

**Minutes of the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee Meeting held on 30  
November 2020**

Present: Jeremy Pert (Chairman)

**Attendance**

Philip Atkins, OBE	Janet Johnson
Tina Clements	David Leytham
Janet Eagland	Paul Northcott (Vice-Chairman)
Ann Edgeller	Kath Perry, MBE
Phil Hewitt	Bernard Peters
Jill Hood	Ross Ward
Barbara Hughes	

**Apologies:** Julie Cooper, Maureen Freeman and Ian Wilkes

**PART ONE**

**38. Quorum**

The Chairman verified that the meeting was quorate.

**39. Declarations of Interest**

County Councillor Janet Eagland declared an interest on all matters included on the Agenda as they related to Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust owing to her membership of the Trust's Council of Governors.

**40. Minutes of meeting held on 26 October 2020**

**RESOLVED** – That, subject to the correction of the following typographical errors, the minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2020 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman:-

- Minute No. 34 'serge' change to 'surge';
- Minute No. 34 'Cabinet Member' change to 'Health'.

**41. West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust - Reconfiguration of Staffordshire Community First Responders Scheme - Update**

The Committee considered a presentation/report (Schedule 1 to the signed minutes) of the Chief Executive of West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust (WMAS) updating them on the operation of the Community First Responders (CFR) Service in the County. This followed scrutiny of decisions taken by the Trust in April 2020 to make changes to:- (i) vehicles used by CFRs; (ii) range of drugs routinely

carried by CFRs in their voluntary capacity and; (iii) training received, and qualifications attained by CRFs, at their meeting in June 2020.

The meeting was attended by Mark Doherty, Director of Nursing and Clinical Commissioning and Vivek Khashu, Strategy and Engagement Director from the Trust together with Paul Sergeant and Jane White from the Staffordshire CFR Team.

The Committee submitted the following questions to the Trust in advance of the meeting to facilitate their key lines of enquiry:-

- “The changes to the Staffordshire CFRs came into place in April 2020, has there been any appreciable change in the level of Staffordshire’s Community First Responders supporting the West Midlands Ambulance Service in the period between April and November”?
- “Are there any surveys undertaken on engagement/volunteer satisfaction and have the results of these changed significantly between April and November”?
- “Have there been any significant changes in the number of hours supported or in the percent of calls that the Staffordshire First Responders have attended”?
- “Is there anything relevant to anyone who might have had their lives and life-chances affected by the implementation of these changes”?
- “Has the development of a Staffordshire Community First Responder training and development plan been created and has this been launched with the Staffordshire Community First Responders”?
- “What is the assessment of the changes implemented from back in April 2020”?

The representatives of Staffordshire CFRs also provided Members with a PowerPoint presentation (slides attached at Appendix A to the signed minutes) which outlined the impact of the above-mentioned changes from their perspective.

During their presentation, the representatives of the Trust provided the Committee with answers to the above-mentioned questions. They said that 37 CFRs had resigned from the scheme since April 2020 for various reasons. However, a further 92 applications from prospective volunteers had been shortlisted for consideration which, if successful, would result in a net increase in operational CFRs in the County. Whilst the Trust had previously undertaken Staff Satisfaction Surveys, these had not included CFRs although they said they had been captured in other consultation and engagement initiatives. They confirmed that volunteer hours provided by CFRs were not currently recorded by the Trust. However, their contributions had provided valuable assistance in meeting and maintaining required service standards. It was expected that a new nationally accredited training and development course for CFRs would be implemented in 2021.

The representatives also outlined the Trust’s response to the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic which they said had been robust. They spoke of various innovations currently being implemented with the aim of improving healthcare provision, notwithstanding the pandemic, including the use of electric vehicles. However, they referred to serious

concerns regarding significant delays in transferring patients from ambulances at acute hospital Trusts, which had arisen since their previous attendance at the Committee.

