

## PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 11 March 2021.

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PRESENT: Councillors Charles Clark, Angharad Davies (Chair), Michael Ensor, Roy Galley, John Ungar (Vice Chair), Trevor Webb, Francis Whetstone, Alan Shuttleworth (substituting for Councillor Field), Barry Taylor (substituting for Councillor Liddiard) and Mr Trevor Cristin.

LEAD MEMBERS: Councillor Bob Standley, Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability  
Councillor Sylvia Tidy, Lead Member for Children and Families.

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Gallimore, Director of Children's Services  
Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care  
Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care  
Tom Hook, Assistant Director for Planning, Performance and Engagement  
Elizabeth Funge, Head of Education Improvement  
Sara Lewis, Adult Social Care Training Manager  
Douglas Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance  
Reg Hooke, Independent Chair of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership  
Stuart McKeown, Senior Democratic Services Adviser

### 82 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING: 19 NOVEMBER 2020

82.1 RESOLVED to agree the minutes as a correct record.

### 83 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

83.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tom Liddiard, Councillor Kathryn Field, Councillor Bill Bentley, Councillor Carl Maynard, Simon Parr, Catholic Diocese Representative, Nicola Boulter, Parent Governor Representative and Matthew Jones, Parent Governor Representative.

### 84 DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

84.1 Councillor Michael Ensor declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest as the landlord to Victoria Hall, which is the Bexhill, East Sussex, site for the Sabden Multi Academy Trust school, College Central.

### 85 URGENT ITEMS

85.1 There were none.

### 86 EAST SUSSEX SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (ESSCP) ANNUAL REPORT

86.1 Following changes introduced by the Children and Social Care Act (2017), the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) was replaced in October 2019 by the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (ESSCP). Reg Hooke, Independent Chair of the ESSCP, therefore highlighted to the Committee that the Annual Report covers a period of transition. Mr Hooke then provided an overview of some of the key learning and achievements that have occurred as part of the transition process. For example, the embedding of arrangements relating to a new national panel that oversees case reviews and the movement of the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) to a new Pan-Sussex CDOP led by Public Health and local NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups.

86.2 Mr Hooke also highlighted to the Committee the East Sussex Joint Targeted Area Inspection which took place in February 2020 (on the theme of children's mental health). The subsequent Inspection Letter noted the well-established and effective partnership arrangements in East Sussex.

86.3 Another key area of activity for the ESSCP has been the development of the following priorities for the next three-year period: education safeguarding, child exploitation, embedding a learning culture, and safeguarding the under 5s. With regard to safeguarding under 5s, Members heard that this priority was developed partly in response to an increase during the pandemic in the number of reports of injuries and neglect to children in this age group.

86.4 Mr Hooke also set out some of the challenges the pandemic has presented to the ESSCP. For example, the difficulties associated with having face-to-face meetings with children. In conclusion, Mr Hooke is satisfied that the closer alignment of the agencies under the new arrangements has helped deliver an effective response to the challenges presented by the pandemic, with the agencies working together effectively.

86.5 The Committee welcomed the detailed report before it and discussed a range of issues, with the key items set out below:

- The Committee noted that the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) referred to above identified multi-agency information sharing as an area which could be further strengthened and asked for more detail about this issue. In response, Mr Hooke informed the Committee that each JTAI results in an Action Plan which is overseen the ESSCP. The Plan is broken down into three elements relating to Police, Health and Social Care. With regard to the issue of multi-agency information sharing, Members were assured that the response to the finding is being actioned. Although Mr Hooke also clarified that any subsequent adjustments should be seen as 'fine tuning'.
- Mr Hooke also commented that issues relating to communication will always need to be kept under review. For example, the ESSCP is exploring whether communications between agencies could be improved with regard to electively home-educated children, a cohort which includes potentially vulnerable children.
- With regard to enhancing communication between agencies and professionals, the Director of Children's Services, Stuart Gallimore, also confirmed that the Council's Single Point of Advice (SPoA) page on the Council's website has recently incorporated CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). This means that the SPoA site has now become the contact point for such

referrals, along with other safeguarding referrals. This will help deliver further improvements with regard to supporting communications between agencies.

