



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Chamber, Lodge Road, Daventry, NN11 4FP on Tuesday 21 June 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present Councillor Rosie Herring (Chair)
Councillor Harry Barrett
Councillor Raymond Connolly
Councillor Rufia Ashraf
Councillor Greg Lunn
Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Janice Duffy
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex
Councillor Mike Warren

Also Present: Councillor Adam Brown, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet
Member for Housing, Leisure and Culture
Councillor Matt Golby, Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and
Health Integration

Apologies for
Absence: Councillor Karen Cooper
Councillor Azizur Rahman
Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM
Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor Fiona Baker, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and
Education
Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director of Adults, Communities and
Wellbeing

Officers Jane Carr, Director of Communities and Opportunities
Gillian Spencer, Transformation Delivery Manager
Colin Foster, Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Children's Trust
Cornelia Andrecut, Director of Children's Services, Northamptonshire
Children's Trust
Andrew Tagg, Director of Finance and Resources, Northamptonshire
Children's Trust
Geraldine Davies, General Manager for Renal and Transplant
Services, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust
Suzanne Glover, Deputy Head of Nursing, University Hospitals of
Leicester NHS Trust
James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager
Kathryn Holton, Committee Officer

57. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Roberts advised that she was no longer declaring an interest as a Board member of Northampton Partnership Homes because she had resigned from the Board in May 2022. She was still Chair of Food Aid Far Cotton.

58. **Notification of requests from Members of the Public to address the Meeting**

There were none.

59. **Minutes**

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the minutes of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 25 April 2022.

60. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair announced that there had been changes to the membership of the Committee for 2022/23. Councillors Ashraf, Duffy and Flavell had joined the Committee and Councillors Randall, Purser and Hinch had left. The Chair welcomed the new members and thanked those who had left for their contribution over the last year.

The Chair and Councillor Roberts advised that an action plan had been produced by the Anti-Poverty Oversight Group, which was well done and targeted. Feedback had been taken into account.

In response to points arising from the item on Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) at the previous Committee meeting, the Chair advised that she had spoken to the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs who had said that there would be a strategic effort to address the backlog of planning applications. The Chair of Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not propose that the Committee should investigate issues around land ownership and maintenance responsibility affecting NPH, due to other work programme priorities.

The Chair advised that she had put forward the comments of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee members in relation to Household Support Fund Scheme 2 funding. She had attended the Cabinet meeting on 14 June 2022 and the comments were duly noted, with some to be taken up.

Committee members commented that the issues around land ownership and maintenance responsibility arising from the previous item on NPH were important and that the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be encouraged to follow up this matter if possible.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that the Chair should again contact the Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to encourage that committee to scrutinise the issue of land ownership and responsibility for maintenance affecting Northampton Partnership Homes properties.

61. **Debt and Money Advice Transformation Project**

The Chair invited the Director of Communities and Opportunities and Transformation Delivery Manager to present an overview of the Debt and Money Advice Transformation Project.

The Transformation Delivery Manager outlined the report and noted current pressure on the debt and money advice services provided by many different organisations. The pandemic had magnified issues substantially and there had been an uptake in services due to the increased cost of living. Issues relating to debt could have a significant impact on health and wellbeing, whilst people dealing with anxiety and stress were also less able to make good decisions. Education and early intervention were critical and this provided an opportunity to work across directorates.

The interim model of debt and money advice services provided by West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) since its creation was different in each locality. In Northampton, the Housing Options Team focused on homeless prevention and keeping people in their own homes. South Northamptonshire had an in-house debt and money advice team providing an extensive range of support. In Daventry, the service was provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau. These different approaches had generated the aim of developing an effective service that covered the whole of West Northamptonshire in a consistent way whilst also responding to different needs within the local population.

The Director for Communities and Opportunities emphasised that the Transformation Project was at a very early stage. The objective was to establish what services were currently being provided and then use the Appreciative Inquiry framework to deliver the project. This would be a proactive approach, working with other services to look at the wider holistic picture. Workshops had been held with senior staff, with stakeholders and the wider community also to be included. There were no preconceptions about how the project would be delivered and the consideration would be how to reach those most in need. The WNC offer was currently geographically focused. There were many charities offering advice and the current focus was on mapping this information. No decisions had been made about how services would be delivered. The priorities of other corporate strategies, such as the Anti-Poverty Strategy would be taken into account during the development process.

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Leisure and Culture advised that he had no preconceptions about the outcomes of the Transformation Project. This could include changing the location of the debt and money advice function within WNC's organisational structure if this would be logical.

The Director for Communities and Opportunities invited input from Overview and Scrutiny on the direction and outcomes of the Transformation Project. The Chair welcomed the opportunity for the Committee to be involved at an early stage.

