

Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

Chairman: Cllr Leigh Redman

Division and Local Member: All

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1. Summary

- 1.1. The Scrutiny for Policies Children and Families Committee is required by the Constitution to make an annual report to the Council and to provide each other meeting of the Council with a summary progress report and outcomes of scrutiny. This report covers the work of the Committee's first meeting of the new quadrennium on 16 June 2017.
- 1.2. The main focus of our work programme will be to ensure the continuous improvement and delivery of the 7 priorities contained within the Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP). In this endeavour the Chairman has again suggested that each Member of the Committee volunteer to act as a 'champion' for each of the 7 programmes.
- 1.3. Our predecessor Committee were pleased to see continuing progress in many areas of the Council's improvement agenda for children and young people and our central focus will also be to constantly ask - What impact does that have on children in Somerset?
- 1.4. The Committee has 8 elected Members, 1 space being vacant. We also have 7 co-opted members. We have 2 Church representative vacancies along with 1 Parent Governor vacancies and we are looking at ways to ensure those positions are occupied. We have retained our Schools Compact representative and a representative from the Schools Forum; our co-opted members have voting rights on education matters only. We look forward to once again hearing first hand testimony from front line staff who will we invite to attend and participate at our meetings.
- 1.5. Members of the Council are reminded that:
 - all Members are invited to attend meetings of all the Council's Scrutiny Committees and to contribute freely on any agenda item;
 - any Member could propose a topic for inclusion on the Scrutiny Work Programmes;
 - any Member can be asked by the Committee to contribute information and evidence, and to participate in specific scrutiny reviews.

2. Background

2.1. Scrutiny Work Programme

As noted above the focus of our work programme will be the 7 priorities of the CYPP with practical work to support and challenge service improvement. The Committee fully supported this at our first meeting and look forward to working with the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and other Officers to ensure topics dealt with during Scrutiny meetings support the improvement process.

Each of our future meetings will have specific agenda items to consider the work programme and this will allow members and officers to suggest items we should scrutinise in more depth. We are also very keen to enhance our ability to monitor our suggested outcomes and recommended actions to ensure these have been progressed, and to assist us in this we will continue to review our outcome tracker at every meeting to ensure this is meaningful.

2.2. 16 June 2017

Our first main agenda item was an update information report that provided the Committee with details of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) a three year plan that had started in April 2016 that set out the actions the Council and its partners were taking to continue and sustain improvements in Children's Services. The Plan followed a multi-agency approach, and was overseen by the Somerset Children's Trust and had 7 improvement programmes, each managed by a relevant Board to ensure improvement in those areas. We accepted the report and the Chairman encouraged Committee Members to consider the CYPP before the next meeting in July and he also expressed his desire for each Member of the Committee to become a volunteer champion, taking a specific interest in one of the 7 programmes. The Committee also requested that a glossary of acronyms be provided to aid understanding.

We then considered a report that provided details of a peer review carried out last May by Gloucestershire County Council of the Council and partners, as part of the preparation for a Local Area Inspection of Special Educational Needs and Disability 0-25 (SEND 0-25) by OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The Chairman asked how the required improvements would be brought and monitored and the Director of Children's Services replied that the peer review had recommended priority areas and a lead officer had been identified to drive through a rapid response. The priority area groups would meet fortnightly and focus on addressing the findings of the peer review and would report to a newly established multi-agency SEND 0-25 Intervention group. It was also noted that an Interim Head for SEND was now in post, and this would provide valuable capacity and expertise in the Council's response to the peer review. We accepted the report and it was suggested and agreed that an update be provided in a few months to give the Committee an overview of the progress.

Next was a report that provided us with an update (requested by the previous Committee in 2016) on the capital projects that were submitted to the Education Funding and Skills Agency (EFSA) to support sufficiency of places for the new requirement to deliver 30 hours a week funded places for 3 and 4 years old from 1 September 2017. This had been brought about by the Childcare Act 2016 that discharged a duty to Local Authorities to secure sufficient places for the extended entitlement of 30 hours childcare for eligible working parents of 3 and 4 year olds. We heard that Somerset had submitted 6 projects for consideration by the EFSA and all 6 projects had been approved with total capital funding awarded to Somerset of £1,515,027.31. We had a brief discussion about the estimated sufficiency of places and the overall supply and demand estimates and it was reported that by the end of last May, some 280 providers out of 496 that would

accept the extra entitlement had registered as offering 30 hours spaces, 56% of providers and approximately 3902 spaces. We accepted the report. Our final report provided an overview of the on-going fostering recruitment activity, and Members heard that a rolling programme of pro-active recruitment activity continued with the support of the Communications Team and that it had been particularly good at raising awareness and the profile of this important area. It was reported that the recruitment of sufficient numbers of foster carers for children in care had become a rising challenge both locally and nationally, and there had been a national rise in the number of children in care although Somerset had been able to hold this number steady at approximately 475 children for a period of 12 months. In response to a question it was stated that this was due to improved care planning and support provided to families to enable them to continue to care for children at home. During consideration and discussion of the report Officers encouraged Members to share ideas and suggestions for improving the overall fostering offer in Somerset and Members suggested attendance at local Shows or Fetes being held across the County in the summer months and it was also suggested that information articles be included in local Parish/Village magazines to raise awareness of the possibility of fostering. The Chairman thanked the Officers for the update

3. Consultations undertaken

- 3.1. The Committee invites all Councillors to attend and contribute to its meetings.

4. Implications

- 4.1. The Committee considers carefully, and often asks for further information about the implications as outlined in the reports considered at its meetings. For further details of the reports considered by the Committee please contact the author of this report.

5. Background papers

- 5.1. Further information about the Committee including dates of meetings in the new quadrennium, and agendas & reports from previous meetings are available via the Council's website.
www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers