

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 15 September 2017 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chairman), Cllr M Pullin (Vice-Chairman), Cllr N Bloomfield, Cllr A Bown, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr J Lock, Cllr N Taylor, Cllr J Williams. Mrs Ruth Hobbs and Mrs Eileen Tipper

Other Members present: Cllr H Davies, Cllr A Govier, Cllr T Munt, Cllr F Nicholson and Cllr R Williams

Apologies for absence: Mr Richard Berry and Ms Helen Fenn

20 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations of interest.

21 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The Committee agreed the minutes of the last meeting were accurate, providing minute 15.8 was amended to clarify that breastfeeding support services were the responsibility of Somerset County Council and midwifery services were the responsibility of the Clinical Commissioning Group.

With regard to the Committee Champions (page 15), the Chairman asked Members to consider volunteering for the vacancies on Programmes 2 and 3. Cllr Ann Bown volunteered for programme 3. The Chairman confirmed that he will ask the relevant officers to make contact with their Member champion soon. Cllr Lock requested that the nominated officer for programme 5 be updated.

22 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

Nigel Behan, Unite Branch Secretary, asked a public question in regard to Item 10 – Family Support Services.

Q1 “Options Appraisal – Mechanism for Service Delivery” – Will an integrated public-public In-House Service(s) Improvement and Innovation Plan be fully considered prior to any move towards procurement?

Alison Bell responded to Mr Behan to confirm that a full options appraisal is being developed.

23 Scrutiny Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

The Committee considered and noted the Council’s Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in forthcoming months.

The Committee considered and agreed its own work programme and the future agenda items listed. A Committee Member questioned whether exam

achievements were available and should be added as an agenda item to a future meeting. It was clarified that interim results were available but final results would not be published until January 2018 to allow time for appeals. There is usually a slight difference between interim and final results but it is important to allow time for the analysis of different groups and for comparison with other areas. It was highlighted that there has been a significant change to exam standards and also a move from letter grades to number grades.

It was agreed to circulate the interim results electronically and to consider the final results as an agenda item at the 26 January 2018 Committee meeting.

The Committee also accepted the updated outcome tracker and considered the two red items. The Chair reminded the Committee of the importance of completing their DBS check.

The Governance Manager updated the Committee that he had met with the relevant Chairmen regarding a joint meeting of the Adults & Health and Children & Families Scrutiny Committee. Both Chairmen were supportive and it looked as though a joint meeting would take place in January, with a date to be confirmed. Early discussions indicate that the meeting will focus on the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS), which spans the remit of both committees.

24 **SEND 0-25 - Peer Review Update** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee considered this report that provided an update on progress of the SEND 0-25 intervention nine priorities following the Peer Review report to Scrutiny in June 2017.

SEND 0-25 Intervention arrangements have been put in place to address the findings from the Peer Review and the Committee were asked to consider and comment on these arrangements. The nine multi-agency priority groups have been mobilised and have identified actions which would evidence improvement and improve outcomes for Children and Young people with SEND in Somerset. These are being closely managed until December 2017 with multi-agency strategic leads reporting monthly on progress. The nine priority groups 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.

The Committee also received the results of the interim Education Health and Care Plan POET survey (Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool). This survey, available for children and young people, parents and practitioners, offered an opportunity to use the experiences of people who receive SEND services to inform the nine priority group action plans. It was confirmed that these are benchmarked against national results.

Concern was raised over some of the results of the POET survey, in particular: the decrease in those that feel safe and the increase in those home-educated and/or outside of Somerset. The service is aware of these and agrees with the

concern. These are very challenging issues with conflicting interests to balance. They represent a broader, community issue that is bigger than just Children's Services alone. It was suggested that this needs a more strategic view and could be recommended to the Health & Wellbeing Board to consider.

Concern was also raised over the subjective nature of the questions in the survey, the size of the survey and the parameters used if a decrease in score can still be categorised as 'good'. The survey uses a small sample but gives an indication of some of the issues that the service needs to address. The ratings relate to comparison with national performance. Overall, Somerset's results are weaker than the national picture and the service would agree with that indication.

The Committee felt that more information about the survey was required if they will need to be reviewing the report regularly. More clarification was required around the purpose of the survey and how the results impact on improving the outcomes for children in Somerset. After a request to add this to the agenda for the next meeting, it was suggested to wait for the final report to be published. This would then be circulated electronically to Members and any questions arising would then be answered.

The delay in changes to Higher Needs (HN) funding was questioned and the impact this is having on nursery business plans. It was confirmed that there are no planned changes to HN funding in this academic year, only for future funding years. The changes are necessary to ensure proper SEND assessment and funding and to bring Somerset in-line with other authorities. We are still waiting for an announcement from central government regarding the Fairer Funding formula. It was agreed that there is differential practise across school on the use of HN funds.

