

## **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 held virtually via Microsoft Teams, on Wednesday 2 December 2020 at 1.00 pm

**Present:** Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr R Williams (Vice-Chair), Cllr M Dimery, Cllr James Hunt, Cllr B Revans and Cllr W Wallace  
Mr P Elliot, Mrs R Hobbs and Mrs E Tipper – co-opted members

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

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr J Williams

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

The following declarations of interest were made at the meeting: -

- (a) Mrs Ruth Hobbs (co-opted member) – agenda item relating to consultation on future school provision in Crewkerne & Ilminster area – governor at one of the schools going to be impacted by the consultation;
- (b) Mr Peter Elliott (co-opted member) - agenda item relating to consultation on future school provision in Crewkerne & Ilminster area – Chief Executive of The Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust, and Maiden Beech Academy, one of the schools in the Trust, would be affected by proposals.

### **2 Minutes from the previous meeting held on 12 November 2020 - Agenda Item 3**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020 were approved as a correct record, subject to the following amendment: -

Youth Offending Service - Minute 7 refers, (top page 6 second bullet point) – amended as follows: -

“Mrs Tipper said that for children with developmental speech and language issues, the disorders are the ~~‘route to a person’~~ ‘route to prison’ (as more likely to be permanently excluded and are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system)…….”

### 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 Committee considered the current work programme and the outcome tracker for the Scrutiny Committee. It was noted that the agenda for the meeting had been published on 24 November and had considered the November Forward Plan at the meeting on 12 November. The Cabinet Forward Plan had been updated and published on 1 December 2020.

The Council's Scrutiny Manager, outlined the key points relating to the documents and the outcome tracker was updated as follows: -

- Include 'Exclusions' on the outcome tracker - report back from the Executive. It was noted that the Government has also indicated that may be revising the Guidance.
- Outstanding actions – going forward, will be sending out information items which are 'for noting' to members via email.

The Committee noted the list of proposed items for the meeting on 27 January 2021 and 3 March 2021 and the proposed meeting dates for the remainder of 2021.

The Scrutiny Manager mentioned the all members workshop on the morning of Friday 22 January 2021 on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), looking at key areas of development in Somerset. Aligns to the priorities aligned to the SEND WSoA so will be of particular interest to members of this Scrutiny Cttee. There will be a Q&A session with expert panel, including reps from the LA, CCG, public health, educational psychology, paediatric services. The Chair urged members to put this in their calendar's and attend if possible.

### 5 **Written Statement of Action (WSoA)** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee received a report and presentation from the Council's Director of Children's Services, Mr Julian Wooster, which provided a further update about the Written Statement of Action (WSoA) which priorities the areas' work on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the forthcoming 18 – 24 months.

The Director advised that the WSoA had been submitted to Ofsted in November and the document has now be signed off. A copy of the WSoA had been circulated to the Committee as soon as it became available, on 30 November. An easy read version of the report has been signed off and this will be circulated to the Committee following the meeting. A re-inspection against the actions outlined in the WSoA will take place within the next 24 months and Inspectors will expect to see significant improvement against all 9 areas.

Following queries raised at the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, the report also provided information about the SEND Improvement Board, which is co-chaired by the Chief Executive of the County Council and the Chief Accountable Officer of the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and also the SEND governance arrangements.

The Committee members listened to the update and asked several questions: -

- (a) query about how will facilitate children and families to feedback and (b) the role of the Improvement Board in challenge / in terms of any key performance indicators (KPIs) (see page 5/72 of the WSoA). With regard to point (a) the Director referred to the range of activities around participation and engagement, found on page 19/72 of the WSoA. With regard to point (b) the Director referred to pages 29/72 -30/72 which outlines the performance measures which are in effect KPIs and are reported quarterly to the Improvement Board, which then reports into the Health & Wellbeing Board. He said that Scrutiny can receive these too.
- Question on process following the reinspection – the Director said that if there is insufficient progress a Statutory Notice of Improvement would be issued. 60% of local areas have a WSoA and most will make some form of progress. Some issues of course will take longer than 18 months to progress as this is an extensive programme. The Improvement Board signed off the plan and there is a strong commitment for it to work and for targets to be met.
- Question on role of schools / education and support to schools to achieve targets. The Director highlighted measures on page 52/72 specifically related to schools and section 6 (pages 47/72 – 51/72) of the WSoA.
- Questions on the timeliness of receiving the WSoA and the governance arrangements diagram - where hold officers to account, scrutiny's' role and role / membership of the Children's' Executive Group (page 6/72). The Director referred to Appendix B in the covering report and that the SCC governance bodies includes all the relevant Governance bodies in the Council, including scrutiny. The Director confirmed that he and the CCG Chair the Children's Executive Group and this deals with cross-

cutting theme delivery. The decision-making body is the SEND Improvement Board.

