

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

Committee Chair: Cllr Leigh Redman

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officer: Scott Wooldridge – Strategic Manager – Democratic Services

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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 also to provide each other meeting of the Council with a summary progress report and outcomes of scrutiny. This is the fifth annual report of the Committee since our first meeting in May 2015, following the Council's enhanced focus on scrutiny of Children's Services. This report will summarise the regular update reports and cover the work of the Committee's meetings from June 2019 to July 2020.
- 1.2. In our first 12 months, the Committee has brought a greater focus to its work. Initially, the main part of our work programme was based on the nine cross-cutting Somerset priorities that had been agreed by the Somerset Children's Improvement Board. Then our focus was the seven themes of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2016-2019. Once this 2016-2019 CYPP was replaced by the Somerset Plan for Children, Young People and Families 2019-22, our focus has been the four priorities of that Plan.
- 1.3. The Committee has eight elected Members and seven co-opted members. There is currently one Church representative and two vacancies. We have a Parent Governor representative and one vacancy. We have a Schools Compact representative and a representative from the Schools Forum. All of these co-opted members have voting rights on education matters only.
- 1.4. Members of the Council are reminded that:
  - all Members have been invited to attend meetings of all 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.
- 1.5. Since our first meeting in May 2015 we have been pleased to see continuing progress in many areas of the Council's improvement agenda for children, young people and their families. Our central focus has remained to constantly ask - **What impact does that have on children in Somerset?**

We remain committed to retaining a focus on working towards ensuring the best outcomes for Children, Young People and Families in Somerset. We wish to place on record our thanks to those Officers who have supported us in the Committee in our joint work for the children and young people of Somerset.

## **2. Items for Consideration**

**2.1.** In our last Annual Report we proposed five recommendations, all of which we were pleased to see incorporated in the Council-wide Scrutiny Review Recommendations, agreed by Full Council in November 2019. We recognise that our Report is for information. However, we ask that Cabinet Members and other SCC Members keep the following three points in mind over the next 10 months – the last of the current quadrennium:

- we seek more Scrutiny Committee and Member input before Cabinet decisions;
- we encourage more Member participation to make Scrutiny more valuable;
- we urge that the outcomes of the Scrutiny review are implemented ASAP; this will ensure the Committee is fully supported, will improve awareness of the right issues, and will improve the Committee's questioning to hold officers, partners and stakeholders to account.

## **2.2. Work Programme**

The Committee Chair and Vice-Chair have worked closely with the Director of Children's Services (DCS) to select items for scrutiny that support the improvement process. When considering reports and policy changes we try to constantly assess the impact on the children of Somerset. We encourage all Councillors to become more actively involved in Childrens Scrutiny as a direct way to meet their corporate parent responsibilities.

Each of our meetings had specific agenda items to consider the work programme and allow members and officers to suggest items we should scrutinise in more depth. We have also reviewed and updated how we track and monitor our suggested outcomes and/or recommended actions, so we can understand the impact of our work and learn how to better focus our scrutiny work to ensure we have made a difference. In addition to our regular Committee meetings, officer support/resources allowing, we would like to conduct more Task and Finish Groups as our experience has shown this approach to be very productive and worthwhile.

This year, after discussion and debate in Scrutiny, Committee Members have made suggestions and have expressed opinions to Commissioning/Service

Directors and Cabinet Members. Most of these have been accepted and incorporated into either the Council's operations or in Cabinet decisions. The Committee wishes formally to place on record its appreciation to those Cabinet Members who have attended our meetings. This has often proved helpful for the Committee, the Cabinet Member and the Lead Officer. We have also been grateful for the benefit of first hand testimony from the front-line staff who have attended our meetings. We are also grateful to those professionals who have participated in our Task and Finish Group work (often at short notice) and we have greatly valued them sharing their expertise.

The Committee has been mindful of the Council's objective to improve outcomes for young people across Somerset and to ensure improvement is real and deliverable. In this regard we have sought to coordinate with our sister Scrutiny Committees (Policies and Place) and (Adults and Health) so that our three work programmes avoid duplication and complement each other's work. We were pleased to hold a joint informal workshop with the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee in June 2019 and are looking forward to doing so again later this year when we will consider how we might improve outcomes during the several transitions that children and young people go through.

### **2.3. Meetings Overview**

The Committee Chair and Vice-Chair have set the Committee to focus on the four priorities of the revised Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP). They will develop the Committee's work programme with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, the Cabinet Member for Schools and the DCS.

The Committee will continue to focus on the outcomes arising from the OFSTED/CQC Inspection on Children with SEND and will liaise closely with Cabinet over the Written Statement of Action, for SCC to co-produce with the Somerset CCG, and its constituent SEND Improvement Plan.

The Committee will also interest itself in the delivery of the new Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) for 2019-2022. The Vice-Chair worked closely with Officers on the four priority themes of this CYPP:

- Supported Families;
- Healthy Lives;
- A Great Education;
- Positive Activities.

In addition to the topics mentioned above, the Committee has considered a wide range of topics. These have included:

- Family Support Services (FSS) ;
- Self-Harm;
- Proposals to implement the new Somerset Safeguarding Children

- Partnership Arrangements;
- Early Help Strategic Commissioning Board ;
- Troubled Families;
- Value for Money: Tracker and Social Care Experts Review 2018-19;
- Review of the Scrutiny Function;
- Progress on the Implementation of the new Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnerships Arrangements;
- Annual Customer Feedback ;
- Young Carers;
- Children’s Services Performance Report Q2 2019-20;
- Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Emotional Well-being;
- Medium Term Financial Plan for Children’s Services;
- Family Safeguarding;
- Special Educational Needs and/or Disability Information, Advice and Support (SENDIAS) Service;
- Safe Routes to School;
- School Exclusions – the Committee’s Task and Finish Group Report for Cabinet;
- Council Response to Covid-19 – Children’s Services ;
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Local Area Inspection. This work is likely to feature regularly in the Committee’s work programme over the next year and the Chair and Vice-Chair are liaising closely with the DCS to ensure effective scrutiny of the production and delivery of the SEND Improvement Plan.

#### **2.4. Reflections on the Last Year**

The Committee has remained mindful that it was created specifically to help improve Children’s Services which required urgent improvement.

We recognise the Committee is still developing its *modus operandi*. We have always approached our Scrutiny task as a ‘critical friend’. We are supportive of Officers and encourage them to highlight areas of concern to us, whilst we challenge poor performance or improvement that is too slow. We look for assurance that action is underway and that it is being effective in producing the outcomes we want.

On occasion, we have supported requests for extra resource and have supported the adoption of new ways of working, particularly when the Council collaborates with other agencies to bring about improvement. However, we continue to believe that the Committee’s involvement in ‘pre-decision’ Scrutiny is too limited. We are keen that Scrutiny’s input to Cabinet decisions increases; this is one of the recommendations of the Council-wide Scrutiny Review, whose recommendations were agreed by Full Council in November 2019.

### **3. Consultations Undertaken**

**3.1.** The Committee invites all County Councillors to attend and contribute to its meetings.

#### **4. Implications**

**4.1.** The Committee carefully considers the reports submitted to its meetings, and often asks for further information about the implications of those reports.

**4.2.** 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's work, including the dates of its meetings in the new quadrennium, and agendas and 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.