

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Lewes on 24 March 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors Penny di Cara, Nuala Geary, Alan Hay, Wendy Maples, John Ungar (Vice Chair), Trevor Cristin, John Hayling and Mr Simon Parr, Mr Trevor Cristin (Diocese of Chichester Representative), Mr John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative) and Mr Simon Parr (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative).

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

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Roy Galley, Chair of East Sussex Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)
Alison Jeffery, Director of Children's Services
Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care and Health
Elizabeth Funge, Assistant Director Education
Kathy Marriott, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
Samantha Williams, Assistant Director, Strategy, Commissioning and Supply Management
Claire Lee, Head of Policy
Debbie Endersby, Head of Supply Management and Learning Disability Commissioning
Claire Roberts, Senior Manager: Support and Intervention (Improving Performance)
Nicola Maxwell, Strategic Lead for Specialist Adolescent Services
Stuart Hale, Detective Superintendent and Force Lead for Exploitation (Sussex Police)
Sophie Permain, Supply Development Manager (Market Resilience and Engagement)
Beth McGhee, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

25. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - 18 NOVEMBER 2021

25.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2021 as a correct record and agree the recommendations made at the meeting.

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bob Bowdler, Charles Clark, Chris Dowling, Kathryn Field, Stephen Shing, and Miss Nicola Boulter (Parent Governor Representative).

27. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

27.1 There were no disclosures of interests.

28. URGENT ITEMS

28.1 There were no urgent items.

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

29.1 The report was introduced by the Chair of East Sussex SACRE. In the introduction the Chair noted that the coronavirus pandemic had continued to limit some of the usual activities of SACRE, such as school visits, and that the opportunity had therefore been taken in 2021/22 to work with schools to revise the locally agreed religious education syllabus for the county, to be adopted from September 2022.

29.2 The Committee welcomed the update and discussed the report. This covered:

- **Remote meetings** – the Committee noted that the Chair of East Sussex SACRE had mentioned in the introduction that remote working had improved attendance at primary and secondary school network meetings and asked whether the intention was for these meetings to continue to be held remotely. The Chair confirmed that remote meetings would continue to be held wherever possible to maintain improved accessibility for teachers.
- **Faith schools** – the Committee asked what impact the new religious education syllabus would have on faith schools. The Chair of East Sussex SACRE confirmed that faith schools tended to follow the agreed religious education syllabus, but with optional modules relevant to the school added (for example on Christianity in Church of England schools), so would be subject to the new syllabus. Roman Catholic Diocese schools had their own separate syllabus. The Committee noted feedback from Trevor Cristin that representatives of Church of England schools in the Diocese of Chichester spoke highly of the work of East Sussex SACRE.
- **Community building** – the role of collective worship in building a sense of community in schools was discussed. As part of this, the Chair of East Sussex SACRE noted that the broader religious education syllabus assisted with improving understanding of different communities' religious and world views; and helped improve understanding in secular communities of what religion had to offer to those who were religious or who lived in more religious societies around the world.

29.3 The Committee RESOLVED to note the update.

30. CHILD EXPLOITATION AND COUNTY LINES PRESENTATION

30.1 A presentation on child exploitation and county lines was delivered by Stuart Hale, Detective Superintendent and Force Lead for Exploitation (Sussex Police) and the Strategic Lead for Specialist Adolescent Services (ESCC Children's Services Department). The presentation explained that 'county lines' were when gangs and organised criminal networks exported illegal drugs from an area into one or more importing areas in the UK using dedicated mobile phone lines or other forms of deal lines. It was explained that child exploitation formed a significant element of county lines activity as gangs used children to move drugs between places. The presentation covered work by Sussex Police to identify and disrupt county lines and the work of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership's (ESSCP) Multi-Agency Child

Exploitation (MACE) group to safeguard children involved in county lines. A copy of the presentation that was delivered was included in the meeting agenda.

