

# Bristol City Council

## Minutes of the People Scrutiny Commission

27 September 2023 at 6.00 pm



### **Members Present:-**

**Councillors:** Christine Townsend (Chair), Sarah Classick (Vice-Chair), Kerry Bailes, Brenda Massey, Sharon Scott, Lisa Stone, Mark Weston, Tim Wye and Katja Hornchen

### **1 Confirmation of Chair**

The Commission was notified that Councillor Tim Kent had stepped down as Chair of the People Scrutiny Commission, with Councillor Christine Townsend nominated as the new Chair. The appointment of Cllr Townsend as Chair of the People Scrutiny Commission was confirmed.

**Resolved; That the People Scrutiny Commission confirm the appointment of Cllr Christine Townsend as Chair.**

### **2 Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information**

The Chair welcomed the attendees. Health and Safety information was provided.

### **3 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

No apologies were received.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were received.



## 5 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

**RESOLVED; That the Minutes of the previous meeting be approved.**

## 6 Chair's Business

The Chair noted that the meeting was filmed by a member of the public.

## 7 Public Forum

Public Forum questions and statements were published prior to the meeting and can be viewed [here](#)

Jen Smith submitted 5 questions and received written responses as detailed in the Public Forum pack. Three supplementary questions were raised.

Following the response provided to question 3, Ms Smith noted that as 42 people responses had been received to the FACE survey out of 554 families affected, and queried whether this suggested a failure of engagement. The Director for Education and Skills challenged this assessment. It was noted that the survey was sent to all active members.

Following the response to question 4, Ms Smith raised a concern that relying on families that required additional assistance to identify themselves would be onerous. The Director for Education and Skills stated that a mechanism was in place for engagement and provided assurance that no family that was unable to pay would be asked to do so. A PSC Member noted the concern in light of the ongoing cost of living crisis and anticipated migrations to Universal Credit.

Following the response provided to question 5 regarding the delayed ALP payments, Ms Smith highlighted that those delays would have also resulted in missed education and queried how this could be addressed. The Director for Education and Skills agreed to provide a written response to this. The Chair noted that she had been pleased to see more staff had been assigned to this area and hoped this would lead to future improvements.

Jen Smith also presented a Public Forum statement regarding Bristol Autism Project.

Dan Akroyd submitted a question regarding the complaints submitted by parents of students with SEN, and received a written response. As a supplementary question he suggested that the response did not fully address the question querying why the complaints process could not prioritise certain submissions.



Cllr Craig confirmed that the response was accurate. The complaints policy itself would need to be changed in order to address this, which itself would have to be agreed by Full Council.

Sally Kent submitted 8 questions regarding the EHCP update and received written responses.

**RESOLVED; That the Public Forum be noted, and that additional responses to supplementary questions be provided.**

## **8 PSC Annual Business Report**

The Scrutiny Advisor presented the Annual Business Report for noting. This confirmed the Commission's membership and Terms of Reference, as agreed in Full Council in May 2023.

**RESOLVED; That the People Scrutiny Commission note the PSC Annual Business Report.**

## **9 SEND Update (Standing Item)**

The Director for Education and Skills presented an update against the performance of Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments. It was noted that this was to remain a standing item for future meetings in 2023-24.

Key points of the presentation included:

- There had been a general increase in the demand for the service in 2023, with a resultant impact on team performance.
- The first and second quarters of the year showed a 6% increase in EHC Needs Assessments against the same period in 2022-23, and an improvement in the number of Assessments meeting the wait time.
- A commitment to invest in process improvements had been made with the support of a commissioned delivery partner. This improvement work had a lens on sustainability and aimed for a cultural change.
- The commitment to improving Needs Assessment timeliness was emphasised.

A Member raised the concern that issues in this area had been known for some time but that, to date, it had not been possible to get ahead of the problems. The Director for Education and Skills stated that Bristol City Council recognised that systems and process change was required. This was being addressed by working with schools and intervening as early as possible. Officers were clear that there was no single solution, and part of the work involved ensuring that the processes in place allowed for the flexibility to meet the needs of individuals.



A Member raised a particular concern around tribunals. This was recognised as a national issue. It was noted that there had been a 24% decrease in tribunals from the previous year.

