

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 on Wednesday 27 January 2021 at 1.00 pm

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr R Williams (Vice-Chair), Cllr M Dimery, Cllr James Hunt, Cllr T Munt (substitute for Cllr B Revans) and Cllr W Wallace
Mr P Elliott and Mrs R Hobbs – co-opted members

Other Members present: Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr C Paul, Cllr F Purbrick, Cllr P Clayton, Cllr H Davies, Cllr A Kendall, Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr J Lock, Cllr H Prior-Sankey and Cllr L Vijeh

Apologies for absence: Cllr B Revans and Cllr J Williams

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

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

2 **Minutes from the previous meeting held on 2 December 2020** - Agenda Item 3

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 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 Committee considered the current work programme, the outcome tracker for the Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet Forward Plan.

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

- Add to agenda for 3 March - Future schools provision in the Crewkerne and Ilminster area – this will be a substantive agenda item
- Scrutiny review update – item to be moved from 3 March meeting to June 2021 meeting
- Move the 'update on voice of young people' item to June 2021 meeting to allow for broader report

- Special Schools Funding – which arose at the recent Schools Forum meeting and a report will be considered its meeting in early March. This paper will be circulated to the scrutiny cttee members and the Scrutiny cttee could then decide how and in what way it wants to take this further
- Add item on 'Education performance' to June 2021 meeting

The following items were raised by members of the Committee for inclusion in the work plan: -

- Cllr Munt raised 2 items (a) closure of the Shapwick School be added to the work plan, around outcomes and learning for SCC; (b) deep dive into tribunals and appeals relating to education. Cllr Munt was asked to send further details to the Chair so this can be considered further.
- Cllr Dimery - school meals provision and the general healthiness of school meal provision. Cllr Dimery was asked to send further details to the Chair so this can be reviewed.
- Cllr Lock – experience of younger children in care system – look at outcomes. Cllr Lock was asked to send further details to the Chair so this can be considered further.

The Chair referred to the excellent all member workshop on 22 January 2021 on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) looking at key areas of development in Somerset, and which aligns to the priorities aligned to the SEND WSoA. The Committee discussed the best way to capture this aspect in its work programme.

Cllr Munt asked the following question on behalf of Cllr Revans - What is Somerset County Council doing to support Adverse Child Experience (ACE) awareness and how can we use this to make children's lives better in Somerset? The Council's Director of Children's Services, Julian Wooster referred to discussions and activities around the WSoA and that the presentation later at the meeting (on mental health and wellbeing), and the WSoA around inclusive schools will probably explore that question.

AGREED - That the Chair and Vice Chair will review the agenda items for the meeting on 3 March, following the meeting.

5 **Children's Services Data Overview** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee received a presentation from the Council's Deputy Director, Children Services Claire Winter, on Children's Services data trends. The Deputy Director explained that the purpose of the presentation is for the Committee to consider children services data and partnership qualitative information to identify areas of possible concern and success in these strategic leadership of the Somerset Children's Partnership; to explore potential hypothesis from the information provided about the effectiveness of specific aspects of that

leadership in improving children's lives; and to prioritise the hypothesis the committee would like to test through work integrated into the Forward Plan.

The presentation was divided into 4 sections- Early help, Children in need of help and protection, Children looked after and Care leavers, with each section broken down into the following- background, data, what the data indicates and potential hypotheses, for further scrutiny by the Committee as part of its forward plan.

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

- Cllr Munt – had a question on data presented around care leavers activity (education, employment or training) – Claire Winter said that there is a need for greater focus on meeting the education, training and employment needs of care leavers. The Chair asked for feedback on the help and support provided.
- Cllr Munt – with regard to Children Looked After, asked about the data presented regarding foster placements and also long term placement stability – Claire Winter clarified that 72% of children looked after live in a foster family and 47% of young people are placed in own provision, others are placed in independent fostering agencies. A further breakdown of this data will be provided. The potential hypotheses are that there are not enough foster carers or residential care homes in Somerset with the right skills to be able to care for children long term and there are insufficient foster homes and residential care providers for Somerset children to be cared for locally
- Ms Hobbs – had a question on children in need of help slides and whether the data takes account of children who are now under a social worker because of direct payments. Claire Winter confirmed that they were not included in these figures and that a potential hypothesis is that early help support in Somerset is largely effective in reducing the need for children to access help from a social worker.
- Ms Hobbs – had a question on schools' data and how children who are looked after compare with their peers on their school journey. Julian Wooster said that this links to the inclusion work being done through the priorities in the WSoA work
- Cllr R Williams – question on the data on child protection plans – Claire Winter confirmed the rate of children subject to a child protection plan in Somerset has reduced gradually over the last 4 years, increasing slightly in the last 6 months. This rate is now below the England and statistical neighbour average and that it's around the effectiveness of plans, rather than the number of plans
- The Chair asked for clarification on 'early help' and 'early intervention' – Claire Winter responded that these terms are essentially 2 sides of the same

coin – early help is around the whole system working together and is statutory requirement.

