

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 24 March 2022

By: Assistant Chief Executive

Title: People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Purpose: To review and discuss the People Scrutiny Committee's future work programme

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) review and agree the updated work programme set out at Appendix 1;
 - 2) accept the recommendations of the Scoping Board on ASC Workforce Challenges and Scoping Board on School Attendance not to progress with scrutiny reviews of these topics at this stage (as set out at paragraphs 2.9 and 2.13);
 - 3) discuss topics for potential scrutiny reviews to be included in the Committee's future work programme; and
 - 4) review upcoming items on East Sussex County Council's Forward Plan as set out at Appendix 2 to identify any issues that may require more detailed scrutiny.
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1 Background

1.1 The work programme is an important tool in ensuring the correct focus and best use of the Committee's time in scrutinising topics that are of importance to the residents of East Sussex, and the efficient and effective working of the Council. It also provides clarity for those who may be requested to give evidence to the Committee on the issues under review, and the questions the Committee requires answers to.

1.2 Discussion of the work programme provides the Committee with the opportunity to consider topics that it may be of value to scrutinise, and to decide whether further scoping work is required. This provides a basis for deciding the best way of scrutinising a topic, the timescale, and who from the Committee will be involved in carrying out the review work. If there are a number of potential topics for review, Members can determine the priority of the work within the resources available to the Committee.

2 Supporting information

Work programme progress update

2.1 The following work has taken place since the Committee last considered their work programme in November:

Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group

2.2 A meeting of the Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group took place on 8 December 2021 to provide ongoing scrutiny and input into a Public Health-led project which aims to understand the nature and impact of loneliness on East Sussex residents and identify systemic opportunities and approaches to mitigate its worst effects. The Group received a detailed update from officers and Collaborate Community Interest Company (who have been commissioned to deliver the project) on insights from partner and community engagement activities undertaken during the autumn. Members asked questions on the research methodology and emerging

findings, provided additional insights on the drivers of loneliness in their divisions and asked for further information on the role of Village Agents in East Sussex. The Group heard that the next step of the project was to synthesise the insights from the engagement activities into recommendations and a further meeting has been arranged for 21 March 2022 to consider an insights report and emerging recommendations for the project. Next steps and the need/timeline for further meetings of the reference group will be determined then.

Presentation on Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls

2.3 A briefing presentation on ESCC's work to tackle Domestic Abuse (DA) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) was held on 10 December 2021. The presentation included a briefing on the draft pan-Sussex Strategy on Domestic Violence Accommodation and Support. The Committee welcomed the draft Strategy, particularly plans to ensure sanctuary schemes were available across the county and plans to increase support for children, particularly boys and young men. A note of comments from the meeting was submitted to the Department and taken into account in development of the final Strategy which was reported to the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) in January 2022.

2.4 The briefing presentation also covered ESCC's work to tackle VAWG and the Children's Services Department (CSD)'s work to support children in families with domestic abuse. The Committee asked questions on various aspects of the work outlined, welcomed the work taking place and requested that updates on work to implement the new DA Strategy and tackle VAWG be included in the next Annual Review of Safer Communities report to the Committee. The Committee also requested that any learning for ESCC from the national review into the death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes was shared with the Committee as part of the annual update on learning from case reviews provided in the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report update. These requests have been captured on the Committee's updated work programme.

RPPR Board 2021

2.5 The Committee held its RPPR Board on 13 December 2021. A summary of the Board's comments to Cabinet are included elsewhere on this meeting's agenda.

Scoping Board on Adult Social Care (ASC) Workforce Challenges

2.6 The Committee agreed at its November 2021 meeting to proceed with scoping two topics for potential scrutiny review in the new year.

2.7 A scoping board for a potential review of Adult Social Care Workforce Challenges was held on 9 March 2022. The Board was formed of Cllrs Chris Dowling (substituting for Cllr Geary), Ungar (Chair) and Webb. The Board heard that challenges facing the ASC workforce locally, in recruitment, retention and workforce development and planning are significant, but not specific to East Sussex; and while these challenges existed before the coronavirus pandemic, they had also been compounded by it. The Board were updated on the wide range of activities the ASCH Department is undertaking in response, including recent recruitment of new staff to support the work; the activities planned to get underway in the coming months; and how these build on the recommendations of the Committee's previous review of the Adult Social Care Workforce in 2019.

2.8 The Board discussed the work outlined and asked a number of questions including on: progress to deliver a bespoke website for social care vacancies (as recommended in the previous ASC workforce scrutiny review), work to address gender imbalance in the workforce, the impact of the Kickstarter programme, the latest vacancy rate for care roles and potential barriers to progression. The Board also requested further detail on a number of areas of work planned and made suggestions for how some areas could be expanded, which the Department welcomed and committed to look into.

