

## **Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

At 7:00pm on Tuesday 15 October 2024

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

### **Present:**

#### Members

Councillor Lyn Buckingham (Chair)	Councillor Scott Brown (Vice Chair)
Councillor Martin Griffiths	Councillor Dr Anup Pandey
Councillor Paul Marks	Councillor Steven North
Councillor Andy Mercer	Councillor Russell Roberts

#### Officers

Adele Wylie – Chief Executive  
Claire Edwards – Executive Director of Finance and Performance  
Charisse Monero – Executive Director of Children’s Services  
Jane Bethea – Director of Public Health  
Sanjit Sull – Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)  
Guy Holloway – Assistant Chief Executive  
Matthew Jenkins – Assistant Director of Commissioning and Performance  
Simon Mills – Assistant Director of Customer Experience  
Dean Mitchell – Assistant Director of Finance Accountancy  
Mark Dickenson – Assistant Director of Finance & Strategy  
Kunwar Khan – Scrutiny Manager (Interim)  
Louise Tyers – Senior Democratic Services Officer

#### Also Present:

Councillor Scott Edwards – Executive Member for Children, Families, Education & Skills  
Colin Foster – Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Children’s Trust  
Andrew Tagg – Director of Finance, Northamptonshire Children’s Trust  
Sarah Reed – Director of Corporate Services, Northamptonshire Children’s Trust

### **21. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed Charisse Monero, the new Executive Director of Children’s Services to her first meeting of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

### **22. Apologies for Non-Attendance**

Apologies for non-attendance were received from Councillor Anne Lee.

### **23. 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.

#### **24. Notification of Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were no requests to address the meeting.

#### **25. Minutes of the Meetings held on 12 September 2024**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **26. Children's Trust and Transformation & Efficiency Board Update**

The Chair welcomed Colin Foster, Andrew Tagg and Sarah Reed from Northamptonshire Children's Trust to the meeting to present the Committee with an update on transformation and efficiency activity associated with the Trust and the wider systems improvement approach to delivering better outcomes and achieving better value for money.

Colin Foster welcomed the support from the Council over the past four years. The Transformation and Efficiency Board, which was chaired by the Chief Executives of both councils, was a real momentum shift for the Trust. The projects of the Board aimed to improve outcomes and generate savings but it was recognised that there was still work to do.

Sarah Reed, who was seconded to the Trust from West Northamptonshire Council, recognised that there was a need for robust business cases and benefits realisation. The majority of the costs of the Trust sat within placements and work was being undertaken to move people out of high-cost placements. Both councils had started to identify alternative residential accommodation for all ages of children and young people, including care leavers, that could be added to the current programme of new provision. This was a big piece of work that would provide better value than the market. Placements was a difficult market, and the Trust was exploring a long term strategic partner. There had also been concern about the ICT being used within the Trust and both councils had provided investment and use of the Logic system was now being rolled out. The use of agency social workers was continuing to fall, with the number of permanent staff increasing. It was encouraging that people now wanted to come to work in Northamptonshire.

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

- i. It was noted that the Transformation and Efficiency Board had agreed that £0.584m of money would be returned to the Council to support the development of our early help offer, had any plans been agreed on how that money would be used? In response, Mr Foster confirmed that early help was under developed in both councils and the money would help to develop those offers. Developing earlier interventions would support the Trust. The Executive Director of Children's Services confirmed that the current early help offer was reactive and statutory based. How resources were being used was being reevaluated and an Early Help Strategy, based on needs, was being developed. There was a significant amount of work still to be done.
- ii. In response to a question on how the Family Hubs programme was developing and what impact they were having, the Executive Director explained that they

were delivering the early help offer by providing a one-stop shop of co-located services. They had a virtual front door, which enabled access to resources 24/7. The ambition was that they would support more families in not having to access our statutory services, therefore improving outcomes for children and families.

- iii. Members questioned how the virtual front door and supporting apps would be progressed and what was in place for those people who do not use this type of technology or whose first language was not English? In response, the Executive Director confirmed that the possibility of digital exclusion had been raised a number of times. It was important to ensure that there was an inclusive strategy in place as inclusivity was the driver to ensure full access to the Hubs. Officers were looking to download information in multi-languages and facilities to be able to translate the information.
- iv. Members acknowledged that COVID had had a big impact on affecting the development of that cohort of children, how would the Family Hubs support families and schools in improving that situation. Mr Foster acknowledged that the complexity of need had been unprecedented post-COVID and there had been a particular rise in 14-16 year olds entering the care system, often with more complex needs. The Executive Director confirmed that there was a need for a robust, coordinated Early Help wraparound offer with a need to understand what schools were offering. It was important to avoid the need for children and families entering our statutory services.
- v. Members raised that at the last meeting the Trust had attended, the issue of invoicing partners was raised and questioned whether that position had now improved and what impact it was having on the budget. In response, Mr Tagg advised that for the joint funding of complex children, £3.2m was now outstanding. The Trust had received just over £3m from health colleagues. A lot of intensive work was happening around brokerage.
- vi. Members highlighted that the MASH had been a concern for a while and questioned what was happening on the work around the redesign of the MASH. Mr Foster responded by advising that the MASH and front door had been the subject of an Ofsted focus visit in October 2023. This report had been the strongest in a number of years and was a positive shift forward.
- vii. Members noted that the aim was to get to Good in terms of the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS). How long did the Trust and Council think it would take to get to this position? In response, Mr Foster advised that the next inspection was expected in early 2026. A number of focussed visits take place between ILACS, the latest being arrangements for care leavers. If the current narrative continues, it was hoped that the trajectory would be going in the right direction for the next ILACS. Everyone was travelling with hope and optimism.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the contents of the report and the progress made to date.
- (ii) The Committee acknowledge the good direction of travel the Transformation and Efficiency Programme is having.
- (iii) To receive a further report at the February 2025 meeting of the Committee.