During their presentation the representatives of the CFRs gave Members background to the operation of the Scheme in Staffordshire including an insight into those who had volunteered. The Scheme had charitable status and raised funds in a variety of ways including sponsorship from local businesses, donations from Parish Councils and other community groups etc. Besides responding to medical emergencies, CFRs work also included checking Community Defibrillators, delivering training and giving demonstrations to community groups. Continuing, they expressed their great disappointment at the lack of consultation by the Trust prior to the changes being implemented and refuted some of the explanations and justifications which had been put forward to the Committee at their meeting in June 2020. They also expressed concern over the long-term impact of the changes on the morale of CFRs and operation of the scheme.

In the full and wide-ranging discussion which ensued, the Trust re-affirmed their firm commitment to the scheme which they said would continue as an integral part of their service to Staffordshire residents. They highlighted their performance against national key indicators which had been maintained notwithstanding the changes and additional pressures arising from the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic. They explained that the key role of CFRs was to provide a first response to medical emergencies rather than services which would otherwise be provided by fully equipped ambulances crewed by trained paramedics. In response to the concerns expressed both by the Committee and representatives of the CFRs, the Trust sought assistance in compiling evidence/examples of occasions where these standards had been compromised as a result of the above-mentioned changes. They also undertook to provide further detailed performance metrics for rural areas of the County by postcode so that individual Members could be given assurance that their areas had not been adversely affected.

The Trust went onto acknowledge the criticisms expressed by the representatives of CFRs regarding the lack of prior consultation over the above-mentioned changes, which had left volunteers feeling disrespected and devalued. They therefore assured the Committee of their intentions to work towards a more constructive/inclusive relationship with CFRs in the future which included seeking views on a review of their Standard Operating Procedure for deployment. The Committee remained concerned about the apparent lack of dialogue and potential impact on service delivery in the County and offered to facilitate further informal meetings between the parties, as necessary, to cover such matters as training and development and implementation of the Standard Operating Procedure going forward.

The Chairman then thanked the representatives of health for interesting and informative presentations and the opportunity to give meaningful scrutiny to their work for the benefit of residents of the County.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the reports/presentations be received and noted.

(b) That Members provide evidence/examples of occasions where required service standards had been compromised as a result of the above-mentioned changes to the

Community First Responders (CFR) Scheme and that further scrutiny be given to the matter, as necessary.

(c) That further details of West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust's (WMAS) performance in respect of response times by area be provided to individual Members on request.

(d) That the Trust consider:- (i) including CFRs in future Staff Satisfaction surveys in the interest of inclusivity and; (ii) reviewing the existing four mile radius from incident for deployment of CFRs in their Standard Operating Procedure, following consultation with volunteers.

(e) That the Staffordshire CFRs be thanked on behalf of the Committee for their valuable contribution to the work of the Trust in delivering essential health services to the residents of Staffordshire.

(f) That further informal consultation and engagement meetings between Staffordshire CFRs and WMAS be brokered by the Committee, as required, in order to promote dialogue, co-operation and a more effective working relationship between the parties.

#### **42. Digital Inclusion/Exclusion**

The Committee considered a report of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources (Schedule 2 to the signed minutes) regarding work being undertaken by the County Council to tackle digital exclusion in Staffordshire and improve access to health services.

Digital exclusion is a continuing unequal access and capacity to use Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) that were essential to fully participate in society could be broken down into the following three key barriers; (i) Connectivity (infrastructure/access to the internet; (ii) Accessibility (for all including low income homes, people with disabilities etc and; (iii) Digital Skills (being able to use computers and the internet).

Whilst the level of digital exclusion nationwide had been decreasing prior to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, it was still an issue of concern. Five cohorts of people had been identified as most likely to be excluded ie:- (i) older people; (ii) disabled people; (iii) low income households (iv) women and (v) people who had left education at an early stage. In Staffordshire, 4% of premises did not have access to superfast broadband and three Districts were identified as having a medium likelihood of digital exclusion (ie East Staffordshire, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stafford).

Analysis of emerging national trends on the impact of Covid-19 had shown an increased use of digital across all sectors. However, whilst digital exclusion had reduced in some areas following efforts to support people at risk, the impacts on those who remained digitally excluded was likely to become more severe without action. Lack of access to affordable devices and internet packages were recognised as key issues, particularly for older people and low-income households.