- Members discussed the reported rise in safeguarding incidents involving children under the age of 5 and sought clarification as to what had caused the increase. In response the Director of Children's Services commented that the rise in reports was an issue nationally and related to the impact of lockdowns and restrictions on services caused by the pandemic. For example, health visitors during the first wave were re-deployed to hospitals. In response to the national restrictions the Council developed an effective virtual response which has provided vital support to many families. However, whilst the virtual offer has been well-supported, it is the case that home visits being stopped or significantly reduced, together with new parents being unable to turn to their normal social support systems of families and friends has unfortunately contributed to the national rise in reports. Whilst the rise is a concern both locally and nationally, East Sussex has not suffered a high rate of incidents. A number of local initiatives may have helped in this respect. This includes, for example, the introduction of virtual home visits and other creative solutions developed by the Department and schools to help deliver support in different ways to those who most need it.
- Members discussed the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and young people's mental health. The Committee asked whether the ESSCP believed CAMHS would be able to manage an increased demand for its services. In response, Mr Hooke confirmed to Members that for the last two years mental health has been a priority area for ESSCP and that the partnership has undertaken a number of audits. These audits have shown a positive trend in terms of waiting lists for CAMHS services, but Mr Hooke agreed with Members that more work is required. In particular in support of individuals who have developed mental health issues due to the impacts of Covid-19. Stuart Gallimore also informed the Committee of the Sussex-wide review of Emotional Health and Wellbeing Support report. The report, called 'Foundations For Our Future' is set to be considered by the Council in summer 2021 and will have a focus on mental health support for children and young people.
- In response to a query about support with 'lower level' mental health issues, Mr Gallimore commented that the best way to address these issues was for children to be back in school. Individuals would then have access not only the support of their friends, but also the professional support that schools can call on. Whilst initial reports indicate that the full return to school has gone well, Mr Gallimore is aware that some children will be anxious. It is also a factor which schools are aware of and have worked hard to prepare for ahead of the full reopening of schools. Mr Gallimore also encouraged all parties to not unintentionally put pressure on children and young people by focusing on the 'loss of learning' issue. Whilst there is a significant issue, schools are again prepared for the challenge and will work hard to assess the learning needs of individual children in the coming months and identify the best ways to support them.
- Members sought assurance that the structure of the ESSCP was manageable, given its complexity. Mr Hooke informed the Committee that despite appearing complex from the outside the Partnership works smoothly. For example, and so

as to ensure proper oversight, the ESSCP sub-groups report to the Panel's steering group on a quarterly basis.

- Members discussed the impact that Covid-19 restrictions has had on new parents accessing support, such as post-natal services and parent and baby classes. In response Mr Hooke confirmed that whilst many services have successfully moved online, the lack of in-person interaction may be a factor that impacts negatively on the mental health of new parents. As these services are vital for both parents and for infant development, the ESSCP have identified this an issue it will consider further.

86.6 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

87 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF SUPPORT FOR UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC) - 12 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

87.1 Liz Rugg (Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care) introduced the report and provided the Committee with an update on progress with implementing the recommendations set out in the People Scrutiny Committee's 'Support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children' report. The Committee were also provided with an update on developments relating to the recently created specialist UASC team within the Children's Services Department and how the Department have responded to the challenges presented by the pandemic. With regard to Recommendation Six of the scrutiny review report, the Committee were also informed that work on the UASC guidance document for Members (referred to as a toolkit) was progressing and that a draft for comment would be circulated to relevant members.

87.2 Set out below is a summary of the key points discussed by the Committee:

- Members sought clarification about the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on access for UASC to social and religious activities. Members were especially concerned about this specific issue given the restrictions may have a more pronounced impact on the wellbeing of individual UASC. In response Members were informed that outside of the pandemic this is an area where positive progress is being made, although Covid-19 restrictions have had some impact. So as to reduce feelings of isolation therefore, UASC were provided with online platforms which helped individuals maintain effective contact with their peers. Looking forward, Members were also informed that initial discussions are taking place about how physical spaces can be safely re-opened so UASC can start to meet in person again.
- In response to a query about the number of UASC who are missing and the risks of exploitation this may expose them to, Members were informed that East Sussex does not have high numbers of absconson. Nonetheless Liz Rugg agreed that 'even one child missing, is one child too many'. With that in mind, the Department have, for example, developed even closer working relationships with the Police and other agencies to help reduce the risk of an individual absconding. In practice this means officers are now able to speak to new arrivals quickly and reassure them about the support East Sussex County Council will provide, and it appears this is having a positive impact. It is also the case that spontaneous arrivals now have their fingerprints and biometric details

recorded soon after they are discovered. Whilst this does not stop absconding behaviour, it does mean individuals are easier to locate should they go missing.

