

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission

At 7.00 pm on Tuesday 17th May, 2022

Held in the Council Chamber, Cedar Drive, Thrapston, NN14 4LZ

Present:-

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury (Chair)	Councillor Kevin Watt (Vice Chair)
Councillor Matt Binley	Councillor Philip Irwin
Councillor Robin Carter	Councillor John McGhee
Councillor John Currall	Councillor Gill Mercer
Councillor Mark Dearing	Councillor Simon Rielly
Councillor Jim Hakewill	Councillor Geoff Shacklock

Officers

Adele Wylie – Director of Governance and HR (Monitoring Officer)
AnnMarie Dodds – Executive Director of Children’s Services
Tony Challinor – Assistant Director of Commissioning and Partnership
Guy Holloway – Assistant Chief Executive
David Watts – Executive Director of Adults, Communities and Wellbeing
Louise Tyers – Senior Democratic Services Officer

In attendance:

Colin Foster – Northamptonshire Children’s Trust
Andrew Tagg – Northamptonshire Children’s Trust
Cornelia Andrecut – Northamptonshire Children’s Trust
Councillor Scott Edwards – Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills
Councillor Zoe McGhee – Chair, Levelling Up Communities Scrutiny Review Group
Councillor Anne Lee – Observer

49 **Apologies for non-attendance**

There were no apologies for non-attendance.

50 **Members' Declarations of Interest**

The Chair invited those who wished to do so to declare any interests in respect of items on the agenda.

No declarations were made.

51 **Notification of requests to address the meeting**

There were no requests to address the meeting.

52 **Minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2022**

Councillor Jim Hakewill wished to put on record his concerns at how the last meeting had been chaired in relation to the vote taken on the item relating to major highways

capital works, particularly the number of times the Chair had conducted the vote. He advised that he had raised his concerns with the Monitoring Officer following the meeting. These comments were supported by Councillor Simon Rielly.

In response, the Chair stated that during the vote it had not been clear how members had voted and that was why it had to be taken again.

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed.

Councillor Jim Hakewill asked that his vote against the approval of the minutes be noted.

53 Children's Trust - Performance and Inspection Readiness

The Scrutiny Commission considered a report of the Chief Executive of the Children's Trust which introduced the key headlines from the Trust's Annual Self Evaluation. These included:

- The Trust's next full Ofsted inspection was due in the Autumn and it was expected that the outcome would be 'requires improvement', however it needed to be noted that this would be from a low starting base.
- The independent Fostering Agency had been judged as 'requires improvement to be good' in November 2021 and the Voluntary Adoption Agency had been judged 'good' earlier this year.
- As the last NCC inspection had been judged as inadequate, 4-6 monitoring visits had been held. These had judged that progress was being made but practice was inconsistent. No children at risk had been identified.
- The Chief Executive held 58-minute briefings three times a year for staff and the Trust would look to run a session for Members.

During discussion, the following principle points were noted:

- i. The introduction of peripatetic social workers was welcomed to support those areas of emerging pressure and to support manageable caseloads and stability.
- ii. With respect to fostering and adoption, progress was being made and there had been a net gain of 14 foster carers. Several carers had left during the pandemic, but recruitment continued. With adoption there were a number of issues with children with complex needs. The process for adoption was often a lengthy process, and this time could be lengthened even more due to delays in court proceedings.
- iii. In response as to what support was provided to families following adoption, officers advised that good support was in place, with the child being supported until they were 18 years of age. The Trust was currently looking at developing outcomes for an Adoption Support Fund. This support was vital because if an adoption broke down the child would go back into the Trust's care.

