

Somerset County Council  
County Council – 19 February 2020

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## Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

Chairman: Cllr Leigh Redman

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officer: Jamie Jackson – Governance Manager - Scrutiny

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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 24 January 2020.
- 1.2. We continue to focus, on the outcomes arising from the Ofsted Inspection, and on ensuring the delivery of the new Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP). The Vice-Chair worked closely with Officers on the 4 priority themes of the CYPP: Supported families; Healthy Lives; A Great Education; Positive Activities.
- 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 we outlined the importance for the Committee to focus on all aspects of the four new priorities of the revised Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) and we agreed that our work programme should be developed through discussions with the Committee Chair, Vice-Chair, Director of Children’s Services and relevant Cabinet Members.

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.

## 2.2. 24 January 2020

**Medium Term Financial Plan for Children’s Services** – We received an update and overview of that summarised the key messages from the Medium-Term Financial Plan (2020-23) Strategy Report considered and approved by Cabinet on 18 December 2019. It also included an overall assurance narrative from the Director for Children’s Services (DCS) alongside more details about the key areas of focus for transformation in the next few years, and further explanation of the reasons for movements in levels of spend and funding between years over the MTFP period. The Committee agreed to:

- Support the financial strategy and welcome the long-term view as presented;
- Note that the Director of Children’s Services was content with the rebasing of the budget for the 2020/21 financial year, representing a 7.9% on year increase;
- Note the uncertainty of some grant funding, as this represented about 4% of the Children’s Services budget and the potential impact on future funding/spending;
- Support the Director of Children’s Services and staff and to encourage the Director and Cabinet to continue to seek and develop innovative solutions.

**Family Safeguarding** – We then received an interesting and informative update on this new approach to bring adult workers into integrated teams with children’s workers to strengthen the whole family. This would then help children to remain with birth families and not come into care, reducing the ‘care population’ – both in prevention and return home. A range of measures would be used to support families including the motivational interview, which all staff would be trained to provide this including senior managers and Directors. This was designed to encourage and stimulate families to help themselves so they would feel inclined to willingly make changes rather than being told to do something. We requested that an update be provided in 6 months.

### **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](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers)

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