

PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, County Hall, Lewes on 19 November 2024.

PRESENT Councillors Johanna Howell (Chair), John Ungar (Vice Chair), Colin Belsey, Charles Clark, Anne Cross, Kathryn Field, Nuala Geary, Peter Pragnell, Stephen Shing and Colin Swansborough

LEAD MEMBERS Councillor Standley
 Councillor Bowdler (attended online)

ALSO PRESENT Detective Chief Superintendent Richard McDonagh, East Sussex
 Safeguarding Children Partnership Chair
 Ben Brown, Consultant in Public Health
 Carolyn Fair, Director of Children's Services
 Ian Gutsell, Chief Finance Officer
 Kathy Marriott, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care
 Leigh Prudente, Assistant Director (Operations)
 Mark Stainton, Director of Adult Social Care & Health
 Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser

20. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2024

20.1 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2024 as a correct record.

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

21.1 There were no apologies for absence.

22. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

22.1 There were no disclosures of interest.

23. URGENT ITEMS

23.1 There were no urgent items.

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

24.1 The ESSCP Chair introduced the report which outlined the work undertaken by the Partnership in 2023/24. The Chair also noted the publication of *Working Together 2023* which sets out the arrangements for cooperation between organisations to improve the wellbeing of children and includes revised ESSCP multi agency safeguarding arrangements that came into effect in September 2024.

24.2 The Chair outlined key findings from the report and highlighted the continuing key priorities for 2023-26 of safeguarding children in schools; safeguarding adolescents; and embedding learning.

24.3 The Committee thanked the Chair for a thorough report and noted the achievements within the report, including the positive responses to training. The Committee asked questions and made comments on the following areas:

- **Format of the report** – the Committee welcomed the information contained in the report and asked if the use of acronyms could be reduced. The Chair welcomed the feedback and noted the priority to communicate the report effectively.
- **Looked after Children** – A question was asked about the number of sexual offences that related to looked after children. The Chair responded he did not have this data to hand but that it could be obtained and brought to a future partnership meeting and reported back to the Committee. The Director of Children's Services assured the Committee that there were processes in place to respond to looked after children.
- **Safeguarding persistently absent children** – The Committee asked how the Partnership was working with schools to safeguard children who were persistently absent. The Chair noted new guidance introduced in 2023 which included education as a safeguarding partner; work was underway to develop this role and ensure there was effective educational representation in the Partnership. The Director of Children's Services Department (CSD) noted that attendance was a priority for the Department and processes were in place to monitor attendance and identify children who were vulnerable. The Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care added that wrap around support was provided to families where attendance was a concern.
- **Safeguarding electively home educated children** – The Committee asked how safeguarding concerns were identified for children who were electively home educated and the number of concerns for this cohort. The Director of CSD noted the priority for all children to be in school, but that work was targeted to support vulnerable children to attend school. The Assistant Director commented that additional scrutiny was in place with families choosing to electively home educate where children are known to social care, including children with a Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan to ensure a robust safeguarding system.

24.4 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

25. TRANSITION IN SERVICES

25.1 The Director of Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) introduced a report on the Preparing for Adulthood Model. The Model had been jointly developed with CSD to support young people to transition between services and was built on four principles: education and employment; housing; inclusion; and health and wellbeing.

25.2 The Director noted that the transition pathway currently focussed on children supported by the Children's Disability Team, however there were plans to expand this to other children known to CSD with care eligible needs.

25.3 The Director of CSD commented that the transition process would be an area of focus in the upcoming SEND inspection and Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment.

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

- **Role of parents** – The Committee recognised the benefits of this model for children and asked questions on how parents engaged with this process and their role in supporting their child to transition. In response, the Assistant Director (Operations) ASC noted the role of Link Workers in the Preparing for Adulthood Team who had regular conversations with parents to reassure and support them throughout the process and relationships between parents and children were regularly reviewed.
- **Eligibility for Preparing for Adulthood Services** – The Committee discussed eligibility for transition support, including for care leavers and children not previously known to CSD. The Director of ASCH noted that the number of young people not known to CSD was small, but ASCH used a person-centred approach to assess the need for care,

