



## Scrutiny Committee

Notes of the Meeting Held on 15 December 2021  
at 10.05 am as a Microsoft Virtual Teams Meeting

### Present:

Cllr Steve Morpew (Chair)	
Cllr Lana Hempsall (Vice Chair)	
Cllr Carl Annison	Cllr Keith Kiddie
Cllr Lesley Bambridge	Cllr Jamie Osborn
Cllr Graham Carpenter	Cllr Richard Price
Cllr Phillip Duigan (substitute for Cllr Nick Dubney)	Cllr Robert Savage (substitute for Cllr Barry Duffin)
Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris	Cllr Brian Watkins
Mr Giles Hankinson (Parent Governor Representative)	

### Also present (who took a part in the meeting):

Cllr Andrew Jamieson	Cabinet Member for Finance
Cllr Graham Plant	Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy
Cllr Shelagh Gurney	Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health & Prevention
Cllr Daniel Elmer	Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services
James Bullion	Executive Director of Adult Social Services
Seb Gasse	Assistant Director Education Strategy and Infrastructure, Children's Services
Simon George	Executive Director of Finance and Commercial Services
Karen Gibson	Economic Programmes & Skills Manager, Community and Environmental Service
Katy Dorman	Apprenticeship Strategy Manager, Community and Environmental Service
Lauren Reader	Apprenticeships and Talent Development Partner, Strategy & Transformation
James Wilson	Director of Quality and Transformation, Children's Services
Marcus Needham	Head of Quality Performance & Systems, Children's Services
Peter Randall	Democratic Support and Scrutiny Manager
Kat Hulatt	Head of Legal Services
Tim Shaw	Committee Officer

In his opening remarks Cllr Steve Morphew (Chair) said that following the Government's announcement to ask those who could work from home to do so (and given the emerging situation with regard the Omicron variant of covid-19) he and Lana Hempsall (Vice-Chair) had asked Councillors not to turn up for the Scrutiny meeting in person. He added that Councillors and other essential attendees were invited to join this remote public meeting via Teams, where the scheduled business could be safely discussed. This was being broadcast live and would also be available on the County Council's YouTube channel. Any decisions reached would be reported to the next quorate meeting for endorsement so that they then had the same standing and validity as if they had been made in a full scrutiny meeting in County Hall.

## **1B Apologies for Absence**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Nick Daubney, Cllr Barry Duffin, Cllr Ed Maxfield, Mr Giles Hankinson (Parent Governor representative), Mrs Julie O' Connor (Church Representative) and Mr Paul Dunning (Church Representative)

## **2 Minutes**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021 were noted but could not be confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair before they were presented to the next quorate meeting of the Committee.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

- 3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

## **4 Urgent Business**

- 4.1 No urgent business was discussed.

## **5. Public Question Time**

- 5.1 There were no public questions.

## **6. Local Member Issues/Questions**

- 6.1 There were no local member issues/questions.

## **7 NCC Apprenticeship Strategy and Action Plan**

- 7.1 The annexed report (7) was received.
- 7.2 Cllr Graham Plant, Cabinet Member for Growing the Economy, said that the Apprenticeship Strategy explained how Norfolk County Council went about creating a strategic vision and operational action plan for apprenticeships across all areas of work-related activity in the county.
- 7.2 The Cabinet Member said that the NCC Apprenticeship Strategy and Action Plan cohesively brought together three strategic strands of activity which were summarised as:  
**Strand One:** NCC Children's Services: supporting a broad range of pathways into

apprenticeships for those pre-16 years of age and those aged 16 to 18.

**Strand Two:** NCC Growth and Development: driving forward the provision of apprenticeships to support Norfolk businesses to prosper and Norfolk residents to achieve their aspirations throughout their working lives.

**Strand three:** NCC Human Resources: including the provision of leadership and coordination of the internal Norfolk County Council apprenticeships programme.

