

## PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 22 September 2025.

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PRESENT Councillors Johanna Howell (Chair), Kathryn Field (Vice Chair), Colin Belsey, Charles Clark, Anne Cross, Nuala Geary, Stephen Shing, Colin Swansborough and Matthew Beaver and Lesley Hurst Diocese of Chichester Representative

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health (attended online)

ALSO PRESENT Seona Douglas, Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Adults Board  
Carolyn Fair, Director of Children's Services  
Ian Gutsell, Chief Finance Officer  
Michaela Richards, Head of Safer Communities  
Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care and Health  
Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

### 10. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

10.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2025 as a correct record.

### 11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

11.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Webb and John Hayling Parent Governor Representative. Councillor Beaver was in attendance as a substitute for the current vacancy on the Committee.

### 12. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

12.1 There were no disclosures of interest.

### 13. URGENT ITEMS

13.1 There were no urgent items.

### 14. WORK PROGRAMME

14.1 The Chair introduced the work programme report which outlined the Committee's latest work programme, including its ongoing input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR process), noting that the Committee was meeting in October to discuss this in more detail.

14.2 Councillor Cross commented on the upcoming Home to School Transport scoping board meeting and that it would be helpful to see the recent audit report on Home to School Transport. The Director of Children's Services noted that this was a public report and could be circulated to the Committee, the headlines of the report would also be reported at the scoping board.

14.3 The Committee discussed the agenda for the November meeting and agreed to prioritise receiving reports on the recent Ofsted Focussed Visit of Children's Services Department (CSD) and Care Quality Commission assessment of Adult Social Care. The Committee noted that equality and inclusion were embedded in the work of ASCH, and therefore considered more

broadly by scrutiny, and that they had recently received a detailed briefing on the Climate Change Health Impact Assessment and agreed that scheduled reports on these items could be removed from the work programme at this time.

14.4 The Committee therefore RESOLVED to add the following reports to the work programme: Ofsted Focussed Visit of Children's Services Department (CSD) and Care Quality Commission assessment of Adult Social Care; and remove the following reports: Equality and Inclusion in Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) and the Climate Change Health Impact Assessment.

#### Forward plan

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

#### Work Programme

14.6 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the updated work programme and to review the work programme in more detail at the upcoming awayday.

### 15. SAFEGUARDING ADULTS BOARD- ANNUAL REPORT

15.1 The Chair of the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) introduced the report which outlined the work of the SAB for 2024-25 including progress on the strategic priorities of self-neglect; prevention and early intervention; and safeguarding and homelessness. The Chair praised the positive engagement from members of the SAB, as well as wider partners, noting a commitment to ensure safeguarding is person centred, collaborative, timely and proportionate.

15.2 The Director of ASCH thanked the Chair for her work on the SAB and commented on the Board's approach to collate resources and knowledge to protect vulnerable adults. He also welcomed the current priorities which reflected the local population, noting the high number of single households who were at higher risk of self-neglect and current challenges with homelessness, and which built upon multi agency work to prevent abuse. The SAB allowed for system partners to continue to challenge each other to improve safeguarding.

15.3 The Committee welcomed the report and asked questions and made comments on the following areas:

- **Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) referrals** – The Committee enquired about the reasons for fewer SAR referrals than in previous years and asked if this was reflecting fewer incidents, or a change in criteria. The SAB Chair commented that it was difficult to attribute progress to the number of referrals as this could reflect either fewer incidents, or fewer incidents being reported and it was therefore important to interrogate this data, particularly in light of staff turnover to ensure partners had good knowledge of safeguarding.
- **Self-neglect** – The Committee welcomed the priority to support adults who self-neglect and enquired if loneliness and mental health issues were contributing factors to this. The Committee also commented that adults may not actively seek support and asked what approach was being taken to identify and support adults. In response the Chair of SAB emphasised the role of partners and the wider community, including councillors, to report concerns and share information, noting the need to be professionally curious and for a multi-agency approach. Targeted campaigns helped to raise awareness of self-neglect in communities and share the message that safeguarding is everyone's business, however noted that most referrals came from services. The Chair agreed that loneliness and mental health issues could be contributing factors to self-neglect. The Director for ASCH reiterated the need for professionals to consider the wider context when in contact with individuals and raise any concerns of self-neglect.

