

Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

Chairman: Cllr Leigh Redman

Division and Local Member: All

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1. Summary

- 1.1. The Scrutiny for Policies Children and Families Committee is required by the Constitution to make an annual report to the Council and to provide each other meeting of the Council with a summary progress report and outcomes of scrutiny. This report covers the work of the Committee's meetings on since 7 December 2018 and 25 January 2019.
- 1.2. The main focus of our work programme will be to ensure the continuous improvement and delivery of the 7 priorities contained within the Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP). In this endeavour the Chairman has again suggested that each Member of the Committee volunteer to act as a 'champion' for each of the 7 programmes.
- 1.3. Our predecessor Committee (from 2015 to 2017) was able to help bring about continuing progress in many areas of the Council's improvement agenda for children and young people and our central focus will also be to constantly ask - **What impact does that have on children in Somerset?**
- 1.4. The Committee has 8 elected Members. We also have 7 co-opted members. We have 2 Church representative vacancies along with 1 Parent Governor vacancies and we are looking at ways to ensure those positions are occupied. We have retained our Schools Compact representative and a representative from the Schools Forum; our co-opted members have voting rights on education matters only. We look forward to once again hearing first hand testimony from front line staff who will we invite to attend and participate at our meetings.
- 1.5. Members of the Council are reminded that:
 - all Members are invited to attend meetings of all the Council's Scrutiny Committees and to contribute freely on any agenda item;
 - any Member could propose a topic for inclusion on the Scrutiny Work Programmes;
 - any Member can be asked by the Committee to contribute information and evidence, and to participate in specific scrutiny reviews.

2. Background

- 2.1. **Scrutiny Work Programme** – As noted above the focus of our work programme will be the 7 priorities of the CYPP with practical work to support and challenge service improvement. The Committee fully supported this at our first meeting of the quadrennium and we look forward to working with the

Director of Children's Services (DCS) and other Officers to ensure topics dealt with during Scrutiny meetings support the improvement process.

Each of our future meetings will have specific agenda items to consider the work programme and this will allow members and officers to suggest items we should scrutinise in more depth. We are also very keen to enhance our ability to monitor our suggested outcomes and recommended actions to ensure these have been progressed, and to assist us in this we will continue to review our outcome tracker at every meeting to ensure this is meaningful.

The Committee is also keen to help facilitate and progress the on-going Scrutiny Review being undertaken in the Council, so we can continue to build on our role in policy shaping, holding the Cabinet to account and reviewing issues of importance to local communities.

2.2. 7 December 2018

Public Question Time – We had several members of the public attending who asked questions about each agenda item and we ensured that those questions received a written response as some of the questioners were unable to attend the meeting.

Self-harm in Somerset – A report from the Director of Public Health that provided analysis of available data to help understand the apparent high rates of self-harm in Somerset. In summary the conclusion seemed to be that evidence pointed to the most effective interventions being the overall promotion and support of mental health and emotional wellbeing for all young people, especially girls, rather than providing specialist services. The Chair reflected that the mental health and well-being of others was a matter for all, not just the NHS. We accepted the report and requested a further update be considered at the June meeting.

Somerset Local Transformation Plan (LTP) – We then considered a report that explained that Somerset CCG was required by NHS England to “refresh” the 2015-2020 Somerset Local Transformation Plan (LTP) for Children & Young People's Mental Health & Learning Disabilities (CYP MH/LD). There was a discussion of the report and it was noted that the LTP Programme Board included a range of partner representatives, including a member of this Committee and a representative of the Parent Carer Forum and work on refreshing the plan had involved many different partners to reflect and compliment other plans. Members also voiced concern at the combining of mental health with learning difficulties and it was confirmed this was the adopted approach of the CCG. The Committee thought that this was not an appropriate link and an unfortunate policy and suggested that thought be given to amending it. We accepted the report.

Local Area Improvement Network (LAIN) – provided an update on Officer led activity since our previous update, last June. We were reminded that the progress against the SEND Strategy Outcomes were monitored through the Local Area Improvement Network (LAIN), which was accountable to the SEND improvement Board, Children's Trust Board (as part of the CYPP) and to the Health and Well-Being Board. We accepted the update.

