

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 27 September 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors Sam Adeniji, Charles Clark, Penny di Cara, Chris Dowling, Ian Hollidge (substituting for Councillor Nuala Geary), Johanna Howell (Chair), Carolyn Lambert (substituting for Councillor Kathryn Field), Wendy Maples, Stephen Shing, John Ungar (Vice Chair), Trevor Webb and Ms Maria Cowler (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative).

LEAD MEMBERS: Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health
Councillor Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families
Councillor Bob Standley, Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND)

ALSO PRESENT: Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Alison Jeffery, Director of Children's Services
Ian Gutsell, Chief Finance Officer
Michaela Richards, Head of Safer Communities
Lucy Spencer, Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) Development Manager (Interim)
Chris Robson, Independent Chair of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership
Beth McGhee, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

9. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 22ND JULY 2022

9.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2022 as a correct record and agree the recommendations made at the meeting.

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

10.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nuala Geary (substituted by Councillor Ian Hollidge) and Kathryn Field (substituted by Councillor Carolyn Lambert), Mr Trevor Cristin (Diocese of Chichester Representative), Miss Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative) and Mr John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative).

11. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

11.1 Councillor Ungar declared a personal, non-prejudicial, interest that a family member was responsible for managing and administering the Household Support Fund for a local authority.

12. URGENT ITEMS

12.1 There were no urgent items.

13. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SAFER COMMUNITIES PERFORMANCE, PRIORITIES AND ISSUES

13.1 The Head of Safer Communities introduced the report which outlined the performance of the Safer Communities Partnership for the 2021/22 year against the Partnership's business plan priorities. The Head of Safer Communities' introduction covered trends in some criminal activity from local police data, service performance priorities and issues, residents' community safety priorities highlighted in responses to the latest East Sussex Reputation Tracker Survey, and the Partnership's successes with securing additional income, all of which were set out in more detail in the report and appendices.

13.2 The Chair thanked the Head of Safer Communities for the comprehensive report and particularly for Appendix 2, which had been provided in response to a previous request from the Committee. The Committee asked questions and made comments on the following areas:

- **Anti-Social Behaviour Crime Reports** – the Head of Safer Communities was asked to comment on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) figures included in Appendix 1 of the report and reports of ASB for wards in Hastings. The Head of Safer Communities clarified that while reports of ASB had steadily increased in the data period captured in Appendix 1 (2018/19-2020/21), in the rolling data for August 2021-July 2022, compared to the rolling data for August 2020 to July 2021, reports of ASB nuisance crimes had decreased in Hastings by 47% which was positive and showed progress in the right direction. It was recognised that there remained some significant issues with ASB in Hastings Town Centre and a member of the Safer East Sussex Team attended a multi-agency partnership group focussed on addressing this specifically. A question was also asked on whether there had been any interrogation of whether the decrease in reports of ASB in 2021/22 referenced in the cover report related to a decrease in reports, rather than a decrease in incidents. The Head of Safer Communities responded that unfortunately the Safer East Sussex Team were not able to determine this from the data available, but did ask borough and district council colleagues to notify the Team of any community tensions so that they could understand if there were concerns about increases in ASB that were not being reported.

- **Insights from domestic abuse figures** – the Head of Safer Communities was asked to comment on domestic abuse figures and clarified that while incidents of domestic abuse had slightly decreased (by 4.7%) between 2020/21 and 2021/22, overall reports of domestic abuse had marginally increased and the number of high-risk domestic violence and abuse cases discussed at the East Sussex Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) had increased. The proportion of high-risk cases considered at the MARACs was also higher than seen nationally. The Head of Safer Communities was asked to comment on what could be inferred from these figures and they responded that the increase in reports suggested victims were more likely to come forward to ask for help, but the reduced number of recorded incidents suggested not all reports would be progressed through the criminal justice system or result in a prosecution and conviction. A lot of cases did not reach this stage as nearly 60% of people withdrew a report of domestic abuse once made. Regardless of whether the case was progressed to prosecution, the MARAC process would continue once initiated by a referring agency. The Head of Safer Communities added that the MARAC heard a high number of repeat cases because if the MARAC heard a case once and there was any further incident within the following twelve months, the case would be heard again.