30.2 Committee Members and the Lead Member for Education and ISEND thanked the presenters for providing an interesting and detailed presentation on their work. The Committee and Lead Member then asked questions on a range of matters arising from the presentation:

- **Age profile** – the Lead Member asked what the age profile of children involved in county lines tended to be. The Strategic Lead for Specialist Adolescent Services responded that the age-range of cases handled by the MACE hub and Vulnerable Adolescent Risk Panel (VARP) tended to be ages 14-17. The panel had seen cases of younger children in the past but this was rare.
- **The long-term effectiveness of police interventions** – the Lead Member asked whether it was common for a county line to be replaced by gangs following disruption. The Sussex Police Force Lead for Exploitation responded that unfortunately gangs would often replace county lines following disruption and that the police worked with the National Crime Agency (NCA) to address this, as the NCA had resources to tackle organised criminal activity at a more strategic level. Sussex Police also worked with charities and providers to promote support to users of county lines (for example, in sending a text message to all drug users on a line when it was disrupted to advertise support services) to reduce the chance that they would seek to purchase drugs through an alternative line. Sussex Police were also working with the Metropolitan Police to analyse information about users collected through county line operations to date to better target support for drug users in future.
- **School exclusions** – the Lead Member noted that the presentation had highlighted the prevalence of fixed term exclusions among the cohort the MACE group worked with and asked whether it tended to be the case that children became involved in county lines because they were subject to school exclusions or were excluded from school because they had become involved in criminal activity through county lines. The Strategic Lead for Specialist Adolescent Services responded that the MACE group saw cases of both circumstances, but knew that exclusions from school significantly increased a child's risk of exploitation. The MACE group therefore worked very closely with schools and colleges to keep children motivated and engaged to stay in full-time education wherever possible to reduce this risk. The Department and Lead Member acknowledged that this could be challenging to do as the children the MACE group worked with had often had negative experiences of education earlier in their lives and had behaviours that were very challenging for teachers to manage and disrupted fellow pupils' education.
- **Phone numbers** – the Committee asked how gangs and organised criminal networks sourced the phone numbers that drugs were advertised to. The Sussex Police Force Lead for Exploitation explained that gangs would develop a customer base and share information on people looking to buy drugs. Cuckooing was one particular method used to build a customer base, which was when a person would take over a property inhabited by a vulnerable person and use that base to become known in the community.
- **Missing episodes** – the Committee noted the presentation had highlighted that missing episodes were frequently reported in the cohort of children involved in county lines and asked how long a child had to be missing for this to be categorised as a missing episode. The Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care responded that children who were in care placements could be regarded as missing if they were anything from 30 minutes later than expected at their place of residence. Children's Services monitored how frequently those episodes happened and would always seek to make contact with the child to determine if there was an explanation for where they were. The Assistant Director noted that Children's Services

were required to try to undertake return-home interviews with all children who were reported missing from social care, even if just for short periods, so the Department had developed a triage approach in response to ensure interviews were undertaken with the most vulnerable and at-risk children, which was in line with the national approach.

- **Early identification of exploitation** – the Committee asked what work took place to identify early signs that a child may be at risk of becoming involved in county lines. The Strategic Lead for Specialist Adolescent Services responded that all social care and early help teams and staff in schools were provided with training from the ESSCP on the early warning signs to look for that may indicate a child was being exploited or at risk of exploitation (for example, having lots of new money or clothes); and what to do if they had concerns in order to intervene early and prevent the situation escalating wherever possible. The Chair of the Committee asked if this training was focussed on spotting the signs among children in care. The Strategic Lead clarified that the training was clear that early warning signs should be looked for in all children's behaviour, regardless of background, as any child could be at risk of exploitation and many of the children who were supported by the MACE group were not in social care placements.

- **Youth activities and inclusion** – the Committee asked whether there was any evidence of a link between the provision of services such as free youth clubs and/or after school activities and children with access to those being more engaged in school and at reduced risk of exploitation. The Director of Children's Services responded that research on the correlation between provision of services such as youth clubs and certain public health outcomes showed a variety of different outcomes, and there was not necessarily a positive link between activities and inclusion. The Director emphasised that it was most important that children were included in school, felt they belonged to their school community and were able to engage in constructive activities. The Director assured the Committee that the Education and ISEND service advocated for schools to be inclusive for all children, and provided support to schools to help understand and manage the sorts of challenging child behaviour referenced as part of this discussion. The Director added that practice varied across the county and while some schools worked incredibly hard to keep children with challenging behaviour in school, other factors such as draft Department for Education guidelines on behaviour made the Department's advocacy for inclusion more challenging by condoning use of fixed term exclusions despite limited evidence that they were effective at changing pupil behaviour.

