



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Chamber, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester NN12 6AD on Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Rosie Herring (Chair)
Councillor Azizur Rahman
Councillor Harry Barrett
Councillor Imran Ahmed Chowdhury BEM
Councillor Raymond Connolly
Councillor Nigel Hinch
Councillor Greg Lunn
Councillor Bob Purser
Councillor Wendy Randall
Councillor Emma Roberts
Councillor Sue Sharps
Councillor Nick Sturges-Alex

Also Present: Councillor Matt Golby

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Karen Cooper
Councillor Mike Warren

Officers: Stuart Lackenby, Executive Director - Adults Communities and Wellbeing
James Edmunds, Democratic Services Assistant Manager
Kathryn Holton, Committee Officer

Before the start of the meeting the Committee observed a minute of silent reflection in recognition of the current situation in Ukraine.

42. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were no requests from members of the public to address the meeting.

44. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 25 January 2022 were agreed as an accurate record, subject to the amendment noted below.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the minutes of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 25 January 2022, subject to the amendment of minute 37, sixth paragraph, third bullet point to refer to 'prospective employees' not 'prospective employers'.

45. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair advised that she had had a useful discussion with representatives from Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) learning more about the organisation.

The formal committee meeting this evening would be followed immediately by a workshop session to discuss the WNC Housing Strategy.

46. **West Northamptonshire Anti-Poverty Strategy**

The Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration commented on the aims and development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy, advising that the new Administration at WNC had prioritised commitment to an Anti-Poverty Strategy. A cross-party open process had built on work previously done by Northampton Borough Council. The draft Anti-Poverty Strategy was almost ready but had been held back until April 2022 to allow time to go through the Cabinet process properly and was awaiting some funding. The development of the strategy had been a good exercise in collaboration, which would make a difference to residents and align with other work taking place in West Northamptonshire.

The Chair and Councillor Roberts, who had been involved in the working group contributing to the development of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy, commented that it had been a good piece of collaborative work, which had allowed scope for constructive challenge.

The Executive Director, Adults, Communities and Wellbeing presented an overview of the development and key themes of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Executive Director stated that the starting point had been to identify areas across the country which had already prioritised anti-poverty. Areas of good practice were looked for, with reporting mechanisms to hold to account. Salford City Council (SCC) was identified as particularly experienced. SCC had high levels of deprivation, together with areas of affluence and had taken forward a nuanced approach which was inspiring. SCC's mayor was on their second term and had made anti-poverty a single priority of both terms of office. SCC required an annual report to the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and full council. The biggest learning had been the principle of getting started. There was a commitment to reducing the circumstances leading to poverty.

The West Northamptonshire Anti-Poverty Strategy document was a structured document based on that of SCC, but with a WNC direction. A Poverty Truth Commission (PTC) had been established, whereby those in poverty were encouraged to report on their situation and what they considered WNC could do differently. The vision was for a fairer and more inclusive West Northamptonshire.

Three priorities were identified as follows:

- Supporting people currently struggling in poverty – for example improving communication and access to support, increasing access to affordable credit, welfare and debt advice.
- Preventing people falling into poverty in the first place – for example, fuel collaboratives, equipping young adults, ensuring housing provision is of good quality, supportive communities and partnership working.
- Influencing government and national organisations to get best deal for local people. Focussing on anti-poverty had benefits for wider communities.

Nine outcome measures were identified which would be monitored quarterly to the HWB and annually to council. It would be naïve to think that poverty could be eradicated quickly; it needed to be a long-term priority.

Three questions were proposed as suggested areas for scrutiny:

- Do you agree with the three priorities and strategic objectives outlined?
- Have we identified those communities most vulnerable?
- Do you agree the outcomes highlighted will tell us if we are making a difference?

