

## **SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Friday 16 June 2017 at 11.00 am

**Present:** Cllr L Redman (Chairman), Cllr A Bown, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr J Lock, Cllr M Pullin (Vice-Chairman), Cllr J Williams, Richard Berry and Ruth Hobbs

**Other Members present:**

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr N Bloomfield, Helen Fenn and Eileen Tipper

### **2 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2**

The Chairman welcomed all those present to the meeting and he hoped that both new and returning Members would find being on the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee and enjoyable and interesting experience.

At the suggestion of Cllr J Lock, the Chairman called for a moment of quiet contemplation to mark the anniversary of the passing of the former Member of Parliament for Batley and Spennings, Mrs Jo Cox, who had been murdered in her constituency, 12 months earlier.

Cllr Coles, Cllr Filmer, Cllr Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr Pullin, Cllr Redman, and Cllr Williams, all declared a personal interest as a District and/or City/Town, Parish Councillor.

Mrs Hobbs declared a personal interest regarding agenda item 7 as a Director Somerset Parent Carer Forum.

### **3 Minutes from the last meeting - Agenda Item 3**

The Committee agreed the minutes of the last meeting were accurate, and the Chairman signed them.

### **4 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4**

There were no members of the public present.

### **5 Scrutiny Work Programme - Agenda Item 5**

The Chairman explained to the Committee that an item on the agenda for each of its meetings would be to consider its own work programme and proposed future agenda items and he noted that any Member of the Council could propose an area and or topic within the Committee's remit for it to consider and scrutinise.

The Committee considered and accepted its own work programme and the future agenda items listed and agreed to add the following items:

To include for the 29 July meeting an update on the MFTP process and savings within Children's Services;

To include for the 15 September meeting an update on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children;

The Committee considered and noted the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in forthcoming months including Cabinet meetings up to 10 July 2017. The Chairman explained that this was also included for each meeting to allow Members an opportunity to request considering an item either before or after a Cabinet meeting or Cabinet member decision.

The Chairman explained the background of the outcome tracker and how this had proved to be a useful tool in ensuring the recommendations or suggested actions of the Committee were being followed through and progressed. There was a brief discussion of some of the previous outcomes and their colour/status and the Scrutiny Manager provided updates. The Committee accepted the updated outcome tracker.

## **6 Children and Young People's Plan 2016-19 - Agenda Item 6**

The Committee considered this 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, as follows:

1. Supporting children, families and communities to become more resilient
2. Promoting healthy outcomes and giving children the best start in life
3. Embedding a 'Think Family' approach
4. Improving emotional health and wellbeing
5. Building skills for life
6. Providing help early and effectively
7. Achieving effective multi-agency support for more vulnerable children and young people and developing an excellent children's social work service.

The Partnership Business Manager – Children's Services, introduced the report and provided a very thorough overview of its contents, explaining the CYPP's origins after the Council received a Direction Notice from the Secretary of State for Education in November 2015 requiring a three year CYPP to be developed and implemented which the Department for Education could then use to judge how effective and sustainable improvements in children's social care functions had been.

It was explained by way of further background that the CYPP was the strategic plan for Somerset Children's Trust, providing the focus for partners' actions and investment and the means by which the Department for Education would measure improvement. An update of the plan was reported on a quarterly basis and the report contained details of Quarter 4 and the end of Year 1. The meeting therefore provided an opportunity to introduce Members to the CYPP and allow time for comments and questions on the progress at the end of the

first year and to consider the actions set to progress the Plan into its second year.

Members heard about the data contained in the Executive Summary and particular explanation and attention was given to the areas that were showing as red and therefore missing target. In addition it was reported that measures were also being used to assess the delivery of the 7 improvement programmes and a set of overarching measures designed to assess 'how we would know we had made a difference', as this would be a likely method that Ofsted would use to gauge how effect policy changes brought about by the CYPP had been.

The report was accepted. The Chairman encouraged Committee Members to consider the CYPP before the next meeting in July. 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.

## 7 **SEND Peer Review** - Agenda Item 7

The Committee 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 resulting report (attached to the report as an appendix) acknowledged that there were some good practices and initiatives throughout the service but that a local area inspection would be likely to find 'significant weaknesses' in practice, based on progress to date in the implementation of SEND reforms and a lack of evidence to display the positive impact made in relation to outcomes for children across Somerset to date.

It was reported that the peer review had found an acknowledgement that there had been a delay in Somerset responding to the SEND reform agenda – which had been reflected by the reactive nature of the SEND work since 2015. This had meant that the local area had not made the level of progress that would normally be expected by the reforms in terms of showing improved outcomes for children and young people. Overall the peer review found there had been a slow pace of change and it was unclear why certain areas had been prioritised over others when looking purely at the measurable impact those had made for Children and Young People in Somerset with SEND.

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.

The report was accepted and it was suggested and agreed that an update be provided in a few months to give the Committee an overview of the progress.

## **8 Progress Report on the Implementation of the 30 hours per week Early Years Entitlement - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee considered this report that provided 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.

It was explained that the capital funding and support strategies to the early years sector aimed to help create sufficient childcare places for the 30 hours extended entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds in Somerset and supported the 7 programmes in the Somerset's Children and Young People's Plan 2016-19.

Members heard, by way of a background, that expressions of interest had been sought from the early year's sector and applications were scored against the EFSA criteria set out in the application guidance. Somerset had then 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.

The six projects put forward scored the highest scores at shortlisting and were most likely to meet the tight timeframe to be ready to deliver 30 hour spaces in September 2017. The final six projects were a combination of both Local Authority led bids and private providers and an update about each of the projects was provided in section 4 of the report.

There was 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. The figure had subsequently risen to 69% of providers with 4,271 spaces and it was explained that offering spaces was not mandatory and providers could voluntarily register online with the Council. This meant there may be more providers offering spaces and proactive exercises to establish the extent of further spaces would be carried out during June and July 2017.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the update and the report was accepted.

## **9 Fostering Recruitment Update report - Agenda Item 9**

The Committee considered this report that 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.

It was noted that a lack of sufficient numbers of foster placements remained a significant pressure within the service and it affected the delivery of appropriate plans for children. In response to a question it was explained that Somerset had enough placements for Somerset children but that it remained the case some were taken up by children from other areas, and that the existing gap of placements was around 30-40 number. Members heard that local authorities across the country had at times to place children, particularly older children, in placements which may not meet their assessed need, for example, children may be placed in residential provision or in placements out of county due to insufficient fostering provision including children with more complex needs.

There was a brief discussion about Performance information over the last year and it was noted that 2016/17 had seen a continued increase use of in-house fostering provision despite an overall net loss of foster carers as de-registration numbers remained high and represented a net loss of fostering households. In response to a question about the reasons for deregistration it was stated that there were various reasons and that for a number of carers it was because permanence has been secured for the children placed with them. This could mean some foster carers becoming special guardians or adopting the children in their care. Amongst other reasons given were due to changes in the foster carer's family circumstances and it was noted that only 4 carers gave dissatisfaction with the service as a reason for deregistration and no carers had left the service to transfer to another fostering agency.

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.

**10 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 10**

The Chairman, after ascertaining there were no other matters arising, thanked all those present for attending this first meeting of the new quadrennium and he encouraged his fellow Committee Members to take up opportunities to visit and/or learn about this interesting and varied area of the Council's business.

**(The meeting ended at 1.20 pm)**

## **CHAIRMAN**