
Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 9.30am on Thursday, 11 January 2024 in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

Cllr Ray Gooding (Chairman)
Cllr Marie Goldman
Cllr Carlo Guglielmi (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Daniel Land
Cllr Sue Lissimore
Cllr Peter May (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Aidan McGurran
Cllr Ross Playle
Cllr Michael Skeels
Cllr Wendy Stamp
Cllr Mike Steel

In virtual attendance via Zoom:

Cllr Eddie Johnson
Cllr June Lumley

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer and Sharon Westfield de Cortez were also present throughout the meeting.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and noted.

Apologies had been received from Cllr Eddie Johnson and Cllr June Lumley who both joined via Zoom instead.

Cllr Sue Lissimore advised that her daughter worked for Essex Cares Limited as a carer.

2 Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 7 December 2023 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3 Questions from the public

There were none.

4 Adult Social Care (ASC) Priority Area of Focus – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Committee considered report PAF/01/24. The following attended the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

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- Cllr John Spence, Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care and ICS Integration
 - Nick Presmeg, Executive Director, Adult Social Care
 - Moira McGrath, Director, Commissioning (ASC)
 - Phil Chiz, Team Manager ASC
 - Jonathan Gatefield, Training and Testing Manager

The following additional officers were also present throughout the item and in a few instances supplemented responses given by presenting officers:

- Alison Ansell, Director of ASC
- Annelise Barns, Service Manager ASC
- Ruth Harrington, Director of Adult Social Care, Adults with Disabilities
- Stephen Hurry, System Development Lead

As part of introducing the update, the following was highlighted:

- An overview of the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) was outlined and the associated statutory responsibilities. Examples were given of people having differential use of services and the importance of ensuring accessibility for all and that no cohorts were disadvantaged.
- An action plan was in place focusing on a number of dimensions in terms of how people were identified, how they were assessed and reviewed and how statutory responsibilities were delivered.
- Partnership work was undertaken with the NHS, district/borough councils and the voluntary sector around data insight and lived experiences to ensure the diversity of the population was supported.
- Four ASC Quests which looked at staff experience linked to their protected characteristics under the Equality Act were outlined.
- The Race Quest had included looking at language and culture, using more diverse interview panels, organising key celebrations at ECC such as Black History Month and updating Mosaic to capture more ethnicity options linked to National Census data.
- The Disability Quest had included auditing the levels of accessibility in all buildings, technology improvements and looking into policies including 'Access to Work'.
- The LGBTQIA+ Quest had undertaken interviews and surveys to hear of people's experiences, and presented findings to senior leadership Teams, and helped promote and support Pride profile and events.
- Similarly, the Age Quest had organised live events and presenting Quest findings to the senior leadership teams.

- A further quest focusing on mental health was scheduled for 2024.
- Common themes identified across all Quests included looking at policies to ensure that they addressed what was set out to achieve, language and culture in ASC, education and training, recruitment, retention and progression in the workforce.
- Quest volunteers were involved in other work such as collaborating with the Employee Networks, delivering Learn Fest sessions at ECC, working with the Essex Social Care Academy and helping out with a number of events. A Quest Network had been established.
- It was expected that the ASC work on EDI would be further reflected in ECC's organisation wide workforce strategy.

Following the presentation, the following was highlighted, raised and/or noted:

- (i) Senior leaderships teams had responded positively to the respective Quest findings. An action plan was in place to track progress on actions being taken.
- (ii) People with learning disabilities were more likely to wait longer for a review of their care and as a result the service had been doing targeted work to identify and reduce some of that difference. It was stressed that nobody was waiting to receive care support and needs were being met.
- (iii) The learning disabilities population could be less adept at identifying their health symptoms. ASC and health service partners were working to minimise the differential between the life expectancy of somebody with learning disabilities and other parts of the population.
- (iv) It was noted in the report that people of South Asian origin were more likely to develop diabetes. It was clarified that this was referring to type 2 diabetes.
- (v) Operating a zero-tolerance policy was challenging when staff were receiving abuse from those they were caring for. The service had to continue to deliver care for people, so each circumstance was looked into on an individual basis within a multidisciplinary and risk enabled approach to review how the care was to be delivered whilst also safeguarding staff. This was outlined on the website in the service offer.
- (vi) Opportunities for participation in the Quest work was the same for staff both in office settings and frontline workers.
- (vii) It had been identified that more work needed to be taken in encouraging more prevention and early intervention. Examples of this were supporting people with disabilities and mental health to access regular physical health checks and specific preventative care and early stage work with people with dementia.

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- (viii) Security was strong around the Mosaic records system and training was included as part of the induction process. Everyone who had access signed a non-disclosure agreement and the system could only be used on ECC laptops. If a laptop was lost or stolen the link to Mosaic could be disconnected. There were strict guidelines on what could be shared with partners.
 - (ix) During the Quests people had shared personal stories and their journeys but there were also still some challenging views expressed and it was surprising how much more there was still to do in terms of zero discrimination and challenging those views and behaviours.
 - (x) There was now an improved gender balance at the most senior levels of ECC but sometimes people from certain backgrounds still did not put themselves forward for situations for which they were capable. It was important for people to believe whatever their background and gender that they could all progress and develop further.
 - (xi) Training for managers, culture of inclusivity and HR policies and recruitment and retention were consistent themes identified across all Quests and were being pursued as individual recommendations for change and improvement.
 - (xii) The pandemic had had a particularly detrimental effect on some people with protected characteristics. One particular area of concern was the effect it had on the working environment for people with disabilities and their accessibility requirements where, for example, it was wrongly assumed that everybody could work on Teams and work at home.
 - (xiii) Members encouraged monitoring staff interviewing techniques to see how they could be further improved. The workforce in ASC had changed over the last decade and over 20% of the workforce would now identify as being from ethnic minority backgrounds.
 - (xiv) It was important to learn from other local authorities and to have the ambition to do more. Essex historically had not had the diversity of other councils and so methods had to be learnt to understand the Essex population better. The CQC would be looking for evidence of change and impact.
 - (xv) Members were assured that funding for Dementia services was not being cut in Essex. There was a range of training available for those in the workforce supporting people with Dementia and it covered the whole age spectrum and the service was looking into further increasing training. Use of grant funding would also help to further resource these services.
 - (xvi) In terms of the budget, there was an increasingly ageing population with more complex needs and with older people more likely to have multiple

conditions. In addition, more people with complex disabilities were living longer. It was important to ensure the quality and quantity of care for the ageing population was sustained at costs that could be afforded.

Conclusion

- (i) PAF members were invited to indicate if they wished to attend a briefing being arranged by Councillor Spence and officers to reflect on feedback from recent CQC inspections (including the most recent one at Suffolk).
- (ii) There should be clear identification and explanation of Jewish by race as well as religion, as a protected characteristic, in documentation and recording on Mosaic and any other appropriate systems.
- (iii) In terms of the zero-tolerance policy, to consider further explanatory wording on the risk-based approach taken when applying the zero-tolerance policy to ensure safeguarding both the service user and support staff.
- (iv) Members would consider further their conclusions on the five discussions on the ASC Priority Performance Areas and respond formally to the Cabinet Member.

5 Work Programme

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/02/24 comprising the work programme for the Committee.

6 Matters Arising

The Committee considered and discussed report PAF/03/24 comprising outstanding matters arising from previous meetings.

7 Proposed schedule of meeting dates for 2024-25

The Committee considered and agreed report PAF/04/24 comprising future meeting dates for the Committee.

8 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on Wednesday 14 February 2024.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11.28am.

Chairman