including Care Act eligibility and statutory responsibilities, and the best approach for individuals. The Assistant Director Early Help and Social Care commented that most young people presenting to ASCH would be known to CSD through its partnerships with education and health, as well as wider partners. The Assistant Director (Operations) ASC noted that work was planned to expand the Preparing for Adulthood Panel to ensure a consistent service to all young people who may need support from ASCH. In response to a question about care leavers, the Assistant Director Early Help and Social Care outlined CSD's specific responsibility to support looked after children up to the age of 25. Looked after children with SEND needs could also be supported through the Preparing for Adulthood pathway. Following further questions about eligibility for children with SEND, including those with an EHCP, the Assistant Director clarified that the pathway was specifically focussed on providing transition support to children from the Children's Disability Service to ASCH; a child with an EHCP or SEND needs did not necessarily meet the criteria for this service, however there were other support services for children with SEND approaching adulthood. There was a further question about how young people were identified as eligible for support, including young people moving into the county. The Director of ASCH responded that there were multiple routes into support services, including through other local authorities, health partners and schools.

- **Staffing** – In response to a question about the number of officers employed, the Committee heard that there were 17 staff in the Preparing for Adulthood Team.
- **Employment and education support** – In response to a question about employment support for adults, the Assistant Director (Operations) ASC noted that responsibilities under the Care Act included supporting eligible adults to access the community, including employment. The Committee asked about the relationship with education settings to develop young people's skills. In response the Director of CSD noted that ambition for all young people was a core principle of the Council and there was support available to access to education, training and employment.

25.5 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

26. RECONCILING POLICY, PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES (RPPR)

26.1 The Director of ASCH introduced the report, which incorporated the recent RPPR Cabinet report which provided an update on the policy context, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), capital programme, and the Council's response to significant financial pressures. The report presented a further opportunity for the Committee to ask questions on the planning context and to request any additional information required for the RPPR Board in December.

26.2 The Director of ASCH outlined the Department's priority to deliver statutory duties under the Care Act and areas which had been protected as far as possible when identifying savings. Savings proposals contained in the November Cabinet report focussed on reducing capacity and improving efficiency, maximising charging, and refocussing external grants to deliver the Council's core priorities.

26.3 The Director of CSD noted the Department's continued focus on prevention and SEND and outlined the savings proposals contained in the Cabinet report which focussed on consolidating functions, maximising income and grants and a review of service models.

26.4 The Chief Finance Officer outlined the financial position of the Council and key headlines from the recent Government Autumn Budget statement.

26.5 The Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND) commented that announcements in the Autumn Budget were unlikely to benefit ESCC and there was an ongoing challenge to balance the budget.

26.6 The Committee asked a number of questions regarding the information provided in the report including:

- **Children's Care Market** – In response to a question on the recent Government announcement to 'crackdown' on childcare profiteering, the Lead Members for Education and ISEND noted there were concerns as well as potential positives from this announcement and more detail was needed on the Government's approach.
- **Autumn Budget announcements** – The Committee enquired about implications of announcements in the Autumn Budget to increase Employer's National Insurance contributions, as well as increases to the National Living Wage on the Council's budget. The Chief Finance Officer clarified that this was not currently reflected in the MTFP and it was unclear how National Insurance contributions would impact on ESCC; although the Chancellor said that the Public Sector (including local authorities) would be protected from the increase in Employers' National Insurance, it was not yet known how this would be funded. It would most likely impact on the Council's contracts and suppliers, including social care providers and this would be factored into future modelling. The Director of ASCH noted that negotiations were taking place with providers around these costs. In a response to the impact of these on self-funders, the Chief Finance Officer commented that costs probably would increase for self-funders and noted the previous government's plans for social care funding reform which were now not going ahead. The Government's approach to social care funding was not yet known. The Chief Finance Officer also noted that the year on year increase to the National Living Wage will require in the future a review of local government pay structures, which will increase costs.
- **Procurement** – There was a question on social value in procurement. The Chief Finance Officer and the Director of ASCH noted that social value was part of the existing procurement process, including with social care providers. The Director of CSD noted the ongoing work to ensure value for money was being achieved and contracts were currently being reviewed to ensure outcomes delivered impact.
- **Public consultations on ASCH savings** – The Committee welcomed the strong engagement with the public consultation on ASCH savings proposals, and asked how responses were being considered. The Director of ASCH noted that all responses would be analysed and evaluated, including those that included alternative proposals, once the consultation had concluded. If any alternatives were financially and operationally viable, these would be presented, along with other relevant information, to Cabinet in February for decision.
- **Financial impact of savings** – The Committee asked about the long term costs of savings. The Chief Finance Officer responded that the MTFP took into account the costs of delivering services and emphasised the need to set a balanced budget amidst a funding deficit. He noted that previous one year settlements had curtailed the ability to plan longer term and, like other local authorities, ESCC was now in an unsustainable position with the need to make savings it did not wish to make. The announcement of multi-year settlements from 2026/27 was welcome and it was hoped would result in the ability to conduct longer term planning. The Director of ASCH clarified that savings proposals for statutory services would be reprovioned so would not incur additional costs, however, savings proposals in relation to preventative services were being analysed to understand future need for eligible services. Although it was recognised that these savings could increase demand, the Department had to prioritise its ability to meet statutory need.

