

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

Chair: Cllr Leigh Redman

Division and Local Members: All

Lead Officer: Neil Milne – Governance Specialist

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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 the last report to Council in November 2022.
- 1.2** The Committee focusses on the outcomes from the Ofsted Inspection of Children’s Services and the Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) which has the following three priorities: keeping children and young people safe (priority 1); supporting physical and emotional health and resilience (priority 2); enabling young people to learn and thrive (priority 3). We have now arranged our work plan to cover the following broad areas –
- universal education
 - SEND and Inclusion
 - social care and commissioning
 - cross-cutting items
 - and a number of training items and workshop items.
- 1.3** Members of the Council are reminded that:
- all Members have been invited to attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committees and to contribute freely on any agenda item.
 - any Member can 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 13 elected Members on it and has up to seven co-opted members appointed as follows - two church representatives (one vacancy), two School Governor representatives (both filled), one representative from the Somerset Schools Forum (vacant) and two parent governor representatives (both vacant). All co-opted members have voting rights on education matters only. We are still trying to appoint representatives to fill the vacancies.
- 1.5** I am particularly pleased that during this phase of meetings we were able to gain and understanding of some of the points highlighted in the most recent

Ofsted report, this included 'Return home interviews'. We were updated on 'Trauma Informed Somerset practice model and implementation', members now have a better understanding around Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's), I would encourage all members to become aware of ACE's and their impact on all young people. I thank all officers for their efforts supporting the committee's operation.

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 has helped to guide our future work.

At each meeting we review how we monitor how our suggested outcomes and/or recommended actions have been progressed so we can understand the impact of our work and learn how we can 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 Executive Members after discussion and debate.

2.2 Meeting on 7 November 2022

The main points from the meeting were: -

Progress on Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services Action Plan – The Inspection of Children's Social Care services in July 2022 rated the service Good across the board and the inspection report was published on 21 September 2022. We received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Assistant Director, Community & Strategy, Paul Shallcross, on the progress on the action plan and an update on post Ofsted service planning 2023/24. There are five key areas of focus – workforce, prevention, protection, care, partnership and strategy. The Committee welcomed the update and asked that the draft plan be shared with the Committee and see the Improvement Plan in 6 months time.

LA Maintained Schools - Core Offer – Overview – this was a pre Executive item. We received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Assistant Director Education Partnerships and Skills, Amelia Walker, about the proposed changes to the LA maintained schools core offer. The policy was due to be considered by the Executive at its meeting on 14 December 2022 and it was agreed that the Committee would consider the full business case at its next meeting on 12 December 2022.

Ms Walker highlighted the risks if there was no change – resource compartmentalisation; short-term granularity; inability to flex to demand; the

'moral hazard' (to risk) and compliance. She then highlighted the issues needing to be addressed – cost pressures; academisation; long term planning; compliance failures and crises. The 4 main options available and strategic mitigation were then highlighted. The preferred offer is option 3, which is to reform the service and charging to provide higher income but with value added to service to mitigate (core offer), as this is the only option where risk is manageable.

The Committee agreed that the report to be considered at the Executive at its meeting on 14 December 2022 be shared with the Committee and this include details of the Equality Impact Assessment undertaken; and this will be the substantive agenda item at the next Committee meeting.

2022 Key Stage assessment results – I highlighted this item in my report to the November Council meeting. At the Committee we received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Assistant Director Education Partnerships and Skills, Amelia Walker on the 2022 Key Stage Assessment Results.

We expressed our alarm and concern and requested that the Executive, as a matter of urgency, task Officers to undertake a review to identify the underlying issues leading to this continued under performance. This review is of critical importance as improvements must be made in Somerset Schools to enable all pupils to achieve better outcomes. The Committee will be closely monitoring progress and will seek reassurance from the Executive and Officers that improvements are being made.