- **Domestic abuse reports increases** – Committee members raised concerns about the increases in reports of domestic abuse and high-risk cases referred to the MARAC. The Head of Safer Communities responded that the Safer East Sussex Team were putting in place a range of measures to try to address increases in reports of domestic abuse but noted that increases in

reports did not necessarily mean incidents were increasing, and it could be encouraging that more people felt able to come forward to report an incident.

- **Fly-tipping** – it was noted that there had been an increase in respondents of the reputation tracker selecting fly-tipping as an area of ASB they felt it most important for the Safer Communities Partnership to tackle, and a question was asked on whether this could be related to changes in provision of Household Waste Recycling Centres in East Sussex. The Head of Safer Communities responded that fly-tipping was not an area of responsibility for the Safer East Sussex Team but they would speak to the Communities Team about the responses received on fly-tipping.

- **Changing social attitudes to criminal activity** – a question was asked on whether the Partnership was undertaking any work looking to change attitudes and make it less socially acceptable to commit criminal activity, such as ASB and fly-tipping. The Head of Safer Communities responded that a lot of work was taking place on awareness raising, and this focussed on raising awareness of crimes such as modern slavery, signs of child exploitation and domestic abuse, and harassment in public places. The Team commissioned providers to undertake comprehensive training programmes to raise awareness on these matters and also frequently bid for funding to deliver additional training programmes. A lot of the White Ribbon accreditation that the Team was working to secure for the Council was also focussed on raising awareness of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The Team had also contributed to partnership work that focussed on attitudes to crime. For example, the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner's Office had commissioned a public campaign on VAWG targeted at men and encouraging them to call out inappropriate behaviour of their friends; and Children's Services had undertaken a survey in schools on attitudes to VAWG that the Safer East Sussex Team had contributed questions to.

- **Training and education on respectful behaviour** – further detail was requested on who the audience of the training (mentioned in the response above) was; the focus of the training, including whether it focussed on the need for respect for other people; and whether work was taking place to ensure children were educated on the importance of having respect for others. The Head of Safer Communities responded that the training referred to in the response above was often delivered through commissioned providers but the Safer East Sussex Team also delivered direct training. This included training around 400 people on the PREVENT duty and awareness of the Channel Programme; applying for PREVENT funding to deliver training for practitioners who worked with children, particularly young boys who might have mental health conditions that make them more likely to be drawn towards radical philosophies; and offering domestic abuse training for professionals, including health colleagues. The Director of Children's Services added that a lot of work had taken place in schools to ensure children understood the importance of respectful relationships. Schools focussed on issues such as peer-on-peer sexual abuse, particularly following a national OFSTED report on the matter, and work had been done using theatre to educate children on the importance of consent. Work had also been done to raise young people's awareness of the risks of exploitation through County Lines, conducted through a county-wide roadshow. The Lead Member for EISEND also commented on the important role parents play in teaching children the importance of respect for other people.

- **Headline Activity – Police Data 2021/22** – updated figures for March 2022 to the year to date were requested to assist the Committee with better-understanding the latest trends in activity. Concerns were also raised regarding some of the figures in the report, particularly the increase in notifiable crimes of 8.6% in the year to the end of March 2022 and the 15% increase in serious violent public space crimes. The Head of Safer Communities gave an update on activity figures for the rolling year to the end of July 2022. This covered that there had been significant decreases in reports of weapons possessions and knife crime, but reports of violence

against the person in public spaces has increased on the previous year. There were also higher numbers of sexual offences and incidents of stalking and harassment, but burglary has reduced everywhere in the county except Wealden. Drug offences had reduced quite significantly, and ASB in the nuisance category had reduced by around 50% in all of the district and borough areas. It was noted that the percentage changes sometimes related to some very small numbers (e.g. hate crime had gone up by a large percentage increase but it related to relatively small numbers initially). The Head of Safer Communities committed to check with police colleagues if rolling-year police data on activity could be shared with the Committee to provide the latest figures.

