

## **Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee**

Chairman: Cllr Leigh Redman

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officer: Julian Gale – Strategic Manager – Governance and Risk

Author: Jamie Jackson – Governance Manager - Scrutiny

Contact Details: 01823 359040 [jjackson@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:jjackson@somerset.gov.uk)

### **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 meeting in July, September, October and November.
- 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 9 elected Members. 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 of the quadrennium and we

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. 28 July 2017**

Our first main agenda item was a 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 and an update was provided of each. We accepted the report.

We then considered a report that recognised that the focus of the Committee's work programme would 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 Chair, as he had initiated during the last quadrennium, suggested that each Member of the Committee volunteer to act as a 'Champion' for each of the 7 programmes. The report was discussed and it was explained that those volunteer Members would not have lone responsibility for each topic but would be an initial point of contact and allow better understanding of that area. 7 Members agreed to act as a Champion for various CYPP programmes. Next we considered a report and received a presentation that provided an update on the progress to create 'early help hubs' in local communities, agreed as a key priority in the Children and Young People's Plan 2016-2019. (This has subsequently been renamed Family Support Service). The hub service would offer multi-agency integrated services to identify and support children and families who need additional help and quick intervention, and over time help reduce the gap in outcomes for those in deprived areas. We held a thorough discussion of the report and Members made many suggestions, with questions being asked and answers provided. Members emphasised the importance of effectively communicating these proposed changes to service users so they were aware of what was happening and could offer comments. Given the importance of the proposed changes we asked for regular updates and suggested for the time being that an update be provided at each meeting.

The Committee considered a report that provided an overview of the proposed Progression Scheme as part of the Council's attempt to improve the offer to Foster Carers. These changes had been designed to help ensure that children were cared for by people with the right skills and experience and that foster carers were recognised for the skills and experience they brought to the role. We had the benefit of hearing from a Foster Carer who provided the Committee with an overview of his experiences and his opinions and views on the proposed changes, which he welcomed. Members also heard the Foster Carer welcome the inclusive approach of the Foster Carer team which meant that Foster Carers were treated like professionals and felt valued and a part of the team. We thanked the Officers, and the Foster Carer for their contributions in updating us and the report was accepted.

### **2.3. 15 September 2017**

We began our September meeting with a report that provided an update on progress of the SEND 0-25 intervention nine priorities following the Peer Review report to us last June. We noted that SEND 0-25 Intervention arrangements had been put in place to address the findings from the Peer Review and we considered and commented on those arrangements and the progress made. The nine multi-agency priority groups had been mobilised and had identified actions which would evidence improvement and improve outcomes for Children and Young People with SEND in Somerset. Those were being closely managed until December 2017 with multi-agency strategic leads reporting monthly on progress. We considered each of the nine priority groups, which are: Joint commissioning; Health Engagement & Co-ordination; Transitions; Participation; Early help for SEND; Statutory assessment & Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP); Complex Cases; School Improvement and Ofsted Preparation. We accepted the report.

We then considered the annual report on Children's Social Care Statutory Customer Feedback. This report provided us with details on the operation of the complaints procedure in relation to Children's Social Care Services and included the number of complaints at each stage including those considered by the Local Government Ombudsman; the type, timescale and outcomes of complaints; which customer groups made complaints; learning and service improvements and a summary equality monitoring data. In addition to this, the annual report contained a summary of the compliments and comments received by the service. We accepted the report.

Members of the Committee then received an update on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Syrian Families in Somerset, our first such update since September 2016. We asked if the impact of dealing with these issues was impacting on the other work of the service and it was stated that the service continued to struggle to fill foster places and was considering whether it can continue to take part in the national transfer scheme. The update was accepted. Next we received a report from the Strategic Finance Manager which gave an update on the In-Year Budget savings for Children's Services and we asked questions and received answers and accepted the update.

