



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Northampton, NN1 1DE on Tuesday 21 September 2021 at 6.00 pm.

Present Councillor Karen Cooper (Chair)

Councillor Harry Barrett
Councillor Raymond Connolly
Councillor Cheryl Hawes
Councillor Greg Lunn
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex
Councillor Mike Warren

Also Present: Councillor Matt Golby, Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration

Apologies for
Absence: Councillor Rosie Herring
 Councillor Azizur Rahman
 Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM
 Councillor Nigel Hinch

Officers Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director - Adults Communities and Wellbeing
 Katie Brown, Assistant Director - Safeguarding and Wellbeing
 Rosanne Furniss, Director, Newton Europe
 Kim Curry, iCAN Delivery Director
 Colin Foster, Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Children's Trust
 Cathi Hadley, Director of Children's Services
 James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager
 Kathryn Holton, Committee Officer

There were also two members of the public in attendance.

9. Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members

Apologies were received from Councillors Herring, Aziz, Chowdhury and Hinch. Apologies were also received from Councillor Baker, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education. In the absence of the Chair, the meeting was chaired by the Vice-Chair, Councillor Cooper.

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager reported that there had been a change in committee membership: Councillor Fiona Cole had been replaced by Councillor Raymond Connolly. The Chair welcomed Councillor Connolly to the Committee.

10. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Sturges-Alex declared in relation to the agenda item on Children's Services Performance that he was a foster carer working for Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT).

Councillor Roberts declared in relation to the agenda item on the West Northamptonshire Anti-Poverty Strategy that she was Chair of Food and Far Cotton (foodbank).

11. Notification of requests from Members of the Public to address the Meeting

A request had been received from Mr Robin Burgess, Chief Executive of the Hope Group, to address the meeting in respect of the agenda item on the West Northamptonshire Anti-Poverty Strategy.

12. Minutes

A member questioned that the minutes of the previous Committee meeting did not attribute comments to individual members, which would be helpful. The Democratic Services Assistant Manager advised that West Northamptonshire Council (WNC)'s corporate style for minutes was still evolving and was currently the subject of work by Democratic Services.

RESOLVED that: the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Agreed the minutes of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 20th July 2021, subject to the following amendments to Minute 8 (Development of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/2022):
 - The addition of a reference to concerns raised by Councillor Emma Roberts during discussion regarding under-utilisation of the Disabled Facilities Grant in Northampton in 2020/2021 and the potential impact of this on residents.
 - The addition of youth provision and youth space to the list of items identified as potential areas for inclusion in the Committee's longer term work programme for 2021/2022.
- b) Requested to be provided with further information on the latest position regarding Disabled Facilities Grant utilisation.
- c) Recommended that minutes should attribute comments to individual councillors in future.

13. Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements from the Chair.

14. **Integrated Care Across Northamptonshire (iCAN)**

The Executive Director - Adults, Communities and Wellbeing introduced the report, which gave an update on progress with the iCAN programme in particular areas identified by the Committee at its previous meeting.

The Director of Newton Europe outlined the development of the new Target Operating Model (TOM) for Adult Social Services in Northamptonshire, which provided the foundations for the iCAN programme. iCAN was one of the four major transformation programmes supporting development of Northamptonshire's Integrated Care System, recognising the need to provide effective frail and elderly care. There were opportunities to improve in this area and secure better outcomes.

The iCAN Delivery Director gave an overview of the benefits that the iCAN programme was intended to produce for service users in terms of maintaining independence and autonomy, for care staff and for the overall care system.

The Director of Newton Europe and the Executive Director - Adults, Communities and Wellbeing commented further on the outcomes that the iCAN programme should produce for WNC, highlighting the following points:

- There were clear opportunities for iCAN to produce financial benefits from reducing admissions to acute care and enabling people to remain independent. Up to £13.3m savings per year were anticipated by 2024.
- The TOM programme had already demonstrated a track record of achieving good outcomes from pursuing similar principles, which provided reassurance.
- The iCAN programme would include strong quality assurance and contract review processes. NHS England Improvement would be involved in contract review.
- The initial focus within iCAN was on supporting the response to winter pressures causing increased demands on acute care at admission and discharge stages. Work was being done to fast-track some iCAN measures.
- Some local authority areas were currently experiencing pressures on domiciliary care staff resulting in local social care staff needing to be redeployed. The iCAN programme provided a context of whole system working that would assist West Northamptonshire to plan for risks such as this.

