

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 14 July 2025.

PRESENT Councillors Johanna Howell (Chair), Kathryn Field (Vice Chair), Colin Belsey, Charles Clark, Anne Cross, Nuala Geary, Peter Pragnell, Stephen Shing, Colin Swansborough, John Ungar and Trevor Webb. Lesley Hurst, Diocese of Chichester Representative (online)

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families (online)
Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health (online)

ALSO PRESENT Ben Brown, Consultant in Public Health
Nathan Caine, Head of Education: SEND and Safeguarding
Michael Courts, East Sussex Housing Partnership Lead
Deborah Ennis, Assistant Director, Commissioning and Transformation
Darrell Gale, Director of Public Health
Ian Gutsell, Chief Finance Officer
Hayley Martin, Health Improvement Principal
Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

1. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 MARCH 2025

1.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2025 as a correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative).

3. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

3.1 Councillor Webb disclosed a personal, non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 8, East Sussex Housing Partnership, as a trustee of His Place, Hastings and as a voluntary member of Maslow Housing Co-operative.

4. URGENT ITEMS

4.1 There were no urgent items.

5. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

5.1 The Director of Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) introduced the report which marked the start of the Committee's input into the 2025/26 RPPR cycle and provided a stock take of the Council's position for scrutiny's consideration ahead of more detailed planning for the 2026/27 financial year. The report contained as appendices relevant parts of the Council's Year-End Monitoring Report, which highlighted achievements and challenges for services the Committee scrutinised, and the State of the County report which looked ahead at demographic, financial and policy trends and challenges. The Director highlighted the challenges of demand,

complexity and cost outlined in the State of the County report and noted the limited financial options available to the Council due to reduced reserves.

5.2 In relation to ASC the report set out a £10m overspend, mainly due to additional demand on the community care budget arising from increases in assessments and reviews as well as specialist work in mental capacity and deprivation of liberty. The Council remained in the upper quartile for its indicators and the recent ASC survey showed improvement in 5/6 areas of ASC services.

5.3 Priorities for the department remained around prevention, waiting times, safeguarding, quality and value for money. There would also be a focus on developing an action plan in response to the awaited Care Quality Commission (CQC) rating outcome from the recent assessment; responding to national reforms including the recently published NHS 10 Year Plan; and developing health and social care integration programmes with partners.

5.4 The Assistant Director Commissioning and Transformation set out the key headlines in relation to Children's Services (CSD) in the report which included an overspend of £13.6m due to staffing costs in localities, looked after children placements, and costs in Home to School Transport. The Assistant Director commented that the Dedicated Schools Grant position in March 2025 was surplus of £2.8m, however that was not expected to continue and the Department was forecasting a deficit at the end of 2025/26. The Assistant Director noted progress against targets with many met as well as areas for improvement, including education measures and attainment in Bexhill and Hastings areas. There was significant work underway in these areas to improve attainment and would remain a focus looking forward.

5.5 Other areas of focus for CSD including addressing areas of overspend, including placement costs and Home to School Transport; responding to national policy changes; and prevention and early intervention.

5.6 The Chief Finance Officer (CFO) outlined the key financial outlook in the report which set out the 2024/25 outturn deficit position of £7.6m, in addition to the £14.3m planned draw from reserves when the budget was set. The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in the State of the County projected a deficit of £36.5m for 2026/27.

5.7 The CFO commented that the recent Government Spending Review (Fair Funding Review 2.0) included some welcome announcements, including the updating of relative needs formulae, recognition of remoteness in an Area Cost Adjustment and the consolidation and simplification of grants, however there were still many unknowns in terms of future funding arrangements. He also noted, for East Sussex, this had resulted in an increased recognition of need, however, for Adult Social Care, there was a reduction for ESCC in the relative need formula due to a shift in focus from older people to working age adults. The new foundation formula would also result in fewer allocations to some local services, including cultural and environmental projects. The demand on Home to School Transport however was recognised which was positive, although a 20 miles per journey cap would limit the potential benefit overall, there was a risk that ESCC could see reduced funding under new mechanisms and would be responding to the consultation to ensure allocations would be able to meet the needs of East Sussex.

