

MINUTES
of a meeting of the Governance Committee
10 November 2020
(11:00-12:25)

Meeting held by video conference call

Present:

Anne-Marie Dean, Chairman
Ian Buckmaster, Company Secretary
Bev Markham, Community Support Officer
Carole Howard, Office Administrator

Carol Dennis, Jenny Gregory, Dawn Ladbrook, Di Old and Val Perry, Members

1 Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all participants to the video conference.

2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations.

3 Minutes of meeting held 13 October 2020

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record and the Chairman was authorised to sign them in due course.

4 Finance report

The report for October was presented. There were no financial matters to which attention needed to be drawn. The average monthly expenditure this month for the year to date was £9,013, still below the five-yearly average but rising, and the actual spend in October had been £10,165, which was in line with previous monthly average expenditure. A total of £828 had been spent in the year to date in dealing with the consequences of Covid-19.

5 Dealing with Covid-19

The Chairman advised that it had been reported that the Nightingale hospitals network was unlikely to be put into operation unless general hospitals were in danger of becoming overwhelmed, as insufficient staff were unlikely to be available. Overwork and stress were leading to staff becoming exhausted.

Evidence from an outbreak of infection from mink in Denmark suggested that new strains of the virus were evolving.

Public Health Havering (PHH) had consulted Healthwatch about advice that might be given to visitors to A&E who might return home after treatment having inadvertently acquired Covid-19 infection while in hospital – a balance was needed between giving helpful advice and causing unnecessary alarm, without dissuading those who needed to from attending A&E. Suggestions for advice were discussed and it was agreed that PHH be advised to arrange for a suitable advisory leaflet to be given to A&E patients before they left the department at the end of their treatment *[it was subsequently learned that PHH had taken that advice on board and entered into discussion with BHRUT to explore how best to implement it].*

The Committee noted that new concerns had arisen about relatives and friends visiting care home residents. New government guidance had recently been issued but was giving rise to increased anxiety on the part of visitors. It was agreed that Healthwatch should offer to help care homes with facilitating visits. The report of the recent survey of relatives and friends would shortly be published, and could form part of that response.

6 Engagement projects

Oral updates were given on the following projects:

- Audit of GP websites – this project was now underway. Members participating reported having a mixed experience – some GPs had good websites, others did not even have their own. The CCG had been asked to define the contractual obligation on GPs with regard to website provision.
- Digital exclusion – The Chairman reported that the CCG had approached Healthwatch for help with avoiding digital exclusion of patients. It was noted that this fitted well with the survey on GP Websites, and that Healthwatch England had an interest in examining the extent of the problem. There was also the problem of affordability for some patients.
- Advocacy for service users – arising from a recent complaint, it had been confirmed that MIND continued to provide advocacy support. FoI requests had been sent to BHRUT and the Council to ascertain the level of complaints received by them respectively.

7 Improving the reach of Healthwatch Havering

Further to previous reports, it was noted that the process of moving to a new website was now in hand. The Committee thanked Alice Markham for her help so far.

Access to the initial website would shortly be available so that Committee members could observe its development.

8 Recruitment

It was noted that a recent applicant for membership was experiencing some difficulty in providing references (despite being a potentially outstanding recruit). The process of recruiting him continued.

9 Problems with testing NHS staff for Covid-19

The Committee were advised of reports that some NHS staff were experiencing difficulty in obtaining tests for Covid-19 infection, despite government and NHS England assurances that they were given priority. Practice on testing seemed to vary between NHS Trusts.

10 Safeguarding

It was reported that Healthwatch had been praised for its approach to safeguarding issues during a recent seminar.

11 Office move

It was noted that discussion had taken place with the Queens Court handyman about the coming move to a new office, which now seemed likely to take place at the end of November or in early December.

12 Next meeting

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday, 12 January 2021.

Chairman