

**Committee and Date**

People Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

21st October 2026

PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**Minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2026**

In the Council Chamber, The Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury, SY3 8HQ

6.00 - 7.53 pm

Responsible Officer: Shelley Davies

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Present

Councillor Mandy Duncan (Chairman)

Councillors Neil Bentley (Vice Chairman), Susan Coleman (remotely), Dawn Husemann (remotely - substitute for Thomas Clayton), Duncan Kerr, Mark Morris, Alan Mosley, Wendy Owen, Colin Taylor and Teri Trickett.

Other Members in Attendance:

Councillor Ruth Houghton – Portfolio Holder for Social Care

Councillor Andy Hall – Portfolio Holder for Children and Education (remotely)

Councillor Roger Evans – Portfolio Holder for Finance (remotely)

Officers in Attendance:

David Shaw – Director Children's Services

Sonya Miller – Service Director Children's & Young People

Laura Tyler – Service Director Commissioning

Cezar Sarbu – Service Manager Ops Central

Natasha Moody - Families First Partnership Strategic Lead

Tom Dodds - Strategy and Scrutiny Manager and Statutory Scrutiny Officer

4 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Thomas Clayton (substitute: Dawn Husemann – remotely).

5 Disclosable Interests

Councillor Mark Morris declared that he operated a private hire business which provided school and SEND transport.

6 Minutes**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd April and 14th May 2026 be confirmed as an accurate record.

7 Public Questions

There were no public questions.

8 Member Questions

There were no member questions.

The Chairman advised that, having reviewed the reports, she considered that the Local SEND Reform Plan would address a number of issues likely to arise during discussion of the Ofsted Shropshire Area Thematic Visit report. Therefore in order to avoid duplication and make the best use of the Committee's time, the order of the agenda would be amended for Item 9, Local SEND Reform Plan, to be considered before Item 8, Ofsted Shropshire Area Thematic Visit and that questions on both items be taken together.

9 Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report – Care and Wellbeing

Cezar Sarbu, Service Manager Ops Central, presented the Quarterly Performance Monitoring report, outlining the continued challenges facing Adult Social Care due to sustained demand, increasing complexity of need and the challenges of delivering services across a large rural county. He advised that despite these pressures, the service had maintained a strong focus on prevention, early intervention and supporting people to remain independent.

Members were updated on the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme, including the Prevent, Reduce and Delay and Complex Pathway approaches. The report also highlighted performance against national comparators, safeguarding activity, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), recent legal changes arising from a Supreme Court ruling, and preparations for the forthcoming Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection. Cezar advised that data submissions to the CQC were due in July, with the on-site inspection expected in September.

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Councillor Ruth Houghton, commended the comprehensiveness of the report and thanked officers for their work in preparing for the CQC inspection, noting the significant effort required to meet the inspection timetable.

In response to a question about which areas of performance officers were most proud of, Cezar Sarbu explained that it would be difficult and unfair to single out particular teams, as all areas of Adult Social Care made valuable contributions. He highlighted the importance of safeguarding work and the service's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. Laura Tyler, Service Director Commissioning agreed that it was difficult to identify only one or two areas of performance because there were strong examples of good practice across the service. She highlighted that Adult Social Care was seeing positive outcomes through its preventative approach and that there were good examples of support helping people remain independent.

Members queried how the Council worked with partners to avoid duplication, delays and unnecessary costs within health and social care pathways. In response it was explained that a range of checks, communication processes and escalation routes were in place between social care, NHS partners, district nurses and care providers.

In response to a query about how carers and family members could raise concerns or report issues, Cezar Sarbu advised that care and support plans contained details of allocated social workers and team contact numbers and duty arrangements operate during office hours, supported by an Emergency Duty Team out of hours, while the First Point of Contact service provided a clear route for members of the public to raise concerns and access support.

Councillor Houghton, the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care added that one of the service's key strengths was supporting more people to remain living independently in their own homes and communities, which aligned with the preferences of residents. She highlighted recent examples of successful hospital discharge arrangements and reassured members that robust communication systems and safety nets were in place to support people when issues arose.

The Chairman asked officers to identify the greatest risks ahead of the CQC inspection. Officers advised that the greatest challenges remained the waiting lists for Occupational Therapy and DoLS assessments. It was acknowledged that these pressures were significant but noted that they reflected national issues rather than concerns unique to Shropshire. Officers explained that the focus was on ensuring people were supported to "wait well", with robust risk assessments, prioritisation processes and regular reviews in place to manage risk while individuals waited for services. They also highlighted the need to further strengthen support for unpaid carers and improve access to information and advice as areas of ongoing improvement.