The Strategic Lead for Specialist Adolescent Services added that while some 'traditional' youth and after school activities may not engage the children who were already known to the MACE group, as those children may have been excluded from education for a long period of time, the ESSCP had undertaken successful multi-agency work to provide targeted activities for children with the highest needs. This included work in Hastings with eight children at the Hollington Youth Centre, and other projects in Hastings, Uckfield and Hailsham which worked with groups in the community, such as local businesses, to provide activities and opportunities that kept young people engaged and at lower risk of being drawn into criminal activity.

- **Coronavirus impact** – the Committee asked how coronavirus had impacted the situation and the Strategic Lead for Specialist Adolescent Services confirmed that county lines activity had continued in the pandemic, albeit adapted, and that the ESSCP had continued their work, including face-to-face contact with the most vulnerable children. It was noted that there had been challenges with children with the highest needs maintaining engagement in education during the pandemic.

- **Exploitation Coordinators** – the Committee welcomed the reference in the presentation to the new Exploitation Coordinator roles Sussex Police were recruiting to in each division of Sussex to work across agencies to further improve the multi-agency response to

exploitation and child exploitation. The Committee requested that a future update be provided to the Committee on the effectiveness and impact of these roles.

- **Longer-term response and resourcing** - the Committee asked if longer-term work was planned to consider the multi-agency response to date and learn from cases of success. The Sussex Police Force Lead for Exploitation responded that any commitments that could be made around longer-term work were reliant on funding. Although those in Sussex Police working on disrupting county lines were in 'mainstreamed' posts that would be funded from ongoing budgets (partly by the uplift in the Police and Crime Commissioner Council Tax precept), other work, such as the work to provide activities for young people with the highest needs highlighted earlier in the discussion, was funded through other funding streams such as funding for the Violence Reduction Partnership. Such funding streams increased resources available but was committed on a fixed-term basis only.

The Chair of the Committee sought to clarify how much restricted funding impacted the multi-agency work that was able to take place. The Sussex Police Force Lead for Exploitation explained that the work to disrupt county lines was critical so would be funded by Sussex Police regardless, but that the additional resources outlined above provided important additional capacity and the ability to undertake more innovative work to keep children safe. One-off funding helped fund innovative pilot activity but the police, Council and other partners then had to work to identify ways to enable the approach to be scaled up and/or maintained longer-term. Officers assured the Committee that partners sought to take advantage of all one-off funding opportunities; for example, in applying for Home Office funding in 2021 which had been used to train all police officers, social workers, youth workers and staff in schools on adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed approaches to working with children. The Director of Children's Services added that the situation described here was also exemplary of a much broader challenge the Department faced in finding ways to direct the resources available to undertaking early intervention work wherever possible, rather than intervening once a situation had escalated, as it improved outcomes for children and was much more cost-effective.

- **Geographic concentration of county lines** – the Committee asked why the number of active county lines in Hastings was disproportionately higher than the rest of the county. The Sussex Police Force Lead for Exploitation explained that the issue of county lines was only one part of a broader picture of drug misuse, so while Hastings may have higher active county lines, other issues related to drug use were more prevalent in other parts of Sussex. The Force Lead for Exploitation committed to share further information about Sussex Police's response to drug-related crime in Hastings, including the response supported by funding from Project ADDER. The Committee also asked why the Operation Centurion figures cited in the presentation on the number of county lines taken out in East Sussex and current live investigations was much higher in East Sussex than elsewhere in Sussex. The Force Lead for Exploitation explained that the figures were higher in East Sussex because there had been a particular focus on disrupting county lines activity there, supported by additional investment. It was expected that the figures would increase in West Sussex and Brighton & Hove as the approach taken in East Sussex was expanded there.
- **Reducing drug use** – the Committee suggested that one element of the response to drug dealing undertaken through county lines was to reduce the demand for drugs, including from those who took drugs recreationally. The Sussex Police Force Lead for Exploitation agreed that this was one part of tackling the activity and that more work to educate people on the social consequences of drug use may support that.
- **Resolving challenging MACE cases** – the Committee asked for further information on the creative and imaginative methods referred to in the presentation, which were used to progress cases that had been with the MACE hub for more than 12 months. The Strategic Lead

for Specialist Adolescent Services explained that in instances where the standard approach had not been successful in moving children away from criminal activity and exploitation, senior managers in the service would consider ways they could use resources across agencies more creatively to reduce the child's involvement in criminal and exploitative activity. This could involve creative use of mental health support, education provision, work experience or a mentoring opportunity for example. The Assistant Director for Early Help and Social Care provided specific examples where the service had been able to arrange activities that tapped into a young person's particular interests to improve their confidence and communication skills, and noted that the role of a 'trusted adult', which every child supported by the MACE Hub was allocated, was key in identifying those interests.

