

## PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 12 March 2026.

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PRESENT Councillors Johanna Howell (Chair), Colin Belsey, Charles Clark, Nuala Geary, John Ungar, Trevor Webb and Brett Wright and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative) and Lesley Hurst (Diocese of Chichester Representative)

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Bob Standley, Lead Member for Education, and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability  
Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health (attended online)

ALSO PRESENT Carolyn Fair Director of Children's Services  
Elizabeth Funge, Assistant Director Education  
Darrell Gale, Director of Public Health  
Megan James, SEND Home to School Transport Project Manager  
Haley Martin, Health Improvement Principal  
Katie Ridgway, Head of Education: Inclusion and Partnerships  
Sarah Speedie, Head of Education - SEND and Safeguarding  
Mark Stainton Director of Adult Social Care and Health  
Jessia Stubbings, Head of Education, Participation and Planning  
Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

### 27. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

27.1 The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2025 as a correct record and RESOLVED the actions of the items that were taken on a non statutory basis.

27.2 The Chair noted that this was the last meeting of the Committee ahead of local elections in May and thanked officers for their work with the Committee as well as the work of their teams. The Chair also thanked Members for their contribution to the Committee in recent years.

27.3 The Chair thanked John Hayling for his role as Parent Governor Representative on the Committee.

### 28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

28.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anne Cross, Kathryn Field and Stephen Shing. Councillor Brett Wright attended as a substitute for Councillor Cross. Councillor Chris Dowling attended as substitute for the current vacancy. Apologies were also received from Councillor Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families.

28.2 Councillors Field and Shing attended the meeting online.

### 29. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

29.1 Councillor Colin Belsey declared personal interest for time 5 as a trustee for Age Concern in Eastbourne. He did not consider this to be prejudicial.

29.2 Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health declared a personal interest for item 5 as a Member of Rother District Council. He did not consider this to be prejudicial.

## 30. URGENT ITEMS

30.1 There were no urgent items.

## 31. HEALTHY AGEING SCRUTINY REVIEW

31.1 The Director of Public Health introduced the report as a 12 month update on the Healthy Ageing action plan, reflecting the importance of healthy ageing in East Sussex and the need to change the narrative around ageing by recognising the assets, skills and contribution of older residents, alongside work to support healthy lifestyles and reduce future care needs.

31.2 The Health Improvement Principal outlined the progress of the scrutiny review and thanked the review board for their input into this work.

31.3 Work to progress the review's recommendations included development of the *Stay Strong, Stay Steady, Stay Independent* falls prevention campaign delivered through community events and social media, the development of additional community strength and balance programmes, and work to develop an intergenerational activity toolkit, together with communications activity linked to *Age Without Limits*.

31.4 The Committee welcomed the progress made and asked questions in the following areas:

- **Intergenerational (IG) toolkit:** The Committee asked about engagement with the IG toolkit. The Health Improvement Principal advised that web page usage data was not yet available but noted strong interest through launch webinars which had been attended by people from across the community. She noted that future communications would use case studies and webinar recordings, and that a further video case study was being developed.
- **Employer engagement:** The Committee asked about engagement with employers on the Age Friendly Employer Pledge. The Health Improvement Principal explained that although this data was not available, the pledge is promoted through wellbeing at work activity and district and borough councils, including Hastings and Rother, had signed up. ESCC's HR Management Board was reviewing multiple workforce pledges to take a more holistic approach, while continuing to embed age friendly principles in practice, including retention work for over-55s.
- **Age friendly communications:** The Committee welcomed the range of activity but queried how the plan would embed sustained change beyond awareness raising, including whether Council literature/forms/policies would be reviewed and whether baseline measures and tangible outcomes would be established. The Health Improvement Principal explained that ageism is widespread and deeply ingrained and that changing attitudes would take time. Work to date had focused on raising awareness through national campaigning led by the Centre for Ageing Better, including *Age Without Limits*. Measuring impact was challenging due to limited local data, although progress was being made through age friendly community work in Hastings and Rother. Internally, officers were considering how best to promote existing national guidance on inclusive language and imagery.
- **Falls –reduced admissions:** The Committee asked whether there had been a reduction in falls admissions as a result of the work. The Health Improvement Principal advised there was no evidence yet, noting falls admission data is typically reported annually and that a campaign was unlikely, in isolation, to shift system level outcomes. There was Sussex wide work through the Sussex Frailty Board and a newly established falls subgroup focused on long term, system wide action.