Scrutiny at Somerset Council – considered the report regarding involvement in this Task and Finish Group. The purpose of the Task and Finish Group is to review the current approach, structure and resource of scrutiny at Somerset County Council and Somerset District Councils and agree an approach to the structure and approach to scrutiny at Somerset Council from 1 April 2023.

Task and Finish Groups -we agreed to set up 2 Task and Finish Groups - Sufficiency of external placements; and Home to school transport.

Information item – the Committee noted the following item for information:-

- (a) Briefing on Wyvern Nurseries – implementation update
- (b) SEND, Data and Commissioning FAQ's – key points from SEND, data and Commissioning workshop on 28 September 2022
- (c) Member Development Panel information
- (d) Education and Inclusion Services redesign / restructure – follow-up update.

Public Question Time – a member of the public asked a number of questions relating to the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services and to policies and procedures in Somerset in particular relating to Special Guardians. The Executive Lead member advised that she has met with him and the conversation is ongoing.

2.3 Meeting on 12 December 2022

The main points from the meeting were: -

LA maintained schools – core offer – business case – we considered a report and received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council’s Assistant Director Education and Partnerships and Skills, Ms Walker regarding the proposals for changing the current support offer for Local Authority Maintained Schools.

The Committee held a thorough discussion of the options after hearing from the Executive Member and receiving a presentation to further explain the background for the proposals, noting there had been a yearlong conversation held with Somerset schools. During the discussion the following topics were mentioned and answered and further details were provided regarding - changing the financial arrangement between the LA and schools; giving choice to schools, the base offer and bespoke offer limiting the net increase, in cost, to schools to 60%; maintaining capacity for schools; changes to grant funding.

The Committee welcomed the presentation and were generally supportive of the proposed direction of travel and proposals for enhancing the Councils relationship with Somerset Schools. It was noted that all Schools would be able to utilise the admissions service and that a previous underfunding of the school appeals service had been addressed.

The Committee accepted the proposals and endorsed their presentation to the Executive at its meeting on 14 December 2022 by the Lead Member noting the contingency fund for schools is increased from £7k to £17.5k and requested:

- The committee were generally supportive of the adoption of option 3; and
- That the proposals be monitored with regular reports to ensure mitigation where necessary and to limit any negative, detrimental impact to Children, Schools and Schools Staff and that an update report be provided 6 months after implementation (October 2023).

Somerset Connect and links to Frome LCN development – we considered a report and received a presentation from the Council’s Assistant Director Commissioning, Richard Selwyn and Strategic Manager Public Health, Patsy Temple, who provided details of the Somerset Connect pilot, (a community-based model) and links to the Frome LCN development. Cllr Wide Deputy Leader Frome Town Council and Chair of Frome Area LCN also joined meeting.

Somerset Connect is an emerging jointly commissioned (children, adults and health) community-based model which seeks to better connect and add value to the work already taking place in communities across the County. The model focuses on three key areas of improvement:

- Access – Ensuring families and people in need can easily access the information, guidance and support they need. Removing any existing barriers caused by siloed working.

- Connections – Ensuring those services working in communities (health, social care,
- schools and voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sectors (VCFSE)) can easily connect to ensure the right support, in the right place, at the right time is available.
- Relationships – Ensuring that through every contact, families and people in need are being empowered to be resilient, building their own community and networks of support.

It was confirmed there will be an evaluation of the pilot in the new year (tender); with regard to staffing of the hubs, will provide some support in terms of capacity in each of the primary care network areas; the point made about signposting is a good one; will be clear that it's an offer of help available to all families.

Verbal update on Task and Finish Groups – we received an update on the work of the 2 groups and planned reporting timeline, amended due to the SEND Inspection

Education Strategy for Somerset – this item was deferred.

