

PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 16 June 2022 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at Time Not Specified

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ian Corkin – in the Chair

Councillor Kate Gregory (Deputy Chair)

Councillor Imade Edosomwan

Councillor Andy Graham

Councillor Michael O'Connor

Councillor Nigel Simpson

Councillor Bethia Thomas

Councillor Michael Waine

Councillor Nick Leverton (substituting for Councillor Juliette Ash)

**Other Members
in Attendance:**

Councillor Tim Bearder (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care)

Councillor Mark Lygo (Cabinet Member for Public Health and Equality)

Councillor Glynis Phillips (Cabinet Member for Corporate Services)

Officers:

Karen Fuller (Interim Corporate Director of Adults), Claire Taylor (Corporate Director, CODR), Lorna Baxter (Director of Finance), Stephen Chandler (Interim Chief Executive), Emily Schofield (Head of Strategy), Victoria Baran (Deputy Director, Adult Social Care), Karina Russell (Senior Policy Officer), Elena Grant (Policy Officer), Tom Hudson (Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer), Helen Mitchell (Interim Scrutiny Officer)

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

1/22 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR 2022/23 MUNICIPAL YEAR
(Agenda No. 1)

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that Cllr Corkin should be appointed Chair of the Committee for the 2022/23 municipal year. Cllr Corkin assumed the role of the Chair at this point.

2/22 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR 2022/23 MUNICIPAL YEAR
(Agenda No. 2)

It was proposed, seconded and **AGREED** that Cllr Gregory should be appointed Deputy Chair of the Committee for the 2022/23 municipal year.

3/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS
(Agenda No. 3)

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Ash. Cllr Leverton substituted for Cllr Ash.

4/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE
(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

5/22 MINUTES
(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee considered the minutes of the previous meeting. It was **AGREED** that the Chair should sign them off as an accurate record.

A query on the progress made against the undertaking to appoint key stakeholders and co-optees was raised. It was confirmed that this work was underway and educational appointees would be expected to be in place by the special meeting on educational matters scheduled for October.

6/22 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS
(Agenda No. 6)

There were none.

7/22 ADULT SOCIAL CARE REFORMS IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE
(Agenda No. 7)

It was noted by the Committee that the expected report from Helen Coombes was not present as it was not ready for publication. It was confirmed by Karen Fuller that it would be ready in time for the next ordinary meeting of the Committee in November. It was **AGREED** by the Committee to add this item to the work plan for the November meeting.

Cllr Bearder, Cabinet member for Adult Social Care, introduced the presentation. The Council spent almost half its budget on adult social care, making the changes faced in this area highly significant for the Council overall. The reforms to adult social care

meant significant increases in the number of people the Council would need to support. Without correct funding for such a significant increase in demand, the situation could prove very challenging for the Council.

Karen Fuller, Interim Corporate Director of Adults, proceeded with the presentation, providing background information on the requirements set out in Government policy and legislation on the reform of Adult Social Care and to provide an update on the approach to implementation in Oxfordshire.

The Health and Care Act 2022 involved multiple strands: the Build Back Better work, which includes the care cap; implementing CQC assurance for local government; integration with the NHS; Fair Cost of Care, which concerned reviewing the fairness and sustainability of care; and the publication of a Market Sustainability Plan. The first priority for the Council amidst this suite of reforms was to complete its work around Fair Cost of Care to meet the October 2022 deadline. Other work is however, proceeding concurrently. For example, legislative changes to the Liberty Protection Safeguards preparation. This work was confirmed to be underway and the Council will be responding to the national consultation in July. It was noted that the proposed changes would involve undertaking assessments on young adults aged 16 and over, requiring collaboration with children's services also.

In response to the requirement from government that a Fair Cost of Care exercise be carried out, the Council would be using the government methodology and relevant tools and would be engaging an independent organisation to undertake the work to ensure impartiality and fairness throughout the process. Early research highlighted a number of important issues, including the relatively high number self-funders which the council potentially will have to support.

The implementation date for the care cap is scheduled for October 2023, but there is the opportunity that assessments can commence in April 2023 in a transition stage which does have some benefits as it does avoid a significant spike in workload caused by an expected increase in demand for assessments of approximately 50% in October. The Council, via the Oxfordshire Way transformation work in Adults has positively reduced waiting lists for assessment by 45% over the previous year which is positive compared to the national picture where waiting lists have increased.