- In response to a query about the rate of spontaneous arrivals, Members heard that there have been 29 cases in East Sussex in the latest period (the term spontaneous arrival is used to describe children who have arrived in the UK illegally and who are usually discovered by the Police or the Border Force). In addition to spontaneous arrivals, UASC have also come into the care of East Sussex County Council via the National Transfer Scheme.

87.3 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report and welcomed the progress being made by the Children's Services Department with regard to its recommendations.

## 88 STANDING ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

88.1 Councillor Roy Galley, as Chair of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE), introduced the report and highlighted to Members a number of key developments. These include:

- **Impact of Covid-19:** due to Covid-19 related restrictions some activities of the committee have either not been possible or have had to be adjusted. For example, it had not been possible for SACRE to visit schools. Furthermore, and also as a result of Covid-19 related requirements, no Religious Education (RE) exams have been allowed to take place. However, positive progress has still been made. For example, effective primary and secondary school networks have been developed and this has allowed for increased direct contact with teachers. Another innovation has been the deployment of online training courses for education professionals, which have been well-received.
- **Schools Working Group:** a working group of teachers and head teachers has been formed to advise and assist SACRE with its work. The Group is currently focused on the task of revising the Locally Agreed Syllabus (see also next bullet point).
- **Locally Agreed Syllabus:** Religious Education is a statutory element of the curriculum for all pupils, which is determined locally. As a result, one of the key duties of SACRE is to review once every five years the Locally Agreed Syllabus. The next review is due in 2022 and with that in mind, Councillor Galley informed the Committee that SACRE have developed a plan to take this task forward. The plan will involve full engagement with teachers and religious representatives and will be informed by national guidance and resources on the provision of Religious Education. The revised Syllabus will be agreed by the end of 2021 and will be implemented in schools starting in September 2022.

88.2 The Committee discussed the importance of having a range of representatives on SACRE. In response, Councillor Roy Galley informed the Committee that SACRE aims to have as wide as possible representation from the faith groups in East Sussex. However, there have been challenges with appointing representatives from some faith communities. In order to help maintain a balanced view, SACRE have also appointed a Humanist observer.

88.3 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

## 89 RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

89.1 The Committee discussed its input into the Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process and possible future improvements. Set out below is a summary of the key discussion points:

- Members discussed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on how the Council works and delivers services to the public. In particular, some Members expressed the expectation that next year's RPPR process will provide further insights into new working practices which the response to the pandemic has brought about. In response Members were informed by Mark Stainton that the Adult Social Care Department has, for example, developed a programme which seeks to capture and help embed new ways of working that going forward will help deliver efficiencies and improvements in customer service. It is anticipated therefore that changes relating to how Departments operate will be discussed in the coming year.
- Members heard that a major piece of work for the Adult Social Care and Health Department in the coming year will be its response to the Health and Social Care Bill. This will require detailed planning in support of working towards delivering an integrated care system for April 2022.
- Stuart Gallimore confirmed to the Committee that it will receive an update report on the impact of savings relating to Early Help services (with regard to the decisions taken in October 2019 by Councillor Tidy as Lead Member for Children and Families). With regard to a specific query relating to Key Workers, Mr Gallimore confirmed savings relating to this area of activity had been deferred for the past two years.
- In response to a request made by the Committee, Mark Stainton undertook to provide Members with a briefing on developments relating to the Better Care Fund. The timescale for producing the briefing will be confirmed at a later date as the Department are yet to receive updated guidance from central government for the 2021/22 financial year.