Information item – the Committee noted the following items for information:-

- (a) 2022 Key Stage assessment results – correspondence sent to the Leader Somerset County Council on 14 November and response received on 15 November 2022
- (b) Somerset Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2021/22 - circulated on 15 November 2022
- (c) Peninsula Fostering Framework Agreement - Decision taken on 16 November 2022 – circulated on 21 November 2022

2.4 Meeting on 16 January 2023

The main points from the meeting were: -

Update on Task and Finish Groups – we received the following update:

- (a) Sufficiency of external placements
The Task and Finish group held further meetings, looking at the external placements budget information; will consider draft report and finding and recommendation to Executive.
- (b) Home to School Transport
We agreed that the work of this Task and Finish Group should be paused. This is because an external review has been commissioned by the service to consider home to school transport provision. It is envisaged currently that this external review will be concluded by the end of March 2023 and by pausing the Task and Finish Group, will avoid duplicating work.

Scrutiny update on the Ofsted Action Plan – we received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Acting Director Community and Strategy, Paul

Shallcross on the Ofsted action plan and progress made. This covered the two named areas for improvement, which are – placement sufficiency (which is also a national issue) and which is being considered by the Committee’s Task and Finish Group; the take-up of return to home interviews and which was considered as a separate agenda item at the meeting (see below); and other key areas of focus, such as the early help demand management work and strategy discussions and audit work. It was agreed that the Life Story Work, which is taking place for the majority of children looked after, and data around that, will be an agenda item at a future meeting.

Return Home Interview process and progress – we received a report and PowerPoint presentation from the Council’s Head of Service Prevention, Lise Bird who outlined the work being done in response to the Ofsted findings on the take up of return home interviews, with improved use of data to inform individual and service planning. Ms Bird provided an overview of the numbers of missing reports / episodes and the increase in demand, managing risk and the main actions taken including rolling out of the [Philomena Protocol](#) and training and the review and reworking of the return home interview form to ensure capture of all information gathered allowing effective data reporting. Missing Return Interviews are completed by the small sub team within the Family Intervention Service. Ms Bird also highlighted the actions still required and in progress and shared some case examples.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s) – Trauma Informed Somerset practice model and implementation - we welcomed the following to the meeting for this item - Vikki Hearn - Joint Commissioner, Children’s and Health; Patsy Temple- Consultant in Public Health; Tim Cockerill - Principal Education Psychologist; and Tamsin Coles – Consultant Clinical Psychologist. We considered a report and received a presentation on the practice model and its implementation across Somerset.

A short film was shown at the start of the presentation and the presentation provided details on the terms used (ACE and trauma informed); ‘Sam’s story; impact of childhood trauma; trauma recovery model, layers of intervention and underlying need; consistency, predictability, reliability; creating emotional safety; the five principles of trauma informed care (safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, empowerment); the importance of trauma informed practice and an improved model for Somerset.

Mr Cockerill outlined some examples of trauma informed education: relational behaviour policy and practice and referred to the ‘pathfinder’ schools who act as ‘champions’ in the local area, providing support. The role of governors was mentioned as well and training for them.

Ms Hearn highlighted the journey to developing a trauma informed model and the Trauma Informed Charter. The Charter will be released for consultation at the trauma informed network launch event on the 24 January 2023 to ensure system approval before being released and Members were invited to attend. The

Charter will also ask organisations which sign up to it to nominate a trauma informed champion to join the network, laying the initial groundwork. A copy of the Charter will be shared with the Committee. Ms Hearn advised that a coordinator is also being recruited to pull together training resources and training plan for the next two years and to be linked with the development and progression of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Transformation Plan. Ms Hearn also highlighted the range and number of organisations included in those who have helped to develop the model and proposals.

On behalf of the Committee, I thanked the presenters for the excellent presentation and information and asked for an update on progress in 6 months' time.

2.5 Meeting on 6 March 2023

Our 8th - and final - meeting in the municipal year will be on Monday 6 March 2023. At this meeting we will be discussing the following areas: -

- Joint Local Area SEND Inspection outcomes and update on SEND Green paper
- Education for Life Strategy
- Update on the Core Offer
- Updates on the work of the Committee's Task and Finish Group's – sufficiency of external placements; and home to school transport
- Information items

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

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