

Cabinet Member Children and Families: Annual Report

Cabinet Member: Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member
Children & Families

Division and Local Member: All

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1. SUMMARY

- 1.2 This annual report provides an account of the role of the Cabinet Member for Children & Families in terms of responsibilities as required by the statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) April 2013. The Cabinet Member for Children & Families covers the full role of the LMCS as set out in the guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/directors-of-childrens-services-roles-and-responsibilities>.
- 1.3 The above guidance is subject to amendment by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 (the Act) which is intended to improve support for looked after children and care leavers, promote the welfare and safeguarding of children, and make provisions about the regulation of social workers. The Act sets out corporate parenting principles for the council as a whole to be the best parent it can be to children in its care. Local authorities will be required to publish their support offer to care leavers and to promote the educational attainment of children who have been adopted or placed in other long-term arrangements. The Act makes changes to the arrangements for local child safeguarding partnerships and the serious case review process, including provision for a central Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel for cases of national importance. It also establishes a new regulatory regime for the social work profession.
- 1.4 The Act requires all schools to provide relationships education to pupils receiving primary education, and relationships and sex education to pupils receiving secondary education. The duty applies in relation to academy schools and independent schools as well as maintained schools. The provision of personal, social, health and economic education to pupils receiving primary or secondary education is a permissive power under the Act. The Department for Education is currently consulting on guidance in relation to the above duties and regulations.
- 1.5 Ofsted re-inspected the Council's Children's Services (services for children in need or help and protection, children looked after and care leavers) in November 2017. The previous two inspections, in 2013 and 2015, both rated these service 'Inadequate'. Since then, the Council has been working with improvement partners from Essex County Council with regular scrutiny from the Department for Education. Ofsted inspectors now rate Children's Services in Somerset as 'Requiring Improvement to be Good'. Within this, the performance of the Adoption Service is rated 'Good'.

- 1.6 In summary, the report points to steady progress with improved quality of practice, reduced caseloads and clear consistent leadership. It also highlights increased scrutiny and challenge from elected members. Ofsted noted that aspirations for children have increased within children's services, but there is more to do to ensure that all the departments of the local authority share this responsibility and children looked after and care leavers are prioritised across the County and District Councils.
- 1.7 The Inspectors identified the development of a learning culture in children services as important in supporting further improvement. The report sets out 13 recommendations for the Council, which are underpinned by:
- Increasing the capacity of the leadership team so that the pace of change can be accelerated.
 - Ensuring that partners (especially Health and Police) work effectively together to secure positive outcomes for children.
 - Increasing the range and quality of local care placements for children looked after.
 - Improving the consistency of social work practice
- 1.8 Following the Ofsted re-inspection, the Statutory Direction has been lifted and the Council is no longer subject to Statutory Intervention. The DfE will provide a 12-month period of 'supervision and support' to sustain the improvement. At the request of the Council, Essex have agreed to continue during 2018 to Chair the Quarterly Performance Review Meetings (QPRM), established following the Ministerial Direction in 2015.
- 1.9 Improving children's services remains a key priority for the authority. The Cabinet welcomes this recognition of progress made so far and is committed to building on it to move the services to a rating of 'Good' and eventually 'Outstanding'.

2. THE STRATEGIC & PROFESSIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- 2.2 The current statutory guidance has, as the central principle, the co-ordination of education and children's social care services under a single elected member to support the strategic and professional framework within which the safety and the educational, social and emotional needs of children and young people are considered together.
- 2.3 The strengthened professional structure for children's services comprising Children's Social Care, Education, Commissioning and Performance, and Quality Assurance and Safeguarding was established in 2016. Each senior manager provides professional leadership for their service area and also represents children's services, deputising for the DCS (and all the functions of the role) as required. Following the departure of the Assistant Director, Quality Assurance in October 2016, we have not yet been able to re-appoint permanently to the role. The role's function is current covered by an interim.
- 2.4 The statutory responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) and therefore the Council's responsibilities in relation to Education remain significant. The departure of the Deputy Director Education in 2017 has led to a reassessment of the leadership capacity to support the Council's aspirational

ambition for education outcomes, with the need to strengthen senior leadership in relation to inclusion of vulnerable pupils, and overall attainment and skills levels in Somerset.

