

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny Committee - Children and Families held in the Sedgemoor Room, Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater, TA6 3AR, on Wednesday, 18 September 2024 at 10.00 am

**Present:**

Cllr Leigh Redman (Chair)  
Cllr Evie Potts-Jones (Vice-Chair)

Cllr Simon Carswell  
Cllr Dixie Darch (substitute for Cllr Jeny Snell)  
Cllr Alistair Hendry

Cllr John Hunt (attended remotely)  
Cllr Frances Nicholson  
Ruth Hobbs – co-opted member

Cllr Peter Clayton  
Cllr Andy Hadley

Cllr Henry Hobhouse (substitute for Cllr Martin Lovell)  
Cllr Marcus Kravis  
Cllr Pauline Ham (attended remotely)  
Rev'd Tobie Osmond – co-opted member

**In attendance:**

Cllr Heather Shearer

**Other Members present remotely:**

Cllr Mandy Chilcott  
Cllr Martin Lovell  
Cllr Lucy Trimmell

Cllr Andy Dingwall  
Cllr Jo Roundell Greene

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

Apologies were received from Councillor J Snell (substituted by Cllr D Darch) and Councillor M Lovell (substituted by Cllr H Hobhouse - Cllr Lovell was able to join the meeting virtually). Councillor J Hunt and Councillor P Ham attended the meeting remotely.

The Chair welcomed Mary Cox to the meeting – Ms Cox will be joining the Committee as a co-opted member, representing the Clifton Diocese.

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

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

- (a) Cllr P Clayton – non-pecuniary – agenda item 9 refers – is a Consultant independent Panel member Adopt South West.

### **3 Minutes from the Meeting held on Wednesday 7 August 2024 - Agenda Item 3**

Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Children and Families held on Wednesday 7 August 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 noted the Committee's current work programme, outcome tracker and the Executive Forward Plan of planned key decisions in the coming months including Executive meetings.

### **6 Children's Services - Budget Monitoring - Month 4 - Agenda Item 6**

The Committee received a [presentation](#) from the Council's Service Managers, Jo Currie and Siobhan Cleverley who provided an update on the budget position for Children's Services – Month 4 (2024/25). This shows a £6.4m forecast overspend (4.5% of budget) and the overspend predominantly relates to external placements (residential / unregistered), education cost pressures, DSG High Needs Block.

The Committee discussed the presentation in detail and the following points were raised and responded to:-

- provided an update on the situation with regard to the Homes and Horizons project and homes 6 and 7 had opened very recently which will help the situation; there are still some issues regarding officer capacity as mentioned previously. The department for example is now funding a Planning Officer post (a 6 month post) as a pragmatic approach to a very difficult problem.
- residential care costs are increasing for all authorities – which is why the Council is seeking to develop its own provision to help manage the situation but is a very difficult market – having additional foster carer will greatly help as well.
- 16+ accommodation, the lack of social housing and private rented accommodation to 'move out to' - a note will be shared providing more information to the Committee on this.
- the Council is asking for views on proposals which aim to ensure provision for children with additional needs – the [consultation runs to 18 October 2024](#) and this will be discussed at the October meeting of the Committee.
- in view of the significance of the issue, the DSG Deficit Management Plan will be considered at a future meeting of the Committee and if this should be ahead of consideration by the Executive – and will consider holding an extraordinary meeting of the Committee if necessary.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked members for their engagement and questions and thanked officers for the presentation and for the detailed responses. The Homes and Horizons work is positive but the budget situation continues to be troublesome and will continue to be so.

The Committee noted the update position on the budget.

## **7 Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of Somerset - serious youth violence - action plan - Agenda Item 7**

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting for this agenda item – the Council’s Executive Director, Children Families and Education, Claire Winter and Sarah Ashe, Associate Director Safeguarding Children, NHS Somerset ICB (attending on behalf of Shelagh Meldrum, Chief Nursing Officer). Due to short notice and operational matters, apologies were received from Lisa Simpson, Area Commander, Somerset & North Somerset Police.

Further to the meeting held on [7 August 2024](#), the Committee received an update [presentation](#) on the Somerset Joint Targeted Area Inspection of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Somerset.

The Chair said that the Committee had wanted to consider the action plan at this meeting. In response the Executive Director advised that the multi-agency action plan needs to be signed off by Ofsted before it can be brought into the public domain and would not be able to share the document at this meeting. Ms Winter and Ms Ashe presented the key headlines and some details in the multi agency action plan, including timescales and how stakeholders are working together.

