

## **SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE (VIRTUAL MEETINGS FROM MAY 2020 DUE TO CORONAVIRUS)**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee (virtual meetings from May 2020 due to Coronavirus) held in the Virtual Meeting, on Thursday 12 November 2020 at 1.00 pm

**Present:** Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr R Williams (Vice-Chair), Cllr M Dimery, Cllr James Hunt, Cllr W Wallace, Cllr J Williams and Cllr B Revans (Substitute)  
Mrs Ruth Hobbs and Mrs Eileen Tipper – co-opted members

**Other Members present:** Cllr J Lock, Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr T Munt, Cllr C Paul, Cllr F Nicholson and Cllr F Purbrick

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr N Hewitt-Cooper

1 **Declarations of Interest** - Agenda Item 2

There were no new declarations of interest made at the meeting.

2 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 9th September 2020** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020 were approved as a correct record.

3 **Public Question Time** - Agenda Item 4

There were no questions submitted by members of the public.

4 **Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee Work Programme** - Agenda Item 5

The Chair directed attention to the Committee's own work programme, outcome tracker and the latest version of the Cabinet Forward Plan (November 2020) and invited suggestions for possible future agenda items.

The Committee discussed the work programme in detail and agreed that the following items would be included on the agenda for the next meeting on 2 December 2020: -

- update on the consultation on the Future Schools Provision in the Crewkerne and Ilminster Area – this item will be the main / substantive item.
- To receive the Written Statement of Action.

The Committee also agreed that the following items should be included on the agenda for the meeting on 27 January 2021: -

- EHCP Deep dive
- Issues paper around preparing for transition to unitary – provisional
- Children & young people mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Performance Report (already scheduled in)

Issues around elective home education was again raised during the discussion and how this can best be reflected in the work programme. Cllr Revans also said that progress on the recommendations from the School Exclusions Task & Finish Group needs to be included in the outcome tracker.

The Chair said that the RAG status of items on the outcome tracker needed to be reviewed and that this would be something that he and the Vice Chair would focus on before the next meeting.

The Committee also said that reports must be made available to them earlier than occurred this time and this was taken on board by officers.

## 5 **Scrutiny Review Update** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee received an update from the Council's Scrutiny Manager, Jamie Jackson on the context to the scrutiny review at the Council following the 2018 peer challenge. The scrutiny review was undertaken by the Centre for Public Scrutiny in early 2019 and the final report was agreed by Council in January 2020.

Mr Jackson advised that he has reported to each of the 3 Scrutiny Committees' during the November cycle of meetings and provided a detailed update on each of the recommendations. The implementation of the 11 recommendations has in part been delayed due to the on-going pandemic and the subsequent change to ways of working at the Council, however the target is to ensure that all recommendations have been fully embedded by March 2021. Mr Jackson highlighted the following as key areas of work: -

- Recommendation 5 - Review approach to work planning, agenda setting, meeting preparation. Scrutiny work programmes should avoid repetitive reporting, 'for-information' items or general presentations and reports to which scrutiny can add only minimal value. This is a focus of work through to end of the year.
- Recommendation 7 - Scrutiny should develop a clear methodology in the creation of work programmes to ensure that it segments and prioritises and aligns with the Council's plans and goals. This should be member-led and in consultation with Cabinet. This is a focus of work through to end of the year.

- Recommendation 10 - Many members expressed a gap in their knowledge and skills relating to scrutiny and would value training and development. Our assessment suggests that general training of the essential principles and practice of scrutiny, questioning techniques and work programme planning were of value. This is a focus of work through to early 2021.

The Chairs of the 3 Scrutiny Committees are meeting in early December to discuss this further. Mr Jackson said that the level of Chairing and participation by Committee Members has considerably improved during the virtual process and the adaptability of all 3 Scrutiny Chairs has been impressive.

Further work will be done in terms of external scrutiny facing / partnership scrutiny, such as the Police and Crime Panel and work around shadow Authority Scrutiny.

