

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Commission

At 7:00pm on Tuesday 23 May 2023

Held in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby

Present:

Members

Councillor Wendy Brackenbury (Chair)

Councillor Valerie Anslow

Councillor Robin Carter

Councillor Jim Hakewill

Councillor Philip Irwin

Councillor Zoe McGhee

Councillor Andy Mercer

Councillor Gill Mercer

Councillor Lee Wilkes

Officers

AnnMarie Dodds - Executive Director of Children's Services

Tom Barden – Head of Performance, Intelligence and Partnerships

Louise Tyers – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Also Present

Councillor Scott Edwards – Executive Member for Children, Families, Education & Skills

Cornelia Andrecut – Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Olivia Ives – Northamptonshire Children's Trust

Helen Dickens – Northamptonshire Children's Trust

85 Apologies for non-attendance

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillors John Currall, Mark Dearing, Geoff Shacklock and Kevin Watt.

86 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 of interest were made.

87 Notification of requests to address the meeting

There had been no requests to address the meeting.

88 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2023

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to:

Minute 80 – Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 April 2023

Add additional paragraph – “The timetable for the Green Burials Scrutiny Review would be considered by the new Scrutiny Management Board after the Annual Meeting of the Council.”

89 Consideration of Any Matter Referred to the Commission for Call-In

There had been no requests for call-in.

90 Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Fostering Agency

The Scrutiny Commission considered an Ofsted report on the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust Fostering Agency which provided information about the independent fostering agency which had been registered on 1 November 2020. This was the second inspection since registration. The agency offered a range of placements, including short and long-term, connected persons and remand placements.

At the request of the Chair, the Children’s Trust were asked to explain how far they had progressed with addressing the issues raised in the report.

During discussion on the report, the following key points were made:

- i. The inspection frameworks for Local Authority Fostering Services (LAFS) and Independent Fostering Services (IFS) were separate. The only way to run a fostering service in a Children’s Trust was to be an IFS.
- ii. IFS did not have access to children’s social care files. Separate children’s records had now been introduced so the Trust were able to follow the journey of the child.
- iii. There had been a story in the local press that a child’s bedroom had been found to have drug paraphernalia. This cycle would continue, and members sought reassurance that something was being done to address this issue and to prevent children being caught up with county lines gangs and grooming. In response, officers advised that there was now a tighter policy around bedroom checks. Training had also been tightened around safeguarding, including exploitation. Systems had previously not been able to track training, but they now did. Each child now had a safe care plan and they were seen every eight weeks.
- iv. The report made very worrying reading. It was concerning that Ofsted did not recognise the system of reporting and what was the Trust doing to address this. In response, it was clarified that agreement had now been received from councillors to procure a new system in August. There would then be a schedule of training for staff. Ofsted would return in early July and then will inspect the Trust in 6 – 12 months. It was hoped that Ofsted would take the new system into account.
- v. Gaps in practice which had been identified had been accepted by the Trust. Systems had now been developed to take this work forward.

- vi. What had been the impact on staff following the report and what was the level of vacancies? In response, officers advised that a large amount of improvement work had been undertaken. Between inspections, some members of staff had left. Some had found the level of scrutiny difficult and had decided not to stay. However, the Trust were now in a better position. The picture was improving and some of the vacancies had now been filled. The change of culture and expectations had been difficult for some staff, but processes were now being put in place.
- vii. Recruitment and retention of foster carers was a focus of the Trust's work, including support to carers. There had been 18 new fostering households in 2022/23, which made a total of 323 fostering households, with 418 children being cared for.
- viii. There was a lot in the report which raised concerns, including households not being checked. It had been acknowledged by Ofsted that support was needed. An IFA in a Children's Trust was new for Ofsted as well. New systems were being put in place.
- ix. The report read that the focus had been on carers rather than the children, what was being done to address that. In response, officers advised that historically the focus had been on carers. There had been a shift in culture and ways of working and this had been shown in the monitoring report where Ofsted had begun to see the change. Joint visiting with the children's social worker and the supervising social worker was now in place where the children must be seen, and it must be a meaningful visit.
- x. The guidance for supervision had now been reviewed and the policy now expected visits every four weeks. Newly approved households would never be more than six weeks depending on needs.
- xi. The Trust deserved our support. The former Northamptonshire County Council had a problem of being in denial, so this new approach was welcomed. Foster carers are golden, and the Commission thanked them for all they do. The Team do an amazing job.
- xii. It was highlighted that the Council was now a Friendly Fostering Council.
- xiii. In response to a question as to when support for leavers stopped, it was confirmed that support stopped at 25 years of age. The Trust would be in touch up to 21 and with consent up to 25.
- xiv. The Executive Director of Children's Services thanked the Commission for its comments. It had been quite a journey and there had been a lot of learning and the Commission were thanked for recognising the changes. The Executive Member stated that plans had now been put in place, which Ofsted had recognised. We would like to encourage more foster carers as that was the best place for children if they could not be with their family. It was accepted that there was more we could do with care leavers but there was confidence that the next inspection would see improvements.

On behalf of the Commission, the Chair thanked the Trust for attending and put on record their thanks for everything the Trust did.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To note the report and the information provided.

91 Performance Indicators Report (Period 12)

The Scrutiny Commission considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance and Performance 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.

Comments on several specific indicators were made, including:

- Number of rough sleepers (AFL12) – the number of rough sleepers remained the same. They were a transient population and it was believed the majority were in Wellingborough. Officers undertook to establish the information behind the data.
- Care leavers involved in the criminal justice system – was it possible to measure this going forward. Officers undertook to look into whether it would be possible to monitor it or to establish what was reported locally.
- % gross affordable housing delivered (STP24) – a recent Freedom of Information request showed that NNC had not built a single affordable house since 2018. Officers responded by stating that the data came from returns which were submitted to Government, so there was confidence in the data. there was quite a lag on the data and what was reported was the position at March 2022, it may be possible to look at trajectories for the future.
- Affordable housing was now often dependent on social housing providers, NNC needed to start thinking how we can build homes. Was there a policy and when would it come forward? Officers advised that they would make the Housing Affordability ratios available.
- % of schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted (BBF12 & BBF13) – only primary and secondary schools were reported, could nurseries be included going forward. Officers undertook to look at whether nurseries could be reported.

RESOLVED:

To note the performance of the Council and its services.

92 Exclusion of the Public and Press

RESOLVED:

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business because exempt information, as defined under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, may be disclosed.

93 Northamptonshire NHS Foundation Trust - Quality Report 2022/23

The Scrutiny Commission considered a report of the Senior Democratic Services Officer which requested the Commission to consider the draft Quality Report 2022/23

of Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. At the request of the Trust, the draft report should be treated confidentially at this stage.

During discussion on the report, Members requested that officers liaise with the Trust about how the report can be brought earlier to Scrutiny to enable more meaningful consultation.

RESOLVED:

- i) To note the report.
- ii) That the feedback and comments on the draft Quality Report be forwarded to the Trust.

94 Close of Meeting

As this was the last meeting of the Commission, the Chair wished to thank all of the Commission and officers for their support over the last two years. She also wished to thank Councillor Mark Pengelly, as Chair of the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee.

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

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Chair

Date