5.8 The Government was also consulting on council tax equalisation. It was currently unclear how that would impact on ESCC, but shire counties could see reduced funding and local modelling would therefore need to factor in funding for ESCC to either flatline or reduce. The CFO also noted the work underway on a CIPFA Financial Resilience and Governance review.

5.9 The Committee thanked officers for the information provided in the reports and through ongoing briefings, although requested that fewer acronyms were used in reports. The Committee discussed and asked questions in the following areas:

- **ASC survey** – The Committee welcomed the positive feedback received from the ASC survey, particularly regarding the work of the Joint Community Rehabilitation Team. The Director of ASCH also welcomed this feedback and noted that this highlighted good practice in health and social care integration and commented that work was ongoing to develop this further through integrated neighbourhood teams.
- **Use of the independent sector**– The Committee enquired about the use of the independent sector to deliver services, including Interventions Alliance, and asked if the Council prioritised the voluntary, community and enterprise sector (VCSE) in its commissioning and how many VCSE organisations had applied. The Director of ASCH clarified that during the tendering process priority was given to quality and value, including social value; the number of applications from the VCSE sector for the Refuge contract would be provided after the meeting. He also directed Members to the Market Position Statement which sets out the required provision to meet need. In relation to wider reliance on the independent sector, the Director commented that it was important to have a mixed economy of care and that due to CQC regulations, it could be challenging for some providers to meet standards and noted there was little interest in providing support for older people from the VCSE sector.
- **Support for carers** – The Committee enquired about a target to support carers. The Director clarified that this target related to a small, targeted service to support carers in crisis. The Department was focussed on preventing the need for this support so would aim to see a reduction. It was also noted that the voluntary organisation that provided this support was seeing fewer referrals but had increased the number of visits for individuals due to increasing complexities. The target had been changed to reflect this.
- **Prevent workshops** – There was a question about the number of workshops provided to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) providers with a comment that this seemed high. The Director of ASCH noted that a detailed written response could be provided after the meeting but that this was not particularly high given the broad range of SEND provision, including schools, in the county.
- **Employability Brokers** – The Committee sought clarification on the KPIs in relation to the Employability Broker's project. The Director of ASCH noted that this was partly due to the project building capacity - the KPI only reflected part year, as well as the significant work involved in supporting people into employment.
- **Drug and alcohol support** – The Committee expressed concern about the increase in drug and alcohol related deaths and asked about work to promote support services. The Director of ASCH commented that there had been an increase nationally and more significantly locally in drug and alcohol related deaths but clarified that most of these related to people with a long period of misusing alcohol and where alcohol is recorded as a factor of death; there had not been an increase in overdose related deaths. The Director noted the high success rates of people engaging with treatment, with ESCC above the national average for successful completion rates of rehabilitation courses, and there was continued investment in drug services. The Director of Public Health added that deaths often related to people unconnected with ESCC services. Work was underway to identify people in need of support, including through hospital admissions, and further promote support available, including the ADDER project, as well as work with providers to reduce stigma around seeking support. The Committee welcomed this work and asked for more information about the new measure which includes alcohol specific mortality and deaths related to drug

misuse. The Director ASCH confirmed that a written response with this detail would be provided after the meeting.

