

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

17 November 2021

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN

CARE AND INDEPENDENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Suicide Prevention Update

We revisited our earlier work on Suicide Prevention. Progress against all priorities remains strong. It is especially pleasing that our awareness campaigns and initiatives are helping reduce the stigma associated with suicidality, enabling people to talk about suicidal thoughts and emotional distress and increase their help-seeking behaviours.

These initiatives start long before people end up in crisis, to minimise the distress that people experience before they get effective help.

A great deal is being done for us as elected representatives to understand all aspects of suicide intervention and prevention. I would like to highlight again that on Wednesday 10th November 2021 public health colleagues will provide members with information on support for people bereaved by suicide and provide a mental health training taster session. Pat Sowa a HeadFirst trainer, champion for suicide prevention and a mother who lost her son Dom to Suicide in 2017, will deliver this - supported by key officers.

Direct Payments and the Covid Pandemic

We looked again at how Direct Payments are applied in practice, prevalence data and the impact Covid 19 has had on the service and the people who requested and received a Direct Payment.

There has been a disappointing drop in numbers of people applying for the service - whether because they were not aware of the service and that it could help, or the number of those in need were reducing. A lot of work is ongoing with this, introducing peer support meetings, best practice sharing and enabling staff to promote direct payments as an option. Therefore, whilst levels of take-up might still not be where we would like them to be, there is convincing evidence that there is a positive, supporting infrastructure within the directorate.

Overall, members were pleased that the service continued to offer a high level of support and had adapted well to the challenges of the pandemic.

Living Well During Covid 19

The Living Well Team have also coped and adapted well during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Referrals to the service showed a dip from March 2020 but that demand quickly began to increase and returned to pre Covid-19 levels by Spring 2021. Analysis shows Living Well support was more concentrated in areas of highest need during the pandemic – areas with higher levels of deprivation.

The flexible nature of the service remained a bridge between community and voluntary services and the council's adult social care response. With their experience in creative problem solving and knowledge of local services, staff were able to find different and imaginative ways to support people to be as independent as possible - even when services were disrupted.

The last time the committee looked into Living Well, evidence showed the positive impact upon service users. That assessment remains valid; Living Well is a genuine success story.

Older Peoples Champion

Cllr Andy Paraskos explained that the major part of his role is meeting older people through their representative groups, to extend their "voice", to listen to their views, concerns and experiences. The pandemic has meant that most groups have not met - either digitally or face to face – so that engagement aspect has been curtailed.

He is pleased to be involved in the work done by Stronger Communities, which looks towards putting in place an effective approach to involving older people's representatives. The team are working hard to not only build inclusive communities in which older people can thrive, but also to find better ways to engage with them.

The picture regarding older people's familiarity with digital communication is mixed across the county. Some people and their groups have yet to get to grips with digital communication. Some have, but there is a sense that some may never manage it and are just marking time until they can go back to getting together face to face.

Loneliness and isolation is of course always a significant concern, but the hope is as things open up, people can be encouraged to get out-and-about safely to foster their independence. Andy emphasised the massive contribution during the pandemic by older people as volunteers. Without this, a lot of activity that supported people so well in communities would simply not have happened.

Looking Ahead

At our next full meeting, we will review:

- HAS Financial Pressures.
- Charging for Social Care - Overview.
- Director of Public Health Annual Report.
- Annual North Yorkshire Safeguarding Adults Board Report.
- Local Account.

COUNTY COUNCILLOR KARIN SEDGWICK

4 November 2021