- **County Lines activity** – a question was asked on whether there was data available on crime and ASB incidents linked specifically to increased County Lines activity. The Head of Safer Communities agreed to see if it was possible to get an update on data related to County Lines for the Committee and added that the Safer Communities Partnership Board had asked to receive more regular reports on the work taking place to address child exploitation and county lines.
- **Activity in Devonshire Ward** – it was confirmed that the reference in Appendix 1 to Devonshire Ward in Eastbourne consistently having the highest number of both victims and perpetrators of serious violence related to the highest numbers of both for the whole of East Sussex.
- **Refuge service contract handover** – further information was requested on the lessons learned from issues referenced in the report with the handover of the refuge contract to a new provider in 2021. The Head of Safer Communities responded that the main learning from a commissioning perspective was that there needed to be less reliance on provider reports and more direct engagement with people using services. A community development worker had now been employed to work across Sussex to create a lived experience network and board that would feed into, and be represented on, the Sussex Partnership Board for Domestic Abuse to ensure the lived experiences of victims was captured at a strategic level.
- **Sourcing accommodation for refuges and other support** - further information was requested on what might be involved in the compulsory purchase of empty buildings, such as hotels, that could be used to deliver services such as refuges, or accommodation for other groups such as refugees. The Director of Adults Social Care responded that sourcing such accommodation required a really clear understanding of need and where it was geographically. ASC would prefer not to use compulsory purchase to source accommodation for refuges because doing so could be time-consuming and expensive. The Director also clarified that refuges were not typically large blocks of accommodation and the service was instead focussing on provision of small, local accommodation to meet the broad range of needs of people requiring refuges. In terms of support for refugees, the Director highlighted to the Committee that the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health had agreed at their last meeting to allocate move-on funding for Ukrainian guests to bring their private housing options in line with other refugee groups, such as Syrian and Afghan refugees. Even with this funding, the priority was to ask hosts to continue to support guests wherever possible as housing supply was hugely challenged in East Sussex, and this area required close work with borough and district partners as the county's housing authorities.
- **Work of the Partnership** – comments on the positive work of the Safer East Sussex Partnership, including the work with borough and district partners, were noted.

13.3 The Committee RESOLVED to request that an update on data on County Lines activity; and the latest police data on headline activity covered in the report be shared with the Committee, if agreed to by Sussex Police.

14. EAST SUSSEX SAFEGUARDING ADULTS BOARD (SAB) ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

14.1 The Director of Adult Social Care and Health introduced the report on behalf of the Independent Chair of the East Sussex SAB, Deborah Stuart-Angus, who would usually present the report but had had to send apologies to this meeting. The Director highlighted that the report covered the work of the partnership board in the 2021/22 year, and the work and focus of the Partnership during this time had continued to be heavily impacted by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The Director's introduction covered key highlights from the report under the SAB's five strategic themes; and noted that a number of areas covered in the report, such as the safeguarding issues presented by domestic abuse and modern slavery, linked to the work of the Safer Communities Partnership covered in the previous agenda item, and vice versa. The Director also highlighted the increasing complexity of safeguarding cases that the agencies in the SAB were seeing, with incidents of self-neglect and coercion and control particularly challenging to respond to. The Director concluded by highlighting common areas for learning and assurance arising from Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SAR) that had taken place in 2021/22. The Interim SAB Development Manager was invited to comment and added that the SAB continued to be very active, including in SAR activity, with three SARs underway currently and that area of the SAB's work increasing.

14.2 The Chair thanked the Director and SAB Development Manager for the report. The Committee asked questions and made comments on the following areas:

- **General Practitioner (GP) safeguarding referrals** – a question was asked on whether numbers of safeguarding referrals from GPs had improved, noting that this had been an area of concern for the Committee in previous years. In response, the Director committed to follow up with the figures but understood that safeguarding referrals from Primary Care more broadly, including from roles other than GPs, such as practice nurses, had significantly improved. A lot of work had been done through the SAB and NHS Commissioners to raise awareness of adult safeguarding in health, to bring this in line with the awareness of children's safeguarding.
- **Partnership Protocol** – a question was asked on how the partnership protocol mentioned in the report was applied in practice. The SAB Development Manager responded that the protocol had been in place since 2016 as the focus of the safeguarding partnerships frequently overlapped. Recently, a piece of work had been undertaken looking at common learning themes from reviews (Domestic Homicide Reviews, Safeguarding Adults Reviews, Drug and Alcohol Related Death Reviews and Local Children Safeguarding Practice Reviews). This had identified a number of areas to focus on and there would now be bi-monthly meetings of review managers, which would include sharing recommendations from reviews underway and ones that had concluded, to ensure action planning was smarter and avoided duplication. The partnerships were also looking at other ways to amalgamate learning to make better use of capacity and resources. Other areas of joint working had included ensuring SARs and Domestic Homicide Reviews had similar action plans to give the clearest overview of common themes in learning possible; and increasing awareness of modern slavery through the safeguarding community network. Work had also taken place with community workers and district and borough councils to develop awareness of modern slavery in the rollout of the Homes for Ukraine, Syrian and Afghan refugee schemes.
- **Learning from complaints** – a question was asked on the reasons for no outcome being recorded for three complaints in the SAB Annual Report. The Director explained that one of the complaints was ongoing so would receive an outcome when it concluded, while the other two had reached a conclusion without necessarily being formally upheld or rejected.

