

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 25 September 2023.

PRESENT Councillors Penny di Cara, Chris Dowling, Kathryn Field, Nuala Geary, Johanna Howell (Chair), Wendy Maples, Stephen Shing, John Ungar (Vice Chair) and Trevor Webb and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative)

LEAD MEMBERS Councillors Bob Standley

ALSO PRESENT Councillor Bob Bowdler (by MS Teams)
Seona Douglas (Interim Independent Chair East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board)
Alison Jeffery, Director of Children's Services
Michaela Richards, Head of Safer Communities
Tim Read, Exploitation Manager, Sussex Police (by MS Teams)
Chris Robson, Independent Chair East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (by MS Teams)
Douglas Sinclair, Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance (by MS Teams)
Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care & Health
Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

10. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

10.1 The Committee agreed the minutes from the previous meeting with an amendment made on the Members present.

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

11.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Adeniji, Clark and Maria Cowler (Diocesan Representative). Apologies were also received from Lead Member Councillor Maynard.

12. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

12.1 There were no disclosures of interest.

13. URGENT ITEMS

13.1 There were no urgent items.

14. EAST SUSSEX SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (ESSCP) ANNUAL REPORT

14.1 The Independent Chair of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children's Partnership presented the Annual Report to the Committee. The Chair outlined that the report showed the partnership work between East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police and the NHS, in East Sussex to safeguard children and stated that the report provided assurance about the good work taking place. The Chair noted the strong culture of support, learning and challenge across the Partnership, as well as the exceptional senior leadership team in Children's Services.

14.2 The Chair outlined key findings from the report and highlighted the key priorities of the Board, including safeguarding in education, child exploitation, embedding a learning culture and safeguarding under-fives.

14.3 The Chair informed the Board about upcoming legislation changes, with the possibility that Education could become a fourth strategic partner.

14.4 The Sussex Police Exploitation Manager provided an update to the Committee on the recruitment of an exploitation team as requested by the Committee last year. The Committee heard that this new team was responding to all forms of exploitation, including child exploitation, and noted the good engagement at a partnership level, including with the new restructured Safer Panel.

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

- **Whole family support and wider information sharing** - The Committee asked about wider support offered to families when a child is identified as a victim of crimes such as domestic abuse and sought assurance that adults involved were referred to other agencies. In response the Chair noted that there was a good system in place to work with the whole family and share information between professionals and although the police would deal with certain investigations, they were aware of the wider impact of crimes on families and the community. He also noted the preventative measures in place, including Early Help and social workers to prevent incidents; current work included working with 'invisible' or 'unseen' men to engage fathers with safeguarding issues to reduce incidents with very young children. The Committee asked about the number of fathers who had harmed their child (compared with other men in the family); the Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance replied that in a sample study conducted by the National Safeguarding Children Panel, the perpetrator was the biological father of the child in most cases.
- **Young People in custody** – The Committee asked for more information on young people in the youth justice system, including those held in overnight police custody. The Chair of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children's Partnership told the Board that there was a Youth Justice Report which explored these figures in more detail.
- **Mental Health** – The Committee were concerned about the number of children needing mental health support. The Director of Children's Services said that information published by the provider trust SPFT showed an increase in the number of children being seen, but also a steep increase in referrals. She noted, too, that there was also a high non-attendance rate for appointments which CAMHS were working on reducing through reminders and working with partners to support attendance. The Director noted the high self-harm rate in East Sussex compared with statistical neighbours.
- **Transition** – The Committee sought clarification on when support is offered to children who are transitioning into adult services. In response, the Director of Children's Services clarified the difference between disabled children transitioning to adult services, which is planned from an early age, and "transitional safeguarding support" which is the term for safeguarding support provided for supporting vulnerable young people over the age of 18, who may not have received support when they were younger.
- **Education**– The Committee asked about the impact and risk from potential legislative changes to make Education a strategic partner in the group. In response the Chair of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children's Partnership said a significant challenge with this was how wide ranging education is, including nursery settings, so it would be vital to get