89.2 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

## 90 PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

90.1 The Committee discussed its Work Programme which is comprised of a number of ongoing scrutiny reviews, reference groups and planned reports. Set out below is an overview of the key items discussed.

### Current Scrutiny Reviews

#### *School Exclusions*

90.2 The Committee heard that because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the ability of schools to participate, it continued to be necessary to pause work on the

scrutiny review of issues relating to the high rate of school exclusion in East Sussex. The Committee anticipate that work will be able to recommence in autumn 2021.

### Initial Scoping Reviews

#### *Loneliness and Resilience Initial Scrutiny Scoping Board*

90.3 In response to the extensive evidence available about the negative impact of loneliness on local communities, the Committee appointed a Loneliness and Resilience Initial Scrutiny Scoping Board in November 2019. The Board comprised: Councillors Clark, Galley, Ungar (Chair) and Whetstone. Following delays caused by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Board met in February 2021. Councillor Ungar, as Chair of the Board, informed the Committee that its key finding was to recommend the establishment of a loneliness scrutiny reference group. The Board reached this conclusion following a briefing provided by the Adult Social Care and Health Department regarding a new loneliness-focused project it intends to take forward in summer 2021. The Board heard that the project will first seek to develop an improved understanding of the nature and impact of loneliness on East Sussex residents, before then seeking to identify opportunities and approaches to mitigate its worst effects. The Board were also informed that the Department intend to engage with a wide range of partners and residents throughout the project. With this in mind and given their unique insights into the communities they represent, the Department are particularly keen to work with elected members on this project.

90.4 On the evidence presented to it, the Committee agreed with the Board's recommendation that a scrutiny reference group should be appointed for the following reasons:

- the Department's project will seek to develop practical, evidence-based and community focused responses to the negative impacts of loneliness;
- that a reference group will provide members with an effective opportunity to help shape new initiatives; and
- that a separate scrutiny review would represent a duplication of effort.

90.5 The Committee therefore RESOLVED to establish a Loneliness and Resilience Scrutiny Reference Group, with the membership of the group to be reviewed at the next meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee in June 2021.

### Suggested Potential Future Scrutiny Review Topics

#### *Elective Home Education*

90.6 The Committee agreed to continue to pause activity on the potential scrutiny review of issues relating to the increase in the numbers of children being electively home educated. Whilst there is not a clear date for activity to resume, there is an expectation that the government will issue national guidance. The Committee therefore agreed it would be prudent to revisit this subject once the new guidance becomes available.

#### *Developing Care Markets/Bedded Care Strategy*

90.7 The Committee had previously decided to postpone further scrutiny activity on this area until mid-2021. However, and given the impact of the pandemic, the Committee agreed that it would be helpful to receive an update report from the Department in the autumn (2021). The report would include, for example, detail regarding the number of beds available and information about care home closures. This will then allow the Committee to make an informed decision about how to proceed.

90.8 The Committee RESOLVED to receive an update report on developments relating to Bedded Care. The date the report will be considered is to be confirmed, subject to further advice from the Director of Adult Social Care.

### Future Committee Agenda Items

#### *Public Health Update*

90.9 The Committee discussed receiving an update on developments relating to the activities of Public Health, including planning, resources and working with others, for its next meeting in June 2021.

90.10 In addition the Director of Adult Social Care undertook to provide summary comments on, but not limited to, the other activities already listed in the Committee's Work Programme. This would then allow the Committee to identify if there are any issues it would like to explore in more detail. The current items listed on the Work Programme are:

- The work of care staff during the pandemic and impact on recruitment and retention, including the use of agency staff and experiences of BAME care workers.
- Support to care homes, including health service input.
- The experience of carers during the pandemic.
- The impact of Covid-19 on Departments and the services they provide.

90.11 The Committee RESOLVED to request an update on developments relating to Public Health and other elements of the Work Programme for the next meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee in June 2021.

### Scrutiny Reference Groups

#### *Educational Attainment and Performance Scrutiny Reference Group*

90.12 Councillor Roy Galley informed the Committee that the reference group met in February 2021 and were provided with an excellent briefing which led to informative discussions on how school performance is measured and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education in East Sussex. This included a discussion about different methods of delivering teaching via remote methods. The Committee agreed that the reference group provides an important forum for members to be briefed on key issues relating to educational attainment and school performance and therefore that the group should continue.