The Director assured the Committee that all complaints were viewed openly and as an opportunity to learn.

- **East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT) safeguarding training** – a question was asked on whether the Webinar and flowchart that had been produced to improve ESHT staff knowledge of the process of raising a safeguarding concern had now been delivered. The Director responded that the delivery of this training sat with ESHT and so they would follow up to confirm if the issue had been resolved and update the Committee.
- **Fire Authority Home Safety Visits** – Councillor Carolyn Lambert, as Vice Chair of the East Sussex Fire Authority (ESFA), welcomed the report highlighting work by East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (ESFRS) on Home Safety Visits (HSVs). The ESFA Vice Chair also welcomed any support the County Council could lend to ESFRS in rolling out a new telephone befriending service. In response, the Director agreed that ESFRS made a significant contribution to the SAB and that huge progress had been made with delivering HSVs. The Director would speak to officers at ESFRS to find out more about befriending service and whether ESCC could support its rollout.
- **Preventing vulnerability by encouraging Pension Credit take-up** – a question was asked on whether work was taking place to encourage pensioners to take up unclaimed Pension Credit they were entitled to, to reduce risk of vulnerability. The Director responded that that activity would sit outside the responsibilities of the SAB but ASC had recently re-established the East Sussex Financial Inclusion Steering Group (FISG), comprised of ESCC, voluntary and community sector partners, boroughs and districts and the Department for Work and Pensions, to look at ways the group could collectively support residents to face challenges from the rising cost of living. One of the key roles of this Group was to maximise uptake of benefits in the county through making people aware of their eligibility, and if necessary, support them with making their claims. The Director noted that the FISG had been working on pulling together information on cost of living support to go on the ESCC website. The Chair of the Committee asked that when this went live it was also shared with town and parish councils and the Director confirmed it would be shared with town and parish council clerks.

14.3 The Committee RESOLVED to request that the latest figures on GP safeguarding referrals and an update on the rollout of online training on safeguarding referrals for ESHT staff be provided to the Committee.

15. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

15.1 The Director of Adult Social Care and Health introduced the report which provided the latest update to the Committee in the current RPPR cycle. The report covered the latest assessment of the policy and financial position for the Council for 2023/24 and beyond, due to be considered at the next meeting of the Cabinet, including an initial assessment of the potential financial impact of the planned ASC charging reforms. The report also covered proposed use of the one-off £5.175m Services Grant for 2022/23, taking account of feedback from the Committee's consideration of proposed use for the funding at its awayday earlier in September. The Director outlined that a prudent approach to use of the funding was being recommended to Cabinet; holding most of the funding in reserve given the particularly uncertain financial outlook for the Council. The exception was the recommendation to allocate £270k to activities to support recruitment and retention given the workforce challenges faced by all Departments. The Director noted that the proposal of introducing a Family Safeguarding model, which the Committee had been supportive of, was now also proposed to be taken forward on a longer term basis within the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

