

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Ruthin and by video conference on Thursday, 8 December 2022 at 10.00 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Michelle Blakeley-Walker, Karen Edwards (Vice-Chair), Pauline Edwards, James Elson, Alan James, Cheryl Williams and Huw Williams (Chair)

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor Barry Mellor and the Lead Member for Health and Social Care, Councillor Elen Heaton were in attendance at the Committee's invitation.

Observers – Councillors Bobby Feeley, Huw Hilditch-Roberts, Peter Scott, Rhys Thomas, Andrea Tomlin and Mark Young.

ALSO PRESENT

Corporate Director: Economy and Environment (TW), Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services (EJ), Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (MJ); Senior Engineer Road Safety and Sustainable Transport (BWJ), Scrutiny Coordinator (RhE); Committee administrators (SJ, NH and RhTJ)

Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Chief Executive (JK);

Director of Partnerships and Engagement (EH)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Merfyn Parry.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No interests of a personal or a personal and prejudicial nature were declared in any of the matters under discussion at the meeting.

Prior to commencing the meeting's business, the Chair paid tribute to the late Councillor Brian Blakeley, a valued member of the Committee, who had passed away recently. In extending the Committee's condolences to his daughter Councillor Michelle Blakeley-Walker, also a member of the Committee, and the rest of the family he referred to Councillor Blakeley's devoted public service to the residents of Rhyl and of Denbighshire.

3 URGENT MATTERS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

No urgent matters had been raised with the Chair of the Committee prior to the meeting's commencement.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 8 September 2022 were submitted. The Committee:

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2022 be received and approved as true and correct record of the proceedings.

No matters were raised in relation to the contents of the minutes.

5 WELSH AMBULANCE SERVICE TRUST

The Chief Executive of the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust (WAST), alongside the Director of Partnerships and Engagement of the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust, provided members with a presentation highlighting matters relating to ambulance response times, including various emergency response data for callouts in Denbighshire.

During the presentation WAST representatives highlighted Emergency Medical Services Performance. It was only 'red calls' that had a set performance indicator (PI) target, which was that 69% of calls should be responded to within 8 to 10 minutes. The graph for this PI indicated that performance had generally declined since November 2020.

The Service's main aim was to ensure patient safety. With a view to securing patient safety in the face of increase demand on WAST's services a collaborative independent demand and capacity review, focussing on Amber level calls and patient safety concerns had been instigated. This review predicated on the level of hospital handover lost hours of 6,038 (December 2018), considered high at the time. By October 2022, the Trust lost 28,937 hours due to waiting for hospital handover - 36% of its capacity or 65 shifts a day. This situation was likely to worsen in the winter significantly. It was emphasised that the concern about patient demand data was not the fundamental issue concerning patient safety; the fundamental problem was capacity, particularly the number of hours lost waiting to handover patients at hospitals and to a lesser extent sickness absence levels amongst WAST personnel.

In October-22, due to a number of factors e.g. sickness absence, CoVID-19, annual leave, training etc. the number of staff available on WAST rosters was down 40%. The roster review used a benchmark of 30%. Pre-CoVID-19 WAST had started to deliver the 30% benchmark. Unfortunately, although sickness absence was coming down training commitments were high currently due to internal movements linked to recruitment and this had an adverse effect on roster availability.

In relation to data on National Reportable Incidents (NRI) (avoidable deaths/serious avoidable harm) WAST was considered a "high reporting" organisation. This was regarded as a good approach because it meant a culture of openness and transparency, an essential aspect of a patient safety culture. WAST referred patient safety incidents to health boards where the primary cause was considered to be

hospital handover lost hours. It was a health board responsibility to review and report these incidents, where appropriate, as NRIs.

An independent strategic review had been undertaken by Operational Research in Health on behalf of the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee (EASC). EASC was made up of the seven health boards, which have a responsibility for commissioning ambulances. The basis of the Review was Amber patient incidents (serious, but not immediately life-threatening). This represented the largest patient incident category accounting for 70% of patient incidents, compared to Red (immediately life-threatening) which accounts for 10% of patient incidents. It was felt that Amber waiting times were too long, and there was some concern about the number of serious adverse incidents for patients (SAls) in the Amber category.

The findings of this Review identified that the WAST had a gap between the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff budgeted to fill its Response rosters and the FTEs required to fill the rosters of 263 FTEs. As a result of this review EASC agreed to invest in WAST and close this gap, known as the “relief gap”. Consequently, WAST delivered an uplift in FTEs of 136 FTEs in 2020/21 and was on target to deliver a further uplift of 127 FTEs in 2021/22, which would close the “relief gap”. This has been achieved despite the pandemic.

