

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 28 July 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chairman), Cllr A Bown, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr N Taylor, Cllr J Williams. Cllr Coles (Substitute) and Cllr John Hunt (Substitute). Ruth Hobbs and Eileen Tipper

Other Members present: Cllr Groskop, Cllr Nicholson and Cllr Verdon.

Apologies for absence: Cllr M Pullin, Cllr N Bloomfield, Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr J Lock. Richard Berry and Helen Fenn.

11 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

Cllr Bown, Cllr Coles, Cllr James Hunt, Cllr Redman, Cllr J Taylor, 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.

Eileen Tipper declared a personal interest as a lay member of the Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and as a trustee of CHYPPS.

12 Minutes from the last meeting - Agenda Item 3

The Committee agreed the minutes of the last meeting were accurate, providing they were amended to show Cllr Filmer had been present, and the Chairman signed them.

13 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no members of the public present, and hence no questions asked, statements/comments made or petitions presented.

14 Scrutiny Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

The Committee considered and agreed its own work programme and the future agenda items listed.

The Committee considered and noted the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in forthcoming months including Cabinet meetings up to 27 September 2017.

The Committee also accepted the updated outcome tracker and the Scrutiny Manager reminded Members that once an outcome had been agreed as complete (Green) and reported to the Committee, it would be retained on the master copy but not reported again.

15 **Children and Young People's Plan update reports - 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. Improving emotional health and wellbeing
4. Building skills for life
5. Providing help early and effectively
6. Achieving effective multi-agency support for more vulnerable children and young people and developing an excellent children's social work service.
7. Embedding a 'Think Family' approach

The Partnership Business Manager – Children's Services, introduced the report and provided a very thorough overview of its contents, noting that the CYPP was reported on a quarterly basis and the report contained details of the activity of the first quarter of Year 2 and provided a summary of activity and progress as demonstrated by each of the 7 programmes' Highlight Reports.

Attention turned to the Executive Summary and it was reported that the second year of the CYPP had begun with ambitious and robust action plans that reflected the good progress made throughout the first year, and would focus on embedding the developments made in year one, and setting out the challenges to ensure the Somerset Children's Trust (SCT) meets the outcomes agreed in the CYPP.

It was reported that as a result of an analysis of the achievements to date that they could be categorised in to 4 main areas and they were: Information and Resources; Resilience in children, young people, their families and those who support them; SEND – a focus on the 9 priorities identified during the recent peer review; and Approaches – the main focus would be on developing early help hubs (or Family Hubs) through closer joint working between public health nursing and 'getset' services.

The Committee then began to consider the 7 highlight reports that provided an overall status update; progress made since the last highlight report; slippage – reasons and remedial actions; actions and outputs for the next period; and the most significant current risks and issues regarding each improvement programme. There was a brief discussion about the direction of travel arrows and how the 'trend' judgement was decided and it was suggested that consideration be given to how this was assessed and shown as for a few of the programmes it seemed as if the trend arrow and colour did not seem to match the narrative report or overall direction of travel on the improvement journey.

In respect of Programme 1 there was a question about the most significant current risk concerning debt advice and support and the lack of data to show if

family (when signposted) were accessing advice and/or benefits they were entitled to. In response it was explained that much of this information was held by the Department for Work and Pensions and possibly due to the General Election last May, data on universal credit roll out and the number of family in each District Council area this affected. It was thought the numbers of family seeking help with debt issues were lessening but effort was made to provide advice/support when identified. The Committee noted its on-going concerns with the universal credit scheme and its implementation, delays in which had seemingly caused unnecessary hardship to a number of vulnerable young people and families.

Also regarding Programme the Chairman asked about the increase in the number of school aged children with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities (SEND) placed out the state sector. In response the Director for Children's Services said that this was a complex issue however the key was to ensure children were supported in the most appropriate provision to suit their (often complex needs) and currently he acknowledged too many children were placed in special schools or out of county settings. An idea was floated about a possible future Task and Finish Group to consider the 'wider inclusion' agenda. It was suggested and agreed to receive an overarching SEND update at the next meeting.

Regarding Programme 2 the Committee welcomed the news that the first cohort of 21 teaching staff had completed the Personal, Social, Health, Economic (PSHE) Education Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course. It was also noted that there were now 23 breastfeeding volunteer champions, and an additional 30 staff had been trained in perinatal and infant mental health awareness. There was a question about the transition from 'statements' to Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP's) and it was agreed to include these figures in the SEND update at the September meeting. There was a question about the fall in the number of new birth visits conducted by Health Visitors within 14 days and it was explained that there was uncertainty on the accuracy of this figure; breastfeeding support and midwifery were the responsibility of the Clinical Commissioning Group and those services were undergoing a period of change. However the majority of support for new mothers continued to be provided in the home.