It was queried whether the cause of the national increase in pressure on the system was known. Nationally, there had been an increase in diagnoses as well as in general population, without a proportional growth in funding. Locally, as a sanctuary city Bristol had seen an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers who may have had complex needs.

The issues around transition between education and Adult Social Care was recognised. This topic had been identified as a topic for further in-depth Scrutiny work later in the 2023-24 year. This was recognised within both the Adult Social Care and Our Families transformation programmes and formed a key part of ongoing work.

Officers noted that there were peak times of year in May-July and October-November in which there would be an increase in the number of applications. These peaks had a subsequent impact on timeliness, but there was a consistent priority to meet a 20-week timeline.

A Member queried whether looking at the outliers in completion time would identify blockages. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Equalities suggested that the reports sent to the SEND Improvement Board could provide further information on this, and was happy for Officers to share these with Members.

The SEND Team Manager noted that there had been some recent additional support to Senior Inclusion Officers and was hopeful in seeing an impact of this resource. The average case load had been increasing yearly due to the volume of Annual Reviews.

The ability to record outcomes had now been built into the system, using a portal to send schools a digital copy of an EHCP to both ensure that an updated version was being used and as a reminder for an Annual Review. This should support efficiency within the team.

Officers were thanked for the report.

**RESOLVED; That the People Scrutiny Commission note the report.**

## **10 'Our Families' Transformation Programme Update (Standing Item)**

The Director for Children and Education Transformation presented an update against the Transformation Programme. It was noted that this was to remain a standing item for future meetings in 2023-24.

- The Transformation Programme aimed to prioritise children and families through a total redesign of the operating model.
- The complex and challenging environment for Children and Education services was acknowledged, alongside the tension between the improvement challenge and financial



constraints. The publication of recent Cabinet Papers noted the significant financial challenges, particularly in home-school travel and the high cost of placements.

- The three core elements of the Our Families Programme approach focused on
  - 1) Demand – addressing the level of need
  - 2) Supply – evaluating how resources are commissioned and delivered
  - 3) Workforce – organising and supporting staff in the most effective way
- Workforce retention was noted as both a local and national issue. Nationally more social workers were leaving the profession, and locally it was known that Bristol was not aligned with market rates.
- Home to school travel was identified as a key pressure point, as this had increased alongside the increase in EHCPs. With more out of area placements the knock-on effect had doubled the cost of transport. Proposals to address the issues included consideration of a Bristol City Council owned fleet of transport.

Members queried how sustainable improvement could be delivered at the same time as cutting budgets. The Director for Children's Transformation stated this would be by re-examining all systems and processes for efficiency. There were opportunities to make some processes automated and remove some bureaucracies. It was clear that some difficult decisions would be needed, while still protecting statutory duties. Joint working with Adult Social Care around commissioning was also expected to produce some improvements and savings. Officers welcomed suggestions for ideas and alternative ways to look at demand and deliver efficiencies.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Equalities noted that the largest outlay was around out of area placements. Cases were being regularly reviewed to help address this. Work was also being undertaken with neighbouring Local Authorities to develop provision across the region.

A Member queried how risk was being managed in light of high caseloads for social workers. The Director for Children and Families stated that there was a clear culture of expectation that risk would be held at the senior level. Weekly meetings were held for senior leaders to examine stress points and identify where available capacity could be utilised.

Quality assurance around the use of taxis as home-to-school transport was raised.

Social worker salaries were discussed. It was noted that under the new operating model these would be brought in line with the region as part of the efforts to improve consistency in the workforce. A national campaign to assign key worker status to social workers was noted. The same issues were being seen under Adult Social Care and would be looked at jointly. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care noted the useful cross working between Children & Education and Adult Social Care that had been taking place to jointly consider approaches to issues like expensive placements and supported housing.

Members emphasised the importance of building local facilities. The local campaign to promote fostering had been noted.

The Officers were thanked for the report.



