

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Children and Families held in the John Meikle Room, The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton TA1 1HE, on Wednesday, 15 May 2024 at 10.00 am

**Present:**

Cllr Leigh Redman (Chair)

Cllr Evie Potts-Jones (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Simon Carswell

Cllr Pauline Ham

Cllr Marcus Kravis

Cllr Frances Nicholson

Cllr Jeny Snell

The Rev'd Tobie Osmond – co-opted member

Cllr Peter Clayton

Cllr John Hunt

Cllr Martin Lovell

Cllr Sue Osborne (substitute for Cllr Andy Hadley)

Ruth Hobbs – co-opted member

Jo Simons – co-opted member (attended remotely)

**In attendance:**

Cllr Heather Shearer

**Other Members present remotely:**

Cllr Norman Cavill

**1 Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1**

Apologies were received from Councillor Andy Hadley (substituted by Cllr Sue Osborne) and Jo Simons (co-opted member) joined the meeting online.

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

There were no new declarations of interest received.

**3 Minutes from the Meeting held on Wednesday 13 March 2024 - Agenda Item 3**

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Childrens and Families held on Wednesday 13 March 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

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

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

#### **5 Scrutiny Committee - Children and Families Work Programme - Agenda Item 5**

The Committee received and noted the Committee's current work programme, outcome tracker, meetings overview from 2023/24, draft work programme for 2024/25 and the Executive Forward Plan of planed key decisions in the coming months including Executive meetings.

The Committee noted the items planned for the next meeting on 26 June 2024, in particular the item on the Children's Transformation Plan for Childrens Services (deep dive). In preparation for the next meeting, it was agreed that Committee members would to be approached to see if they are interested in being involved in the priorities / areas and also members who have previously been involved should contact the relevant officer(s). The Children's Services Transformation priorities / areas, are as follows:

- Connect Somerset (Tobie Osmond, Ruth Hobbs).
- Children Looked After (CLA) Transformation (Cllr Evie Potts-Jones, Cllr Martin Lovell).
- Education for Life Strategy (Jo Simons).
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy (Cllr Simon Carswell, Cllr Frances Nicholson).

The suggestions for items for the work plan made by Cllr John Hunt and Cllr Carswell will be reviewed.

#### **6 Update on short break provision / action plan - Agenda Item 6**

Further to the meeting held on [10 January 2024](#), the Committee received a [presentation](#) from the Council's Strategic Commissioner – Children's Services Louise Palmer and Head of Service, J Manning, who provided a progress update on short break provision. It was noted that the action plan had been shared with the Committee.

The Committee discussed the update, asked a number of questions, and made a

number of comments which were responded to at the meeting, including the following – the proposed 2 new homes; need for and value of engagement, including involving councillor (Tell Local Councillor); the learning from Homes & Horizons work; the budget and timescales and the need to move forward.

The Committee was very supportive of the proposals and direction of travel and looks forward to seeing the project as it moves forward.

## **7 Education for Life - Progress on Years 2-5 - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee received a [presentation](#) from the Council's Service Director Education, Amelia Walker who provided an update on progress on the Education for Life Strategy and the actions and focus for years 2 – 5.

The Committee discussed the update and asked a number of questions and made a number of comments which were responded to at the meeting, including the following – discussion on the proposed localities and their geographical areas, which will be based around schools, SEND, Inclusion, FIS staff; it was noted that are still working on details / early days and will not be exactly aligned to Local Community Networks' (LCNs) as need to ensure map around schools; 'co-production' was stressed and relationships being important, for example with Multi Academy Trust (MAT) CEO's; view that school clusters better sometimes than geographical area; reference made to the work of the Education Standing Panel, and that other members are welcome to attend the meeting if they wish; the Vice Chair asked whether the panel can be renamed.

The Committee welcomed and noted the progress update.

## **8 Update on DBS checks for Councillors - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee noted the update from the Council's Scrutiny Manager, Jamie Jackson on the position with regard to Disclosure and Barring Service Clearance, [DBS checks](#) for Councillors.

The Committee discussed the update and asked a number of questions and made a number of comments which were responded to at the meeting, including the following – the 'portability' of DBS's; mention that candidates standing for election as a councillor were made aware that there is an expectation they will need to complete an enhanced DBS check as part of the role; complete a DBS; query about the regularity of DBS check and expectation for second round in period of term of office and this will be checked.

The Committee noted the position and requested a further update in the near future.

## **9 Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic - Agenda Item 9**

The Committee received a [presentation](#) from the Council's Participation and Partnerships Business manager, Fiona Phur on the care experience as a Protected Characteristic. The Council in May 2023 agreed to 8 recommendations to implement care experience as a Protected Characteristic and the Committee noted the actions arising. In March 2020, the Council signed the national Care Leaver's Covenant and Committee to meeting its five core outcomes.

The Committee noted the Somerset definition of 'care leavers and care experienced' and the proposed next steps / considerations for implementation and the Somerset definition has now been agreed - *'In Somerset 'care-experienced' refers to anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a looked after background at any stage of their life, no matter how short, including adopted children who were previously looked after. Care may have been provided in one of many different settings, such as in residential care, foster care, kinship care or through being looked after at home with a supervision requirement.'*

The Committee discussed the update and asked a number of questions and made a number of comments which were responded to at the meeting, including the following - the ambition for children / Corporate Parent Board (CPB) role; the Somerset definition now agreed by legal team is quite wide-ranging definition; need to be clear on parameters; with definition can move forward / on journey; around influence and encouragement; do support beyond 25 if able (but not a lifelong service); the role of CPB.

With regard to the data provided and number of those who experience homelessness (slide on page 56 – slide 6), the Committee asked officers to seek more information / breakdown of figures in more detail and this could be looked at a later date - the Executive member mentioned the 'Big sleep out' on 15 June.

The Committee noted the update and requested an update on care experience as protected characteristic at some point to a future meeting, (including views of those who are care experienced). The Committee noted that the CPB is where can and do hold people to account and that the data dashboard produced for the CPB is interesting and informative.

## **10 Items for Information - Standing Item - Agenda Item 10**

1. The Committee noted the following items for information:

- (a) LGA virtual event – Improving support for care leavers
- (b) Update on Academisation Programme – link to website – [Academisation Pipeline Page | Support Services for Education](#)

2. Noted the proposed meeting dates for 2024/2025:-

The meetings will be held in Deane House, JMR, Taunton except where indicated:-

- Wednesday 26 June @ 10am.
- Monday 5 August @ 1.30 pm.
- Wednesday 18 September @ 10am (Sedgemoor Room, Bridgwater).
- Tuesday 29 October @ 10am.
- Monday 9 December @ 1.30pm.
- Wednesday 22 January @ 10.30am.
- Monday 10 March @ 1.30pm.
- Wednesday 23 April @ 10.30am.

**(The meeting ended at 12.48 pm)**

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**CHAIR**