PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 16 December 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors Sam Adeniji, Penny di Cara, Chris Dowling, Nuala Geary, Johanna Howell (Chair), Wendy Maples, Stephen Shing, John Ungar (Vice Chair) and Ms Maria Cowler (Roman Catholic Diocese Representative) and Mr Trevor Cristin (Diocese of Chichester Representative)

LEAD MEMBERS: Councillor Bob Bowdler, Lead Member for Children and Families
                Councillor Bob Standley, Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability (EISEND)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Charles Clark, Kathryn Field and Trevor Webb (by MS Teams)
                Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care and Health
                Alison Jeffery, Director of Children's Services
                Paul Hussey, Assistant Director, Planning, Performance and Engagement
                Beth McGhee, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

26.   MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 17 NOVEMBER 2022

26.1   The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 as a correct record and agree the recommendations made at the meeting.

27.   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

27.1   Apologies for absence were received from Ms Nicola Boulter and Mr John Hayling, Parent Governor Representatives, and Councillor Carl Maynard, Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health.

27.2   Councillors Charles Clark, Kathryn Field and Trevor Webb were not present in the Council Chamber but joined the meeting via Microsoft Teams. They participated in the debate but did not vote on the items under discussion.

28.   DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

28.1   There were none.

29.   URGENT ITEMS

29.1   There were no urgent items.

30.   SCRUTINY REVIEW - USE OF DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGY IN ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH

30.1   The Chair of the Review Board, Councillor Penny di Cara, introduced the Review Board's report on the findings and recommendations of the Review. The Review Board was

established by the Committee in July 2022 to look at the Department's plans to encourage more people to use digital and self-service methods when they contact and transact with the Department, and use its services. The Review had looked at the digital services currently in place in ASCH, the extent to which they were used and cultural and behavioural changes that could lead to greater use of them, focusing particularly on the service areas of financial assessments; reviews (especially carer reviews); information, advice and signposting; and carer assessments.

30.2   Overall, the Review Board were impressed by the work underway and the balanced approach the Department was taking to increasing the use of digital and self-service options. While the Department knew there were benefits to increasing digital options, the Review Board was reassured to hear that alternative options and routes for contacting the Department (e.g. via phone or in person) would remain for those who needed them. The Review Board found the Department was adapting and improving its approach to use of digital and technology in response to feedback and consideration of best practice. The Review Board had made recommendations that were practical, built on the good work underway, and were focussed on supporting increased use of the Department's digital offer.

30.3   Councillor Wendy Maples, Member of the Review Board, added that the Review Board had considered both the theory behind, and practical examples of, behavioural change as part of the Review; and that the final recommendation - that the Department explore the benefits of introducing a digital ambassador scheme - was an opportunity for the Department to explore the value of a practical approach to encouraging behaviour change. Councillor Nuala Geary, Member of the Review Board, also commented in support of the work taking place that the Review had heard about. The Review Board thanked all the witnesses for their contributions and officers for all their work on the Review.

30.4   The Chair thanked the Members of the Review Board for their work and the introduction provided. The Committee welcomed the report and, in discussing it, asked questions and made comments on the following areas:

•   **Assistance with using digital platforms** – a question was asked on what support (e.g. coaching) was available for users who may be new to, or less familiar with, digital services. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health responded that while it may be possible to incorporate an element of support with using the Council's digital applications into visits to people with care needs who were known to the Council, the Department would also need to look at how it could draw on broader offers for improving digital literacy, including from other services and agencies. The Assistant Director Planning, Performance and Engagement added that the Department would continue to work closely with the One Council Digital Inclusion Programme which undertook a range of work to increase digital inclusion and promote support that improved access to digital services in the County.

•   **Language and accessibility** – a question was asked on whether the language used on the ASCH webpages was sufficiently accessible, particularly for people who may be less familiar with technology or for people with English as an additional language. The Chair of the Review Board responded that the Review had considered the role of both language and literacy, and identified that these could be potential barriers to people using digital options. The Director also recognised this but assured the Committee that ASCH's webpages, including the new Cost of Living webpages, were tested on volunteers in the People Bank to ensure the language used was understandable and accessible to residents who did not have expert or technical knowledge.

In terms of translations, the Director responded that there were options and ways to translate information on the ASCH webpages but recognised careful work was needed to ensure the

information remained accurate once translated. It was noted that the accuracy of translation tools had already improved a lot, and could be expected to continue to improve as translation technology itself improved. The Assistant Director added that the Department had a dedicated Equality and Inclusion Team which had good links to ethnic minority communities across East Sussex and ensured that they had the opportunity to shape and inform design of ASCH's work, including its digital offer.