- **Cost of Adult and Children's Social Care** – The Committee asked if the Council had been too conservative in its budget planning for adult and children's social care costs given the overspend. The Director of ASCH clarified that each year an estimate on growth and demography in terms of fee uplifts is negotiated for older people, but for other adults and younger people this is negotiated depending on need. The challenge for both budgets was that they were demand led, and the Council had a legal duty to meet eligible need, and it had been difficult to predict the level of need. The Council was however, seeing an increasing complexity in need each year.
- **Local government funding** – the Committee sought clarification on proposals for local government funding, including the consolidation of some specific funding and the increased focus on deprivation, and asked how the Council would be responding to the current Fair Funding Consultation. The CFO noted that a simplification of grants would be welcome, however the mechanism to deliver this was not yet clear. In terms of changes to relative needs, he noted that although this had increased for ASC, the shift in focus from older people to working age adults meant this would be a loss for ESCC. 100% Council Equalisation would also be a disadvantage due to the assumption of 100% collection. The Council would respond to the consultation outlining the needs of East Sussex to ensure ESCC and its partners could effectively use of grant resources to meet the needs of residents.
- **Youth Centre Heathfield** – Councillor Cross welcomed the imminent opening of the new youth centre in Heathfield. The Assistant Director, Commissioning and Transformation noted this was positive for young people in the area.
- **Foster Carers** – The Committee welcomed the increase in ESCC in-house foster carers and noted the excellent care children received from in house provision and foster carers and commented that some of the related red RAG ratings in the report reflected the complexity of care required by some young people. The Assistant Director, Commissioning and Transformation noted the success in recruiting in house foster carers which would benefit children in East Sussex as well as relieve pressure on social care costs. She also noted work with West Sussex and Brighton & Hove councils to further develop fostering services across Sussex.
- **Educational attainment** – The Committee expressed concern about attainment scores in Hastings and Bexhill, noting the ongoing challenges in these areas despite targeted funding and work, and asked what ESCC could do to support the performance of academies and improve attainment. The Committee also asked about wider support for parents. The Assistant Director noted the targeted work and collaboration with colleagues and partners to support families, including work to prevent the need for statutory support from children's social care services for families, and work with academies to support attainment. A written response providing more detail on work to improve attainment in Hastings and Bexhill would be provided after the meeting. In response to a question on how Pupil Premium was being spent in schools, the Assistant Director noted that a written response would be provided after the meeting. The Committee commented that there was a need to expand Family Hubs to provide support to wider areas and recognised the limited role of the Council to support and influence school academies.
- **Youth Justice Inspection** – In response to a request to see the Youth Justice Inspection report, the Assistant Director, Commissioning and Transformation noted that this would be circulated to the Committee and commented that it had received a good outcome.
- **HUGG voucher underspend** – The Committee enquired about the reasons for an underspend on HUGG vouchers. A written response after the meeting

clarified that vouchers were delivered through early years settings, schools and college. However, not all vouchers were redeemed by families. CSD continued to promote the take up of vouchers through its communication channels and education settings.

- **Home to School Transport** – The Committee discussed the financial pressures in Home to School Transport (HTST), reflecting on the statutory duties in relation to this, and asked for more detail on how money is allocated and how alternative options are considered; how decisions on HTST are made across CSD and Communities, Economy and Transport (CET) departments; and if there was potential for further scrutiny. The Assistant Director, Commission and Transformation noted that further detail could be provided on work with CET. Some Members commented that the ability to means test parents in relation to HTST could significantly reduce costs.
- **SEND reforms** – The Committee enquired about anticipated changes to Education Health and Care Plans in the upcoming Schools White Paper. The Assistant Director Commissioning and Transformation commented that upcoming SEND reforms were still unclear, with the White Paper now expected in the autumn, but the reforms were expected to be significant. Despite this uncertainty, the Department was continuing to support pupils with SEND across the county.

5.10 The Committee RESOLVED to establish an RPPR Board to meet in December to consider the developing financial position for 2026/27 and draft Portfolio Plans and agree detailed comments on those to be put to Cabinet. The Committee agreed the Membership of the RPPR Board would be the whole Committee.

5.11 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

6. WORK PROGRAMME

6.1 The Chair introduced the report which outlined the Committee's latest work programme.

Transport for all Age Care Review

6.2 Councillor Pragnell, Chair of the Scoping Board, updated the Committee on the outcome of the recent scoping board on Transport for all Age Care noting that the Board had agreed to focus on Home to School Transport (HTST) but, due to expected national guidance and the Schools White Paper, it had been agreed to hold the next meeting in the autumn to ensure the Board was as informed as possible. Some Members agreed that a meeting in the autumn would allow the Scoping Board to make an informed decision on whether to proceed with a review. The Assistant Director commented that a meeting in the autumn would include an update on the recent HTST audit and clarified that although the updated guidance would include all aspects of HTST, it was expected to align with reforms in the Schools White Paper.

6.3 Councillor Cross noted her interest in exploring topics relating to work with suppliers to mitigate transport costs and work with other authorities to share best practice and expressed concern in delaying the start of a review. Councillor Cross requested interim information on the audit report and the Assistant Director confirmed that information about the scope of the audit could be provided to the Committee after the meeting.

Forward plan

6.4 The Committee reviewed the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions.

Work Programme

6.5 The Chair informed the Committee that an awayday would take place in the autumn to consider the work programme in detail.

