

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee held in the Taunton Library Meeting Room, Paul Street, Taunton, TA1 3XZ, on Wednesday 4 March 2020 at 1.00 pm

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr R Williams (Vice-Chair), Cllr M Dimery, Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper, Cllr J Lock, Cllr W Wallace and Mrs Eileen Tipper

Other Members present: Cllr M Chilcott

Apologies for absence: Cllr J Williams, Cllr J Hunt, Mr P Elliott and Ms Helen Fenn. Apologies were also received from Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr F Purbrick and Julian Wooster

39 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

There were no declarations made.

40 Minutes from the previous meeting - Agenda Item 3

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2020 that were signed by the Chair.

41 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no questions asked, statements made or petitions presented.

42 Scrutiny Work Programme - Agenda Item 5

The Chair of the Committee invited Members to consider the Cabinet's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in forthcoming months and suggest any items for the Committee to consider. The plan was noted.

The Chair directed attention to the Committee's own work programme and invited suggestions for possible future agenda items. The Transition plans for LD service users (18-25) going into adult services has been suggested as an agenda item for the forthcoming joint meeting with the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee.

The Vice Chair informed the Committee that the Task and Finish Group on School Exclusions hope that their final report would be reported at the April committee.

It was noted that the Outcome Tracker needs to be refreshed following today's meeting.

43 Special Educational Needs and/or Disability Information, Advice and Support (SENDIAS) service - Agenda Item 6

The Committee considered this report that summarised the areas of success within the service: Improved partnership working, building relationships with families, schools and health and social care colleagues in order to offer a cohesive and effective approach. Better support and tools to do the job with a newly designed website, up-to date promotional material, an improved Local Offer and the Effective Support for Children and Young People with SEND and their families in Somerset document and Successfully implementing National Standards which will attract future national investment into Somerset.

The areas of challenge within the service: Increase in mediations/tribunals, Increase in request for Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments, Higher caseloads.

The future plans for the service: Investment into service through Children's Service Transformation – this investment creates new SENDIAS Support Worker posts in each area of the County and will provide early help to families by getting the right support from schools to deliver high quality and appropriate education to their children. The workers will also identify where the child's needs require more intervention than the school alone can give – and these children will be supported through the process to gain support from an EHCP by SENDIAS Area Co-ordinators. Additionally, the funding will create a new Area Co-Ordinator post to work in the areas of highest demand. A more strategic management approach and hearing the voice of the SEND child and young person more strongly are vital.

The following points were raised:

- Are the numbers recorded to monitor the number of children that are being excluded?
- With the getset work is there an opportunity to look at secondary schools and is there a strategy in place to support them moving forward and expand their role?
- There has been an increase in the tribunal cases. Do we know why?
- Parent engagement: is there a cohort of parents who do not want support?
- If a child is elective off role or home educated do, we have the information available?

In response to the points raised, the case holders track the children that are on the edge of exclusion, home educated or have been excluded to support the families and growing their confidence, Special Educational Needs and/or Disability Information, advice and Support service do a quarterly report and this information can be shared with the committee members. Next year when the funding is applied for there is a training package that will support Schools,

Parents, carers and any other agencies with a whole system approach in developing training in all areas. There is a national issue with tribunals with timelines part of the problem and that the number of parents not in agreement with tribunal outcomes has increased. It is parent's choice if they want to engage and may not accept the advice or may have unrealistic targets set. Support and advice are given to parents and a booklet is available online as a resource for them. Only information that is gathered is if SENDIAS is aware of the children are out of education.

The Chair thanked Fiona Phur for the presentation and acknowledged the benefits attached and focusing on the positives, and the committee requested an update in 6 month's time in order to see the progress moving forward.

44 **Safe routes to school - Agenda Item 7**

The Committee received a presentation on Safe Routes to School. Section 508B of The Act places a duty on Local Authorities in England relating to home to school travel arrangements for 'eligible' children, which are defined under schedule 35B of The Act 1996 as children who attend schools beyond the statutory walking distance, children whose route to school is deemed to be unsafe, children from low income families and children with special educational needs or disability (SEND). Where children live within statutory walking distance of their transport area or nearest qualifying school, the Local Authority has a duty to provide travel assistance, where the nature of the available walking route is such that a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk (accompanied as necessary) in reasonable safety.

With regards to the impact in Somerset, we currently have 1,224 children with entitlement to school transport due to Road Danger. Those children attend 75 different schools.

Based on an average cost of transporting a child to a mainstream school of £1,123, the total annual revenue impact of Road Danger entitlement is approximately £1.374m.

The previous work Transport Service Review – "Road Danger Points" outline business case Feb 2013 identified:

- 190 "Danger Points" creating additional entitlement to free home to school transport for 1200 pupils (approx. 10% of those entitled).
- Reviewed 13 danger points affecting 11 routes, 400 pupils (£184k PA additional cost)
- Considered engineering solutions, policy changes to allow use of footpaths & bridleways, reviewing historic designations in the light of new conditions.
- High level engineering feasibility report on each of the locations. Found potential to reduce or remove entitlement on 9 of the 11 routes. (est. £128k saving for circa £430k capital)

Engineering Pilot Projects 2014 Holyrood Academy: 40 road danger pupils in 2013 (20 in 2020), danger was the cross over on the bend that has got poor visibility on the A358 south of Chard/ Tatworth. The estimated annual saving is £4.2k and the initial estimation cost is £9k.

Maiden Beech Academy project 2015. 34 road danger pupils in 2013 (30 in 2020). Danger due to need to cross on bend (Pye corner, Merriott) with poor visibility. 60m footway needed on east side to join with existing footway and the saving would reduce vehicle and route change. Giving an estimate annual savings £11.6k and Initial estimated cost £32k.

The following points were raised

- County wide development of a Climate Change strategy will likely result in much of the current transport information to be out of date in terms of recommendations and changing in behaviors. Criteria of a route being deemed suitable seems to be subjective. What constitutes the criteria for visibility as your visibility compared to mine is completely different?
- On the high-level engineering feasibility, the 9 routes Is there a guarantee of the proposed engineer project and when will it be?
- £128k revenue saving for circa £430k capital spend what period of years are you saving for?
- Are children or parents getting injured or are there near misses occurring is this information recorded?
- Given the circumstances are we in a position to reconsider the reintroduction of some bus services and routes?
- Are you consulting in regards to new housing developments?

In response to the questions it is outlined the auditor follows the Road Safety guidance when taking an initial assessment, the engineering project is about measuring the potential opportunity checking the routes is safe. The quote on the estimate saving is per annum. With regards to monitoring the injuries this is recorded when the police are involved in a traffic accident or when a parent raises an issue and informs of a near miss or accident that has not involved the police. All legal actions are reviewed and applied from the government with regards to the seats on the buses and a limit is also applied. Highway officers and road safety are liaising about new buildings developing, ensuring sections of roads are suitable or unsuitable when following through an assessment.

The Chair thanked Mike O'Dowd-Jones and Will Rochford for the clarification on the legal challenges and for providing the committee with a fuller understanding on the balancing required for actions on Safe routes to school.

45 **School Exclusions - Update from the Task and Finish Group - Agenda Item 8**

Members received a verbal update about the work undertaken so far and that the plan is to report back to the committee on the 1st April. Currently at the drafting stage of writing the report with considerable material to coordinate. Hoped that once Members heard that the Chair and Vice Chair have prepared the final report, this will help contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people at risk of exclusion.

46 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 9

There were no other items of business.

(The meeting ended at 2.38 pm)

CHAIRMAN