

COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY SCRUTINY PANEL

Virtual Meeting held on Tuesday, 2nd February, 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor David Hennigan in the Chair;

Councillors Jim Blagden (Vice-Chair),
Dale Grounds, Kevin Rostance, Dave Shaw,
John Smallridge and Caroline Wilkinson.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Carol Cooper-Smith, Ruth Dennis,
Joanne Froggatt, Theresa Hodgkinson, Pete
Hudson, Mike Joy and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Richard Mitchell (Chief Executive of Sherwood
Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust).

CP.20 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

CP.21 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 December 2020, be received and approved as a correct record.

CP.22 NHS and Kings Mill Hospital Covid Response

The Chairman and Director of Place and Communities warmly welcomed Richard Mitchell, the Chief Executive of Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, to the meeting and thanked him for taking time out of his busy schedule to speak to the Committee.

Through the Scrutiny Panel, it was important that the Council conveyed its eternal gratitude to the NHS and the staff at Kings Mill Hospital for their unrelenting care and support of local residents throughout the pandemic. The recent extension of vaccine provision to the Council's front-line staff from the Hospital Trust also required the Council's gratitude and would go a long way towards protecting employees who were committed to delivering services to the people of Ashfield on a daily basis.

Richard Mitchell, Chief Executive of Sherwood Forest Hospitals Trust

Having thanked the Chairman for his opening words, Richard Mitchell briefly spoke about his role as Chief Executive at the Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust which covered Kings Mill Hospital, Newark and

Mansfield Community Hospitals. He was also Executive Lead for the Mid Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Partnership whose overarching remit was to improve the integration of care and facilities within local communities.

In relation to the Trust's response to the pandemic, overall the care service provided had been immense and staff had worked tirelessly to provide care to its patients. However, the last 12 months had taken its toll and staff were exhausted and in many cases, emotionally spent. The Council had been a great support to Kings Mill Hospital during the pandemic and the relationships that had been cemented would endure and be invaluable going forward.

The Trust had provided safe care for all its patients over the last 12 months with some cancer and diagnostic care continuing wherever possible. As Chief Executive, Richard was aware that the care needed to be for patients and staff alike and it had been a tough task for staff having to work in this challenging environment and wear full personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout. The pandemic had also had an impact of NHS staff working at home and it had been paramount that they all continued to share experiences and have access to welfare support as required.

From any angle, the Trust could be immensely proud of what it had achieved over the last year; their PPE plan especially had been effective from the start and all staff had been able to access full PPE equipment as needed. The excellent PPE provision had also enabled the Trust's many partners including care homes and funeral suppliers to have access to equipment and supplies as required.

The Trust were the first to offer 24/7 vaccine provision and this was continuing, placing them in the top 5 for vaccine provision and roll out of the programme. It was also noted, with relief, that the Trust had not lost any health care workers to Covid-19 to date and this was hopefully in small part due to the continuous supply of PPE and the support network in place to protect and care for staff during the most difficult times.

As an up to date position, the Trust was currently caring for 161 patients with Covid-19 and this had fallen from 220 patients at its peak three weeks prior. 14 of those patients were currently in intensive care of which 5 of those patients were receiving critical care but not in relation to the virus. Therefore, these reducing figures allowed the Trust to be a little optimistic that things were moving in the right direction. It had also been acknowledged that sickness absence had risen to around 10% from the average baseline of 4.5% with most of the additional 5.5% of sickness absence being due to Covid-19 and any resulting isolations.

In relation to the vaccination programme, by 8 December 2020, around 25,000 people had been vaccinated which equated to a quarter of Over 80s, around 20% of care homes and the remainder being mostly NHS care workers across the spectrum. The national vaccination programme had proved effective so far and was continuing at pace.

