

PUBLIC

**MINUTES** of a meeting of **IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PEOPLE** held on Wednesday, 7 February 2024 at Committee Room 1, County Hall, Matlock, DE4 3AG.

### **PRESENT**

Councillor R Iliffe (in the Chair)

Councillors C Dale, R George, N Gourlay T Kemp and J Wharmby.

Also in attendance was Richard Chamberlain, Linda Elba-Porter, Lisa Holford, Luke Impey and Smruti Mehta.

Apologies for absence were submitted for Councillor K S Athwal, S Burfoot and P Rose.

### **01/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R Iliffe declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 6 'Updates on Current and Future Development in Fostering' due to his membership on the Derbyshire County Council Foster Panel.

### **02/24 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 01 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **03/24 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**Question received from Mr & Mrs Mitchell on behalf of Maitiu:**

When the Council considers its forthcoming round of cuts, please can you reassure me and my family that services to children and adults who have a learning disability, and their Carers, will be ring-fenced? Families across Derbyshire like mine are already struggling to cope, and any more cuts to the Learning Disability budget will place intolerable burdens on us all.

**Mr & Mrs Mitchell were not in attendance; a written response was provided as follows:**

Thank you for your question and the issues you raise within this. As you may be aware the council is facing significant budget pressures.

As well as a current forecast overspend for 2023-24 of £33m, the council has a predicted shortfall of £39.5m in its budget for the year ahead (2024-25) which has resulted in savings proposals being put forward.

In common with authorities across the country, we're facing budgetary pressures far greater than experienced before, due to factors beyond our control.

This includes dealing with higher than anticipated inflation and higher prices for fuel, energy and materials, meeting the cost of the national pay award and the continued unprecedented increase in demand for vital adults' and children's social care services.

This means that we are having to consider all areas of the council's spending to ensure that we can set a balanced budget for 2024/2025 - which we are legally obliged to do.

Lots of work is going on in the background to consider how we can achieve this but we are also very clear that we have statutory responsibilities towards children, families and carers and local people who require adult care support, and we will continue to meet these.

We understand that news of the proposed savings to services will be unsettling. However, many of the proposals, if it is agreed for them to go forward, will be subject to further Cabinet reports and then followed by appropriate public engagement or consultation before any final decisions are made.

We remain committed to supporting people to lead their best lives in Derbyshire.

As you are no doubt aware, we've been working for some time to change the way we support people with a learning disability and/or autism to maximise their independence and realise their aspirations whatever their abilities.

This includes supporting people to fulfil their ambitions, progress and develop leading to:

- Better informed choice.
- Increased employment rates.
- Increased community and digital inclusion.
- Effective contingency planning.

Any proposals to change services further would have many stages to go through and would be the subject of close scrutiny.

Please be assured that no decisions would be made without the appropriate engagement or consultation with the public, including everyone directly affected by the proposals.

**Question received from Ms Foulkes:**

Have all the committee members received a recent follow up report detailing the detrimental impact that the closure of 8 day centres last year, had, and continues to have on people's health and wellbeing, their loss of friendships and in some cases the ADVERSE effect on their behaviour? Many people are travelling long distances AND out of county to privately run centres as there are no longer the LOCAL CENTRES.

This meeting is clearly to discuss the future of the 4 remaining centres. You should be made aware, that the council have deliberately NOT been referring any new clients to these 4 centres since before covid. The reason for this is to keep numbers so low that it is no longer viable to keep them all open.

The public consultation that will follow in a couple of months, will no doubt recommend more closures of day centres and apparently also respite care centres. The opposition from families will be as overwhelming as it was at the consultation 2 years ago, when 83% of participants voted NOT to close the 8 centres.

The private centres are rapidly filling up and there will be a massive shortfall of places for these vulnerable people to enjoy fulfilling opportunities, with the level of support needed.