2.9 The Board welcomed the update and concluded that as the Department was just starting, or about to progress, a wide range of work in response to the challenges outlined, the Board would recommend to the Committee that it was not an appropriate time to commence a scrutiny review of this area. The Board instead requested that the Department provide a progress report to the Committee in nine months setting out what has been delivered in that time and the impact

it is having. The need for further scrutiny of this area could be considered by the Committee at that point. The progress report has been scheduled for the 17 November 2022 People Scrutiny Committee meeting on the attached updated work programme.

2.10 In the meantime, the Board requested that the Department re-visit the recommendation of the previous scrutiny review that *'All councillors, via their connections with local groups and organisations... help raise awareness of the role of the Personal Assistant and the related advice and support available from the Support with Confidence team'* as the Board felt the pandemic had prevented this recommendation from being fully delivered. The Department committed to look at how it could provide councillors with further information and materials to fully deliver this action. The minutes of the scoping board will be circulated to the Committee once they are finalised.

Scoping Board on School Attendance

2.11 A scoping board for a potential review of School Attendance was held on 10 March 2022. The Board was formed of Cllrs Adeniji, di Cara, Field, Howell (Chair) and Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative). The Board heard that issues with overall and persistent school absence rates had been a challenge in East Sussex for some time. Despite effective joint working and improvements in targeted schools, this had not yet led to consistent improvement across the county. As was the case nationally, the situation had been compounded by COVID, with COVID-related illness and parent/carer and pupil anxiety related to COVID currently seen as the most common reasons for school absences in East Sussex; and pupils with historic persistent absence having been further impacted by changing expectations on attendance and uncertainty during the pandemic. The Board also heard about the offer the ESCC Education Support, Behaviour and Attendance Service provide to schools to improve school attendance; specific projects undertaken to improve attendance; and work CSD undertakes with strategic partners to secure full attendance of children and young people.

2.12 The Board discussed the latest situation and the work of the Department to improve school attendance rates in East Sussex. The Board asked questions and sought assurance on: whether ESCC has oversight of the education status of all children in East Sussex, including child refugees; how fees and sanctions are used to improve attendance; the reasons children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities are more likely to have higher school absence rates; what work takes place to address the underlying causes of school absence; whether there were interventions that had not been taken but needed to be; the role of messaging to parents/carers in improving attendance; how the picture of school attendance is linked to school exclusions; and how much issues with absence rates in special schools were historic or influenced by COVID.

2.13 The Board concluded that while there are clear challenges with school attendance rates in East Sussex that merit further consideration by People Scrutiny, as so much of the current situation regarding school absence rates is related to the ongoing impact of, and disruption from, the coronavirus pandemic, it was too early for the Committee to undertake a scrutiny review of school attendance. The Board concluded it would recommend to the Committee that the review should commence in Spring 2023 when we expect to have a clearer sense of the long-term impact of COVID on school absences. This timeframe has been reflected on the attached updated work programme, and it is proposed that a further short scoping meeting take place in early 2023 to establish the terms of reference for this review. In the meantime, the Board requested that an update on school attendance rates is provided to the Committee before next spring and this has been scheduled for 17 November 2022 Committee to be considered as part of the work programme report to assist with work programming of this planned review. The minutes of the scoping board will be circulated to the Committee once they are finalised.

Future work

2.14 The scrutiny review of school exclusions remains on the work programme and is proposed to progress in early autumn with a further short scoping meeting to consider an update from the Department on work that has been undertaken with ISOS consultancy in this area and any amendments required to the existing Terms of Reference before proceeding.

2.15 A review of Elective Home Education (EHE) also remains an area of interest for the Committee and it is proposed to consider how to proceed with this once the Committee receives an update from the Department on their work on EHE, and recent national developments, at the November 2022 Committee.

2.16 A meeting of the Health and Social Care Integration Programme Reference Group will be held on 6 April to consider the Integration White Paper and progress with establishing a Sussex Integrated Care System.

2.17 The Committee is asked to review, discuss any amendments to, and agree the latest work programme.

2.18 When considering potential topics for inclusion in the work programme, the Committee is asked to consider a range of questions. These include:

- Is the topic relevant to the Council's Corporate Priorities?
- Is the issue of concern or of relevance to East Sussex residents?
- Can Scrutiny have an impact and add value by scrutinising this issue, service or policy?
- Is the issue one that the Committee can realistically influence?
- Are the resources needed to undertake the review available?

2.19 Any suggestions for potential Scrutiny Review topics should be discussed with the Chair, or the Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser, in advance of the Committee meetings.

Forward Plan

2.20 A copy of the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions for the period 1 March 2021 to 30 June 2022 is included at Appendix 2. The Committee is requested to review the forthcoming items on the Forward Plan to identify any issues within the remit of this Committee that may require more detailed scrutiny. The Forward Plan is revised and published on a monthly basis and Committee members should regularly review the Forward Plan.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 An important part of managing the work of the People Scrutiny Committee is regularly reviewing its future work programme. This involves the Committee assessing its priorities, ensuring its ongoing reviews are completed in a timely fashion and identifying new areas for scrutiny.

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