

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 13 October 2021.

PRESENT: Mr A Booth (Chairman), Mr P V Barrington-King (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Binks, Mr N J Collor, Mr G Cooke, Mr R C Love, OBE, Mr H Rayner, Mr O Richardson, Mr J Wright, Dr L Sullivan and Mr P Stepto

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs C Bell (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health), Mr P M Hill, OBE (Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services) and Mr C Beart

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr R Smith (Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Health), Mr D Whittle (Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance), Ms L Jackson (Policy and Relationships Adviser), Mr S Peerbux (Head of Community Safety), Ms S Sheppard (Communities and Place Lead, Adults Social Care and Health), Mrs A Taylor (Scrutiny Research Officer) and Mr M Dentten (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

10. Introduction

(Item A1)

The Chairman informed Members that it was Mr Wright's last Scrutiny Committee meeting. He thanked him for his contributions over the past 4 years, which included service as the Committee's Vice-Chairman.

11. Declarations of Interests by Members in items on the Agenda for this Meeting

(Item A3)

No declarations were made.

12. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2021

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2021 were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

13. Update on Progress of the Loneliness and Social Isolation Select Committee Recommendations

(Item C1)

Mrs C Bell, Cabinet Member, Adult Social Care and Public Health; Mr M Hill, Cabinet Member, Community and Regulatory Services; Mr R Smith, Corporate Director for Adult Social Care and Health; Mr D Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance; Ms L Jackson, Policy and Relationships

Adviser; Mr S Peerbux, Head of Community Safety and Ms S Sheppard, Communities and Place Lead, Adults Social Care and Health were in attendance for this item.

1. Mrs Bell introduced the progress made against the recommendations of the Loneliness and Social Isolation Select Committee. She reminded Members that her predecessor, Mr Gibbens, presented the report to County Council in March 2019 and that a cross-service approach, involving Community Services within Mr Hill's portfolio, was followed. Regarding progress generally, she recognised that whilst the Covid-19 pandemic had highlighted social isolation and loneliness, the required response had impacted certain work streams. The impact of the Resilient Communities project, part of the Making a Difference Everyday, Adult Social Care policy was noted. Mrs Bell highlighted the positive impact digital technology had over the last two years in reducing social isolation and recognised that technology had become more popular with older age groups.
2. Mr Smith acknowledged that social care had come to the forefront of public consciousness during the pandemic. He recognised that many individuals entered social care due to a lack of support from family or friends, and that this was directly linked to loneliness and social isolation. He further highlighted the impact of Kent's older demographics and rural geography on isolation.
3. Mr Hill commended the performance of community wardens in tackling social isolation and mentioned that the service had directly supported over 4,000 vulnerable people during pandemic.
4. Mr Whittle confirmed that the final draft of the Civil Society Strategy had been out for public consultation from 6 September to 3 October, which would be followed by Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee consideration, 9 November, and an Executive Decision by Cabinet, after which the strategy would be Council policy.
5. Members scrutinised the progress made against the Select Committee's 11 recommendations. Key points raised by the committee and responded to by the attendees included the following:
 - a. Following a question from a Member, Mr Smith acknowledged that socially isolated individuals were hard to engage by nature and that Adult Social Care worked with partners across the health and voluntary sectors, which included GPs and NHS mental health services. He noted that Adult Social Care made up part of a wider network which collaborated tackle the issue. Mr Hill added that libraries and registry services had the widest KCC service outreach and acted as a conduit for engaging and raising awareness of lonely individuals.
 - b. Members asked whether the Civil Society Strategy could include a dedicated policy for tackling social isolation. Mr Whittle clarified that the strategy was intended as the corporate policy for voluntary and community sector partnership and was never intended to be a social isolation strategy, though he noted that it included how civil society provided support.

