

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 19 October 2018 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr J Lock, Ruth Hobbs, Mrs Eileen Tipper, Cllr P Clayton, Cllr M Keating, Cllr T Munt and Cllr M Pullin

Other Members present: Cllr Coles, Cllr Chilcott and Cllr Nicholson.

Apologies for absence: Cllr R Williams, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr G Frascini, Cllr James Hunt, Cllr W Wallace, Cllr J Williams, Elliot and Ms Helen Fenn

5 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

6 **Minutes from the previous meeting** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the last meeting held on 14 September 2018 were accepted as a correct record of the proceedings and were signed by the Chair.

7 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

The Chair invited the Scrutiny Manager to read aloud the following question in respect of agenda item 6 that had been received from Mr Robin Head who was unable to attend the meeting:

Earlier this year the leader of the Council trumpeted the announcement of a loan deal struck with the Department for Education involving Somerset receiving £116,000,000 for capital build for required new schools or school extensions to cope with new intake of students emanating from new housing linked with developments at Hinckley.

We now understand that this money cannot be taken up for at least 18 months as there will be no way of paying it back. Could we know how the County is going to support sufficient places for educating an increase in student numbers in Somerset? "Alternative sources" have been mentioned but not expanded upon.

Response

The Local Authority is reviewing its options to ensure it has a sufficient number of school places to meet increased demand not just brought about by the Hinckley C development but by significant housing developments in some parts of the County and demographic growth.

It was always the intention to ensure that we drew down as much funding as possible from third parties e.g. from developers and from Section 106 and CIL contributions. We continue to receive Basic Need Grant from the DfE and wherever possible will submit bids for other funding as the opportunities arise.

The Chair invited the Scrutiny Manager to read aloud the following question in respect of agenda item 9 that had been received from 'Family Voice' who were unable to attend the meeting:

The young carers service has a case load of 178, in the Getset strategy it states there is an estimated on the 2011 census for 1750 young carers. Please could we have a more recent statistic for this report?

Will the revisions to young carers also alter the service level of agreement in relation to the report earlier this year?

Please could the report also include how the service currently and proposes to cover mental health with young carers that is described as a level 2 target intervention. The Future in mind government report. (Attached) Could this committee see a report on children's and mental health provisions, and how Somerset can challenge the mental health and safeguarding with the loss of all youth clubs (that many young carers and children with some needs attended).

Response

In relation to young carers, a series of conversations as to how the service could be delivered in the future has started. There is no pre-determined outcome of these conversations and commissioners are keen to fully understand the views of young carers who are receiving support and young carers who are not receiving support in order to understand what is valued by young people and what the barriers are to accessing support currently.

Engagement begins with young carers w/c 29th October with specific events for our service users and this will be accompanied by an online questionnaire which we would encourage young carers and their parents to respond to as it will inform any future service design. Adults Commissioners will be leading on this going forward given their experience in working with the local voluntary sector.

In relation to youth and community provision, SCC is not the only financial contributor to this. Parish and Town Councils, Youth Investment Fund and others also fund provision.

This is an area where the VCS is well developed, are accessing funding without SCC involvement and are commencing strategic conversations around what their own partnerships might look like. This includes mutual support and quality and collective bids for funding from large national grant schemes. Sustaining as much provision as possible for all young people, including young carers who access universal groups is a key focus from now until March 2019. Some positive collaborations are already well under way.

The Chair invited Tina Emery of the Somerset Parent Carer Forum to make the following comments in respect of agenda item 9:

Firstly, we would like to acknowledge the good work the young carers service is delivering and the hard work of the team.

The report lists what the service has delivered. Please can you clarify which parts of this has been delivered through funding by Somerset County Council and what was funded by the Young Carers charity or other grants.

Please can you confirm that there are clear published criteria for accessing the service and a published carers strategy that included Young Carers.

A recent government call for evidence highlighted that more needs to be done to support young carers. Current or past young carers (67% of respondents) responded that they have not received any support as young carers. With the government green paper on carers due to be published shortly, how confident is the council in its proposal to make cuts to the young carers service?

Response

In relation to young carers, a series of conversations as to how the service could be delivered in the future has started. There is no pre-determined outcome of these conversations and commissioners are keen to fully understand the views of young carers who are receiving support and young carers who are not receiving support in order to understand what is valued by young people and what the barriers are to accessing support currently. Engagement begins with young carers w/c 29th October with specific events for our service users and this will be accompanied by an online questionnaire which we would encourage young carers and their parents to respond to as it will inform any future service design. Adults' commissioners will be leading on this going forward given their experience in working with the local voluntary sector.

Broadly speaking the Young Carers charity or grants contribute to respite activity or bespoke solutions and other activity such as assessment is paid for by SCC budgets.

Information relating to who is eligible for young carers' support is available on the Somerset County Council website.