- Question about the role of Academies. The Director agreed that it is a complex picture and advised that the Regional Schools Commissioner sends a representative to the Improvement Board. The Council's Scrutiny Manager confirmed that scrutiny of the WSoA falls within the remit of the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee.
- Role of scrutiny needs to be more explicit there in the documentation too / having place in the governance structure. The Director highlighted the Priorities in the plan and the 3 cross-cutting themes are all about 'culture' and referred to pages 19/72 – 29/72 of the WSoA. The Director confirmed that this is a joint plan with the CCG and not all bodies providing challenge are referenced in the plan and confirmed the very important role of scrutiny. There are organisational challenges but there is a commitment, including from non-execs and assured the Committee that it is a priority across health system (regardless of any future structural changes in health).
- Discussion on where scrutiny can 'add value' and what should focus its efforts on. The Director confirmed that all 72 pages of the plan are all a priority / urgent priority work. He referred to the recent work through task and finish groups which had been helpful, and that getting feedback from frontline staff / parents / carer feedback have been helpful as well. The focus on performance, around Education, Health Care Plans at the next meeting was welcomed as well. Referring to the Exclusions work undertaken by the scrutiny committee, the Council's Assistant Director Education & Partnerships, A Walker mentioned the enquiry work with schools on inclusion and what it means to be inclusive and that scrutiny could link into that work (building on the work / recommendations of the Task and Finish Group). The logistics will be worked out. Ms Walker will provide further information to the Scrutiny Manager.
- Comment made that little mention in the report on early years and this could be an area to be looked at, to include role of health visitors as well. The Council's Strategic Manager, Public Health, Ms Falconer said that she would be happy to pick up the contribution of the public health nursing service (including health visitors) to the SEND agenda, with those interested, outside the meeting. The Chair clarified that 'early years' / 'early help' are different things and the Director said that the Inspectors had found early years to be effective (outside the WSoA).

The Chair said that this was the Committees early thoughts on the document which would develop and provided a summary of the areas of focus for further work, initially looking at the following: -

- leadership / including role of scrutiny in governance (Improvement Priority 2)
- Improvement Priority 5

- Improvement Priority 6
- Theme 3 – Inclusion Services and delve deeper - Section 7.5 (core offer school nursing) & 7.6 (health visiting) (see pages 56/72 and 57/72).

It was recognised that further discussions would need to take place off-line to agree and provide greater clarity.

The Chair thanked the Director and he thanked the Committee for their input and highlighted that it is a big priority for the Council and health and will be very focussed on this area of work.

Agreed: -

1. To note that following the focussed work on School Exclusions, a report on the timeliness and quality of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) will be considered at the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 27 January 2021.
2. 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.
3. That the following areas within the WSoA will be explored in more detail by the Scrutiny Committee: -
  - Leadership (Improvement Priority 2)
  - ASD (Improvement Priority 5) (see recommendation 2 above)
  - Inclusive Schools (Improvement Priority 6)
  - Performance Monitoring
4. The Chair and Vice Chair will meet to discuss the scheduling of the areas of work and expectations in terms of reports for example.

## 6 **Update on the consultation on the future school provision in the Crewkerne and Ilminster area** - Agenda Item 7

The Committee received a report and presentation from the Council's Assistant Director, Education, Partnerships and Skills, Ms Walker, together with the Cabinet Member for Education & Transformation, Cllr F 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 consultation documents are also available electronically on the following - <https://someset.inconsult.uk/consult.ti/CISP/consultationHome> .

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 as follows: -

- Why consulting on a proposed model that hasn't been tested for those areas, in terms of costs / long term financial modelling – Cllr Purbrick clarified that are currently in the first stage in the process and that if do move to statutory notices, more of that detail will be worked up into a full Business Case.
- Original assumption was that fall in pupil numbers is driver due to falling birth rate but queried the parental choice factor and moving out of catchment area. Ms Walker said that know where pupils go to school / where live and travel, but currently don't have details on the reason for those decisions. Will be seeking to find drivers that are taking people out of area and reaching out to parents to find out why. Ms Walker said that she is happy to bring back hard data on the numbers coming out of Crewkerne and Ilminster area and choosing to be educated elsewhere.
- Questions on the cost of transporting children, if on school transport, can't access after school provision and has the bigger picture been examined to see getting best value for money; whether some families are disempowered from getting involved as the consultation is being done virtually; risk to females as having to transport their children around and whether it will impact on their ability to get employment (mitigation). Ms Walker confirmed that they do have cost information and the modelling of long-term costs is complex and the variables are

great. A full costs analysis is appropriate later in the process. The costs of transport are part of that. With regard to vulnerable families & mums – they are high on radar and if do progress to statutory consultation, will be speaking to families, via support from the Family Intervention Service for example. With regard to after school care, it is difficult to assess if it is at the level required by parents. Is an issue in Ilminster area and are committed to looking at the busing situations there.