30.3 The Chair of the Committee thanked officers for their presentation and the responses to questions asked. The Chair summarised that the Committee had particularly understood the important preventative role schools, targeted activities and work within communities played in reducing the risk of children being drawn into criminal activity and exploitation; and the challenges one-off funding presented in planning future service provision. The Committee RESOLVED to request an update on the impact of Exploitation Coordinator roles at a suitable future date and to note the presentation.

31. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

31.1 The Chair introduced the item, outlining that it was the final stage of the Committee's input into the RPPR cycle for the 2022/23 financial year; and an opportunity to review the Committee's input into the cycle and consider any changes or improvements that should be made ahead of scrutiny's engagement in the next RPPR round. The Chair highlighted that the report recommended two enhancements for scrutiny involvement in future RPPR cycles following consultation with the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group:

- That the Committee consider relevant parts of the end of year monitoring report and State of the County report annually at the Committee's July meeting, to enhance scrutiny's consideration of performance achievements and challenges over the preceding year, and support earlier engagement with the forward-looking demographic, policy and financial analysis in State of the County; and
- that the Committee hold an annual work planning awayday in early September to consider key issues arising from State of the County for services in the Committee's remit and ensure that those issues are incorporated in the Committee's ongoing work programme.

31.2 The Director of Children Services and Director of Adult Social Care both commented that they felt scrutiny's input to the RPPR process currently worked well but that the changes set out in the report would enhance it further by enabling the Committee to start their scrutiny of the Council's business and financial planning earlier, and to align this with the Committee's work planning.

31.3 The Vice Chair of the Committee commented that the RPPR process generally worked effectively, as it provided information on outcomes achieved with the money invested in services. The Vice Chair supported the report recommendations and expected that the changes proposed would enhance the Committee's input, noting that the Committee's effectiveness in scrutinising RPPR was dependent on receiving relevant information about budget and business planning at the earliest opportunity.

31.4 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the report and the enhancements to the RPPR scrutiny arrangements recommended at paragraph 2.6.

32. PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

32.1 The Chair introduced the report on the Committee's latest work programme and updates on scrutiny work that had taken place since the last Committee meeting were received. The key issues discussed were:

Reference Groups

Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group

32.2 Councillor Ungar, as Chair of the Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group gave an update on the work of the Reference Group which had met twice since the Committee's last meeting in November 2021. Councillor Ungar reminded the Committee that the reference group had been providing scrutiny input into a public health-led project to consider the impact of loneliness on East Sussex residents and identify opportunities for a systematic approach to mitigate its worst effects. The Group had had a positive meeting earlier in the week where they had considered the findings and draft recommendations of the project, which the Group were supportive of, and had suggested elements that would need to be considered in the practical delivery of the recommendations. The Reference Group planned to hold another meeting to consider the final report and how the recommendations would be taken forward and would then report back to the Committee.

32.3 Other Members of the Reference Group welcomed the work that had taken place so far and looked forward to considering the final recommendations and practical outcomes of the project.

Initial Scoping Boards

Adult Social Care (ASC) Workforce Challenges

32.4 The Committee agreed at their November 2021 meeting to proceed to scoping a potential scrutiny review of Adult Social Care Workforce Challenges. Councillor Ungar, as Chair of the Initial Scoping Board outlined that the Board had met earlier in March and received a presentation from the Department on work they had started, or were about to begin, to address challenges in the ASC workforce locally, building on the recommendations of a People Scrutiny review of this area that was undertaken in 2019. Councillor Ungar fed back that there had been a good discussion of the work taking place and the Board had made suggestions of areas the Department could expand their approach.

32.5 Councillor Ungar summarised that, as set out in the work programme report, the Board had agreed to recommend to the Committee that as the Department were just starting, or about to progress, a wide-range of work in response to ASC workforce challenges, it was not an appropriate time to commence a scrutiny review of this area. Instead, the Board had requested the Department provide a progress report to the Committee in nine months setting out what had been delivered in that time and the impact it was having. In the meantime, the Board asked that the Department proceed at-pace with delivering the planned work they had shared with the Board and with completing all the recommendations of the previous scrutiny review, particularly the recommendation that all councillors were supported to promote the role of Personal Assistants.

