

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 March 2018 at 10.00 am

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

Other Members present: Cllr A Govier, Cllr A Groskop, Cllr T Munt and Cllr G Verdon

Apologies for absence: Ms Helen Fenn, Mr Richard Berry and Cllr J Williams

63 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

Eileen Tipper declared an interest as a member of the Community Council for Somerset.

Cllr Leigh Redman declared an interest as a Governor at The Willowdown Primary Academy.

64 Minutes from the previous meeting held on 26 January 2018 - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the last meeting held on 26 January 2018 were accepted as being accurate and signed by the Chair.

65 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were 8 Public Questions in relation to Item 10. The questions largely expressed concern regarding the effect that staff redundancies would have on the provision of services within SSE teams, particularly the PIMMS team. Concern was expressed over how valuable services could continue to be provided with less staff and over the lack of consultation with service users and young people. A verbal response was provided from Children's Services Commissioning. Those present were reassured that no change can be made to a child's Education Health Care Plan without a review with parents and the young person. The overall funding allocated to support children with SEND is increasing, although there may be changes as to how it will be spent. HN Top-up Funding will go directly to schools but children with higher level needs will continue to be supported by the specialist service teams within SSE.

All questions will receive a written response.

There was also a question regarding the school admission code for summer born children. The question will receive a written response.

66 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. In addition was requested:

- An update on changes to SSE services (20 April)
- SEND Peer Review Update (20 April)

The Committee noted the outcome tracker and the Scrutiny Manager provided updates and it was agreed this would be reviewed at the next pre-meeting.

67 SEND Peer Review Update - Agenda Item 6

The Committee considered and agreed a request to defer this item to the 20 April meeting.

68 Children and Young People's Plan 2016-2019 - Agenda Item 7

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 each area.

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 noted that 'Children and Families' were a key theme within the County Plan 2016-20, recognising the importance of providing the information and advice families need to help themselves and of focusing our help early and effectively when needed. The key priorities were to improve children's safeguarding services; to improve exam results, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils; and to improve children's health and wellbeing.

The CYPP was reported on a quarterly basis and this report focused on activity of the third quarter (October to December 2017) of Year 2 and provided a summary of activity and progress, supported by each of the 7 programmes' highlight reports. Members heard that work during this quarter had been impacted by the month long OFSTED single inspection of Children's Social Care and the subsequent required activity to effect improvements ahead of the published report in January 2018. Six out of 7 of the programmes are rated green; meaning they are on track to achieve the actions by the target date. Work will need to begin shortly to evaluate the current CYPP in order that this can feed into the development of the Plan after 2019.

Highlighted achievements included: the consultation of Family Support services; preparation for the SEND joint inspection; multi-agency work to reduce self-harm in children and work on how to establish permanent social workers. The report also highlighted challenges causing slippage to the action plans including: recruitment difficulties and increasing non-attendance and exclusion rates.

With regard to programme 1, it was clarified that the rise in exclusions is a complex issue with no one root cause. The issue is not unique to Somerset and is due to reviewed nationally.

With regard to programme 2, members asked to be provided with more detail about the Gp pilot in the next report.

A report for programme 6 was not provided because of the recent Ofsted judgement report. An action plan has been put in place reflecting the outcomes of the judgment.

Regarding programme 7, it was confirmed that social worker caseloads have increased. This is partly due to an increase in quality and partly due to difficulty in recruiting locums. Staff turnover is lower than national average but there is more work to do. The number of people applying for social worker posts has increased but the impact of this will not be felt for three or four months.

The Committee agreed to accept the report.

69 **Changes to Education Travel Policy - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee considered this report that provided an overview of the biennial review of the Council's Education Travel policy to ensure it complied with legislation and statutory guidance. Appendix A was tabled at the meeting. In addition to ensuring the revised policy provided more clarity and flexibility in terms of service provision, efforts had been made to reduce the size of the document.

It was reported that during this 2 yearly review Officers had also taken the opportunity to remove the final few discretionary elements from the policy, in order to enable the Council to deliver the required statutory elements within a pressured budget. In a verbal update, the Committee was informed that the proposal regarding late applications for school admissions has been withdrawn. 'Legitimate Expectation' requires policy changes to only affect new pupils starting school for the first time and those children who are changing schools.

It was clarified that any changes will be put in place for new service users. Those already accessing services will not be affected unless they change address or school, when they will be re-assessed. It was highlighted that there is a diminishing market in public transport and a shortage of bus operators.

A Member raised that the changes need to be carefully managed as some children may have behaviour difficulties due to additional needs. It was also raised that some situations may need to be judged on an individual, case-by-

case basis. The Committee was reassured that individual needs of children would be considered where appropriate.

The Committee agreed to accept the report.

70 School Performance 2017 - National Curriculum Test and Public Examination Results - Agenda Item 9

The Committee considered this report that provided a summary of the Somerset outcomes through Ofsted inspections and performance data for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Assessments, KS1 and KS2 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), GCSE and A Level results for 2017. It was noted that also the report included comparisons of performance against national data, where available, and included details of performance of vulnerable groups against each Key Stage. It was explained not all the data had been validated, so caution needed to be given to the accuracy of results as some national comparative data was unavailable for some indicators. To aid comparison the report also included information for statistical neighbours.

It was highlighted that KS4 outcomes present the greatest area of challenge.

It was clarified that under performance is taking place across academies and LA controlled schools with no emerging pattern. Individual academies can be more difficult to hold to account but there are no schools in Somerset that don't engage with the LA.

It was clarified that the LA is not involved with re-brokering Collaborative Academy Trusts; this is done through the Regional Schools Commissioner.

The Committee requested more information at a future meeting regarding KS4 outcomes, particularly for children with SEND. They accepted the report.

71 Update on Support Services for Education - Agenda Item 10

The Committee considered this report which explained SSE was an internal trading unit within the Council's Commercial and Business Services Directorate that provides a wide range of 24 support services to schools and other education providers, with a turnover of approx. £19m and 400 staff.

The report was supplemented with a presentation which provided: a highlight/overview of the service to date; priorities for the future – services, financials and customers; and an update on commissioning of SSE SEND services.

The Committee were informed that SSE has achieved a break even position and that there is consistent buy back across SSE services. SSE has developed a one-stop shop website and introduced customer service reviews to improve feedback and help shape future services. SSE is currently collaborating with North Somerset Council to provide services that North Somerset Council is unable to support. It is also currently developing new traded services, including those to meet the needs of large academies and Multi Academy Trusts. A £210k surplus is currently forecast for 2018/19 and this will be reinvested in services.

The Committee heard that SEN Advisory Support Services are being re-designed. A joint service review was required as a result of pressures on the High Needs Funding. The current proposals primarily affect Hearing, Vision and Physical Support teams.

The debate focussed on the causes for concern raised during Public Question time. It was clarified that only SSE staff had been consulted and that redundancy notices had already been issued. It was confirmed that there would be no impact from staff redundancies until May. The Committee expressed concern that the changes could result in a significant change to services and that they had been implemented with no consultation of service users or the Committee.

The Committee agreed a Member proposal that an urgent position statement was required on the implementation of staffing changes within SSE services. In addition, the Committee recommended to the Cabinet Member that any planned changes be paused and requested that a full report be presented to the Committee at the next meeting (20 April 2018).

72 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 11

There were no other items of business and the Chair thanked all those present for attending and closed the meeting at 13:05.

(The meeting ended at 1.05 pm)

CHAIRMAN