## 27. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report

The Assistant Director of Customer Experience presented the report which provided the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) annual letter about what complaints about the Council had been investigated and their independent outcomes. The report covered the LGSCO findings for the year 2023/24.

The LGSCO had received 10 complaints in relation to services provided by the Council for 2023/24, compared to 64 the previous year. The breakdown, by service area, of the complaints received by the LGSCO was:

<b>Service area</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>Upheld 2023/24</b>
Adult Care Services	6	8	19	5
Benefits & Tax	8	3	2	-
Corporate & Other Services	N/A	8	5	-
Education & Children's Services	16	22	31	8
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	5	9	15	1
Highways & Transport	3	2	5	-
Housing	8	6	13	1
Other	N/A	N/A	1	-
Planning & Development	9	6	10	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>17</b>

Whilst the LGSCO welcomed that the Council had agreed to and implemented recommendations made in 15 cases, they were disappointed that over half of these cases had not been completed within the agreed timescales.

There were three key LGSCO annual statistics for the Council:

- 77% of complaints investigated were upheld.
- In 100% of cases the LGSCO were satisfied the Council had successfully implemented their recommendations.
- In 18% of upheld cases, the LGSCO found the Council had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint had reached the Ombudsman.

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

- i. Members noted that the LGSCO had highlighted that timely responses had been an issue for the Council and questioned why they were not being responded to in time. In response, the Assistant Director advised that it was considered healthy to have a level of complaints. The Policy had now been updated and included relevant codes of practice. Mandatory learning logs and how we learn from complaints had also now been included.
- ii. The Council has had to pay compensation in a number of cases due to failures in service, Members questioned whether this was an issue the new case management system would pick up or would it be reliant on officers being aware of the cases. The Assistant Director advised that response rates to complaints were now 10 days instead of 20 days, which was now in line with LGSCO guidance. The case management system would help officers with

automation and chasing of complaints. If queries were answered at the first point, the Council will start to see the benefits.

- iii. Members questioned how recommendations for improvement were implemented and monitored as to whether they had improved service provision. The Assistant Director advised that the aim was to ultimately improve the customer's experience. We looked at KPIs to see and track improvements and look at how to correct something that was fundamentally wrong.
- iv. In response to a question as to how the lessons learned process worked within services, the Assistant Director advised that identified learning was tracked and this could include making changes, where appropriate, to policies. The Feedback Team would also monitor progress. We also looked at a 'You Said, We Did' approach as part of complaints. Members requested that future reports should contain examples of learning from complaints and details of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.
- v. It was noted that the report detailed the complaints that were recorded against the Council, but Members questioned how compliments were reported and again, what learning could we gain from them and how was that shared. The Assistant Director advised that the focus was on complaints as we needed to make a difference. Compliments were now dealt with separately and we were looking to bring the same focus on to compliments.
- vi. Members requested that a report back on changes to the process be brought back to the Committee at a future meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the content and recommendations of the LGSCO's annual review letter.
- (ii) That future reports contain examples of learning from complaints and details of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints.
- (iii) To receive an update on the impact of the changes in the process at a future meeting.

**28. Indicative Budget Timeline and Scrutiny Process 2025/26 - Update**

The Assistant Director of Finance and Strategy presented the report which asked the Committee to consider the 2025/26 budget setting process and scrutiny arrangements.

At the Council budget setting meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2025 the following reports will require approval:

- The General Fund budget and the Council Tax levels for 2025/26 and the General Fund Medium Term Financial Plan.
- The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget for 2025/26 and the level of Housing Rents for 2025/26 and the Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan.

- The Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2025/29 for the both the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund.

It is proposed that detailed scrutiny of the budget is carried out in two distinct phases by the Committee, which follows on from the process undertaken last year.

Phase 1 of scrutiny would be undertaken between 28 October and 21 November. This first phase of scrutiny will look at the in-year position and the detail of the current budgets and activity as well as general pressures and opportunities. This will include any updates with regard to Government funding arrangements and any other proposals. It was intended that this will provide the background for the scrutiny of the budget proposals, ready for when there is greater clarity of the potential funding and other budget requirements.

Phase 2 of scrutiny will take place when the 2025/26 draft budgets proposals have been reported to Executive on 19 December 2024. This will trigger the budget consultation and will represent the formal draft proposals. The Scrutiny process will complete in January 2025 alongside the consultation, to feed into the updated budget report to Executive on 6 February 2025.

Similar to the process for 2024/25 it is proposed that the Scrutiny Sessions for Phases 1 and 2 are split across the main service areas, which are:

- Place and Economy
- Adults, Health, Partnerships and Housing, including the HRA
- Public Health and Communities
- Children's and Education Services
- Enabling and Support Services – Finance and Performance, CEX, Chief Information Officer, Customer and Governance.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) To note the proposed timeline for the setting of the budget and that this may be subject to change in line with Government announcements or other factors.
- (ii) To note the proposed budget setting and scrutiny arrangements for the Children's Trust.
- (iii) To note the overall indicative timeline for the budget setting for the Council.
- (iv) To note the proposals for the scrutiny of the Council's budget.

**29. Scrutiny Work Plan for Corporate Scrutiny Committee**

The Corporate Scrutiny Committee received the Scrutiny Work Plan as it related to the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

To note the Scrutiny Work Plan as it related to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee.

**30. Close of Meeting**

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

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

---

Chair

---

Date