

Somerset County Council
County Council – 22 January 2020

Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

Chairman: Cllr Leigh Redman

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officer: Jamie Jackson – Governance Manager - Scrutiny

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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 meetings on 13 September, 18 October, 15 November and 13 December 2019.
- 1.2.** We continue to focus, on the outcomes arising from the Ofsted Inspection, and on ensuring the delivery of the new Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP). The Vice-Chair worked closely with Officers on the 4 priority themes of the CYPP: Supported families; Healthy Lives; A Great Education; Positive Activities.
- 1.3.** Our predecessor Committee (from 2015 to 2017) was able to help bring about 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. 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 we outlined the importance for the Committee to focus on all aspects of the four new priorities of the revised Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) and we agreed that our work

programme should be developed through discussions with the Committee Chair, Vice-Chair, Director of Children's Services and relevant Cabinet Members.

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.

The Committee was keen to help facilitate and progress the Scrutiny Review, and we support the recommendations about the Scrutiny function, made elsewhere in the agenda.

2.2. 13 September 2019

Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board Update – We received an update and overview of the Early Help Board, and they noted the 5 key areas of activity approved by the Cabinet last February designed to develop and improve the early help offer in Somerset. The Chair summed up the discussion and noted that the Committee would endorse the call for better collaboration and support for transforming data capture and analysis to cope multi agency intervention. He encouraged Members, particularly those who were District Councillors to help work in district councils and to attend connection events. He also requested that Officers look in to arranging an appropriate visit for the Committee and an update report in 6 months.

After our Committee meeting finished we then held an open workshop, to which we invited all members, that provided us with an interesting and informative overview of Special Educational Needs.

2.3. 18 October 2019

Troubled Families update report – We considered this report about how the Troubled Families programme has been delivered in Somerset. It was noted that the Troubled Families (TF) Programme (2015 – 2020) was run from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and managed by the Council. The TF programme was working to achieve significant and sustained progress with up to 3000 Somerset families, to help with addressing worklessness, poor school attendance, health problems, crime and anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse and children who need help. The Vice-Chair thanked the Officers for the interesting and informative presentation. He noted that the Health and Well-being Board (HWB) was leading on liaising with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to improve data sharing with partner agencies. He suggested, and it was accepted, that the Committee ask the HWB to request that the TF programme be included amongst the areas where enhanced partnership working was being encouraged.

2019/20 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report - Month 4 – We considered this report, introduced by the Deputy Leader of Council, that provided details of the month 4 forecast outturn position for 2019/20 for the net Revenue Budget. The report also highlighted variances to service budgets, as well as detailing emerging issues, risks, areas of concern and proposed actions to resolve them. There was a brief discussion about social worker recruitment, and it was noted that recruiting experienced social workers was not only difficult but could also be more expensive. However, in the long run it would save money as it would require less to be spent on children as they would be better supported in their families.

Value for Money: Tracker and Social Care Experts Review 2018 - 2019– We considered this report introduced by the Deputy Leader of Council, that had been used by the Council’s external auditor to inform their overall Value for Money conclusion. It was explained that the external auditor had sought additional assurance over the robustness regarding the Council’s budget planning in respect of some services, including the increase to the Children’s Services base budget. The work had provided more information to the external auditors and enabled them to provide assurance over the embeddedness of arrangements for sustainable resource deployment. We accepted the report.

2.4. 15 November 2019

Review of Scrutiny function – We considered this report that provided details of the scrutiny review and the subsequent proposals for an enhanced role for scrutiny members. We endorsed the report along with the implementation of its recommendations to encourage stronger and more effective scrutiny and to hold the Executive to account. The Chair and Committee were excited by this change, the need to make scrutiny more accessible and open was welcomed, and it was hoped that by moving our meeting day more Members would be able to take part, and having an Officer whose role was just Scrutiny would open up many opportunities.

Progress on the implementation of the new Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership arrangement – We considered this report that noted that the three Somerset Safeguarding Partners (Somerset County Council, Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, and Avon and Somerset Constabulary) now constituted a tripartite Children’s Safeguarding Partnership. In the interests of efficiency, it had been possible to integrate the Somerset Children’s Trust with the new Safeguarding Partnership arrangements. Delivery subgroups were currently under review with revised chairing and membership. We noted the final report of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Board for 2018/2019.

Annual Customer Feedback report – This report provided details of customer feedback and it was noted that in 2018/19 there were a total of 1923 pieces of feedback recorded (all types) compared with 1933 in the previous year (0.5% reduction). Complaints had reduced by just over 2% on the previous year with

1076 received (compared to 1101 in 17/18). The report was accepted.

2.5. 13 December 2019

Young Carers Update report – This report provided details on the future support arrangements for young carers following a Cabinet decision last May based upon a vision for better identification of, better engagement with and better support for young carers both known and unknown within Somerset. It was noted Young Carer attendance at the new youth clubs from September to October 2019 had remained stable compared to participation in the groups which existed prior to the Cabinet decision, with the exception of the newly commissioned group in Minehead.

2019/20 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report – Month 6 (Quarter 2) - This report sets out the Quarter 2 (month 6) forecast outturn position for 2019/20 for the net Revenue Budget of £327.967m. It highlighted for us that variances to service budgets, as well as emerging issues, risks, areas of concern and proposed actions to resolve them. We noted that Children's Services are reporting an adverse variance within their budget of £1.768m which is an adverse movement of £1.149m from month 5. The report was accepted.

Children's Services performance report Quarter 2 – 2019/2020 – We considered this report which set out the key activities and measures used to check performance for the year against the identified priorities. It was noted that the report did not contain details of all the other activities that together contributed to what helped make a difference to children in Somerset. The report included key performance indicators (KPIs), to show how progress was assessed against targets and project updates. Performance was shown using performance ratings (based on the RAG ratings) and progress was shown in terms of direction of performance (DOP) through the use of arrows. There were questions about tolerance and success with regards to how those levels and measures would be reflected in future reports. The Chair suggested and it was agreed that the Committee give consideration to allocating a Member Champion for each of the 6 key activity areas.

Update on the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing – We considered this report that provided a commentary on the development of a new Strategy for Children and Young People's Mental Health 2020-2024 which would be drafted and the consulted on in early in the new year. The Committee heard that a key aim was to address the gaps in preventative and early intervention mental health support for CYP and their families; expand capacity of voluntary community and primary care sector. Over the previous 18 months, there had been significant improvements in the mental health services available for the children and young people of Somerset. There was a discussion about the development of the improvement and transformation programmes and the importance of keeping clearly defined and separate the strategies and plans. The report was accepted and it was

suggested and agreed that a further update be provided in the Spring.

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 Lead Officers are engaged in this process and reports are being 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

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.