

Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

Friday 25 January 2019
9.30 am Library Meeting Room, Taunton Library



SUPPLEMENT TO THE AGENDA

To: The Members of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

We are now able to enclose the following information which was unavailable when the agenda was published:

Item 4	<p>Public Question Time (Pages 3 - 8)</p> <p>The Chair of the Committee will allow members of the public, who have registered, to ask a question/s and/or make a statement/s about any matter on the agenda for this meeting. Each member of the public that has registered to speak is allocated 3 minutes.</p> <p>At the Chair's discretion, questions and statements from the public may be taken during the meeting, when the relevant agenda item is considered.</p>
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Community Governance, County Hall, Taunton

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**Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee
Friday 25th January 2019**

Agenda item 4 – Public Question Time – All questions relate to Agenda item 10
Update on CAF-14b Proposals for the alteration and / or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families – getset

Elvira Elliott on behalf of the “Parents and carers of GETSET” group, RE: 3.2
“A lead practitioner should undertake the assessment, provide help to the child and family, act as an advocate on their behalf and co-ordinate the delivery of support services. A GP, family support worker, school nurse, teacher, health visitor and/or special educational needs co-ordinator could undertake the lead practitioner role. Decisions about who should be the lead practitioner should be taken on a case-by-case basis and should be informed by the child and their family. “
Question: This was the caseworker from GETSET at level 2. now who would that lead practitioner be given that social services, teachers, health visitors, SENCO’s and doctors are overloaded and understaffed already, school nurses are a rarity, family support workers are (or were) GETSET?

RE: 3.6

“Safeguarding Partners (Local Authority, police and the Clinical Commissioning Group) and other stakeholders across SCC, District Councils, NHS agencies in Somerset, schools and early years settings, the police, housing providers, and the charitable, voluntary and community sectors “

Who out of these is going to provide the sort of groups and keyworker support that GETSET were providing up to this point (albeit in reduced form due to previous cuts)? If the answer is volunteers and parents that is not good enough as detailed in my previous communication with the GETSET consultation.

RE: APPX 1

RE: 1

Question: what is to keep the remaining staff in their jobs for another year knowing their jobs will not last? Staff morale is at an all-time low. Many have already taken voluntary redundancy costing thousands of pounds in settlements because the cut was initiated before the consultation on impact had been carried out. A decision informed by what we now know to be dubious data and incorrect assumptions. How can the service now function for another year with so few staff left?

“The team will deliver a “train the trainer” model for evidence based parenting programmes open to any community / voluntary group to enable them to identify and support more vulnerable families and run parenting programmes”. Question: this raises several serious concerns. Firstly, that the staff should have to train their replacement to work for free, knowing their own job is to end next year. This is frankly an insult to their many years of work and training.

Secondly, does the idea of parents approaching their peer group (volunteers and community groups) for parenting support not create a particularly problematic power dynamic? This could easily lead to social exclusion and gossip.

How is privacy safeguarded in such a situation like delivering parenting courses? Under this model anyone who wants to get involved can find themselves in a position of power over and in possession of very personal information about another person in their peer group. How is accountability to be dealt with under this scenario?

What does “Train the trainer” mean in this context? Who are these people trained by a chain of other people answerable to? Short in-house workforce training programs cannot equate to and should not replace a range of multidisciplinary professional qualifications? The home-start model was designed to augment not replace other professionally provided services.

Who is delivering TTT? How long for and what level of program?

Why is it felt that unqualified people can do this specialised work? Specialist knowledge of child development and child protection is needed.

“The team will move to providing group work and building resilient community settings, rather than individual case work”

This is literally a cliff edge for the families who are currently being supported by level 2 key workers.

“working alongside other key agencies that support 0-4 year olds eg health visitors and Early Years settings”

Question: Health visitors are also being cut and some replaced by assistant health visitors. Early years settings are struggling to cope with the new demands of the 30 hours placements and cannot take on case work. How can early years settings help parents who cannot afford to have their child in a nursery and do not qualify for funding? How can these two realistically take on any of the work of the GETSET staff?

