

PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday, 17 February 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors E Clynch (Chair), J Banks (Vice-Chair), D Jackson, T Mohan, M Nugent, S Platt, S Tranter, Z Uddin, G Wilson and L Young.

OFFICERS: C Cannon, T Dunn, C Jones, C Lunn and J Tynan.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors L Hurst and M McClintock.

24/56 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and explained the fire evacuation procedures.

24/57 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

| Name of Member | Type of Interest | Item / Nature of Business |
|----------------|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Cllr J Banks | Non-Pecuniary | Employed within education setting. |
| Cllr E Clynch | Non-Pecuniary | Employed within education setting. |
| Cllr D Jackson | Non-Pecuniary | School Governor. |
| Cllr S Tranter | Non-Pecuniary | Employed within education setting. |
| Cllr L Young | Non-Pecuniary | Employed within education setting. |

24/58 **MINUTES - PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL - 20 JANUARY 2025**

The minutes of the People Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 20 January 2025 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/59 **CHILDREN MISSING FROM EDUCATION (CME) - FURTHER EVIDENCE**

At the People Scrutiny Panel meeting on 20 January 2025, Members were of the view that a second invitation should be circulated to schools in the hope that further input from school representatives could be obtained in respect of CME. Headteachers were again contacted via email inviting them to attend the meeting or provide written representation on how CME affected schools, and if there was any specific support or improvements that could be identified.

One school accepted the invitation to attend, but unfortunately provided late apologies to the meeting due to unforeseen circumstances. The school had been offered the opportunity to provide a written statement.

A further school provided the following information:

“At our school, we have a lot of families that move between authorities and as a school, we sometimes struggle to get an update on the child/ren and their wellbeing from parents.

We sometimes can't provide support to families that need to get their child in to school due to language barriers and when they have left the area abruptly, not giving school the opportunity to discuss their options with them.

We feel like 20 days is a long time and a lot can change in family circumstances during this time and when the child is in a different authority there is no way of ensuring that they are safe.”

The Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision advised on the 20-day timescale noted in the school's statement and the concerns that the school had with this. The 20-day period was the timescale that children needed to be continually absent from school before schools could refer the issue to the Local Authority (LA). Schools also needed to ensure children remained on their school roll until the 20-days had expired and carry out their own checks on the child up to this point.

After 20-days, Local Authorities could use resources to trace CME including health agencies, housing benefit services and other LAs. LAs would continue to search for CME until they were found in another LA area, or if evidence suggested that they had left the country. The Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision went on to explain that the 20-day period gave families sufficient flexibility and prevented an unreasonable loss of a school place.

A Member raised a query in respect of working closely with BME families, taking into account preferences for extended holidays. It was noted that schools approached this issue differently, however matters had positively progressed.

A Member noted the concerns of the school and considered that this particular school had a large transient community, with an above average movement of children on and off the school roll. The Member suggested that the school would appreciate discussions with the LA, ahead of the 20-day period of absence to ensure school places were utilised effectively. The Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision agreed with the Member's comments and would be willing to discuss this further with the school.

The Chair thanked schools for their involvement in the Panel's investigation. Members were provided with the initial terms of reference for the investigation to determine whether all had sufficiently been considered. Following a short discussion, it was agreed that the final report could now be drafted.

AGREED that:

1. **A draft final report in respect of the CME investigation be prepared for the next scheduled meeting.**
2. **The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/60

HOMELESSNESS - DISCUSSION/ APPROVAL OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

Members discussed some potential Terms of Reference for the Homelessness scrutiny review.

After consideration, the following Terms of Reference were proposed:

1. To identify the current levels of homelessness in Middlesbrough.
2. To understand the relevant section(s) of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) 2017 in respect of Relief Duty and the Council's responsibilities.
3. To consider the Council's use of temporary accommodation in the reduction of homelessness. Consideration to be given to the impact on families, their health and wellbeing.
4. To consider Local Authority and multi-agency approaches to tackling the issue of homelessness and the resource implications around this.

AGREED that:

1. **The Terms of Reference, as proposed, were approved.**
2. **The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/61

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair provided an update on items discussed at the recent Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings, as follows:

22 January 2025:

- Executive Member Update – Children's Services.

- Executive Forward Work Programme.
- Scrutiny Chairs Update.

12 February 2025:

- Executive Member Update - Environment and Sustainability.
- Executive Forward Work Programme.
- Scrutiny Chairs Update.

NOTED

24/62 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - 24 MARCH 2025 AT 4.30 P.M.**

The next meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel had been scheduled for Monday, 24 March 2025 at 4.30 p.m. in the Mandela Room, Town Hall.

NOTED

24/63 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**

The Democratic Services Officer provided an update on behalf of the Interim Director of Adult Social Care.

It was explained that the result of the Adult Social Care CQC inspection was expected to be published on 21 February 2025 - all members would receive notification of this, via email, on 20 February 2025.

NOTED