

LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Minutes of Special Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber and at Remote Locations on Monday 15th January 2024 at 18:00

PRESENT IN CHAMBER:

Deputy Mayor Councillor G McCleave (in the Chair)

Councillors R Carlin, P Catney, K Dickson, A Givan, G Hynds, J Laverty, U Mackin and A Martin

PRESENT IN REMOTE LOCATION:

Aldermen M Gregg and S P Porter; Councillors S Burns, N Eaton, A P Ewing, J Gallen, B Higginson, P Kennedy, T Mitchell, A McIntyre, M McKeever, N Parker, G Thompson and N Trimble

IN ATTENDANCE:

Director of Finance and Corporate Services
Member Services Officers (BF & EW)

South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (via Zoom)

Helen Moore, Director of Planning, Performance and Informatics;
Maggie Parks, Director of Surgery, Elective Care, Maternity & Paediatrics; and
Rachel Gibbs, Director of Adult Services & Healthcare in Prison.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from the Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor A Gowan, together with Aldermen H Legge and J Tinsley, and Councillors R T Beckett, D J Craig and C Kemp.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor M McKeever indicated that he was employed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and that the SEHSCT was a commissioning Trust for the service which he managed.

3. South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust

The Deputy Mayor welcomed to the meeting Helen Moore, Director of Planning, Performance and Informatics; Maggie Parks, Director of Surgery, Elective Care, Maternity & Paediatrics; and Rachel Gibbs, Director of Adult Services & Healthcare in Prison.

The Trust's representatives delivered a presentation which dealt with three themes, i.e., 'Reflect, Refocus and Renew'. The presentation gave an overview of the current issues within the Trust area and the challenges presented, together with the plans to address those challenges. In particular, the Council was apprised of the introduction in November of 'encompass', which was a digitised record system that aimed to enable the health service to become safer, more efficient and effective. The Council was provided also with an overview of a range of further applications and systems that would be introduced.

The Deputy Mayor then invited Members to pose questions to the deputation.

3.1 Alderman S P Porter - Lisburn Assessment & Resource Centre/Hillhall Centre

(Councillors S Burns and R Carlin joined the meeting at 18:06; Councillors N Trimble and A Ewing joined the meeting at 18:10).

Ms R Gibbs addressed two issues which had been raised in advance by Alderman P Porter, the first of which related to the Trust's plans to utilise land to the rear of Lisburn Assessment and Resource Centre. In this regard, she indicated that the Trust was currently examining several options for the site with a view to enhancing the range of services available, together with parking provision. She undertook to provide further detail to Alderman P Porter in relation to the plans which had been developed previously for the site and clarity on the consultation process that would be undertaken with patients and carers as this matter progressed.

With regards to future delivery of services at the Hillhall Centre, Ms Gibbs indicated that the Trust was currently exploring the feasibility of providing additional emergency respite care at an alternative site. In addition, a working group had been established to consider the matter in greater detail and a range of options were under consideration. She undertook to keep Alderman P Porter, who had raised the issue on behalf of several carers, updated in this regard.

3.2 Councillor P Catney - Industrial Action & Ambulance Response Times

Ms Moore and Ms Parks, in response to a question by Councillor P Catney, gave an overview of the measures which the Trust had in place to maintain critical and emergency services in advance of industrial action on 18th January. She outlined also, in response to a question by Councillor R Carlin, the steps that would be taken to manage any backlog of cases that may result due to the industrial action.

Councillor P Catney raised concerns regarding ambulance response times and issues also regarding emergency department waiting times. Ms Moore acknowledged that such issues were a matter of concern and that the Trust had implemented a range of mitigations to address the current scale of demand and enhance patient flow and throughput in the hospital and maximise the use of community capacity. These include the provision of a 'discharge lounge' to free up emergency department capacity for new arrivals, together with plans to escalate bed capacity, a measure which had seen the addition of eighty-two additional beds over the previous weekend.

She added that, should services reach critical levels, directors were available to manage and react to situations as they developed. In addition, new triage processes had been introduced and the Trust was constantly reviewing and updating its service provision to address emergency care as part of its overall winter planning processes. The Trust also managed its unscheduled capacity by using a system-wide approach in conjunction with other Trusts. In the SEHSCT area, bed management was coordinated across all inpatient hospital sites, which covered the Lagan Valley, the Downe and the Ulster hospitals.