#### *Health and Social Care Integration Programme Reference Group*



90.13 Councillor Davies informed the Committee that the Director of Adult Social Care had undertaken to provide a further briefing for the Reference Group in July 2021.

*Strategic Commissioning Review of Early Help - Scrutiny Reference Group*

90.14 The Committee agreed to retain the Early Help Scrutiny Reference Group on the Scrutiny Work programme.

The Committee RESOLVED to amend the work programme in line with the items agreed in paragraphs 90.5, 90.8, 90.11 and 90.13 above.

**91 SCRUTINY REVIEW OF THE CHANGING CARE MARKET: ADULT SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE - 12 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT**

91.1 Tom Hook, Assistant Director for Planning, Performance and Engagement introduced the report by saying that good progress has been made with implementing the Committee's recommendations, although the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on some areas. Key developments include:

- Improved levels of joint working between Adult Social Care and the Employment and Skills team.
- The online offer for the independent care sector has also been enhanced as there now a dedicated web page on East Sussex County Council's website which is used for recruitment.
- In terms of other workforce support for the independent care sector during the pandemic, the Department provided a range of resources which included training and recruitment advice and regular email bulletins. The Department also helped the sector access various government support such as the £1.3m Work Force Capacity Fund.

91.2 Sara Lewis, Adult Social Care Training Manager, briefed the Committee on the national 'Call to Care Campaign' (which ran between 1 February and 31 March 2021). The campaign was launched in response to an urgent need to boost the numbers of short-term staff available during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of the campaign, the Department received once a week a list of contact details for individuals who had registered an interest in working in the care sector. At the time of the meeting there had been 69 applicants, 21 of which have been screened and forwarded on to interested provider services. It is hoped that a significant number of the individuals recruited as a result of the campaign will value their new roles and want to stay within the sector.

91.3 Councillor Trevor Webb, as Chair of the Adult Social Care Workforce Scrutiny Review Board welcomed the report and the progress being made with implementing the Committee's recommendations. Although he also noted that the workforce environment has been subject to considerable change since the report was published given the impact of the pandemic. The Committee then discussed the report in detail. Set out below is a summary of the key issues discussed:

- In response to a query about what would happen after the Call to Care Campaign ended, Members were informed that the Department will follow-up with every individual who has registered an interest. Other work includes, for example, exploring opportunities with the job centre service and the provision of regular

workshops with provider services where workforce issues and challenges can be discussed.

- The Committee noted that the details of individuals who had indicated they were not prepared to deliver personal care (in response to the Call to Care Campaign) were not forwarded on to service providers. However, some Members also noted that there are roles where this may not be a requirement and asked for clarification as to whether these individuals could be considered for such vacancies. In response, Mark Stainton informed Members that older people services have a high number of clients who require support with personal care. As a result, a willingness to provide personal care was a crucial factor for the Department when assessing expressions of interest. Although going forward the Department will explore if there are suitable vacancies within the working age range of services.
- The Committee discussed the impact of Covid-19 and sought clarification about rates of workforce turnover in the sector. In response Members were informed that sadly due to the number of excess deaths, some care homes have furloughed staff and temporarily closed down units. As a result, rates of turnover have remained relatively stable in recent months. Although it is anticipated that demand for staff is likely to increase as the demand for care services picks-up as the national emergency eases. With regard to potential workforce challenges relating to Brexit, Members were informed that the full impact was not yet clear. Although to help mitigate its potential impact the Department are, via providers, encouraging relevant staff to complete by the government deadline documentation which will enable them to remain in the United Kingdom. In conclusion therefore, Mr Stainton stated that the current level of vacancies is not representative of the normal situation or of his future expectations.
- The Committee asked for clarification from the Department about the promotion of a career in adult social care to young people. In response Members were informed that this is an area of ongoing work with the Employment and Skills Group and that the Department will continue to engage with young people and promote the benefits of a career in adult social care.

91.4 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report, and welcome the progress being made implementing the People Scrutiny Committee's recommendations.