

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 Monday 5 September 2022 at 1.00 pm

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr O Patrick (Vice-Chair), Cllr S Aujla, Cllr J Baker, Cllr S Carswell, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr S Hart, Cllr B Height, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr J Kenton, Cllr E Potts-Jones and Cllr M Lovell,
R Hobbs and E Tipper – co-opted members

Other Members present: Cllr T Munt and Cllr C Ellis

Other members attending virtually; Cllr A Kendall, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr A Dingwall and Cllr L Trimnell

Apologies for absence: Cllr J Snell and The Revd T Osmond (co-opted member)

1 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

The following declaration of interest was made at the meeting: -

(a) Ruth Hobbs – co-opted member – Governor at Herne View Church of England Primary School.

2 Minutes from the previous meeting held on 25 July 2022 - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 25 July 2022 were approved and signed as a correct record.

3 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

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

4 Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

The Committee considered and noted the Committee's current work programme and outcome tracker and the Executive Forward Plan of planned key decisions in coming months, including Executive meetings.

The Chair apologised that the papers for the meeting had been circulated late and that for future meetings they will be submitted in a more timely manner.

The Chair stressed the need for clarity on which items are considered by which Scrutiny Committee and has also asked the Scrutiny Manager to arrange a meeting of the 4 Scrutiny Committee Chairs.

The Governance Manager mentioned that a '[glossary of terms](#)' has recently been published on the Council's website.

It was agreed that: -

- The Home to School Transport Policy item, which is being considered at the Place Scrutiny Committee on 6 September, be brought to the next meeting of this Committee.
- Budget monitoring of Children's Services will be reported on an ongoing basis for the Committee.
- Members were invited to contact the Chair and Vice Chair, or support Officers if they have any further items they would like the Committee to focus on.
- The work plan and outcome tracker be noted.

5 **2022 Key Stage assessment results for Somerset** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Assistant Director, Education Partnerships and Skills, Amelia Walker who provided a data and standards update, including the early indications from the 2022 Key Stage assessment results for Somerset and the areas of focus.

Testing generates vast quantities of data and therefore accurate and reliable results to pupil level will not be in the public domain until January 2023. The national data is released in October and the Committee would like to see that when can (possibly November mtg). Ms Walker said that she would circulate the presentation given to the informal meeting last year which provided an introduction to education data and performance.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following questions and issues were raised and responded to, as follows: -

- Referred to the early indications / KS2 assessment data and whether the gap has widened and areas of focus – explained that comparisons are difficult and that all standards have moved
- Early years results and younger children and whether there is a plan of action – are priorities and strategies for early years; impact of pandemic has been particularly difficult for the younger children
- Impact of the restructure and early years – this is currently being consulted on and trying to create dedicated capacity
- Referred to slide 5 indicating difference between estimated and actual grade in GCSE English 2017-21 independent and state funded selective

schools – highlighted this is taken from research by a national Think Tank and had included the slide due recent press about it

- Discussion about KS3, which has no formal national assessment (and has been referred to in the past as ‘the wasted years’) and can confuse ‘assessment’ with ‘testing’
- Referred to slide 7 which provided some early indicative information on the position in Somerset relative to the national position compared to 2019 – writing at Key Stage 2 analysis suggests that a sharp downturn in writing outcomes has mitigated the encouraging improvement in reading; are putting programme in place for schools; explained that fuller details (pupil level data) will come through later
- Brief discussion about the National Tutoring Programme and take up

On behalf of the Committee the Chair thanked Ms Walker for the informative presentation.

6 **Academisation - moving towards 2030** - Agenda Item 7

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council’s Assistant Director, Education Partnerships and Skills, Amelia Walker which provided an update on academisation in Somerset, following the publication of the Government Schools White Paper ‘Opportunity for All’ in March 2022. This set out the intention to: -

- See all schools in ‘strong trusts’ by 2030
- Achieve greater clarity about the respective roles for the Department for Education, Local Authorities, Ofsted, Multi-academy trusts (MAT) and the Schools Adjudicator
- Create ‘Education Investment Areas’ where standards are lower (following the end of Opportunity Areas)
- Replace Regional Schools Commissioner offices with Regional Teams
- Raise standards in existing trusts

Ms Walker highlighted the implications and work being undertaken in Somerset – this includes discussions with schools about the traded offer (‘the Patchwork’). A group of secondary schools has put together a partnership with feeder primary schools to collaborate on school improvement (‘Somerset Partnership’) - neither is a replacement for academisation. The traded offer is a new traded offer, and it is intended to mirror how trusts support schools more closely, but an LA cannot be a trust. The Partnership is similar to existing groups in the county known as ‘Community Learning Partnerships’.