- 7.3 The Cabinet Member added that the report showed the three partnership directorates had made some significant progress in delivering operational action plans for each of the strands within the apprenticeship strategy. Collectively the strategy provided an agile response to a changing apprenticeship landscape particularly as Norfolk moved out of the pandemic and into economic recovery. The action plan attached as an appendix to the strategy was updated regularly and reported quarterly to the NCC Apprenticeships Board.
- 7.4 The issues that were considered by the Committee included the following:
- The educational institution where the young person was enrolled had the legal responsibility to provide impartial advice and guidance about the next stage of a person's education or entry into work. Pathway to Work teams went into schools to work directly with young people and careers teachers to ensure that young people knew about their options.
  - For young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) there was a health and care coordinator to ensure they were well prepared for adult life.
  - There were opportunities for young people at complex needs schools to experience the world of work.
  - Since 2017 apprenticeships for all age groups had gone through a significant period of reform, including major changes to the way courses were designed, delivered and the way they were funded.
  - Data had shown that the long period of decline in apprentice places had continued in 2021 and the reasons for this were wider than just the pandemic.
  - Another big challenge for businesses was helping them understand how the funding worked and working with them to maximise the levies and to ensure that they got the programmes in place that best suited their needs.
  - While things were quite complex, there were still plenty of opportunities for businesses and for apprentices to take up suitable places; if an individual, employer and training provider were all in place collectively.
  - Cllrs said that additional allowances in funding were important to provide apprenticeships for those difficult-to-reach groups or people living in isolated rural areas to take up places and this should be borne in mind when negotiating with training providers.
  - In response to questions from committee members it was pointed out that there was additional support available for certain apprentices with a learning, or other disability, who required extra support.

- Apprentices had a right to the same terms and conditions of employment as other employees and had to be paid at least the minimum apprentice rate.
- Cllrs questioned whether a lack of public transport in rural areas and the pay for apprentices were stopping some people taking up apprenticeships.
- In response, officers said that a three-month long council study had found that, although the national minimum wage for an apprentice was £4.30 an hour, the average in Norfolk was over £5.50. In some cases apprentices were paid much higher rates and this could be seen more in certain sectors. Officers agreed to find further data for Cllrs following the meeting. The transport policy for all those aged 16-19 was currently being refreshed.
- Regarding the many detailed figures shown in the report, success meant moving the number of apprenticeship starts into a positive figure in the next 2-3 years and continuing to minimise complexities in the system.
- The number of vacancies since February 2021 to the present day had increased from a low of 100 vacancies in a week to a figure that exceeded 380 in a week (which had plateaued over a 3-month period). Steps were being taken to ensure that vacancies were filled, particularly by young people, because the 16-19 and 19-24 demographic groups were the hardest hit by the pandemic.
- Apprenticeships Norfolk had secured £1.9m in external funding since August 2020 to provide businesses with a range of initiatives including wraparound support and the incentives/grants they needed to stimulate an upturn in the take up of apprenticeships and progress individuals from the Kickstart scheme onto an apprenticeship. It also included funding to support apprentices with bursary grants for equipment and travel expenses. This included funding from the Norfolk Strategic Fund, ESF, FCE C-Care and Community Renewal Fund.
- Human Resources had supported 640 starts within NCC's workforce to date, of which 347 were currently active.
- Adult Learning apprenticeships had increased by 76% this year compared to last year.
- The adult employment service worked with approx. 80 people with learning difficulties at any one time and was part of a whole inclusion programme.
- The County Council worked to support youth offenders. Those in a prison setting were supported through the work of other agencies who had overall responsibility for providing the training for these groups.
- There were many examples of well-supported higher and degree level apprenticeship schemes within the County Council which were commended by Cllrs and officers.

## 7.5 **RESOLVED**

1. **That the Committee give their full support to the NCC Apprenticeship Strategy and Action Plan, thanking officers for their hard work in drawing it together.**
2. **The Committee endorses the outlined activity to improve opportunities for**

young people in Norfolk.

3. **The Committee requests that the Cabinet Member and officers report back in a year's time with a refreshed action plan and an outline of next steps to increase the number and type of apprenticeship opportunities in Norfolk and reduce barriers to access.**

## 8 **Quarterly Update on Children's Services and Adult Social Care Performance Review Panels**

8.1 The annexed report (8) was received.

8.2 This report outlined progress with regards to the establishment and ongoing activity of the two Performance Review Panels (PRPs), one for Adult Social Care and one for Children's Services. The Performance Review Panels were responsible for monitoring and providing challenge to Norfolk County Council's Children's/Adult Social Services functions, reviewing performance to improve service delivery and ensure readiness for future independent inspections (CQC/Ofsted).

### 8.3 **Adult Social Care PRP**

The issues that were considered by the Committee included the following:

- Cllr Shelagh Gurney the Deputy Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Prevention said that she had agreed, alongside the panel, a forward programme of work and schedule of meetings for the Adult Social Care Performance Review Panel through until April 2022. The Panel was scheduled to meet once every 6 weeks.
- Issues for the Panel included:
  - HomeFirst - Discharge to Assess (D2A), partnership working and the impact on Social Care
  - Safeguarding – Trends and Drivers of Safeguarding Activity
  - Performance of the care market in Norfolk and market shaping
  - Value for money in the care market.
- The Committee noted that the upward trend of demand for services had continued during 2021 and no sign existed that this level of demand was tailing off.
- It was important that the Panel benefitted from the experience of front-line staff and service users. The *Making It Real Group* was thought to be a good example of work that would provide a broad base of people and experiences.
- Some of the key areas to improve were staff recruitment (current vacancy rate was 14%), people with disabilities in employment, reablement, follow on care after discharge from hospital and reduction in residential care volumes.
- Staff recruitment and retention were very important issues to the panel, with dedicated session planned for the new year.
- The compulsory vaccination of care staff was a "one off" issue for staff retention.

- The Executive Director said that 27,000 people worked in social care in Norfolk. This figure needed to rise by 6% a year to take account of demographic growth and should currently be at least 28,000 people.
- Differences in pay between the NHS and Adult Social Services was a major challenge going forward.
- Training courses for those working in the adult social care sector provided for 600 to 700 places a year and would help improve the quality as well the quantity of care in Norfolk.
- Details regarding the *Front Door Service* would be shared with Cllr Lesley Bambridge after the meeting.
- The Chair said that it was important for detailed issues to be explored by the performance review panels rather than by the Scrutiny Committee duplicating that work.
- The Vice-Chair said that it was important to explore areas of work where improvements could be made and how the service could be effectively challenged rather than simply coming up with a list of existing issues within Adult Social Services.

#### 8.4 Children's Services PRP

The issues that were considered by the Committee included the following:

- Cllr Daniel Elmer, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children's Services, said that topics selected by the panel for a deep dive included School Exclusion rates and an overview of the Ofsted inspection framework.
- The Scrutiny Committee discussed in some detail the rate of looked after children in Norfolk. It was noted that the current rating for NCC was red, but the quality of practice and end of care had been strengthened so was more sustainable. This rating was now returning to normal slowly and therefore the data was plateauing. The red rating did not however tell the full story and could be a distraction for Cllrs.
- The number of children per 10,000 who were in care was a vital sign. The number of children in care currently stood at 1,081 children of which 82 were unaccompanied child asylum seekers. The detail behind this issue was flagged up as a matter for the review panel to consider rather than the Scrutiny Committee.
- Staffing levels and staff turnover in the fast teams were identified as another vital sign issue for the review panel to consider as a deep dive rather than the Scrutiny Committee to consider at this stage.
- Other vital signs to be considered by the panel were school exclusions and issues of home schooling.
- The Vice Chair said that the Panel needed to consider where it was providing a challenge to the officers in those areas it was considering and what added value it could make to the work of Children's Services.

- The Chair, adding to comments made by the Vice-Chair, said that a promising start had been made in the relationship between the review panels and the Scrutiny Committee and that next time the Committee received a report it would need to look carefully at the effectiveness of the review panel process itself.
- It was important to have substitute members attend the review panels where appropriate.

## 8.5 **RESOLVED**

**That the Committee:**

- 1. Note progress and activity from the two performance review panels, providing feedback and recommendations where appropriate.**
- 2. Note the forward work programmes attached to the report (Appendix A & B), providing feedback to the panel leadership around potential items for further investigation.**

## 9 **Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme**

- 9.1 The annexed report (9) was received. It was noted that some issues had yet to be programmed within the work plan and that the plan needed to be extended to cover a calendar year.
- 9.2 The Chair said that the County Council needed to have clear rules in place to identify what could and could not be done by Cllrs as part of virtual meetings.

## 9.3 **RESOLVED**

**That the Committee note the revised forward work programme as set out in the appendix to the report.**

The meeting concluded at 1.10 pm

**Chair**