Mr Jackson advised that an update report will also be considered at the full Council meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

The Committee then asked questions and made several comments, which were responded to by Mr Jackson as follows: -

- Councillor Hunt – how does the approach to scrutiny at SCC compare to other local authorities? It' s about making what do 'smarter' and the review provides a useful yardstick of what should be doing for example more focus on work programme.
- Councillor R Williams – echo the Chairs comments on role of scrutiny around good governance. Should reduce emphasis on officers to Cabinet Members and there be shorter presentations by officers with more time for scrutiny questions. Also issue of how keep track and monitor the impact of these recommendations – it's about sharing best practice and more regular meetings of 3 Chairs and Vice Chairs will be good way for this. Will bring back review report to the March meetings of the 3 Scrutiny Committees.
- Chair – is there Cabinet and service buy in? The SLT has been updated and raised challenges in delivering some of the recommendations. If there are major issues, there is the opportunity to raise them as concerns.

Agreed: -

1. To thank Mr Jackson for the update and work undertaken and the update be noted.
2. That an update report be considered at the March 2021 meeting of the Committee.

## 6 **Written Statement of Action - update** - Agenda Item 7

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Director of Children's Services, Julian Wooster, providing an update about the Written Statement of Action (WSoA) which priorities the areas' work on SEND for the next 18 – 24 months. The WSoA had been submitted to Ofsted on 5 November 2020. The 3 main themes are: -

1. Joint working arrangements – between NHS / LA
2. Inclusive schools (outcomes and reduced exclusions)
3. Inclusive service – capacity and performance

The Committee Members listened to the update and asked a number of questions: -

- Cllr R Williams – the delivery model looks good. Regarding the governance scrutiny, where does scrutiny fit in to that and link to the SEND Improvement Board? Mr Wooster confirmed that scrutiny is part of the 'SCC governance bodies' part. The Improvement Board is chaired by the Chief Executive of the Council / Clinical Commissioning Group.
- Cllr R Williams – is the plan deliverable in the 18 – 24 month timeframe? Mr Wooster advised that the service will be re-inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Are in culture change and there is better ownership of the challenges and better engagement which is a real strength. He said that he is confident making substantial progress and there is good engagement happening as well.
- The Chair asked when scrutiny could look at the WSoA. Mr Wooster said that it is a very detailed document and are waiting on comments from Ofsted / CQC. Once this has happened the document will be signed off and published. He confirmed that it should be available for the next meeting of the Committee.
- Cllr Revans asked about the role of Academies / where sit in the work. Mr Wooster said that this was a national issue and the Regional Schools Commissioner (or their representative) attends each Improvement Board meeting as well.
- In response to a question, Mr Wooster confirmed that there was no backlog of SEND assessments.
- The Chair asked about the SENCO network – Mr Wooster said that support to the network / Forum has been strengthened and Head Teachers recognise its importance as well. He said that he is very pleased with inclusion work and the positive engagement that has happened on that agenda.

Agreed: - That the update be noted.

## 7 **Youth Offending Service** - Agenda Item 8

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Deputy Director Children's Services, Claire Winter together with the Team Leader Kat Brooklyn about the Youth Offending Service and the forthcoming Inspection which is due in the next year. 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 next Spring.

The team is part of Children's Services, is separate from the police and courts and works with young people who get into trouble with the law. The teams investigate the background of a young person and try to help them stay away from crime. The teams also run local crime prevention programmes for example.

The presenters provided a flavour of the work of the teams, numbers of young people involved and low reoffending rate which shows evidence of the quality of the service. The speech and language therapy outcomes were praised in the SEND inspection report. The youth resettlement work from custody to community was also praised in the national thematic inspection in 2018/19.

Areas for improvement included education attendance and outcomes. The service has put in education inclusion worker to create links with schools. There is also good joint working with the Virtual School as well.

