

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 9.15 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Ken Miall (Chairman), Abdul Loyes (Vice-Chairman), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Jenny Cheng, Clive Jones, Adrian Mather, Jim Frewin, Barrie Patman, Michael Firmager and Malcolm Richards (substituting Guy Grandison)

**Others Present**

Nick Durman, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough  
Jim Stockley, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough  
Jo Dixon, Healthwatch Wokingham Borough  
Dom Hardy, Chief Operating Officer, RBH  
Madeleine Shopland, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

**28. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor Grandison.

**29. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 September 2020 and the Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting held on 19 October 2020, were confirmed as a correct record and will be signed by the Chairman at the next available opportunity.

Councillor Frewin asked about an update on ambulance response times. It was confirmed that an update was still being sought.

Councillor Firmager indicated that as it was his first meeting as a Committee member, he would not vote on this item.

**30. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Jones declared a Personal Interest in item 33 Royal Berkshire Hospital, on the grounds that he had recently been elected to the Royal Berkshire Hospital NHS Trust Board of Governors. He also declared a Personal Interest in this item on the grounds that a family member worked at the hospital.

Councillor Frewin declared a Personal Interest in item 33 Royal Berkshire Hospital, on the grounds that a family member worked at the hospital and also as he was a First Responder.

**31. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions.

**32. MEMBER QUESTION TIME**

There were no Member questions.

**33. ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL**

Dom Hardy, Chief Operating Officer, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, provided a presentation to the Committee.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Dom Hardy thanked the Members, residents and all the organisations that had supported the Trust during the first wave of the pandemic, either by doing the right thing, providing donations or providing free food or services for staff. The Trust had been grateful for the solidarity, which had improved staff morale.
- The hospital was fully open with all services running. All necessary precautions such as PPE and social distancing were being taken.
- The Trust was keen that patients attended their appointments and were aware that some people had concerns about visiting a health care facility during the pandemic.
- The Trust had a number of aims over the winter;
  - to deal with hospitalised Covid patients, although the number of people hospitalised during the second wave was not at the same levels as during the first wave. Whilst the prevalence of community transmission had increased this had not translated into such a high hospital admittance;
  - continuing to provide urgent care to non Covid patients;
  - Sustaining major pieces of work such as the development of a Strategic Outline Case for a new hospital development. If this was successful an Outline Business Case would be developed followed by a Final Business Case. Councillor Miall commented that the survey on the mini site regarding potential options was now closed. Dom Hardy indicated that the Committee could send further comments to him if they wished.
- Services were currently running at normal levels and inroads were being made into the backlog, which had built up during the first wave. Services would be sustained so long as it was safe to do so.
- Members thanked the Trust for their hard work over the course of the pandemic.
- Councillor Frewin commented that he had heard examples of services such as the cancer services, continuing to run effectively during the pandemic. He commended the Trust on that achievement.
- Councillor Frewin asked about the outcome of the Prime Minister's recent visit. Dom Hardy commented that he had visited in relation to the review of hospital food but the opportunity to impress on him the importance of investing in the health infrastructure had been taken.
- Councillor Frewin commented that Healthwatch had had feedback that the communications letters in the maternity service had not been updated to reflect Covid measures. Dom Hardy indicated that he would take this up.
- Councillor Firmager asked how long it was anticipated to be before the backlog in services, was cleared. Dom Hardy commented that there was an operational standard to ensure that no one waited more than 52 weeks for treatment. There were currently approximately 1200 patients affected, and assuming services did not have to be suspended, it was anticipated that the backlog would be cleared by April/May. Where patients had an urgent need e.g. cancer, they did not have to wait this long and treatment was expedited.
- Councillor Jones asked whether the Trust would be able to maintain stroke, heart attack and cancer services during the second wave. Dom Hardy indicated that it would and had also done so during the first wave of the pandemic. Whilst there had been speculation in the media that people were choosing not to attend appointments, the stroke team had undertaken an audit and found that the number of users this year was broadly comparable to last year. In addition, cancer patients were moved through the cancer pathway as speedily as possible.
- Councillor Jones asked whether other sites or hospitals had been used to create extra capacity. Dom Hardy indicated that some patients had been treated at the Berkshire Hospital, some orthopaedic patients had been treated at the Circle and Dunedin had undertaken some oncology and haematology treatment. Good patient

surveys had been received across the Trust's sites including West Berkshire Hospital, Prince Charles Eye Unit and the Townlands Memorial Hospital.

