

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor Whitham to ask the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care (on behalf of Councillor White):
Retaining Care Workers

Care work is essential but underpaid and under recognised. Unfortunately, many are leaving this sector. How many care packages are waiting to be picked up by care agencies at the moment and how does this compare to last year? Also what is the Council doing to retain care workers?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care.

As of the 21st January 2022 there are 16 care packages waiting to be picked up by care agencies whereas on the 21st January 2021 there were 8. There are a number of factors contributing to this increase including the volume of people coming out of hospital needing care and the number of care staff absent due to sickness. The increase therefore isn't directly attributable to vacancies in the sector.

However, the council is committed to boosting staff numbers and retaining care staff and has been working closely with Providers to look at ways to achieve this, this includes:

- In line with our commitment to the Ethical Care Charter we require our Care Providers to pay their staff the 'Real Living wage' to ensure they receive fair salaries.
- Passporting Workforce grants from Government directly to providers to use to recruit and retain staff, allowing providers to use the funds in the best way to support their staff.
- Asking Providers to use Infection Control Fund allocations to pay for parking passes to ensure that staff have the flexibility to use cars where needed and not worry about parking fines.
- Asking providers to use their Infection Control Fund allocations to pay staff wages when they have to isolate due to Covid to ensure staff are not losing out on their wages.
- Sharing with providers evidence of good practice from around the country about how to retain staff to ensure that there is shared learning.
- We are helping six Home Care and Support Framework providers with overseas recruitment. Providers had to bid for the funds. A key part of the bid was how providers will support new staff who enter the country and build links to Reading's wider communities to ensure that they become part of the community.
- The Council is intending to use the Workforce Recruitment and Retention Fund to benefit front line carers by offering monetary rewards to staff working in the sector for their work during COVID.

I am disappointed that the Government does not recognise the importance and dedication of care workers in the way that we in this Labour Council do. Carers make a hugely meaningful, and observable, positive difference to individual lives on a daily basis - and that's exactly the

message at the heart of our current care recruitment campaign and our social media Thank You campaign, which was suggested by one of our providers.

I really hope that the forthcoming NHS Integrated Care System will increase the profile of care work as a career, because our health service is as dependent on carers as it is on nurses and doctors. With my colleagues, I'll be pressing for the NHS and the Government to recognise the value of carers through proper, secure, funding. I know that creating long-term sustainability in the sector - just as this Council has always sought to do even with our more limited resources - is the right thing for our community, for our residents, and for our carers.

2. Councillor Whitham to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport (on behalf of Councillor White):
Drug and Alcohol Treatment

Our residents who are dependent on drugs and alcohol are struggling and are very vulnerable indeed. I understand the number of people in specialist drug and alcohol treatment has increased dramatically since Change, Grow, Live took over this service. Please can the Lead Councillor provide me with the latest yearly figures from 2018/19 onwards. How is this increase being managed without a reduction in capacity and quality?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

I'd like to thank Councillor White for asking this question about such an important issue. I know he shares my anger at the major and wrong-headed government funding cuts that local public health services have suffered in England since not long after responsibility was transferred from the NHS to councils. The respected Health Foundation calculated that government public health grant to councils in England has been cut by 24% in real terms per capita between 2015-16 and 2021-22. It is in this context that councils have had to grapple with how to maintain effective services with smaller budgets.

In response to the first part of the question the numbers in treatment are:

2018/19 - 999

2019/20 - 997

2020/21 - 1147

Change Grow Live (CGL), the charity commissioned by the council to provide these services in Reading, are working with people aged 18+ to address their drug and/ or alcohol needs.

Reading Public Health and CGL Reading are working together to address increasing demand and the resulting capacity issues which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. The service, in common with many others has also experienced challenges in respect of clinical staff recruitment. CGL Reading are currently recruiting 4 additional posts through their charitable funds to maintain a quality service whilst we re-negotiate the upcoming extension of the contract in October 2022.

Reading Public Health will be carrying out an extensive needs assessment in early 22/23 to ensure we understand the current needs and level of un-met needs for this service, and this will help us to develop a new local strategy.

The Government announced a new 10-year Drugs Strategy, "Harm to Hope" in December 2021, in which additional funding is expected over the next 3 years, to strengthen drug and

alcohol treatment services. At this time, Reading's allocation is not known, but we our needs assessment and local strategy will drive forward our work alongside how any additional monies will be spent in the delivery of a partnership approach to support people to become drug and/or alcohol free.

For the benefit of the people needing advice, support and services, it is essential we have more opportunity for prevention and early intervention. This leads to better outcomes for the individual, reduces the hidden harms associated with dependency and in the longer term reduces demand on the range of services required to deal with the direct and associated consequences. It is important therefore that we do not only consider those in treatment but have a greater understanding of how we can help people earlier.

The drug and alcohol service are funded via the Public Health Budget and the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Police and Crime Commissioner announced in November 2021 funding cuts across to the budget for Reading which will result in a 47.2% budget reduction for Reading over the next 3 years.

In Reading, 55% of the Police and Crime Commissioner funding is used to fund the current criminal justice pathway within the local drug and alcohol service, and the new reduced funding formula will greatly impact the drug and alcohol treatment service delivery offer in the future. Public Health is working with partners to try and explore alternative options, but the risk is that this reduction in service is likely to have a negative impact on the people who need support and the local community, particularly in terms of crime costs, but also in terms of health improvements, reduced drug and/or alcohol related deaths, lower levels of blood-borne infection and wider social harm.

So, in answer to the second part of Councillor White's question the increase in treatment is being achieved through strong partnership working and the dedication and hard work of workers at CGL but it is clear that there are major challenges facing this service.