

# 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 357337 [fabbott@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:fabbott@somerset.gov.uk)

## 1. Summary

- 1.1** The Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee is required by the Constitution to provide Full Council with a summary progress report and outcomes of scrutiny. This report covers the work of the Scrutiny Committee since May 2021.
- 1.2** The Committee continues to focus on the outcomes arising from the Ofsted Inspection, including the Written Statement of Action (WSOA), which prioritises 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 have been invited to attend meetings of the three 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 and has up to seven co-opted members and following minor changes made at the Council meeting in May, the current position is - two church representatives (one vacancy), two School Governor representatives, one representative from the Somerset Schools Forum (now vacant) and two parent governor representatives (both currently vacant). 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. This has led to items being added to the work programme and help guide our future work.

At each meeting we 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 Informal Meeting on 9 June 2021

The main points from the informal meeting were: -

**Homes for children in Somerset** – the focus of the item was to discuss and comment and feed into the decision-making process that will see Somerset get back into the delivery of children's homes and ahead of consideration by Cabinet on 21 June.

We received a report and detailed presentation on the proposals, which is to secure a strategic partner to develop a comprehensive range of services for the highest needs children and young people looked after in Somerset. The new proposed service will offer the right intervention at the right time and tailored to meet the needs of this high need cohort of young people. The service would combine the resources of children's homes, high needs foster carers, and a therapeutic education service. It will deliver a new blended care model and services that address the full range of needs of children and young people with complex multiple needs. These young people would be at risk or currently using high cost, sometimes distant placements.

We asked several questions and comments were made on the proposals, which were responded to at the meeting. These covered issues such as - the background to, and reasoning for this proposed model & approach by SCC; how the voice and experience of the young person will be fed into / involved in the modelling / review; partnership and engagement planned; how attract strategic partner and assurances around working with them; KPI's and social benefit; the size of homes being considered (smaller) and spread across the county (urban and rural environment); rethink title of project to perhaps '*roots and wings for children – supporting local children locally*'.

I thanked Members for their comments, for the responses received and for the DCS and the Cabinet Member for allowing this to come to Scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting. I then summed up the discussion, which I reported verbally to the Cabinet meeting on 21 June, as follows: -

- Including young people as much as possible is important, in both the

- commissioning and the operation
- Positive comments were received about the learning / revising to develop our offer
  - Working with providers, in a partnership arrangement and along with joint commissioning with our main stakeholders - blending the provision to include – NHS, Police, CAMHS, for example, to make sure we have a good offer
  - Taking good practice from other authorities and developing it to fit Somerset, will help our young people
  - Asked for clarity around the number of young people we will be supporting in this
  - Consider if in future, if consider building homes so we can build the provision specifically from there
  - Supportive of the proposals, with the need to ensure clear targets and KPIs are set and importantly monitored to provide social benefit and value and to ensure establishing relationships to fit alongside these
  - That a more reflective name be agreed
  - Request feedback report in 6 months

**Education performance data** – we then received a detailed presentation on education data and performance trends. The aim of the presentation was to provide an overview of education data and performance trends, to help inform the future work of the Committee.

Several questions and comments were made on the information provided, which were responded to at the meeting. These covered issues such – how scrutiny can 'add value', looking for the 'so what' in the data and how focus on how can add value; School improvement support and work around the Education Strategy; importance of 'relationships' in the educational landscape; reference made to the Inclusion Inquiry (conversation); the work being undertaken around assessments at early years and that no children 'are missed'; noted that the data presented was national data which, in the main, was collected in 2019 and due to the pandemic, the data will next be reported in early 2023.

The presentation was a great learning opportunity and we need to consider further how to take this forward in our future work.

### **2.3 Meeting on 7 July 2021**

The main points from the meeting were: -

**6 months on – learning from the voice of children and young people in the later stages of the pandemic** – we received a presentation from the Partnership Business Manager and heard about the work being done for the CYPP. We also had the opportunity to view the short film made by the Care councils (Sicc and SLCC) – *children in care and care leavers asks of the Council as corporate parents*.

**Schools Exclusions** – we considered a report and received a presentation from

the Assistant Director, Inclusion who provided an update and progress on actions taken on the recommendations from the Committee's Task & Finish Group; next steps and future priorities.

Progress is continuing to be made in implementing the recommendations of the Exclusions Report and which has provided an important stimulus for action. In addition, the development and implementation of the WSoA has further galvanised a whole system approach to strengthening inclusion in Somerset. Progress in addressing the issues associated with school exclusions is being supported by three key elements:

- school leaders owning and shaping the county's understanding of and approach to inclusion;
- strengthening the focus of behaviour partnerships and local networks to commission support for vulnerable children and promote inclusion; and
- greater alignment of early help with support for inclusion.

We heard about the development of the local First Panel and requested further details on this. We asked the Assistant Director to report back to the Committee in 6 months and also noted that a deep dive on Educational, health & Care Plans is scheduled for our October meeting.

**SCC Business Plan 2021 - 2023** – we discussed the Business Plan and key points for the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee and were invited to highlight any gaps / information not included.

**Unitary Transition Task and Finish Group** – I gave a progress update on our Committee's Task and Finish Group. Following consideration of initial feedback, the Group agreed to pause the examination until the SoS has made public his decision on how Somerset may become a Unitary authority; this would allow for a more detailed and outcome aware examination once the direction of travel was clearer. The work done to date has produced some initial comments and the Group members will ensure they are included in future work. Initial feedback has not allowed for any definitive conclusions.

I would again like to thank everyone that took the time to respond to the initial call for evidence. It became clear that more detail would be needed for the Group to be able to come to an informed conclusion.

**Information items circulated to the Scrutiny Committee since the last meeting** – the Committee noted that the following information item had been circulated since our last meeting – briefing paper prepared by the Health Promotion Manager on children's oral health.

## 2.4 Suggestions for the Future

We look forward to an interesting and informative year ahead. Work is underway

on 'reframing' and refocussing the work programme and outcome tracker, so that it better reflects our priorities and areas of focus (WSoA and the preventative agenda).

I am keen to keep the meetings current and adapt to include as much information as possible, to support members ability to participate and grow, recording circulated reports in our minutes. As such we now include on our agenda 'items for information' - these are reports or comments that are shared with members for reading in their own time and members of committee can then contact the author directly with questions. Should members feel that a deeper dive is necessary they can come back to Chair, the Vice Chair (or Clerk), to discuss inclusion in future meetings.

We have always endeavoured to approach our task as a 'critical friend' by trying to be supportive to officers and encouraging them to highlight areas of concern to us, whilst hopefully providing a suitably robust challenge to question poor performance and seek reassurance that appropriate action is taken to achieve improvement.

We still feel the Council would benefit from Scrutiny being asked to undertake more pre-Cabinet decision work to help the transition from policy development to implementation.

### **3. Consultations Undertaken**

The Committee invites all County 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.

### **4. Implications**

The Committee considers carefully and often asks for further information about the implications as outlined in the reports considered at its meetings.

For further details about the reports considered by the Committee, please contact the author of this report.

### **5. Background Papers**

Further information about the Committee including dates of meetings 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.