

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 18 October 2019 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr R Williams (Vice-Chair), Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr James Hunt, Cllr J Lock, Cllr W Wallace, Mrs Eileen Tipper, Cllr M Keating, Cllr L Leyshon and Cllr D Loveridge (substitute). Mrs Eileen Tipper.

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

Apologies for absence: Cllr L Redman, Cllr M Dimery, Cllr J Williams, Elliot, Ms Helen Fenn and Ruth Hobbs.

7 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

Cllr Keating declared a personal interest as a Member of the Somerset Schools Forum.

Mrs Tipper declared a personal interest as a Member of the Somerset Community Council.

8 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The Committee agreed that the minutes of the last meeting, following a few minor amendments, were correct and the Vice Chair signed them.

9 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no members of the public present and no questions had been submitted.

10 Scrutiny Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

The Vice Chair of the Committee invited Members to consider the Cabinet's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in forthcoming months and suggest any items for the Committee to consider. The plan was noted.

The Vice Chair directed attention to the Committee's its own work programme and invited suggestions for possible future agenda items.

It was agreed that a 'Young Carers update report' be added to the agenda for the 13 December meeting.

It was suggested that a report about 'Adoption Medicals' be added to the work programme and the Scrutiny Manager undertook to liaise with the CCG to ascertain when they could attend.

It was suggested that a report about the availability of school places be considered for a future meeting. The Cabinet Member asked that the Member who had raised the issue approach her in the first instance to discuss her concerns.

Cllr Lock again requested that, as part of a joint meeting with the Adults and Health Committee, that the issue of Transition Plans for LD service users (18-25) going in to Adult Services be included on that agenda.

On the topic of a joint meeting with the Adults and Health Committee, Mrs Tipper requested that the 'health of children' be included, and that this incorporate the different proposals and plans such a 'fit for your future'.

The Scrutiny Manager undertook to discuss the proposed joint meeting between this Committee and the Adults and Health Committee with the respective Chairs of each Committee with a view to identifying a date.

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

11 **Troubled Families update report - Agenda Item 6**

The Committee considered this report about how the Troubled Families programme has been delivered in Somerset. It was noted that the Troubled Families (TF) Programme (2015 – 2020) was run from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and managed in Somerset by the Council. The TF programme was working to achieve significant and sustained progress with up to 3000 Somerset families, to help with addressing worklessness, poor school attendance, health problems, crime and anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse and children who need help.

It was explained that the outcomes were measured against a national Troubled Family Outcomes Framework using the Somerset Families Outcomes Framework which supported delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan. Successful progress of the TF programme in Somerset had secured £2m in Payment by Results claims and additional funding for 'transformation' and attachments fees had been invested in Early Help and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Members heard that Officers had developed a TF database – Transform, which enabled practitioners (internal) to have a holistic view of the family's complexities by drawing together information from different systems to provide a snapshot of the family. Additionally, the database had provided information for the Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board with insights into the effectiveness of Early Help arrangements. The current programme had been due to conclude on 31 March 2020, however in September the Government's spending review confirmed a further year of funding for the programme, but there was no confirmation of a 'successor' programme from March 2021.

The report was supplemented with a short PowerPoint presentation that showed a map of Somerset and the location of troubled families including their complexity of issues. There were diagrams to help demonstrate how outcomes were monitored and how a complex legal landscape had been simplified to ensure efficient flow of information that complied with data protection legislation.

During the discussion of the report and presentation, issues/concerns were raised, questions asked/answered and further information was provided on:

- Qualitative data from staff involved in the TF Programme indicated that the work undertaken had been effective in initiating change at a local level, and feedback from participant families had reflected the benefit of the initiative;
- It was reported, in response to a question, that 2,254 families in Somerset had achieved 'significant and sustained' outcomes, and it was further highlighted that many more families had made positive changes for and within their families but had not met the set outcome criteria so were not included in the official figures;
- The Director for Children's Service noted that an element of progress saw payments being made by demonstrable results and he was confident that Somerset was now better at achieving improvements in outcomes;
- It was requested that the phrase 'hard to reach families' was not used as it was troubled families that found it hard to reach services;
- Predictive analytics was a new and exciting area as it could be increasingly used to help to mitigate potential problems and help ensure better targeted support and use of resources;
- A glowing tribute was paid to the Lead Officer, who was described as 'a Goddess' and her work had been shown to a former Prime Minister and it was thought that the early work with TF undertaken in Somerset had helped to inform and shape national policy;
- It was noted that improvements could be made through improved liaison with the NHS, to include data sharing and if District Councils held a register of private landlords.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Officers for the interesting and informative presentation. He noted that the Health and Well-being Board (HWB) was leading on liaising with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to improve data sharing with partner agencies. He suggested and it was accepted that the Committee ask the HWB to request that the TF programme be included amongst the areas where enhanced partnership working was being encouraged. The report was accepted.