The Committee considered the report and members raised points as follows:

- Concern was expressed at the number of areas of uncertainty that could affect the iCAN programme. It was highlighted that Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations in Daventry working with clinically vulnerable people had not yet received funding expected in May 2021.
- More people ended up in hospital because they could not see a GP and remained in hospital because of a lack of support available in the community after discharge. Carers were leaving the role to take better paid jobs. The iCAN programme looked positive but would it deliver the intended outcomes in practice.
- Concern was expressed that domiciliary care packages were reliant on delivery by care staff and it was questioned how the situation was managed if care visits were missed.
- The iCAN programme was a massive project to implement. The report seemed to be presenting a proposition as well as referring to previous work. The Committee should seek more information about actual progress with iCAN.

- How was holistic care being implemented?
- The iCAN programme seemed to involve benefits for the NHS but increased costs for the local authority. Would reducing delayed transfers of care result in WNC having unsustainable costs?
- Concern was expressed regarding winter pressures this year and how far iCAN would contribute to addressing these.

The Executive Director - Adults, Communities and Wellbeing, the Director of Newton Europe and the Assistant Director - Safeguarding and Wellbeing made the following points in response:

- Funding for VCS groups would be provided by the end of that week. There had been a delay of around 6 months. It was difficult to quantify exactly as different funding streams were involved but it was acknowledged that WNC needed to resolve this matter.
- Issues that could affect service provision highlighted at the current meeting had been identified in work by Newton Europe. The iCAN programme was designed to address these.
- It was recognised that the care market was currently very volatile, particularly given that other jobs paid more and carers were required to be vaccinated against COVID-19. The iCAN programme would not solve these problems but would help.
- Domiciliary care staff causing issues were in a minority. Missing out a care visit was a safeguarding issue and WNC and the Care Quality Commission should be notified. This would trigger a visit to the organisation to look at the structures and interventions in place. The vast majority of care providers used an electronic case monitoring system that logged when visits were made. WNC had good oversight of the delivery of care.
- The TOM programme had been operating for a year and would shortly be subject to its first annual review. The Committee could consider including this topic in its work programme. However, the fact that different organisations were involved would affect the information that could be shared.
- The design process for the iCAN programme would identify how holistic care would be implemented.
- The iCAN programme would produce a benefit for WNC not just for NHS bodies. Building community resilience would produce a benefit.
- The next winter was expected to be challenging. Mobilising the first part of the iCAN contract would assist in the response but iCAN could not address the situation alone: local service providers were developing a wider winter plan.

The Committee considered the potential to appoint a scrutiny panel to scrutinise progress with the delivery of the iCAN programme, which could be linked to the gateway points built into the contract.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration advised that he also wished to see the iCAN programme deliver the outcomes intended. He had confidence in Newton Europe: the iCAN contract was also structured to ensure that they were not paid until results were delivered. It was right for Overview and Scrutiny to seek ongoing reassurance about iCAN and he would be doing the same as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board.

RESOLVED that: the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Agreed to establish a task-and-finish panel to scrutinise the delivery of iCAN programme outcomes, linked to the gateway review points in the contract.
- b) Agreed that the task-and-finish panel should produce the scope for the scrutiny review, with input from the Executive Director Adults, Communities and Wellbeing.
- c) Agreed that the iCAN programme task-and-finish panel should consist of 7 councillors, made up of Councillors Emma Roberts (chair), Wendy Randall and Sue Sharps and others to be identified through an invitation to all non-executive councillors.

15. **West Northamptonshire Anti Poverty Strategy**

The Executive Director - Adults, Communities and Wellbeing introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- There were 78,000 people in West Northamptonshire suffering with income deprivation, which demonstrated the impact it had.
- WNC would use a Poverty Truth Commission to support the development of its Anti-Poverty Strategy. This reflected the importance of local connections.
- A strategy workshop would take place on 30th September 2021 to build understanding of the situation in West Northamptonshire.
- The Anti-Poverty Strategy should involve significant actions that would make a meaningful difference to people's lives.
- It was planned to take the Anti-Poverty Strategy to Council early in 2022. Combatting poverty should be a core ongoing focus for WNC.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration advised that taking meaningful action against poverty in all parts of the authority was a priority for the Administration. It was intended to identify best practice and reflect this in a Strategy that could be reported back on annually, to provide accountability.

Mr Robin Burgess, Chief Executive of the Hope Group, addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- He endorsed the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy by WNC and the political commitment to doing this, particularly given prospective changes to Universal Credit.
- In practice VCS organisations often played a significant part in responding to poverty. In West Northamptonshire an alliance of 40 different groups was working in this field.
- He urged WNC to see the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy as a co-production with the VCS and faith sectors, reflecting that they were sources of intelligence additional to the Poverty Truth Commission.

