



Committee and Date

Council

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Item

Public



Annual Report – People Overview Committee 2023/24

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Scrutiny Chair:	Peggy Mullock		

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 People Overview Committee looked at a range of key topics in 2023/2024 which are summarised in this paper.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Shropshire Plan includes 'Healthy Organisation' as a priority outcome and the Strategic Objective that "We will ensure councillors are supported to advocate for their constituents but to also be ambassadors for the Council".
- 2.2 Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the governance of the council, where councillors who are not on Cabinet can hold decision makers to account and make evidence-based recommendations to inform and influence the development of policy.
- 2.3 This report shares the annual statement for 2023/24 for the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2.4 The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews the implementation of existing policies and considers the scope for new policies for all aspects of the discharge of the Council's functions concerning the provision of personal services for adults and children including social care, safeguarding, special needs services, schools and learning. The Committee does this by:

- Assessing the effectiveness of decisions of the Cabinet in these areas of the Council's statutory activity
- Relating scrutiny to the achievement of the Council's strategic priorities as described in the Shropshire Plan.
- Making reports and recommendations as appropriate arising from this area of overview and scrutiny.

2.5 The topic areas which the Committee reviewed are:

- All Age Market Management
- Children and Young People Mental Health Partnership
- Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report (across adults / children)
- Ofsted Report - Focussed Visit to Shropshire's Children's Services
- Report of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Rural Proofing in Health and Care
- Adult Social Care, Care Quality Commission (CQC) Self-Assessment

3. Recommendations

3.1 Members are asked to note and comment on the 2023/24 annual statement for People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1 Effective Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) is a feature of the Council's governance arrangements, particularly where the Council is operating executive arrangements. There are a range of factors that could result in risks to Council of not doing O&S effectively.

- Failure to challenge and hold decision makers to account.
- Failure to link O&S work to the delivery of the council's priorities and risk management
- Failure to demonstrate added value
- Failure to carry out thorough and appropriate research to make evidence-based recommendations.
- Failure to engage partners and providers.
- Failure to ensure that structures and models of operation are fit for purpose and match ambition and available resources.
- Failure to ensure that O&S can operate as the voice of communities.
- Failure to draw on member knowledge and experience to inform policy development.

4.2 To mitigate, tolerate or eradicate these risks, enablers for effective scrutiny include:

- Operating in an apolitical manner.
- Clarity of vision and purpose
- Overview and Scrutiny support availability, capability and capacity
- Effective engagement and commitment by Members and officers at all levels, including Cabinet, Opposition Leaders, Scrutiny Chairs and Senior Officers who play a central role in setting the tone and direction
- Robust work programming and prioritisation of topics with clear objectives and expected impacts
- Access to and availability of robust data and intelligence
- Good relationship with partners and providers

4.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committees have remits that cover the breadth of the work of the Council, as well as looking externally including Health Services and provision through Health Overview and Scrutiny requirements.

4.4 Topics for Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes are identified based on a number of different considerations including an understanding of risks to the Council, employees, people who use services, to services themselves, and to communities. These may be identified through reviewing performance information and comparing with others, changes to national and local policies, budget information, feedback from communities and customers/service users, feedback from partners/providers, and reports from regulators.

4.5 During Overview and Scrutiny work evidence will be gathered that builds on this understanding to inform the development of conclusions and evidence-based recommendations.

4.6 The use of external peer challenge such as that offered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny provides objective review and feedback about opportunities to develop the effectiveness and impact of Overview and Scrutiny. The Council carries out a regular review of overview and Scrutiny to collect feedback from Members and officers on what is going well and where there are opportunities for continuous improvement.

5 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with the annual statements of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees set out in this report.

5.2 Effective Overview and Scrutiny produces evidence-based recommendations. These can be informed by learning from best practice and an understanding of "what works" at other similar local authorities, as well as developing a robust picture of the situation locally based on data, intelligence and insights. Where adopted recommendations can help with the efficiency and effectiveness of services that can be delivered differently, as well as informing the development of current and new policies.

6 Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes directly link to the Shropshire Plan priorities, including Healthy Environment which is built around climate change and carbon reduction, and the natural and historic environment.

7 Background

- 7.1 The People Overview Committee considered a full range of topics from its remit, carrying out activity to both hold decision makers and the providers of services to account, as well as identifying opportunities to inform the development of services and the delivery of outcome for social care for Adults and Children and Young People. The following section provides a summary of key topics and the work done.

Market Management

- 7.2 Members were advised of the current market challenges for social care including increasing costs, demographic makeup, the rural nature of Shropshire, workforce and retention challenges, increased demand from the acute hospital trust, increase in complexity of clients, increasing number of contacts to social care, and an increase in need for mental health support.
- 7.3 Following questions and discussion the Committee were encouraged to hear that since March 2023 there has been a notable increase in the Domiciliary Care market performance resulting in much improved figures for sourcing care packages. At March 2023 sourcing approx. 90% of all required Packages of Care compared to an average of 62% in 2022 This had been achieved following the Council giving a 12% increase on the hourly rates.
- 7.4 The Committee also heard that set against these outlined challenges, that going forward there would be a focus on prevention and demand management, setting a clear market position statement, a review of supported living due to high costs (per head living in the community), a focus on technology, quality assurance, joint commissioning for community equipment provision, and workforce.
- 7.5 It was recommended by the Committee that a Task and Finish Group be formed to look at the prevention strategy and demand management. It was agreed in the November Committee that this topic would be covered by the Transformation & Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the Transformation and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Task and Finish Group.