15.2 Following the Director's introduction, the Committee asked questions and made comments on the following areas:

- **Plan for Patients** – a question was asked on whether the £500m fund Government had announced alongside the Plan for Patients would replace the funds lost from the cancelled National Insurance increase. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health responded that the fund was separate to funding for the charging reforms and the Department understood that it had been allocated to support the health system through the winter, particularly with facilitation of hospital discharges. The exact allocations for ESCC, the means of allocation (e.g. whether it will be allocated to the NHS or local authorities) and conditions for use were unknown.
- **Market Sustainability Plan** – the Committee asked if it would be possible to receive a copy of the Market Sustainability Plan once finalised and reviewed by the Department for Health. In response, the Director explained that the estimated impact of the Fair Cost of Care exercise was included within the report to Cabinet and would be talked through at a Whole Council Forum for councillors the following day. The Director confirmed the Committee could receive a copy of the Market Sustainability Plan, although the Director would need to take advice on whether this was done confidentially given the potential commercial implications for the market of the information included within it.
- **Funding for future financial uncertainty** – a question was asked on whether there was scope to reduce the proposed funding to be set aside for managing uncertainty following announcements in the Chancellor's recent mini-budget statement, such as the cancellation of the planned National Insurance increase which ESCC would no longer need to budget for. The Chief Finance Officer responded that from a budget perspective, the reduction in employer National Insurance requirements was welcomed as the increase had added £1.3m to the 2023/24 budget. However, as an element of the one-off services grant was allocated to fund the employer National Insurance increase, there was an increased risk that the grant would be reduced, therefore having a net nil impact on the MTFP, or redistributed. The Chief Finance Officer therefore recommended that it was prudent for the funding to be held in reserve until the draft Local Government Finance Settlement was published, as ESCC was facing uncertainty around a number of funding streams.
- **Projected deficit** – clarity on the increase in the projected deficit figures included in the report was requested, and the Chief Finance Officer explained that £14.999m was the deficit to 2025/26 that had been projected at State of the County in July. Over the summer officers had updated modelling to take account of local changes and pressures, and this had increased the projected total budget deficit to £31.471m by 2025/26. Appendix 1 of the RPPR report to Cabinet provided the detail on the movements since July. A follow-up question to clarify the budget position in 2023/24 was asked and the Chief Finance Officer explained that the deficit for 2023/24 was projected to be £17.544m and that the table included in paragraph 3.3 of the RPPR report to Cabinet showed both the annual and cumulative projected deficit.
- **Proposals to maximise recruitment and retention** – a question was asked on what proportion of the proposed investment in activity to support recruitment and retention would be spent on retention. The Chief Finance Officer committed to follow up with a response. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health added for clarity that the investment proposed in the report was to be spent on addressing challenges with recruitment and retention of directly employed staff, and while there were recognised, significant challenges with recruitment and retention of care workers in the independent sector, addressing that was not the focus of this proposed investment. Separate work was underway to address this which included a range of activity including overseas recruitment.

15.3 The Committee RESOLVED to request to see a copy of the Market Sustainability Plan when it was finalised and to request further information on the proportion of proposed investment on recruitment and retention that would be spent on retention.

16. WORK PROGRAMME

16.1 The Chair introduced the report on the Committee's latest work programme, outlining that the draft work programme appended to the report reflected changes agreed at the Committee's recent work planning awayday. The Chair asked the Committee for any further comments or changes regarding the work programme and the following was discussed:

Report on Armed Forces Covenant

16.2 The Chair asked if the Committee could receive an update report on ESCC's work on the Armed Forces Covenant and the work needed for ESCC to achieve a gold accreditation. The Director of Children's Services explained that the Lead Member for Children and Families had recently become the Armed Forces Champion. The Covenant had been placed on a statutory footing and a number of steps had been taken to look at enhancing ESCC's work in this area. This included arranging training for councillors and members of staff on the new Armed Forces Covenant duty, looking at what would be required to move ESCC from silver to gold in the employer accreditation programme and undertaking a staff survey to determine how many members of staff had a connection to the armed forces community. While the survey had only just started and only 50 returns had been received to-date, 20% of respondents had said they had a link. The Director explained that in terms of the staff accreditation, ESCC was very close to meeting the requirements to be gold standard and the ambition was to achieve this by the time of ESCC renewing the signing of the Covenant in 2023. An event was planned to be held after the local elections in 2023, inviting district and borough partners to sign the covenant and put a spotlight on actions taken by each council to discharge their obligations under the covenant.

16.3 The Director and Lead Member for Children and Families added that it had been challenging to secure full engagement from borough and district partners on this work but engagement continued. ESCC hoped that in playing a leadership role it would be able to demonstrate to other public sector organisations what was possible, and the contextual pressures facing all councils, which made it challenging to engage in work such as this, were also noted. The Chair of the Committee asked if the work on the Covenant needed to be better highlighted to borough and district councils and the Director responded that as the legal basis for the Covenant was a new development, there was a need for general awareness raising and this was the reason for provision of the staff and councillor training.

Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group

16.4 Councillor Clark commented that it was important the reference group held its final meeting to consider the final recommendations of the work that had taken place and how that would be progressed. Councillor Clark remarked on the ongoing importance of tackling loneliness, including thinking about how to connect with, and share information on services, with elderly people who do not have access to computers.