- **Design and usability** – assurance was also sought that expertise on design and usability was sought when designing ASCH's digital tools. The Assistant Director confirmed that resource had been invested by the Department to ensure ASCH's digital offer was designed, from the outset, in a way that was accessible and easy to use. Digital forms and tools were also tested with different groups for usability.

- **Limitations of digitisation** – Members of the Committee felt that there would be some limitations to a 'digital by default' approach, namely in delivery of self/ digital care assessments, and had concerns that not all residents would necessarily be able to self-serve. Members of the Committee therefore felt it was important that alternative routes for contacting and accessing services remained for those who needed them. Councillor Maples, as a Member of the Review Board, assured the Committee that the Board had considered with the Department the limitations to digital services, particularly noting that some demographic groups more likely to require social care (such as people with disabilities or older people) may be limited in their ability to use digital options. As part of this the Review Board had noted that often the people who would be completing ASCH's digital forms and applications would be carers of those requiring social care. For this reason the Review had noted the importance of good, inclusive design for making it as easy, quick and appealing as possible for carers, who already had limited time, to contact and apply for support from ASCH digitally.

- **Support for the Review** – taking account of the comments above, Members of the Committee supported the Review Report and the Department's planned direction of travel.

30.5   The Director thanked the Review Board for their work on this area, as their questioning and challenge had been very useful for helping shape the future work of the Being Digital Programme.

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

31.   <u>WORK PROGRAMME</u>

31.1   The Chair of the Committee introduced the report which outlined the Committee's latest work programme, and included a summary of the work of the Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group.

Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group update
31.2   The Chair of the Reference Group, Councillor John Ungar, introduced the summary of the Group's work appended to the report. The Reference Group had been formed to consider a project on loneliness and isolation, which had been led by ESCC Public Health but delivered in partnership with partners across local government, health and the voluntary and community sector, recognising that loneliness and social isolation were complex and systemic social issues that could not be addressed by one agency alone. Collaborate Community Interest Company (CIC), a social consultancy and research organisation, were commissioned to support the project, developing the evidence base and identifying opportunities to mitigate loneliness and its worst effects.

31.3   The Reference Group had met four times across 2021/22 and inputted into the project as it was planned and delivered. The outcome of Collaborate CIC's work was two detailed reports on insights and recommendations for a systems approach to addressing loneliness in the County, which the Reference Group had considered in detail and could be made available to other Members of the Committee on request. At the latest, and final, meeting of the Reference Group it had been confirmed that funding had been allocated to establish a System Stewardship Group, as a first step to responding to the other recommendations of the Collaborate CIC report. This would build on existing partnership work to ensure there was system-wide responsibility to tackle loneliness. ESCC would lead on convening the Stewardship Group on behalf of partners, with focussed planning to establish the Stewardship Group commencing in the new year. An interim evaluation of the Group and its work was planned to take place in December 2023, followed by a final evaluation in December 2024-March 2025. The Reference Group requested an update report back to the March 2024 meeting of the Committee, following the interim evaluation.

31.4   The Chair of the Reference Group welcomed the work that had taken place, noting how positively Public Health had worked to find ways to tackle this issue. The Director of ASCH responded, thanking the Reference Group for its work on what was a very important issue, and which had impacts on people's health and wellbeing and demand for social care. The Director noted that the membership and scope of the Stewardship Group was to be determined when concerted planning got underway in the new year.

31.5   The Committee discussed the update and commented on the following area:

- **Role of poverty** – it was suggested that the role of poverty needed to be considered in this work as people on lower incomes, or facing increased financial pressures from the rising cost of living, would increasingly struggle to take part in paid social activities, such as visiting a café or pub, which could increase social isolation and loneliness. The Director responded that it was correct that the rising cost of living would have impacts on a range of social issues, and on progress tackling issues such as loneliness. The work the Department was planning to commence on establishing new community hubs/networks could help with this by starting to provide some social or gathering space in local communities, which was free.

31.6   The Director of Children's Services added that in the next phase of the work, it was intended that the challenges with loneliness and social isolation facing children and families (including new mothers) would also be considered.

ASC Reforms Reference Group and Market Sustainability Plan
31.7   The Committee agree to update the Committee's work programme to reflect that the work of the ASC Reforms Reference Group should commence closer to the new anticipated implementation date of the reforms of October 2025.

31.8   The Committee also noted that the Market Sustainability Plan would be circulated to the Committee once finalised, but that this was no longer expected to be in February 2023 due to the delay to the planned charging reforms.

Forward Plan
31.9   The Committee considered the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions and agreed there were no issues that required more detailed scrutiny.

31.10   The Committee RESOLVED to agree the latest work programme, subject to:
- an update on progress with the systems loneliness work and Stewardship Group being scheduled for the March 2024 Committee, as requested by the Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group; and

- it being updated to reflect that the work of the ASC Reforms Reference group would commence closer to reform implementation.

The meeting ended at 2.17 pm.

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)