

## PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Thursday, 14 September 2023 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.30 pm

**Present:**

**Members:** Councillor Nigel Simpson – in the Chair

Councillor Sally Povolotsky (Deputy Chair)

Councillor Imade Edosomwan

Councillor Trish Elphinstone

Councillor Andy Graham

Councillor Nick Leverton

Councillor Michael Waine

Councillor Liam Walker

**By Invitation:** Cllr Tim Bearder, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care;  
Cllr Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Performance Services

**Officers:**

Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

Karen Fuller, Interim Corporate Director for Adult Social Care

Victoria Baran, Interim Deputy Director for Adult Social Care

Elena Grant, Policy Officer

Tim Spiers, Director of IT

Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Communications, Strategy, and Insight

*The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.*

### **12/23 INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME**

(Agenda No. 1)

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed members to it. He declared the Committee's apologies that it was likely to defer consideration of the Education Commission's report and for the wasted journey of those who had travelled to present it.

### **13/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS**

(Agenda No. 2)

Apologies were received from Cllr Hannaby.

**14/23 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE**

(Agenda No. 3)

No declarations of interest were made.

**15/23 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 4)

The minutes of the meeting on 13 July 2023 were **AGREED** as an accurate record.

The Committee requested an update on its recommendation for a press statement to be issued. The Committee also asked that, in future, minutes should more clearly identify action points.

**16/23 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**

(Agenda No. 5)

No applications to address the Committee were received.

**17/23 EDUCATION COMMISSION**

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee had received the report of the Oxfordshire Education Commission and had intended to scrutinise it at this meeting. However, the time between publication and the meeting was considered too short for adequate preparation. The Committee was very sorry that the Chair of the Commission had travelled to present the report but it considered it necessary to defer consideration to another occasion.

Proposed by Cllr Waine and seconded by Cllr Povolotsky, the Committee resolved to **DEFER** consideration of the report to another date with the Scrutiny Officer working to ensure an appropriate date as soon as possible where it could be considered alongside the Local Area SEND Inspection report which had not yet been published.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Local Area SEND Inspection was also on the agenda for the meeting on 21 September 2023 of the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee recognised that the constitution did not explicitly permit HOSC to meet jointly with the Committee but was keen to ensure that it had the opportunity to consider the report in full.

**18/23 ADULT SOCIAL CARE DEMAND MANAGEMENT AND ASSURANCE**

(Agenda No. 7)

Cllr Tim Bearder, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Karen Fuller, Interim Corporate Director for Adult Social Care ('the Director'), and Victoria Baran, Interim Deputy Director for Adult Social Care ('the Deputy Director'), attended to present the

report the Committee had requested to understand trends in performance with regard to demand management and assurance in adult social care.

Cllr Bearder introduced the report and advised the Committee that there had been a pilot assessment under the new framework in five different areas and that the Council as a whole would be inspected by the Care Quality Commission at some point between October 2023 and August 2024. It was not known when but the directorate had made extensive preparations.

The Director and the Deputy Director delivered a presentation which drew the Committee's attention to the key parts of the report. It was explained that local authorities would be assessed against four principal themes, namely: working with people; providing support; ensuring safety; leadership. A wide range of evidence would need to be provided including self-assessment.

The Director highlighted the key role of political leadership and scrutiny in the assessment.

Extensive preparations had been undertaken and self-assessment had identified a wide range of strengths which was summarised in the following way:

- The Oxfordshire Way provides a vision and commitment to prevention, delay of formal support, and innovation delivering real impact for our residents;
- There is understanding in teams that strengths-based practice supports people to have control over their lives;
- There is a strong focus on supporting people in communities;
- There is strong leadership with clear vision, well understood roles and practice leadership;
- There is strong partnership working including with the community and voluntary sector;
- Robust joint commissioning arrangements are in place with significant pooled budgets;
- We have a commitment to innovation and digital transformation;
- There is a strong commitment to equality and diversity evident in strategies and priorities;
- Oxfordshire is active in sector-led improvement.

Self-assessment had also supported a focus on key areas for further improvement:

- Timeliness of Assessment, Reviews and Safeguarding;
- Embedding co-design and tackling inequalities;
- Use of data and monitoring our performance;
- Widening channels of assessment;
- Digital and innovation;
- Engaging with the care market;
- Learning and Development;
- Good access to information and advice.

Discussion followed with the following being drawn out.

Work with partners was key and there had been external scrutiny of the self-assessment and there would continue to be so going forward.