In Staffordshire, a considerable amount of work had already been undertaken to provide digital support and information for communities during lockdown to assist with them in accessing services such as health including, supplying digital equipment to vulnerable residents and families, flexible Community Learning opportunities and support to voluntary, community and social enterprises.

In addition, following various consultation and engagement initiatives, a draft 2020/21 Digital Inclusion Action Plan had been prepared by the County Council with the aim of addressing barriers to digital inclusion by:- (i) ensuring as many people as possible can connect to the internet where they live and work, especially in rural areas; (ii) enabling access to the internet, digital devices and / or digital support for everyone, in particular older people, people with disabilities, low income families and people in rural areas; (iii) helping residents to have the right skills and the confidence to use the internet and digital devices to access the support they need, especially during the social distancing restrictions in place due to Covid-19 and; (iv) Communicating as effectively as possible the benefits of using digital and the support available to those who may be excluded. In addition, engaging with residents and reviewing data to ensure the issues surrounding Covid-19 were understood an approach developed accordingly.

During the discussion which ensued Members highlighted the need for closer scrutiny of the various initiatives included in the draft Digital Exclusion Action Plan 2020/21 to ensure that they were fully aligned with the County Council's aims and objectives with regard to health. They also drew attention to changes announced in the Government's Spending Review which might impact on the roll out of Broadband connectivity to those communities not currently served. The Committee recognised that connection speed and broadband width were key to ensuring digital inclusion in health and care. However, whilst both factors were not always within the County Council's control, wider digital infrastructure requirements had been included in the Plan for co-ordination with Partners, as necessary.

Members also expressed concern about the level of intergenerational support available for residents who were not currently IT savvy. They recognised the valuable contribution that the younger generation could make in sharing skills and knowledge and looked forward to a time when schools could re-engage for the benefit of the wider community and in the interest of health promotion.

The above issues were acknowledged by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources who reassured them of his commitment to the on-going development of the Action Plan. In addition, an all Member virtual seminar would be held during the early part of 2021 in which they could contribute further having regard to their health remit. The Cabinet Member also spoke of the County Council's participation in 'NHS X' which involved the trialling of mobile portals in residential care settings in order to support the digital transformation of care and reduction of social isolation.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That further engagement with Members of the Committee be undertaken during the development of the County Council's Digital Exclusion Action Plan having regard to their knowledge of issues in the health arena.

#### **43. District/Borough Health Scrutiny Activity**

The Committee considered a report of the Scrutiny and Support Manager (schedule 3 to the signed minutes) giving a summary of the health scrutiny activity which had been undertaken by Staffordshire District and Borough Council's under the standing joint working arrangements, since their previous meeting.

Members noted that no update on the work of Cannock Chase District Council's Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee was available at the meeting.

With regard to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel, it had been agreed that they would take the lead in scrutinising the temporary closure of Leek Minor Injuries Unit by Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. However, they would seek assistance from the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee if necessary, having regard to their expertise, Terms of Reference and Code of Joint Working in Health.

**RESOLVED** – That the report and further updates set out above be received and noted.

#### **44. Work Programme 2020/21**

The Committee considered a rolling Work Programme for 2020/21 (Schedule 4 to the signed minutes).

During the discussion which ensued a Member drew attention to South East Staffordshire and Seisdon Peninsular's Clinical Commissioning Group's (CCG) 2019/20 rating as 'Inadequate' under the NHS's new Oversight Framework and requested inclusion of an appropriate item in the Work Programme. In reply, the Chairman highlighted the Code of Joint Working with Health and said that the Committee should confine themselves to scrutiny of County-wide issues only. Therefore, the matter of the CCG's performance was principally a local issue for scrutiny by the appropriate District/Borough Council(s). However, he undertook to liaise with the Member further regarding this matter following conclusion of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That the report be received and noted.

(b) That subject to the following amendments, the updated Work Programme 2020/21 be approved:-

- 'Integrated Care System' additional meeting to be scheduled for a date/time to be arranged in January/February 2021;
- 'Wider Determinants of Health – Inquiry Day' to be postponed until further notice.

#### **45. Date of Next Meeting - Monday 1 February 2021, 10.00 am, Virtual/On-line**

**RESOLVED** – That the date, time and venue of the next meeting be noted.

**Chairman**