

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, ADULTS AND HEALTH COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee held in the Luttrell and Wyndham Rooms, County Hall, Taunton, TA1 4DY, on Wednesday 8 March 2023 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr R Woods (Chair), Cllr G Oakes (Vice-Chair), Cllr H Bruce, Cllr B Ferguson, Cllr A Govier, Cllr A Hendry, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr E Pearlstone and Cllr F Smith

Other Members present: Cllr N Cottle, Cllr D Denton, Cllr T Robbins, Cllr C Sully, Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr S Coles, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr M Lovell, Cllr S Osborne, Cllr B Revans, Cllr H Shearer, Cllr G Slocombe and Cllr M Stanton

Apologies for absence:

Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

- 12 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 26 January 2023** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

- 13 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

There were no public questions.

- 14 **Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee Work Programme** - Agenda Item 5

The Committee considered and noted the Work Programme and requested the following additions: -

- That the Working Group on Mental Health Services and Workforce Planning be established ,
- Working relationships between Adult Social Care and the LCN's and how they will work,
- Dental Services -need an update since this has been outstanding for over a year,
- Update on the Armed Forces Covenant,

- 15 **Southwest Ambulance Service Response times** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee had a comprehensive report from South Western Ambulance Service covering the performance since they last reported to the Committee in 2019.

Activity in the Somerset area saw substantial increases in the summer of 2021 following the lifting of lockdown restrictions. In July 2021 incidents increased to

above 310 per day. After this level of unprecedented activity, which was replicated across a large proportion of the South West region, activity levels have reverted to more sustained levels and much closer to the activity SWASFT were seeing in the period prior to COVID. Activity in December 2022 was an exception, with activity rising to over 300 incidents per day. Similar increases were seen across most areas of the region, with winter pressures and cases of COVID and flu being a factor to the uplift.

The Service is continuing with an extensive Somerset recruitment programme for Paramedics and Emergency Care Assistants and have recently recruited an additional four New Zealand paramedics following a successful recruitment programme back in 2019. Similar to other Somerset NHS providers recruiting people is challenging at times, especially qualified clinicians. This continues to be an absolute focus for recruitment teams for this year and in recent months the Service has recruited a number of Graduate Paramedics and Emergency Care Assistants into Somerset.

The Service has recently recruited to a new Hospital Ambulance Liaison Officer (HALO) role which covers both Musgrove Park Hospital and Yeovil District Hospital seven days a week. The role is to provide a dedicated link to two Somerset acute hospitals in managing periods of escalation and also working alongside Emergency Department colleagues on systems/process and new ways of working to improve the handover process between crews and local Emergency Departments. The dedicated three person team are SWASFT clinicians who provide leadership and support whilst carrying out this role across both sites and it is anticipated this role will be key in developing further improvements in flow into Emergent Departments and the overall patient experience.

In 2022 there was a three year extension to Somerset GP service which provides a dedicated GP within the county seven days a week. During the weekend period there are two GPs working alongside operational crews responding to a variety of incidents within the county whilst supporting patients in the community and reducing hospital admissions. This scheme is unique to Somerset and has been a great example of multidisciplinary team working within the organisation.

The Service continues to work with system partners and the ICS on new ways of working and new services which support care in the community and reduce the impact on Emergency Department admissions and acute capacity. These have started to redirect to other services including the new Falls Service and Rapid Response from our patient waiting queue which supports a more appropriate and timely response to some of our lower acuity patients with the benefit of freeing up operational resources for higher acuity life-threatening calls. Operational crews are also referring into the existing and new services

when attending a patient at home or in the community as part of our 'See and Treat'.

The Service is continuing to replace operational fleet of vehicles in line with the national NHS procurement framework and a number of new FIAT type vehicles are now operational across the county with the remaining Mercedes vehicles being replaced later this year.

The Committee acknowledged the challenge over the past few years and recognised the pressure the Ambulance Service was under. The response times to Category 1 and 2 incidents was discussed and how the decisions were made to allocate the correct category and therefore response time. It was confirmed that triage is based on the greatest risk to life being Category 1 incidents. The Committee were interested to know why it was proving so difficult to recruit permanent staff in Somerset. It was recognised that some experienced staff chose to work for agencies on zero hours contracts so they can have greater flexibility in their working commitment. There is also a finite pool of graduates and Somerset struggles to compete with the larger cities and is regarded as somewhat remote.

