



## **People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date:** Friday, 1 March 2024

**Time:** 10.30 am

**Location:** Allerdale House, Workington

**Present:** Cllr C Wills (Chair), Cllr Dr H Davison, Cllr M Eldon, Cllr S Pollen, Cllr A Pratt and Cllr H Tucker

**In Attendance** Democratic Services Officer  
Director of Adult Social Care and Housing  
Policy and Scrutiny Advisor  
Assistant Director, Adult Social Care and Housing  
Acting Senior Manager - Mental Health  
Assistant Director - Children and Families  
Senior Manager - Inclusion

### **PEOS.40/23 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Whalen (Cllr Grisdale substituting), Cllr Bulman-Jones and Ms L Watson (co-opted member).

### **PEOS.41/23 Disclosures of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

### **PEOS.42/23 Exclusion of Press and Public**

**RESOLVED**, that the press and public be not excluded during any item on the agenda.

### **PEOS.43/23 Public Participation**

There were no questions or representations received from members of the public.

### **PEOS.44/23 Minutes**

**RESOLVED**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2024 be approved as a true record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

### **PEOS.45/23 10.40 am Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support**

Members received a report and presentation that detailed the Refugee, Evacuee and Asylum programmes operational within Cumberland. The report outlined the current position of each programme and provided an overview of current support in relation to housing communities, social care and education. A Service Development Plan was appended to the report which provided an overview of areas for service development.

The Assistant Director – Adult Social Care and Housing gave a presentation on Cumberland's Global Resettlement Programme outlining key definitions, terms and the current number of individuals located under the various programmes in Cumberland. The presentation focussed on the current and enhanced core offers in place to support individuals.

The housing stock pressures in Cumberland, including homelessness accommodation, was discussed. The Assistant Director advised additional resource was needed and that an application to the Local Authority Housing Fund would be made in partnership with Housing and Homelessness. It was noted that there was an Empty Home Officer in the Carlisle area but not in the West of Cumberland. Members were informed that the service was still operating under legacy council arrangements and the service needed harmonised.

The work undertaken by the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector and community groups in supporting resettlement, integration and community cohesion was highlighted and praised by members and officers. It was noted that the Resettlement team had made funding available to further support the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector for 2024 and were in the process of evaluating funding applications. The Assistant Director informed members of collaborative work with the NHS and outlined the supportive work of the Social Care and Education teams.

Members were informed 166 bed spaces had been allocated to the Cumberland area and questioned the allocation of this number, whether consultation with the Council had taken place and that Cumberland lacked a suitable dispersal policy. A member raised the need for clarity on dispersal for officers, councillors and members of the public and for positive and myth busting communication. Members were advised that Serco, the northwest regional contracted provider for the Home Officer, was responsible for dispersal and did not routinely inform the Council when properties were occupied. It was acknowledged that this made it difficult for those occupying the accommodation as they were unfamiliar with the local area and services that could support them. The officers advised members of work taking place to build better relationships with the Home Office and Serco.

A member raised a concern that when a Leave to Remain notice was issued, and not received, an individual only had 28 days to vacate that accommodation. A member highlighted Article 4 when areas were ruled out as unsuitable for dispersal. A member questioned support available in and for schools. A discussion took place on unaccompanied asylum seeking children, age assessments and support available to them. The officer agreed research funding arrangements for voluntary and private nurseries.

Members agreed to establish a Working Group to undertake a deep dive into the issues raised at the meeting to include housing, education, dispersal, zoned areas and health services. It was further agreed to involve Place and Health Scrutiny members and officers as the subjects cut across a number of committees and departments.

**RESOLVED**, that a Working Group be established as outlined above.

#### **PEOS.46/23 11.40 am Transitions to Adulthood**

Members received a report on the continued development of transitions pathways across Cumberland. It was noted that professionals across education, health and social care had statutory responsibilities to support and prepare children and young people with special educational needs into adult life. A Local Area SEND inspection carried out in 2019 identified that young people in Cumbria had not been adequately supported and improvements to

services had been developed and implemented within the Council and Health Services. The officer outlined the improvement work taking place.

Members noted that a transitions protocol – ‘Moving On’, providing information and guidance to all families and young people on the various stages of transition, was scheduled to go to the next Cumberland SEND Partnership Board for approval. It was agreed to circulate the protocol to Committee members and feedback on it was welcomed. It was further noted that new annual review paperwork, focusing on preparation for adulthood, had been co-produced with education settings and was now in use.

Members discussed difficulties in transport. A review of the SEND transport policy was taking place. It was acknowledged that the provision of private travel arrangements sometimes hindered independent travel. The officers said that a Cumberland policy for transport and travel training was necessary. The Chair informed the Committee of his involvement in work that was taking place with Highways to improve transport links. The Director of Adult Social Care and Housing informed members of digital and technical solutions, such as travel apps, designed to help and improve confidence.

Members were informed that there was a need for a Housing Strategy and the STEP project, outlined in paragraph 1.6 of the report, was discussed. The project, undertaken in the Northeast, had proven successful and a Working Group had been established to see if the approach could be replicated in Cumberland.

The work taking place, in partnership with Westmorland and Furness, to develop pathways to employment for young people with SEND was highlighted. A member asked for information on employment opportunities for young people with SEND in Cumberland Council.

In discussion of safeguarding and exploitation, the Chair requested information on the links between vulnerability and criminality. Members were informed of a defined transition safeguarding pathway that had been developed.

Budget pressures, staffing levels and challenges faced by the services were discussed. The officers outlined budget and staffing pressures. It was noted that there was an increasing demand for assessments which was predicted to double by 2030. The impact of the Covid pandemic, the fantastic collaborative work taking place with the NHS and the diagnostic pathways were also discussed. Members were informed that assessments were based on need and not dependent on diagnosis. In answer to a member’s question, the Director informed members of work that was taking place with health colleagues to develop a neurodiversity pathway.

To conclude, the rise in home schooling was discussed. Members were informed that this was a national issue and the Council had requested more leverage on this, the aim being to return pupils to schools.

The officers were thanked for their informative report.

**RESOLVED**, that the report be noted.

### **PEOS.47/23 12.40 pm Committee Update**

The Policy and Scrutiny Advisor presented an update report providing an overview of matters relating to the Committee’s work, including the Forward Plan of Key Decisions. A new work

programme for the Committee was being developed in conjunction with the relevant Executive Directors and Lead Members.

Further clarification had been sought by members following the last meeting on educational attainment and this information was appended to the report.

**RESOLVED**, that

- (1) the items on the Forward Plan be noted;
- (2) the questions on School Attainment, requested by members at the last meeting, be noted;
- (3) the potential items on the 24-25 Forward Plan for the Committee, pending further discussion with the Committee, relevant Executive Directors and Executive Lead members, be noted.

### **PEOS.48/23 Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was to be confirmed.

The meeting finished at 12.50 pm