As for a post-Covid world, the reality for the Trust was that there would inevitably be some fallout from the intense, pressured environment that staff had been working in for the last 12 months. Staff would definitely need time to

rest and recuperate from the psychological trauma of the pandemic and the loss of many lives, but this would inevitably have a huge impact on the ever-increasing waiting lists for other areas of patient care. Cancer care treatment at Kings Mill Hospital had thankfully been continuous through most of the pandemic but diagnostic care had halted and the waiting lists for this type of treatment had inevitably increased.

Question/Comment:	Response from Richard Mitchell:
<p>What impact has the pandemic had on the full range of other care services provided? (Cllr. David Hennigan)</p>	<p>There are 4 main pathways of care namely, emergency, cancer, diagnostic and elective/planned care.</p> <p>Emergency services were working well with a response time of around 4 hours but worryingly the number of people presenting in emergency had fallen (but heart attacks/strokes etc. were still happening).</p> <p>The cancer pathway had been largely protected although fewer operations were taking place due to preparation time and implementation of Covid safety measures taking more time.</p> <p>Diagnostic and elective care had been hit the worst with the target of 52 weeks from referral to operation/treatment not currently being met. No diagnostic care took place for the first 6 months of the pandemic and nationally there were over 250,000 cases waiting that were outside the 52 week target.</p>
<p>I had great care and support over the weekend when visiting the Ashfield Health Village for a vaccination (Cllr. John Smallridge)</p>	<p>Thank you, I will pass on your comments</p>
<p>Some over 80s residents in my Ward are worried that the vaccine will have run out and they won't get their second dose? (Cllr. Caroline Wilkinson)</p>	<p>No one can say with complete certainty that the vaccines will be continually available, but it is highly unlikely that the country will run out of vaccine.</p>
<p>Concerns surrounding whether the vaccine programme is reaching all ethnic minority groups so how might the Council help in mitigating against this potential problem? (Cllr. Dave Shaw)</p>	<p>Looking at recent data from the vaccination of health care workers in Newark, there was parity in the reach of the vaccination through all groups and out of 56% vaccinated, 53% were from ethnic minority groups.</p>

	<p>I have not seen the Mid Nottinghamshire figures but I believe there is more of a gap in that area. All partners alike should endeavour to work with community groups to dispel any myths and make it clear that the vaccine is safe.</p>
<p>A massive thank you to all your staff at the Trust for keeping us safe over the last 12 months. I appreciate the initiatives that you are implementing to protect employees' health and wellbeing (Cllr. Kevin Rostance)</p>	<p>Thank you but the initiatives are not just down to me, they are in existence because of my amazing, strong team of staff (around 5,000 in the Sherwood Trust). I will pass on your thanks.</p> <p>It was recognised early that staff needed to feel valued and supported and some of the initiatives implemented have helped but most employees just want us to focus on doing the basics well with everything in its rightful place.</p> <p>I hear time after time and totally believe that the most important thing to staff is being valued and genuinely supported by their line managers. Staff must never be left feeling guilty for taking leave and recuperating.</p> <p>It became apparent that some of our staff across all three of our hospital sites were suffering hardship and having to access foodbanks, so early on we set up a hardship fund and £15,000 of that has supported around 150 staff through their most difficult times to date.</p>
<p>Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to the residents of Ashfield. As someone who tries to devote time to the children's wards at Nottingham hospitals, could you advise if many children have been affected by Covid? (Cllr. Dale Grounds)</p>	<p>Luckily very few children have been affected by Covid. The planned and day care children's services at Kings Mill Hospital are wonderful and we have been awarded a rating of 'outstanding' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).</p>
<p>Do you have any idea when staff at private health care companies might be vaccinated? (Cllr. Dale Grounds)</p>	<p>No, I am unfortunately not aware.</p>