3.3 Councillor J Lavery – Ulster Hospital Dundonald and Services for Young Persons

In response to a question from Councillor J Lavery, Ms Moore undertook to provide, at the next scheduled meeting, additional information regarding performance statistics and service target levels for the various specialties across the Ulster Hospital site.

Councillor J Lavery requested also figures on the number of patients who had attended the enhanced minor injuries unit at the Ulster Hospital since the closure of the minor injuries' units in Bangor and Newtownards. In response, Ms Moore indicated that there had been 3,800 attendances at the new site from 6th September to the end of October 2023, and that feedback had indicated a 97% satisfaction rate with the service. Ms Moore reported also that the option of a 'Phone First' service for minor injuries had been launched for the Ulster Hospital on 9th January, which was separate to the 'Phone First' services which were available at in the Trust sites at the Lagan Valley and Downe hospitals.

In addition, Ms Moore undertook to liaise with the Trust's Director of Adult Services to provide Councillor J Lavery with information in respect of the number of younger persons currently in care within the Trust area; the number of families availing of contact services; and the costs associated with the facilities for such services. It was her understanding, she added, that the Trust had met previously with Councillor J Lavery and that a range of options in this regard were being explored and that all appointments had been booked for the January period in advance. She indicated that the Trust would be willing to meet again with Councillor J Lavery on an individual basis to discuss further the issues raised.

(Councillor P Catney left the meeting at 18:58).

3.4 Councillor G Hynds – Governance Arrangements

In response to a question from Councillor G Hynds, Ms Moore gave an overview of the overall governance arrangements for the Trust, together with the level of involvement for patients and carers in those processes.

3.5 Councillor A Givan – Miscellaneous

Ms Moore outlined the longer-term plans which the Trust had in place for the provision of care packages and domiciliary care and reported that the waiting list for such services had decreased from 800 to 300 between December 2022 to December 2023. She outlined also the significant staffing pressures which existed and the steps which had been taken to address any shortfalls.

In response to a question regarding traffic flow in and around the Lagan Valley site and for vehicles exiting on to the Hillsborough Road, Ms Moore explained that a traffic survey had been conducted by the Department for Infrastructure and that no issues had been identified regarding access to the Hillsborough Road from the hospital site. She added that the Trust would continue to monitor traffic flow at the Lagan Valley site.

Councillor A Givan enquired also on the plans that existed for the former Lisburn Health Centre. In response, it was explained that the longer-term future of the building would fall within the remit of the Department of Health but that the site was currently being utilised for staff training purposes.

3.6 Councillor U Mackin – General Practitioner Services

Following a query which had been raised by Councillor A Givan, Councillor U Mackin added that the inability of constituents to contact their general practitioners was very concerning and sought clarity on how such concerns should be raised at a higher level.

Ms Moore reminded the Council that the Department of Health/Strategic Planning and Partnership Group oversaw the management of GP contracts and acknowledged that the concerns raised existed across the region. She noted that representatives from the Directorate of Primary Care had previously attended a meeting with the Council and undertook to liaise with the Director of Primary Care & Older People to highlight the concerns raised by Members.

In response to a further question by Councillor J Lavery, it was explained that it was difficult to accurately quantify the number of people presenting at accident and emergency departments due to an inability to contact their GP.

3.7 Councillor A Ewing – Services at Lagan Valley Hospital

Ms Parks outlined the future plans in place to manage day procedures at the Lagan Valley site and its current operating capacity. She pointed out that any extension to services would be subject to additional commissioning, funding and staffing. She added that services were at present operating at full capacity and that other options to expand the services would be examined should it be deemed necessary.

(Councillor T Mitchell left the meeting at 19:32; Councillors B Higginson and G Thompson left the meeting at 19:36; and Councillor N Trimble left the meeting at 19:40).

3.8 Deputy Mayor Councillor G McCleave – Children's Services

The Deputy Mayor raised issues relating to autism assessments and Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services and was advised that the Trust was in the process of clarifying several related queries in response to a written request which had been received previously.

The Deputy Mayor thanked the SEHSCT officials for their attendance and informative presentation.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 19:50.

Mayor/Chair