

## PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 24 September 2024.

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PRESENT Councillors Johanna Howell (Chair), John Ungar (Vice Chair), Colin Belsey, Charles Clark, Anne Cross, Kathryn Field, Peter Pragnell, Stephen Shing, Colin Swansborough, Trevor Webb, Eleanor Kirby-Green (substitute for Councillor Nuala Geary) and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative) and Maria Cowler (Diocese of Arundel and Brighton Representative)

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Standley  
Councillors Bowdler and Maynard (attended online)

ALSO PRESENT Carolyn Fair Director of Children's Services  
Elizabeth Funge, Assistant Director Education  
Seona Douglas, Chair of the Safeguarding Adults Board  
Ian Gutsell, Chief Finance Officer  
Rachel Jospheh, Strategic Lead: Inclusion and AP  
Emma King, Public Health Consultant  
Michaela Richards, Head of Safer Communities  
Sarah Russell, Assistant Director or Planning, Performance & Engagement  
Becky Shaw, Chief Executive  
Lucy Spencer, Safeguarding Adults Board Development Manager  
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 15 July 2024 as a correct record.

### 11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

11.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Geary and Lesley Hurst. Councillor Kirby-Green attended as a substitute for Councillor Geary.

### 12. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

12.1 Councillor Webb declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest under item 6, Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources, as the Labour spokesperson for community engagement and anti-poverty at Hastings Borough Councillor and as a trustee of His Place voluntary organisation. Councillor Webb also declared the personal, non-prejudicial interest under item 8, Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report, as a trustee of His Place voluntary organisation.

### 13. URGENT ITEMS

13.1 There were no urgent items.

### 14. SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS SCRUTINY REVIEW

14.1 The Assistant Director Education introduced the report and updated action plan which set out progress made against the recommendations of the School Exclusions Scrutiny Review. The report also provided an update on local Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) provision.

14.2 The Assistant Director noted work across the Department to take forward the agreed action plan, including work with schools to build a sense of collective ownership, and noted that although there had been increases in the number of exclusions, this was not as significant as what was showing in national data, despite national issues also having an impact in East Sussex.

14.3 After the current PRU, College Central, was judged inadequate by Ofsted in February 2024, there had been challenges in delivering quality provision for the most vulnerable children and in delivering preventative work on exclusions. The Assistant Director noted that the Department for Education had agreed to transfer this provision to London South East Academy Trust, which would take place in 2025.

14.4 The Committee thanked officers for the report and discussed the following:

- **Progress against the action plan** – The Committee sought assurance on work underway to address actions that were rated amber in the action plan. The Strategic Lead: Inclusion and Alternative Provision noted challenges with the change in PRU and the delay with this process due to the general election and assured the Committee that the Department was working towards these. The Lead Member for Education, Inclusion and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) noted that work with Department for Education had impacted on this timeline, but assured the Committee that continued progress would be reported at the next update.
- **SEND pupils** – The Committee enquired about the number of SEND pupils with a permanent exclusion, as well as work to support SEND pupils who had been or were at risk of permanent exclusion. The Strategic Lead responded that in the last academic year, 64% of students who were permanently excluded were SEND. A key focus was to support schools in delivering a strong SEND provision, which would in turn benefit all children. She also noted most pupils at risk of permanent exclusion presented with additional needs, including social, emotional and mental health, autism spectrum disorder, communication, and processing skills and there were workshops and training available to schools to address these needs. The Assistant Director added that the alternative provision strategy aimed at meeting the needs of all children, with different tiers and levels of intervention available. The Department also worked with schools to ensure that, where possible, alternative provision was tailored to support any additional needs, including those identified by schools but without a formal diagnosis.
- **Exclusion data** – The Committee sought clarification on the number of permanent exclusions detailed in the report and heard that for 2023/24 there were 37 primary and 93 secondary permanent exclusions, and for 2022/23 there were 33 primary and 79 secondary permanent exclusion in East Sussex. The Committee welcomed news that this data was more positive than national exclusion data and asked how this had been achieved. The Assistant Director noted that although national complex reasons were mirrored locally in levels of demand across services, work had begun locally years earlier which was now having an impact. This included rethinking responses to exclusion and working with schools to develop a collaborative approach. The Strategic Lead noted the ongoing challenges locally, including higher number of permanent exclusions in Hastings, Rother and Rye, but that schools were working in partnership to support pupils and families.
- **Support for and engagement with parents** – The Committee enquired about support and engagement with parents when a pupil is at risk of permanent exclusion, including the process if parents do not wish to engage. The Strategic Lead noted the work of support practitioners who worked with families when a child has been permanently excluded and that these were often positive relationships as they are independent of the decision. Communication and

support could also take place through social workers where this applied to a family.