- **Targeting areas of work:** The Committee asked how areas with high falls rates would be targeted beyond the initial phase, how success of intergenerational micro grants would be measured, and whether the work would be rolled out to other districts and boroughs if successful. The Health Improvement Principal explained that future work would link to Integrated Community Teams, including development of local information packs identifying hotspot data and practical actions. On grants, she advised the programme was in development and would include proportionate monitoring expectations and support for organisations to evaluate activity, with wider roll out dependent on additional resources and partnership arrangements.
- **Loneliness:** Councillor John Ungar welcomed the work and highlighted its links to previous scrutiny work on loneliness. He noted that many older people experience loneliness and that initiatives to promote physical activity and wellbeing also play an important role in bringing people together and reducing social isolation.

31.5 The Lead Member for ASCH welcomed the update and commented that the Healthy Ageing Scrutiny Review demonstrated effective scrutiny, with positive officer engagement. He emphasised the importance of partnership working and noted that the success of the work would be seen by tangible improvements in health outcomes for older residents. He thanked officers and the Review Board for their work.

31.6 The Committee welcomed progress to date but agreed that further updates could benefit from scrutiny by the incoming committee.

31.7 The Committee RESOLVED to note the progress made against the agreed actions at Appendix 1 and to recommend to the incoming committee that this is further explored at a later date.

## 32. WORK PROGRAMME

32.1 The Chair introduced the work programme report and noted that this was the final meeting of the current committee ahead of the local elections. The Chair invited members to identify items to recommend for consideration for future scrutiny and topics that should be signposted to the incoming Committee, including through induction. Members were also invited to review the Committee's input into the Reconciling Policy Performance and Resources (RPPR) process and request any further information which may be required to inform future scrutiny engagement.

32.2 The Committee made comments in the following areas:

- **Member induction:** Members emphasised the importance of induction for new members, given the breadth of council responsibilities, and the need to highlight key challenges and areas of work for departments within the Committee's remit.
- **RPPR:** Councillor Field commented on the RPPR process noting that while scrutiny receives a list of proposed savings, it is not consistently provided with supporting information including alternative options and requested that more comprehensive details be made available in future to facilitate effective engagement. The Director of ASCH noted that while recent reports had sought to set out the criteria used to protect priority areas, learning could be taken forward to enable earlier engagement with scrutiny.
- **Home to school transport:** The Committee suggested there was a role for Cabinet to lobby government to allow means testing for Home to School transport contributions, in the context of demand led cost pressures and limited ability to seek contributions under current legislation.
- **Priority areas:** The Committee agreed priority areas to include on the work programme to recommend to the incoming committee, including maintaining

reference groups on Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessments, Children's Services reforms and the Health and Social Care Integration Programme.

- **Mental health and social media:** Members raised concerns about the impact of social media on children and young people's mental health and suggested that this be highlighted to the incoming committee to consider as part of wider work on children's mental health support.
- **Carers Partnership Plan scrutiny:** The Committee asked how the incoming committee could progress scrutiny of the Carers Partnership Plan. The Director of ASCH responded that a recent presentation had been provided to members and suggested the incoming committee could consider either a scrutiny review or a progress update on delivery of the Plan.

32.3 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the updated work programme and incorporate the suggestions outlined above as recommendations for consideration by the incoming committee.

### 33. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF PERSONAL TRAVEL BUDGETS AND INDEPENDENT TRAVEL TRAINING IN SCHOOL TRANSPORT

33.1 John Hayling, Chair of the Review Board, introduced the scrutiny review into Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training, explaining that it was established in response to increasing demand and cost pressures within Home to School Transport, particularly for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). He outlined that the Review focused on the effectiveness of current policies, barriers to uptake, and opportunities to strengthen communication and engagement, and commended the report and its recommendations to the Committee.

33.2 The Committee welcomed the report and its recommendations and asked questions and made comments in the following areas:

- **Language support** – The Committee asked what support was provided to families for whom English is not their first language, and for those with different cultural backgrounds. The Head of Education Participation and Planning highlighted the translation services available; there were also meets and greets with families as well as wider support.
- **Promoting independence and addressing parental anxiety:** Members emphasised the importance of supporting young people's independence and confidence, noting that parental anxiety can be a barrier and that communication about what Independent Travel Training involves, and the support offered to families, is crucial.
- **Incentivising use of public transport:** The Committee sought clarification on reference in the report to incentivising pupils 16+ to use public transport. The Head of Education explained this was linked to transition to adulthood, with a focus on promoting the wider benefits of independence including travelling to employment.
- **Wider contextual concerns:** The Committee noted broader factors that may affect attendance and/or travel to school, including social media.

