



## PEOPLE OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

**Minutes of the meeting held on 11 August 2021**

**10.00 am - 12.05 pm in the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

**Responsible Officer:** Tim Ward

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### **Present**

#### Shropshire Councillors

Councillors Peggy Mullock (Chairman), Claire Wild (Vice Chairman), Peter Broomhall, David Evans, Nat Green, Ruth Houghton, Hilary Luff, Kevin Pardy, Kevin Turley and Roy Aldcroft (Substitute) (substitute for Ed Bird)

## **4 Apologies and Substitutions**

4.1 Apologies were received from Councillor Ed Bird and Sian Lines (Hereford Diocese)

4.2 Councillor Roy Aldcroft substituted for Councillor Bird

## **5 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

5.1 There were no declarations of pecuniary interest

## **6 Minutes**

6.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 3 March 2021 and 20 May 2021 had been circulated.

### **6.2 RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meetings held on 3 March 2021 and 20 May 2021 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## **7 Public Question Time**

7.1 There were no questions from members of the public

## **8 Members' Question Time**

8.1 Questions had been received from Councillor Alex Wagner regarding secondary school places in Shrewsbury, and from Councillor Kevin Pardy regarding youth services.

8.2 By way of supplementary question Councillor Pardy asked for how many months had young people in market towns such as Shrewsbury, Oswestry and Market Drayton been left without access to an outreach youth worker. The Executive

Director Children's Services advised that there was a delay in the passing over of services to Town and Parish Councils due to delays in them not being able to make the necessary decisions, but that there was some delivery of services in place during this time. The Head of Early Help, Partnerships and Commissioning commented that the pandemic had had an effect on face-to-face youth clubs but that prior to the pandemic there had been a move from Parish and Town Councils to pick up the provision of open access youth clubs and that following the relaxation of the current covid restrictions these clubs would be opening up across the County.

- 8.4 Councillor Pardy asked what had happened to the unused budget allocated to outreach youth work from the financial years 20/21 and 21/22. The Executive Director – Children's services advised that this money remained in the Children's Services budget.
- 8.5 Copies of the questions and responses may be found on the agenda page on the Council website.

## **9 Response to the Covid 19 Pandemic**

- 9.1 Members received a presentation which updated them on the response of Children's Services to the covid pandemic.
- 9.2 The Principal Education Improvement Advisor and the Service Manager, Business Support Learning and Skills updated the meeting of the impacts on schools and pupils. Members were advised that overall school attendance had been higher than the national average due to the lower number of Covid cases but that inevitably that had been a loss in progress which was worse for disadvantaged pupils. In addition, there had been an impact on social and emotional skills and an impact caused by "missed experiences"
- 9.3 In response to a question regarding opportunities for pupils to catch up on "lost learning" the Principal Education Improvement Advisor advised the meeting that there was additional funding available and that each school would identify how best to utilise this money.
- 9.4 A Member commented that amongst "missed experiences" was the opportunity for work experience and asked how this would be addressed. The Principal Education Improvement Advisor advised the meeting that each school would identify how best to take this forward and that it would be monitored as part of the Schools Improvement advisors' regular assessments. The Executive Director Children's Services comments that for those pupils that had missed out and left school the "Kickstart" programme may provide opportunities.
- 9.5 A Member commented that the vouchers scheme had been well received and had been a lifeline to many and asked that given the reduction in Universal credit and no voucher scheme for October half term how will the most vulnerable be protected? The Service Manager, Business Support Learning and Skills comment that there may be some support from Government may be forthcoming but that he was unsure at this stage what form this would take.

- 9.6 The Head of Early Help, Partnerships and Commissioning updated the meeting of the work of the Early Help Team during the pandemic. Members were informed that a new case management system had been implemented which had enabled better information sharing between departments. The Head of Early Help, Partnerships and Commissioning advised that early help requests at level three had increased with peaks coinciding with schools reopening after lockdowns and that visits to supported families had been maintained throughout the period. Members were advised that extra support would be provided to families though the school holidays with activities provided to over 1500 children & young people.
- 9.7 The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Safeguarding informed the meeting that there had been a significant increase in demand on social care which had peaked when schools returned after lockdowns, and that there had been an increasing complexity in cases. The Assistant Director advised that there had been an increase in the number of children in care which was due partly to an increase in the number of large families entering the care system and a delay in some children exiting the care system.
- 9.8 In response to a query the Assistant Director confirmed that some of the new ways of working that had been developed would continue to be used going forward.
- 9.9 In response to a question the Assistant Director confirmed that the rise in the number of looked after children mirrored what was happening nationally and that the costs and complexity of cases was also comparable.
- 9.10 A Member asked whether the standard of housing that families were living in was a contributory factor to children entering the care system. The Assistant Director informed the meeting that it was not a problem they were aware of, but that they would look into the matter.
- 9.11 The Business Manager, Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnership advised the meeting that the impact of the Covid epidemic on safeguarding had been continually assessed through regular meetings and that a series of guidance notes and other documents had been produced to assist officers and external scrutiny had been used to ensure that all processes were carried out correctly. The Business Manager advised Members that there had been an increase in the statutory case reviews and also there had been an increase in the reporting of anti-social behaviour reported.
- 9.12 The Director of Children's Services paid tribute to officers who had risen to the challenges well and continued to provide a good service and commented that the effects of the pandemic would continue long after the pandemic was over. Members also paid tribute and thanked Officers for their work.
- 9.13 **RESOLVED:**
- That the People Overview Committee thank all officers, staff and other people involved in the care, education, and protection of children and adults in Shropshire for their work during the covid pandemic.

## 10 Work Programme

10.1 Members received the report of the Scrutiny Officer which set out the proposed work programme for the People Overview Committee for the forthcoming municipal year.

10.2 Amongst topics raised for addition to the programme were:

- Support for people with a sensory impairment
- Access to dentistry for young children
- Secondary school place planning
- Staff recruitment and retention
- Provision for places for excluded pupils

## 11 Date of Next Meeting

11.1 Members were reminded that the next meeting of the People Overview Committee would be held on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at 10.00am

Signed ..... (Chairman)

Date: .....