12 **2019/20 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report - Month 4 - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee considered this report, introduced by the Deputy Leader of Council, that provided details of the month 4 forecast outturn position for 2019/20 for the net Revenue Budget. The report also highlighted variances to service budgets, as well as detailing emerging issues, risks, areas of concern and proposed actions to resolve them.

It was reported that Children's Services had an adverse variance within their budget of £0.467m, although this had decreased by £0.030m from month 3. The Deputy Leader stated that it was encouraging that the financial forecast continued to show confidence that the changed approach to budget planning for 2019/20 onwards had ensured that the budget assumptions were realistic,

and deliverable with a relatively small adverse variance in overall service forecasts of £0.520m.

There was a brief discussion of the report and it was noted in response to a question that the variance was currently being off-set by a 'notional' allocation from corporate contingency and in addition firm management actions to correct variances were being developed. To ensure a tight grip was maintained the monthly monitoring reports to Cabinet and the Scrutiny for Policies and Place Committee would continue as this would help ensure effective review and scrutiny. Alongside this internal tracking and budget monitoring processes would continue to be given close attention by the Council's senior leadership team.

It was noted that the Children's Services budget, while rebased, remained under pressure as the Service continued to improve and this was in part due to unknown aspects especially regarding placements. It was reported that fees and allowances were reporting a reduced underspend of £0.130m although the number of adoption allowances had increased, resulting in an additional projected cost of £0.059m. This however reflected a positive outcome for children in Somerset and was more likely to result in cost avoidance on other placement budgets. The report also detailed a £0.175m underspend in the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) budget and an overall staffing underspend of £0.487m.

There was a brief discussion about social worker recruitment, and it was noted that recruiting experienced social workers was not only difficult but could also be more expensive. However, in the long run it would save money as it would require less to be spent on children as they would be better supported in their own families.

The Committee accepted the report.

13 Value for Money: Tracker and Social Care Experts Review 2018 - 2019 - Agenda Item 8

The Committee considered this report, introduced by the Deputy Leader of Council, that had been used by the Council's external auditor to inform their overall Value for Money conclusion. It was explained that the external auditor had sought additional assurance over the robustness regarding the Council's budget planning in respect of some services, including the increase to the Children's Services base budget. The work had provided more information to the external auditors and enabled them to provide assurance over the embeddedness of arrangements for sustainable resource deployment.

It was explained that the experts' conclusion had been attached as Appendix A to the report and it contained a section on Children's Services and included some useful benchmarking comparisons. The overall VFM experts' opinion for Children's Services had concluded that there was a moderate risk to the delivery of the Council's budget in respect of Children's Services.

Members heard that the work undertaken during the additional review had identified a few areas where further action would be required to strengthen the Council's financial resilience regarding Children's Social Care. It was reported that management actions had been incorporated into the VFM tracker considered by the Audit Committee at its last meeting and progress reports would be reported to each Audit Committee during 2019/20.

There was a brief discussion about how progress on the 3 specific VFM actions that related to Children's Services (VFMY20008, VFMY20010, and VFMY20012 (page 113)) would be reported to the Committee, and the Vice Chair noted the clear demarcation lines between the work of the 2 Committees.

The Committee accepted the report and the Vice Chair undertook to work with the Chair and Officers to determine how the Committee could best review progress on the 3 specific VFM actions during the year.

14 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 9

After ascertaining there were no other items of business, the Vice-Chair thanked all those present for attending, and closed the meeting at 11.44am.

(The meeting ended at 11.44 am)

CHAIRMAN