It was requested that responses to these 3 questions be provided in writing to the questioners and those responses be included in the minutes of the meeting and published on the Council's website.

8 Scrutiny Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

The Committee Chair explained the reports that make up the work programme agenda item and the importance the Committee should attach to planning its future work.

The Committee then considered and noted the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in forthcoming months and items for consideration at future Cabinet meetings.

The Committee considered and agreed its own work programme and the future agenda items listed. The Chair raised the possibility of a task and finish group or something similar, whereby a few members of the Committee might work in tandem with a few members of the Audit Committee to review financial issues

within Children's Services and he undertook to make further enquiries and try to progress this outside of the meeting.

The Committee considered and noted its outcome tracker, and an update was requested on the suggestion of a 'decision tree' to help service users in SEN and the Clerk undertook to follow up on this previous outcome.

9 **West Somerset Opportunity Area - Agenda Item 8**

The Chair of the Committee agreed to bring this agenda item forward to allow officers to attend another meeting. The Chair invited the Lead Officer to introduce her report, of 85 pages, and she began by providing a brief presentation and introduced Jan Downie from the Department for Education (DFE).

Members were reminded that the West Somerset Opportunity Area (WSOA) Programme was designed to improve social mobility and opportunities for young people in 12 areas across the country that had identified communities. The original plan, that had been published last October, encouraged working across business, education and community to create and maintain more opportunities for young people.

The programme was due to run to March 2020, and a detailed delivery plan had been produced for 2018/19. It was explained that the DFE & Somerset County Council have worked with West Somerset District Council, early year's providers, schools, colleges, employers, the voluntary sector, and the Local Enterprise Partnership to draw together plans for the West Somerset Opportunity Area. Each Priority is overseen by a Priority Group made up of key stakeholders to ensure relevance and delivery.

Members considered the report and attention turned to Appendix 1 of the report, that detailed the work undertaken by the 4 priority groups during 2017/18 to design and start delivering the West Somerset Opportunity Area plan. In addition to the 4 priority groups the opportunity area added 4 cross cutting themes which included Mental Health, extra-curricular activities, Special Educational Needs and Access to Services including Child care, transport and digital connectivity. An update was provided on progress made in each area.

Appendix 2 of the report was considered, and this provided details of performance in the start year of 2017 with provisional data for 2018. The historic data from 2015 showed how services had changed since the area was first identified as having issues with social mobility. There was a question about involvement of public health and if the WSOA had liaised with the 'Fit for my Future' project which was seeking the views of Somerset residents about the kind of health and care service they would like in the future. The Lead Officer undertook to follow up this suggestion.

The report also provided in Appendix 3 a trio of case studies that highlighted activities undertaken during the first year. In consultation with the priority groups the DFE had coordinated a delivery plan for the 2018/19 Academic year. Appendix 4 to the report was the proposed plan written by the DFE and agreed by the West Somerset Opportunity Area Programme Board. It was

asked if the WSOA worked with Parish Councils and it was confirmed that Parish Council were included in the communications strategy and invited to meetings and training events. The Chair praised the considerable work undertaken that had resulted in the summer activities booklet and programme of various things for people to participate in.

There was a brief discussion about the measures being introduced to provide more information for mothers about accessing child care, which was important regarding employment possibilities and providing clear and impartial information about the various options open to young people regarding further and higher education, including vocational training.

It was also requested that 'lessons learnt' and examples of good practice from other areas be shared, although it was acknowledged that most of the other Opportunity Areas were in urban areas and presented different challenges to those found in sparsely populated rural West Somerset.

Members also requested that Officers be mindful of ensuring that other areas in Somerset could benefit from things learned in the WSOA and welcomed the approach that sought to ensure that all the new initiatives introduced and trialled were done so with sustainability in mind. Officers confirmed a key ongoing aim of the process evaluation was to provide regular internal reporting to ensure lessons were learned and good practice was shared. The report was accepted.

10 Committee Call-In - Review of Cabinet Decision - CAF14a "Proposals for the alteration and/or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families - getset" - Agenda Item 6

The Committee considered this report, at the request of the Chair, following it's call-in of the Cabinet decision regarding savings proposal CAF14a – proposals for the alteration and/or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families.

The Committee discussed the report and noted that the extraordinary Committee meeting when it had considered a single report had been an opportunity to consider a report in some depth, and this had allowed for an interesting discussion of the issues during which questions asked had produced additional information and explanations.

The further details provided during the discussion had been included in the Committee's report to the Cabinet and this had in turn helped to inform the Cabinet's reconsideration of that savings proposal.

It was noted that responses to all the submissions received from members of the public were being compiled and prepared and would then be published on the Council's website and circulated to the Committee.

The Committee agreed to note the report.

11 Consultation on Early Help - Agenda Item 7

The Committee considered this report that set out details of the proposed consultation regarding saving proposal CAF14b. This proposal had been approved at the September meeting of the Cabinet and the Committee had requested more information about the next steps before the scheduled Cabinet decision next February.