32.6 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the recommendation of the Initial Scoping Board not to proceed with a review of ASC workforce challenges and to instead receive a progress

report from the Department on work to address challenges at the November 2022 committee meeting.

School Attendance

32.7 The Committee agreed at their November 2021 meeting to also proceed to scoping a potential scrutiny review of school attendance. Councillor Howell, as Chair of the Initial Scoping Board fed back that the Board had similarly recently met and having considered a detailed presentation from the Department, agreed to recommend to the Committee that because so much of the current situation regarding school absence rates was 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 instead recommended that a scrutiny review progress in Spring 2023 when there was expected be a clearer picture of the long-term impact of COVID on underlying challenges with school attendance.

32.8 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the recommendation of the Initial Scoping Board not to proceed with a review of school attendance at this time and to revisit the topic for review in Spring 2023.

Future Scrutiny Review topics

32.9 The Committee then discussed potential topics to prioritise for future scrutiny reviews:

Use of digital and technology in ASC

32.10 The Chair of the Committee proposed that the Committee consider this topic and the Director of Adult Social Care and Health then provided further detail on potential areas a review could consider, including looking beyond existing plans the Department had for use of digital and technology to consider innovative and bold ways technologies could maintain a high standard of care and support sustainability of ASC in the next five-to-ten years.

32.11 The Committee were supportive of proceeding with this review topic and commented on the importance of keeping the scope of the review manageable and also considering the role of digital inclusion in this work. The Committee RESOLVED to proceed to the scoping stage a potential review of the use of digital and technology in ASC and to appoint Councillors Geary, Maples and di Cara to the Initial Scoping Board.

ASC Equality and Inclusion Strategy

32.12 The Director of Adult Social Care and Health outlined that the Department had launched a new Equality and Inclusion Strategy in 2021 and would welcome scrutiny's review of this strategy, the Department's existing work and priorities and consideration of where work should focus next.

32.13 The Committee RESOLVED to proceed to the scoping stage a potential review of the ASC Equality and Inclusion Strategy and to appoint Councillor Ungar to the Initial Scoping Board. Nominations of other Committee members to sit on the Board would be sought remotely after the meeting. [Post-meeting note: Councillors Geary and Webb were also appointed to the Initial Scoping Board].

Elective Home Education

32.14 It was noted that the Committee was supportive of undertaking a scrutiny review of Elective Home Education, which was listed on the Committee's work programme as a potential

future review topic, at the earliest opportunity. The Director of Children's Services agreed that this was an important area for scrutiny to consider given the large number of pupils now educated at home. However, the Director had concerns that schools - who would need to be involved, to an extent, in this review in looking at what might be driving the increase in parents opting to Electively Home Educate their child – would not have capacity this side of the summer to engage due to the ongoing impact of COVID on staff absences.

32.15 The Committee therefore RESOLVED to maintain this item on their work programme as a potential topic for a future scrutiny review; and to receive an update on the Department's work and national developments in this area in November 2022 to support timetabling of this.

Prevention in Children's Services

32.16 The Director of Children's Services suggested that in light of the Committee's discussion under the earlier item on the agenda on county lines and child exploitation, which had recognised the importance of earlier and community interventions in preventing children being drawn into criminal activity and exploitation; the Committee could undertake a scrutiny review of the role of prevention and early intervention in Children's Services. This could include considering broader opportunities across the Department to invest existing resources in a different way that prevented need escalating.

32.17 The Committee RESOLVED to proceed to the scoping stage a potential scrutiny review of the role of prevention in children's services and that nominations of Committee Members to sit on the Board would be sought remotely after the meeting. [Post-meeting note: Councillors Adeniji, Field and Howell were appointed to the Initial Scoping Board].

32.18 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the updated work programme subject to the above changes and it was agreed the updated programme reflecting the changes would be circulated to the Committee.

Future Committee items

Complaints in ASC

32.19 Councillor Maples asked, following recent interactions with the ASC Department following a resident complaint, for the Committee to receive a presentation on the processes that were followed in ASC when complaints and enquiries were received, how they were resolved and how learning from complaints was taken forward to adjust practice where it needed to be changed. Councillor Geary also supported proportionate scrutiny of these processes to ensure they were robust, fair and transparent.