“The team will align with the Public Health Nursing teams and be allocated across the 8 family hubs; they should act as community agents and help partners through training to identify and provide support for families so that partners can continue this once the getset level 2 service ends in March 2020. “

Question: Again, we have the reference to partners. Who will provide playgroups and level 2 keyworkers? The police? The housing association? Nhs clinics? . The answer cannot be “volunteers” and “community groups” unless the council has actually identified specific volunteers and groups who are prepared to take this on forever, for free and have the capacity to do so. I see nothing here to replace GETSET. I see no evidence that volunteers and community groups with the capacity to help have been identified and that such groups would not also be overstretched with trying to run the libraries and other services. As the GETSET users from our group have made quite clear, we cannot give that amount of time commitment and work for free. There is a huge difference between people who put their names down on a piece of paper wanting to “help” in vague terms and people who will actually turn out week after week to run groups unpaid. Parents with young babies will not be able to do much and people with school age children will have moved on from GETSET so there is a very narrow window of volunteering time. There will be constant churn. If you ask the question : your service is going to be cut do you want to help it continue? of course people will say yes. The questions on the consultation were very loaded in this way.

RE: 2

“Empower parents/carers to be confident in utilising self-help methods to increase self-reliance, in line with SCC’s digital strategy, by: o Signposting families via Somerset Choices and the local offer “

Question: this is nothing more than victim blaming. Parents are struggling with serious issues like universal credit, housing, and domestic abuse. The entire point of GETSET universal and level 2 support is for parents who need help. Self-reliance is a bit difficult when your partner walks out leaving you and two autistic under-5s with no money from UC for 6 months. (real life example of a GETSET user).

Support services in our area are woeful and often inaccessible to people in rural communities. There is no point signposting to charities and organizations who are already overwhelmed. Having lived in Somerset with small, SEN children for years I am wondering again, who are these organizations and specifically which of them will be delivering playgroups and keyworker support for families who have multiple issues and needs? It is not good enough to keep referring to “partners” and “organizations” unless the council has identified which ones have the capacity to take over specific aspects of GETSET’S work.

“Redesign and resourcing of Somerset Direct (SD) to be first point of contact for young people and families (based on adults model) providing advice and guidance in a more comprehensive way, only referring onto the Early Help (EH) Advice Hub if appropriate “

Question: A phone number/webpage is no substitute for a universal playgroup where highly trained staff can observe children and parents. What about someone who has post-natal depression and just needs to see a smiling face and be listened to in a non-judgmental way? A 2 week wait for the GP could mean the difference between suicide and treatment. A physical place where you can drop in for advice while your child plays is incomparable. What mitigation will be in place to prevent children who are not in school or nursery from falling through the cracks? How will the council ensure that every hard to reach parent in Somerset knows that they are to direct all their parenting/life problems to a customer service enquiries line or a “portal”?

RE: 3

Question: What capacity does community connect, an organization which helps the elderly and disabled stay in their own homes and live independently have to provide childrens services? What relevance does their work and resources have to providing Children’s services? How could this be achieved without compromising the service they currently provide? If recruitment and commissioning is going to have to be used to set up a whole new wing of community connect, why not just call that thing GETSET, retain the staff and children’s centres and equipment?

“This fund will be facilitated by SCC with application/tender panels drawn from the multi-agency Early Help Commissioning and Area Advisory Boards to seed fund support at level 2 and 3 of need.”

Question: how are services going to be funded when the seed funding runs out? Who is going to deliver this support?

“larger voluntary and community sector ”

Question: once again, has the council actually identified volunteers and organizations which have the capacity to take on GETSET'S workload, which is bound to increase as universal credit rolls out to more families?

"Utilise Somerset Choices and the SEND Local Offer as key resource of information, advice and guidance to families by ensuring community groups, support and activities are widely publicized, thereby supporting individuals to help themselves and promote independence."

Question: There's no point publicizing what barely exists. What groups have been identified that serve rural areas of Somerset? Are these activities inclusive and affordable to the poorest and hardest to reach families? If the children's offer is not reaching these families it is failing.

RE: 5

"Clear vision and communications and marketing to promote and engender support for early help in Somerset o Refresh and implementation of the EH strategy, offer and approach across Somerset o Measuring impact and effectiveness of EH across the "system" o Holding partners to account o Two way link with each of the EH Area Advisory Boards o Stronger voice of families and an ambition to co-produce. 4 o Greater presence from the community and voluntary sector"

Question: This all sounds like management speak. What does any of it mean in specific concrete proposals? Some of these aren't even proper sentences.