In response to a question regarding the scale of waiting lists, Cezar Sarbu explained that demand for assessments continued to exceed capacity in some areas. He noted that DoLS assessments were experiencing significant pressures due to national increases in demand and legislative changes, with waiting times in some cases extending for long periods. He emphasised that robust prioritisation arrangements, risk assessments and regular contact with providers were in place to ensure individuals with the greatest need received support first and that changes in circumstances were identified promptly.

The Committee thanked staff for their work, particularly in preparation for the forthcoming CQC inspection. Members agreed that issues such as waiting lists, support for carers and performance monitoring may merit further consideration within the Committee's future work programme.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted:

- The Quarter 4 Performance Report update;

- The transformation programme themes for adult social care;
- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) impending inspection for adult social care; and
- The change in legislation around Deprivation of Liberty safeguards.

10 **Children's Services Quarter 1 Performance Report and National Local Outcomes Performance Framework Scorecard**

David Shaw, Director of Children's Services, introduced the Quarter 1 Performance Report and National Local Outcomes Performance Framework Scorecard and advised that officers had sought to provide a comprehensive picture of performance across Children's Services, including the development of a draft performance scorecard requested by the Committee.

Sonya Miller, Service Director for Children and Young People, explained that the scorecard was designed to complement the existing Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) by providing a clearer strategic overview of key performance indicators and outcomes and had been developed around the themes of the National Outcomes Framework. She advised that existing performance data showed Children's Services continuing to perform strongly overall, although demand across the system remained high and added that the scorecard would provide an important baseline against which future improvements could be measured.

The Chairman welcomed the inclusion of comparative and benchmarking data within the scorecard, noting that it provided useful context regarding areas of strong performance and areas requiring further improvement.

Concern was raised about adoption timeliness, particularly the length of time taken to place children with adoptive families. Sonya Miller advised that increased case complexity, particularly involving sibling groups, had contributed to delays despite an increase in adoption activity since joining the Together for Children Regional Adoption Agency. She confirmed that the matter had been raised with the Together for Children Board and that performance continued to be closely monitored.

Members requested that future reports should more clearly link performance information with financial data, enabling members to understand both the effectiveness and efficiency of Children's Services activity and demonstrate how Children's Services activity was contributing towards reducing financial pressures on the Council. David Shaw acknowledged the need to strengthen links between performance and financial reporting and advised that officers were exploring cost and outcome benchmarking to inform future reports. He highlighted the long-term financial benefits of prevention and early intervention and agreed to consider how these savings could be presented more clearly to members. He also agreed to circulate Local Government Association benchmarking information.

Sonya Miller added that much of the financial pressure within Children's Social Care related to residential placements for children in care. She explained that while the majority of looked after children were placed in family-based settings, around 100

children were in high-cost residential placements, which represented the greatest area of financial challenge. She advised that significant work was being undertaken to safely step children down from residential placements into family-based care wherever appropriate, and that officers would consider how to better report both cost reduction and cost avoidance achieved through this work.

Laura Tyler, Service Director Commissioning added that while financial pressures remained significant, officers needed to improve how they communicated both the cost avoidance achieved through placement negotiations and commissioning activity and the work underway to reduce future costs across Children's Services and Adult Social Care. She advised that considerable work was being undertaken behind the scenes and agreed that improvements could be made in reporting this more transparently to members.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report, welcomed the draft scorecard approach and requested that future reports include clearer links between performance, financial outcomes, cost avoidance and service improvement activities to support effective scrutiny of Children's Services performance.

11 The Local SEND Reform Plan

Natasha Moody, Families First Partnership (FFP) Strategic Lead presented the Local SEND Reform Plan, which was developed in response to national SEND reforms and increasing financial pressures. She explained that the Government had invited Local Authorities to submit reform plans to address High Needs deficits, with the potential for significant historic SEND debt to be written off if approved. The plan aims to create a more inclusive and sustainable system through earlier intervention, stronger mainstream provision, improved access to specialist support and greater delivery of services closer to home.

Natasha advised that the plan was the first stage of a wider programme of reform and had been developed within challenging timescales. While the Department for Education supported the direction of travel, further work was required on data, financial management and performance oversight. The national report shared by Grant Thornton, taking learning from their national client base, had also highlighted that strong financial governance, commissioning and partnership working, alongside addressing wider system limitations within the national SEND system, were key components of developing a sustainable local and national SEND system.

Natasha Moody then presented Item 8, Ofsted Shropshire Area Thematic Visit. In accordance with the approach agreed by the Chairman at the start of the meeting, members considered Items 8 and 9 together, with questions taken across both reports due to the overlap in subject matter.

12 Ofsted - Shropshire Area Thematic Visit

Natasha Moody, Families First Partnership (FFP) Strategic Lead, presented the findings of the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission SEND thematic visit, which reviewed the effectiveness of Shropshire's SEND arrangements. Inspectors found strong strategic leadership, partnership working and a clear commitment to inclusion, with leaders demonstrating a good understanding of local needs and performance challenges. However, they noted that improvements made at a strategic level were not yet being consistently felt by children and families.