A key pressure to be understood relating to the Fair Cost of Care is that there is no confirmation yet as to how much funding the Council would be allocated in relation to the outcome of the aggregation of the Fair Cost of Care reviews nationally by central government.

At present, the Assurance process is being designed by CQC but it is anticipated that they would include how the Council works with individuals, ensures safety within the system (including working with partners), and leadership within the local authority.

The Council was aware that with the significant changes much work would be necessary to ensure information for stakeholders was available online. The work for this was significant but underway. IT support was also being devoted to improving the efficiency of data-collection and sharing following initial care assessments as well as ongoing work.

Following the presentation, the Committee sought clarification on a number of matters. IN the first instance, the Cabinet Member was asked for his vision for the adult social care sector and how, in light of the duty on the Council to shape the market, it would be expected to look in the future. As a newly appointed portfolio holder, Cllr Bearder was currently meeting with key stakeholders whilst the outcome of the Fair Cost of Care exercise was being awaited to understand the issues prior to reforms then shaping the outlines of the market. Only when that was known would it be possible to take a firm position. In a broader sense, however, his vision was that people should be supported to remain within their own homes and communities for as long as possible and communicating the import of the reforms. An important part of communication and implementation was the adoption of digital technologies. Knowing that many older people do not, however, use technology, it was also recognised how well the Customer Service Centre was providing signposting.

Other issues raised included the shape of the social care market, which, through procurement, was undergoing a move away from care home provision, and towards prevention and care at home. However, it was also emphasised that the biggest change in the coming 18 months was over how care was funded and managing and responding to that would be the primary focus of the Council's activity. In the longer run, learning from the success of the Oxfordshire Way, the belief that any individual can be successful, through support from cross-organisational local support. That success meant that the county was performing very well overall, with 93.3% of care providers rated good or excellent by the CQC, and that radical changes, apart from those being imposed extraneously through the reforms, were unlikely.

The importance of maintaining a view of reducing the number of those waiting for the Council to do so something was emphasised. It was suggested that the Local Account, currently out of date, would be refreshed in the coming months. The Committee suggested this could act as a dashboard for Scrutiny to keep a view on progress in addressing waiting times for individuals.

Clarifications were also sought on the operation of the cost of care cap, the type of care homes which fell within the remit of the calculations, whether care homes currently in development were being included in calculations, and the capacity to deliver the increased number of care assessments the Council would need to provide.

It was **AGREED** that the Scrutiny Officer would follow up as to how the Committee could continue to monitor progress and standards.

No recommendations were made in relation to this item.

Cllr Bearder, Stephen Chandler and Lorna Baxter left the meeting at this point in the meeting.

Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Equalities introduced the report. The Council recognised the value of the voluntary and community sector, contributing to society in ways that local government could not. During the pandemic public involvement in volunteering had increased substantially. This has included a new level of engagement and collaboration with the statutory sector. There is considerable ambition within the VCS to retain this new culture to drive efficiency, flexibility, and responsiveness. The Council, likewise, wished to build, develop and foster these relationships and outcomes. The embryo for this strategy was from an LGA peer review in 2019, with work continuing to develop the strategy from then on. In September 2021 the Cabinet approved the development of a VCS strategy, to be co-produced with the sector. The aim was to consider the Council's commitment to the sector and analyse and align relationships and funding – to create a clear and cohesive strategic approach across Oxfordshire as a whole.

Co-production and engagement had been central to the development of the strategy, with the Council going above and beyond what would be expected to garner the views of communities across the county. The Council had also directly engaged the district councils in the county, and via them parish councils also. Five priorities and a number of underpinning commitments were agreed through a VCS and public sector co-production working group, based on the input from an externally held workshop. The priorities were:

- (a) Collaboration and Networking
- (b) Volunteering and Social Action
- (c) Capacity and Skills
- (d) Supporting a Sustainable Sector
- (e) Reducing Inequalities

The Council aimed to continue to promote and champion the VCS, strengthen partnership working, work collaboratively with the VCS to address long-term challenges, promote the value of social action and volunteering, upskill volunteers and address barriers to volunteering, help with VCS with access to and understanding of data about local communities, and tackle inequalities, including digital exclusion.