The Committee considered the report and members highlighted areas to be taken into account in the development of future provision as follows:

- There was significant pressure on the resources available to voluntary and community sector organisations to provide support to local residents without additional investment.
- There should be mapping of deprivation areas and the reach and effect of existing services, with an opportunity to scrutinise resulting information before partners were commissioned.
- The use of ethical loan providers was emphasised.
- Language barriers were highlighted as an issue for people not engaging with services and in enabling providers to give correct advice.
- Good communication was key: if people were referred to WNC and struggled to make contact they were likely to give up.
- Community groups often gave immediate advice and then referred people on: acting as a conduit rather than the ultimate solution.
- People in debt to WNC, for example in relation to housing or Council Tax, could find it difficult to approach it for advice about debt and money management. Providing these services through a partner, or under different branding, was important to address this issue.
- If WNC got to the stage of considering punitive action to recover a debt there should be the option of referring a person for debt advice before the final step was taken.

The Director for Communities and Opportunities noted the comments made and advised that the Transformation Project could be brought back to the Committee in future. Consideration was also being given to carrying out a survey of councillors to gain further local knowledge to inform the Transformation Project.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Agreed that the points raised in discussion would be fed into the transformation of debt and money advice services;
- b) Agreed that the debt and money advice transformation project would be added to the Committee work programme to allow further scrutiny in future.

62. **Children's Services Performance**

The Chief Executive of the Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) introduced the report and invited questions from the Committee on the latest overview of children's services performance presented to it.

The Chair made the following initial points:

- The report indicated that the overall position in Northamptonshire had been steadied but what plans were being made to achieve significant changes in performance where this was necessary? The report identified that 47% of children in care had initial health assessments within 28 days of entering care in 2021/22. This was an area where there was scope to show more ambition, although it was recognised that this function did not just involve NCT.
- The Committee should consider any other areas where there might be scope to make more progress in performance improvement. This should take account of external factors, such as pressures on recruitment, as well as good work being done such as the emphasis that the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and

Education was putting on increasing local provision for children with special educational needs and disability and on future corporate parenting arrangements in the authority.

The Chief Executive made the following points in response:

- Work was being done with health partners relating to the completion of health assessments for children entering care. This was recognised as a priority area.
- The Local Government Association was due to carry out a review of corporate parenting arrangements in Northamptonshire in January 2023, which was timed to reflect the full Ofsted inspection in autumn 2022.

The Committee considered the report and members raised the following matters during the course of discussion:

- What was the latest position concerning work to manage pressures on staffing, including in relation to attracting new social workers, developing existing staff members and enabling social workers to return to work after a career break?
- It was questioned why the overview of Collaborative Reflective Practice Discussion (CRPD) gradings included in the report appeared to show a significant number of 'inadequate' gradings in the area of support to remain living safely with family.
- How was the overview of CRPD included in the report used to maintain continuous oversight of performance?
- Contact with NCT staff reinforced that improvements were being made as well as providing feedback that staff valued communication and openness by the Chief Executive and senior managers and felt able to raise issues.
- There needed to be a clear idea of what 'good' looked like in relation to children's services in West Northamptonshire and the provision of resources to support achieving this.
- The profile of social work needed to be raised within society as a whole.
- The information in the report that 12.7% of children in care had three or more placements within a year in 2021/22 suggested an issue with the quality of placements.
- Consideration should be given to the availability of drop-in provision for young parents, which played a crucial role in supporting parents and children at that stage in their lives.
- It would be useful for future updates to the Committee to include more comparative data to enable it to see progress over time. The ratio of caseworkers to children, how this was changing and how it compared to the position in other authorities should also be included.
- The percentage of children in foster placements in 2021/22 who were in in-house placements, and the percentage of children in care in residential placements, reinforced the need to make progress with the development of in-house provision.
- The thanks received from service-users and successes set out at the end of the report had been encouraging to read.

The Chief Executive, Director of Social Care and Director of Finance and Resources responded to points raised by members during the course of discussion as follows:

- NCT had just launched a teaching partnership with the University of Northampton that was intended to attract more trainee social workers to Northamptonshire and

to support them to work in the area. All social work students could be offered a supported year of practice through the Social Work Academy.