6.6 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the updated work programme and to further review the work programme at the upcoming awayday.

7. SEND INSPECTION REPORT

7.1 The Head of Education: SEND and Safeguarding introduced the report, noting the legal requirement for a joint inspection of SEND services by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). He commented that the inspection had taken place at a challenging time with high demand nationally in the SEND sector and that the report included lobbying work with central government as part of the national Change Programme to address key issues in the SEND system.

7.2 East Sussex was awarded the middle outcome with the inspection report noting inconsistent experiences and outcomes, which aligned with the self-assessment. An action plan had been developed in response to identified areas of improvement and work on this was underway. Another inspection was expected in three years at which point there would be an updated SEND strategy which would incorporate upcoming SEND reforms.

7.3 The Committee discussed and asked questions in the following areas:

- **Waiting times for CAMHS** – The Committee commented on the ongoing issues in relation to waiting times for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and challenges around recruitment and increases in demand. The Head of Education recognised the ongoing challenges with waiting times, including the availability of professionals and noted the work underway to provide support to families whilst they were waiting.
- **Waiting times for wheelchairs** - The Committee raised concerns about waiting times for wheelchairs and asked if there were performance issues with the provider. The Head of Education noted that this service was commissioned by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and although there were no performance issues with the provider, there had been issues with funding due to increased costs for equipment. Interim funding had since been agreed to address this and the ICB had contributed to the action plan to address both waiting times for CAMHS and wheelchairs.
- **EHCP caseloads** – Councillor Clark commented that he had received a detailed response from CSD on Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) caseloads and expressed concern about staff levels to process new applications given the increase in demand. The Head of Education noted that high demand was a challenge for the department, however ESCC performed highly on its response times to EHCP applications. He also commented that the department was not always able to provide the service it wanted due to high caseloads, and it was currently unclear what the future framework for SEND would be. Once more detail was available, the department would be able to plan the resources needed.
- **Post 16 support** – The Committee asked about work to address the lack of provision for post 16 year olds noted in the report. The Head of Education informed the Committee that there had been a significant shift in provision for post 16 year olds over recent years with a reduction in level 1 and entry level courses at a local level. The department was working with providers to anticipate future need, develop new courses, and share information on the needs of current pupils through annual review processes. Work was also underway with parents and carers to develop commissioned post 16 provision for pupils with more complex needs and disabilities as some of the current options were limited.
- **SEND support in schools** – A question was asked about SEND support for pupils that did not meet the threshold for an EHCP but still required support. The

Head of Education informed the Committee that approximately 20% of children had some form of SEND, however only 5% had an EHCP. Schools had a responsibility to provide a graduated response to meet need before statutory support was offered and it was hoped that government reforms would shift focus from statutory high-end support to a broad inclusive offer. There was concern about the number of children not attending schools in their local communities, which was impacting on their outcomes, and the department was working with schools to provide support and develop a clear expectation that every child is supported in their school, including targeted support for pupils with more complex needs. The national Change Programme was also placing a greater emphasis on mainstream inclusion. In response to a question on the pilot special school satellite class in mainstream schools, the Head of Education noted the first meeting was taking place that day. There was evidence of it working well in other authorities and an update could be provided to the Committee on the progress of this at a later date.

- **School places for SEND pupils** – The Committee asked if children placed in special schools were ever moved back into mainstream education. The Head of Education noted that whilst the department was keen for this to happen where possible, this was rare with parents often not wanting to move their children back into mainstream settings due to a lack of trust that this could provide the right support.

7.4 The Committee thanked officers for the report and requested an update on progress be brought to the Committee at a later date.

7.5 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report and to receive an update on progress of the action plan at a future meeting.

8. EAST SUSSEX HOUSING PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

8.1 The East Sussex Housing Partnership (ESHP) Lead introduced the report which details the work of an East Sussex Housing Partnership multi agency group to develop a medium and long term vision for housing strategies in district and boroughs and set a framework for joint working.

8.2 The strategy identified key priorities including homelessness prevention; housing, health and care integration; housing standards; development and enablement; tackling climate change; and the private rented sector. The strategy was currently out for public engagement and feedback would be used to refine the strategy ahead of its adoption in the autumn. Once adopted, an annual implementation plan would be developed to address specific areas of work.