A member questioned the figures on page 46 and if the conversion target of March will be met. It was clarified that the date relates to a moving cohort of children. Current conversion performance does not indicate that the target will be met by March. The service has been focused on the children who need the transfer most and these cases are often more complicated. The service is reasonably confident that other children will be quicker and simpler to transfer and that they have the necessary resources to achieve. Correct placement will take precedence over achieving the deadline; however, both issues are being addressed.

The Committee noted the report.

25 **Children's Social Care Statutory Customer Feedback report** - Agenda Item
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The Committee received this report from the Service Manager, Customer Access & Experience. Somerset County Council has a statutory obligation to report on the operation of its complaints procedure in relation to Children's Social Care Services. The regulations require that an annual report is produced that includes; 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 contains a summary of the compliments and comments received by the service.

The key messages and findings from the report include:

- 426 pieces of customer feedback received during the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. This comprised 267 complaints, 124 compliments, 16 comments and 19 member enquiries.
- Virtually all complaints were resolved at the initial stage (Stage 1) with only 4 cases escalated to Stage 2 and/or Local Government Ombudsman investigation.
- The average timescale for resolving a complaint during the year was 26 days. Whilst this exceeds our local 10 day target, it does represent improvement on the previous year (29 days).
- The main reasons for complaints is consistent with last year – communication, service provision and attitude/behaviour of staff. There has been an improvement from 29% to 15% in terms of complaints about attitude/behaviour of staff but complaints about communication have risen from 17% to 22%.
- Recommendations have been made to review the complaints policy and associated processes with a view to improving communication with the customer and resolution timescales. The current policy is to respond in 10 working days. This is not being met and needs to be reviewed.

Members questioned the response timescales of other authorities. This varies between 10 and 25 working days. The service would want to carry out an options appraisal before making any changes to the response timescale. A Member commented that in order to achieve a 'first time fix', it was important to signpost people to the right person first time. The Service Manager agreed with this and stated that she wanted to ensure more resource and quality assurance at the first stage to achieve this and reduce the need for escalation.

It was clarified that there was a typing error in Recommendation 1 (page 55). This should read: 'work with Children's Social Care to *remove* blocks and barriers experienced in the service to working effectively within the complaints process.

The Committee discussed unreasonably persistent complaints. The need for clear communications and timescales was acknowledged; however, after having reviewed the current policy regarding this it was felt that it was not robust enough. The policy will therefore be reviewed and any amendments taken through the decision-making process.

There is a desire to improve and embed learning from complaints in a business as usual manner. This will require a change in organisational culture.

A Member commented that the number of upheld complaints indicated that the Council was listening more. She questioned the number of complaints that go to the ombudsman for investigation. In Children's Services an increase has been noticed. Some complainants go straight to the ombudsman service. The ombudsman service is a free way of gaining independent scrutiny so is welcomed to a certain degree. There are a few complaints at the initial stage with the ombudsman service.

It was confirmed that the service will be reviewing compliments too to analyse them and highlight best practice. This will be linked to the Staff Awards.

A Member noted that 80 out of 246 complainants were classified as children. She questioned how the service ensured that those who are vulnerable were not overpowered by the Council system. It was reported that there is an advocacy service for any children making a complaint and that clarification of advocacy data could be included in future reports.

The Committee noted the report.

26 **Update on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Syrian Families** - Agenda Item 8

Dr Orla Dunn presented a report to the Committee which provided an update on the resettlement of Syrian families in Somerset.

The Committee heard that 9 families have been settled through Somerset County Council and a further family has been settled in partnership with a community group. Two more families are due in September 2017 and October 2017. Progress is in line with the Council aspiration to resettle 30 families over a three year period subject to capacity in relevant services.

There has been much progress on integration and resettlement. All families have been enrolled in adult English classes; all children are either in school / nursery and are making progress. Two males from within the first six families to resettle are in work after first year. There has been facilitation of links and integration with local communities including Brownies, Saturday football, and local allotments.

The report also detailed the challenges faced in settling the families. There is a lack of culturally relevant services in Somerset with no similar resident population to integrate families into. Difficulties continue in accessing halal foods, mosques and distance from other Syrian or Arabic speaking families have contributed to some of the recent families to have resettled to each area feeling isolated. Two of the original six families have moved out of Somerset to a larger city and others have wanted to move within Somerset. Unsurprisingly many express a preference to be in larger urban areas with larger numbers of other Syrian or Arabic speaking families and closer proximity to related resources. To address this the service has re-considered suitable resettlement locations and has taken steps to try to ensure a critical minimal number of families in each area.

Sourcing accommodation has also been challenging. Further funding from the Home Office has enabled the exploration of more creative approaches to rental accommodation with the Council paying rent in advance for a period to reassure Landlords. We have also been grateful for a number of 'philanthropic landlords' who have come forward willing to rent properties at below market rates and also flex with the inherent uncertainty that the resettlement programme involves.