<p>The NHS staff deserve all the praise for their achievements over the last year and in the future. How do you intend to give staff the rest and recuperation they so desperately need? (Cllr. Jim Blagden)</p>	<p>It is the biggest concern we now have and the recent media narrative (mainly driven by the situation in London who are 3 weeks ahead of the East Midlands) for the NHS to move immediately to reduce waiting lists post Covid is difficult to hear when staff are already exhausted.</p> <p>It is hoped that the Government will recognise how hard staff worked and acknowledge that a longer-term plan for recuperation is needed. Many firstly need to take annual leave without any guilt and then address any wellbeing issues they may now have as a result of the pandemic.</p> <p>Also just to note, the vacancy rate at the Trust is the lowest in the Midlands and this hopefully reflects the fact that staff are appreciated, valued and supported in their roles across all 3 sites.</p>
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Following the question and answer session, the Chairman proffered a heartfelt thank you to Richard Mitchell, on behalf of the Panel, for attending the meeting amidst all the other pressures and commitments that were undoubtedly facing him at this difficult time.

In turn Richard thanked the Council and all its staff for their unwavering support to the NHS during the pandemic.

The Director of Place and Communities also took the opportunity to reiterate the growing partnership between the Council and the Trust and reaffirmed that the Council would continue to support all the NHS campaigns in relation to Covid safety measures and the roll out of the vaccination programme.

RESOLVED

that the following recommendations be made to Cabinet:

- a) the work undertaken by the Council and the Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust as a partnership, to support the NHS and Ashfield residents through the pandemic, be noted, welcomed and continued;
- b) a letter of appreciation and thanks be forwarded to Richard Mitchell and all the staff at the Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust for their unwavering dedication and care to the people of Ashfield during the pandemic.

CP.23 Guidance and Restrictions Update

The Vice Chairman gave an update to Members in relation to the latest position and Government's need to look at further options to tighten regulations if required. Some of the options to be considered:

- introducing a 3-metre rule
- wearing masks outside in busy areas
- scrapping support bubbles
- scrapping childcare bubbles
- restricting school access to children of 'critical workers'
- banning people from meeting to exercise
- limiting exercise to one hour a day
- increasing fines handed out for rule breaches
- shutting nurseries for non-key workers
- closing playgrounds
- shutting car parks at country parks.

The excellent work of the Finance Team was highlighted with the current processing position being that 1,697 businesses have been paid a total of £7.666m to date with the following split:

- Businesses with a Rateable Value: 1,332 paid to a value of £7.098 million
- Businesses without a Rateable Value: 365 paid to a value of £568 thousand.

The Discretionary Grant Scheme closed at midnight on Sunday and the Council's website had been updated to reflect this. There had been a last minute surge over the weekend of around 70 applications taking the outstanding discretionary applications that morning to 246. Processing was expected to take up to 3 weeks. Delivery of the scheme had been an enormous amount of work for staff and on behalf of the Panel, thanks were afforded to the Corporate Finance Manager (and Section 151 Officer) and the Chief Accountant for their diligence and professionalism throughout.

Latest coronavirus figures for the Ashfield District continued to drop. As of 31 January, there had been an increase of 83 with 7757 having contracted the virus since the pandemic began.

The Service Manager, Scrutiny and Democratic Services advised the Panel that the latest picture was ever changing but reiterated that people must not become complacent and continue to strictly follow the Government guidelines.

The Director of Place and Communities asked Members to consider how they might utilise their roles as Councillors to encourage residents to take up the vaccinations and stay safe. They had influence within their Wards in their community leadership roles and had built up many contacts and networks over their time in office. The Communications Team were also available to assist them as required and any assistance they could offer would be welcomed.

In relation to the Council's Communication Team, Members were advised that the Senior Communications Officer currently attended two weekly meetings, one with the Local Resilience Forum in relation to Covid-19 communications

across the County and the second, with Nottinghamshire County Council and the CCG regarding the vaccination roll out programme.

The Portfolio Holder for Streets, Parks and Town Centres had joined the meeting and advised that he was currently a Member on the Nottinghamshire County Council Health and Wellbeing Board.

Many older residents were confused as to the correct course of action to access the vaccination following receipt of their letters. It was suggested that 'Tech Buddies' would be a help to residents who were struggling to get online and book their vaccination slots.

