

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET 18 June 2024

Adult Social Care Assurance Update Report of People Overview & Scrutiny Committee (2023/24)

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
 - a) Agree to respond to the recommendation contained in the body of this report, and
 - b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update Scrutiny for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendation, or until they are completed (if earlier).

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. At its last meeting of the 2023/24 municipal year on 22 April 2024, the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Council's preparations for the Assurance assessment visit of the care regulator, the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The report also provided an update on the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge.
4. The Committee was grateful to Cllr Liz Leffman, the Leader of the Council, and Karen Fuller, Corporate Director for Adult Social Care, Victoria Baran, Deputy Director for Adult Social Care, and Alison Enever, Project Manager, for preparing and introducing the report, and for attending to answer questions.
5. The Committee was disappointed that Cllr Bearder, the Cabinet member for Adult Social Care, had declined the Committee's invitation to attend for a second consecutive meeting.

SUMMARY

6. The Committee was reminded that, since the introduction of the Health and Care Act 2022, the CQC had a duty to assess how local authorities met their duties under the Care Act 2014. The Assurance assessment would not simply consider Adult Social Care in isolation but the Council as a whole and the Committee was advised that there were preparations afoot across the organisation.
7. Officers were commended by the Leader for their excellent work that was evident in the results of the Peer Review. The Committee was pleased to note that there was a well-evidenced culture of continuous improvement. Inevitably, as well as strengths, there were opportunities for further improvement highlighted by the Peer Review. These included the need to further embed the Oxfordshire Way into staff culture and to develop work done around co-production.
8. Given the wide-ranging nature of the report, the Committee had a similarly wide-ranging discussion. Amongst other topics, the Committee explored the purpose and value of the CQC assessment. It also discussed reassessments of service users and how it was hoped that increased use of technology would enable carers to spend more time with individuals. Members were keen to discuss the Council's ability to influence district councils' Local Plans particularly with regard to affordability of housing, especially for key workers.
9. The Committee was keen to ensure that the directorate's successes were shared more widely and so made one recommendation to that effect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The success of the Oxfordshire Way has been seen in the strong performance of the Adult Social Care directorate throughout this past municipal year. The Committee has monitored and scrutinised the service but was acutely aware that the narrative around adult social care nationally is often negative owing to pressures and difficulties faced by individual councils, in contrast to the Council's own successes. The Committee was pleased to establish that the positive changes had not been the result of additional staff but, rather, a focused attention to detail with frontline staff following the Oxfordshire Way to ensure all opportunities to support service users had been fully explored.
11. There has been a reduction in the use of agency staff and a successful use of apprenticeship schemes to develop the Council's own capacity. A bespoke recruitment campaign has seen a good response for occupational therapists and for social workers. There is excellent and effective partnership working.
12. Very often, national news items relating to adult social care are reported through a lens of negativity. There are challenges in Oxfordshire and there

are opportunities for further improvement but the situation here is far more positive than the national picture might indicate. The Committee was aware that the Council does distribute 'stories of difference' which demonstrate its work and positive stories on social media and the Council's website and that they have appeared in the local press previously. However, to increase the confidence of local residents, the Committee was of the view that communications should be broadened so that more are aware of the successes of the directorate and its level of service to residents. The Oxfordshire Way is a good news story and is one which residents should know more about, as well as also being able to inform the national conversation around Adult Social Care.

Recommendation 1: That the Council should publicise the successes of Adult Social Care more widely.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION

13. It is probable that the Committee will consider CQC Assurance again in this new municipal year.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
15. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

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Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

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