**Ms Foulkes was not in attendance; a written response was provided as follows:**

Thank you for the above question. The purpose of the Scrutiny meeting item is not to discuss future proposals and Improvement and Scrutiny Committees are not decision makers. Today the committee will be considering the outcomes that were achieved for people with a learning disability and / or who are autistic who attended Derbyshire County Council's day centres prior to the redesign in October 2022. The information to be shared has been collated through the standard requirement to regularly review people's support plans and whether these are continuing to meet their identified social care outcomes.

**04/24 DAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY AND/OR WHO ARE AUTISTIC**

Linda Elba-Porter, Interim Director of Adult Social Care and Lisa Holford, Assistant Director gave a presentation to the Committee on day opportunities for people with a learning disability and/or who are autistic.

On the 13th of October 2022, Cabinet approved the redesign of day opportunities to support a new model offered by Derbyshire County Council. The new model consisted of an enhanced community connector

service, four building based day centres provided by DCC, and the promotion of blended support planning.

The presentation outlined feedback received about the community connectors from people who previously attended a DCC day centre as well as feedback from people with lived experience.

In Spring 2020, The Hub practitioners worked with 379 people attending a DCC day centre to complete person centred, outcome focused assessments in conjunction with people with a learning disability and / or who are autistic and their carers. This work resulted in 278 people accessing alternative opportunities in the form of a 'blended' support plan. The overarching feedback was that people wanted to live safe, fulfilled lives as independently as possible, in their communities with equal access to opportunities and services such as social and leisure, housing, jobs, health and transport.

Since the redesign in October 2022, everyone that attended a DCC building based day centre had a further review from The Hub practitioners which also included Community Connectors support to explore new opportunities and/or an offer within the four remaining DCC centres.

Officers asked Members if they had any concerns or feedback from their constituents to ask for the constituents consent to share and to then feed the information to the relevant officers to be investigated appropriately.

Committee Members requested an update be brought back to a future meeting and the item be added to the work programme.

## **05/24 UPDATES ON CURRENT AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN FOSTERING**

Smruti Mehta, Assistant Director, Luke Impey, Interim Head of Service, and Richard Chamberlain, Fostering Recruitment Manager gave a presentation to the Committee on the current and future development in fostering.

The service had four key recruitment objectives:

1. Increasing the number of in-house foster carers.
2. Boosting the supply of Contract Carers, with a specific emphasis on experienced carers capable of meeting the needs of complex young individuals.
3. Growing the pool of foster carers for disabled children, siblings, and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).
4. Expanding placements for hard-to-place children and young people through targeted recruitment campaigns, specialized training, and support packages.

Nationally more carers were leaving the profession than joining, DCC were also having to compete against Independent Fostering Agencies and had challenges with retention due to the aging profile of foster carers. It had been reported that there was only one available bed in the homes of foster carers.

The D2N2 project, a £1.6 million Department for Education (DfE) funded initiative, would span 18 months and aimed to innovate foster carer recruitment and retention. This would be implemented on the 1st of April 2024.

The department was undertaking a realignment of key personal and staffing resources to reflect the changing landscape of fostering. The new key positions would be funded from the existing staffing budget. The roles were: Fostering Recruitment and Retention Manager, Fostering IRO Officer, a Placement Support Team, Lead Family Finding/ Duty Officer, and a Single Head of Service.

Since October 2023, the team had successfully facilitated 9 step-outs of residential care, with an additional 3 planned for February-March. Additionally, 9 children had been identified for internal residential care, with 4 slated for a fostering care plan. 12 children had moved out of residential and into foster carers homes in the last 12 weeks. Officers had been creative in how to maximise space at the homes of foster carers such as funding extensions and loft conversions.

Officers tried to listen to the views of foster carers as frequently as possible. Panels and monthly sessions were held, and foster carers could book sessions with Luke. Officers also created creative packages, held events and received training packages.

Committee Members requested an update be brought back to a future meeting and the item be added to the work programme.

## **06/24 WORK PROGRAMME**

Committee Members requested that a Fostering Update and an Update on Day Opportunities be added to the work programme.