

## **SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee held in the Library Meeting Room, Taunton Library, on Friday 26 April 2019 at 10.00 am

**Present:** Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr R Williams (Vice-Chair), Cllr M Dimery, Cllr Leyshon, Cllr Burridge-Clayton, Cllr Keating and Cllr W Wallace.

**Other Members present:**

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr James Hunt, Cllr J Lock, Cllr J Williams, Mr P Elliott, Ms Helen Fenn and Mrs Ruth Hobbs

### **54 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2**

Cllr Burridge-Clayton declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 8 in his capacity as a Member of the Somerset Adoption Panel.

### **55 Minutes from the previous meeting held on - Agenda Item 3**

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting were accurate and the Chair signed them.

It was noted that the responses to the public questions asked at the last meeting had not been received and the Director for Children's Services gave an undertaking to ensure these were produced.

### **56 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4**

There were no questions asked, statements/comments made or petitions presented.

### **57 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 Cabinet'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.

The Vice-Chair requested that an update report on the new arrangements for the Somerset Children's Trust & Somerset Safeguarding Board (safeguarding procedures) be prepared for the May meeting as it was going to be presented to the June Cabinet meeting.

The Vice-Chair requested an overview of the priorities for Children and Families, when looking at the work programme. Each item seemed to have similar priority and it would be helpful to focus attention on the top priorities and those should be identified.

The Vice-Chair requested that consideration be given to risk management and looking across the year at the threats and opportunities and how the Council could improve the life of Somerset children and families.

Regarding a possible joint meeting with the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee it was suggested that the topics of 'Immunisation' and 'Oral Health-dental' be added to the possible items for consideration.

It was noted that the Outcome Tracker had been refreshed and updated and it was accepted.

## 58 **Regional Adoption Agency update** - Agenda Item 8

The Lead Officer provided an update and overview of the recent past and changes that were undertaken in 2017 to create the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Overall it was stated that 31 children had been adopted last year and against the Department for Education scorecard a good rating had been achieved.

It was noted that after the change to the Regional Adoption Agency some practices had defaulted to the Devon County Council approach as the lead authority and some aspects of the transition had left people very unhappy. There continued to be issues for RAA staff visiting Somerset, such as printing and access to buildings and booking meeting rooms, but these were being addressed.

Members attention was drawn to manging performance challenges and the figures for 2018-19 had shown a drop of 50% in fostering arrangements and it was thought this may have been due to the impact of the new arrangements and the change to regionalisation. A total of 23 children had been placed for adoption. It was noted that that at any one time on average there had been between 16-18 children waiting over 4 months for a placement.

It was acknowledged that there was still lots of work to do and lots of energy required. Recognised nationally and continuing dialogue, I am confident we are doing all that is required, and it is first 6 months, and all new staff would become used to this way of working, despite the loss of experienced staff.

The Cabinet Member noted that as Somerset remain accountable to Ofsted for services that were delivered in Somerset, quarterly meetings between DCS's and Lead Members are held. It was also explained that staff were working closely with the Council's commissioning service to robustly monitor adopt southwest, more support from commissioning had been agreed.

The Vice-Chair stated he had found the presentation very interesting and supported in principle this important work, with its intricate governance, and operational management at a higher level. He noted a clash of cultures across

the 4 authorities in the run up to regionalisation described as a 'them and us' feeling, and welcomed the measures introduced to ensure risk was managed and process had been clarified and simplified.

The DCS noted that the governance had been signed off by the Cabinet some time ago and agreed across the 4 authorities. The Vice-Chair asked the Cabinet Member if she was content with the governance arrangements and she replied yes and was content that it was working through the culture at an operational level.

The Vice-Chair asked if this was a true regional agency given the other south west peninsula authorities not involved. In response Members heard that the area covered by the RAA covered quite a large area and felt quite big and meant a possible 6 hour round trip for some staff in Torbay, Plymouth and/or Devon. It was thought possible that Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly may join. There was a question about post adoption support for children in a school setting and it was explained it was a part of support for education and needs of adopted children. It was asked if the potential adoptees and cases getting bigger or diminishing and how? It was noted that nationally the gap was getting bigger, i.e. more children than adoptees and was therefore a national challenge. The southwest/regional picture sufficiency appeared to have remained similar, but it would be important to keep going recruiting, we do national searches sometimes.

