

Somerset County Council
County Council – 17 February 2021

Report of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee

Chair: 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 12 November 2020 and 2 December 2020 and provides information on the items to be considered at the meeting on 27 January 2021.
- 1.2.** We continue to focus on the outcomes arising from the Ofsted Inspection, including the Written Statement of Action, which priorities the areas work on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the forthcoming 18 – 24 months 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. The Committee has up to seven co-opted members - two parent governor representatives (one vacancy), one representative from the Somerset Schools Forum, one representative from the Schools Compact and three church representatives (all still vacant unfortunately). Co-opted members have voting rights on education matters only.

As part of the on-going work from the Scrutiny review, the Chairs of the 3 Scrutiny Committees are meeting regularly and are reviewing the role of co-opted members going forward. We have contacted the Roman Catholic and Church of England Dioceses inviting them to appoint a representative to the Scrutiny Committee. We had a favourably reply from the Church of England Diocese and hope to have a nomination to the Committee shortly. As we do have a parent governor representative on the Committee and because of the

review mentioned, we have held off contacting the Governance Service Manager in the Education Team about seeking a second representative.

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. We are grateful for the support of officers in this work, and in particular the support and direction provided by the Deputy Director of Children's Services.

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 12 November 2020

Scrutiny Review update – we received an update from the Council's Scrutiny Manager on the context to the scrutiny review at the Council following the peer challenge in 2018 and received a detailed update on the implementation of the recommendations which had been approved by the Council in January 2020.

The Chairs of the 3 Scrutiny Committees have now met on 2 occasions and have discussed in particular the following recommendations – namely, approach to work planning / agenda setting (recommendation 5), work programming (recommendation 7) and training (recommendation 10).

The target is to ensure that all recommendations have been fully embedded by March 2021. An update report will be considered at the March meeting of the Committee.

Written Statement of Action (WSOA) – update - we received a presentation and update from the Director of Children's Services, Julian Wooster on the WSoA. We were advised that the WSoA had now been submitted to Ofsted / Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Youth Offending Service – we received a presentation from the Council's Deputy Director of Children's Services Clare Winter together with the Team Leader Kat Brooklyn about the work of the YOS and about the forthcoming HMIP Inspection which is due to take place in 2021. The last inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) was in 2016 with GOOD result and the

next inspection is anticipated to be in spring 2021

It was agreed that a briefing note would be prepared on the speech and language service, County Lines (prevention), education attendance and outcomes. This will now form part of an item being considered by the Committee in March on prevention (impact of prevention fund funded projects for children and young people).

How has COVID-19 impacted on the delivery of the CYPP – we received a report and presentation from the Council's Partnership Business Manager Fiona Phur on how has COVID-19 impacted on the delivery of the children and young people's plan 2019 to 2022. The presentation covered areas to help the committee understand the implications from the point of view of children and young people, including - support to families, education, health, positive activities.

We agreed to have an update on the voice of young person to our March meeting, but this has now moved to the June meeting to allow for a broader report to be presented.

2.3 2 December 2020

Update on the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) – we received the WSoA which had been submitted to Ofsted / CQC and received an update from the Council's Director of Children's Services on the SEND Improvement Board and the governance arrangements. A re-inspection against the actions outlined in the WSoA will take place within the next 24 months and the Inspectors will expect to see significant improvements against all 9 areas of the plan.

We agreed that, in view of the significant challenges in Somerset, the SEND Improvement Board be encouraged to closely monitor the work joint working improvements needed between partners to support children with Autism and other associated neuro-development conditions. The following areas within the WSoA will be explored in more detail by the Scrutiny Committee: -

- Leadership (Improvement Priority 2)
- ASD (Improvement Priority 5)
- Inclusive Schools (Improvement Priority 6)
- Performance Monitoring

We also agreed that there needed to be focussed work on School Exclusions and for there to be a report on the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). This was to be scheduled for the meeting on 27 January 2021 but has subsequently been held over and the date is to be agreed.