- NCT was offering other childcare professionals opportunities to step up to social work.
- The current vacancy rate for children's social workers in Northamptonshire was 16.5%, which was better than the national average of 17%.
- When the Chief Executive had first joined NCT he had been concerned at how far out of step the challenges it faced were with the national position. This was no longer the case: Northamptonshire was now facing similar challenges to other local authority areas.
- A specific recruitment process was used with social workers returning to the profession. Further information on this could be provided if requested.
- NCT had a net increase in social worker numbers over the previous six months. It continued to work on the aim of reducing the number of agency staff. Part of NCT's approach involved the Chief Executive or directors speaking directly to applicants for social worker positions to reinforce that it offered a supportive working environment to inspire confidence in staff.
- The overview of CRPD gradings included in the report showed a snapshot of the practice in particular cases that had been audited. Of these, 77% were graded as 'good' for support to remain living safely with family: 9% that had been graded as 'inadequate' would be the focus of subsequent improvement work. This level of 'good' practice, as well as the ability to quantify it and to maintain good oversight of overall effectiveness, reflected the improvements made in Northamptonshire in recent years.
- The NCT quality assurance cycle did not repeatedly revisit the same cases, although it would revisit those where concerns had been identified. Cases where practice was graded as inadequate would result in action by managers to address specific issues. The Quality Assurance Board maintained oversight of the overall position to ensure that Ofsted requirements were met.
- The overview of CRPD gradings could be included in future reports produced for the Committee.
- There would always be some children in care who would need to be in residential placements. The percentage in Northamptonshire in 2021/22 was in-line with the national picture, although it would be beneficial to have more in-house foster carers. Placements was an area of significant pressure as it was challenging to find placements to meet individual needs, particularly when young people came into contact with NCT at a point of crisis. NCT was working to give young people more choice.
- Nationally, the independent care sector was not effective and the more of a move that could be made to high quality local provision the better.
- NCT was required to demonstrate value for money and to work in a way that took account of the budget environment set by the two Northamptonshire authorities.
- NCT had no placements in Clarion Housing Group properties.

The Committee considered potential conclusions resulting from the discussion. Committee members commented that the Committee could highlight to the Cabinet the point raised about performance on initial health assessments of children entering care.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Recommended that West Northamptonshire Council recognise the need to improve performance from the current position of 47% of children in care receiving an initial health assessment within 28 days of entering care.
- b) Requested that Northamptonshire Children's Trust develop the content of future performance updates to the Committee to provide more comparative data.

63. **Changes to provision of NHS dialysis services in Northamptonshire**

The Chair welcomed the General Manager for Renal and Transplant Services and Deputy Head of Nursing from University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust.

The Democratic Services Assistant Manager advised that scrutiny of health service provision was part of the remit of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This gave the Committee the role of reviewing and scrutinising the planning, provision and operation of health services in West Northamptonshire and powers to make reports and require the provision of information. A health service provider that proposed to make a substantial variation to a local health service was required to consult with Overview and Scrutiny in the area concerned. This did not seem to apply in the current case, but the service provider was seeking engagement with the Committee and potential input in shaping the way forward.

The General Manager for Renal and Transplant Services presented the report, highlighting the following points:

- The University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust (UHL) was commissioned to deliver out-patient renal dialysis in Lincolnshire, Peterborough, Leicestershire and Rutland, and Northamptonshire.
- In Northamptonshire there was one unit in Kettering and one in Northampton, located at Riverside House.
- The unit at Riverside House had opened in 2014. The contract with the private provider – Renal Services (UK) Ltd – that operated the two Northamptonshire units was now up for renewal and planning was being done for the future provision of the services.
- Riverside House was a five storey building: the dialysis unit was located on the ground floor and the other floors had previously held offices. However, NPH was now redeveloping the other floors for housing. Renal Services (UK) Ltd had experienced issues connected with the building works. In light of this and the wider impact of the redevelopment on the suitability of Riverside House as the location for a dialysis unit Renal Services (UK) Ltd was pursuing an opportunity to move provision to an alternative location that would better meet the needs of patients.

The Deputy Head of Nursing went on to provide additional information on the provision of out-patient dialysis as follows:

- There were approximately 250 patients receiving out-patient dialysis in Northamptonshire. They attended appointments three times per week for around four hours each time and often needed transport to and from the unit. The Northampton unit also provided nocturnal dialysis and training for patients in home dialysis.

- The redevelopment of Riverside House would involve patients and staff using a shared foyer with residents. This represented a health risk to patients as well as having security implications for the dialysis unit.
- There was a 25-year lease on Riverside House, which included one break point in December 2022.
- The proposed alternative location for the Northampton unit was bigger and would support future service provision. A planning application relating to the new location was due to be submitted that week.

The Committee considered the report. In response to questions the Deputy Head of Nursing advised that it was not standard practice for out-patient dialysis services to operate from hospital sites due to pressures on space: the existing Kettering unit was not based at Kettering General Hospital. The Committee sought reassurance about the suitability of the proposed new location for the Northampton unit. The Committee was advised that the site was on a small industrial estate, which was not near residential buildings and was close to an ambulance station. The location had good transport links. The site would provide good space for treatment including capacity for likely increases in demand.