In respect of Programme 3 attention was drawn initially to correct a typographical error and it was explained that 'Kooth' was an online counselling service launched in Somerset. There was question about the quality of the CAMHS service was measured particularly in regard to the various referrals – emergency, urgent or routine. In response it was noted that this information could be included in the next report, it was noted that the emergency and urgent referrals were showing 100% on target and the waiting time for routine referrals was currently 6 weeks in Somerset, against 8 weeks elsewhere.

Consideration of Programme 4 began with an overview of schools performance as measured by Ofsted inspections/visits and how this had compared with previous years. There was also a brief discussion of the availability of provision for 30 hours per week in Early Years settings in Taunton. It was noted that the concern was with parents currently accessing the 15 hour provision and the capacity to extend to 30 hours and it was explained that it was believed that the extra provision was available but that this didn't have to be in the same

location. There was a question about a new interim head of SEND being in place and in response it was confirmed that in fact this post was now vacant as a result of management changes. The Director for Children's Services promised to keep the Committee updated on staffing developments. It was noted that the number of pupils being excluded on a fixed term and/or permanent exclusion basis had continued to increase and two thirds of those affected were categorised as having SEND. Members sought and received assurance that Officers were working with Head teachers Association to understand this trend and address the issues. It was also noted that the number of families choosing to home educate continued to increase and a survey was being undertaken to understand the reasons for those choices.

Regarding Programme 5 the Committee welcomed news of the successful implementation of the Early Help Case Management System for 'getset' services including initial training and wider deployment was being considered for other services. It was requested that the supporting information to demonstrate performance in the length of time open cases (Early Help assessment) be reviewed.

In respect of Programme 6 there was a brief discussion of IR35 and what the change in locum rules referred to. Members heard that that this was a change in the tax legislation that impacted on locum staff and made them less likely to want to travel. It was acknowledged that this might encourage some to look to take up more permanent positions although the general shortage of social workers in the South West of England and a shortage of social workers willing to relocate to the region remained an issue. There was a question about Team Around the School (TAS) coverage and it was explained that all secondary schools had access to TAS and approximately 505 of Primary Schools.

In respect of Programme 7 the Chairman suggested that the highlight report contain more information so that the Committee would be better able to understand the situation and provide support if required. There was a question about increase in the average caseload for social workers and it was explained that this was due to an increase in the overall caseload and a number of vacancies arising in some teams. It was requested that a map be produced for Young Carers to help them identify available services/support. It was suggested that further education colleges might be approached regarding apprenticeships and in response it was explained that consideration had been given to creating an apprenticeship in social care and an update would be provided in the next report.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for its detailed consideration of the report in detail and the suggested outcomes/actions points had been noted and picked up at future meetings.

16 **Children and Young People's Plan - Member Champions** - Agenda Item 7

The Committee 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 Chairman, as he had initiated during the

last quadrennium, had again suggested that each Member of the Committee volunteer to act as a 'Champion' for each of the 7 programmes.

The Committee, in recognising the importance of the CYPP in ensuring continued improvement in Children's Services, was asked to ensure that each member of the Committee took a special interest in one of the 7 improvement programmes of the CYPP.

There was a brief discussion of this ambition and attention turned to Appendix A of the report which listed the 7 programmes and the Member volunteers to date.

The Committee noted that Cllr Lock had indicated she would be happy to take an interest in Programme 5 and the Chairman indicated his continued interest in Programme 6.

In addition Cllr Williams volunteered to take an interest in Programme 1; Mrs Eileen Tipper volunteered to take an interest in Programme 2; Cllr Dimery volunteered to take an interest in Programme 4, and it was noted that Cllr Pullin (although absent) had also indicated an interest in Programme 4; Cllr Taylor indicated his willingness to take an interest in programme 7.

The Committee welcomed the interest in this suggestion 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. The Committee would retain overall responsibility for questioning/challenge. The report was accepted.

17 **Family Hubs** - Agenda Item 8

The Committee considered this 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. 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.