Inspectors also praised practitioner engagement and the work of SENDIASS, although feedback from parents indicated that they did not always feel fully involved in decision-making. While services were found to be inclusive and supported by knowledgeable staff, families reported that the local offer could be difficult to navigate and that personal relationships often helped them access support more effectively than digital information alone. Inspectors concluded that the partnership was moving in the right direction and encouraged continued progress in governance, communication and inclusion.

Questions from members focused on issues discussed in conjunction with the SEND Reform Plan.

The Vice-Chairman asked how the Council would secure enough Educational Psychologists to support the reforms without increasing reliance on agency staff. Natasha Moody advised that recruitment remained a national challenge and that the Council was developing its own workforce through trainee and assistant Educational Psychologist roles. She also highlighted the need to promote Shropshire as an attractive place to live and work. David Shaw added that regional work was underway to manage agency costs, expand training opportunities and lobby Government to increase national recruitment pathways.

Members welcomed the emphasis placed on personal relationships and direct engagement with families rather than relying solely on digital systems. It was suggested that Government workforce policies were restricting recruitment pools for specialist roles and therefore proposed that the concerns be raised with national policymakers. The Chairman supported the principle of seeking reassurance regarding future workforce availability and recruitment challenges and agreed with Councillor Houghton's suggestion to review workforce recruitment and retention progress across both Adults' and Children's Services in 12 months' time.

Members queried whether sufficient outreach support was available in schools to identify and respond to SEND needs before specialist placements were required. Natasha Moody advised that the reform plan included enhanced outreach from special schools and support to build expertise within mainstream settings. While teacher recruitment was generally stable, challenges remained in recruiting teaching assistants, particularly in rural areas. David Shaw highlighted successful initiatives such as the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme and emphasised the importance of monitoring workforce capacity as the reforms progressed.

Members emphasised the importance of listening directly to children and young people, citing an example of a young person whose engagement improved once provision reflected their interests and aspirations. Natasha Moody agreed and highlighted the development of the Young Ambassadors programme, which would help ensure children's voices informed future decision-making. She also outlined the role of SENDIASS, the Parent Carer Forum and wider engagement activities, including the forthcoming "Big Listen" events, which would gather feedback directly from children, young people and families. David Shaw added that feedback from children and young people did not always mirror the views of parents and carers, reinforcing the importance of hearing directly from young people themselves.

The Chairman sought further information on the benefits realisation framework within the reform plan and sought clarification regarding governance arrangements and the role of the Children's Ambition Board. Natasha Moody advised that a framework was being developed to monitor savings, reinvestment and service improvements and would be brought back to the Committee to support future scrutiny. She explained that strategic oversight sat with the Children's Ambition Board, chaired by the Chief Executive and responsible for driving wider ambitions to make Shropshire a more child-friendly County. David Shaw added that governance arrangements would continue to evolve alongside wider discussions about the Health and Wellbeing Board and partnership structures.

Members asked about the financial impact of the planned end of the statutory override and future SEND deficits. Natasha Moody advised that detailed financial modelling formed part of the reform plan and would be considered by the Finance and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She noted that alternative options would be explored if government support was not secured. David Shaw added that the statutory override had been extended while national SEND reforms and funding arrangements continued to be developed.

The Committee noted the significant implications of the SEND Reform Plan and requested ongoing updates on workforce capacity, benefits realisation, performance and the involvement of children and families. In relation to the Ofsted Thematic Visit, members welcomed the positive findings on partnership working, leadership and inclusion, while recognising the need to improve family engagement, access to the local offer and outcomes for children and young people. Future scrutiny will continue to focus on performance, governance and lived experiences.

13 Work Programme

Tom Dodds, Strategy and Scrutiny Manager and Statutory Scrutiny Officer presented the draft work programme and reminded members that it reflected the outcomes of the recent strategic work programming session.

A number of themes arising from the meeting which may warrant future scrutiny, including support for unpaid carers, workforce recruitment and retention, SEND reforms and the financial impacts of preventative services were highlighted by Tom Dodds and he suggested that members may wish to hold a dedicated informal session to review the work programme in greater detail and agree future priorities.

In response, the Chairman agreed that the Committee had covered a significant amount of ground during the meeting and identified a number of clear areas for ongoing scrutiny. She supported arranging a further session to review and refine the work programme and thanked members and officers for their contributions to the discussion.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the draft work programme and agreed that it should be reviewed to reflect the priorities identified during the meeting, with a further session arranged to consider and prioritise future work in more detail.

14 Date of Next Meeting

Members noted that the next meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Meeting will be held on Wednesday 21st October 2026 at 6.00 p.m.

Signed (Chairman)

Date: