

Adult Care & Health Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee 2021/2022 Annual Chairman's report

Chairman: Gareth Allatt

As former Vice-Chairman for the greater part of this municipal year, sadly I must preface this report with the news of the untimely and unexpected death of former Chairman, Cllr Mary Cooke on 7 January 2022 who served as Committee Chairman with flair and distinction from May 2017. Mary will be greatly missed for her commitment, wisdom, and incisive thought. Those who knew her will also miss her warmth and good humour.

Clearly, the pandemic still cast its dark shadow over the period, and in the midst of facts and figures associated with COVID 19, at the heart has been the sorrowful loss and pain for so many families and those close to the bereaved. On a brighter note, at the end of the municipal year, the prospect for both the incidence and severity of the virus to go into retreat feels palpable, and it is very much hoped that life will now enter into a post pandemic phase.

That aside, there are some significant legacy issues that call for attention in relation to those suffering from "Long Covid", the mental health issues caused by bereavement, isolation and financial insecurity, as well as the unwelcome effects of those who have experienced the effects of weight gain and increased alcohol consumption during successive lockdowns and restrictions.

The Committee, in response to a presentation, made representations to the South East London Clinical Commissioning Group ('SEL CCG') in the year in relation to the difficulty in getting face to face surgery consultations that had emerged over the pandemic. It is apparent that this is not a straight forward matter. Minimising transmissibility of the virus has been just one factor. This is a complex issue set against a backdrop of demand for services eclipsing practice capacity, increase in acuity of conditions, and longer waiting lists, together with backlogs in routine check-ups, screening and immunisations. Those issues aside, I am sure that this will be a matter for continued scrutiny into the future.

An early consequence of the lockdown was for all local authority day care centres to have to close, however, with the Council's financial support and in compliance with Public Health guidance resumption of services began in August 2021, albeit the return has been slow.

The Council's capacity to manage Adult Social Care remained resilient. The department was awarded the Municipal Journal's Award for Integration of Social Care and Health in September 2021. This was an excellent recognition of the work carried out both to enable people to be discharged from hospital in a timely way and the work done with care homes. We commend both Council staff, Care Home staff and our retained contractors for their commitment, focus and endeavour.

Thanks are also warmly extended to those many volunteers who reached out particularly to those experiencing isolation and loneliness. It is estimated over 40% of the Borough's households aged 65+ live alone. Cllr Aisha Cuthbert and council officers continued working on the issue, to provide definition to the importance of not only physical welfare, but crucially also to sustaining mental health by looking after social connections and the key role these contribute to overall wellbeing. The actions identified from the resulting output report are currently in the course of delivery.

The Committee was grateful to receive and consider a report from the Bromley Safeguarding Adults Board ('BSAB') which covered the very wide span of control provided by various different agencies focusing on; domestic abuse, financial abuse, self-neglect, modern day slavery, transitional care of children into adulthood, and vulnerable adults in specialist care and residential homes. Clearly this is a vitally important subject and a matter that needs to be at the forefront of all our thinking.

The scrutiny of the various aspects of Adult Care and Health matters will of course continue. Bromley is a large borough at some 59 square miles which can pose particular challenges in relation to coverage and the various contractual arrangements it commissions to provide services such as domiciliary care. The strands of the Council's responsibilities are many and diverse including some 1700 care placements, of which 1300 are in care homes (excluding private placements). The population of Bromley comprises a comparatively older age profile with some 60,000 aged 65+ and an increasing prevalence of dementia. Separately some 1300 adults are estimated to have moderate or severe Learning Disability and so the challenges of accommodating demand with first class care services within the financial envelope available will continue in to the future.

The four priority outcomes into the next municipal year will remain:

- Safeguarding the vulnerable
- Promoting optimal life chances, resilience and wellbeing
- Integrating health /hospital and social care
- Ensuring operational and contractual efficiency and effectiveness

In closing, thanks and appreciation goes to the Committee support staff and subject matter experts who in difficult times have demonstrated commitment, skill and diligence in performance of their duties.

Committee members both elected and co-opted are also thanked for their willingness to study the extensive committee papers to prepare and contribute to meetings which likewise is also extended to the various professionals from the BSAB, PRUH, Oxleas, and the SEL CCG.

**Gareth G Allatt
Chairman**