33.3 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report of the Review Board and that this would be further considered by the incoming committee ahead of reporting to Cabinet and Council.

### 34. SEND UPDATE

34.1 The Assistant Director of Education introduced the report which set out the national Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) context, local pressures and the development of East Sussex's local SEND reform plan. The Committee heard that SEND

reforms, published as part of the wider Schools White Paper and currently out for consultation, present both opportunities and risks, including greater inclusion within mainstream schools and more children being educated locally. However, this may also result in increasing demand for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), financial pressures, and challenges to manage demand and build capacity in mainstream schools and to support schools in meeting needs. Members were informed that detailed guidance had been received from the Department for Education, funding allocations were expected in spring 2026, and all local authorities would be required to submit a multi-agency SEND reform plan for the local area. The Assistant Director commented that East Sussex was well placed for the reforms, with existing work aligned to the direction of travel and learning from participation in the national change programme informing the revision of the SEND strategy, however resources to implement reforms would be challenging.

34.2 The Director of Children's Services Department (CSD) emphasised the likely anxiety among parents/carers and the risk of increased EHCP requests during the transition, describing capacity pressures and modelling which projected significant growth in EHCP numbers and noted the work underway to mitigate this. The Director also commented that whilst delivering the reforms will be challenging, the current system was not working for children and welcomed the core tenants within the White Paper.

34.3 The Committee asked questions and made comments in the following areas:

- **Capacity pressures:** The Committee welcomed the direction of travel in national reforms but expressed concern about capacity to implement these locally, alongside induction for new councillors and local government reorganisation. Officers acknowledged the scale of the challenge and agreed capacity is a key risk. Members also stressed the importance of schools having capacity not only to meet needs but to conduct meaningful reviews of progress and provision. The Assistant Director responded that reforms would move towards more plans sitting within schools (individual support plans) and that there would be a training offer alongside access to specialist support and strengthened school partnerships.
- **Resources:** The Committee highlighted concerns about the availability of specialist staff (e.g., psychologists and therapists) and asked whether adequate funding would be delivered. The Director of CSD acknowledged that this is a significant challenge nationally and noted that, while further detail on workforce plans and funding is expected in spring, the reforms will require a phased approach as additional specialist capacity cannot be created quickly.
- **SEND Attainment:** The Committee asked why the KS2 reading/writing/maths outcome for pupils with SEN for working at the high standard was the only outcome shown as decreasing. The Head of Education Inclusion and Partnerships noted that there had been a small amount of progress at Key Stage 2, but that working at the higher standard is challenging and not all pupils with SEND will reach this level. She emphasised the importance of pupils reaching the expected standard and being identified early where additional support is required. The Assistant Director added that alongside SEND reforms there are also curriculum reforms which will support young people to be successful in their learning.
- **SEND Strategy** – The Committee sought clarification on the differences between the SEND Strategy and the Local SEND Reform Plan. The Assistant Director explained that the Council has an existing multi-agency SEND Strategy, which had been extended pending national SEND reforms. She confirmed that guidance had been received earlier in the week and that work would now begin to revise the Strategy as a high-level vision document to 2030. She added that the local SEND reform Plan would likely sit beneath the Strategy, setting out how the system would prepare for the reforms and how progress would be monitored by the Department for Education.

- **Increase SEND demand:** A question was asked about whether work was being done to understand increased demand for SEND, particularly for pupils with autism. The Assistant Director Education noted that autism is a spectrum and has historically been under diagnosed. She commented that many children's needs can be met in mainstream settings with improved training and support. The Head of Education Participation and Planning described place planning work across the county, expansion proposals (including in the north of the county), and support/training initiatives for schools.
- **Place planning:** The Committee asked about forecasts for specialist need and whether the planned creation of new places was sufficient. The Head of Education, Participation and Planning responded that the forecast was based on continuation of current EHCP growth and did not take account of the proposed SEND reforms, which are expected to reduce future demand over time. The Committee heard that the Council would continue its programme to expand specialist facilities aligned to the SEND reforms.
- **Impact of screen time:** The Chair raised concerns about the impact of screen time and reduced interaction on early development. Officers referenced government work on early years guidance and outlined local best start and school readiness work, including sharing starting reception resources, supporting parents via family hubs, and the challenge of distinguishing developmental delay from SEND need at reception stage.

