

## Commissioning Report

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Division and Local Member: All

### 1. Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update members of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee on the purpose and improvements made within children's services commissioning service; acknowledging the journey so far, and the further progress the commissioning team is expected to make.
- 1.2 The report highlights the work of children's commissioning team across the seven improvement programmes of the Somerset Children and Young People's Plan, noting particular focus and achievement in programme 6 "Achieving effective, multi-agency support for more vulnerable children and young people and develop and excellent children's social work service".
- 1.3 The report explains the council's approach to commissioning using the Commissioning Cycle below. Somerset County Council's definition of commissioning is *"How we identify needs and creatively work with everyone involved to make things happen to meet those needs in the most appropriate and cost effective way"*
- 1.4 The broad role of commissioners includes:
- analysing data, need and demand,
  - planning using strategies and co-production,
  - securing services by procurement, grant funding, piloting or partnership working, and
  - reviewing outcomes, service performance and provider approach, holding services and providers to account while working in partnership to achieve the best for our children, young people and families.



SCC Commissioning Cycle

- 1.5** Maintaining good communication with providers is essential to the development, diversity and health of the market, so the Children's Commissioning team have produced a 'Communications plan' (Appendix A), explaining how we ensure regular contact and engagement with provider organisations, partner agencies and internal colleagues. This will particularly apply to fostering and residential providers, where communication is key to finding placements for our most vulnerable children and young people.
- 1.6** Placement Sufficiency in Somerset is a significant issue, even though there are more residential beds available in the county than we need, and limited, but available, capacity in the independent fostering market. Commissioners are working more closely with providers to understand their issues and sharing the detail of our needs to ensure the right provision is available and that Somerset is the preferred commissioner.
- 1.7** In this report we have highlighted the recent commissioning of a number of new models for the council which will increase our Early Help offer, including:
- 'Safe Families for Children', a DfE Innovation programme to prevent children coming into care and increase family support in the community,
  - Pathways to Independence (P2i), an innovative, outcomes based housing solution for young people run in partnership with the YMCA and our District Council colleagues, and
  - Family Group Conferencing which aims to identify strengths and resources within families and communities to support them to thrive without state intervention.
- 1.8** Children's Services commissioners are committed to achieving excellence through a quality assurance cycle, ensuring continuous improvement of both externally and internally provided services. Information gained from a variety of sources to inform current performance, is used to shape future service delivery, which improves outcomes for children and families. We hold responsibility for reviewing all contracts across children's services. These services are reviewed quarterly or more frequently, depending on the perceived need and risk, which is analysed through the contract register (Appendix B).

## **2. Issues for consideration**

- 2.1.** Members are asked to consider the breadth and complexity of work undertaken by children's commissioners now, compared with the more limited approach experienced 18 months ago. In particular, the lack of supplier engagement and market development activity previously has contributed to issues with placement sufficiency, leading to a new focus on relationship management
- 2.2.** Members are asked to acknowledge and support the future progress of commissioning in children's services

## **3. Background**

- 3.1.** Since 2015, there have been extensive developments in children's

commissioning, including staffing restructure and recruitment, and development of skills.

- 3.2.** The former commissioning structure focussed on project management, with operational staff holding and managing contracts. This has been transformed and all commissioning activity now sits with Commissioners. Each Commissioner now specialises in particular areas of children's services, enabling them to follow the whole commissioning cycle for each area of work on a consistent basis
- 3.3.** Key achievements are detailed in the report, and include the development and embedding of the Children and Young Peoples Plan, a revised and fit for purpose Sufficiency Statement, the re-commissioning of the Pathways to Independence (P2i) approach to youth homelessness, delivering a nationally recognised best practice service for young people in Somerset and raising the profile of commissioning throughout children's services with a shared understanding of commissioning, a common language and agreed approach that is both creative and compliant. We are creating and improving partnerships with other local authorities in the South West and South Central by collaborating where this is beneficial, as well as securing good relationships with colleagues in adult social care, Public Health and the CCG.

#### **4. Background Papers**

For sight of individual background papers Please contact the report author

- 4.1.** Communications Plan
- 4.2.** Contracts Register
- 4.3.** Children & Young People's Plan Governance Structure