The Response Roster Review had twin objectives:

- 1) to improve patient safety (by delivering rosters aligned to patient demand); and
- 2) to improve staff well-being (by delivering good workable shift patterns).

There had been a high level of engagement with the Review and positive feedback received in relation to the approach taken.

In addition, the Review had identified a range of efficiencies for WAST, particularly re-rostering ambulance resources around the daily patient demand pattern. Re-rostering would see the introduction of Cymru High Acuity Response Unit (CHARUs) and more emergency ambulances. The CHARUs would focus on resuscitation (clinical outcomes) and emergency ambulances on the Amber 1 tail (patient safety). Re-rostering was complex and emotive area of work, but the new Rosters were currently going live.

The CHARUs would be replacing the RRV as WAST’s rapid response vehicle. CHARU would provide increased clinical skills and leadership in responding to very high acuity calls. Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) would see less rapid response resources, as WAST increased the number of emergency ambulances available.

Responding to Members’ questions WAST officials –

- advised that as a direct result of the EMS Roster Review 263 more personnel had been recruited nationally, 73 of whom were located within the BCUHB area
- agreed to facilitate discussions between senior officials of Denbighshire County Council and WAST to explore potential options for enhancing local authority and Third Sector links that could help support the Ambulance

Service, as well as utilising Denbighshire's communications platforms to share messages and to promote the use of volunteers in local communities to lessen the strain on the ambulance services.

- advised that co-working between the fire and rescue and ambulance services did take place, but to various degrees across Wales' three Fire and Rescue Service areas. In some FRS areas a co-responders service existed. Officers clarified the matter was the subject of industrial negotiations, and was continually kept under review.
- confirmed that local defibrillators were crucial to saving lives from cardiac arrests. They were easy to use, would not cause any harm to a patient experiencing a cardiac arrest, and WAST were in possession of up to date location maps of all registered defibrillators and could direct emergency callers to the nearest one for use whilst waiting for an ambulance/RRV.
- stated that in their view the amalgamation of WAST with the Health Board would not provide a solution to the extended hand-over period for patients from the Ambulance Service to hospitals. The issue was the lack of flow of patients from health service settings to social care establishments or back to their own homes. This problem was not unique to North Wales, it was happening across Wales, the UK and internationally.
- advised that the use of ambulances as 'extensions' to Emergency Departments was not good for either the patient or the Ambulance Service. They were undignified places for patients to be waiting for a long time, and until WAST personnel could handover their patients to hospital staff a valuable ambulance resource was tied-up and unavailable to attend another emergency elsewhere.
- outlined the three different types of ambulance services provided by WAST – the emergency 999 ambulances, urgent care ambulances (for conveying less serious cases to hospital) and the non-emergency patient transport (used for conveying people to and from hospital appointments and home from hospital). Whilst WAST did utilise ambulance services provided by charities, such as the Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance, along with private ambulances at times, it could not however be over reliant on the voluntary sector.
- confirmed that first responders did visit people in their homes to assess if an emergency vehicle was required in order to reduce the pressure on ambulance services. WAST now employed a vast range of medical staff such as advanced paramedic practitioners, pharmacists, occupational therapists etc. and dependent upon the nature of the ailment these personnel may be able to deal with the medical emergency without the need to convey to hospital. This in turn would help relieve the pressure on the 999 emergency ambulances.

At the conclusion of an in-depth discussion, the Committee thanked the officers for their presentation, and all WAST personnel for their hard work and efforts which, they carried out under extremely difficult conditions at times. It:

Resolved: subject to the observations made –

- (i) to receive the presentation and information provided by the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST), and acknowledge the**

- measures being developed and implemented in a bid to respond and effectively manage emergency call-outs going forward;*
- (ii) having regard to the pressures currently experienced by WAST that the Corporate Director: Environment and Economy convene a discussion between senior officials of Denbighshire County Council and WAST with a view to exploring potential options for enhancing local authority and Third Sector links that could possibly help support the Ambulance Service to focus its resources on dealing with emergency calls; and*
- (iii) recommend that links be established with the Council's Communications and Marketing Service with a view to facilitating the sharing of WAST public information messages with residents via the Council's communications channels and social media platforms.*

6 INTRODUCTION OF 20MPH SPEED LIMIT ON THE COUNTY'S ROAD NETWORK

The Lead Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor Barry Mellor, alongside the Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services, the Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager (TPRSM) and the Senior Engineer Road Safety and Sustainable Transport (SERSST) introduced the Introduction of 20 mph Speed Limit on the County's Road Network report (previously circulated).

The report aimed to explain the background to the forthcoming 20 mph limit in towns and villages across Wales, including the Welsh Government's criteria for identifying exceptions to the default speed limit. The report also provided an overview of the tasks that the Council was required to undertake in preparation for the introduction of the default speed limit on 17 September 2023.

