair with regards to what help and support had been offered to those residents that no longer used the telecare service due to the price increase, it was commented that affected residents were supported to help ensure that all eligible benefits were being claimed, that Council Tax reductions had been applied, as well as liaising with next of kin to explore all feasible options for the service to continue to be provided. It was considered that there were very low numbers of residents that had exited the service, due to the cost increase, if the service was necessary for them.

- In response to a question from Councillor A Aston with regards to the support provided to those residents that no longer used the service and if data on those residents continued to be captured, it was stated that a follow-up review was undertaken for all residents that had exited from the service on a 12 week and 6 month basis. However, as the Call Centre Manager also managed the front door access, they were also able to check and follow a resident's journey.
- Arising from further questions from Councillor A Aston with regards to how Dudley's charges compared with private organisations who provided a similar service and if the service was constrained to the Dudley Borough, it was commented that a cost comparison exercise had been undertaken prior to the cost increase. Dudley continued to be competitively priced and were the lowest cost provider in offering a complete end to end service. Whilst it was considered that some aspects of the Telecare Service could be offered across the Black Country, with the exception of falls response due to the time it may take to travel to other areas outside of the Dudley Borough, they had been reluctant for this to be pursued until a robust digital platform system was in place.
- In responding to questions raised by Councillor M Hanif, it was stated that full assessments were undertaken upon request to establish a person's needs and to discuss available support options. There were no additional charges applied and a package would be designed to meet individual needs. The challenges faced by the service were considered to be ensuring that the service was fully managed; the change over from analogue to digital platform; and the importance of ensuring all staff were appropriately trained in providing a critical service, which was a lifeline for some residents. A copy of the Telecare Service brochure would be provided for Elected Members to share with residents and to provide support should residents contact them directly with regards to the service.
- In response to a question raised by Councillor A Davies with regards to the reasoning as to why the Tender was aborted in December, it was commented the procurement process had to be reviewed to identify what had prevented partners from coming to Dudley.

- Councillor A Aston referred to the falls response service that was previously provided by West Midlands Fire Service, which had ceased due to concerns that non-clinically trained staff were put at risk by moving a person that had fallen, and questioned if the same risk applied for the Council. It was stated that response staff had been trained and had worked alongside Ambulance staff and clinicians to triage patients and were trained to ensure that a patient was lifted safely. Should there be any concerns, an ambulance would always be called.

Resolved

- (1) That the impact of the charging policy be noted.
- (2) That the awareness and impact of the analogue to digital switchover, be noted.
- (3) That the plan to increase the uptake of technologies to ensure individuals were supported through the digital offer, be noted.
- (4) That a copy of the Telecare Service brochure be provided to Members of the Committee for them to share with local residents and to support them with any enquiries received.

47 Recommendations and developments from ADASS Principal Social Worker Practice Review Programme of Dudley Adult Social Care

Members considered a report of the Director of Adult Social Care on the external practice review report highlighting the key strengths and areas for improvement with actions to meet requirements.

In presenting the report, the Director of Adult Social Care commented that the Practice Review was the second part of the regional Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance Exercise that took place during November/December 2023. The Practice Review was a voluntary exercise to help with preparations for a CQC Inspection, which it was reported could happen at any time with three weeks' notice. The review focussed on 20 case files which had been selected by the Directorate and the individual assessors (Social Workers) responsible for those cases were interviewed by representatives of the review panel. Each case was then scored by the regional team in the same way the cases would be during an official CQC Inspection.

The Practice Review ranked the 20 cases as follows:-

Outstanding 25%

Good 60%

Requires Improvement 15.5%

Inadequate 0.5%

It was reported that the results referred to above were the strongest set of results from a practice review undertaken in the West Midlands to date and that improvement would continue to be overseen by the Council's Continuous Development Group.

The Director of Adult Social Care advised that preparations were now ongoing to identify and prepare 50 cases, in readiness for when a CQC Inspection was announced. The Director of Adult Social Care also advised that as part of the inspection, the inspectorate may wish to speak with Members of the Select Committee and that Care Act Awareness Training was available online for any Member who wished to refresh their knowledge.

Members commented positively on the work that had already been completed by the Directorate in preparation for an inspection and acknowledged the need for cases to be regularly reviewed.

Councillor A Aston referred to the comments in the report with regards to the concerns that had been highlighted by practitioners in relation to silo working and requested assurance that the initiatives that had been put into place were working to breakdown silos. In responding, the Director of Adult Social Care outlined some of the initiatives that had been implemented to address the issue, which included the establishment of a Resolution Panel to jointly consider cases; a Myth Busting Exercise, where staff had the opportunity to share their perception of other teams and the establishment of six-weekly staff events that were arranged for different services to showcase what they did, which provided engagement opportunities, networking and to build and strengthen relationships. It was recognised that to eliminate silo working entirely would require ongoing relationship building and effective communication and that measures had been implemented to encourage a more joint working approach.

Resolved

- (1) That the report on the external Practice Review, together with the key strengths and areas for improvement, be noted.

48 **Progress Tracker and Future Business**

Resolved

That the Adult Social Care Select Committee Progress Tracker and Future Business, be noted.

49 **Questions under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

50 **Comments by the Chair**

This being the final meeting of the Select Committee during the 2023/24 municipal year, the Chair expressed his thanks to Officers and Committee Members for their continued support.

The meeting ended at 6.50pm

CHAIR