**RESOLVED; That the People Scrutiny Commission note the report.**

## **1 New Assurance Framework for Adult Social Care**

**1**

The Executive Director for Adults and Communities delivered a presentation on the new framework for Care Quality Commission assessments. Key points included:

- In April 2023 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) was granted new regulatory powers to assess Adult Social Care.
- A Single Assessment Framework for the assessments had been provided. This comprised 4 themes, each of which would be rated as part of an assessment.
  - o Working with People
  - o Providing Support
  - o Ensuring Safety
  - o Leadership
- Particular attention was drawn to Appendix A outlining nine Quality Statements that Local Authorities must commit to, and corresponding 'I' Statements on what people expected.
- There was an expectation of the first inspections under the new framework beginning in December 2023 or January 2024, with a nine-week lead in period for selected Local Authorities.
- Preparation for a self-assessment in Bristol was underway, and an LGA Adult Social Care Preparation for Assurance Peer Challenge was scheduled for week of 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

A Member noted the four themes outlined and queried if any were expected to be limiting or binary in the same way that Safeguarding was in an Ofsted inspection. This was not yet known, but not anticipated. It was known that Leadership was weighted heavily in the Key Lines of Enquiry.

A Member asked if any themes or issues in Bristol were of particular concern. Areas for improvement were known, particularly around progressing Section 42 enquiries, and the workforce issues in Adult Social Care were the same as previously identified in Children's Social Care. A Continuous Improvement Plan was being developed; this was not a requirement of the inspection but intended to demonstrate awareness of the issues with plans to address.

Officers thanked colleagues in Children's Social Care for their support and advice in preparation for the new assessments.

**RESOLVED; That the People Scrutiny Commission note the report.**

## **12 Adult Social Care Transformation Programme Update (Standing Item)**



The Executive Director for Adults and Communities presented an update against the Transformation Programme. It was noted that this was to remain a standing item for future meetings in 2023-24.

Key points included:

- The Adult Social Care Transformation Programme was originally established in 2021-22 but had been re-set to address the increased urgency of financial pressures.
- Social Care systems were under pressure nationally with councils focusing on more complex cases out of hospital settings and working with younger adults in communities. The impact of Covid had also been severe.
- Locally, Bristol was the fastest growing core city with a high percentage of disabled adults. 5500 adults in Bristol were in receipt of Adult Social Care services, an increase since 2019.
- Recent Bristol City Council Cabinet papers had shown that 45-50% of the budget was devoted to Adult Social Care, with 75% going to Social Care overall. Savings proposals were being examined, including proposals on reducing the purchasing budget.
- Work was being undertaken on developing in house services. As with the Our Families Programme, a range of activity was in place to manage demand with more preventative and community solutions.

Members emphasised the importance of housing-based solutions, noting case work examples of long waits for appropriate places. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care highlighted the benefit of regular evaluation of placements and care packages to ensure appropriate levels of care were being provided. Some providers had been identified with capacity to offer step down care.

The support needs for carers was raised. It was queried what options for breaks were available, including areas where a carer could take a service user for a short break in an appropriate environment. Considerations of this were anticipated in the next phase of the programme. It was agreed that further discussions around carers needs could be held as the programme developed.

Community support was discussed. The proposal of a Bristol City Council owned fleet for home-to-school travel had also been raised as a potential benefit for community use. This was relevant to those who relied on buses for community transport and may have found further travel isolating.

**RESOLVED; That the People Scrutiny Commission note the report.**

### **13 Q1 2023-24 PSC Risk Report**

The Risk Report was submitted to the People Scrutiny Commission for consideration.

**RESOLVED; That the People Scrutiny Commission note the report.**

### **14 Q4 2022-23 PSC Performance Report**



The Performance Report was submitted to the PSC for consideration. It was agreed that questions raised were to be directed to relevant Officers as actions. Future reports were expected to be received as a dashboard.

The Chair noted the statement that school meals were no longer being used as a measure of poverty, and queried what was being used in its place. It was agreed that an answer would be provided.

**RESOLVED; That further information clarifying the use of school meals as a poverty indicator is sought; the People Scrutiny Commission note the report;**

## **15 Adoption West Annual Report (For Noting)**

The Adoption West Annual Report had been added to the agenda for the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 People Scrutiny Commission once the document became available with the expectation that this would form a more substantial item at the following People Scrutiny Commission on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023. Following discussion it was agreed that this would not be necessary and an informational Members Briefing on the report would be sufficient

**RESOLVED; That 1) the People Scrutiny Commission note the report; that 2) a Member's Briefing be arranged regarding the Adoption West Annual Report.**

## **16 Scrutiny Work Programme**

The Work Programme was noted. Revisions were anticipated with updates to be circulated once available.

Meeting ended at 8.30pm