- 2.5 The strategic framework for children's services, to meet the requirements of the statutory guidance and the Direction Notice, is met by the Somerset's Children and Young People's Plan 2016–2019 (CYPP) <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/plans/children-and-young-peoples-plan/> . The plan was approved by Full Council in May 2016 and commits the County Council and its partners to the level of resourcing required for Children's Social Care and its associated functions for the period 2016–19, the plan reflects the ambition of the Council to have in place 'excellent' services by the end of 2019. The multi- agency plan, overseen by Somerset Children's Trust (SCT) contains seven improvement programmes:
- Supporting children, families and communities to become more resilient
 - Promoting healthy outcomes and giving children the best start in life
 - Improving emotional health and wellbeing
 - Building skills for life
 - Providing help early and effectively
 - Achieving effective multi-agency support for more vulnerable children and young people and developing an excellent children's social work service
 - Embedding a think family approach across the workforce.
- 2.6 Each improvement programme has an annual action plan, with both the 2nd and now draft 3rd year plans being directed by the progress indicators published in the CYPP. In this second year of the CYPP the multi-agency nature of the partnership has been evaluated to evidence a maturing relationship between agencies, both at strategic and operational levels.
- 2.7 Accountability and challenge in relation to these plans has been provided by partner agencies through the Children's Trust, the Education Partnership Board and by elected members through the Corporate Parenting Board and the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee. Year two of the CYPP has demonstrated many achievements towards the ambitions for our children and young people to be safe, well and aspiring to their best potential. However, there are still some challenging outcomes to meet as the plan moves to year three.
- 2.8 Strategies that are in place include:
- Somerset's Education Strategy – Achieving Excellence for All 2016–2019 (with supporting strategies / plans across key stages)
 - Somerset's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2016–2019
 - Somerset's Early Help Charter
 - Somerset's Early Help Strategy 2016–2019
 - Effective Support for children and families in Somerset – thresholds for assessment and services guidance (reviewed in September 2016)
 - Workforce Development Strategy
 - Somerset County Council Sufficiency Statement for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2016–2019
 - Somerset's Transformation Plan for Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing 2015–2020

- Somerset's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy for Children and Young People aged 0–25

3. Children's Social Care

- 3.1 All the improvement programmes of the CYPP contribute to improving children's social care services either directly or indirectly by improving outcomes for vulnerable children and thereby reducing demand for children's social care services. Improvement Programme 6 has provided the core improvement focus for Children's Social Care – *Achieving effective multi-agency support for more vulnerable children and young people and developing an excellent children's social work service*. Programme 6 for 2018/19 is being updated to reflect the Ofsted report's recommendations.
- 3.2 Although Children's Social Care leadership and management capacity continues to strengthen, including successful internal promotions, this area remains a priority for the Council and has been identified as a priority by Ofsted to sustain and continue improvement. The Principal Social Worker role is currently unfilled, following the departure of the individual to a role in a southwest university.
- 3.3 **Youth Offending Team (YOT)**. The work of the multi-agency YOT is overseen by the YOT management board which provides strategic direction with the aim of preventing offending by children and young people and is currently chaired by the DCS. An annual Youth Justice Plan is in place.
- 3.4 The Government in 2016 carried out a review of the youth justice arrangements in England, however there remains concerns about securing multi-agency funding from statutory partners with an unequal share of funding falling on the Council.
- 3.5 A Short Quality Screening (SQS) of the Youth Offending Service in Somerset carried out by the Probation Inspectorate in 2016 found that the Youth Offending Teams were 'very good' at engaging with children and young people and understanding their individual needs. They had a clear understanding of the benefits of restorative justice and worked well with others to achieve positive outcomes, particularly in cases presenting complex educational, or emotional and mental health needs. As with their social care colleagues work is in place to address the consistent quality of assessments and plans and more effective management oversight of practice.