Setting up suitable English classes has also been a challenge. Many refugees have come with such limited levels of English and sometimes unfamiliarity with education that they have been unable to access the beginners' provision currently available and this has been limited in scope in most areas compared to a Home Office aspiration of 8 hours a week. We have used additional Home Office funding to commission more suitable bespoke English classes in some areas. This remains a work in progress and in the next year we aim to expand provision. The rate of improved participation is limited in some areas by a lack of numbers to make classes financially or structurally viable. Volunteers have been able to support this by providing English classes. We recognise the value of comprehensive English provision to facilitate integration to the resident communities and provide social networks between resettled families.

In a separate report the Committee received an update from the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) team, presented by the Strategic Manager, Children Looked After and Leaving Care.

As of 30 August 2017, Somerset County Council is responsible for 30 UASC children. 14 of these children have arrived as part of the National Transfer scheme over the last year. The remaining 16 have travelled individually over a much longer period and are therefore outside the remit of the transfer scheme. The arrival of these 16 children is therefore unexpected and not planned for.

Somerset prioritised the transfer of male UASC in their later teenage years as we could quickly access appropriate supported accommodation, which the Home Office advised would best suit these young men's needs.

Somerset social workers have facilitated access to appropriate churches and mosques and culturally relevant food, with regular trips to Bristol to provide a wider cultural group. However, most of the UASC have arrived in Somerset expecting to live in a large urban environment. They have, almost universally, not wanted to remain in Somerset, once they understood that they were not in or near a major city. For these young men, their ambition is to move to live in London or the West Midlands to be part of a larger, more international community with greater access to other people of a similar religion and culture.

The inability to feel settled has, for some young men, affected their emotional health adversely. Alongside the trauma of their journeys to this country and the loss of their family, the need to live alongside their compatriots has become an increasing focus. For those young men, where we have been able to find family members or people of significance (such as godparents), in other parts of the country, and supported the UASC to move nearer these people, their emotional health has quickly improved. To a lesser, but still significant extent, a move to living in a culturally varied and urban environment (mainly London or

the West Midlands) has been positive for those young men who have chosen to do this, when they reach 18. These young men would be better served by a social work service, local to the area they now live in. However this is not within the parameters of the transfer scheme, so responsibility for these UASCs' welfare remains with Somerset Children's Social Care.

In consideration of a younger age group of UASC who may be able to settle better into a rural county, the authority has run fostering recruitment campaigns targeting carers for UASC in the last 12 months, but few, if any carers, have come forward to offer exclusively UASC placements. As there are currently insufficient foster placements for children already in the care of the council, it is not pragmatic to accept younger UASC at this time.

It was clarified that if the young men leave Somerset they are still under the responsibility of Somerset until they reach the age of 24. It is more difficult to scrutinise whether their needs are being met when they are outside of Somerset but we try to make local arrangements for them. This is the same for Somerset-born children in care.

It was also clarified that they are still subject to the same rigorous process for asylum and must complete Leave to Remain interviews.

Members questioned how the volunteer groups have generated. Some groups have self-generated and it was confirmed the service is having direct conversations with the Frome volunteer group.

Members questioned whether asylum should be sought in the first European country they arrive in. The children do arrive through Europe but our statutory duty remains for anyone who gets Leave to Remain. It is up to the Home office to determine their legal service and deport if necessary.

Members questioned the impact of UASC on the other work of the service. The service is struggling to fill foster places and is questioning whether it can continue to take part in the national transfer scheme.

The Committee noted the report.

27 **Update on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and saving targets - Agenda Item 9**

The Committee received this report from the Strategic Finance Manager which gave an update on the In-Year MTFP savings for Children's Services.

During the months of September 2016 through to February 2017 there were a number of MTFP savings developed under a themed approach. For Children's Services most of the savings that applied to their budgets were under the umbrella of the service redesign theme, with one under the transport theme. The main thrust of the redesign was around reducing some of the service expenditure for high cost services closer to the national benchmark cost. The main area this applies to is in Children's Placements.

The other savings were part of the overall target to reduce building running costs across the Council, and there was a saving aimed at reducing high cost SEN transport routes.

Placement Cost Savings

The target saving in the MTFP for this work is £1.046m and to date there has been good progress to date that provides confidence this saving will be achieved in full although overall placements spend is increasing.

Activities included in this work include:

- A SWAP Audit was conducted to assist target process improvements.
- Recommendations were then taken forward and placement processes were reviewed and altered.
- Provider meetings and events were held to highlight Somerset's children's needs
- Exploration of regional commissioning opportunities
- An Edge of care service has been scoped
- Review of residential Individual Placement Agreements underway.
- Communication and roll-out of processes and procedures to staff.