Our final report was an update on Family Support Services (previously early help hubs) which provided an update on the proposed changes to Family Support Services. We noted that the service would be launching a consultation to consider where services should be delivered from and what services should be delivered and this consultation would begin in September 2017 lasting for a 10 week period. We asked for clarification on the nature of the consultation and it was confirmed that it would focus on how to deliver services in the future. In addition we noted that it would be a two stage process, firstly working out the model of service and then at a later date how to deliver it. It was further confirmed that an equalities Impact assessment will be carried out on a district basis and will be updated throughout the consultation process. We discussed the proposals and raised concerns regarding: how outreach services would be provided in rural areas and how urgent cases would be identified; the consultation document needed to be in plain English and accessible; protecting services in areas of high level of deprivation; access to digital technology and the access and cost of transport for low income families; it seemed as if users were being asked to choose between buildings and staff; some families would not welcome services in their own home; good co-ordinated outreach services work because the most vulnerable families don't use centres. We accepted the update and emphasised

the need of effectively communicating these proposed changes to service users so they were aware of what was happening and could participate in the consultation.

#### **2.4. 20 October 2017**

We began our October meeting with a presentation regarding an update on Children's ICT and Information Sharing. We asked about resilience in the event of IT hostile attacks, sharing data with partner organisations, and new data protection laws. We were informed that data was stored in multiple locations to protect information, work was ongoing to improve sharing data with partners, and the new office 365 surfaces (laptops) would help the Council be compliant with new data protection laws. The update was accepted.

Before our next report, on about the proposed changes to Family Support Services, we heard from a service user who raised concerns about the public consultation and the online questionnaire which she felt was poorly publicised and had leading questions. An Assistant Director of Children's Services replied noting: the public consultation was open for 10 weeks; hard copies were available at various places, in addition the online version had room after each question for additional answers and concerns.

Further debate on this item included: possible future venues for services, online support for families, ensuring that those who were less likely to get involved in the consultation were listened to, linking with property and the libraries programmes, concerns about reducing services, recognising the importance of early help support, flexible working hours for staff, encouraging more community support, and ensuring that people knew how to access support. We requested an update at our December meeting.

Our final report was about the West Somerset Opportunity Area, part of the Government's programme to tackle social mobility and improve opportunities for young people across the county. West Somerset had been identified as area 324 out of 324 social mobility areas due to a combination of factors. A number of priorities had been identified around children having a good start in life, educational excellence in the classroom, transition to adulthood, and skills for employment and business. We accepted the report and agreed to request an update in 6 months.

#### **2.5. 17 November 2017**

We began with 2 members of the public asking questions on different agenda items, and it was agreed each would receive a written reply.

Our first report provided us with a summary of information contained within the Children's Social Care Annual Performance Report 2016/17. We considered and discussed the report that covered performance across a range of service areas and specifically compared performance in the year 2016/17 with the previous year, identifying trends and areas of improving and deteriorating performance. We accepted the report.

Next was a 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 each area. This report provided details of the activity of the second quarter (July to September 2017) of Year 2 and a summary of activity and

progress, supported by each a highlight report for each of the 7 programmes. After a thorough discussion of the report we agreed to accept the report and the Chair wished to record the Committee's thanks for the hard work undertaken by numerous members of staff in various locations that have helped bring about improvements.

We then considered an information report that updated Members on the overall purpose of children's services commissioning service and improvements made to date, reflecting on the journey so far, and the further progress the commissioning team was expected to make. We noted that it would be particularly important for the Council to identify the required outcomes from each contract so that contracts were properly managed and poor performance challenged. We accepted the report and it was agreed that an update on this would be given in 6 months. Our final report provided an overview on progress of the Young Carers Strategic Steering Group following the recommendations made by a Task and Finish Group of the former Committee in April 2017. It was explained that the initial Task and Finish Group had held meetings in February and March and met with Young Carers, Young Carer Professionals, Young Adult Carers, and those working in Public Health and members of the Somerset Parent Carer Forum to help inform its recommendations in April 2017. We discussed the report, welcoming progress that had been made. We requested that an update report be prepared for the 16 March 2018 meeting. 2 Members (one male and one female) indicated that they were interested in becoming the Member Champion for Young Carers and undertook to discuss this with Officers outside of the meeting. There was a suggestion about providing Young Carers with some form of ID (to confirm/recognise their status) and Officers undertook to consider this proposal.

### **3. Consultations undertaken**

- 3.1. The Committee invites all Councillors to attend and contribute to its meetings. The Committee Chair and Vice Chair invite prospective report authors to attend their pre-meetings and recently Lead Officers have engaged in this process and reports have been submitted on time.

### **4. Implications**

- 4.1. The Committee carefully considers reports, 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](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers)