

Summary comments for Cabinet – People Scrutiny RPPR Board (15.12.23)

1.1. The People Scrutiny RPPR Board met on the 15 December 2023 and agreed comments to be put to Cabinet, on behalf of the parent Committee, for its consideration in January 2024. The information supplied to the Board to support its discussions comprised of:

- an RPPR Board overview report
- a Local Government Association (LGA) briefing on the Autumn Statement 2023;
- an interim report on the responses to the public survey; and
- the draft portfolio plans for the Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) and the Children’s Services Departments (CSD).

1.2. The Board met before the provisional local government finance settlement 2024 to 2025 was published and therefore the Board was not able to comment in detail on the Council’s budgetary position. The Board received an update from the Chief Finance Officer on the finance briefings circulated and the Government’s local government finance policy statement published on 5 December.

1.3. The comments of the People Scrutiny RPPR Board are set out below:

Financial outlook

1.4 The Board expressed its concern about the financial challenges facing the Council, particularly ASCH and CSD, following the Autumn Statement and subsequent local government finance policy statement. Whilst the Board welcomed the increase to the national living wage and its benefit for local workers, there was also recognition that this would generate additional financial challenges, particularly for ASCH in relation to care fees.

Interim public survey report

1.5 The Board discussed the interim results of the public engagement survey and also noted that, as a snapshot of local views from those who responded, the survey needed to be viewed as part of wider stakeholder engagement. The Board discussed approaches to engagement which were noted by Officers. The Board noted that the results highlighted a preference to prioritise spending on roads, however Members commented that this did not necessarily show the full picture and conversations with residents about care services, for both adults and children, often led to an agreement that spending in this area was also a priority. The Board agreed that more work needed to be done to promote to communities the work and priorities of ASCH and CSD, to raise awareness of the range of services they offer as well as current pressures.

Adult Social Care and Health draft portfolio plan

1.6 The Board received an update from the Director of ASCH on the draft ASCH portfolio plan and the key developments and challenges facing the Department for 2024/2025.

1.7 The Board recognised the impact of the changing demography in East Sussex, most notably the projected ongoing increase in the number of older people, including those with long term illnesses, which was contributing to increased pressures on local services and the ASCH budget.

1.8 The Board wished to acknowledge the ongoing challenge of recruitment in adult social care services and the potential impact of this on service delivery. However, the Board was reassured that this remained a priority area and that targeted work on this had recently reduced the number of vacancies.

1.9 The Board recognised the increasing resources needed to support migrants, and the complexity of the various schemes in place for different migrant groups and welcomed the work the Department was doing to respond to this, working with local partners.

Children's Services draft portfolio plan

1.10 The Board received an update from the Director of CSD on the draft CSD portfolio plan and the key developments and challenges facing the Department for 2024/2025.

1.11 The Board noted the range of responses to social care challenges reflected in the Department's plans and specifically welcomed the recently agreed increase in foster carer payments and viewed this an investment which would result in savings elsewhere through supporting the availability of in-house foster care placements.

1.12 The Board recognised the need for strong mental health support for young people and were reassured that this remained a priority for the Department, as seen through their ongoing work with partners, including the NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, and ongoing funding to support mental health and emotional wellbeing in schools.

1.13 The Board recognised the ongoing challenges in education around school attendance and welcomed the prioritisation of work in this area within the Department's Portfolio Plan, including work to reduce the number of pupils on part-time timetables and the number of families electing to home educate (EHE). The Board noted the progress in this area to date, including work from a pilot EHE early intervention programme which had seen a significant reduction in the number of new elective home education applications.