About work at the edges of the regional, on the perimeter/boundaries it was noted the Adopt West and Aspire working arrangements were good. It was about maintaining a good presence in those areas and continuing to recruit and the DfE lessons learnt report had helped to understand geography and ensuring right recruitment was in the right in place.

Members heard from a Adopt Board member who stated that there had not been a massive amount of change, 2 panels still met each month in Somerset. It was explained that on each case a timescale section was provided, and these seemed to be coming downwards, far more coming forward for adopting. It was also noted that the transition to paperless also went smoothly.

There was a question about the details and figures and it was explained that they were based on the financial year figures (2018-19) and they had shown fewer children had come forward for adoption, investigation but the figures provided were for Somerset children.

A question was asked about post adoption support and if it had been affected and was working well and if this was delivered by the RAA. It was noted that whole post adoption support was delivered by the RAA, no concerns had been raised about those services. It was explained that, Somerset won't know those children unless referred in as Children in need. Still benefitted from an adoption support fund, every adopted child could benefit from £5k therapeutic support each year.

The Chair asked about capacity issues and the DCS noted that the Council offered as much support as it could, and the issue was not related to funding

but attracting staff, although some that had left had subsequently re-joined the Council.

The Chair suggested and it was agreed that an update report be provided in 6 months.

#### 59 **Pathways to Independence (P2i) update** - Agenda Item 7

The Strategic Manager Joint Commissioning introduced this topic and provided Members with a general overview following the recent strategic annual review of the P2i service. The Lead Officer was also accompanied by a former P2i resident who spoke about her experiences.

It was explained that the review had included provider visits, including a review of Self-Assessment; Staff and resident interviews and Case File and further compliance audits. There had also been visits to floating support and night stop team and visits to all five district areas accommodation and a review of voids.

It was also stated that a mediation performance review had been conducted with Team 8 and this had resulted in mediation improvements this year that have included:

- An expanded offer in terms of cover arrangements, an on-duty worker in each District between 7am-10pm;
- An expanded offer in terms of an edge of care service, meaning that there were now 2 routes into the service: P2i hub co-ordinators, plus emergency out of hours referral for young people;
- Attendance at panel every week, ensuring any opportunities for intervention were exhausted.

It was also noted that Team 8 attendance at panel meetings was helpful and could be strengthened by consistent attendance from representatives.

The verbal update also included details of the supported accommodation in each of the 4 district council areas and the progress of recommendations made following the annual review.

The Committee then heard the P2i service user speaking with the Lead Officer and she provided an overview of her experiences as a young person that had used the P2i service. Members welcomed the opportunity to hear directly from a service user who had now become a mentor for young people in P2i. Members described the young person as being a brilliant role model and they had gained from listening to her sharing her experiences and knowledge.

The Chair thanked both for attending and Members welcomed the continued improvements in the service.

#### 60 **Young Carers Future Service provision update** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee considered this report introduced by the Director of Children's Services (DCS). Members were reminded that last September the Cabinet deferred a decision regarding the future direction of young carer provision in

Somerset, pending the completion of an engagement exercise to obtain more information about potential options.

It was noted that the decision was further deferred in February 2019, to allow adult commissioners to engage with the voluntary sector. Until that time, the responsibility for young carers in Somerset is being held within Prevention Services in Children's Services. Members noted the current legislative responsibilities placed on Local Authorities regarding Young Carers and the new arrangements, described as temporary, that had been put in place pending the Cabinet decision expected in early summer 2019.

There was a discussion of the report and Members indicated that they were supportive of the direction of travel being proposed, although they thought the report when presented to Cabinet would benefit from further detail and information to assist the Cabinet and better inform its decision making. Members expressed frustration that the lack of detail provided had restricted their ability to provide constructive comments.

