Shropshire Council

Committee and Date

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13th January 2027

PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2026
In the Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ
6.00 - 7.57 pm

Responsible Officer: Shelley Davies
Email: shelley.davies@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257718

Present
Councillor Mandy Duncan (Chairman)
Councillors Mark Morris, Alan Mosley, Colin Taylor, Teri Trickett and Ben Jephcott (Substitute for Neil Bentley)

Other Members in Attendance:
Councillor Ruth Houghton – Portfolio Holder for Social Care
Councillor Dawn Husemann (Remotely)

Officers in Attendance:
Chris Atherton – Director of Adult Services
David Shaw – Director Children's Services
Sonya Miller – Service Director Children's Social Care (Remotely)
Natasha Moody - Service Director Children's Services Reforms (Remotely)
Michelle Williams - Service Manager Long Term Support
Lisa Gardner – Temporary Business Manager, Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnerships Business Unit
Sophie Foster – Overview & Scrutiny Officer

15 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neil Bentley (substitute: Ben Jephcott), Dawn Husemann (attending remotely) and Wendy Owen.

16 **Disclosable Interests**

Councillor Mark Morris declared that he operated a private hire business which provided school and SEND transport.

Councillor Terri Trickett declared that her husband was employed as a taxi driver and transported SEND children.

17 **Minutes**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st July 2026 be confirmed as an accurate record.

18 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

19 Member Questions

There were no member questions.

20 Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report - Adults

Michelle Williams, Service Manager Long Term Support, presented the Quarterly Performance Monitoring report which provided an update on performance across Adult Social Care. Members were advised of the continued improvement across a number of areas, including support for carers, safeguarding and sensory services. It was noted that more than 1,600 assessments had been completed for carers previously unknown to the Council, with 98% completed within 28 days, while the same-day safeguarding response model had enabled the service to maintain no waiting list despite increasing demand. Michelle Williams explained that the sensory service had also significantly reduced its waiting list, from over 600 people to approximately 150 and the overall the picture was positive across the service.

Further information was sought by members on domestic abuse, including the number of cases and the measures being taken to reduce incidents and support victims. Michelle Williams advised that detailed domestic abuse data was not included within the report but could be provided in future. She highlighted the Council's partnership approach and suggested that domestic abuse should form a specific focus of the next report. Members were also advised by Lisa Gardner, Temporary Business Manager for the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnerships Business Unit that partnership activity included preventative work in schools, professional awareness and training, dedicated domestic abuse support and sanctuary scheme assessments to improve the safety of victims' homes.

Members questioned whether the safeguarding figures included repeated concerns relating to the same individuals. Michelle Williams confirmed that information on repeat contacts was available and could be included in the next report. In response to concerns about the overall increase in safeguarding enquiries, she explained that increased awareness, greater reporting by partners and closer monitoring of some care providers could be contributing to the increase, with the same concern sometimes reported by more than one person. Further analysis was required to establish whether the increase represented greater levels of abuse and neglect or recurring concerns involving the same individuals or providers.

The increase in safeguarding concerns and the reported figure that 97.55% of individuals had indicated that their desired outcomes had been fully or partially achieved was also queried by members. Michelle Williams confirmed that analysis of the increase was underway but that no one cause had been identified. She acknowledged that there was an important distinction between fully and partially achieved outcomes and agreed that the underlying data should be examined further,

including whether follow-up with those reporting partially achieved outcomes could identify learning or improvements.

In relation to sensory services, Members welcomed the significant reduction in the waiting list and questioned how this improvement had been achieved. Michelle Williams explained that changes to service management, waiting-list oversight, triage arrangements, the waiting well approach and more efficient administrative processes had enabled the specialist team to spend more time supporting people. In response to a further question regarding the respective responsibilities of the NHS and Adult Social Care, she explained that the NHS primarily diagnosed and treated sensory conditions, while Adult Social Care supported people to manage the impact of sensory impairment on their daily lives and independence.