- Are there lots of classes operating below capacity / below viable numbers? Ms Walker said that the aim is to bring every school in area where pupil / teacher ratio is efficient, with less variability year to year with classes as close to 30 as can be.
- Questions about 6<sup>th</sup> form provision in area and Wadham School. Ms Walker confirmed it is a small sixth form. The Director clarified that the 6<sup>th</sup> form is not part of this consultation as the consultation covers pupils up to age 16. There is a wider discussion to be had separately about sixth forms across Somerset and how work with FE colleges.
- Question asked about the 'Gunning principles' and whether points 2 and 3 of the principles are being met. Cllr Purbrick said is a 2 part process and if the decision is taken to move to second stage there will be more information. The information at this stage is right for this part of the process. There has also been wide and open discussion, over a number of years.
- Impact of changes on children getting to school and environmental impact; impact assessment done on staff retraining (and role of Trade Unions there). Ms Walker said already know have a huge amount of movement of pupils currently and would be beneficial if a higher number attended their catchment school, closer to home. Grateful to support of Trade Unions in process and are continuing discussions about training requirements for example. With regard to staff conditions, do have comprehensive information provided to staff from HR colleagues about the detail, at this early stage.
- Cllr Revans said that he would like more information about structural deficit at Wadham School. Ms Walker said that the specifics relate to funding at KS4 (not KS3), as generally KS3 'subsidizes' KS4 due to the number of subjects covered and need for greater number of teachers. The Director said that he is happy to discuss this issue outside the meeting.
- Maiden Beech school is an academy – is there a binding agreement with the Academy; consultation meetings be better if Zooms/ Teams meetings; if legal challenge to school closure – what effect on process? Ms Walker said that the conversations are on-going with the Academy. With regard to a legal challenge, the impact of it depends on the substance of any challenge (if this happens).
- Cllr Munt asked a number of questions - why not a Key Decision; a schools visit would be appropriate; whether a risk assessment made on

business and community use; whether pay transition funding to Academies; if changes made – how quickly deficit at Wadham clear?

Ms Walker responded as follows: –

- the decision to consult taken by Cabinet and nothing could be decided in terms of implementation without further Cabinet approval;
- transition funding – as part of the consultation there is a document outlining financial principles, which outlines the conditions under which when funding would be made available to the Academy and also mentioned role of the Schools Forum re growth funding;
- business sector comment and use of Wadham is not part of the consultation and not able to answer the particular query. Cllr Munt to send details to Cllr Purbrick;
- deficit at Wadham – the proposal is about achieving financial sustainability for the area, so if implementation was agreed at that point a Recovery Plan would be feasible and discussed with the School;
- The Director clarified that Wadham is judged as Good school by Ofsted and the LA has a duty to provide good quality, sufficient school places which is sustainable, hence the purpose of the consultation in this area (trying to address here pupil numbers and the way schools are funded essentially).

The following comments and suggestion were made for additional supporting information that, subject to a further non-key decision, could be provided alongside the statutory notices and opportunities to raise the profile of the proposals and reach segments of the community who might otherwise be missed – consider how best to ‘reach’ people, bearing in mind the comments made earlier about technology.

Agreed: -

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That data relating to pupil modelling be provided.
3. That the Committee receive further details on the consultation if decision is taken to process to the second stage.
4. That the following information 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).
5. That the questions raised about the Wadham School and funding and curriculum led financial planning be discussed outside the meeting.



**7 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 8**

The following items of urgent business were raised at the meeting: -

- (a) Cllr Munt asked for information about the co-opted member representative vacancies on the Scrutiny Committee – the Scrutiny Manager will provide a response after the meeting.
- (b) Young Carers – Cllr Munt asked the Cabinet Member to explain policy on the provision of caring services for young carers when the individual for who they care, passes away, support offered, assessments – Cllr Nicholson said that she would be happy to discuss with Cllr Munt following the meeting. Cllr Munt asked to reserve her right for this to go on the agenda for the next Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- (c) Mrs Hobbs mentioned the Big Tent project has been launched and there are some launch events around children’s mental health and wellbeing services. Details to be circulated by the Scrutiny Manager.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday 27 January 2021 beginning @ 1 pm.

**(The meeting ended at 3.36 pm)**

**CHAIR**