8.3 The Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health noted the recent Member briefing on the ESHP and encouraged the Committee to watch the recording if they had been unable to attend.

8.3 The Committee welcomed the work to develop the strategy and discussed and asked questions in the following areas:

- **Issues in housing planning** – The Committee discussed issues with planning including delays to building once permission has been granted; a lack of social housing; accountability; restrictions under current legislation and affordability. The ESHP Lead responded that the Partnership was working closely with Developers East Sussex to look at these issues, including challenges with affordable housing delivery on section 106 sites and to explore opportunities for collaboration and funding. Housing authorities were also seeking to address these issues, and this had informed the strategy. Work was also underway with housing partners to input into local plans. The issue of affordability, including

feedback from engagement would continue to be considered in the development of the strategy. In response to a question on collaboration with the National Housing Federation (NHF), the ESHP Lead clarified that the NHF was on its strategic board and had supported key areas of work including the production of a framework of good practice and a recent consultation on supported housing regulation.

- **Funding** – The Committee enquired about funding for the work of the Partnership, noting government funding for housing cooperatives, and enquired if this funding could be used by the Partnership. The ESHP Lead confirmed there was a funding allocation to Homes England to support those types of initiatives and part of the Partnership network was supporting community led housing initiatives; the Partnership would continue to explore opportunities and work would continue with districts and boroughs to support schemes at a local level. In terms of wider funding for the ESHP and why this work was happening now, the ESHP Lead noted a number of ongoing initiatives to support fuel poverty and homelessness prevention etc.; the strategy aimed to look at how these projects contributed to a longer term vision and how housing could work with system partners to develop the sector and address gaps in provision.
- **Supporting people with multiple compound needs** – In response to a question on a strategy to manage demand in relation to people who have been moved into East Sussex from neighbouring authorities, the ESHP Lead noted these cases were part of the Partnership's wider work to support people with multiple compound needs and learning from these would inform the future approach, including strengthening partnerships with neighbouring authorities to address regional challenges.
- **Floating Housing Support** – The Committee asked for an update on funding for floating housing support. The Director of ASCH noted that referral pathways had recently been revised to reflect lower activity levels due to the reduction in funding and clarified that ESCC would continue to fund £0.5m; priority would be given to households with children at risk of homelessness and households with adults at risk of needing care if housing needs are not met. Combined funding from districts and boroughs would also provide £0.5m and this would focus on homelessness prevention. The ESHP Lead commented that the Homelessness Prevention Grant funded the majority of this work, and the continuation of this had been confirmed in the recent Spending Review, however local allocations were yet to be confirmed. Wider collaboration with districts and boroughs was also taking place on prevention services.

8.4 The Committee RESOVED to note the report.

9. HEALTHY AGEING SCRUTINY REVIEW PROGRESS REPORT

9.1 The Consultant in Public Health introduced the report which provided an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Healthy Ageing Scrutiny Review. The action plan included progress on the new Healthy Ageing Partnership, work to support older adults to be more active, and work with partners to support the Age Friendly Communities Age without Limits campaign to tackle ageism and develop age friendly communities.

9.2 The Committee welcomed the positive outcomes outlined in the report and asked questions in following areas:

- **Supporting older people in the workplace** – the Committee asked what progress had been made with local employers to support older people in the workplace as well as work with ESCC on adopting Age Friendly employment principles. The Health Improvement Principal commented that work was progressing on these actions and was on track to complete on time. In response to a question on the definition of an 'older worker', the Health Improvement

Principal clarified that the ESCC definition for an older person is anyone over the age of 50.

- **Partnership working** – The Committee welcomed the positive examples of partnership working, including the Active Partnerships to support people with physical activity as they age. There was also a request to hear more about progress of this work in the northern parts of the county.

9.3 Councillor Ungar, Chair of the Review Board, thanked members of the Review Board and officers for their work on the review and commented on the positive outcomes it had produced. Councillors Geary and Webb, members of the Review Board, also commented on their positive experiences working on the review, including engaging with knowledgeable witnesses.

9.4 The Committee agreed to note the report and to receive a further update report in six months' time.

Meeting ended at: 13:44

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)