16.5 Councillor Hollidge noted that the Place Scrutiny Committee had requested a report on the work of the libraries service and suggested there was a need to promote that service, both physical libraries and work with volunteers to take books out into the community, as a way to connect with people who were not able to get online. The Chair of the Committee agreed that the service provided an important opportunity to connect with people and asked that it was explored whether the Committee could also have an update on the work of the libraries service.

16.6 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the updated work programme, with the addition of an update report on work to deliver the Armed Forces Covenant.

17. EAST SUSSEX SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

17.1 The Independent Chair of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership introduced himself and the report, which the Independent Chair reminded the Committee was a report covering the work of the multi-agency Partnership, rather than solely the safeguarding work of ESSC. The Independent Chair noted that the Committee had requested that this report cover learning for East Sussex from the national reviews into the deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson and the Independent Chair assured the Committee that the Partnership had carefully considered the messages from the National Panel's report. The Independent Chair had written to all the strategic leads for safeguarding in the Partnership to ask what steps they were taking to respond to the recommendations in the national reviews and he had been re-assured by the responses received, with a number of actions taking place, including a mock-Joint Targeted Area Inspection.

17.2 The Independent Chair highlighted that the Partnership had conducted eight multi-agency rapid reviews of cases of child serious injuries or deaths and four of those had resulted in a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review in 2021/22. The Independent Chair added that the East Sussex system and all strategic leads were very open to learning from those reviews. The Independent Chair also highlighted a range of key developments and achievements within the report and concluded by commenting that the ESSCP was one of the best safeguarding partnerships he had seen in his time working in safeguarding, with really strong leaders in all agencies who all agreed that safeguarding was key.

17.3 The Committee asked questions and made comments on the following areas:

- **Sufficiency of resourcing for safeguarding** – a question was asked on whether there was sufficient resource to carry out the work that safeguarding partners felt was needed to address issues identified by the ESSCP. The Independent Chair responded that while they felt there was not enough resource to do all that the ESSCP would want to, and they would always be supportive of more investment in safeguarding, the resources the partnership and its members did have were extremely well managed and effective. The Director of Children's Services added that while they would also always support opportunities to invest in children's services and safeguarding work, even if more funding was to become available it would be challenging to recruit more children's social workers at this time. The Director felt that the service had just about enough resource for what it needed to deliver but noted that caseloads of social workers were the highest they had been, with some social workers responsible for 23-25 cases as opposed to the 16-18 cases that were aimed for. All cases were managed very carefully. The Director added that the proposals to implement a Family Safeguarding Model through RPPR involved recruiting 36 additional workers to deliver adult support which was a significant investment but was expected to deliver savings in the longer-term by keeping children out of care wherever safe and possible.
- **Child exploitation in work** – a question was asked on whether there had been any cases of child exploitation where a child was working in a business, such as a newsagents or takeaway, without a license for that work. The Independent Chair responded that the partnership did investigate exploitation of children in work through reports of modern slavery but they were not aware of any examples of children being exploited at work in the way described in the question. The Director added that Children's Services was responsible for approving licenses for children to work in the way described and committed to find out the latest position

on this and provide an update. The Independent Chair and Director also noted that criminal and sexual exploitation was more a focus of the ESSCP and the report.

- **Supervision caseloads** – a Member of the Committee commented that they understood there had been an improvement in numbers of cases supervisors were responsible for, and welcomed this improvement, as the Department had previously been found by the regulator to need to address this. The Director said she believed that the approach to supervision of cases in East Sussex was strong.

- **Safeguarding in Elective Home Education (EHE)** – the strengthened legal basis local authorities had for requesting evidence from parents of suitable home education was welcomed and a question asked on whether there was an overlap between hidden children and those in EHE, and if so, how those children would be identified and assessed. In response the Director agreed that it was positive that the recent outcome of the Judicial Review of Portsmouth City Council's approach to securing assurance on home education standards would support other local authorities to take a similarly rigorous approach.