- In response to a question from Councillor Jones, Dom Hardy indicated that the hospital would have the ambition to potentially become a teaching hospital in the future.
- Councillor Bishop Firth asked about escalation plans should the situation in the second wave unexpectedly worsen. Dom Hardy stated that the Trust would use other sites in addition to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, and also independent sites. He re-emphasised that whilst the number of Covid patients admitted to hospital had increased from September, the hospital was not seeing the same level of admissions as during the first wave. Councillor Bishop-Firth asked whether hotels would be used in emergencies. Dom Hardy stated that this would likely be for social care provision outside of the acute sector.
- Dom Hardy indicated that Adult Social Care and in particular Matt Pope, the Director Adult Services, had been very supportive.
- Councillor Loyes commented that he had been informed by local mosques that there appeared to sometimes be delays in issuing a death certificate when a patient had died of Covid, and questioned why this was. Dom Hardy stated that he was not aware of any delays but that he would look into it. It could sometimes take a while for a death certificate to be issued if the Medical Examiner was delayed in establishing a cause of death.
- Councillor Loyes asked whether the Trust was confident that it could cope with the second wave of the pandemic as the usual winter pressures also began to take effect. Dom Hardy indicated that they were. There was a need to protect staff as well as patients and a sufficient supply of PPE was vital.
- In a few weeks' time, asymptomatic testing would be rolled out to staff. Results would be known quicker, helping to reduce transmission amongst staff. There had been a slight increase in the number of staff off sick with Covid however cover arrangements and temporary staff could cover this.
- Councillor Loyes asked whether there had been an increase in the number of children hospitalised with Covid, and was informed that fortunately very few were seriously impacted unless they already had extensive underlying conditions.
- Councillor Frewin stated that he had seen in the media about the possibility of a hospital being built in Shinfield, and questioned whether this was speculation. Dom Hardy agreed that it was. Four options had to be provided in the Strategic Outline Case.
- In response to a question from Councillor Mather regarding access to Covid tests, Dom Hardy commented that the hospital had access to point of care tests for patients. Results were usually known within a couple of hours. Staff testing was through the south wing car park of the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Currently staff were being tested and self-isolating if required. Occupational health were helping to operate track and trace for staff.
- Councillor Mather questioned whether individual outcomes had improved since the first wave and was informed that whilst there had been some learning such as around the benefits of using CEAP machines and proning, there may be other reasons why less patients were requiring intensive care treatment.
- Councillor Mather asked whether the Trust had sufficient supplies of PPE and oxygen and was informed that it had a very good supply, the Trust being one of the only Trusts to make its own oxygen.
- Some funding had been provided upfront to make some initial improvements to the Trust's estate, including the destemming of the main hospital building, and the demolition of some of the most outdated buildings.

- With regards to the Covid vaccine, Councillor Jones questioned whether it would be mandatory for staff to receive it. Dom Hardy emphasised that staff would be strongly encouraged to receive the vaccine but that it would not be mandatory. There had been an over 70% take up of the flu vaccine this year, which was positive.
- Councillor Loyes asked whether Brexit would have an impact on the supply chain and was informed that during the first wave of the pandemic only 4% of PPE received by the NHS had been from UK based companies. It was now more like 70%. The Trust had its own supply and whilst issues could not be completely ruled out, Dom Hardy was more confident regarding the PPE supply.
- Councillor Miall asked whether A&E attendance had reduced. Dom Hardy indicated that during the first wave, A&E attendance had been two thirds of usual levels but during the second wave, attendance levels had not greatly reduced.
- Councillor Miall asked whether the Trust had reached full capacity at any point in the pandemic. Dom Hardy stated that there had been a shortage of surgical gowns during Easter weekend but this shortage had been managed through mutual aid and emergency deliveries.
- Nick Durman asked for an update on the phlebotomy services as a number of residents had informed Healthwatch that they had had difficulties in accessing the service. Dom Hardy stated that initially it had not been possible to offer phlebotomy services in the Royal Berkshire Hospital due to difficulties around social distancing. However, a bookable appointment system had now been introduced. Patients could also use West Berkshire hospital and the facility at Bracknell.
- Councillor Frewin emphasised that he was a Community First Responder and that they had seen a decrease in the number of inappropriate calls that they were being sent out to.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1) Dom Hardy be thanked for his presentation;
- 2) the presentation be noted.