- **Self neglect podcast**– The Committee welcomed the use of podcasts to raise awareness of self neglect and asked how many people had listened to these. The Chair of the SAB confirmed that these were publicly available and that data could be shared after the meeting.
- **Dementia** – The Committee asked how the Board was responding to people at risk of self-neglect due to dementia and a lack of contact with services. The Chair commented that there were national examples of people with dementia that were not known to services due to a lack of contact with outside agencies or family and friends and that this was a challenge as support could only be provided if adults were known about, and noted other signs, such as property neglect, which could help identify adults at risk. The Chair also commented that older couples, where one adult has dementia, could also be at increased risk of domestic abuse in cases where more traditional gender roles were challenged and couples were unable to cope. There were increasing challenges where there was still mental capacity but a lack of willing to engage with services. Recent research with Durham University on dementia and safeguarding had produced learning for all partners in identifying risk of abuse.
- **Domestic abuse** – The Committee recognised the challenges of supporting people with domestic abuse who refuse support. The Chair responded that there were multi agency processes in place to intervene and record concerns and commented that there would be a point where people would accept help so ensuring safe mechanisms and mitigations at the point people do contact services was vital. The Director of ASCH added that multi-agency persistence aimed to ensure adults at risk are monitored and support was available when they seek support. He also noted the importance of ensuring unpaid carers were aware of the support available to them.
- **Family carers** – the Committee raised concerns about older carers (often parents) who are struggling to cope and the impact on the people they are caring for when they die. The Director acknowledged there was an increasing number of older parent carers and noted the need in these cases for a gradual increase in people accessing external support. The death of a carer could also leave people very isolated and in challenging circumstances but support from services could help to ease that transition.
- **Community cohesion** – The Committee enquired about the impact of community tensions and hate speech on vulnerable people. The Chair of SAB noted that inclusion was a key focus and the SAB worked closely with Safer Communities to respond to these issues, develop awareness across the partnership and identify any health and social care needs.
- **Data recording** – The Committee commented that it would be helpful to see a longer-term trajectory of safeguarding concerns detailed in the report to compare the data. It was noted that some of the data could be misleading, as the high proportion of white males recorded as perpetrators of aggression likely reflects the demographic makeup of East Sussex. The Chair of the SAB recognised the difficulties with some of the data and although this was regularly challenged at the SAB, it was hoped that development of the dashboard would improve on regular reporting. In response to a question about data in the report on partially achieved enquiries and if this related to levels of funding, the Director of ASCH clarified that safeguarding was a duty under the Care Act and priority of the Council and therefore not dependent on funding. The outcome data represented what the department was able to put in place, and the number of partially achieved mainly reflected adults with capacity making choices against the advice of ASCH and therefore only partial mitigations were put in place.
- **Cuckooing** – The Committee asked if ‘cuckooing’ would continue to be reported on now it had been incorporated into the Violence Reduction Partnership and commented on the wide ranging impacts ‘cuckooing’ had on individuals and the wider community. The Chair of SAB noted the joint working with health and social

care and the police and the need for a long term strategy to support people who have been 'cuckooed' and to prevent future incidents.

- **Unknown deaths** – Councillor Geary noted recent examples, in her work as a celebrant, of deaths in the community that had been unknown for some time and asked what was being done to prevent this. The Chair of the SAB commented that this could be due to a number of factors including more dispersed families or those not in regular contact, a lack of mobility, and in some cases older people whose children have passed away before them. Preventing this was part of a broader health and wellbeing agenda to ensure people live healthier lives for longer and to tackle loneliness.
- **Homelessness** – The Committee asked for clarification on which agencies provided safeguarding data around homelessness. The Chair of SAB clarified that the Board focussed on 'street homelessness', based on a national picture of SARs where this was a critical factor, and that data was shared with partners on the high level dashboard. This was a new responsibility of SAB and work would continue with partners, including district and borough councils, to progress this.
- **Identification of vulnerable households** – In response to a question about identifying vulnerable households in emergencies, the Chair of SAB noted that for adults living in supported living accommodation there was a clearer picture of occupants, however this was more challenging in other residential settings, particularly where residents were not known to services. The Director of ASCH commented that the creation of any kind of list was challenging as it would not reflect real time information and therefore would not be accurate. He noted that in major incidents the Council worked as part of a response to draw data from a range of partners to identify households with vulnerable people, however this was still dependent on people updating their records.
- **Hoarding** – The Committee asked about rising hoarding and related health risks. The Director of ASCH confirmed an increase and outlined joint work with East Sussex Fire and Rescue and local councils to identify and support at-risk individuals, including action under environmental health legislation where there is risk of disease or infection.

15.4 The Committee thanked the Chair for their work and RESOLVED to note the report.

## 16. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SAFER COMMUNITIES

16.1 The Head of Safer Communities introduced the report which outlined the performance across the Safer Communities Partnership during 2024/25. The Head of Safer Communities confirmed that East Sussex remains a safe place to live with crime rates below national average, despite some challenges in coastal areas of the county.

16.2 The Partnership's key objectives of protecting vulnerable people, identifying people at risk or harm, and keeping communities safe remained the same and business plan objectives overall were progressing well.

16.3 The Committee was informed of updated data since the publication of the report regarding deaths that had met the criteria for a domestic abuse review and heard that there had been notifications of four in the last week. The Head of Safer Communities commented that the criteria had recently broadened to include death by suicide in the context of domestic abuse.

16.4 Committee thanked officers for the report asked questions in the following areas:

- **Drug related offences** – The Committee welcomed and sought clarification on reasons for the reduction in drug related offences, particularly in the Hastings area. In response they heard that there had been significant investment in treatment and recovery through the Drug and Alcohol Treatment, Recovery and Improvement Grant which had resulted in more people entering treatment as well

as targeted work with young people. The Head of Safer Communities commented that heroin and other opiates was being used less widely amongst young people, but alcohol was becoming an increasing concern.