The Committee challenged the funding and achieving National Standards. In the report in 2019 it was noted that an extra £19m was going to solve the problem back then and yet the figures appear to show little change. This was down to the COVID Pandemic and the unprecedented demand on the service over Christmas 2020.

There was a concern that people might lose confidence in the service when they are advised to drive patients to hospital in private cars because of delays in getting an Ambulance out. The Committee were assured that this was in rare cases and the advice was to 'only if it was safe to do so'.

The Committee sought reassurance that the service was regularly reviewed and this assurance was given.

The Somerset Scrutiny for Policies Adults and Health Committee:

- **Thanked the Ambulance Service for the detailed report and answering some challenging questions,**
- **Asked that they be given an update in six months' time.**

16 Somerset Hyperacute Stroke Services - Consultation - Agenda Item 7

The Committee had the comprehensive document covering the full scope of the public consultation on Stroke Services in Somerset. This consultation started on 27 January 2023. The vision behind the consultation is to ensure : "Stroke patients in Somerset will receive timely acute interventions and receive access to world-class services, regardless of where they live."

The ageing population and rurality of Somerset are two of the biggest challenges. The current prevalence of stroke in Somerset is higher than the national average at 2.38%, compared to an England-wide prevalence rate of 1.8%. This equates to around 1600 people per year. There are currently 13,991 stroke survivors registered with a Somerset GP.

Most people with a suspected stroke are admitted via a 999 call to either Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton or Yeovil District Hospital, in Yeovil. Journey times are a challenge due to the rurality of the county.

The full document ran to 294 pages setting out all the options and the reasons why only two options were now being offered in the public consultation. These options were proposals to:-

- Deliver hyper acute stroke services at one hyper acute stroke unit located at Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton,
- Deliver acute stroke services at either:
 - (i) Two acute stroke units at both Yeovil District Hospital and Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton; or
 - (ii) One acute stroke unit, which would need to be located at the same hospital as the hyper acute stroke unit proposed to be Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton.

Public consultation gives people the opportunity to provide their views. The ICS (Integrated Care Service) wants to understand what the potential upsides and downsides are to the proposal from a range of perspectives. This will help to plan the solution. There may be something not yet thought of, or an aspect that needs to be considered further.

The Committee discussed the proposals and challenged some of the rationale that resulted in only two options being recommended for the public consultation. The fact that the Senior Stroke Consultant was about to retire from Yeovil District Hospital was an event that could and should have been anticipated and planned for. That fact that this consultation was taking place may well have had an influence on potential candidates who may have felt they were joining a diminishing team that was not a priority.

There was some concern about the impact any decision may have on neighbouring hospitals outside of Somerset. The Committee were assured that Dorset are undertaking a similar exercise and are aware of the options being examined in Somerset.

The Committee challenged some of the data in the report. One example was the way physiotherapy services in Yeovil Hospital were noted. The fact that the physiotherapist at Yeovil were not dedicated Stroke practitioners did not mean there was no physiotherapy at Yeovil rather that they covered more generalist roles.

There was also an assertion that the length of stay was reduced in a specialist hyperacute unit yet the report to did not appear to have evidence to justify that.

The Committee were concerned that there did not appear to be a direct communication to Somerset County Councillors and detailed information of what events were taking place across the county so that Councillors can encourage participation. They felt that 500 responses since 27th January appeared to be rather low.

The Somerset Scrutiny for Policies Adult sand Health Committee:

- **Agreed to look out for communications and encourage constituents to attend open meeting, complete the on-line survey and given feedback to the consultation.**

17 Supporting Carers in Somerset - Update from Workshop - Agenda Item 8

The Committee had a presentation covering the activities undertaken since the Workshop in September 2021 which focussed on the support given to Carers in Somerset and to seek suggestions for wider support and improvements.

The 2011 Census shows that there are approximately 6 million unpaid carers nationally. In Somerset, 58,000 have identified themselves as carers and there are many more that are not known about. It is important to recognise and value the contributions that carers make to communities and Somerset County Council want to make sure it is supporting them to carry out their caring role and to achieve their aims and ambitions.