- **PRU provision** – The Committee enquired about PRU provision, including available accommodation. The Assistant Director noted that current work to transfer provision, including securing more permanent and secure provision, included accommodation in Hastings, Eastbourne, and Newhaven. In response to a question about provision in other parts of the county, the Assistant Director noted that buildings were in areas of highest need, but a range of provision was available across the county, including outreach services and in school provision.

14.5 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report and to receive a further update report in six months time.

## 15. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

15.1 The Chief Executive introduced the report which included in its appendices a report to be considered by Cabinet on 26 September detailing the latest financial outlook, in the context of the projected revenue outturn for 2024/25. The report outlined the Council's response to the significant financial pressures, including a recommendation to begin public consultation on a range of specific potential savings. The Chief Executive outlined the next steps in the RPPR process, including considering the impact of any announcements in the national Budget which was expected on the 30 October.

15.2 The Director of Children's Services Department (CSD) highlighted the key pressures in Children's Services, including the impact of growth and complexity in need, particularly for care placements and SEND support, which had subsequently increased demand for home to school transport. The increase in demand and costs were reflective of national trends. The Director noted the local responses to these pressures, including work on prevention and early intervention, as well as national, local and regional work on the care market. The Department was also considering the potential for savings across support services and non-statutory services, as well as opportunities for consolidation, although there were currently no identified savings proposals that required public consultation.

15.3 The Assistant Director Planning, Performance and Engagement outlined the pressures in Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH), particularly on the community care budget, due to increased demand and complexity of need, cost of living challenges and increased levels of debt. The Assistant Director noted the Department's legal duty under the Care Act 2014 to provide care and support to those eligible and outlined the areas which had been protected as far as possible when identifying savings. 11 public consultations were due to be launched in October; 7 of these would cover community based directly provided services for older people and adults with a learning disability and proposals included reprovisioning services for people with eligible needs. The other consultations focussed on preventative commissioned services including supported accommodation, housing support and drug and alcohol services. Consultations would be used to develop equality impact assessments (EQIAs), which would be considered as part of the decision making process.

15.4 The Chief Finance Officer outlined the financial position which included a significant gap and noted that similar pressures were being experienced by other councils.

15.5 The Committee asked a number of questions regarding the information provided in the report including:

- **Council budget** – The Committee sought clarification on the increasing projected deficit for the current financial year. The Chief Finance Officer commented that, at quarter 1, services were forecasting significant in-year overspends linked to continued pressures and demand on services. As a result, it

was expected that further use of reserves would be needed for the current financial year. He noted that modelling on the Medium Term Financial Plan was continuing, and additional information would be presented at the November Cabinet meeting.

- **Savings proposals** – The Committee asked about the current budget for services identified in the proposals for consultation and enquired if alternative, more cost efficient ways of running these services had been explored. The Assistant Director noted that different models of running services, including Linden Court, were being explored, including through the consultation process. A question was also asked about how officers had identified these areas for savings in ASCH, and if more information could be shared on any initial considerations. In response, the Chief Executive recognised the potential impact these savings could have on vulnerable people and outlined that the proposals were made in light of significant financial pressures, and the need to set a balanced budget, and that protecting services with the most preventative impact had been prioritised. The Chief Executive welcomed any suggestions for alternative areas to consider for potential savings and clarified that the proposals were included in the report in order to begin consultation processes but that a further detail on the budgets could be provided outside of the meeting.
- **Consultation process** – The Committee sought assurance that the consultation process would seek to capture the views of vulnerable adults and older people and commented that those affected by the proposals did not always have the same advocacy as people engaged with other service areas, or the ability to engage digitally. In response, the Assistant Director noted different ways (including non-digitally) that people could engage with the consultations and recognised the importance of hearing a range of voices. She noted that there would be engagement with advocacy groups, forums, associations, families and carers to achieve this. In response to a concern that consultations would not affect decisions about savings, the Lead Member for ASCH commented on the value of consultations which had historically contributed to how service changes were implemented, and that it was important people engaged with these. In response to a question about the cost of undertaking consultations, the Chief Executive noted the legal duty to consult on these proposals and that the cost would primarily be staff time.
- **Equality considerations** – The Committee asked about the impact of proposed savings on vulnerable people, including people who had previously been impacted by service closures and changes, and if more information could be provided on initial considerations for equality impact assessments (EQIAs). In response, the Chief Executive explained that an initial EQIA had been carried out to consider the impact on people sharing protected characteristics and emphasised that people eligible under the Care Act would still receive a service. The Assistant Director added that more detailed EQIAs were underway, and staff were working with clients to understand need and any potential impacts and provide advocacy for those less able to engage. It was recognised that suggested alternative services would not be suitable for all clients, but a range of services would be available, and the consultation process would increase understanding of need.
- **Alternative ASCH services** - The Committee sought more information on the ASCH savings proposals which detailed alternative services and the potential for reduction in choice for clients. The Assistant Director clarified that, although some options would be removed, alternatives such as direct payments could provide different options for some clients. A mapping exercise was underway to identify available services that could be viable alternatives, including those provided by the VCSE sector and private providers. Appropriate alternative services would be dependent on individual circumstances.