The TPRSM provided some background to the new policy advising that in 2020 the Welsh Government (WG) accepted all 21 of the recommendations made in a report by a Task Force it had commissioned to look at the case for making 20 mph the default speed limit in towns and villages across Wales. In July 2022, the Senedd passed the main Statutory Instrument to amend Section 81 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1988 as it applied to Wales so that 20 mph will become the mandatory speed limit for 'restricted roads'. 'Restricted Roads' being roads that have street lights. This legislative change will come into force on the 17th of September, 2023.

The TPRSM informed the Committee that the WG had developed exception criteria to the default 20mph limit based on the likelihood of "significant numbers of pedestrians and cyclists travelling along or across the road". To help local authorities make this assessment, it had also developed the following "place criteria":

- (i) Was the road within 100 metres of a school or other educational establishment?
- (ii) Was the road within 100 metres of a community centre?
- (iii) Was the road within 100 metres of a hospital?

- (iv) Did residential or retail properties front the road and exceed 20 properties per kilometre of the road (i.e. five or more properties every 250 metres of the road)

The TPRSM then outlined the list of proposed exceptions to the default 20 mph speed limit in Denbighshire, as listed in Appendix C to the report.

During the ensuing discussion:

- the Committee queried whether the 20mph limit would have to be introduced in Denbighshire, as some members had experience of the trial areas in the Buckley area and were concerned about the impacts the implementation could have. The TPRSM clarified that the change was a legislative change by the WG which Denbighshire was obliged to implement. As a result of this legislative change almost all of the current 30mph roads in DCC required to be changed to 20mph. The TPRSM stated there would be a significant cost implication if the work was not carried out, as all exemptions agreed post the new default limit's introduction would require to be funded by the local authority, whilst work relating to the default speed limit's introduction was funded by WG. The Committee was advised that the objective of the new default speed limit's implementation was to reduce collisions and serious injuries. Data highlighted that by reducing speed collisions would be reduced.
- Officers clarified that policing and enforcement relating to the default speed limit would remain a Police matter when the changes were implemented.
- the Committee queried what consultation had been carried out in relation to the proposed changes to the speed limit, especially with city, town and community councils. The TPRSM informed the Committee that as the change related to national WG policy, any consultation would have been undertaken by the WG not by local authorities. Although there were plans in place nationally to run a public information publicity campaign in early 2023 to draw people's attention to the changes coming into force in September 2023.
- it was confirmed that Denbighshire already collated data relating to road traffic accidents and speeds on local roads, this work would continue post the introduction of the new default speed limit.
- Some committee members felt the timing of the proposed changes were unfortunate, particularly given the cost implications during a 'cost of living crisis'. It was felt that the money could be spent better elsewhere. Officers advised that all costs associated with the introduction of the default speed limit were being met by WG through grant funding.
- Officers clarified to members that play areas would be included in the 'place criteria' element of the changes, and therefore 20mph limits would apply.
- The Committee agreed that it would be beneficial that the introduction of the 20mph speed limits be discussed at each Member Area Group (MAG) to allow members to discuss the issue on a local level and also to inform officers of potential other exemptions which may need to be included to the current list of proposed exemptions.
- The Committee was concerned about the potential economic impact the introduction of the default speed limit would have throughout Wales, as it would increase delivery times and reduce profit margins across the national

economy. Consequently, they enquired if a local or national economic impact assessment had been undertaken. Officers advised that as this was a national change it would have been the WG that would have initiated any economic impact assessment.

- Officers advised that traffic calming measures, such as speed humps, would continue to be considered and utilised where necessary based on road traffic accident data, as such measures were costly to implement.

Following a comprehensive discussion, the Committee –

Resolved:

- (i) subject to the observations made during the discussion and to Member Area Groups (MAGs) being consulted on the exemptions to the default 20 mile per hour speed limit in their area, to receive the contents of the report and appendices; and***
- (ii) that the Council's Economic and Business Development Service be requested to contact the Welsh Government to request a copy of the Economic Impact Assessment undertaken by them in relation to the economic consequences of the proposed implementation of the 20 mile per hour default speed limit in Denbighshire.***

7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Coordinator introduced the report (previously circulated) seeking members' review of the Committee's work programme and providing an update on relevant issues.

Discussion focussed on the following: –

- The Mistreatment of Dogs report would be submitted to the Committee for consideration at its meeting on the 19th January. No other items were currently scheduled for presentation.
- for the 9th March meeting two substantial items were currently listed for discussion.

The Committee:

Resolved: to receive the report and confirm the Committee's forward work programme as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report.

8 FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES

None.

Meeting concluded at 12.35pm.