Question: Troubled families is generally held to have been a failed approach. How specifically will implementing this approach help GETSET users?

RE APPX 3: The council's response.

Observations:

3.4 "There appeared to be some concern that volunteers are untrained or unable to provide high quality support for children and families."

The response to this is two cherry picked statistics about two small organisations. I dare say I could find 2 examples of volunteer driven incentives which have not gone so well. What evidence is there that these two organizations or any others have spare capacity?

3.6 "There remains a range of support via casework available at level 2 and 3, from both the council (see appendix 1 below) and other partners eg health visitors and PFSA's for school age children that will continue."

The health visitor service is not in a position to do what GETSET were doing. It is already overstretched and to be cut further. There is nothing else for preschool children at level 2. This answer is utterly disingenuous.

4.1 I find the suggestion that parents said they were against seed funding because they didn't understand the question to be utterly insulting and laughable. Parents are against seed funding because it is unsustainable. We want children's services funded in perpetuity.

4.2 There is a big difference between putting your name down and actually giving your time and labour for free forever. The notion of "helping" could mean anything from sharing on facebook to holding a bake sale. Only a tiny number if any would actually be

able to commit to running groups long term which would be equivalent to a part time unpaid job.

Overall

These responses and proposals are formed around a major assumption that other groups and “partners” have the capacity to take on GETSET’s workload. There is only a year to have it all in place and the caseload is likely to increase in that time with universal credit poised to throw families into chaos. The assumption that there is an endless supply of competent volunteers is highly flawed. Nothing in this proposal is backed up by any convincing data. It is simply an attempt to push the responsibilities of the council onto other organisations with no realistic assessment of how feasible that is. There are no costings here. There is no thought given to staff retention. The council needs to show data to prove that every family that needs support can be supported with a seamless transition by one of these other organisations, and not put on a waiting list, “signposted” in circles or directed to a service they cannot realistically access. Finally, How is accountability and oversight going to be meaningfully carried out if the service is fragmented in the way that is being suggested?

Nigel Behan

Question 1 Relates to Item 10 Update on CAF-14b Proposals for the alteration and / or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families - 'getset'

Paragraph 5.2 states: “The early help arrangements in Somerset, whilst improving as indicated by Ofsted, have still some way to go to become more effective across the partnership.”

and

5.3 states: “The proposal is to retain the level 2 service for a further year to March 2020, in which time further development work can be undertaken with partners and the community and voluntary sector to develop Somerset’s early help offer.”

Does “develop” include the option of SCC continuing to be the Prime Service Provider for the Early Help Offer (following further consultation and analysis of any relevant empirical data in Somerset and other (comparable) Local Authority Areas)?

Question 2 Relates to the Transfer of Health Visitors from Somerset Partnership to Somerset County Council (2019)

Have the recent changes and proposals (known as) and corresponding to CAF 14a and CAF 14b made any changes to the planning for the integration of Health Visitors and School Nurses into Somerset County Council – are HV and SN more likely to spend more time as “lead practitioners” if there has been a reduction in Level 2 in Getset?

Eva Bryczkowski

The government has cut the funding for children's services nationally and locally. Somerset County Council has had extremely tough choices to make regarding where and how to spend the limited amount of money they have available.

A report has just come out by the National Audit Office, with evidence that there has been a substantial increase in cases of child neglect and abuse. Regarding the cuts in funding by the government, social workers, for example, report that because they have huge caseloads, often the easiest and safest choice is to put children into care rather than offer support to struggling families.

QUESTION 1:

GETSET has been given another year to carry on its role of supporting children and families. As the Council continues to struggle with the shortfall in funding from the government, might it be a false economy to not put a lot more money into this service? Otherwise, if families with children are not given enough support, the same thing could happen locally.

QUESTION 2:

Regarding the massive cuts in funding mentioned above, might it be a good idea for Councillors to lobby the government a lot more assertively and forcefully, (in a polite manner), in order to be able to increase the help desperately needed by children and families?

For example, certain Councillors could mention that some, or many of them, risk losing votes as a consequence of making these cuts, which might possibly have a negative effect on the present government's votes, both locally and nationally.