It was explained that the current arrangements 'model' would continue with assessments were being carried out by adolescent services, and some social work/Care services to ensure those assessments were carried out to a high level. The work undertaken to date had identified that some young people needed more intensive support. The voluntary sector could provide a set of support arrangements, and the YMCA was a possible model of what future arrangements in some areas could look like.

It was noted that the responses to the family survey consultation had been quite low, as from the 60 families that had been contacted only 9 responses had been received. From the limited response it had been gleaned that the temporary arrangements had worked well and Young Carers were relieved that support groups would be maintained, and the facilities and venues offered by the YMCA were viewed positively by the young people.

The DCS noted that Young people would like more control of how those services were set up. He stated that it might be in future that separate grant funding in different parts of the county, could determine how those services were provided locally and the Council was keen to co-produce the future arrangements with the young people. As there were only 60 young carers 'on the books' it was acknowledged that more work was needed to better identify Young Carers to ensure all were supported. Young Carers had a range of needs, some low level with some requiring greater support and intervention and the changes were about trying to provide greater support for more Young Carers.

There was a question about how clear the report to be presented to the Cabinet in May would be and if it would contain full proposals. The DCS confirmed that he expected the report for Cabinet in May would be clear about the set of proposals and directions and set out an implementation stage, and a key element would be about the providers being able to attract additional funding. He was hoping for an expansion of support for Young Carers and identifying more Young Carers than were currently known and the arrangements being more effective and making better use of resources and making the support

broader based. Members were encouraged that there appeared to be a number of organisations expressing an interest across the voluntary sector.

There was a question about the current level of funding of £200k and if that would continue. The DCS noted that funding decisions were a matter for the Cabinet. The Cabinet Member did not want to pre-empt any decision and she stated she had not gone through the papers thoroughly, but her view was that support for Young Carers needed to happen in all sorts of different ways and the Cabinet would make decisions that would enable different types of support. Maintaining the level of spending was not intended to say until the full detail was provided exactly how the money should be spent, that would be for the Cabinet to look at in detail.

There was a question about the 'follow-up' after a need had been identified and then nothing else happens and the level of engagement as only 60 young carers had been identified. The family survey return was very small and had Officers considered involving schools to help with the survey. The DCS replied that survey were those 60 families already using the service and interim arrangements and wider discussions had been undertaken with Schools including better recording on the SIMS system. The aim was for Young Carers to be able to access services without necessarily having a full statutory assessment. The vision for the future was if Schools identified a Young Carer they could refer the Young Carer to one of the support groups without a formal assessment, and only needing a formal assessment if the individuals need was such that they required more intensive support. Some Young Carers already received higher levels of support, in line with the national guidance.

The Chair thought that despite the minimal information presented the Committee had indicated it was content to support recommendations, but full details of the proposals were not known, and the Committee had not had the benefit of seeing the proposals in detail. The DCS objected and noted that the Committee had received regular updates, and the report was setting out how the situation was being managed. The Chair reiterated that the Committee had not seen the formal proposal to be submitted to Cabinet so could not comment on the formal proposals but was being asked to agree to several bullet points that were opened ended.

The Committee was frustrated by both a lack of detail in the report, to provide further explanation about the proposals, and the answers to questions asked during consideration of the report. Members thought the limited information did not fully outline the proposals that would be presented to the Cabinet and therefore this limited the Committee's ability to be able to provide constructive comment on this important topic that would impact on children, young people and their families.

The Committee unanimously agreed the following amended recommendations to the report:

- That the Council maintain an appropriate level of spend on Young Carers;
- That the Council integrate the Young Carers assessment function into mainstream services;
- That the Council fund the voluntary sector to provide dedicated services for Young Carers as and where needed;

- That the Council propose additional arrangements to increase the identification of Young Carers by partner agencies;
- That the Council ensures there is an opportunity for the Friends of Young Carers and others to contribute to services for Young Carers;
- That the Council ensures that a monitoring framework is included in the new arrangements for future services for Young Carers.

## 61 **Progress report on Ofsted Inspection outcomes** - Agenda Item 9

The Committee considered this report that provided an update about the Children's Social Care (CSC) team following their Ofsted inspection in November 2017, plans have been in place to address the recommendations outlined in the Ofsted report and improve the quality of social work practice, and the service offered to Children and Families in Somerset.