In response to the presentation the Committee queried the degree to which the strategy tended towards working with larger voluntary and community sector organisations, and whether harder to reach groups, and particularly the views of younger people had been sufficiently heard. A number of explanations and caveats were put forward in relation to this, including the fact that the strategy's purpose was to develop the capacity of the sector overall, and not one element of it, that pragmatically it was necessary to work with those with greatest capacity to develop the sector and that they tended to have the spare capacity to contribute to strategic discussions, that notwithstanding the previous point smaller groups (and indeed individuals) had been involved in the consultation, and young people had been involved. The Committee determined that they should still raise this issue as a recommendation.

The other key area of discussion concerned the apparent prioritisation of adult services over those of children and young people within the strategy. Given that the

Committee considered that many of the capacity challenges and workforce recruitment and retention issues across the sectors were similar, that an equivalence of priority was merited. With regards to spending on commissioned services, it was noted by the Committee that spending on adults was six and a half times that of children and young people. A number of points were made in response to this, including the fact that the strategy itself was one which was designed to support the entire sector, rather than specific elements within it. It was neither for adults nor for children. As part of the consultation, Children's Services had expressed no concerns. The spending on commissioned services, though technically accurate, without context around understanding the size of the different cohorts and the proportion of services commissioned to the voluntary sector gave a misleading impression. The Committee noted that if this were the case, the Council ought to look further into the differences in approach to ensure opportunities were not being missed, and that that if members had picked up that there was a preference for adults over children within the strategy, members of the general public might do so also if left unamended.

The following action was **AGREED**:

1) That the Scrutiny Officer would draft recommendations based on the discussion for sign-off by the Chair and vice-Chair relating to consultation with businesses, and joint-working with other local authorities on an app, and that the Committee would sign off any forthcoming report remotely.

NB The recommendations ultimately agreed were as follows:

Recommendation 1: That the Council undertakes specific additional consultation with smaller voluntary sector groups to ensure its proposals support their needs also.

Recommendation 2: That the Council uses the forthcoming work by the consultation and engagement team to seek informed views on children and young people on the draft voluntary sector strategy.

Recommendation 3: That the Council assures itself that the draft strategy does not deprioritise the needs of younger people over older people.

Recommendation 4: That the Council investigates the reasons behind the difference in spending on commissioned services for adults and young people and investigates whether the difference in approach means opportunities for better services or value for money are being missed.

Recommendation 5: That the Council amends its draft strategy to prevent the impression being given that the needs of children and young people are of lesser priority than older people.

Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report. Digital inclusion was defined as 'ensuring the benefits of the internet and digital technologies are available to everyone' and covered both access to the internet and the ability of individuals to use it. The pandemic had reinforced how vital digital services were to everybody's lives, being fundamental to employment, financial management and social interaction, as well as being more and more relied on for health services also. However, not everybody is able or wishes to access or use this technology, meaning an ongoing challenge exists for the Council in how it provides for such people in an increasingly digitally focused environment. Key groups within this category included, amongst others, those living in rural areas, people living in social deprivation, carers and small businesses. Library and heritage services perform a key function in this regard, providing free access to wifi and computers for users, but also trained staff and volunteers to provide support. Over 8000 applications for services such as blue badges and bus passes had been enabled in this way.

The Strategy covered three key areas: digitally inclusive communities, service delivery, and the workplace. Working alongside partners, a digital inclusion charter had been developed and was being consulted on. When agreed, as many organisations as possible would be encouraged to sign up to the principles as possible. Progress against the strategy, via an action plan to deliver the strategy, would be presented annually.

In response to the presentation the Committee focused its questioning on a number of issues. Good practice from elsewhere in relation to making libraries (and their IT services) accessible for those with children, or those who work was explored. The importance of libraries as the first port of call for many digitally excluded individuals was recognised and it was confirmed that work was already being undertaken by the Council to review the needs of local residents in relation to library access.

The challenge and capacity of the Council to ensure that responsibility for improving digital inclusion was embedded corporately rather than located within a particular team was discussed. In readiness for this, the Council had already moved from a hardware focus to a service focus, with dedicated IT staff for each directorate tasked with understanding the IT requirements to deliver their services as part of the wider corporate offer. Likewise, non-IT staff were being trained to support individuals with use of IT in the course of their existing roles. The importance of this was noted particularly in ensuring that vulnerable users were not exposed to unacceptable levels of risk when using the internet.

