

# Minutes of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board

22 January 2024 at 6.01pm  
Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House

**Present:** Councillor E Giles (Chair);  
Councillors M Allcock, S Gill, Johnston, Kalebe-Nyamongo,  
Millar and Muflihi.

**Also Present:** Phil Griffin (Chair of Healthwatch Sandwell).

**Also Present:** Liann Brookes-Smith (Interim Director of Public Health), Lina Martino (Consultant in Public Health), Alex Goddard (Scrutiny Lead Officer) and John Swann (Democratic Services Officer).

## 1/24 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dunn, Tipper (Vice- Chair) and Uppal.

## 2/24 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## 3/24 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2023 are approved as a correct record.



## 4/24 Urgent Additional Items of Business

There were no urgent additional items of business.

## 5/24 WorkWell Vanguard

The Board received an overview of the bidding process for a WorkWell Vanguard scheme for the Black Country.

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had sought to create 15 WorkWell Vanguard pilot sites nationwide. £59m had been allocated to the national scheme which represented approximately £3.9m per site.

Each Integrated Care Board (ICB) was limited to one bid per geographical area, for this reason Sandwell Council had entered into a joint bid, led by the Black Country ICB alongside the three other Black Country Local Authorities. Walsall and Dudley Councils had previously operated similar programmes which had been successful and learning from these schemes had been incorporated into the bid.

The bidding opportunity had been announced on 30 November 2023, and following this the Council had entered into talks with Job Centre Plus, primary care networks, and the voluntary and community sector.

WorkWell represented an opportunity for local system and place-based infrastructure to come together and support those with disabilities and long-term health conditions to start and stay in employment.

The WorkWell Vanguard for the Black Country had three key objectives:

- **Delivering a holistic work and health service** – via a new early intervention and support service, providing participants with a single gateway into services for their health-related barriers to employment.



- **Forming part of an integrated local work and health partnership strategy** – supporting a joined-up work and health strategy at a local level to increase the ease of access to services.
- **Being part of a national learning programme** – sharing learning across vanguard and non-vanguard areas to help areas to plan and deliver their WorkWell services.

Multi-disciplinary support provided could include employer liaison services, work and health coaching, advice on workplace adjustments and regular support on a 'Return to Work Plan' or a 'Thrive in Work Plan' with a Work and Health Coach.

All WorkWell partners could refer individuals into the service, in addition to referrals from employers and the option to self-refer.

It was envisaged that the vanguard would reduce health inequalities and promote job opportunities to those who experienced systemic barriers as a result of their disability or long-term health condition.

The bid was formally due to be submitted on the 22 January 2023 by the Black Country ICB.

From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- At present the Council offered a 'local skills support' for Sandwell residents, it was proposed that if the bid was successful this would expand and create coaching and placement resources for those with long-term health issues.
- The vanguard would ensure that supported people would retain access to benefits via Job Centre Plus.
- It was acknowledged that some benefits were specialist in nature and required repeat assessments, it was confirmed that if the health of those supported by the scheme deteriorated and they were no longer able to work that access to these benefits would not be at risk.
- Individuals would not be forced to enter into employment or voluntary roles and would be supported at their own pace.



- Each person within the scheme would receive £800 of support.
- It was proposed that if the bid was successful, 4000 individuals across the Black Country would be supported across 18 months.
- Support would remain in place for those leaving employment.
- If the Black Country was designated as a vanguard pilot area funding would be in place for a two-year period, however it was hoped that the programme would sustain itself beyond the trial period.

**Resolved** that if implemented an update on the WorkWell Vanguard be provided to the Board at the end of the 2024/ 25 municipal year.

6/24

## **National Institute for Health Research – Health Determinants Research Collaboration Sandwell**

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) was the biggest private funder of health research in the UK.

Sandwell Council, in collaboration with the University of Birmingham had been successful during the second round of funding awarded to local authorities to establish Health Determinants Research Collaborations (HDRCs) in the local area.

The Council's HDRC programme had commenced on 1 January 2024 with funds of £5m. A range of partners had engaged with the Council to develop the application, including the UK Health Security Agency, Health Education England West Midlands and Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).

As of January 2024, there were 24 HDRCs nationally, the Council intended to work with Coventry HDRC regionally and with other HDRCs nationally to share learning and maximise the associated benefits.

The Sandwell HDRC was to be based on the theme of poverty and the cost of living and would align with the Levelling Up Partnership to address the determinants of health and tackle disadvantage



within the Borough. The application had been tailored to acknowledge the high levels of deprivation within the Borough and the strong voluntary and community sector.

The HDRC would ensure the activities of the Council were robustly evaluated and reflected the needs of the Boroughs diverse communities. By using information in a strategic manner, the HDRC would lead to a higher quality of services the Council delivered and commissioned and improve outcomes for Sandwell residents.

A total of 12 staff members would be recruited to support the delivery of the HDRC from programme funding and would be monitored by an independent oversight group to provide external peer review.

From the comments and questions by members of the Board, the following responses were made and issues highlighted:-

- The £5m of funding would largely be spent on establishing and embedding infrastructure and working practices, with approximately two-thirds of the £5m to be spent on staffing costs over a five year period.
- Infrastructure to be established included data sharing agreements, governance arrangements and a code of ethics.
- A Community Participation workstream would advise on which areas of research should be prioritised and would ensure a grassroots-led and inclusive approach.
- It was envisaged that the HDRC would support the voluntary and community sector to evidence how their work had benefited residents.
- A wider analysis of what makes people ill would be possible once the HDRC systems had been established.

7/24

## Scrutiny Review of Loneliness and Isolation Update

The Board received an update of the work of the Scrutiny Review of Loneliness and Isolation and the activities of the Working Group.



The review had commenced in 2022/23 and had progressed well, research undertaken by the Working Group had shown that many organisations across the public, private and voluntary and community sector were undertaking initiatives that tried to tackle loneliness and isolation.

The Chair of the Board outlined that the Working Group was due to formulate recommendations, complete the review and present its report to Cabinet this municipal year.

## 8/24 **Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Board Action Tracker**

The Board noted the status of actions and recommendations it had made. Further updates would be presented to future meetings of the Board.

## 9/24 **Cabinet Forward Plan and**

The Board received the Cabinet Forward Plan and noted its work programme for 2023/24.

Meeting ended at 7.27pm

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