It was envisaged that vaccinations might soon to be administered by GP surgeries and pharmacies and the Council would be well placed to assist with this extension to the programme by reinforcing messages to local residents and publicising details of the participating sites on the Council's website and social media platforms.

Concerns were also raised that Hucknall residents were being forgotten and it was imperative that Members and the Council continued to lobby the CCG for the provision of a vaccination centre in Hucknall. The Panel also spoke of the need for an asymptomatic testing centre at Sutton in Ashfield as this area continued to report high levels of positive Covid-19 results.

In relation to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Panel it was suggested that invites could be sent to a couple of local charity representatives to enable the Panel to gain insight into how the pandemic has impacted their ability to fundraise and continue to meet their objectives for supporting local people.

RESOLVED

- a) that the latest position in respect of Government guidelines be received and noted;
- b) that Cabinet be recommended to endorse:
 - the continued lobbying of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to provide a vaccination centre in Hucknall;
 - the provision of a mass asymptomatic testing centre in Sutton in Ashfield, as part of a Middle Super Middle Output Area which is currently showing consistently high positive Covid-19 results.

CP.24 Corporate Plan Performance Update

The Assistant Director, Corporate Services and Transformation presented the Quarter 2 Corporate Scorecard for April to September 2020 to enable Members to review the levels of performance achieved and consider the impact of the pandemic on the Council's performance.

The Council has worked extremely hard since the pandemic began and were the only local authority in Nottinghamshire that has continued to deliver their Tier 1 and Tier 2 critical services without interruption. The Council had also

delivered a variety of humanitarian services across the District and had continued to facilitate many of their waste collection campaigns.

As at the end of September 2020, 71% of Corporate Scorecard measures were achieving or exceeding target or were within 10% variance of their targets. 61% of measures were also indicating an improved position compared to the same period in the previous year or were within 5% of the previous year's performance levels.

The key highlights regarding performance were as follows:

Health and Happiness

- work commenced on the new leisure centre build in Kirkby
- many voluntary organisations have benefitted from community funding especially through the Council's 'Feel Good Food' project

Homes and Housing

- service delivery to Council owned stock has been maintained throughout
- prevention of 35% more households becoming homeless
- 99.6% of properties have received their annual gas and safety checks

Economic Growth and Place

- Covid Information Officers have been continuing to support high street businesses
- Idlewells Shopping Centre retained its occupancy up to September 2020
- Economic Recovery Plan created to support the Council's high streets post Covid

Cleaner and Greener

- increases in incidences of fly tipping (mainly due to closure of local recycling centres)
- success of the 'Bag It' campaign
- reduction of reported incidences of dog fouling and littering

Safer and Stronger

- increases in reported incidences of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and nuisance (more prevalent during lockdowns)
- increases in incidences of domestic violence and the recruitment of a Domestic Violence Support Officer

Innovate and Improve

- use of digital and online facilities increased, in no small part due to the introduction of the Council's new website and an easier journey for customers
- effective administration of the online Business Grants Scheme applications.

The pandemic had unfortunately had a negative impact on some of the Council's critical functions and these were outlined as follows:

Business Rates Collection

At the end of Quarter 2, business rates collection stood at 46.1% which was considerably lower than the target of 53.8%.

Rent Arrears

There had been a significant increase in rent arrears due to many households experiencing financial difficulties and the timelines for seeking possession being extended from 3 months to 6 months.

Void Property Turnaround

Void property turnaround had slowed down from the target of 21 days due to difficulties accessing building/refurbishment materials during the lockdowns.

Members discussed the Council's Quarter 2 position in particular the current position with regard to homeless persons in the District and the recent operational difficulties faced by the Housing Team as a result of key officers being in isolation.

RESOLVED

that the level of performance achieved against the Quarter 2 Corporate Scorecard for 2020/21, as presented, be received and noted.

The meeting closed at 8.37 pm

Chairman.