Specific groups who might struggle particularly with digital access were identified and issues discussed. In addition to library provision, central government's Project Gigabit had been of significant help in increasing broadband access for those who might face cost of living challenges, with over 240 community properties being equipped to provide free wifi. Full fibre broadband was being rolled out across the entire county, meaning rural areas would, as the project continued, have full access to fast internet speeds. It was confirmed that all looked-after children were in receipt of ipads, with support being given to maintain the hardware and train the young people on their usage.

The Committee discussed two issues on which it made recommendations. The first concerned the relative lack of priority within the strategy for supporting small and micro-businesses to realise the benefits of the internet. It was recognised in response to questions on this that the Council had relied on district council partners for information around this, rather than consulting relevant businesses directly.

The second area of recommendation concerned the opportunity to lead on developing shared apps between district, parish and county councils. At present, Council staff were prioritising making the website more user-friendly, but the Committee suggested that with other districts looking into this idea, that there was a possible opportunity for joint working which might be of benefit to residents. Further discussion was held over the potential scope of an app or apps, given the breadth and variety of ways in which residents interact with their local authorities, and the need not to ensure the any app remained intuitive and easy to use.

The following actions were **AGREED**:

- 1) That a progress update report on the Digital Inclusion Action Plan come to the People OSC in 12 months
- 2) That the Scrutiny Officer would draft recommendations based on the discussion for sign-off by the Chair and vice-Chair relating to consultation with businesses, and joint-working with other local authorities on an app, and that the Committee would sign off any forthcoming report remotely.

NB The recommendations ultimately agreed were as follows:

Recommendation 1: That the Council approaches Oxfordshire Association for Local Councils to investigate the appetite amongst parish, town, district and city councils on digital inclusion, particularly in relation to access to broadband, online safety and app development.

Recommendation 2: That the Council consults directly with businesses, particularly smaller ones, on the barriers they face to ensuring the benefits of the internet are available to them and develops actions to support any new issues identified within the Digital Inclusion Action Plan.

10/22 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY WORKING GROUP - PROJECT PLAN

(Agenda No. 10)

Helen Mitchell, Interim Scrutiny Manager, introduced the Home to School Project Plan. It was noted that meetings had been delayed, with the expectation that the meeting should proceed in late June or early July.

It was **AGREED** that:

- 1) That any draft report and recommendations should be agreed by the Scrutiny Officer, the Chair and Deputy Chair of People OSC, and the Chair of the working group.
- 2) The Project Plan be accepted and the working group set up accordingly.

11/22 COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23 AND THE COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN

(Agenda No. 11)

The Committee considered the draft work programme for the forthcoming year.

It was **AGREED** that the work programme would be considered, in conjunction with the Cabinet Forward Plan, as a standing item at each meeting.

Following consideration of the Cabinet's Forward Plan, it was noted that the Council intended to begin a procurement exercise for Domestic Abuse services, it was **AGREED** that the Principal Scrutiny Officer would agree opportunities outside the meeting for the Committee to consider this topic, and for it to be run in conjunction with the HOSC.

It was **AGREED** that the proposed report on learning from Covid would consider both learning for schools, and also learning for the County Council.

The benefits to the Committee of having multiple working groups being led in a single year by the same member was called into questioned. Consequently, it was **AGREED** that the Principal Scrutiny Officer would work to develop project plans bearing this in mind, and that the Committee could sign these off remotely. Lead members were confirmed as being Cllr Thomas for the Food Strategy Action Plan, and Cllr Simpson for Family Centres. It was requested that a list of all those who had received transition funding be provided to Cllr Simpson.

12/22 ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

(Agenda No. 12)

The proposed action and recommendation tracker was **NOTED**.

13/22 DEVELOPING THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

(Agenda No. 13)

It was explained to Members that officers were in the process of drafting a number of protocols to regulate a number of the key functions of the Scrutiny function, the Cabinet/Scrutiny relationship, the formation of working groups, and call-ins. Members were advised that their input was sought but the documents were not currently ready. It was **AGREED** that Member views would be passed back via e mail.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