26.7 The Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

27. WORK PROGRAMME

27.1 The Chair introduced the report which outlined the Committee's latest work programme and noted that the Committee had reviewed this in detail at its recent away day. Items for the incoming committee to consider had been added.

27.2 Due to recent changes to the Committee membership, the Committee RESOLVED that Councillor Cross would join the membership of this Group.

Forward plan

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

Work Programme

27.4 The Committee RESOLVED to agree the updated work programme.

28. LONELINESS STEWARDSHIP GROUP

28.1 The Consultant in Public Health introduced the report which provided an update to the Committee on the work of the Connected People and Places project focussed on tackling loneliness in East Sussex.

28.2 Key areas of work included developing a system approach; developing programmes of work; community engagement; establishing a tackling loneliness hub; and developing a vision statement for East Sussex.

28.3 The Committee welcomed the report, recognising that loneliness could affect people of all ages and could have significant impacts, and asked questions in the following areas:

- **Partner engagement** – In response to a question on how partners were engaging with this work, the Consultant noted the work of the Programme Facilitator who was engaging with partners and making connections to raise awareness of the project and align programmes of work. The Stewardship Approach aimed to develop this work with partners and noted a recent event which was well attended.
- **Loneliness in rural communities** – The Committee asked how this project reached rural communities. The Consultant noted that there was work to link with Integrated Community Teams within district and boroughs, including a project in rural Rother, but welcomed the opportunity to engage with further groups across the county.
- **Accessing community groups** – The Committee noted the importance of people being able to access communities and asked if there was collaboration with the Communities, Economy and Transport department to support this. The Consultant noted that the project's annual report included the role of local infrastructure in reducing loneliness. Work was underway to develop a 'connection test' to support local decision making (for example planning and transport) to consider social connections which could be used by partners, including other teams within the Council.
- **Digital inclusion** – The Committee noted that although loneliness affected people of all ages, older people could be at higher risk if they were unable to access online platforms. The Consultant recognised that for older people, it was important to use a variety of methods of engagement; work was underway to pilot telephone befriending schemes.
- **Identifying loneliness** – The Committee noted that it could be challenging to identify and engage with people who are lonely. The Consultant clarified that loneliness was a dissonance between expectations for social connection and actual social connection; the quality of connections was also important, including for people to have a range of 'thick' and 'thin' ties.
- **Voluntary and community groups** – The Committee recognised the important role of the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector to connect people and asked about the impact of recent announcements on increases to National Insurance and National Living Wage on the VCSE, and if this could lead to greater demand for council services. The Director of ASCH commented that discussions were taking place with partners about these impacts and, in recognition of the role they had in prevention, the Department was prioritising VCSE infrastructure. There were still, however, concerns about financial challenges facing the VCSE and the potential impact this could have on individuals' wellbeing and social care needs.

28.4 The Committee RESOLVED noted the report.

29. ASC PEER REVIEW AND CQC PREPARATIONS

29.1 The Director of ASCH introduced the report which outlined the Department's preparations for an upcoming Care Quality Commission (CQC) visit.

29.2 The Director noted that CQC assessments were reintroduced in 2021 and that as part of local preparations for an assessment, the Council had participated in a Local Government Association Peer Review in February 2024. In August the Department was informed by the CQC that its assessment was starting and had provided information as part of the initial process. The Department was now awaiting notification of a site visit.

29.3 Preparations had included learning from other local authorities, and from other external inspections within the Council, and working with ESCC staff and Members to ensure that work reflected duties under the Care Act and was presented within the appropriate framework.

29.4 The Director outlined anticipated areas of focus for the CQC, based on the recent Peer Review and ASC Strategy, as well as the role of the Committee in preparing for the visit and its role more widely in scrutinising the Department.

29.5 The Committee welcomed the report and commented on the thorough preparation undertaken by the Department for the CQC assessment. The Committee also welcomed the transparent way of working within ASCH and the information provided by the Department to aid the Committee's understanding of key areas.

29.5 The Committee RESOLVED noted the report.

The meeting ended at 13:03