- **Impact of proposals on partners** – The Committee raised concerns about the impact proposed savings could have on other organisations, including the NHS and district and borough councils. The Assistant Director recognised the potential impacts on partners, especially in regard to services for supported housing and homelessness support and noted that the Council was working closely with district and borough councils to identify potential impacts and avoid systemic pressures where possible. However, ASCH's priority was to meet its legal duty to support people eligible under the Care Act.
- **Home to school transport** - The Committee commented on the high costs of home to school transport and sought more information on plans to review this service. The Director of CSD responded that this was an area of continued focus, and the Department was reviewing the provision of solo transport, including shared transport opportunities and public transport, as well as opportunities to commission transport in a different way. The Committee recognised the complexity of this service, including the need to provide transport to schools identified in Education, Health and Care Plans which could be a long distance from a child's home, due to individual needs. The Director of CSD recognised the value of placing children in schools close to their home and noted work to increase inclusion across all schools so that they were better placed to meet the needs of their pupils.
- **Income generation** – A question was asked about plans for empty premises if proposals to close day services went ahead. In response, the Chief Finance Officer commented that a property asset management strategy was in place to ensure best value for money approaches were taken for council properties that were no longer needed.
- **Lobbying** – The Committee agreed that lobbying central government was an ongoing priority in response to financial pressures, including for the need to provide funding for preventative services.

15.6 The Lead Member for Education and ISEND commented on the difficult decisions needed to respond to departmental pressures and overspend and welcomed the input of Members in identifying any alternative areas for savings for consideration as well as contributing to lobbying efforts.

15.7 The Lead Member for ASCH noted the challenges arising from the demography of East Sussex and thanked officers for their work on the process so far. He also commented that the priority of the Department was delivering a good service to clients, which could be achieved without some of the physical buildings.

15.8 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

## 16. WORK PROGRAMME

16.1 The Chair introduced the report which outlined the Committee's latest work programme, noting that the Committee was meeting in October to discuss this in more detail.

### Forward plan

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

### Work Programme

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

## 17. SAFEGUARDING ADULTS BOARD - ANNUAL REPORT

17.1 The Chair of the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) introduced the report which outlined the work of the SAB for 2023-24 and set out the Board's priorities. The Chair informed the Committee that the SAB now had a dashboard which was presented at each meeting to view key data on safeguarding and identify any key themes or issues.

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

- **Safeguarding referrals from the NHS** – The Committee noted the increased number of safeguarding referrals from the NHS and asked if this was in line with what the SAB expected. In response, the Chair noted that there had been work to increase awareness of safeguarding issues and processes amongst NHS staff and there was an agreed strategy in place to ensure staff received the right support to identify and make referrals.
- **Drug and alcohol safeguarding concerns** - In response to a question on at what point multi-disciplinary care teams identified safeguarding concerns in relation to drug and alcohol, the Chair commented that a written response, in collaboration with relevant partner organisations, would be provided after the meeting.
- **Unpaid carers** – The Committee sought more information about the SAB's work with unpaid carers. The Chair clarified that work was focussed on ensuring staff considered unpaid carers when there were safeguarding concerns and enquiries, including supporting carers to access care assessments and available support. In response to a question on where referrals came from and how these were communicated to carers, the Chair noted that safeguarding concerns could be reported by anyone in the community, including neighbours and friends, and reassured the Committee that staff would utilise sensitive language when talking to carers. The Chair noted the Board's priority to increase knowledge of safeguarding in the community more widely. The Assistant Director, Planning, Performance and Engagement noted ASCH's wider support for and engagement with unpaid carers.