The early help assessment (EHA) is the multi-agency assessment and referral tool for early help in Somerset. All organisations, other than the Police, use it to assess and record any early help work they do and to refer to the Council's family intervention service/ disabled children's early support team and other services. The police do support that work and notify of incidents. The Chair said that there seemed to be a question around scrutiny understanding any barriers with partners' utilising the EHA.

The data indicates that there are fewer children under 8 receiving professionally led early help than would be expected for the population, particularly for girls. More children aged 12 to 16 are receiving early help than would be expected for the population; this is more marked for girls. For those early help assessments logged, the majority are completed by our Family intervention service. A potential hypothesis is why the early help approach appears to be less effective as children reach adolescence. The Chair said that Scrutiny could also usefully look at these differences and look at the data around Children in need in more depth (rate of children in need per 10,000).

- The Chair asked a question about Children looked After and care leavers and the role of the Corporate Parent Board and how scrutiny could work better with the Board. Claire Winter confirmed that it would be helpful to use each others' skills and expertise and to invite the Chair of the Board to the Committee.
- Cllr R Williams thanked Claire Winter for the presentation and acknowledged that more time is needed to consider the hypotheses (for further work to be done) and more time to consider what the data implies.

AGREED: -

1. That the presentation be noted and welcomed in helping to inform the future work of the Committee.
2. That further work is needed to consider what the data implies and to frame and articulate this future work.
3. That the Chair and Vice Chair will meet to discuss this further.

6 **The Impact of COVID-19 on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing** - Agenda Item 7

(Members of the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee had also been invited to attend the meeting for this agenda item).

The Chair advised that this is a multi-agency session on mental health and wellbeing and that some background information had been published with the agenda pack. He welcomed the following to the meeting for the item: -

- Jenny Pearce Riddy - Strategic Manager and Principal Educational Psychologist, Somerset County Council Children Services
- Fiona Moir – Service Manager, Public Health
- Tim Cockerill - Assistant Educational Psychologist, Somerset County Council Children’s Services
- Nik Harwood - Chief Executive, Young Somerset
- Claudine Brown – Head of CAMHS Somerset
- Katharine Griffin – Service Manager Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service

Jenny Pearce Riddy explained that the purpose of the presentation is for Committee to consider the issue of how big the problem is, what is being done about it and what would make the biggest difference. The presenters provided an outline of national and local statistics; universal and whole school approaches; information on mental health support teams, the community offer and well-being practitioners; and support for specific groups – CAMHS and Children looked after (CLA).

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

- Cllr Hunt – query on the ‘feeling sad’ figures locally, expressed in the ‘Your Views Matter’ survey. Fiona Moir said that she would get clarification on the data and would circulate following the meeting.
- Cllr Munt – asked questions on the support for children and young people at the current time, especially those who aren’t in school setting for example, home educated young people. Cllr Munt said that this generation of children & young people will be impacted educationally and psychologically also asked whether there was any learning from other significant events, for example WW2 or perhaps from military children, who can move schools often.

The Council’s Director of Children’s Services, Julian Wooster said that these were very good questions and other agencies have role as well. The current C&YPP Plan ends in 2022 and need to think about measures need to put into place, to help those with disrupted education due to the massive impact on this generation of young people. Nik Harwood referred to the ‘Big Tent’ provision and the role this will have in terms of the place to go (identify, locate and engage).

- Cllr Munt – asked for clarity around the CAMHS service, waiting lists and treatment. Claudine Brown explained the process and that routine referrals take up to 6 weeks. CAMHS provide assessment and treatment for a wide range of mental health conditions requiring specialist intervention. Would

like to expand specialist trauma work. As a system, are also exploring options (apps for example) which provide young with direct access to support - including peer support. Coming out of Covid, may also need more self-referral options for support.