The Committee considered the report and members raised points as follows:

- The commitment to developing an effective Anti-Poverty Strategy heard from the Cabinet Member and Executive Director was welcome.
- Were VCS groups being invited to the strategy workshop?
- What responses to the Poverty Truth Commission had been received so far?

- How should Overview and Scrutiny consider the Anti-Poverty Strategy in future to add value to it?
- The Committee might consider setting up a scrutiny panel in future on poverty. It might also revisit the response to the Northampton Borough Council scrutiny review on food poverty.
- WNC should ensure that it considered poverty in both rural and urban areas.
- It was welcome to see that the essential living costs that could contribute to poverty identified in the report included the cost of funerals.
- The Strategy should recognise that a person could have a job but not be able to afford to travel to work.

The Executive Director - Adults, Communities and Wellbeing made the following points in response:

- VCS groups had been invited to the strategy workshop.
- Information on the number of responses to the Poverty Truth Commission could be provided to the Committee.
- WNC should aim to produce an annual report on all adopted strategies, including the Anti-Poverty Strategy. Overview and Scrutiny would then be able to use these annual reports to review progress with delivery and the outcomes achieved.

RESOLVED that: the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Welcomed the update on development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and the positive approach being taken by West Northamptonshire Council on this matter.
- b) Requested to be provided with further information on responses to the Poverty Truth Commission received so far.
- c) Requested to receive a further update on the Anti-Poverty Strategy at the first Committee meeting after the anticipated adoption of the Strategy in January 2022.

[The meeting was adjourned briefly at this point].

16. **Children's Services Performance**

The Chief Executive of Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) gave an overview of the Ofsted monitoring visit in July 2021 on children who are the subject of child protection and child in need plans. He highlighted the following points:

- Ofsted had found that senior leaders, both officers and councillors, were maintaining a strong focus on improving practice, which was continuing to benefit children.
- Ofsted had been complimentary about the direction of travel in Northamptonshire, although further progress needed to be made.
- The monitoring visit recognised that more timely decisions were now being made in child protection cases, which had previously been an issue.
- The monitoring visit identified that the quality of social work was improving but still varied. This was a key area for improvement and current work sought to build on that started by the Director of Children's Services when at Northamptonshire County Council.

- There were no surprises in the findings from the monitoring visit. This showed that the organisation knew itself well and would increase the trust that Ofsted put in it.
- It was expected that Ofsted would carry out a full inspection of children's services in Northamptonshire in summer 2022, resulting in a performance rating. Ofsted would then need to determine how it inspected West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire councils' services in future.

The Committee considered the report. Members generally welcomed the progress made with children's services under the current leadership, whilst recognising that improvement needed to be sustained. Members raised particular points as follows:

- What was Overview and Scrutiny's role in supporting further progress? It could potentially review key issues such as staff recruitment and retention and high caseloads, which directly affected the quality of provision.
- The government had proposed having social workers in schools. How was it anticipated that this approach would work?
- Following the inadequate Ofsted judgement in 2019 resources were being focussed on achieving improvements in the 2022 inspection but how would subsequent challenges be managed?
- Children's services needed to have good intelligence from those working on the frontline about approaches that were successful in different parts of the county as well as good engagement with schools. There were some excellent people working in the county and this should be made the standard.
- The Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive of NCT were encouraged to pursue a progressive, innovative approach with the aim of producing class-leading children's services in Northamptonshire in 10 years.
- Northamptonshire still faced the challenge of having too many young people in the care system. What was being done to help to address this by recruiting foster carers and by avoiding young people coming into the care system when this was not the best option for them? The consistency of support for looked after children in schools could also be improved.
- How should multi-agency locality working be re-established and how could WNC support this?

The Chief Executive of NCT responded to points raised by councillors as follows:

- The NCT Improvement Plan areas identified as 'next steps' in the report could be a focus for future scrutiny.
- Northamptonshire's first priority was to reach the point where Ofsted considered that young people were safe. His professional view was that Northamptonshire would not get beyond a 'requires improvement' rating in the 2022 inspection. It would then effectively have another three years to continue to improve, with less intensive monitoring than at present. Current improvement actions would continue beyond 2022 where appropriate.
- There was a will to address the number of young people in the care system in Northamptonshire: the challenge was the scale of the task. Northamptonshire still needed to put in place an effective early help function. The lack of this had meant that opportunities to use low level support to prevent issues from escalating could not be taken, whilst schools perceived that making a referral to children's services

was the only option open to them. Such referrals were unlikely to meet the criteria for statutory action, meaning that the situation would continue to worsen.

- Work was being done to improve the local offer to prospective foster carers and the support provided to them after they have taken on the role. This should include a contact point for foster carers experiencing day to day issues.
- The current discussion could help to support further improvement if it gave councillors confidence that the creation of NCT was not just a change in organisation. He had taken on the Chief Executive role to make a difference.