It was explained that the purpose of the consultation would be to understand the impact of the Council no longer providing services for children with additional needs (at level 2 of the Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset guidance), and how best the Council, as the lead agency, could ensure effective early help across the partnership in future.

It was reported that the target audience of the consultation would be partners, staff and families. During the consultation period Officers would provide briefing notes to staff, attend targeted focus groups and attend as many other partner events as possible such as Head teacher briefings, and early years partnership meetings. Paper copies would be made available at all children's centres and libraries and the consultation would be available online and promoted through social media channels.

The Committee encouraged Officers to ensure that information was provided in as wide a variety of locations as possible to allow for maximum participation and response of service users as not all those using the services would have access to computers/internet.

It was requested that a report be provided at a future meeting and officers also recommended that officers reconsider the length of the proposed consultation period as the 8 weeks included the two weeks of the Christmas holidays.

12 **Young Carers Update report** - Agenda Item 9

The Committee considered this report about how the Young Carers Service might be delivered differently in the future, following the proposals that were initially part of a Cabinet report last September but were then withdrawn. The Committee also considered an update provided on the Action Plan for the service, that had been drawn up following the Committee's task and finish review in 2017.

It was noted that much excellent work continued to be done by the service and this had included a teacher training event focused on what schools could to identify and support young carers and a consultation event with young carers. Members also welcomed that the annual summer respite programme had in 2018 provided 342 individual breaks for young carers and this represented a 16% increase on the 2017 programme.

It was reported that the service delivered fortnightly respite group session and there were 10 groups across Somerset and there were also quarterly meetings of the young carers forum. Looking ahead it was noted that the Government was due to publish a green paper in the Autumn and it was thought this would focus on measures to improve the identification of young carers and assessments of their need to identify levels of care. It was hoped in Somerset that the ongoing and planned work the Council undertook with a variety of

partners would ensure that more young carers were identified, valued and supported.

Members attention turned to the September meeting of the Cabinet when the Cabinet had been agreed to withdraw the savings proposals in relation to Young Carers (CAF - 20) of £200k. It was explained that this decision would be reconsidered by the Cabinet next February and in the meantime additional consultation would be undertaken.

It was reported that engagement events with young carers were arranged to take place over the forthcoming half term (last week in Oct) and that officers in commissioning and participation teams would work alongside colleagues in children's operations to explore opportunities for optimising young carer participation and outcomes and optimising the value proposition.

A key area of focus would be to draw on the Adults experience of involving the voluntary sector to ensure the Council would be able to utilise additional resources and funding streams to deliver local solutions. It was stated in response to a question that an 8-week consultation period had been suggested, in the form of an online survey, and this would open on 13 November.

It was stated that commissioners had attended the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) strategic forum earlier in the month and had further sessions planned to explore viable/sustainable options for future services and support offers for Somerset's young carers. It was also noted they were keen to know what young people valued and wanted to be able to access before any design took place. It was confirmed in response to a question that the outcomes and feedback gained from the consultation/engagement would be available as part of any future service redesign.

The Committee requested that an update report be provided at the December meeting.

13 Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme Update 2018 - Agenda Item 10

The Committee considered this report that provided an update on the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme and it was noted that a further ten families had been resettled over the past year.

It was noted that there have been many successes and achievements and staffing had also been strengthened. Progress had been made on specific goals such as 60% of families resettled in six months and with a family member now in work. Also, the programme remained in financial balance being fully funded by Home Office funds.

The report set out that progress remained in line with the Council decision taken in August 2016 to resettle 30 families over a three-year period, subject to there being capacity in relevant services. Overall resettlement figures were provided including the number in each District Council area and it was noted

this amounted to 106 individuals under the County scheme, 13 of which had subsequently moved to other areas of the UK.

It was stated that 17% of Somerset arrivals (male and female aged over 16) were in work compared 3% nationally. Officers had worked hard to strengthen English class provision – English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) - in each resettlement area. Home Office funding required that eight hours per week of classes for those at Entry level or better on arrival were provided. There was no requirement to fund English classes for those in later years or to have formal classes below this level, but discretion was used to allocate funds as it was thought that acquiring English was so fundamental and important to successful resettlement.

There was a brief discussion about a few instances of those in the programme having encountered racially motivated abuse and occasional physical violence. It was noted in response to a question that Officers endeavour to support the families with this process and to understand how unacceptable this behaviour is and that it should be reported. Work is then undertaken to build up their often-shattered confidence to encourage them to re-engage in their local area.

The Chair and Committee thanked the officer for the clear report and the very worthwhile on-going work in this area. A further report was requested in 12 months.

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

After ascertaining there were no other items of business the Chair closed the meeting at 12.42.

(The meeting ended at 12.42 pm)

CHAIRMAN