- **Temporary accommodation** – The Committee asked if people being housed in East Sussex from other areas, including Brighton, was having an impact on drug and alcohol related deaths in the county, including Eastbourne, and commented that issues could arise if people were housed without adequate support. The Director of ASCH informed the Committee that currently there were approximately 200 Brighton and Hove residents housed in the Eastbourne area and there had been a small number of issues as well as the recent deaths of two adults. However, relationships with colleagues at Brighton and Hove Council were positive and processes were in place to raise issues and repatriate individuals for them to access the appropriate support. In response to a request for information regarding these deaths, the Director confirmed that there had not been Safeguarding Adults Review referrals in relation to these deaths, however the department would investigate access to support services if this was a contributing factor and noted that coroners' reports would be published when available.
- **Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences referrals** – The Committee questioned the high number of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARC) referrals involving disabled individuals and comments in the report that this likely reflected both a higher local rate of self-identified disability and broader interpretations of disability by referral agencies, and asked what criteria was currently in place. The Head of Safer Communities noted that this was being looked at through the audit process but commented that agencies were likely to note individuals were emotionally distressed despite this not necessarily indicating a mental health issue.
- **Drug and alcohol deaths** – The Committee enquired about the change in criteria for recording drug and alcohol deaths and commented that if deaths were only recorded for people accessing services, any change or reduction to services would impact this data and asked if deaths related to drugs and alcohol should be recorded separately. In response the Committee heard there was separate data for deaths relating to drug and alcohol and that alcohol related deaths were often more prolonged compared to fatal overdoses. The most recent data for these was from 2023, due to coronary processes, so additional real time data focussed on people in contact with services allowed for greater understanding of the current picture. The provision of services would impact on this data, however there was significant investment in drug and alcohol services. National statistics also included drug toxicity deaths, such as paracetamol overdoses, which may reflect suicide rather than substance misuse. The Committee asked about how Safer Communities tracks drug and alcohol misuse among those not in contact with services. The Head of Safer Communities noted academic research had estimated this figure, which had consequently informed national investment in treatment, but commented that some individuals will choose not to engage with services. There had however, been local successes in reaching opiate users.
- **Community safety survey**– The Committee discussed the high number of responses to the community safety survey from Wealden residents. The Head of Safer Communities commented that this was possibly due to the Safer in East Sussex newsletter having a broader readership in Wealden. There was an effort to ensure this was circulated widely across the county and welcomed any suggestions to improve this.
- **Community cohesion** – the Committee enquired about work to support community cohesion in response to recent tensions. The Head of Safer Communities clarified that there had been very few recent incidents of far right /counter protests in East Sussex, possibly due to no hotels housing asylum seekers in the county, but noted work on monitoring community sentiments

through sharing information across statutory agencies; a community engagement strategy had been drafted for PREVENT to support conversations around community tension, particularly where there was risk of violence.

- **Domestic abuse related deaths** – A question was asked about deaths caused by domestic abuse and if there were any links to far-right violence. The Head of Safer Communities confirmed that there was evidence linking extremist behaviours to domestic abuse but there was no evidence of this locally in domestic abuse related deaths reviews, although this would remain under comprehensive review. She also noted that the recent increase in domestic abuse related deaths was due to a change in criteria which now included suicide and drug overdose in the context of domestic abuse.
- **Vaping** – A question was asked about the role of Safer Communities in tackling vaping amongst children. The Head of Safer Communities clarified the role of Public Health in encouraging smokers to vape (whilst not encouraging vaping amongst non-smokers) and Trading Standards in ensuring vapes are not sold to children. More information could be provided by Trading Standards on this issue after the meeting.
- **Local housing and crime** – The Committee asked if there was a correlation between the number of new housing estates and crime figures in East Sussex. The Head of Safer Communities informed the Committee that hot spots were monitored and that to date these were not linked to new housing estates, although noted that data could be skewed by a particular household moving into an area.
- **Shoplifting** – The Committee discussed the increase in shoplifting and commented that this data was inaccurate due to a high number of incidents that were unreported due to a lack of trust in the system. Councillor Swansborough noted discussions amongst the Town Centre Crime Panel including incidents of shoplifting by people from outside the local area. Councillor Beaver noted there was frustration amongst retail staff about the inability to stop perpetrators. The Head of Safer Communities recognised that shoplifting was under reported but that police did target prolific offenders so urged people to report any incidents.
- **Funding** – The Committee asked if funding from the Home Office to support activity in high crime and anti-social behaviour areas would continue. The Head of Safer Communities confirmed funding for this year would continue but next year was dependent on the next Spending Review. In response to a question on how local government reorganisation and devolution would impact on funding, the Director of ASCH commented that this was not yet clear but noted that the intended move of responsibility for policing and crime commissioning to the Mayoral authority would likely have an impact.

16.5 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

Meeting ended at 12.30pm.

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)