34.4 The Committee thanked the officers for their report and acknowledged the positive aspects of the proposed reforms. However, members also raised concerns regarding staff capacity to implement these reforms, especially given local government reorganisation and the need to support new members following the election. The Committee agreed that these issues should be communicated to the incoming committee.

34.5 The Committee RESOLVED to:

1. note, and highlight to the incoming committee, the current position on SEND in East Sussex, including demand pressures, financial challenges and progress in increasing specialist places;
2. support the continued development of the Local SEND Reform Plan in response to national change requirements; and
3. note the national policy reform and ongoing programme of work to strengthen inclusion in mainstream settings.

## 35. EAST SUSSEX EDUCATION ATTAINMENT AND PERFORMANCE

35.1 The Head of Education Inclusion and Partnerships introduced the report and highlighted the key areas of the 2024/25 attainment data. She noted a number of contextual factors, including the removal of statutory Key Stage 1 assessment and the limited control the Council has over academies, with 74% of secondary schools now in academy trusts, as well as the absence of Key Stage 4 progress data due to the lack of Key Stage 2 tests during Covid.

35.2 Early Years performance remained strong, with a target for 78% to achieve a Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028. Phonics outcomes were slightly below national, and Key Stage 2 results showed gradual improvement across the county. While Reading, Writing and Maths combined for the county remained below national, the focus was on supporting pupils not yet secondary ready. Key Stage 4 attainment also remained below national averages but continued to improve.

35.3 At secondary level in Hastings, improvements had been made, supported by partnership work with the Department for Education, including improved attendance (now the highest in the county) and a shared programme of improvement with local partners, including a focus on enrichment and parental engagement. The Committee heard there had been recent capital

investment in alternative provision to support pupils who are permanently excluded or require short-term placements while needs are assessed, with the expectation that improvements will continue.

35.4 The Committee thanked officers for the report and welcomed progress, particularly in Hastings, and asked questions and made comments in the following areas:

- **Engagement with borough colleagues:** The Committee welcomed positive results for Hastings but commented that local perceptions remain mixed and suggested improved communication with Hastings Borough Council colleagues. The Director of CSD confirmed discussions were underway with borough leadership about ongoing engagement.
- **Attainment 8 RAG monitoring:** The Committee asked about Attainment 8 monitoring and changes in the RAG rating, commenting that it was unclear. The Director of CSD explained this reflected timing of data availability but would consider how to make reporting more nuanced.
- **Drivers of low attainment:** The Committee asked about factors affecting attainment (e.g., housing, employment, nutrition) and what interventions were being used. The Head of Education Inclusion and Partnerships described a strong focus on improving attendance, working closely with families to remove barriers, and ensuring vulnerable pupils are identified early and linked into Children's Services support. The priority remained getting children into school, with inclusion and attendance teams working alongside schools as they focus on delivering the curriculum.
- **Regional disparity and targeted support:** The Committee asked whether regional disparities were being actively targeted and what support was being provided to lower performing areas. The Head of Education Inclusion and Partnerships described analysis of data, peer learning approaches (including pairing schools around phonics practice), and commented that the gap had narrowed compared to the previous year but hoped to address this further so that all pupils in East Sussex have a positive experience.
- **Attendance:** The Committee sought clarification about medical appointments within attendance figures. The Head of Education Inclusion and Partnerships explained there was national guidance on attendance coding, noting medical appointments are recorded as authorised absence; the key concern was unauthorised absence.

35.5 The Committee RESOLVED to consider the attainment results for the 2024/25 academic year and note the report.

## 36. STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) ANNUAL REPORT

36.1 Councillor Belsey, Chair of SACRE, introduced the SACRE Annual Report and summarised SACRE's statutory work, including implementation of the agreed syllabus introduced in 2022, training and support via RE Today and subject networks, and SACRE member school visits.

36.2 Councillor Webb welcomed the report and asked about membership/representation levels, including vacancies among faith group representatives. Councillor Belsey responded that recruitment to some faith group places can be challenging; however, the Church of England representation had been filled at the most recent meeting.

36.3 The Committee RESOLVED to note the work of SACRE in implementing the local agreed syllabus and supporting high quality RE across schools and academies.

The meeting ended at: 13:30

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)