Committee members questioned what engagement had taken place with patients and local Healthwatch about future plans; the level of risk to relocating the dialysis unit arising from the need to secure planning approval; and what length of tenure would be sought on the new location with a view to securing best value. The General Manager for Renal and Transplant Services and Deputy Head of Nursing provided additional information as follows:

- Future plans had been discussed with existing patients and staff who had responded positively. Engagement with Healthwatch Northamptonshire was planned.
- The new site would be leased for 25-years, which was standard and considered to be most appropriate for this service.

Committee members expressed support for the case for relocating the Northampton unit. It was further suggested that the Committee should highlight to the Cabinet the issues that appeared to have arisen regarding the future use of Riverside House as a location for the dialysis unit as a result of it being redeveloped for housing. These should be considered and addressed as may be necessary to get best use from Riverside House whilst it remained the location for the Northampton dialysis unit as well as in the interests of partnership working.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Supported the need to relocate the Outpatient Renal Dialysis at Riverside House, Northampton, from its current site.
- b) Recommended that the Cabinet looks into issues arising from the change of use of Riverside House from office space to housing that have affected its continued suitability as a site for Outpatient Renal Dialysis, in order to support effective partnership working.

64. **Integrated Care across Northamptonshire (iCAN) Scrutiny Review - Update**

Councillor Roberts, chair of the iCAN scrutiny panel, outlined progress with its work and highlighted the following points:

- There had been two good scrutiny panel meetings so far.
- The scrutiny panel had sought to enhance the information it received on progress with the iCAN programme, as this had initially focused on 'selling' the aims of the programme.
- The scrutiny panel's second meeting had been attended by patient and carer representatives. This had helped to give a better picture of the practical effects of the iCAN programme and of real world pressures.
- Representatives from East Midlands Ambulance Service would be invited to attend the next scrutiny panel meeting to discuss how iCAN might affect demands on first response, although it was important to be clear that iCAN was not directly concerned with this function.
- The iCAN programme was meeting gateway points so far.

The Chair invited Committee members to raise any points relating to the progress of the iCAN scrutiny review that they wished the Committee to consider.

RESOLVED that: the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the update on the iCAN Scrutiny Review.

65. **People Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2021/22**

The Chair introduced the draft Annual Report by the Committee for Full Council, highlighting that it illustrated that the Committee had done a significant amount of work from a standing start.

The Chair invited Committee members to raise any points on the draft Annual Report that they wished the Committee to consider. Committee members made the following points:

- The Committee had covered a lot of ground in its first year. It was important that Overview and Scrutiny asked challenging questions on the areas it considered.
- The Committee had gathered a lot of information in its first year and had established a good relationship with those it scrutinised. Looking ahead it should aim to make more recommendations. The Annual Report should make reference to this.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the Annual Report to Council, subject to the addition to the Looking Ahead section of an acknowledgement that the Committee aimed to make more recommendations in future.

66. **Review of Committee Work Programme**

The Chair introduced the report and went on to advise that she was seeking to establish more regular liaison with each of the portfolio holders whose portfolios came under the wide-ranging remit of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair planned to see each on a quarterly basis in future, which should help to

inform the Committee's work programme and help with pre-decision scrutiny of issues at an early stage.

The Committee considered the latest version of the work programme. Committee members raised the need for the Committee to receive more regular information on performance against Key Performance Indicators for the service areas within its remit, although it was acknowledged that this might be done using relevant existing reports such as the quarterly performance report presented to the Cabinet.

The Committee considered additional potential areas for inclusion in the work programme that had been suggested by the Director of Communities and Opportunities. Committee members highlighted that the challenge for scrutiny was to establish what was most useful to spend time on. The Committee was subsequently advised of the opportunity for it to seek further information about potential topics to inform its decision. The Chair also noted the potential to apply different approaches to different topics and highlighted the 'one-day scrutiny enquiry' model that had been discussed in the Overview and Scrutiny training session held the previous week.

The Committee was advised of and considered a proposal by the Director of Public Health that it hold a workshop-style meeting at the end of July 2022 to consider the delivery of the Household Support Fund Scheme 2.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Agreed to seek more regular information on performance against key performance indicators for the Council service areas within the Committee's remit.
- b) Agreed to include in its work programme potential items of business on the Council's Housing Solutions Transformation Plan and Housing Allocation Policy.
- c) Agreed the following items of business for the Committee meeting on 15 September 2022:
 - Adult Social worker recruitment and retention, including use of Workforce Recruitment and Retention funding
 - Special educational needs and disability support
 - Housing Solutions Transformation Plan
- d) Requested to receive further information about a potential item of business on Communities & Opportunities Directorate key contracts and delivery plans to enable the Committee to confirm at its next meeting whether to proceed with scrutiny.
- e) Agreed to hold a remote workshop-style meeting at the end of July 2022 on the Household Support Fund Scheme 2.

67. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____