- iv. NNC was leading on the development of family hubs, which the Trust would be a part of, and was one of 75 councils to share £132m. A bid for £1m had recently been submitted.
- v. Whilst the Trust was contracted to attend Scrutiny three times a year, they were happy to engage at any time and would do what was required to build confidence and understanding.
- vi. In November 2021, it was reported that there was an underspend of £425k on early years and families and it was questioned whether this could be used to help support Home Start. The Trust confirmed that the underspend still existed, however early help was being reshaped and the £425k had been used for balancing the budget of the Trust. Budgets were looking to be realigned with spending. The Trust did work with Home Start but it was accepted that funds were not passported effectively. The best Ofsted inspections all had a strong early help offer.
- vii. There were challenges with the cost of children in care placements and there was expected to be an overspend of £1.8m in this area. Some of the highest foster care placements cost around £12k per week. From the £131m received from North and West Northamptonshire Councils, around £65m of that was spent on placements. There were also issues with using agency social workers, who could cost up to £42 per hour. The biggest challenges for the Trust were lack of social workers, higher workloads, placements, inflation and recruitment.
- viii. For the children whose placement could cost £12k per week, Members asked whether this was due to inadequacies early in life and medical needs. In response, it was confirmed that these placements had complex level of needs and it could be that some early needs had not been supported. Also, some children had come into the area and had very high, complex aggression needs. Some providers were also demanding about who they would provide a placement to. There had also been a recent change in legislation where children under the age of 16 were required to be placed in an Ofsted registered placement.
- ix. It was accepted that historically, needs had not been picked up early enough. With Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP), the resources should be attached to the child, but they were often currently attached to the setting. These resources did not follow the child when they changed settings and they had to go through the process again.
- x. The Trust was working with the Council to support Ukrainian children by assisting with safeguarding checks on host families. It was important that refugee families were kept together when going to school. It was acknowledged that a lot of schools were now their own admissions authority, but the starting point was always to keep families together.
- xi. It was noted that a third of MASH referrals came back into the system. It was acknowledged that work needed to be done with partner agencies about how cases were referred in. If a referral did not meet the assessment, the partner could make another referral. A new threshold document was being developed to support this process.

- xii. It was felt that there was not enough children's input on the new ICS Board. It was explained that there was a Transformation Board for children and young people and a case for change would be going to the Board in July, which put the child at the centre.

RESOLVED:

To note the contents of the report.

54 Performance Indicator Report 2021/22 (Period 11)

The Scrutiny Commission considered a report of the Assistant Chief Executive which provided an update on the Council's performance across a wide range of services, as measured by performance indicators.

The report provided a summary of the performance of Council services and further detail including trend lines and exception reports. Performance measures were being developed to better reflect the desired outcomes set out at a high level through the Council's recently adopted Corporate Plan.

Responses to the comments and questions made at the Commission's last meeting had been circulated.

During discussion, the following principle points were noted:

- i. Comments on several specific indicators were made, including:
- Current number of home education children (T46) – there was a limit to the powers the Council had in relation to home education. When a family opted to home educate their child, the Council did not assume that that would be the final outcome and school places were now kept open for longer. The Early Intervention and Prevention Team looked to build relationship with parents but if a person had concerns, these should be reported to the MASH if there were safeguarding concerns.
 - Number of working days lost to sickness per employee (T19) – it was noted that this indicator was tracking upwards, was there anything behind that? It was noted that more people were returning to work in the office and often picking up other sickness bugs.
 - Stage 1 complaints received (T22) – the number of complaints was rising, and it may be helpful to look at the top-level breakdown of issues. It was suggested that complaints would be a good source of information for the Scrutiny Commission.
 - Number of defects outstanding on the network (T55) – was this related to potholes?
 - Total number of calls received (T21b) – the number of calls had gone down and was there a reason behind this? Officers would find out whether there was any reason, but more people were now visiting the offices.

- % calls answered (T21a) – had any strategies been put in place to try and ensure calls were answered. A project was about to start on reviewing the Council’s telephone systems as the five legacy systems were still being used. Issues had also been raised with the GDPR messages which users heard at the start of a call.
- Repairs made to the network that are either permanent or semi-permanent (T56) – it would be helpful to differentiate this indicator into permanent and semi-permanent repairs.
- Housing and Communities vacancies – it was noted that there were a number of vacant posts within Housing and Communities. The Executive Director of Adults, Communities and Wellbeing advised that a number of those vacancies were around the trades in Corby and Kettering. Also, there were several vacancies in housing and homelessness. These areas were often difficult to recruit to so apprenticeships were being explored.
- It would be useful to see information on void council homes and how long they remained void.