The Committee Members listened to the update and asked questions, which were responded to as follows: -

- The Chair asked whether the service had seen an impact of county lines? Ms Brooklyn confirmed that there is an impact and outlined the multi-agency response to it. Ms Winter said that the increase in violent offences may relate to exploitation as well.
- Cllr Revans said that he was pleased to see educational worker and links to voluntary sector and asked about the role of restorative justice. Ms Winter confirmed that Restorative Justice is the practice model for the service with victims 'at its heart' .
- In response to a question, Ms Winter said that the team is hoping for GOOD or better inspection outcome and the key issue is around education and making sure young people get effective education which meets their needs.
- In response to a question, Ms Brooklyn said that service deals with 10 – 18 year olds and majority are 16 and 17 and she would provide a breakdown on the ages of young people the service is working with. She did confirm that the team was not working with any aged under the age of 12.

- Some questions were asked about preventative work – Ms Brooklyn mentioned the work led by the police around drug and alcohol diversion (choice and consequences)
- Mrs Tipper said that speech and language is the ‘route to a person’ and asked if schools are identifying this early enough. Ms Winter said that she would discuss this with the Inclusion team and will provide clarification and a response outside the meeting.

Agreed: -

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That the Chair and Vice Chair meet with the officers to prepare a briefing note for a future meeting, covering the following areas – speech and language, County Lines (prevention) and education attendance and outcomes.

## 8 **How Covid-19 has impacted on the delivery of the CYPP** - Agenda Item 9

The Committee received a report and presentation from the Council's Partnership Business Manager, Fi Phur about how has Covid-19 impacted on the delivery of the Children & Young People's Plan 2019 -2022. The report covered the period April – June 2020 (Qtr. 1) and the figures for July – September 2020 (Qtr. 2) are being collated.

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 (isolation, digital connections and poverty, community safety, transport, family time maintained, new community risks).
- Education (pressure at school, emotional health and wellbeing, bubbles, inconsistent story of support in schools, elective home education).
- Health (emotional health and well-being, lack of access to school nurse, more opportunities for co-production, *Kooth* insight).
- Positive Activities (closed venues, county lines, transport, more engagement opportunities, lockdown inconsistencies).

Ms Phur provided some key messages / highlights: -

- *Kooth* is a commissioned, national on-line service and that Somerset's responses are in line with national picture. There is a massive increase in anxiety in families and bonds are being tested.
- Decrease in pressures of forming relationships.
- Small survey of primary school pupils was positive about on-line safety at home.
- Elective home education – seems to be more interest. There is also the issue for those young people as didn't receive exam results in the summer as were teacher assessed.

- Concern around county lines, parks.
- Looking to increase numbers attending youth forum, for next meeting in Spring.
- Round 2 of the Somerset Young People's Fund is about to launch.
- Healthwatch 'Young Listeners' , where young people interview other young people.
- Voluntary sector – recruiting more youth workers – training and focus on participation.

The Committee listened to the update and then asked several questions and commented, as follows: -

- Chair – access to *Kooth* insight be useful and digital provision / barriers, would like more details on this. Ms Phur said that it is often about the sharing of equipment in the home, bandwidth and the pecking order in families. There are around 11,000 young people with some element of digital poverty and there is a lot of community work being done around distribution of laptops in the community. She explained that she is doing a paper on this issue and is happy to share this in due course. The LEP is doing work around adult digital provision as have expressed interest in the work as well.
- Mrs Tipper asked about elective home education issue and whether this is being driven by parents or the young people and what support is offered to them. Ms Phur said that there are hubs supporting them, but this is more difficult at the current time. This will be followed up by officers.
- The Chair thanked Ms Phur for providing the update and said that it was fantastic to hear the voice of the child / young people.

Agreed: -

1. That Ms Phur be thanked for the presentation and the report be noted.
2. That Ms Phur bring an update to the March 2021 meeting of the Committee, following the Youth Forum sessions, to see whether the emphasis has changed.

9 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 10

There were no other items of business raised at the meeting. The next meeting will be on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 beginning @ 1 pm.

**(The meeting ended at 3.53 pm)**

**CHAIRMAN**