4. Education

- 4.1 The strategic education vision for Somerset 'Achieving Excellence for All' that was introduced in April 2016 has remained the focus of the work of the Somerset Education Partnership Board. The focus in 2017–18 has remained on our most vulnerable groups including the more able children and young people. Schools are actively engaged in this agenda and have embraced supporting operational strategies such as the on-going work of the Somerset Education Partners (SEP) to support and challenge every school's performance and the Team Around the School initiative which is now in place across the County.
- 4.2 The SEND Strategy 2016 and implementation of SEND reforms have been tested this year in the form of a Gloucestershire led Peer Review which was held in May 2017. As a result, there is an SEND Priority Action Plan, that has multi-

agency ownership, in place which sets out to address a number of key issues across the local area, including:

- An historic set of arrangements with schools which mean that the number of pupils' subject to formal SEN assessment and planning is significantly lower than other areas
- Improving the capacity of the partnership to ensure high quality Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP) are in place where needed
- Supporting the capacity of Somerset Schools to support pupils with SEND to achieve improved outcomes.
- Increasing the capacity of the SEND casework team to meet the numbers of children who are assessed as needing an EHCP

These areas for development are set in the context where Somerset has a number of strengths including:

- The strategic participation of the Parent Carer Forum and the 'Unstoppables' continues to be a strength of the Somerset partnership.
- Many examples of outstanding practice from Schools and specialist services across the partnership
- Well-resourced specialist support and outreach support to schools.
- Somerset Core Standards which provide a framework for a graduated response
- A strong partnership between Schools and the LA leading the improvements

Planning for revising the *Somerset's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy for Children and Young People aged 0-25 2016-19* is to begin in early 2018, in preparation for this the local authority and Clinical Commissioning Group have completed a Council for Disabled Children (CDC) Audit in relation to implementation of the SEND reforms and a CDC workshop is planned for February 2018.

- 4.3 The Local Authority continues to have a leadership role in driving the educational achievement of Somerset children forward and ensuring that the County's most vulnerable children have the same opportunities as their peers to achieve their full potential. In addition to the SEP programme introduced last year there have been a number of changes to the way in which the LA works with all its schools. 51% of all pupils now attend an academy with 34% of all schools now being academies with an increasing number in Multi Academy Trusts. The relationship between the LA and these schools remains focused on the effectiveness of education provision regardless of status. With the exception of one academy chain all academies have taken up the offer of the SEP programme. For the second-year funding has been provided to enable schools to bid to support groups of schools who are focused on the priorities set out in the strategic vision. This funding has been an agreed partnership between the LA and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The Local Authority has also supported teaching schools in the County to make bids through the Regional Schools Commissioners office for funds to support the priorities set out in the Education Vision and Strategy.
- 4.4 Currently 85.7% of Somerset Schools are judged to be Good or better by Ofsted. This is below the national average of 88.4%. All maintained schools have been risk assessed in relation to their performance and appropriate support programmes put in place.

- 4.5 Over the year we have rolled out Transition Panels across the County that identify pupils that are at risk of not being in Education Employment or Training (NEET). Programmes of support are then put in place to support their transition to college. As at December 2017 91% of pupils supported through this programme had remained in education.
- 4.6 The monitoring of education performance internally is managed through the, Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, the Somerset Education Partnership Board, Schools Causing Concern Group meetings as well as the Children's Trust and some aspects such as SEND being presented at the Health and Well Being Board. Externally education is monitored by the Annual conversation with Ofsted and regular Senior HMI and Ofsted conversations.
- 4.8 **Attainment Headlines.** The Early Years Foundation Stage indicator is the percentage of children achieving a good level of development (GLD), which they need in order to achieve Expected or Exceeding in all prime Learning Goals (including Literacy and Mathematics). In Somerset 71.0% of children achieve GLD in 2017. This is a further 2 percentage points higher than in 2016, and continues a five-year improvement trend and is in line with the National Average. However, it does mean that 29% of children at aged 5 do not have a good level of development.