In terms of safeguarding, it was the Director's view that it was a limitation of the service's safeguarding powers that it did not have a right of entry into people's homes to confirm EHE children were safe, unless evidence was already available of safeguarding concerns. The Government had proposed to establish a register of children not in school within the new Schools Bill, however the Director understood that the new Ministerial Team were now looking to remove this from the planned legislation. The Director recognised that some parents felt strongly about their right to home educate and that many were doing a great job, but felt that given the number of serious case reviews there had been in East Sussex that had involved children who were EHE, it was right to be concerned about limitations in safeguarding in this area. There had been a significant increase in EHE during the pandemic, with 1800 children now home educated in East Sussex, and the Director was really concerned about the potential risks this presented. Committee Members also had concerns about this rising number, and noted that school provided important social and cultural experiences for children. The Chair of the Committee asked if there was anything the Committee could do to make clear to Government their support for strengthening the safeguarding powers councils had, and the Director responded that the Council could write to Government about this. The Association of the Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) had already written to Government to emphasise how strongly they felt about the safeguarding risks from EHE.

- **Engagement with home educating parents** – a question was asked on what engagement the County Council had had with the Home Schooling Network which supported parents with home education. The Director responded that the Council had good relationships with many parents who home educated, including the networks and organisations that support them. The Director felt it was important that parents recognised that the Council's education service could not provide professional support to parents who were home educating and that they also recognised home educating would be challenging and require significant commitment. Children's Services had explored implementing an approach where for every case where a parent wanted to move their child into home education, there was a three-way meeting with the school, the parents and the EHE Team to look at why the parents felt their child should be off rolled. Taking this approach at Portsmouth Council had halved the number of new starting EHE children. While it was not possible to resource this approach for all children moving to EHE at ESSCP, the service would be piloting the approach for cases where a family were looking at home educating due to concerns about the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision at school to see if alternative steps could be taken to keep the child in school.

- **Motivations and reasons for EHE** - a follow-up question was asked on whether the increases in the numbers of children home educated was due to concerns about SEND

provision or whether there were other causes. The Director responded that there were varied reasons that a parent may decide to EHE their child. Some parents had different visions for education to mainstream schooling. There were also parents who may feel their child's needs were not being met and it was those cases the Department was looking to understand with the above pilot to see if there was a way they could be supported to stay in school. There were also instances where EHE was considered by parents because otherwise they would be pursued for their child's non-attendance. These cases were of particular concern.

- **Cost of EHE** - a question was asked on whether there was a cost to the Council from increasing numbers of EHE. The Director responded that there had been an increase in costs from the need to expand the EHE team to administer processes but there were no costs to ESCC associated with supervising the education of home educated children, as the Council could not supervise this. In terms of funding for education more broadly, funding was provided for schools on the basis of the numbers of children on the school roll in January each year, so there would be less money for schools overall due to the reduction in children accessing education.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) pressures** – the increase in CAHMS referrals and in children attending A&E due to self-harm mentioned in the report was noted and a question asked on the work the ESSCP had done to secure assurance around the safeguarding of children with mental health issues given the pressures on CAHMS. The Independent Chair responded that there was a need to recognise that mental health issues facing children needed to be responded to by everyone, not just CAMHS services. The ESSCP was looking at the work needed to support children before they reached the stage of requiring support from CAMHS, which involved upskilling teachers, upskilling parents to deal with challenges facing children before they progressed (while also recognising what was usual adolescent behaviour) and improving mental health provision in schools. The Independent Chair noted that this was challenging to do as the demand on CAMHS was great and working to try to reduce this would be one of the major challenges facing agencies in the partnership in the next two to three years.
- **Identification of risk presented by County Lines** – a question was asked on how children were identified as being at high risk, as it was noted that only five children had been identified as high risk, which appeared low given the breadth of safeguarding concerns covered in the report and the threats presented from increasing County Lines activity. The Director responded that there were high, medium and low risk levels and children at 'high' risk were in what could be described as very high risk (e.g. at real, immediate risk of exploitation). Those five children would have been a snapshot at the time the report was written, with all agencies working very hard to try to keep them safe. There were likely to be other children facing a high risk of exploitation, including from activity such as County Lines, but these would have been the children the service knew about at that time. The Independent Chair added that East Sussex was not an outlier in its number of children at high risk and was also not alone in the threat of exploitation arising from County Lines.

17.4 The Chair thanked the Independent Chair for the report and the assurance it had provided the Committee that the Partnership worked effectively and positive steps were being taken to improve safeguarding of children and young people in the county. The Committee RESOLVED to ask the Director of Children's Service to:

- write to Government to reflect the Committee's concerns around the expected withdrawal of plans to legislate for Councils to have new powers to improve safeguarding in EHE; and
- provide information on employment licences for children issued by ESCC.

The meeting ended at 4.50 pm.

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)