the right people to represent education within the Partnership. The Director of Children's Services noted the current good engagement with schools across the county with safeguarding issues. The Chair also commented that the Partnership did engage with the voluntary sector on after school provision but noted this provision was not as established as it used to be. The Committee also enquired about the number of children being educated at home and if this was identified in wider statistics on children not attending school and if it was indicative of national statistics. The Director of Children's Services responded to say that the number of children who were "Electively Home Educated" (EHE) had risen since the pandemic, in line with a national trend. Although some families may be doing this well, there were concerns for some children around safeguarding and the quality of education they were receiving. The DFE has said that the Government are looking for opportunities to legislate to create a compulsory EHE register; this was a proposal which was part of the Schools Bill which the Government had withdrawn.

14.6 The Head of Children's Safeguards & Quality Assurance commented that the report was comprehensive and recognised the range of multi-agency safeguarding work in place. The Department were aware of the challenges going forward but were reassured that across the agencies there was a culture of challenge and learning and wanting to achieve best outcomes.

14.7 Committee thanked the Chair of the East Sussex Safeguarding Children's Partnership and noted they were reassured by the good partnership work taking place and RESOLVED to note the report.

15. WORK PROGRAMME

36.1. 15.1 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.

36.2. Forward plan

36.3. 15.2 The Committee reviewed the Council's Forward Plan of executive decisions.

36.4. Work Programme

36.5. 15.3 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the updated work programme and to review the work programme in more detail at the upcoming awayday.

16. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

16.1 The Chair introduced the report which followed the Committee's review of relevant parts of the End of Year Monitoring report and State of the County report at the July meeting. The Report included an update on the planning process, including scrutiny engagement.

16.2 The Director of Children's Services highlighted key concerns for the Department, including the increased pressure of the Children's Services budget due to higher costs, and increased numbers, of children in care. The Director informed the Committee about the Department's work with the consultants IMPOWER to review current strategies and projections to deliver the right care that is needed, as well as being cost effective. This work was partly in response to the ongoing challenge to replace foster carers who were retiring. The Director informed the Committee that this was resulting in more high cost agency and residential placements, with a children's care market not functioning effectively. There was investment in family safeguarding to keep more families together, with a new service starting in January, which aimed to improve outcomes for children and reduce budget pressures. The Director told the Committee that the Department were committed to identifying cost effective placements, but

that the interests of the child must come first and noted that the challenge was ongoing and would be a significant factor in RPPR planning.

16.3 The Lead Member for Education, and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability noted the overspend in Children's Services in Quarter 1 and told the Committee that the challenge was to find ways of meeting children's needs which were both more effective and more affordable.

16.4 The Director of Adult Social Care and Health outlined the key issues for the Department including the pressure on the ASCH budget with a projected overspend on the community care budget, and that they were looking into areas of concern, including fees of independent sector providers; the growth and demand of support for older people, and pressures on income (and subsequent debt) due to cost of living. The Department were also seeing an increase in complexity of need, including through safeguarding processes, such as substance misuse and mental health, and there were some high-cost placements which were challenging; the Department was working in partnership with the NHS to manage these.

16.5 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

17. SAFEGUARDING ADULTS BOARD - ANNUAL REPORT

17.1 The interim Independent Chair East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board introduced the report and gave a short presentation on the work of the Safeguarding Adults Board for 2022-2023 and the Strategic Plan 2021-2024. The Committee discussed the contents of the presentation and report.

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

- **Mental Capacity Act** – The Committee asked the Chair to comment on implications on funding with the implementation of the Mental Capacity Act. The Chair replied that any health organisation is obliged to operate under the new legislation and undertake mental capacity assessments. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health added that all practitioners were making assessments about clients' mental capacity, and it was part of the core offer.
- **Safeguarding around fraud/financial abuse** – The Committee asked about the risks of fraud with the increase of digital provision. The Chair noted that fraud was a complex national issue with sophisticated, quick changing technology so it was important that all organisations had checks and balances in place. From a safeguarding perspective, the Chair said that it was important to highlight these risks and that national campaigns were helpful in raising awareness of fraud and scams in the community. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health informed the Board that over half of victims of fraud were over 75 years of age but there was ongoing work to address this including through Trading Standards, who run targeted promotions, and work with the Police. The Committee asked about how the Mental Capacity Act addressed risks of financial abuse, especially for older people. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health replied that the Department had raised awareness of this with partner agencies, but this issue mainly arose during financial care assessments which would identify any concerns around people being able to make informed decisions, or any potential financial abuse within families.
- **Private care homes** – The Committee asked about data showing higher incidents of abuse in private care homes. In response the Chair told the Committee that there was very little own care provision within local authorities, most care was contracted out, and people had a choice on where they purchased care. The Chair noted that the local authority played a key role in preventing people from needing to go into care where possible, but there was a strong provider market promoting good care, and who worked

