

Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

Chair: Cllr Leigh Redman

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officer: Jamie Jackson – Service Manager Governance Scrutiny

Author: Fiona Abbott – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Contact Details: 01823 359040 jjackson@somerset.gov.uk

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 Committees meetings in September and October 2020.
- 1.2. We continue to focus on the outcomes arising from the Ofsted Inspection, and on ensuring the delivery of the Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP).
- 1.3. 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.
- 1.4. The Committee has 8 elected Members. There are also 7 co-opted members, however there are 2 Church representative vacancies along with 1 Parent Governor vacancies and we continue to look at ways to ensure those positions are occupied. We have retained our Schools Compact representative and a representative from the Schools Forum. Co-opted members have voting rights on education matters only.

2. Background

2.1. Scrutiny Work Programme

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 also frequently review how we monitor our suggested outcomes and/or recommended actions so we can understand the impact of our work so we can learn how to better focus our scrutiny work to ensure we have made a difference.

Scrutiny Members have endeavoured through the Committee meetings to

make suggestions and express opinions to Directors and Cabinet Members after discussion and debate. We have constructive relationships with our sister Scrutiny Committees, particularly the Scrutiny for Policies, Adults and Health Committee.

2.2. 9 September 2020

Medium Term Financial Plan for Children's Services

We received a report highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on the Children's Services 2020/21 budget, it outlined the significant additional expenditure and adverse impact upon income in both the current and future years and the robust processes put in place to ensure that it maintains its tight financial controls. The Committee requested and it was agreed that they will receive regular updates on the impact of COVID-19 and consider the potential decisions the service may need to make to mitigate against significant financial impact on the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for 2021/22 to 2025/26.

SENDIAS (Special Educational Needs Disability Information Advice Service) update

We then received an interesting and informative further update on this approach – an early help service providing information advice and support to parents, carers, children and young people (up to aged 25) about special educational needs and disability (SEND) within education. The team works to support needs to be met locally. The Committee heard about what has been working well, for example, increased levels of co-production. The Committee also heard about challenges experienced, for example, the increase in requests for EHC assessments and future plans for example hearing the voice of the SEND child and young person more clearly.

County Ticket update

The Committee then received a briefing from the Councils Strategic Manager, Access & Additional Learning Need Inclusion Somerset on the decision taken in June 2020 to suspend the county ticket scheme for the 2020/21 academic year, the rationale for the decision, which had not been taken lightly. He also outlined the impact and mitigating actions.

Unitary update

The Committee discussed some of the concerns around this issue, recognising that no decision has been made by the Secretary of State at this stage. The Committee agreed that there was a need to try and find a way to keep ahead of ways to mitigate any impact should the decision be taken to adopt a unitary model and to ensure the voice of the child is heard and protected. Committee agreed to explore options for a task group to look into this.

2.3. 7 October 2020

We held a joint Workshop with Scrutiny Policies for Adults and Health. The purpose of this workshop is to understand and explore transitions focussing on aspirations and outcomes for young people aged 14 plus into Adult-life. We had three breakout workshops covering the following areas: -

Employment -

Creating a clearer understanding of what the evidence is that supports young people into employment. There should be clear, evidence-based employment pathways with opportunities for volunteering, supported internships, traineeships and apprenticeships and good careers advice and guidance to help young people with their decision-making.

Independent Living -

A focus on housing options and provide young people and their families the tools and resources they need to fully understand what is available. Young people are encouraged to think about who they would like to live with and where.

Community Inclusion -

Supporting young people to have opportunities to spend time with their peers outside of school and college. They are supported to develop and maintain friendships and relationships. They can access their community and feel safe and confident.

The workshops provided very useful and constructive feedback. This will be used to improve the experience and support for young people as they transition into adult life. The Joint Workshop agreed that supported employment was the cornerstone of preparing for adulthood and Children said they wanted 'something to do and somewhere to go'

2.4. 12 November 2020

At this meeting we will be discussing the following areas: -

- Update on the Written Statement of Action
- Youth Offending Service – consider the HMIP Day 1 presentation
- How has COVID impacted on the delivery of the CYPP
- Scrutiny Review

3. Consultations undertaken

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

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 website:

www.somerset.gov.uk/agendasandpapers

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