RESOLVED:

To note the performance of the Council and its services.

55 Levelling Up Communities Scrutiny Review Group - Update

The Scrutiny Commission considered a presentation by the Executive Director of Adults, Communities and Wellbeing and Councillor Zoe McGhee, Chair of the Levelling Up Communities Scrutiny Review Group which provided an update on the work of the Scrutiny Review Group.

It was noted that several challenges had impacted on the progress of the review, including Afghan resettlement scheme planning, Covid-19 and the Ukrainian response including the coordination of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The final report of the review would be considered by the Commission in July.

During discussion, the following principle points were noted:

- i. Bids for funding from the government for levelling up were currently being developed. It may be beneficial to see those bids prior to their submission.
- ii. The Review Group were reminded that the scope of the Review had been agreed by the Commission in August 2021 and it was important that they worked to that in developing a plan for levelling up the three neighbourhoods identified.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the progress of the Levelling Up Communities Scrutiny Review Group.

- (ii) That the final report of the Scrutiny Review will be considered at the Commission's meeting in July 2022.

56 Integrated Care Systems

The Scrutiny Commission considered a presentation by the Executive Director of Adults, Communities and Wellbeing on the progress in establishing an Integrated Care System (ICS) across Northamptonshire and place-based development in North Northamptonshire. He introduced Ali Gilbert, ICS Place Director who had recently started in post.

The key points made were:

- The ICS would be live on 1 July 2022.
- A number of key roles had now been appointed to.
- The ICS draft strategy would be developed by September 2022.
- There would be four Community Wellbeing Forums based on the sovereign councils, along with eight local areas based on both urban and rural areas.

During discussion, the following principle points were noted:

- i. In response to how GP services and dental care fitted in with the ICS, it was acknowledged that there were several challenges and the system would work closely with communities. GPs had been energised by the proposals for the ICS.
- ii. The ICS was welcomed, particularly in the targeting of areas and streets.

RESOLVED:

To note the progress in establishing an Integrated Care System.

57 Suspension of Council Procedure Rule 10

RESOLVED:

That Meeting Procedure Rule 10 (Guillotine) be suspended to enable the Committee to continue the business on the agenda.

58 Executive Forward Plan - May to August 2022

The Scrutiny Commission received the Executive Forward Plan which showed the key and significant decisions the Executive would be making over the next few months.

In relation to the Priors Hall Golf Course, officers confirmed that the decision had been delayed and would be around future capital bids and investment in the golf course.

Members indicated that they would wish to consider the Executive Decision on the Garden Waste: Future Service Provision.

Members also indicated that they would wish to investigate the process around Hackney Carriage Fares.

RESOLVED to note the Executive Forward Plan.

59 Scrutiny Work Plan and Future Meetings

The Scrutiny Commission received the Scrutiny Work Plan, details of future meetings and other information relevant to the management of the Scrutiny Commission.

The 2021/22 Quality Report for Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust had been received by the Chair and it was proposed to circulate the document to members for their comments before the Chair responded to the document.

The response from the Executive Member for Housing and Community was noted in relation to the Council's strategy for social housing.

The response from the Assistant Director of Highways and Waste was noted in relation to the Council's strategy for the adoption of roads.

The Commission requested an update on the progress of S106, including the recent audit.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the Scrutiny Work Plan.
- (ii) To note the items being brought to future meetings.
- (iii) To note the responses from the Executive Member for Housing and Community and the Assistant Director of Highways and Waste.
- (iv) To note the receipt of the Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust 2021/22 Quality report.

60 Close of Meeting

The Chair thanked members and officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

The meeting closed at 10.33pm.

Chair

Date