Young Carers – We considered a report about how Officers were identifying opportunities for greater involvement of the community and voluntary sector in Young Carers support. We heard that following the withdrawal of the proposal submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet last September an engagement exercise was being undertaken. We sought clarification and it was explained this was different from a consultation as an engagement exercise was focused on obtaining general feedback and opinions whereas a consultation would be focused around specific proposals and there were no proposals currently for the Young Carers Service. It was explained that Officers were now exploring how the Young Carers services could be delivered differently in the future to ensure good outcomes for Young Carers as well as achieving good value for money, so the Council could ensure the provision was fit for the future. We accepted the report.

Capital programme for 2019/20 – We noted that the programme primarily related to the assets which are held or used by the Council to operate or support the services provided to Somerset residents and covers such assets as Schools and Highways. Capital expenditure involves the acquisition, creation or enhancement of fixed assets with a long-term value to the Council. It did not therefore support the day-to-day running costs of Council services which were met from the Revenue Budget. We focused on the ‘Schools basic need programme’ and it was noted that in 2018/19, the Council approved a programme to provide additional schools basic need places over four years. This was in part funded by up to £120m of borrowing. A further investment programme was proposed for 2019/20 and the subsequent three years, but this has now been reviewed in the light of the financial pressures upon the Council. Looking ahead Members heard that the Council would continue to seek further funding to support the addition of school places and avoid the requirement for borrowing.

2.3. 25 January 2019

Children’s Service MTFP budget setting – A report outlined the process and how recommendations arising from the PeopleToo review and financial plan had been incorporated and progressed. Attention turned to Appendix A of the report that set out the Financial Plan for Children’s Services (2019 – 2022) and it was noted that further proposals had been developed offering savings to the budget. Additional recommendations had been made in relation to the High Needs element of the Dedicated Schools Grant, those required further work before recommendations could be fully considered. We agreed to note the report and that it was important to continue transformation work with improvements on systems with partner organisations to make it easier and more efficient with sharing information and using data.

Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) (2019-22) – It was confirmed that all the known funding and service demand pressures had been reflected in the budget alongside proposals for reducing spend and hence producing a balanced budget for 2019/20. This work had produced indicative budgets for each service and the report focuses on those services for Children’s Services. Working with PeopleToo had allowed for a rebasing of the Children’s Services budget and this ensured that from 2019/20 (and indeed from the later part of 2018/19) managers had budgets for which they could be held to account allowing for more effective budget monitoring. We agreed that the recommendations arising from the consultation exercise with the voluntary

sector regarding meeting the needs of young carers should be considered by us in the summer and that we should receive regular financial monitoring reports regarding Children's Services, starting in the new financial year. The report was accepted.

Somerset Safeguarding Board – We considered the Annual report and there was a discussion with questions asked and answers provided on concerns about children being held in custody overnight, safeguarding in home education, information sharing and data gaps, greater emphasis on universal community services flagging safeguarding concerns at an early stage, modern slavery and child exploitation.

Refreshing the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) – We noted a timeline for progress of adopting the CYPP and it was proposed to present the final/agreed CYPP at our 22 March meeting. We recognised the work the Vice Chair, with officers, had contributed to this endeavour. The new CYPP would then be formally launched during April 2019.

Proposals for the alteration and/or reduction of early help services provided to children and their families - 'get-set' – A report provided details of the public consultation and emerging proposals with final recommendations being presented to the Cabinet for consideration on the 11 February 2019. It was explained that following the staff reductions already undertaken in 'get-set', the level 2 service currently consisted of just 11 FTE family support workers and apprentices covering the whole of Somerset, and this reportedly cost £450k. The Council's view that investing an annual £200k in community based local support had the potential to create a larger, more effective and sustainable resource with the ability to attract further funding from other sources. We noted that there would be further work carried out to explore and mitigate gaps identified by cessation of get-set level 2 with community connect and community catalysts. We also requested that responses from other partner organisations which raised concerns would also be added into the report on the consultation and that this would be added onto our forward work programme for a future update.

3. Consultations undertaken

- 3.1. The Committee invites all Councillors to attend and contribute to its meetings. The Committee Chair and Vice Chair invite prospective report authors to attend their pre-meetings and Lead Officers are engaged in this process and reports are being submitted on time.

4. Implications

- 4.1. The Committee carefully considers reports, and often asks for further information about the implications as outlined in the reports considered at its meetings. For further details of the reports considered by the Committee please contact the author of this report.

5. Background papers

- 5.1.** Further information about the Committee including dates of meetings in the new quadrennium, and agendas & reports from previous meetings are available via the Council's website.

www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.