Members questioned how the areas highlighted within the report related to the recent CQC inspection and whether officers were anticipating the inspectorate's findings. Michelle Williams explained that the areas had been selected because they were known key lines of enquiry for the CQC and not because officers were seeking to predict the inspection outcome. It was added that the inspection had now taken place, but the results had not yet been received. It was anticipated that the assessment would provide a wider external view of the service, including assurance and governance, and Members noted that the report would return to the Committee once available.

The performance relating to carers assessments was welcomed and members sought assurance that carers received the support identified through those assessments, particularly respite and replacement care, and that outcomes were subsequently reviewed. Michelle Williams advised that support was tailored to individual circumstances and could include respite within or away from the home, replacement care, direct payments or sitting services. Reviews were used to establish whether outcomes were being achieved, with carers also able to access support through Let's Talk Local hubs and carers drop-ins. In response to a query relating to the use of direct payments and whether these were routinely promoted to eligible individuals, Michelle Williams confirmed that these were promoted as a first-choice option where appropriate although they were not suitable for everyone.

Members considered that future performance reports should place greater emphasis on outcomes and impact rather than activity alone, including evidence of whether residents were safer, healthier and able to remain independent for longer. They also requested clearer information on targets, financial implications and the principal cost drivers, with financial information aligned where appropriate with that considered by the Finance & Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDED:

The Committee noted the report and agreed that:

- Domestic abuse be included as a focus within the next report, including relevant data and information on action being undertaken to support victims.

- Information on repeat safeguarding contacts be included within the next report.

- Future reports include, where appropriate, targets, key cost drivers, financial information and greater information on the outcomes and impact of activity.

- Further analysis be provided distinguishing safeguarding outcomes that were fully achieved from those that were partially achieved.

- The CQC assessment be brought back to the Committee when available.

21 **Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report - Children**

David Shaw, Director of Children's Services, introduced the Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report for Children and explained that it had been developed in response to previous requests from the Committee for more detailed performance information.

Sonya Miller, Service Director for Children's Social Care, outlined progress in developing a performance dashboard based on the national outcomes framework for children and young people, covering children's social care, education, SEND and early years. She highlighted that the number of looked-after children had increased to 117 per 10,000, following an earlier downward trend, with recent increases partly influenced by the arrival of unaccompanied children through the National Transfer Scheme and pressures arising from social work vacancies. Updates were also provided on children leaving care through family and special guardianship arrangements, the education, employment and training outcomes of care leavers, and persistent absence amongst looked-after children.

Natasha Moody, Service Director for Children's Services Reforms, provided an update on SEND performance and highlighted increasing demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). She noted that despite increasing demand, improvement had been made in the timeliness of EHCPs, rising from 34.3% when the report was written to 50% at the time of the meeting, while the number of plans taking more than 30 weeks had reduced from 171 to 54. Members were advised that the focus was not solely on timeliness but also on improving the quality of plans.

Members sought further information regarding accommodation for care leavers, particularly whether young people were able to remain close to their families or foster carers. Sonya Miller advised that most care leavers secured accommodation within their preferred area, although there was a shortage of suitable accommodation, particularly for 18 and 19-year-olds. She subsequently confirmed that 87% of 19-year-olds, 93% of 20-year-olds and 94% of 21-year-olds within the respective cohorts were in suitable accommodation.

Further information was sought on early intervention and prevention during early years, including health visitor provision in Shropshire, caseloads and contact with children under three. Natasha Moody explained that early intervention and prevention formed a key element of the reform programme, including the Best Start in Life work with health visitors and other partners to identify need and provide

appropriate support for children under five. The Committee also highlighted the widening disadvantage gap for children receiving free school meals and considered that early years provision should form a focus of a future performance discussion.

Members questioned the increase in requests for EHCPs as children approached the transition from primary to secondary school. Natasha Moody advised that the move to a larger secondary school environment could lead parents to seek additional reassurance that established support arrangements would continue. She added that additional capacity was being directed towards secondary schools through the SEND Reform Plan to strengthen transition arrangements and support children where possible without the need for an EHCP. The Committee also queried the level of EHCP-related complaints, tribunals and Ombudsman investigations. Officers advised that complaints arose from a combination of timeliness issues and disagreements over assessments, plans and placements, and that improved timeliness should reduce some complaints, although others could result from differences regarding decisions.