At Key Stage One the combined Reading, Writing, Mathematics (RWM) Expected Standard for Somerset increased significantly on the previous year to 65.1% against a national average of 64%. Those children gaining the Higher Standard were 11.9%, compared with 8.1% in 2016, against a national average of 11% in 2017. We are therefore above national performance.

At Key Stage Two the combined Reading, Writing, Maths Expected Standard for Somerset was 58.9% against a national average of 61%. Those children gaining the Higher Standard were 8% in Somerset against 9% nationally. In 2016 the NA was 52 and Somerset achieved 52%. Therefore, although Somerset's performance has improved, the National Average has also increased, with a gap for the LA of 2.1% in 2017.

Assessment measures at the end of Key Stage 4 have undergone considerable change this year with English and Maths outcomes being assessed on a 1-9 scale. In addition, there have been changes to the headline measures, making comparison with performance in previous years problematic. However, comparing Somerset outcomes with National averages, the progress 8 measure of -0.12 is described in DfE tables as 'below average' against the National average for all state funded schools of -0.03. The attainment 8 measure of 45.7 is statistically in line with the National outcome for all schools of 44.6. The percentage of students achieving a Grade 5 or above in English and Mathematics was 40.2% against a national average for all schools of 39.6%.

5. Commissioning & Performance

- 5.1 The Children and Young People's Plan was produced along with a performance framework to ensure delivery of the annual action plans and reporting through the Children's Trust, scrutiny and cabinet. Various events have taken place across the county on key priorities, plus the engagement of

staff through a practitioner champions forum and a quarterly newsletter have continued to ensure awareness of the plan and progress remains a high focus.

- 5.2 The Corporate Parenting Board is now an effective forum, led by a dedicated and enthusiastic independent chair, which is driving delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and supporting action plans to cover the main areas of focus which includes voice of the child, education, health, leaving care and fostering. Performance is presented at every meeting and is scrutinised by the Board. Young people from Somerset in Care and Leaving Care Councils attend regularly enabling them to question officers and provide their perspective on areas under discussion. The vast majority of members have attended corporate parenting training.
- 5.3 Ofsted recognised that there has been improvement within Somerset County Council's internal early help service, the getset teams, but that more needs to be done particularly with partners for early help to be effective. During 2017, the implementation of a new case management system along with the getset QPRM process, training and development activity and audit work have all contributed to improving practice. This will continue in 2018 with ongoing focus on improving practice.
- 5.4 Significant work has been undertaken to develop the Somerset Family Support Services which will encompass getset and Public Health Nursing (health visitors and school nurses). The aim is to establish integrated multi-agency services that identify and support children who need help quickly and effectively. Phase 1 of this work over 2018/19 will focus on the development of the service and the delivery of a co-ordinated early help offer utilising technology and a wide network of local community venues such as families' homes, schools, health centres, village halls and children's centre buildings. This will also include greater co-working and co-location of getset and public health nursing prior to full integration of the two services during 2019/20.
- 5.5 Commissioning within children's services has historically been underdeveloped, and a restructure and appointment of additional capacity has been the key focus during 2017. In addition, the relationships with service providers particularly residential children's homes and independent fostering agencies has been improved with regular visits, provider events and increased sub-regional work through the peninsular arrangements. Further capacity to increase scope and pace of the commissioning team will be in place during the early part of 2018 with immediate focus on sufficiency and costs of placements, establishing an effective contract management function, and more effective early help arrangements with partners.