A SWAP follow up audit will then be commissioned to assess progress and improvements and to assess controls to ensure future compliance with processes.

Reduced Building Running Costs

This saving is part of a bigger target of £1.091m described in the Members' information sheet issued in July as Savings aimed at reducing our building running costs across the council portfolio of assets. This will require consultation with service users in children's centres, libraries and in our mental health accommodation. Savings will come from reduced running costs rather than service activity. The element of the target that is currently assigned to Children's services budgets is approximately £600,000. This must remain a provisional target until the work has been carried out to review which building running costs can be reduced. There has been some slippage in the timeline. It remains to be seen whether we can recover lost ground across the whole target saving. The total value of the saving is not at this stage in question but it is unlikely to be delivered in full in 17/18.

Members raised the timeline for this being achieved and it was confirmed that it is hoped to achieve the saving this year. A Member questioned whether this timeline was realistic.

Transport Savings

The savings in transport will come from a review of high cost SEN routes aimed at saving around £1.45m in total from the current cost. This is going to require a considerable piece of work looking at existing policies, compliance with them and options on how to design the service differently. Work is under way but due to the intensive work required it is unlikely to deliver significant savings in this financial year given the lead in time in consultation work and for the implementation notice required to be ready for term starts. So far, work has concentrated upon incentivising parents for single occupancy journeys and

reviewing high cost multi occupancy journeys including use of in-house fleet. Around £150,000 is assured as a saving but it is difficult to see how the remainder can be achieved without policy changes.

A Member questioned how changes could be made to transport services when they are set by national policy. It was confirmed that a statement by the Secretary of State was expected shortly on the national policy. However, the consultation was focused on the discretionary services in Somerset outside of national policy. The service is looking at different ways of providing transport for example where taxis are being used it is often cheaper to fund parents to transport instead. A Member questioned whether this is being monitored and it was confirmed that there is work to be done to check the children are arriving at school.

The committee noted the report.

28 **Update on Family Support Services** - Agenda Item 10

At the beginning of this item it was confirmed that the draft consultation document was no longer confidential and, therefore, it was not necessary for the Committee to move into confidential session. The committee received a report regarding proposed changes to Family Support Services.

The service is launching a consultation to consider where services should be delivered from and what services should be delivered. The consultation is due to commence in September 2017 and will run for a 10 week period. Members received a copy of the draft consultation document for their comments. It was further confirmed that a Member Non Key Decision on whether to consult was due to be taken on 18 September 2017.

A Member asked for clarification on the nature of the consultation and it was confirmed that this was focused on how to deliver services in the future. 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.

It was confirmed that Somerset has a lot of Children's Centres in comparison with neighbouring authorities. Other authorities have already been through the process that Somerset is just about to begin. A Member raised the differing geography and rurality of areas and how this may affect models of provision. Whilst this is recognised, it is not realistic to provide a centre in walking distance of all families. It was found that previously services did not reach those families who need it most. A different approach is needed for a more engaging service where staff can visit families in their own home. A Member commented that some families would not welcome services in their own home. Another Member commented that good co-ordinated outreach services work because the most vulnerable families don't use centres.

A Member questioned how outreach services would be provided in rural areas and how urgent cases would be identified. Health visiting is already a universal service so could be a first point of call for the whole county. It was confirmed

that following cuts to the Public Health budget, it was planned to skill mix health visiting staff. This is something that doctors and nurses are already doing.

It was confirmed that there are currently 24 Children's Centres as a number were de-designated in 2014.

Concern was raised about the impact on families on Sedgemoor particularly in light of Hinkley Point C and the associated housing development. The aim is that future services will provide an opportunity to link with universal health and wellbeing services, providing a seamless link to early help services. There will be difficult decisions to make about building but this will preserve staff who make the most difference to the service. This will fit with the One Public Estate programme as Somerset currently has a lot of buildings. We want to invest more in resources because we know early help matters. We are not looking for significant savings but want to reduce the costs associated with maintaining buildings. The aim is to locate the administration of services with other services so professionals can work together for better provision for families.

A Member commented that the consultation document needed to be in plain English and accessible. This was acknowledged and agreed. The aim is to circulate as wide as possible and we will work with Communications colleagues to achieve this. It was commented that fathers also need to be considered and not just mothers.

A Member raised the high level of deprivation in some areas such as, Bridgwater, Highbridge and Glastonbury and that the extra needs in these areas should be considered. She also raised the need to consider access to digital technology and the access and cost of transport for low income families.

It was confirmed that where a property transfer would affect a school or academy, Property Services would carefully consider any lease arrangements.

The Vice-Chair suggested to Members that they visit a Children's Centre soon.

The Committee noted the report.

29 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 11

There were no other items of business.

(The meeting ended at 1.10 pm)

**Cllr Leigh Redman
CHAIRMAN**