Following the presentation, members of the committee asked questions and made comments:

- How much additional money had been allocated to support the strategy and where would it come from? Who had been involved in developing the strategy?
- Had the development of the strategy been informed by research done on the needs of community groups, like the Bangladeshi community?
- General attitudes to poverty needed to be measured. Recent national serious case reviews had noted that social workers had become inured to poverty and did not recognize its impact. There had been evidence that poor outcomes among minority ethnic communities was a result of the attitudes of staff in services.
- Concern was expressed about the difficulties small businesses experienced in applying for loans and grants from the council. Small businesses played an important role in keeping money within the local community. It was suggested that the next phase of the anti-poverty strategy could focus on the business community.
- In addition to the nine measures outlined, could children in care be added? Even once in care, children could be in poverty and did not always have access to education resulting in young adults leaving the care system without the necessary skills and resources to live a life out of poverty.
- How much of the anti-poverty strategy was focussed on urban rather than rural issues? Those in rural areas experienced transport difficulties – for example, getting to health providers was difficult.
- It was important to work collaboratively with local groups rather than dictating to them.
- The owner-occupied sector needed to be monitored. The inability to pay a mortgage could result in poverty and loss of a home. There was hidden poverty in rural areas, such as fuel poverty because of reliance on oil.

The Executive Director for Adults, Communities and Wellbeing and the Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration responded to the points raised by members as follows:

- The oversight group was a cross-party group of about 25 members, together with voluntary sector organisations and officers. Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire had organised the PTC. There would be opportunities for members and others to influence the policy going forward. WNC received a public health grant with a resource of one-off monies which could be used to support local people which would kick start the policy. Evaluation of effectiveness needed an ongoing business case to be developed.
- Information concerning the Bangladeshi community could be shared separately.
- In Salford the mayor and the council accepted that the council could contribute to poverty if strategies and services didn't fit together well. The council needed to work with others to remove barriers.
- There was a need to ensure that support for all, including local businesses, was as fair and accessible as possible.
- Connectivity was key. Place (West Northamptonshire) divided into Localities (Daventry, South Northants, Northampton), which would break down into Neighbourhoods of about 45,000 people. Local neighbourhood profiles would then be developed with partnerships to support the delivery of improvement plans.
- Representatives from a wide range of organisations had been involved in the development of the anti-poverty strategy in order to ensure a collaborative approach.
- The development of the anti-poverty strategy was a starting point to raise awareness. Specific issues would be addressed in working groups.

The Committee considered potential conclusions on the elements of the Anti-Poverty Strategy presented to it at the meeting, taking account of the potential areas for scrutiny that were highlighted, and how it should seek to scrutinise the results produced by the strategy in future.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Recommended that all new policies to be adopted by West Northamptonshire Council should have an anti-poverty impact assessment.
- b) Agreed to seek to scrutinise the substance of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Annual Report two months before the final Annual Report was presented to Full Council.
- c) Endorsed the elements of the Anti-Poverty Strategy presented at the current meeting and looked forward to further scrutiny of the full Strategy.

47. **Review of Committee Work Programme 2021/22**

The Chair introduced the report setting out the latest version of the Work Programme, highlighting the following points:

- The Committee needed to identify the items of business for its meeting on 25 April 2022. It might consider inviting the Regional Schools Commissioner or Healthwatch Northamptonshire to attend this meeting.
- Task and finish scrutiny work was progressing. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Scrutiny Panel had five scheduled meeting dates in March – May 2022.

The Integrated Care across Northamptonshire (iCAN) Scrutiny Panel was next due to meet in April 2022.

The Committee considered the report and members made the following points during the course of discussion:

- The Committee should seek an update on adult social care recruitment and retention at its next meeting in addition to the other potential items highlighted.
- Councillor Roberts, as Chair of the iCAN Scrutiny Panel, advised that she was happy with the progress made so far.
- The Committee should seek reassurance before its next meeting about how WNC had used adult social care Workforce Recruitment and Retention funding; the results produced; whether all of the funding received would be used by the deadline; and whether WNC risked losing any unused funding.

RESOLVED: that the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a) Agreed to invite the Regional Schools Commissioner to attend the Committee meeting on 25 April 2022 to discuss matters relating to the performance of academy schools in West Northamptonshire.
- b) Agreed to invite Northamptonshire Healthwatch to attend the Committee meeting on 25 April 2022 to discuss issues it had identified through its work in 2021-22.
- c) Requested to receive an update on adult social care social worker recruitment and retention to the Committee meeting on 25 April 2022.
- d) Agreed to write to the Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Wellbeing and Health Integration and the Executive Director, Adults, Communities and Wellbeing seeking reassurance that adult social care Workforce Recruitment and Retention funding provided to West Northamptonshire Council would be used before the 31 March 2022 deadline.

48. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.30 pm

Chair: _____

Date: _____