The Committee discussed the presentation, and the following questions and issues were raised and responded to, as follows: -

- Question about why ‘we’ are not planning a ‘Local Authority MAT’ – explained that officers have not put forward a proposal for this at this time and also the government has said that it is not minded to permit

the establishment of more than a tiny number of LA MATs initially and it is extremely unlikely that Somerset would be one of them at the current time; does not mean that there will be no new MATs for LA schools to join over course of next 8 years

- Discussion about the proposed Education Investment Areas and that West Somerset will now be the only south West's only priority education investment area, what this may mean in practice and whether its areas of focus are in fact the right ones – highlighted this is a government initiative and are awaiting further details on what is likely to be in that plan
- Discussion on the timescale and work involved in all schools becoming academies by 2030
- Discussion on the condition of LA school estate – recognised that this is a national concern and are focussing on this and working very closely with Corporate Property and making a number of strategic decisions; there is also a need to expand the Traded Offer, as explained above
- Discussion on the 'democratic deficit' and performance of schools in the reformed system and monitoring – explained that are at an early stage working on proposals in relation to accountability, the 'democratic deficit' and monitoring of trusts and are engaging with national organisations and will come back with proposals when they have been formulated.

It was agreed that a progress update be given to the Committee in 6 months.

7 **Update on budgetary pressures in Children's Services** - Agenda Item 8

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Deputy Director of Children's Services, Claire Winter who provided an update on the budgetary pressures in Children's Services.

As a background to the item, the link to the revenue budget monitoring report had been shared with the Committee. This report had been considered at the Executive meeting on 17 August 2022 and concerns the 2022/23 revenue budget monitoring report – month 3 – end June 2022, and in particular the information relating to Children's Services.

The key areas of pressure are external placements for children in care and secondly education transport – home to school and SEND transport and Ms Winter outlined the key performance cost drivers and actions / activity to address pressures. It was confirmed that an overview of home to school transport will be considered at the Place Scrutiny Committee on 6 September 2022 and will be brought to this Committee in October 2022.

It was agreed that the following will be circulated (a) 'Staying Put' policy; (b) numbers in residential care data for 21/22 and how we sit with statistical neighbours.

The Committee also congratulated the department for winning the 2022 LGC award for the fostering campaign.

It was agreed that Children's Services budget monitoring will be discussed at the next meeting. The Chair also highlighted that at some point the Committee may consider setting up a task and finish group looking at external care placements, in conjunction with Corporate Parenting Board.

8 Homes for children in Somerset - progress update
- Agenda Item 9

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Strategic Manager, Daniel Moncrieff who provided a detailed update on the strategic partnership between the Council and 'The Shaw Trust' to deliver homes for complex children and young people including homes for children, high needs fostering and therapeutic education.

Mr Moncrieff outline the progress to date, the purchase of homes, staffing, recruitment, the proposed joint engagement strategy, timelines and next steps. The plan is to open the first homes in early 2023.

The Committee had a broad discussion covering - the work undertaken and that this is an exciting project; engagement with the community, including member engagement; location of the properties; corporate parenting role; need to get message across that they will be 'family' homes and asked to see the 'FAQ' document.

The Chair thanked Mr Moncrieff for the detailed update.

9 Items for Information - Standing Item - Agenda Item 10

The Committee noted the following items for information: -

- (a) Task and Finish Group review of School Exclusions (23 September 2020): -
[Covering report](#)
[Task and Finish Group Report](#)
[Cabinet members response](#)
[Cabinet Digest](#)
- (b) [Task Group review of Elective Home Education](#) (June 2015) and [Report to Committee 3 March 2021](#)

10 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 11

Cllr O Patrick raised the following item at the meeting: -

What is in place to address the impact of COVID on pupil / staff absences and school closures – it was agreed that this will be followed up by a written response.

(The meeting ended at 3.56 pm)

CHAIR