

Paul Burstow MP
Minister of State for Care Services
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

Dear Paul,

Re: Wirral Council

Further to our discussion on the issues facing Wirral Council, as requested I have now completed a review of the issues that you highlighted.

I should start by offering an immediate reassurance about the level of visibility on the issues within the service and across the support structure in place to assist the Council. This is true at the very highest levels, with Carolyn Downs the LGA's Chief Executive having recently visited the Council, which included being at the improvement board. The TEASC Board has also regularly reviewed the adult care issues and the most recent report of this month is included with this letter.

We recognise that the current political context facing the Council is volatile over this immediate period in time. Our experience is that long standing failure in a council casts a long shadow over the process of improvement as things that were not done well before inevitably keep coming to the surface, usually as here in a febrile context. The current issues and report are just such an example. The allegations relate to a past period, but do throw a light upon the issues of governance that are very much on the agenda of the improvement board.

Oliver Mills has been particularly careful to review the issues from the perspective of vulnerable adults. The issues in the recent concerns have their origins back in 2003/04 and the most serious allegations relate to overcharging. The recent independent report highlighted that the charging policy in place at the time was flawed, but a check through the bank balances of those citizens affected confirms no serious hardship. The allegations about abuse over the same time period particularly relate to poor contract monitoring. As safeguarding has been so central to the issues of improvement at Wirral, these have been in the improvement plan from the start. Considerable progress has been made to strengthen both commissioning and safeguarding. The new allegations are being responded to now and being appropriately managed using the safeguarding procedures.

The improvement plan and support provided to the Council is demonstrably in the right place with no obvious gaps. As you will be aware the Council have now recruited a new Director and ADASS will make sure that the offer of both formal and informal support is as strong as ever.

In reviewing all the material, it is clear that it is comprehensive. Although the timescale for peer review has been put back, the Directorate undertook a self assessment exercise which has been reviewed and challenged by Veronica Jackson – the nominated peer Director. I understand this report has been shared outside the Council for assurance purposes.

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services
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In relation to the issues within the control of the delivery of adult social care in Wirral, the major concern currently appears to be that the recent attention to the historic faults of the council may pull back morale and therefore performance. Oliver Mills and I felt that there is a possible need to continue with the evidence of visible attention to the quality of the services being experienced by citizens in the Wirral.

The TEASC Board remains actively involved with the Directorate's improvement plans and, following conversations with the new Director, have arranged a Safeguarding Peer Review which is to take place in May. This will add further reassurance in the areas of safety, quality and outcomes and will report its findings to the Director to allow him to determine the systems he needs to be particularly mindful of during implementation of further improvement. The review is currently being scheduled and the team will be led by Adi Cooper who is a co-lead for the ADASS Safeguarding work. The review will also be solely focused upon casework and file audit. This course of action will be able to give you the assurance of line of sight upon direct quality of experience, whilst also finding a route whereby the Director is able to reinforce an improvement message with staff. It will also provide evidence for the wider Peer Review of Adult Social Care later in the year as this is a council that we are confidently expecting to demonstrate practice improvement during that process.

The frame of reference of adult care above is deliberately carefully positioned so that we offer our view and support on the professional leadership and delivery of adult social care, within a broader council context that is outside of our judgement and is a peer issue for the LGA.

I trust this is helpful to you and gives you the assurance of our continued determination to support Wirral in its improvement process.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Peter Hay', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Peter Hay
ADASS President

CC: Glen Mason
Adi Cooper
Oliver Mills
Graham Hodkinson
Helen Sumner
Carolyn Downs