- c. A Member stressed the need to engage further with active and former armed forces personnel, it was remarked that many suffered from loneliness or social isolation and that future strategies should directly address the issue.
- d. Members commented that the work to fulfil recommendation 3 had not been completed, despite being cited as complete in Appendix 1 of the report.
- e. Concerning recommendation 4, that KCC work with local partners to enable Kent residents to access, from a single online source and contact number, services that reduce loneliness, Ms Sheppard confirmed that a directory was due to launch in November 2021. The features highlighted included a single contact number, postcode and activity searchability and information on how to contact health, social care and community services. It was noted that the directory would be maintained by community organisations. Following a question from a Member, Mrs Bell gave reassurance that the actions taken to fulfil recommendation 4 would be completed in November 2021. She added that an update on social prescribing would be brought to the Adult Social Care Cabinet Committee.
- f. In relation to recommendation 5, Mr Peerbux confirmed that funding had been secured to pilot a social prescribing plus model, with an overall focus on the over 65 age group, that the pilot would be evaluated by the University of Essex and that the project ran until 2023. He verified that 8 connectors had been recruited from the community warden service, with others receiving training. Collaboration between wardens and Adult Social Care through the MADE Build and Test pilot and Area Referral Management Service was highlighted. Regarding prevention, Mr Peerbux informed Members that wardens were able to resolve 43% of issues without referral.
- g. A Member asked whether community wardens covered all rural and urban areas in Kent. Mr Hill confirmed that KCC's 70 community wardens operated in both areas, though acknowledged that there were some urban areas where it wasn't appropriate for wardens to operate.
- h. The attendees were asked to explain the provision of support for lonely disabled individuals and their carers. Mrs Bell confirmed that multiple services provisioned by KCC and the NHS engaged and support disabled residents. Mr Peerbux noted that community wardens were directly involved with a variety of vulnerable groups, including disabled and caring residents. Ms Sheppard added that Adult Social Care commissioned a community navigation service, which provide access and support to those over 55 or with 2 or more long term health conditions, as well as carers. It was further noted that Kent and Medway CCG were in the process of commissioning dementia coordinators, a form of social prescriber. The work of community wardens, which included their proactive support of disabled residents, was commended by a Member.

- i. Members stressed the need to reach out to socially isolated individuals who were not eligible, or a recipient of a service provided by the Council.
- j. Concerning recommendation 8, Mrs Bell confirmed that the Kent Community Foundation had led, with the support of KCC, a Kent campaign to raise awareness of loneliness and social wellbeing. She noted that the decision to go forward with a single campaign was taken to avoid duplication or confusion. Following a Member question, she confirmed that the campaign was shared through KCC's appropriate communication channels and commented that the level of engagement had been satisfactory.
- k. In relation to recommendation 10, Mrs Bell informed Members that an Office for National Statistics (ONS) tool had been used to measure loneliness.
- l. Regarding recommendation 11, Mrs Bell confirmed that a panel had been set up and met once prior to the pandemic to receive updates on progress, against the recommendations, to that point.

6. Mr Cooke moved and Mr Booth seconded **“That the committee:**

- a) notes the report on the progress of the loneliness and social isolation select committee recommendations;**
- b) observes that while the pandemic had influenced the authority's ability to respond it has not diminished the importance of addressing the issues, indeed the pandemic if anything has highlighted the importance of an appropriate and timely response; and**
- c) recommends that a reset might be the best way to progress the Select Committee's recommendations and therefore refers the matter back to the executive to review the recommendations in the light of lessons learnt through the pandemic and to report back to the committee in 6 months' time.”**

7. The motion was agreed unanimously.

8. Mrs Bell thanked the Committee for their comments and recognised that whilst progress had been made on the Select Committee's recommendations, the Covid-19 pandemic had been the main priority for Adult Social Care in recent times.

9. The Chairman thanked Mrs Bell, Mr Hill and the officers for their attendance, answers and commitment to revisit the progress made on loneliness and social isolation in the future.

RESOLVED that the committee:

- a) notes the report on the progress of the loneliness and social isolation select committee recommendations;

- b) observes that while the pandemic had influenced the authority's ability to respond it has not diminished the importance of addressing the issues, indeed the pandemic if anything has highlighted the importance of an appropriate and timely response; and
- c) recommends that a reset might be the best way to progress the Select Committee's recommendations and therefore refers the matter back to the executive to review the recommendations in the light of lessons learnt through the pandemic and to report back to the committee in 6 months' time.

POST MEETING NOTE: A full update on the progress made against recommendations 6 and 7 of the Select Committee's report will be included as part of the Executive's update to the Committee in March 2022.

14. Short Focused Inquiry - Home to School Transport - Update
(Item C2)

1. The Chairman introduced the item, noted the progress made on the Short Focused Inquiry, as outlined in the report, and confirmed that the inquiry would be chaired by Mr Barrington-King. Members that wished to be involved were encouraged to contact Mr Barrington-King.

RESOLVED that the update on the Short-Focused Inquiry on Home to School Transport be noted.

15. Work Programme
(Item D1)

1. Mrs Taylor gave a verbal overview of the work programme and confirmed that any member of the Council could request an item. Members were reminded that agenda setting meetings, involving the Chairman and Group Spokespeople, took place in advance of each meeting.
2. Mr Rayner requested that an item on the input of planning officers into local plans, including the scrutiny of their decisions by Members, be added to the work programme. The Chairman agreed to consider this item.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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