Somerset County Council jointly commissions a Somerset Carers' Support Service with the ICB. This is a universal service for unpaid Carers and former Carers in Somerset. The service delivers a "one stop shop" approach to ensure that all Carers in Somerset can receive the support they require, when they need it, via a single point of contact. There is a focus on early intervention and prevention and the service helps Carers to find support within their local communities.

The report and presentation outlined the wide array of 'touch points' to support Carers in Somerset. Ranging from support in Hospitals, Champions in GP surgeries, Spark Somerset Support Groups, Talking Café's to Roadshows and a Carer Aware Programme.

The Committee were pleased to hear how much progress had been made since 2021. They were keen to support projects to identify Carers in Schools and to use digital solutions to widen access. They were concerned that Carers were able to be able to connect with support when they need it. The Committee were pleased to hear that a digital platform was released two weeks ago.

The Committee were interested to know the approach being taken to encourage people to ask for help without a fear of being 'taken over'. There is a 'no wrong door' approach, joined up services and many micro providers that are available to offer respite care. Somerset Connect brings together all the services and strengthens the 'family centred' approach.

The Somerset Scrutiny for Policies adults and Health Committee:-

- **Welcomed the update and reiterated their commitment to supporting Carers in Somerset.**

18 Adult Social Care Budget report - Agenda Item 9

The Committee discussed the revenue Budget Monitoring Report Month 10. This covered the period up to the end of January 2023.

The overall corporate projection is for an overspend of £23.1m which is an improvement from the previous month of £1.2m and against the net budget of £383.2m represents a 6% overspend. The significant variances are:

- Adult Services has a £11.9m adverse variance against their budget (7.4% of service budget); no movement in position from month nine. The overspend mainly relates to increased demand in residential and nursing placements. There are also pressures forecast due to inflation and potential home closures across Somerset.
- Children's Services has a £19.9m adverse variance against their budget (18.9% of service budget); an improvement of £0.9m from month nine. Most of this pressure is seen in the external placements budget (for children looked after) which is forecasting a £13.9m overspend.
- Economic & Community Infrastructure (ECI) has a £0.8m favourable variance against their budget (1.1% of service budget); a strengthening in position of £0.1m from month nine. This improved position is mainly due to reductions in costs within Somerset Waste due to the Recycling More roll out.
- Finance & Governance are reporting a £0.1m favourable variance which is an improvement of £0.1m from month 9. The projected underspend is within Democratic Services and is mainly because of savings within staffing and increased income generation.
- Corporate Costs has a £3.4m favourable variance due to an increase in investment income following interest rate increases, additional grant funding, and uncommitted Resilience for Business-as-Usual budget.
- Corporate Contingency is a favourable variance of £3.3m after taking account of the additional costs of the national pay award of £1,925 and the reduction of 1.25% in employers National Insurance from November 2022.

The Committee discussed the position and asked about the spend of the extra Winter funding allocated by central government. It was confirmed that this came down in three pots of money. It is always a challenge to spend this money

as it comes with very specific targets to release it. The Director for Adults Social Care has a national role and is working with the Department for Health and HM Treasury to make sure this money is released earlier and that the targets are better planned to take account of actual need. This would allow for advance planning. There was a recent feature in The Times that examined the role Somerset is playing in influencing National policy.

The Committee asked if the Government were listening. The proof of that will be in how the funding is released later this year.

The Committee recognised how well Somerset does in comparison at a national level. The level of 'unmet need' has reduced dramatically recently. Some of this can be put down to the Proud to Care campaign beginning to have an impact with 110 new recruits. Increased hourly rates are also have a positive impact.

The Somerset Scrutiny for Policies Adults and Health Committee:

- **Noted the forecast overspend for 2022/23 of £11.9m**
- **Welcomed the positive steps taken to reduce the 'unmet need'.**

19 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 10

There were no other items of business.

The Committee concluded by thanking Councillor Rosemary Woods for her role as Chair of this Committee since May 2022 .

(The meeting ended at 1.35 pm)

CHAIR