positively with the Safeguarding Adults Board. Where there were safeguarding concerns, the Commissioner was responsible for addressing these with the Board. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health confirmed that the majority of care was purchased from independent care homes which was a regulated service and there were no care homes rated 'inadequate' in East Sussex.

- **Transition** – The Committee asked what age the Department would start looking at the transition of Care. The Chair responded by clarifying that from the age of 14 there would be planning with young people in Children's Services who required support as adults, but there were also families not identified with Children's Services who presented with support needs later on. The Chair also noted the tension for professionals to make right decisions at the right time as support needs could change. The Director of Adult Social Care and Health noted that transition was something the Department had identified as an area to improve on, including identifying the right support at the right time. He also informed the Board that the transition age for people with substance misuse had increased to improve support and outcomes.

17.3 Committee thanked the interim Independent Chair East Sussex Safeguarding Adults Board 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 and gave a short presentation on the Safe Communities Annual Review 2022-2023 and the Serious Violence Duty, including local responsibilities. The Head of Safe Communities noted that East Sussex remained a relatively safe place to live but there were ongoing challenges, especially for some groups and areas.

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

- **Anti-social behaviour** – The Committee asked about work to address anti-social behaviour, including noise from motor vehicles, and the role of social housing providers to support this work. In response the Head of Safer Communities informed the Committee that housing and anti-social behaviour was managed at a District and Borough level and that as an upper tier authority, East Sussex County Council were limited in their scope, but street communities had been included into the business plan objectives for the Safer Communities Partnership in response to the rise in this. The local authority was also represented on the strategic housing partnership. The Committee noted the need for a multi-agency and multi-tier response to this issue. In response to the concern about noise, the Head of Safer Communities clarified that this would fall under the remit of the Safer Roads Partnership but would be able to flag this issue with them. The Committee also asked about the role of educating young people on the consequences of anti-social behaviour and heard from the Director of Children's Services that schools were working well to educate children on citizenship and values.
- **Community safety action groups** – The Committee asked about the possibility of reinstating Community Safety Action Groups. The Head of Safer Communities responded to say that the Department, as part of the response to the Serious Violence Duty and with funding from Safer Streets, were seconding a police analyst to carry out an in depth profile of lower super output areas in the District and Boroughs, including community engagement, which would be presented to the local community safety partnerships to take forward more targeted pieces of work.

- **Knife crime** – The Committee noted the work of the intervention project ‘Habitual Knife Carriers Programme’ outlined in the report and the significant impact of young people involved having improved outcomes. The Committee asked if there were other activities that the Council could invest in to produce similar outcomes for young people. The Director of Children’s Services told the Board that the project evaluation had been reviewed at the recent Youth Justice Chief Officers Group and they were looking at how to share the successful outcomes with other parts of Children’s Services. The Director acknowledged the funding from the Safer Communities Partnership to continue the project and stated this was an important piece of work that supported the approach of the connected practice model in social care and the work of Early Help.
- **Gender hate crime** – The Committee asked how the Partnership was responding to the increase in gender hate crime. The Head of Safer Communities responded to say that numbers in this area were still low so there were no current discussions on this at the Partnership Board. It was noted in the report due to the issues of identify politics and polarisation of views so the Partnership were keeping a monitoring brief on this. The Police were also responding proactively to these incidents.

18.3 The Committee thanked officers for their work and RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting concluded at: 12.47pm

Councillor Johanna Howell (Chair)