

# SHOPSHIRE COUNCIL

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2023 10.00 am to 1.00 pm  
in the Council Chamber, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND**

**Responsible Officer:** Amanda Holyoak  
Email: amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 257714

### **Present**

Councillor Claire Wild (Chairman)  
Councillors Roy Aldcroft, Julia Buckley, Roger Evans, Alan Mosley, Peggy Mullock,  
Chris Schofield and David Vasmer

### **30 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies were received from Councillor Robert Macey, Councillor Roy Aldcroft substituted for him

### **31 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

Councillor Roy Aldcroft explained that he would not participate in his role of substitute member of the committee for the item on Aligning our Customer Services and the Drive to Digital as he was the Deputy Portfolio Holder Culture and Digital

### **32 Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **33 Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

### **34 Member Question Time**

There were no member questions.

### **35 Performance report for Children's Social Care**

The Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, was welcomed to the meeting to present the performance report for children's social care. She also provided a presentation which covered the following: breakdown of current children looked after cohorts, covering age and legal status; children looked after by placement type; starts and ceases; Stepping Stones activity; plans to exit children from being looked after; plans in place to address issues leading to a child becoming looked after and partnership work with public health.

Following the presentation, committee members made observations, comments and asked questions about: the reasons for the increase in looked after children over the last three years; the degree to which and the reasons that Shropshire was an outlier in comparison

to statistical and regional neighbour averages; the degree to which problems of provision of children's mental health services and gaps in health provision had exacerbated the situation; numbers of children who had not ever been seen by a health visitor or health professional; why the looked after children performance indicator was rated green, not red; the degree to which changes in prioritisation for early help in the past had made an impact; level of current resources available to prevent children becoming looked after; and recruitment and retention of social workers and also foster carers.

In response the Executive Director of People, Assistant Director, and Service Manager Case Management emphasised the commitment to early help set out in the Shropshire Plan. They went on to explain targeted funding available for the early help and youth offer. The tripling of funding for Stepping Stones with £4m available from September onwards was a spend to save initiative which would help deliver to a much wider range of families. It was true to say that in past years a large number of local authorities had taken money out of early help as there was little evidence available demonstrating its impact. Now that the impact was clear they were putting money back in. The most effective solution lay within a wider system community response, including nurseries, schools, health and the voluntary sector so that support could be provided before a problem developed - it was essential that this partnership at the front end was right to help prevent the statutory end from having to pick up the pieces. The Executive Director also reported on an imminent children and young people summit with the Integrated Care System which would help identify gaps in provision, where review was required, and it was expected that firm outcomes and actions, particularly with regard to funding health care needs would emerge.

Responding to comments about RAG rated performance, the Assistant Director said she felt that use of an indicator for looked after children was not appropriate. Reporting on foster carers, it was confirmed that since a review of foster fees in autumn 2022, Shropshire now was one of the top two fee payers in the region. It was confirmed that it took a minimum of six months to train foster carers and that a fostering campaign had been relaunched in January.

Responding to further comments, officers reiterated that ofsted had clearly articulated that the service provided to looked after children in Shropshire was good and it was not a system that failed children.

During discussion of recruitment and retention of social workers, officers reported that there was not any appetite for a regional pay scale, but that work had been done regionally to stabilise the agency market. There was a balance of new and experienced social workers working for the council and members were pleased to hear that proposals for a market forces payment were currently with HR for consideration and discussion with unions. This was felt to be particularly important for Shropshire because of the implications of having to travel long distances.

The Executive Director, Assistant Director and Service Manager were thanked for attending the meeting and the Committee agreed the recommendations in the report – to endorse the range of measures in place to address the challenge relating to the numbers of looked after children; to recognise the progress addressing issues of social work vacancies and endorse ongoing work; that a progress update be provided at the appropriate time.

### **36 Aligning our Customer Services and the Drive to Digital - Green Paper**

Councillor Rob Gittins, Portfolio Holder for Digital, Data and Insight presented the Green Paper and explained the proposals for a period of consultation with Shropshire residents on a reduction in customer service centre opening times to around 30 a week. He emphasised that proposed changes would only affect the more generalist non-emergency service requests and opening times of other more complex council services would not change. The shift to more digital services for customers would allow for repurposing of customer service adviser capacity to be freed up to support more preventative outbound customer contact. He also drew attention to the estimated cost of a telephone call of nearly £3, compared to 15 pence per online transaction.

In discussing the proposals, members made suggestions and asked a number of questions including: how the consultation would work for people who were not IT literate, or did not wish to use digital equipment or could not afford it; whether the consultation could involve an explanation being provided on Radio Shropshire; how individuals were identified to receive wellbeing calls; and a request for clarification was made of how a saving would be achieved without making redundancies and by shifting staff capacity to prevention.

The Service Delivery and Improvement Manager, Head of Communications and Engagement and Executive Director of Resources and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Resources responded to questions raised by committee members. It was explained that the consultation would involve all methodologies, for example, writing to customers, informing of them of the consultation during calls to the customer service centre, through hard copies through Shropshire Local and libraries, through Radio Shropshire and through social task force representative groups and Shropshire Association of Local Councils. It was acknowledged that digital solutions were not for everyone and access by telephone would still be available for those who needed it. The Executive Director of Resources answered questions regarding the transfer of cost involved in shifting CSC staff to make preventative calls and how savings would be made and the Service Delivery and Improvement Manager explained how individuals were selected to receive a wellbeing call.

The Portfolio Holder was asked to take the comments of the committee into consideration and it was agreed that there was an important role for local members in disseminating the consultation and encouraging people to respond.

### **37 Financial resilience MTFS 2023/24 onwards**

Members were referred to an informative briefing provided on this issue the previous week, the recording of which was available on the Member Gateway.

### **38 Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 3 2022/23**

Members discussed the contents of the report and principles for inclusion of items highlighted within it. After extensive discussion all members agreed that future reports be made on an exception basis asking that measures rated red would be included alongside

a simple explanation. The Portfolio Holder Finance and Corporate Support also reiterated that Members could access the performance portal at any time, and not to wait for a report or committee meeting to suggest an area for consideration by the appropriate scrutiny committee.

**39 Q3 Financial Monitoring Report**

Members considered the report, acknowledging the pressures on the budget for adult and children’s services. The Executive Director of Resources responded to questions asked about overspend on corporate landlord property and development and shire services; the contribution made by cornovii; level of income from the Shrewsbury Shopping Centres and the capital programme and disposal of assets.

**40 Work Programme**

The Overview and Scrutiny Manager reported on proposals for workshop sessions following likely changes to overview and scrutiny from May onwards.

**41 Exclusion of Press and Public**

It was RESOLVED that, in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and Paragraph 10.4 [3] of the Council’s Access to Information Rules, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item

**42 Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023**

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

Signed ..... (Chairman)

Date: .....