The Oxfordshire Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy for the next three years was being consulted upon. Agency spend had come down but there were occasions when agency staff were necessary. Recruitment was a challenge in some areas but in some other areas there were very few vacancies. Work had been done on making the Council an attractive employer and there were benefits for both retained and recruited staff in this regard. There had been a strong focus on staff welfare.

With regard to supported living placements, the Council was working with district councils to influence Local Plans given that the housing element was integral to social care as well as important for the wellbeing of residents.

The importance of easy and efficient digital access for service users was emphasised as was support for those who found it difficult to access digitally. Libraries were suggested as a place where people could receive in-person support.

The Committee was grateful for the comprehensive report it had received and commended the positivity of the team.

**ACTION:** For the Director to provide data on retention and recruitment.

The Committee resolved to **NOTE** the report.

## **19/23 REVIEW OF THE DIGITAL INCLUSION ACTION PLAN** (Agenda No. 8)

Cllr Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Communications, Strategy, and Insight, Tim Spiers, Director of IT, and Elena Grant, Policy Officer, attended to present the report on the draft Digital Inclusion Action Plan for 2023/24. Cllr Phillips reminded the Committee that this had grown out of the Digital Inclusion Strategy which had been reviewed by the Committee previously and which had been approved by Cabinet in the summer of 2022.

The action plan was a work in progress which was to be overseen the Digital Inclusion Working Group but was a cross-council initiative which needed to be factored in to everyone's thinking. Cllr Phillips advised that it was important for the Council to be encouraging digital inclusion whilst being acutely aware of the potential for digital exclusion.

The action plan set out the long-term ambitions for the Council, broken down into actions, and the directorate that would be leading on that action.

The strategy itself made reference to improving outcomes for small businesses but they were absent from the action plan. It was agreed that should be remedied and that the Council should work with the City Council and the District Councils on that.

The Business Intellectual Property Resource, based at the Central Library in Oxford, was a key resource but it was subject to Government funding. The Committee recognised its value and made clear its hope that such funding would continue.

The Digital Infrastructure Programme which led on connectivity across the county was addressing concerns about rural broadband, social tariffs, and isolated communities.

Libraries were providing considerable support to those who needed practical support accessing the internet and web-based forms.

The Council had worked closely with Getting Oxfordshire Online and had donated 300 laptops to be given to people accessing foodbanks, refugees, and those who were, or risked becoming, homeless. The Committee suggested that it would be useful for the action plan working group to be aware of community action groups which could support the Council in refurbishing equipment for vulnerable residents.

There was discussion about the importance of children being disadvantaged by not having access to computers or tablets. This had been highlighted during the COVID pandemic and the work with the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) to ensure that the right equipment, access, and programmes could be promoted to families was key. An audit of current availability would be useful and this could be requested of maintained schools and suggested to academies.

There was a Local Government Association (LGA) Digital Inclusion Network which the Council participated in and which was an important way of sharing knowledge and experiences across different local authorities. There was also a regular meeting with the Council and the district councils dealing with digital infrastructure chaired by the Cabinet Member. Closer work on the digital inclusion charter across the Councils was to be encouraged.

There was a recognition that the Council's website had been less user-friendly than was ideal but it was improving gradually and the Directors of Communication, Insight, and Strategy and of IT were working together on a digital presence package which focused on the part of the website that dealt with recruitment and careers. The pages on fostering had also been improved to be made more engaging. Work was also planned on the areas of the site relating to customer services and to the music service.

Concerns were raised about the risk of digital exclusion for some older people in particular when, increasingly, car parks and local banks and even GP surgeries required the use of smartphones or of computing software to engage. Mobile ticketing for those without appropriately-enabled mobile telephones was a real challenge.

The consequences of artificial intelligence were absent from the strategy. The proposed closure of railway station ticket offices would raise particular problems for the digitally excluded.

The potential for a research project in partnership with the universities and businesses about what a fully digitally engaged learning package would look like in a school was suggested as being worth considering.

The Committee resolved to **NOTE** the report.

**20/23 LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP SEND INSPECTION**  
(Agenda No. 9)

The report had not been published and so this item was necessarily deferred.

**21/23 ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**  
(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee resolved to **NOTE** the status of current actions.

**22/23 WORK PROGRAMME AND CABINET FORWARD PLAN**  
(Agenda No. 11)

The Committee resolved to **AGREE** its proposed work programme.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing .....