



Committee and Date

People Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

27th November 2024

PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2024

In the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury,
Shropshire, SY2 6ND

10.00 am - 12.05 pm

Responsible Officer: Shelley Davies

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Present

Councillors Roy Aldcroft, Jeff Anderson, Peter Broomhall, Ruth Houghton, Duncan Kerr, Hilary Luff, Peggy Mullock, Kevin Pardy, Vivienne Parry, Claire Wild and Alex Wagner (substitute for Nat Green)

4 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Nat Green (Substitute: Councillor Alex Wagner), and Sian Lines, Diocesan Board of Education.

5 Disclosable Interests

Councillor Ruth Houghton declared an interest as a trustee at Bethphage, a learning disability charity and noted that her Grandson attended Severdale Academy.

6 Minutes

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th April and 9th May 2024 be confirmed as an accurate record.

7 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

8 Member Question Time

There were no members' questions.

9 Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers

Donessa Gray, Assistant Director, Services to Children & Families introduced the Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers Report which provided an overview of the challenges and actions taken to address this issue as part of Shropshire Council's commitment to a Healthy Organisation within the Shropshire Plan.

It was reported that the recruitment and retention of social workers was an issue nationally and was a challenge due to the high turnover of staff and reliance on agency workers. Donessa Gray, Assistant Director, Services to Children & Families added that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the West Midlands relating to caps on the amount paid to agency children's social workers had been in existence for some time, however, many of the Local Authorities who signed up to this have been granted exemptions whereas Shropshire remains within the MoU.

In response to questions members were advised that:

- There were occasions where agency staff were leaving and not working their notice period. This was usually due to poor work which was referred to Social Work England.
- The apprenticeship scheme was not affected by the voluntary redundancy programme and following the closure of the University in the Guildhall the Council had identified an alternative provider in regard to the taught element of the scheme.
- There had been a lot of work undertaken as part of the Shropshire Plan to protect social care frontline services and to ensure children were a priority for the whole Council, however, there was an opportunity to strengthen this when the Plan was reviewed next year.
- There were a number of existing hubs across the county which were being utilised to reduce travelling time for social workers and there were plans to increase the number hubs.
- The delay in relation to DBS checks would be investigated further and any support from the Committee would be appreciated.
- The 45p mileage rate was set by Government and would have implications nationally if increased.
- The suggestion to include a clause to penalise agencies when staff do not work their notice period would be investigated.

RECOMMENDED:

- That Cabinet should write to and lobby HMRC to review and increase the 45p mileage rate for those travelling to carry out their statutory role in larger rural and sparsely populated Local Authorities, such as Social Workers.
- That Cabinet should write to the relevant bodies, including the Police, to highlight the impact of delays in completing enhanced DBS checks on key roles and functions, including the recruitment of social workers and foster carers, and ask what action can and is being taken to address the causes of delays, by when.

Information Request:

That a note should be sent to all Members of the Committee setting out the situation with the capping pay for agency workers, specifically highlighting the position in relation to the DfE and the awaited Technical Guidance.

That data and key messages on the reasons why Social Workers were leaving the Council from their exit surveys/leavers questionnaires, including learning and subsequent actions, was shared with all Members of the Committee.

10 Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 4

Donessa Gray, Assistant Director, Service for Children and Families introduced the Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 4 which gave an update on key areas of performance across Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Education services under the People's Directorate.

Donessa Gray, Assistant Director, Service for Children and Families outlined key areas of the report including the effectiveness of the Early Help and Stepping Stones programmes noting the financial savings and the positive impact these services have had on preventing children from entering care.

In response to questions members were advised that:

- There was additional information available in relation to hospital discharges and more detailed performance data would be included in the next quarterly report.
- There had been an increase in private hospital care due to NHS waiting lists which was likely to increase and therefore Shropshire Council needed to be ahead of the game in regard to the after care and support required.
- A focused update on sensory services, including outcomes and improvements, would be included for the next meeting.
- Artificial intelligence (AI) software was being used by staff where possible.
- The increasing trend of elective home education was a challenge nationally and the lack of oversight and potential safeguarding concerns were noted.
- The Council's position in relation to whether enhanced DBS checks were necessary for Councillors who deal with vulnerable adults or children would be clarified with the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance.

Officers were thanked for their report.

RECOMMENDED:

That steps should be taken to lobby relevant organisations to reduce delays in the completion of enhanced DBS checks (see recommendation for the previous agenda item - Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers).

That more support staff in the People Directorate should be further enabled in their roles by extending the number of licences for artificial intelligence (AI) software (to increase their productivity by reducing the amount of manual handling of data and information they have to carry out).

11 Work Programme

Members received the work programme for 2024-2025. The Scrutiny Officer noted that the work programme was set out slightly differently to previous work programmes with each item being identified as either:

- Briefing (open to all members to attend)
- Briefing and Decision by Members to go to Committee
- Straight to Committee

The Committee discussed the need to balance the focus between children's and adult social care and it was suggested that more topics on adult social care be included in future meetings and briefings to ensure comprehensive oversight.

12 Date of next meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Meeting will be taking place on at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday 27th November 2024.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: