

Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee – Review of Cabinet Decision – CAF14a “Proposals for the alteration and/or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families – getset”

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<b>Summary:</b>	This report contains recommendations from the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee from its call-in meeting on 8 October where it reviewed the decision taken by the Cabinet at its meeting on 12 September regarding the proposal for change CAF 14a – “Proposals for the alteration and/or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families – ‘getset’.”		
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<p><b>The Committee agreed to uphold the call-in and in light of clarification provided by officers during its call-in review of proposal CAF14a, to request that the Cabinet:</b></p> <p><b>Receive a report from the Director of Childrens Services at its next meeting (see Appendix 1), based on Appendix A of the call-in report, and review the decision for CAF 14a that was taken on 12 September with the aim of deferring the implementation, pending the completion of the consultation on CAF 14b with staff, partners and service users in order to allow for a comprehensive proposal to come back to Cabinet for decision in February 2019.</b></p>		
<b>Reasons for recommendations</b>	See background information.		

## **1. Background**

- 1.1.** On 8 October 2018 the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee reviewed the decision taken by the Cabinet at its meeting on 12 September 2018 regarding CAF 14a - proposals for the alteration and/or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families – ‘getset’. The Committee heard questions & received statements from 26 members of the public.

Also, statements and results from a survey of service users was received on behalf of Family Voices Somerset and a briefing was tabled at the meeting from the UNISON trade union. The Director of Children’s Services thanked all those who had submitted comments, observations and questions for doing so and responded. It was agreed that a written response to all submissions received would be prepared and published on the Council’s website, including the 12 anonymous submissions.

- 1.2.** Officers then provided a short presentation, to supplement the information provided in Appendix A to the call-in request. The presentation provided an overview and general background of Somerset’s Early Help journey over the last 4 years. The report and presentation also provided an explanation of the 4 levels of need as set out in the ‘Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset’ guidance.

The overview also noted the changes made in 2016 to the Early Help Assessment Form and the Early Help Advice Hub and changes to the Family Support Service last February. It was stated that the data used in the Cabinet report had been obtained from the case management system, and the apparent drop in demand for Level 2 services was due to improved practice and consistency of recording. An explanation was also provided for the rationale for the proposed changes to the caseloads and associated activities for Level 2 and Level 3 Workers.

- 1.3.** The sponsor of the call-in, Cllr Redman, explained his reasons for requesting that the Cabinet decision CAF14a be reviewed and these centred around the limited data provided to the 12 September Cabinet meeting to enable them to make their decision. He questioned if accurate data and therefore assurance had been provided to Cabinet in order to underpin the statements made in the CAF14a savings proposal that had been agreed on 12 September. The Monitoring Officer noted therefore that the Committee’s attention would be best focused on addressing the questions raised in the call-in request.

A main point of interest was the data provided in the Cabinet report regarding the number of referrals for Level 2 services as it was reported that these had steadily declined and there was a discussion about graphs in the report prepared for the call-in to help explain this point. It emerged during the discussion that the graphs did not actually show the number of referrals but the number of open cases. The Committee did not think that the information provided in the report (either the graphs or supporting text) was particularly clear. There was also a discussion about the reasons provided to explain the apparent drops in the number of open cases and the Committee noted that this could be due to a number of factors not just a fall in demand for Level 2 services. The Committee did not think clear evidence had been provided to the Cabinet to demonstrate either a lack in the number of referrals and therefore the reasons for a decline.

- 1.4.** There was a detailed discussion, including further questions and statements were made by Members of the Committee and the Director for Children's Services and the Assistant Director - Commissioning and Performance and other officers responded to points that had been raised. It was confirmed that the information contained in the presentation provided at the meeting and in the call-in report had not been provided to the Cabinet at its meeting on 12 September.
- 1.5.** During the discussion the Committee sought reassurance on the issue of 'other statutory agencies/partners' being able to provide positive outcomes and members asked about the capacity of those other statutory agencies and partners to provide the 'backfill' if SCC reduced staffing levels as proposed. The Cabinet report had set out that due to a falling number of referrals it would follow that there could be a safe reduction in the number of staff and an increase in each Level 2 and Level 3 caseworkers caseload. In response the Committee heard that the proposals in CAF14a related to a reduction in staff only and that this would not mean a reduction in the service provided, but that this would be subject to consultation under CAF14b.

The Committee did not think clear evidence had been provided to the Cabinet to demonstrate that a reduction in the number of Level 2 and Level 3 caseworkers would not result in reduction of service for those accessing Level 2 and/or Level 3 services. The Committee noted that it had been acknowledged that some areas held waiting lists (for those wishing to access Level 2 services), and this seemed to indicate services had no capacity based on current staffing levels, notwithstanding any possible increase in demand.

The Committee did not think clear evidence had been provided to the Cabinet, in the absence of there being any statutory guidance, to explain how following the reduction in staffing figures, how the proposed staff caseload ratios for both Level 2 and Level 3 workers had been reached.

- 1.6.** In summary and reflecting on the responses to a number of questions raised in the call-in review including, data, demand for services, caseloads for workers and reductions in staff the Committee did not feel that the additional supporting evidence, which it noted had not been considered by the Cabinet, had provided assurance about the decision taken by the Cabinet in respect of CAF14a.

The Committee then agreed, in light of clarification provided by officers, to request that the Cabinet receive a report based on that presented today from the Director of Children's Services at their next meeting and review the decision for CAF 14a that was taken on 12th September with the aim of deferring the implementation pending the completion of the consultation on CAF 14b with staff, partners and service users in order to allow for a comprehensive proposal to come back to Cabinet for decision in Feb 2019.

The Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee Chair Cllr Redman will be attending the Cabinet meeting on 17 October and will answer any questions.