The Committee discussed the presentation in detail and a number of important points were raised and responded to:-

- discussed the timetable for actions and concern that some seemed to be too far ahead - the Somerset NHS FT recording system work and alignment across the Trust and longer term a single system has a date of 2027 – there are 128 different clinical systems which need to be rationalised; having one dedicated record system has been pushed back to 2028; provided reassurance on the need for urgency on actions; the operational work happening and learning and actions are already happening.
- the role out of training to front line staff and also linkages to the Education for Life Strategy and SEND Strategy.
- coordinating intelligence and discussed the specific and critical issue for the Police Force and actions identified for the Police – noted the appointment of Safeguarding Superintendent.
- noted the ‘challenge day’ workshop on 7 October.
- data sharing and happy to present Transform Family View to future meeting of the Committee.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked the presenters and committee members for their questions and it was agreed that:-

1. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, will write to the Chief Executive of the ICB with concerns about the implementation timescale of 2028, for the Foundation Trust to develop a single recording system, where safeguarding information will be readily accessible to relevant staff across the Trust.
2. The Chair will also write to the Executive member to ask her to contact the Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner to share the Committee’s concern about the pace of police activity in improving information and intelligence sharing with partners, as children currently remain at potential risk. The Committee would welcome a written response from the PCC, about

how she intends that this will be challenged and rectified.

3. The Committee will receive an update in 3 months (February 2025).
4. The work on Transform Family View will be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

## **8 Transformation Board- deep dive - Children Looked After - Agenda Item 8**

The Committee received a [presentation](#) from the Council's Service Director, Children & Families, Jayne Shelbourne-Barrow on the deep dive undertaken on Children Looked After, the areas being explored and further areas to explore.

The Committee discussed the presentation in detail and the following points were raised and responded to:-

- with regard to the information on length of care proceedings, significant concern expressed about the situation with regards to court delays (Taunton highlighted in particular) which impacts on children returning to family, adoption – the Executive Director agreed that she would write to the President of the Family Division formally and ask support in trying to reduce the length of time Court proceedings are taking, as there are judicial areas, including Taunton which are taking longer than other areas.
- the audits undertaken and the deep dive undertaken of 11 – 15 year olds and whether it is a 'typical' sample – confirmed there will be further quality assurance to be undertaken to investigate and to look for learning.
- would like further information / reasons behind those children ceasing to be Looked After.
- increase in numbers of CLA – the rise is proportionate and mapping in line with statistical neighbours.
- query about Special Guardianships – agreed to circulate the link to policy / guidance on this.
- confirmed there is regular contact and meetings between Children's Services and Adult Social Care around transitions.

In conclusion the Chair thanked officers for the update presentation and asked for a report back to the Committee if required. The Committee noted the presentation.

## **9 Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group - Agenda Item 9**

The Committee received and noted the report from the meeting of the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group, [held on 25 July 2024](#) and the Groups' current [Terms of Reference](#).

It was agreed that the Chair, Vice Chair, Cllr Nicholson and the Executive Director will meet to review the terms of reference, with a view to formulating a response which will then be shared with the Committee.

It was noted that there will need to be further discussion by the Scrutiny Group about the terms of reference and its review by the Strategic Board before the Scrutiny Group can sign it off.

**10 External placements - update on recommendations made by the Task and Finish Group - Agenda Item 10**

Further to the meeting held on [13 September 2023](#), the Committee received and noted the [update](#) on the recommendations made by the External Placements Task and Finish Group.

**11 Standing Panel for Education Standards - update - Agenda Item 11**

The Committee received and noted the update from Cllr Evie Potts-Jones on recent work undertaken by the Standing Panel for Education Standards.

The next meeting of the Panel will be on 13 November 2024 and all committee members are welcome to attend. The notes from the meetings will now be shared with committee members.

**12 SWAP Audit on EHCP Improvement - Agenda Item 12**

The Committee received a [presentation](#) from the Council's Executive Director Children Families and Education, Claire Winter. This provided information about the audit she had requested due to the complaints made by parents about delays in the Education Health and Care Plan payments process. The audit report was issued in August 2024 and has been shared with the Local Government Ombudsman.

It was agreed that the action plan will be shared, and the audit report will be considered in detail at the next meeting of the Committee on 21 October 2024.

**13 Items for Information - Standing Item - Agenda Item 13**

The Committee noted the following items for information:

- (a) 2023 KS4 and KS2 outcomes / performance for each MAT – circulated on 8 August 2024
- (b) [Somerset Council Engagement and Participation AR for 2023-2024](#) – circulated on 12 August 2024.

**(The meeting ended at 1.17 pm)**

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**CHAIR**