The Director of Children's Services responded to points raised by councillors as follows:

- There were arguments for and against putting social workers in schools. Some support should be available in schools, but the most effective approach could be for school staff members to refer issues to a family support team. Given national pressures around recruitment it was important that social workers were deployed to best effect and other staff used to provide support in schools when this would achieve the desired outcome.
- The relationship between local authorities and schools in the county did need to be built further. Work was being done towards establishing school clusters that would provide more of a platform for activity by NCT. Children's services needed to be accessible from the schools' perspective. Consistent senior leadership also helped to produce confidence.
- It could be productive to focus recruitment on social workers who had previously left Northamptonshire County Council, given that children's services could now offer stable and effective leadership, alongside previous positives.
- She could provide an item on the development of multi-agency locality working to a future Committee meeting. However, it was not planned to make changes immediately to reflect that Northamptonshire was still at a relatively early stage in the Improvement Plan as well as needing to deal with local government reorganisation and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Councillors had a part to play in promoting a balanced view of children's services in Northamptonshire that recognised there were both positives and negatives. If councillors fed back to her or the Chief Executive of NCT on issues raised by constituents it enabled misperceptions to be corrected or concerns to be investigated.

The Committee subsequently considered the need to revisit the topic of children's services performance in 2021/22 and the best timing for this, noting that a further Ofsted monitoring visit was due in November 2021.

RESOLVED that: the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested to receive a further update on children's services performance to the Committee meeting on 25th January 2022 covering the following matters:

- Additional measures to further improve recruitment and retention of social workers
- Achieving consistently good quality practice for all children, supported by full implementation of the practice model
- Outcomes of the Ofsted monitoring visit due to take place in November 2021.

17. **Scope for Task and Finish Scrutiny Review - Child and adolescent mental health and the risk of self-harm**

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager presented the draft scope, which had been developed with the Chair and informed by her preliminary discussions with relevant senior officers. The Committee was asked to consider and approve the scope. This could include establishing priorities in view of the identification of iCAN as a subject for task and finish work earlier at the current meeting.

The Committee considered the proposed scope. It was suggested that the Committee should appoint a member or small group to give further consideration to it, to take account of the establishment of the iCAN scrutiny panel. Committee members expressed an interest in this work. It was noted that other non-executive councillors could then be invited to join the scrutiny panel. The final scope could be reported back to the Committee, although without holding up work as far as possible. The Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service Plan 2021/22 presented to the Council meeting on 23rd September 2021 was highlighted as potential background information for the scrutiny review.

RESOLVED that: the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Agreed to appoint Councillors Nick Sturges-Alex (chair), Rosie Herring and Sue Sharps to give further consideration to the scope for the proposed scrutiny review, to take into account the establishment by the Committee of another task-and-finish panel to scrutinise the iCAN programme.
- b) Agreed that an invitation be sent to all non-executive councillors to make up a task-and-finish panel to carry out the proposed scrutiny review together with Councillors Sturges-Alex, Herring and Sharps.
- c) Agreed that the scope for the proposed scrutiny review be reported back to the Committee meeting on 16th November 2021.

18. **Work Programming Event**

The Chair advised that the proposed time for the Committee's Work Programming event was 21st October 2021 at 6.00pm at One Angel Square, Northampton. The Chair invited members to raise any points relating to the event that they wished the Committee to consider.

RESOLVED that: the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that its Work Programming event be held on 21st October 2021 at 6.00pm at One Angel Square.

19. **Review of Committee Work Programme 2021/2022**

The Chair introduced the report setting out the latest version of the Work Programme.

The Committee considered the report. It was suggested that food poverty would be covered by the Anti-Poverty Strategy and did not therefore need to be listed as a separate item on the Work Programme. It was noted that matters identified earlier in the current meeting would need to be incorporated in the Work Programme and it would also be influenced by the forthcoming Work Programming event.

RESOLVED that: the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorsed the Work Programme 2021/22, subject to the following changes:

- Addition of the iCAN programme scrutiny review
- Addition of an update on children's services performance as an item for the Committee meeting on 25th January 2022
- Addition of an update on the West Northamptonshire Anti-Poverty Strategy as an item for the first Committee meeting after the anticipated adoption of the Strategy in January 2022
- Addition of youth provision and youth space to the list of items identified as potential areas for inclusion in the Committee's longer term work programme for 2021/22
- Removal of food poverty from the list of items identified as potential areas for inclusion in the Committee's longer term work programme for 2021/22 as this topic would form part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

20. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.10 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____