It was reported that good progress had been made in improving services across the board, and this improvement had been confirmed and recognised when Ofsted undertook a Focused Inspection last January. This visit had looked at the Front Door and Early Help services and found both to be making good progress.

Members noted that the Inspectors had reported a highly motivated and professional workforce focused on the needs of the children, with evidence of continuing improvement with Managers knowing their service well and being able to identify areas of strength and areas that required further improvement.

It was stated that most cases reviewed during the Ofsted inspection had met practice standards for a 'good' rating and had demonstrated examples of effective multi-agency child protection work across the service. It was also noted, in response to a question, that no inadequate cases were identified. Inspectors had reported progress on moving to a practice led service, with proportionate interventions focused on strengthening families, engaging and tenacious examples of good social work practice.

There was a question about the quarterly performance review meetings (QPRM) and it was stated that these would continue, and similar meetings were held to engage with colleagues in other Councils across the southwest. It was acknowledged that despite the continuing progress there remained much work to do good progress but importantly the team knew where those improvements were required with a focus on children looked after.

There was a brief discussion about progress made with mental health problems, and places after discharge from acute paediatric care and in response and it was stated that focus was about providing support in the home, and this was achieved through close joint working relationships with colleagues in health, weekly conference calls, and providing emotional, health and well-being support.

The Chair noted that he would like to attend a QPRM meeting again as an observer, and how in the future the Ofsted inspection outcomes would feed in to the new Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP). In response it was explained that children social care team was developing a plan, based on the

former programme 6 of the previous CYPP, and to make it more focused on holistic approach, and ensuring accountability.

The Chair asked about the biggest concern and it was stated it was important for children that had adverse experiences to provide support much earlier, as if support was delayed it resulted in not such not good outcomes, and for the support to be followed by good foster care. And a wish would be for more high quality foster carers to be recruited and available to ensure good outcomes for more children. It was also noted that co-ordination with General Practitioners could do improve.

The Committee accepted the update.

## 62 **Business Plan refresh** - Agenda Item 10

The Committee considered this report introduced by the Director of Corporate Affairs that explained the County Council Vision as being about improving lives in Somerset by creating:

- A thriving and productive County that is ambitious and confident;
- A County of resilient, well-connected and compassionate communities working to reduce inequalities;
- A County where all partners actively work together for the benefit of our residents, communities and businesses and the environment in which we all live;
- A County that provides you with right information, advice and guidance to help you help yourself and directs support to those who need it most

Members were reminded that the Business Plan stated what the County Council aimed to achieve with partners and communities to deliver the County Vision. The Plan was originally approved in 2018, and a refresh exercise had taken place to develop a 2019/20 version.

Members discussed the report and there was a discussion about how performance would be judged and how it would be reported throughout the year. It was noted that considerable work had been undertaken to ensure that all plans, such as the Children and Young People's Plan, were cohesive and working to achieve the same goals.

The Chair asked how Councillors and Members of the public would be able to gauge performance and in response it was stated that reports would be public and each Scrutiny committee in addition to the Cabinet would receive regular reports.

There was a brief discussion about the format of the plan and it was suggested that thought be given to a 'plan on a page' and it was acknowledged that this was quite a difficult thing to do as it often involved some compromise about what to leave out, but this was being progressed.

Consideration was given to the subject of 'digital inclusion' as there were problems for many Somerset residents, not least relating to county geography, meaning some children had to complete homework whilst at school, and there

remained a sizable minority who couldn't cope with digital by design and it should not be a default option for Council services. In reply the Director of Corporate Affairs agreed and stated the Council was committed to providing options and would not proceed as digital by default, so for example Libraries could help people with universal credit and have options for all service users.

The Committee accepted the report and the Chair thanked Officers for their hard work and producing a concise report.

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

The Chair, after ascertaining there were no other items of business, thanked all those present for attending and closed the meeting at 13.01.

**(The meeting ended at 1.01 pm)**

**CHAIRMAN**