#### **34. UPDATE ON WORK OF HEALTHWATCH WOKINGHAM BOROUGH**

The Committee received an update on the work of Healthwatch Wokingham Borough.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- Jo Dixon introduced the report on perinatal services. The Committee asked that this report be resent to Members and considered at a future meeting.
- With regards to the Healthwatch Covid 19 – people’s experiences of Health and Care services and accessing information survey, Councillor Jones questioned how Healthwatch selected who completed the survey. Jo Dixon indicated that the survey had been publicised on Healthwatch’s website and social media and that no specific groups had been targeted.
- Councillor Jones noted that 30% of those who responded had indicated that they had decided not to use NHS and health and care services during lock down, and questioned how many people this equated to. Nick Durman indicated that it was 30% of 178 responders.

- Nick Durman informed Members that he and representatives from the Reading and West Berkshire Healthwatches had presented the findings to the united Executive. Nearly 700 responses had been received in total between the three.
- Nick Durman stated that he had been informed by the Flu Group that a high percentage of people with a high BMI were choosing not to take up their flu jabs. Many people had concerns about attending health care facilities during the pandemic. Targeted communications was needed to ensure that people felt safe to attend to take up their flu jab.
- Councillor Jones felt that it was positive that 61% of responders had said that they would be happy to have a video appointment again. He questioned whether the video appointments saved time for the clinicians. Nick Durman stated that many people had found it a positive experience but some had experienced technical difficulties.
- Councillor Jones questioned whether the response 'I have had ups and downs' to the question about the responder's mental wellbeing, meant that the person usually had ups and downs but that it was worse during the pandemic. Nick Durman felt that it could be read either way.
- Members discussed CAMHS and waiting lists for the services. Jo Dixon indicated that service users had indicated that wait times had increased and that Healthwatch had recently been informed by some parents that the service was no longer accepting new referrals, however, this was yet to be confirmed. Councillor Loyes suggested raising the matter with the relevant Director and Executive Member.
- Members expressed disappointment that some residents had had to ask their surgery repeatedly for a shielding letter.
- Councillor Bishop Firth asked about what type of fears people had about accessing health and social care services during the pandemic.
- Members were pleased to see a large number of positive comments from responders.
- Councillor Jones expressed concern that some GP surgery websites did not have information about wearing masks, whether patients could be accompanied and where they would be waiting prior to their appointment.
- Nick Durman stated that he was meeting with the CCG regarding the GP Patient Survey results. Some surgeries had performed less well in some of the questions. It was suggested that the Committee ask the CCG how they would be addressing this. There was no obligation for individual surgeries to publish the results of the survey on their website.
- Members referred to a briefing which outlined how the Committee could help support Healthwatch. Councillor Jones suggested sharing reports on Facebook and Councillor Frewin suggested sending the reports to all other Members. Jim Stockley commented that once the reports had been critiqued by the relevant service providers they could be published and publicised further.
- Nick Durman suggested that if Healthwatch did not receive a response from a particular service provider to their recommendations, the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee seek an update.
- Councillor Jones commented that he appreciated the independence of Healthwatch and agreed that it was important to highlight that it was a statutory body and not a voluntary organisation.
- Councillor Mather suggested that Healthwatch produce a report on the top ten outstanding actions or hot topics. Jo Dixon commented that this could form part of the income and outcomes report.

- Jim Stockley thanked Nick Durman, Neil Bolton-Heaton and Jo Dixon for their hard work. With regards to video GP appointments he felt that it would be useful to gauge the views of the clinicians on providing video consultations.
- Healthwatch would be producing a monthly column in the local media.
- Councillor Mather asked whether Healthwatch produced a package for what they wanted sharing on social media. Jo Dixon stated that they were currently undertaking a project on carers and had put together a package of suggested posts and communications. In the past when Members had shared Healthwatch's Facebook posts, a good response had been received. She would be happy to pass on the information regarding the carers' project to the Committee. Healthwatch was trying different ways of reaching the community and different parts of the community.

**RESOLVED:** That the update on the work of Healthwatch Wokingham Borough be noted.

### **35. FORWARD PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the forward programme.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were made:

- It was suggested that the update from the Wokingham Borough Wellbeing Board be moved from the January to the March meeting.
- Members agreed that the update on dental services be moved to the unscheduled items section and a further update sought as to when an update may be possible.
- The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recommended that the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee look at various aspects relating to children and young people's mental health, including depression and anxiety levels and whether specific groups or those living in particular areas were affected. It was also suggested that self-harm rates in 15-19 years olds be considered.
- Councillor Miall suggested that suicide prevention be taken to the January meeting if possible.
- Members agreed to the holding of an extraordinary meeting in February to hear from the CCG on how they had worked with the Council during the pandemic. An update would also be sought on the outcome of the GP Surgery Patient Survey.

**RESOLVED:** That the forward programme be noted.