Update on the consultation on the future school provision in the Crewkerne and Ilminster area – we received a report and presentation from

the Council's Assistant Director, Education, Partnerships and Skills, Amelia Walker, together with the Cabinet Member for Education & Transformation, Cllr Frances Purbrick, who provided an update on the consultation on the future school provision in the Crewkerne and Ilminster area.

Preliminary consultation took place in 2019 and on 21 October 2020 Cabinet agreed to publish a formal consultation on a proposed two-tier model. The first consultation launched on the 12 November 2020 and runs until Friday 11 December 2020. Subject to the decision taken by the Cabinet Member, the second consultation (statutory) will potentially be 30 December to 27 January 2021 (subject to Non-Key Decision in December) with Cabinet decision at end of February 2021.

The Assistant Director outlined some of the emerging issues to date, covering – process, quality of education, transition, community and context and possible alternative options.

The Committee had been asked to: -

- 1) Review the proposal for change in Crewkerne and Ilminster, including the associated detailed information accompanying the proposals.
- 2) Make recommendations for additional supporting information that, subject to a further non-key decision, could be provided alongside the statutory notices.
- 3) Advise on opportunities to raise the profile of the proposals and reach segments of the community who might otherwise be missed.

The Committee listened to the update and asked questions, which were responded to in detail.

We agreed that the Committee will receive further details on the consultation if decision is taken to proceed to the second stage. The following information should be provided if this moves to the second consultation stage: -

- (a) plans for business in schools
- (b) travel costs (expense to county / parental cost)
- (c) communication plan
- (d) transition points – to understand the pupil journey in area (Early Years to sixth form and transition points and challenges in area).

As the decision has now been taken to proceed to the next stage, the item will be brought back to the Committee in March.

2.4 27 January 2021

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

- a) Children's Services Data Review
- b) Impact of COVID-19 on children & young people's mental health and

wellbeing – members of the Adults and Health Scrutiny Cttee also invited to attend for this item

- c) Medium Term Financial Plan for Children’s Services
- d) Discussion on the task and finish group on the continuity of Children’s Services through local Government reorganisation.

2.5 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) – this excellent all member workshop took place on 22 January looking at key areas of development in Somerset. It was attended by over 20 members and was of particular interest to members of the Scrutiny Committee as it aligns to the priorities aligned to the SEND WSoA.

The aim of the workshop was to raise awareness and understanding of the long-term impact of childhood adversity; provide an overview of the various areas of development and approaches that are being tested out to help improve outcomes for those that have grown up in adverse circumstances; highlight the importance of early years as fundamental to improved life chances and resilience for the Somerset population.

In preparation for the all members workshop, members also had the opportunity to view the film ‘Resilience’ which delves into the science behind how extreme or prolonged stressful experience in childhood can affect brain development, leading to health and social problems across the lifespan.

At the session we heard about the key messages about ACEs, including the origins, research and development of ACEs/Trauma informed work and the national and international contexts. There were then some presentations as follows –

- CCG project - Evaluating the impact of understanding the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on child neurodevelopment and behaviours
- Public Health project – Mindful Emotion Coaching and ACEs (MACE) – Early Intervention test and learn project – Early Years & Emotion Coaching training
- Somerset Violence Reduction work and needs assessment
- Somerset Foundation Trust Level 3 Safeguarding work led by paediatric Services in Somerset NHS Foundation Trust

There was also the opportunity to ask questions.

I would like to pass on my thanks to all those involved in arranging the workshop, and in particular, Fiona Moir, Public Health Specialist, Dr Sarah Temple (EHCAP - Education, Health, Care and Prisons), Clare Stuart (Violence Reduction Unit), Sam Hutton (Educational Psychology Service) and Kate McCann (Community Paediatric Services).

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. It is still a challenge getting reports through in a timely manner ('work in progress').

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.