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

## 18. ANNUAL REVIEW OF SAFER COMMUNITIES

18.1 The Head of Safer Communities introduced the report which outlined the performance across the Safer Communities Partnership during 2023/24. The Head of Safer Communities commented that the report showed that East Sussex remains a relatively safe place to live and visit, with crime rates below the national average, although there were pressures in some areas, such as housing and rough sleeping, and reinforced the importance of partnerships to address these challenges across the county.

18.2 The Head of Safer Communities outlined the strategic priorities of the Safer Communities Partnership, as well as key work including tackling violent extremism, drug and alcohol, and serious violence. She also noted that the Council had received White Ribbon re-accreditation as part of its commitment to tackle violence against women and girls and informed the Committee about an upcoming pan-Sussex domestic abuse conference that Members would be welcome to attend.

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

- **Domestic abuse** – The Committee discussed the different types of domestic abuse and asked about older people's awareness of their rights against mental abuse, noting that some older people may not view this as abuse. The Head of

Safer Communities noted the challenges in ensuring people were aware of cohesive control and work on the White Ribbon accreditation included raising awareness of this through accessible language.

- **Perceptions of crime** – The Committee discussed perceptions of crime in local areas and asked what was being done to make people feel safe. The Head of Safer Communities commented that the Partnership aimed to take an evidenced based approach in responding to crime and provided communities with facts, however noted the difficulty in changing perceptions, even when crime had reduced in an area. An annual public survey aimed to identify these perceptions and noted that anti-social behaviour and anti-social driving remained a priority in responses. The Committee noted these concerns and the importance of work across the Council to address these, including improving road safety.
- **Knife Crime** – The Committee discussed knife crime and sought clarification on the future of the Habitual Knife Carriers programme. The Head of Community Safety noted that although government funding for the programme was coming to an end, it would continue due to its positive impact. The Government had announced the establishment of Youth Hubs, and it was hoped this would also support work to prevent and tackle knife crime, but details on this had not yet been published.
- **Violent extremism** – The Committee asked what work was taking place to educate children about violent extremism, including in the context of recent national riots. The Head of Safer Communities noted that although riots had not occurred in East Sussex, multi-agency preparations had been in place. The Committee also heard that resources produced by the Department for Education were shared locally with designated safeguarding leads and schools to support conversations and Prevent Officers visited schools to talk to children about extremism.
- **Support for migrants** – Following the discussion on recent national riots, a question was asked about work to ensure migrants and asylum seekers felt protected and safe in local communities. In response, the Head of Safer Communities noted that riots/civil unrest could be triggered at any time in response to an event and exploited by organised groups. The Partnership worked with the Police to monitor community tensions and shared intelligence with partners and the Home Office. There was also strong liaison with local community and faith groups. The Assistant Director noted the Council's work on understanding community tensions and countering extremism. The Assistant Director informed the Committee of the Council's wider support to migrants, including the Council's work with partners to address issues through the East Sussex Migration Partnership and schemes such as Homes for Ukraine.

18.4 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report and agreed to consider it in further detail at its upcoming away day.

## 19. HEALTHY AGEING SCRUTINY REVIEW

19.1 Councillor Ungar, as Chair of the Review Board, introduced the report. The Review Board was established to look at how the Council could respond to the challenges of an ageing population and support people in East Sussex to age well.

19.2 Overall, the Board found that supporting healthy ageing was a priority for the Department and work was driven by strong evidence. The Board also found that increased demand on statutory services, although more likely, was not an inevitable part of ageing and preventative actions, as well as work to tackle ageism, could enable people to age well. The Department should continue to identify and address barriers to healthy ageing initiatives. The Board also recognised the vital role of partnerships to support this work.

19.3 The Chair thanked the Members who took part in the review and the officers who provided support.

19.4 Councillors Pragnell and Webb, Members of the Review Board, noted the wide range of evidence considered, including previous scrutiny reports, that contributed to the Board's findings and recommendations and thanked officers for their support.

19.5 The Committee welcomed the report and asked if poor mental health and bereavement had been considered as a barrier to physical activity. In response, the Consultant in Public Health noted that this was an important consideration and there were many ways to encourage people to be more active, including linking in with groups in the community, and it could be very positive to work with bereavement groups to embed physical activity into their work.

19.6 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the Scrutiny Review report and its recommendations, and to receive six and twelve month monitoring updates on the Review.

The meeting ended at 1.33 pm

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)

The meeting ended at 1.33 pm.