Children and Young People Mental Health Partnership

- 7.6 The Committee sought assurance that areas of concerns they had identified in 2022-2023 were improving and invited the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT) to inform this. The areas they focused on were:
- The lack of referrals and waiting times data
 - The lack of information regarding outcomes
 - Access for rural populations to services
 - Support for 'Looked after Children
- 7.7 The Committee were pleased to have sight of the referral and waiting time data, but still had concerns over the length of time some young people were having to wait to access support. They were also re-assured by the MPFT attendees that if there was an immediate risk a child or young person was seen straight away.
- 7.8 There was recognition that families on the waiting list were now contacted by an assistant psychiatrist who was able to signpost to sources of support and noted that the introduction of direct contact had been welcomed by families. However, the Committee were concerned by the correlation between those who had been waiting longest and the worsening outcomes which highlighted that things need to be done differently.
- 7.9 It was identified that delivering services in rural areas without a base/hub is challenging due to factors such as travel time. Education providers have been invited to be a base where services can be provided from which has begun to happen. Following a discussion and suggestion from the committee that local Members could help to identify venues in their areas, it was agreed that Members would provide MPFT with a list of suitable local buildings where clinics could be delivered from. The Committee were pleased to learn that because of this, that eight new sites had been identified across the county where MPFT could deliver services to young people, with more hopefully being confirmed.
- 7.10 The Committee learned that there had been an increase in demand for services and that both Covid and the cost-of-living crisis had had a massive impact on children and young people's wellbeing.
- 7.11 Members were told that over the last decade mental health services for children and young people in Shropshire had been under-funded and there was a lack of skilled professionals and provision in this area.
- 7.12 Members agreed that the Committee should set up a joint Task and Finish Group with the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee which would investigate the concerns raised around mental health provision.

Quarterly Performance Monitoring Report

7.13 The Committee maintained their strong focus on performance, which was reported to the Committee through quarterly performance reporting. The Committee promoted the need for a move to having access to performance dashboards which aligned to the service and transformation plans and received confirmation that work was underway with the Directorate Leadership Team and Performance Team to do this. The Committee were made aware that the performance reports were from Q3 being produced on an exception basis.

7.14 Following this focused scrutiny the Committee identified the following recommendation:

- That Members would initially be provided with a briefing on the following areas and that once reviewed these may become topics of focus for the Committees future work:
 - Early Help Transformation Programme
 - The Transformation Programme
 - Demand Management
 - Preparing for Adulthood
 - Learning Disability Support
 - Recruitment and Retention in Social Work
 - Multi-Agency Working
 - Commissioning
 - Mental Health
 - Dementia
 - That there will be a six-month update regarding the SEND action plan

Ofsted Report - Focussed Visit to Shropshire's Children's Services

7.15 Members were made aware of the challenges that had led to the findings of the Inspectors and were walked through the Improvement Plan that had been drafted to address the issues and set up an Improvement Board to oversee progress. They heard that setting up the Improvement Board had been voluntarily and not directed by OFSTED or DFE.

7.16 The Members heard that the Business Support Transformation Project was a key part of the improvement journey, where admin support would ensure social workers were able to use their time more effectively on the work that their training and experience was needed for.

- 7.17 Through questioning, the Committee learned that the ideal caseload for a Social Worker was 15 – 18 children, but at the time of the meeting it was 30 plus which was too high and impacted on the quality of practice. It was identified that social worker recruitment and retention were key to improving this. It was important to reduce the number of Agency Staff to help ensure that more children had more consistent continuous relationship with a permanent social worker, as well as the financial benefits this delivers.
- 7.18 It was explained to the Committee how Shropshire is making itself an attractive place to work including working with IT to use new technology to effectively undertake key tasks, so freeing up social worker time. Also, that the establishment of community family hubs would reduce the amount of travel time for social workers.
- 7.19 Following the discussion and debate the Committee made the following recommendations:
- The Transforming Business Support Project be prioritised and given a specific timeline.
 - The Chairman of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee be invited to sit on the Improvement Board.
 - Adequate resources be given to ensure an effective recruitment campaign for social workers.

Report of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Rural Proofing in Health and Care

- 7.20 The Committee recommended that the Rural Proofing for Health Toolkit be adopted by the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a part of their own overview and scrutiny processes to support them in maintaining a robust view on the needs of their local rural populations when reviewing strategies, initiatives and service delivery plans.
- 17.21 The Committee were also keen to ensure that the town and parish councils were aware of the Toolkit and suggested this could be achieved by sharing them with the Shropshire Association of Local Council (SALC).

Care Quality Commission (CQC) Self-Assessment

- 7.22 The Committee were informed about the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessment process that was being rolled out to all local authorities, and that the Council has been contacted by CQC and as a result had submitted a self-assessment with supporting document in advance of the formal visit which took place in June. The Members were made aware of the key points arising from this self-evaluation framework and of how the future onsite visit would proceed.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Meeting Papers for the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee April 2023 to April 2024

Local Member: All

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]