

# Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee held on Friday 20 October 2017 at 10.00 in the Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton.

## Present

Cllr Pullin (Vice Chair in the Chair)

Cllr M Caswell (Substitute)

Cllr M Dimery

Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper

Cllr J Lock

Cllr N Taylor

Cllr J Williams

Cllr R Williams

**Apologies:** Cllr L Redman, Cllr A Bown, Cllr N Bloomfield.

**Church representatives present:** None

**Parent Governor representatives present:** Mrs Ruth Hobbs.

**CHYPPS & Schools Forum representatives present:** Mrs Eileen Tipper (CHYPPS).

**Cabinet Members present:** Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr G Verdon

**Other Members present:**

## 30 Declarations of interest – agenda item 2

30.0 Cllr Caswell, Cllr Dimery, Cllr Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr Lock, Cllr N Taylor, and Cllr J Williams, all declared a personal interest as a District and/or City/Town, Parish Councillor.

## 31 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2017 – agenda item 3

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

## 32 Public question time – agenda time 4

32.0 It was agreed to listen to the public speakers who both wanted to speak on item 7 Family Support Services at the start of the item.

## 33 Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee work programme – agenda item 5

33.0 The Committee considered and agreed its own work programme and the future agenda items listed. It was agreed to add Children's Safeguarding Board to 17 November 2017 meeting and to add January joint scrutiny meeting with the Adults and Health Committee to the work programme.

- 33.1 The Committee considered and noted the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in forthcoming months including Cabinet meetings up to 17 January 2018.
- 33.2 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.

#### **34 Information Management**– agenda item 6

- 34.0 The Committee received a presentation regarding an update on Children's ICT and Information Sharing.
- 34.1 The presentation explained where Children's ICT was in 2015, what improvements had been made, the progress on addressing issues and the current position of what was working well and what was not working well and the focus for the next three months. There was explanation about the Technology and People programme and its plan for the next 5 months.
- 34.2 Members asked about resilience in the event of IT hostile attacks, sharing data with partner organisations, and new data protection laws. They were informed that data was stored in multiple locations to protect information, work was ongoing to improve sharing data with partners, and the new office 365 surfaces would help the Council be compliant with new data protection laws.
- 34.3 The Committee agreed to note the update.

#### **35 Family Support Services** – agenda item 7

- 35.0 The Committee heard from Katherine See, a patron of Children's Centres, and she spoke about the proposed changes to Family Support Services. She felt these services needed to be protected and felt the proposals were short-sighted. She also raised concerns about the public consultation and the online questionnaire which she felt was poorly publicised and had leading questionnaires.
- 35.1 Assistant Director of Children's Services Philippa Granthier responded and said the public consultation was open for 10 weeks for people to fill in. The online questionnaires or hard copies were available at various places including children's centres and GP surgeries. In addition there were drop-in evening sessions being held and other events to publicise the ongoing consultation. There was room after each question on the online questionnaire to type in answers and raise any concerns.
- 35.2 The Committee then heard from Nigel Behan from UNITE trade union, who questioned whether the proposals were about rationing services rather than meeting needs. He asked about what data was being analysed to determine places where centres were most needed and access to services and if the options appraisal would consider existing and future needs, and how quality and cost would be taken into account.

- 35.3 Philippa Granthier responded and said the proposal to limit centres would not limit access to the service. This was not about reducing service. Information about population and further evidence and research including the experience of other local authorities would be analysed. The proposal was for centres to be located in the most deprived areas.
- 35.4 The Committee then considered the report which 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.
- 35.5 Further debate on this item included: possible future venues for services, online support for families, ensuring that those who were less likely to get involved in the consultation were listened to, linking with property and the libraries programmes, concerns about reducing services, recognising the importance of early help support, flexible working hours for staff, encouraging more community support, and ensuring that people knew how to access support.
- 35.6 The Committee agreed to note the update and request a further update at the 8 December meeting.

A short break in the proceedings took place here at 11.40am.

## **36 West Somerset Opportunity Area – agenda item 7**

The meeting resumed here at 11.40am.

- 36.0 The Committee considered a report about the West Somerset Opportunity Area, part of the Government's programme to tackle social mobility and improve opportunities for young people across the county. West Somerset was identified as area 324 out of 324 social mobility areas due to a combination of factors.

A number of priorities had been identified around children having a good start in life, educational excellence in the classroom, transition to adulthood, and skills for employment and business. The progress of this would be reported through the Children's Trust plan.

Further discussion on this included: recognising the importance of mental health of young people, support for parents who were isolated, working with schools in West Somerset and the surrounding areas, funding for the plans for each of the priorities, other government initiatives benefiting West Somerset, working with organisations such as the Somerset Parent Care Forum, encouraging more young families into the area, greater forward planning work between planning and housing services, and recognition that the issue in West Somerset is much bigger than education alone.

The Committee noted the report and it was agreed that an update on this would be given in 6 months.

**37 Any other business of urgency – agenda item 9**

37.0 The Chairman, after ascertaining there were no other matters arising, thanked all those present for attending.

(The meeting closed at 12.20pm )

**Cllr Mike Pullin**  
**Vice Chairman – Scrutiny for Polices, Children and Families Committee**