- Ms Hobbs – asked the following questions (a) the prevalence data. Fiona Moir said that the was NHS Digital definition on disease classification and is the best data we have in terms of analysis of children and young people’s mental health; (b) Pleased to see progress on the ‘Big Tent’ project and asked about the plan on informing parents about it. Nik Harwood said that are taking the time necessary to get it right - there had been ‘test and learn’ following the launch and the website had soft launch in November. Using champions and parents and working on how to best ‘market’ to parents. He said that he would welcome Ms Hobb’s expertise and input in this and will have a discussion ‘offline’. A briefing note on this will also be provided; (c) question on ‘Zoom’ (or equivalent) meeting fatigue and if there had been an impact on young people’s engagement – Nick Harwood said that this was something for staff and the young people and some young people have asked for shorter sessions, having the camera off, using emails / texts as well. He also outlined the work being undertaken regarding digital exclusion and the work around supporting young people to make grants to Somerset Community Foundation. Also, youth work has now got a ‘critical worker status’ which has helped in their work (face to face). A briefing note on this will also be provided.
- Cllr R Williams asked whether there was a connection between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and poor mental health – & role of parents and parenting – and if it would be worth having a joint session with the Adults & Health Scrutiny Committee to explore this further. Fiona Moir said that the connection with adults is valid as over half adults with mental health issues start before the age of 18. A strongly based Somerset approach is needed and aspects of it sit within the work around the WSoA, for example IP5 (autism and ADHD) and will produce a strategic position moving forward. Fiona Moir said she welcomed the positive comments and feedback from the ACE session on 22 January and the momentum it has created. The Chair said that a follow up to the workshop would be added to the work plan for later in the year.
- In response to a question from Cllr Mandy Chilcott about the ACE work and CAMHS, Claudine Brown confirmed that impact of trauma informs their work. Needs to be joined up health and social care as well and a multi-agency response to trauma or ACE’s and are very close to being in that position.
- The Chair said that he would be interested in hearing more about the work of EMHP’s.

AGREED: -

The Chair thanked the presenters for the excellent session and briefly summarised the main points from the presentation / discussion and questions:

- The 'feeling sad' figures locally, expressed in the 'Your Views Matter' survey – further details will be circulated after the meeting
- Concerns around the psychological impact of COVID and what next after COVID need to look at
- Big Tent – briefing note requested, so can help promote and explain it
- CAMHS - & times to access. Pleased that young people can access in timely manner
- Virtual meeting fatigue issue
- ACE – noted & need timetable for response to that so ensure driving forward
- CLA – clarification that life's journeys are included in that item
- Invited members to forward any other points to him after the meeting.

7 **The Medium Term Financial Plan for Children's Services 2021 - 2024 -** Agenda Item 8

The Committee considered a report from the Council's Director of Finance, Jason Vaughan, introduced by the Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Mandy Chilcott, which summarised the key areas of specific interest within the Medium-Term Financial Plan to the scrutiny committee for Children and Families. The Committee was asked to consider the proposed budget for 2021-2022 and the indicative budgets for 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 for the children and families services budgets. The Committee was also asked to review specific proposals for changes from previous years and identify any matters for consideration that they would like to highlight to the Cabinet.

The Committee asked the following questions: -

- Children's Residential Placements – capital bid - the proposal is to purchase several residential properties for short term placements which at present SCC are solely reliant on third party providers – in response to a question, the Council's Director of Children's Services, Julian Wooster clarified that this related to children looked after, full time provision and is about trying to address the market problem the Council has around shortage of care placement. The plan is to develop local provision, for short term placements, in a partnership arrangement with a provider in a phased process. The Director agreed to circulate some further / background information to the Committee.
- Early Years Basic Need – capital bid – in response to questions, the Director explained that council has a statutory duty to deliver sufficient, fit for purpose facilities for the delivery of Early Years education and childcare within the county. This bid is for two projects, one within Sedgemoor and the other in South Somerset. The Director agreed to circulate some details about these projects after the meeting.

- New school buildings – capital bid - in response to questions, the Director said that he would provide a breakdown of the new school buildings which are proposed, after the meeting.
- The Chair said that he would like more detail around the new proposals and the capital proposals in particular, and the background to them i.e. the policy decisions behind the lines in the report and the consequential impact of decisions. The Director of Finance clarified that the report to this committee was a summarised version, to focus on the areas pertinent to the cttee. The report to the Place Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet has all the scheme details of the individual capital schemes and sets out the costs to them and the business cases to each one, are available to members.

The Scrutiny Committee: -

1. Considered the proposed budget for 2021/22 and indicative budgets for 2022/23 and 2023/24 for Children & Families.
2. Reviewed specific proposals for changes from previous years and offered assurance to Cabinet.

8 **Continuity of Children's Services through Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset** - Agenda Item 9

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the Task and Finish Group looking at the continuity of Children's Services through local government reorganisation in Somerset. The Council's Scrutiny Manager, Jamie Jackson advised that the terms of reference needed some final amendments and the final version will be agreed outside of the meeting.

The Committee discussed the membership of the group that there should be up to 4 members appointed, including the Chair and Vice Chair with the ability to pull in topic specialists as appropriate - expressions of interest to be invited, following the meeting.

The Chair clarified that purpose of the work is to consider the potential issues and risks that may impact outcomes for children & families in Somerset from local government reorganisation; to investigate this and report back to the Committee in June 2021 for Cabinet consideration.

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

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

- (a) Cllr Munt – asked about the SCC's plans for the Easter Holiday relating to food and activities for children – the Council's Deputy Director Children's

Services said that she would provide a written response to all members following the meeting.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 3 March 2021 beginning at 1 pm.

(The meeting ended at 4.06 pm)

CHAIR