32.20 Following discussion of what the Committee would find most useful, the Director of Adult Social Care and Health agreed to provide a report for a future Committee meeting on the current processes followed when a complaint or enquiry from councillors and/or MPs was received; and to draw out in a presentation how the process worked in practice and how the Department implemented learning from complaints.

33. DEVELOPING CARE MARKETS - HOME CARE AND CARE HOMES

33.1 The Head of Supply Management and the Learning Disability Commissioning and Supply Development Manager (Market Resilience and Engagement) delivered a presentation to the Committee on the latest position of the local care market for older people's homecare, older people's bedded care and specialist working-age adult care. The presentation also highlighted

the current risks and challenges facing providers and the local care market. A copy of the presentation that was delivered was included in the meeting agenda.

33.2 The Committee welcomed the update, discussed the presentation, and asked questions on the following issues:

- **Funding reforms** – the Committee considered the potential impact of upcoming national funding reforms highlighted in the presentation, including whether there would be challenges presented by self-funding clients having unviable expectations of what the local authority could arrange in terms of care packages. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health responded that the biggest challenge for the Department was expected to arise from the element of the planned reforms that would enable self-funders to ask the local authority to arrange residential care placements on their behalf, as the fees the Council paid to providers were expected to need to be uplifted significantly to cover the loss in income providers would see from self-funding clients moving to local authority rates. This uplift would be required for those providers' business models to remain viable; and an exercise to determine the sustainable fee rate required to be paid by the Council to providers was currently underway.
- **Categories of residential care provision** – the Committee asked if the categories of residential care provision outlined in the presentation (for example 'nursing dementia') could be further split by different models of living arrangements and whether the Department had assessed to what extent different living arrangements resulted in better outcomes for residents. The Head of Supply Management and Learning Disability Commissioning responded that the categorisations used in the presentation mirrored the registration categorisations used by the Care Quality Commission. The Head of Supply Management recognised that the definitions were broad and covered a range of models; for example, a 'registered residential home' covered provision that catered to 4 or 5 clients as well as provision that catered to 40 or 50 clients, both with potentially very different living arrangements. However, it would be very challenging for the Department to develop a more detailed, consistent categorisation of those models of care and that prevented assessments of the impact of those arrangements on outcomes from being made.
- **Specialist working-age services** – the Committee asked if the Department expected that the increase in referrals to specialist working-age services post-COVID, highlighted in the presentation, would be maintained longer-term. The Head of Supply Management and Learning Disability Commissioning responded that it was unclear if referrals to these services would be maintained at the higher post-COVID level long-term but knew we could expect to provide support over a long period of time for those who were being referred as they were younger clients who often required support over their lifetime. In the longer-term, it was possible that demand for services would continue to increase as families with children receiving learning disability support had different expectations of the support that could be provided to meet their child's needs as an adult than had perhaps historically been the case. The experience of the coronavirus pandemic had also led to people seeking diagnoses and support for mental health conditions which may result in an increased need for services. The Assistant Director, Strategy, Commissioning and Supply Management added that the Department was seeing increasing complexity in the needs of people with mental health conditions seeking help and that there was not always appropriate provision in the care market to meet those people's needs. The Department would therefore need to work with partners across the Integrated Care System to ensure those needs could be met in future.
- **Care Home closures** – the Committee noted the figures regarding care home closures referenced in the presentation and asked how closure of care homes impacted the Department's work to support and maintain the local care market. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health responded that while every care home closure had both an impact on the

individuals receiving care within them, and on the Department as it reduced choice and made it more challenging to broker placements; the extent of the impact on the wider care market depended on the nature and size of the care home. By way of an example, the loss of a specialist care home in a rural area would hypothetically have a particular impact due to the loss of local, specialist provision. The Director assured the Committee that the Department did whatever it could to reduce the number of care home closures but that the impact of this was limited as care homes were ultimately independent businesses. The focus on developing homecare provision was part of the Department's approach to building resilience in the market to reduce pressure on, and need for, residential care beds.

- **Homecare fees** – the Committee noted that homecare rates paid to providers had had a 6% uplift backdated to January 2022 and asked if the Department had assurances that this uplift was making its way to homecare staff. The Assistant Director, Strategy, Commissioning and Supply Management confirmed that the Department did have intelligence that both the rates the Council paid homecare providers were broadly comparable with rates paid in other areas and that uplifts in fees were, in part, passed on to staff.

33.3 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting ended at 1.02 pm.

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)