

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee held in the Luttrell Room - County Hall, Taunton, on Thursday 9 September 2021 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr R Williams (Vice-Chair), Cllr M Dimery, Cllr B Revans, Cllr L Vijeh and Cllr W Wallace
The Revd T Osmond – co-opted member

Other Members present: Cllr C Paul, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr H Davies, Cllr A Govier and Cllr A Kendall (all attended virtually)

Apologies for absence: Cllr James Hunt and Cllr J Williams, Mrs R Hobbs and Mrs E Tipper – co-opted members

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 7 July 2021** - Agenda Item 3

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 and noted the Committee's current work programme and outcome tracker and the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in forthcoming months including Cabinet meetings to March 2022.

The following items were added to the work programme: –

- Roll out of Pantry Project etc and support to children & families
- Changes to education governance arrangements - October 2021 mtg provisionally
- Thematic Report – SSCP – November mtg provisionally

The Committee noted the meeting dates for the remainder of 2021, as follows:

- Monday 4 October 2021 @ 10am
- Monday 8 November @ 10 am
- Wednesday 1 December – now beginning @ 2 pm

The meetings will be held in The Luttrell Room, County Hall, Taunton.

The work programme and outcome tracker will be updated, as discussed at the meeting.

5 **SCC Response to the Afghan Refugee Position** - Agenda Item 6

The Committee received a verbal update from the Council's Corporate Affairs Director, Simon Clifford and from the Council's Health Promotion Manager (Resettlement) and the Council's Health Promotion Manager, Brittney Strange on the County Council's response to the Afghan Refugee position.

SCC is the lead authority for co-ordinating the countywide response, with the district councils and voluntary sectors working alongside to support. There is a resettlement webpage with up-to-date information about the current plans, what the accommodation needs are, and what people can do to volunteer or donate: <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/refugee-resettlement/>

Following the presentation, the Committee asked detailed questions and made comments, which were responded to by officers, as follows: -

- Questions on unaccompanied children; support to non-English speaking family members; placement close to places of worship; trauma – these will be responded to outside the meeting and shared with the Committee. The Afghanistan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) is specifically for families and households scheme / pathway and one of the reasons for bringing this update to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee
- Noted the overwhelming response from the community and donations to support people - people are asked to donate to charities that help refugees in the UK and abroad through organisations such as British Red Cross, Oxfam, Save the Children, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UNICEF, World Food Programme, Refugee Action
- Role of locally elected members – will keep the website pages and Councillors informed throughout
- Housing and questions on tenancies etc – there will be varied housing tenures in place
- Noted that the Government funding is in place for 12 months
- Learning from previous programmes and from other LA areas too – has been learning from the Syrian Refugee programme for example, to help shape future provision
- Consideration should be given for additional capacity in the short term to the Resettlement Team.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the officers for the detailed update and work being done by the County Council and partners to support refugees.

6 **Social Care - The Experience of Younger Children in Care** - Agenda Item 7

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Strategic Manager CLA and Leaving Care, Jayne Shelbourne-Barrow on the experience of younger children in care.

The presentation covered the following areas: -

- what we are trying to achieve in Somerset – best outcomes for all children and keeping children in families where it is safe do so; for those children who do come into our care, achieving permanence at the earliest opportunity; as a Corporate Parent, we should always consider with partner agencies how we promote and enable children to achieve their full potential in life and 'is this good enough for my child?;
- what we know about younger children in our care and for the purposes of the presentation, looking at those under 8 years of age;
- what we want to know more about / to better understand – including placement moves; blocks around Special Guardianship Orders for example;
- what young children say about being looked after in Somerset - role of the new Participation and Development Officer; social work practice evaluations & assessment work to bring the child's voice through

The Committee asked detailed questions and made comments, which were responded to by officers, as follows: -

- would be useful to see similar data on children under 8 years from our statistical neighbours – happy to make contact with statistical neighbours / other good authorities for this information
- delays in Court process mentioned – the Council's Deputy Director Children's Services, Claire Winter said that it is a complicated picture and reflects the continuing impact of the pandemic on the volume of cases and pressures in Public law and also Private law; the number of Judges available; the volume of work for a limited pool of expert witnesses and the availability of court time. Officers, lawyers, CAFCASS and private practice lawyers meet regularly with the Designated Family Judge for Somerset and all are working hard to reduce delays but the volume of work in the system makes this difficult.

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The Chair mentioned that the issue of tribunals and appeals relating to education had been raised by Councillor Munt at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 27 January 2021 and had been asked to provide more information.

It would be useful to see response provided by the Council's Assistant Director and this be added to the work plan if necessary.

In conclusion the Chair thanked officers for the detailed presentation and made the plea that the Council is still looking for more foster carers and adoptive parents.

Agreed that the presentation be welcomed and noted.

7 Task and Finish Group - update - Agenda Item 8

The Chair provided a verbal update to the Committee on the work of the Task and Finish Group, on the 'Continuity of Children's Services through Local Government Reorganisation. The work of the Task and Finish Group has re started, following the Secretary of State's decision in July 2021 that a single unitary council for the whole of the existing administrative county of Somerset be created on 1 April 2023.

The Scrutiny Committee noted the update.

8 Information Items circulated to the Scrutiny Committee since the last meeting - Agenda Item 9

The Committee noted the following item which had been circulated for information since the last meeting: -

- (a) Youth Offending Service – update on HMIP Inspection and actions from the meeting held on 12 November 2020 – briefing paper from Lise Bird, Strategic Manager Prevention Services and Helen MacDonald, Service Manager, Operational Management.

9 Any other urgent items of business - Agenda Item 10

There were no other items of business.

(The meeting ended at 11.51 am)

CHAIR