It was explained that phase 1 of the creation of the Family Hub Service in Somerset would be to establish joint working across universal health and well-being services for children and young people (health visiting services for 0-5 years and also school nursing services for 5-19 years) commissioned by the Council and the SCC getset services for children and young people (including children's centre services and family support/troubled family support services).

Members heard that the current gaps in outcomes for instance a 20% lower breastfeeding rate in deprived areas showed that services needed to be delivered in a different way. The proposed changes would help improve outcomes for Somerset's children, young people and families; align service provision to the strategic direction set out in the CYPP; better reflect national best practice and result in efficiencies and cost savings.

It was reported that national research on integrating services would improve processes resulting in an increased understanding, trust and cooperation between different services; improve communication and bring about a more consistent implementation of services; and lead to less duplication of processes across agencies. The changes would lead to improved outputs through providing more responsive and appropriate services; resulting in better access to services and/or increased user involvement; whilst also being more cost-effective. It was also noted that, importantly, the changes envisaged better outcomes such as improved cognitive or school performance; improved general physical health; enhanced social behaviour and improved parenting and/or family relations.

In response to a question it was acknowledged that engagement with effected staff would be of crucial importance as the project evolved and an initial series of workshops had been held with staff groups during March and July. In the latest round of sessions over 100 staff including those from 'getset', Health Visitors and School Nursing had given mostly positive feedback and indicated a desire to work together. Staff had also been able to volunteer to support the 4 work streams that would help to progress the detailed work that would be required.

The next stage was for wider consultation through the Autumn with a decision made on the final implementation of the service delivery early next year.

The Chairman invited comments from Committee Members and in the ensuing discussion the following points were made, issues raised and/or questions asked/answered including:

- An explanation was provided of the background regarding Children's Centres in Somerset and how those facilities and the services they provided had evolved over the last few years; it was explained that many other local authorities had already addressed their early help offer and had closed children centre buildings whilst still delivering an early help service via other delivery mechanisms;
- With the onset of different agencies and providers working together it would be important to ensure agreements and protocols regarding information governance were in place for the secure handling of personal information;
- It was confirmed that a variety of other public sector agencies/services would be involved in the Family Hub centres including the Police, NHS services such as Midwifery, and Education Welfare Services;
- It was noted that the on-going Team Around The School policy had proved to be successful as this would be a helpful indicator/model of bringing about changes and how to work with partners and integrate services;
- It was acknowledged that an aim of the move to creating Family Hubs was to achieve efficiencies however this would not be at the expense of frontline staff, the objective was to slim down management, administration and overheads including the number of buildings and not reduce the number of staff providing services in local communities;
- It was requested that the Family Hub service takes an holistic approach to and offers a variety of services as this would be more likely to ensure greater patronage in local communities;

- A suggestion regarding performance indicators/targets asked that they be meaningful and think about how appropriately successful change could be measured and judged.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the update and the report was accepted. It was suggested and agreed that an update report be provided as a standing item at each meeting.

18 **Fostering Recruitment Activity** - Agenda Item 9

The Committee considered this 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.

It was reported that currently Somerset was one of the few local authorities who did not have such a scheme and therefore these changes would enable the service to align and put itself in a more competitive position regarding the recruitment and retention of foster carers. It was noted that 2016/17 had seen the lowest number of new approvals over a five year period and an overall net loss of foster carers. However in response to a question it was explained that an analysis of why foster carers had left the service did not suggest that they had done so for negative reasons but were more likely due to retirement, ill-health or family commitments.

Members also 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. He had recently spoken to a fellow Foster Carer, who worked with another agency and did not feel as well supported as those working with the Council. He thought this might mean some working with other agencies might come back to the Council.

The Committee's views were sought on the proposed changes, prior to a non-key decision being taken by the Cabinet member for Children and Families in mid-August. In response to a question that the cost of the proposal had been calculated at £226,200 per annum. That figure had been based on the number of current carers, the payment level received during the first 2 weeks of July 2017 and the current number of children in each placement.

There was a brief discussion of the report and attention turned to the Appendix that provided details on the proposed progression scheme and an explanation was provided of the difference between fees and allowances. In response to a question it was stated the fees compared favourably with those paid by other agencies, particularly for specialist fostering and the overall package (including training and support) mean that the Somerset offer was much improved.

The Chairman thanked the Officers for the update and the report was accepted. It was requested that the final version of the revised progression scheme of fee payments be circulated to the Committee once approved.

19 **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.

(The meeting ended at 12.58 pm)

CHAIRMAN