Questions were raised regarding performance information for schools and the Council's ability to influence academy performance. Officers clarified that published data represented the most recently available nationally validated information, whereas local figures reflected the current position. David Shaw explained that the Council had fewer direct levers in relation to academies but continued to provide support and challenge, including through the Shropshire Children Achieving and Thriving Education Strategy and engagement with the Department for Education. It was noted that the impact of the strategy would provide a useful area for future scrutiny.

Concern was raised regarding the 36 social work vacancies and the barriers to recruitment. Sonya Miller explained that there remained a national shortage of experienced social workers and noted that Shropshire Council offered retention payments and enhanced payments for particularly difficult-to-recruit posts, but rurality, travel distances and fuel costs remained challenges.

RECOMMENDED:

The Committee noted the report and agreed that:

- Broader information to be provided for care leavers aged 22-25 who are not in suitable accommodation.

- Further information be provided on health visitor provision in Shropshire, including numbers, caseloads and contacts with children under three.

- The Best Start in Life Programme, including the early years disadvantage gap, form a focus of a future Quarterly Performance Report.

- The impact of the Shropshire Children Achieving and Thriving Education Strategy be considered by the Committee approximately one year following its

introduction, including consideration of the Council's statutory role in relation to academies.

- Further consideration be given to how the Committee could support early language and communication development across Shropshire, linked to its future consideration of early years provision.

22 **Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2025/26**

Lisa Gardner, Temporary Business Manager for the Shropshire Safeguarding Community Partnerships Business Unit, presented the Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2025/26, which provided an overview of how safeguarding partners had worked collectively to safeguard children during the year. She highlighted preparations for the Families First Partnership reforms, strengthened independent scrutiny and the establishment of the Quality Assurance and Performance Group. Positive performance included 1,525 contacts to early help, support provided to 898 families and relatively low levels of repeat contacts into social care. The number of looked-after children had also reduced from 717 to 665 by year end, the first reduction seen in five years at that point.

The Committee was advised that two joint family reviews had been published during the year, with learning subsequently shared through face-to-face and online sessions for the adult and children's workforce. Four multi-agency spotlight sessions had also considered neglect, hidden harms, modern-day risks and earlier help, while 3,141 staff and volunteers had attended safeguarding and protecting children training. Priorities for 2026/27 included further work on child sexual abuse with the NSPCC, implementation of the Families First Partnership reforms and ensuring that the multi-agency workforce had appropriate training, policies, procedures and guidance to support forthcoming changes.

In response to a question regarding stretched partnership capacity and the ongoing resourcing review, Lisa Gardner explained that the pressures related particularly to the Business Unit's ability to maintain the breadth and pace of its responsibilities across children's safeguarding, adult safeguarding and community safety. Increased requirements for training and development and national reforms added to these pressures. The review was intended to ensure that partnership arrangements remained sufficiently resourced and sustainable to fulfil statutory safeguarding functions, with proposals due to be considered by the partnership executive in January. Members were also advised that discussions had taken place with partners regarding the pooled Business Unit budget and increased funding contributions had been secured.

The Committee recognised the breadth of information contained within the report and requested that future overview reports draw out the principal issues more clearly, particularly where detailed appendices contained unfamiliar services or acronyms. The Business Unit and the wider partnership were thanked for the work undertaken, with members commenting positively on the comprehensive information provided within the report and suggesting that it should be shared more widely to improve public understanding of the Council's safeguarding responsibilities.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Children's Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2025/26 be noted.

23 **Work Programme**

Sophie Foster, Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that the work programme had recently been reviewed by the Committee and was largely up to date. It was noted that number of matters arising from the earlier agenda items had already been captured through the recommendations agreed by the Committee and would be reflected in the work programme.

24 **Date of Next Meeting**

Members noted that the next meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Meeting will be held at 6.00 p.m. on Wednesday 13th January 2027.

Signed ..... (Chairman)

Date: .....