

SCRUTINY FOR POLICIES, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ADVISORY BOARD

Notes of a Meeting of the Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Advisory Board held virtually via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday 25 January 2022 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr James Hunt, Cllr J Lock (substitute), Cllr B Revans and Cllr W Wallace

The Revd T Osmond, R Hobbs, E Tipper - co-opted members

Other Members present: Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr C Paul, Cllr H Davies, Cllr A Kendall, Cllr D Johnson, Cllr D Loveridge and Cllr T Munt

Apologies for absence: Cllr R Williams and Cllr M Dimery (substituted by Cllr J Lock)

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 Wednesday 1 December 2021 - Agenda Item 3

The minutes from the meeting held on Wednesday 1 December 2021 were noted and no amendments suggested.

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 work programme and outcome tracker and the Council's Forward Plan of proposed key decisions in the forthcoming months, including Cabinet meetings, was considered. During the discussion the following matters were discussed and highlighted: -

- The agenda items scheduled for the February meeting
- Cllr Revans – highlighted the important issue of education attendance – Dr Hart, the Council's Assistant Director, Inclusion, said that the engagement of vulnerable learners in education will be included and covered in the items scheduled for the next meeting (Inclusion Inquiry and School Exclusions)

- Cllr Jane Lock – asked that consideration be given to including the following items on the work plan – (a) Family Hubs & plans for Somerset; (b) issue of unborn babies and how dovetail into other services; (c) update on Early Years SEND non key decision paper
- Noted that as coming to end of municipal year, these matters will need to be picked up by the new Committee, following the elections
- The meeting on Monday 4 April will be cancelled and there will be an informal joint workshop with the Adults & Health advisory board on Wednesday 6 April @ 10 am.

5 **Partnership Children & Young People's Plan 2022 - 2025** - Agenda Item 6

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting for this agenda item – the Council's Deputy Director Children Services, Ms Claire Winter, the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) Business Manager, Ms Caroline Dowson, and the Participation Officer, Ms Fi Phur.

Ahead of the PowerPoint presentation and consideration of the report, Ms Winter briefly provided the context to the item – that it links to the later agenda item in relation to the budget; it was felt it would be helpful for members to understand how the financial resources that are available to Children Services are used in relation to both Children Services planning and also how that links into the Somerset Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2022 – 2025.

Ms Dowson and Ms Phur covered the following in the presentation of the draft Somerset partnership CYPP 2022 - 2025: -

- the 3 agreed priorities – keeping children and young people safe (priority 1); supporting physical and emotional health and resilience (priority 2); enabling young people to learn and thrive (priority 3)
- safeguarding aspects are covered in priority 1 through existing strategies and governance structures
- the plan will coordinate universal and targeted activity from existing strategies and plans, with specified accountability
- there will be progress reporting from Quarter 1 onwards in 2022/23
- provided information on the vision of the plan and principles underpinning the vision
- have consulted widely with children and young people on the draft plan and referred to the issues highlighted through the 'make your mark' survey responses (2,500), and that education and health are given as being the most important issues to young people
- the plan is still in draft but it is unlikely the priorities will change and are still welcoming feedback
- noted that some actions are still being collated (so not formally signed off)

- provided details of the bodies 'holding the actions' that will meet the priorities.

The advisory board asked detailed question and made a number of comments, which were responded to at the meeting, as follows: -

- accountability and monitoring – there will be reporting on quarterly basis; will also consider where, and how best to, provide information on website; advised that are intending to run further online safeguarding weeks where would be able to link closely to the plan and that this also includes young people
- voice of children and young people and their families – the partnership will be asked to consider how the voice of the children and young people is included in the quarterly reporting – also have Youth Forum for example, which provides influence and challenge to the CYPP
- query on transitions – there are multiple transition points on the children and young people's journey – noted and priority 2 will look at principles going forward too
- link between education and health and support for struggling families and asked for this to be a separate thread in the plan – this is a cross cutting area and see in universal plans as well. There is a specific education subgroup under the governance structure of the SSCP which has developed a dashboard looking at attendance and young people who go missing from education. This will be tracked on a quarterly basis too
- early years does not seem to be mentioned – in response it was clarified that there are good reporting mechanisms for early years into the CYPP and is cross cutting issue as well
- the impact of poverty on families & impact on services and ability to implement the plan – aware and are linking with colleagues in housing for example so do get whole picture
- query where mental health services (CAMHS) features in the plan – clarified that this is part of the multi agency commissioning board, which is run by the Clinical Commissioning Group. The Board has started to populate the CYPP as there is a strong voice from young people about their concerns for emotional health and poor mental health
- query about how the voice of parents of young people features, as can be good resource on how services can be improved – said this was a valid point and mentioned that do seek their voice / lived experience on their child's intervention
- moving toward unitary status and question about how the districts are involved in the formation of plan and going forward; need to ensure other new bodies (such as the Integrated Care System) are included – this point was acknowledged – reiterated that this is a partnership plan and the districts' are fully included

- governance and next steps for the plan – the plan will be taken through the SSCP governance and will go to Cabinet / Full Council post-election and the Health & Wellbeing Board (because of the wider health determinants that relate to the plan)
- both climate and transport were identified as the key issues raised by young people and a question was asked about how these concerns are reflected in the CYPP and that both should be reflected in the cross-cutting themes in the plan – Ms Phur confirmed that their voices are being heard and reference was made to the fact that young people are sitting on the boards for the Bus User and stakeholder group which feeds into the Transport Strategy and they are also working with the climate emergency team.

On behalf of the advisory board, the Chair thanked Ms Dowson and Ms Phur for the detailed presentation and for the excellent graphics and the policy on a page information, which provides links to all activity going on across partnership; that it is important to recognise the voice of child through this and thanked them for the work on engagement with children and young people; asked officers to consider the points and comments made around transitions, education, early years, the parents voice and districts involvement in the future unitary work.

The advisory board noted the presentation and report and the consultation undertaken with children, young people and stakeholders on the new plan and the new priorities for the plan: -

- Keeping children and young people safe
- Supporting physical, emotional health and resilience
- Enabling children and young people to learn and thrive.

6 **Children's Services Business Plan and resourcing through the Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2022 - 2023** - Agenda Item 7

The Chair welcomed the Council's Deputy Director Children Services, Ms Claire Winter and Ms Sian Kenny, Strategic Manager, Finance Business Partnership to the meeting for this agenda item. The advisory board had received a report from the Director of Finance which summarised the key areas of specific interest within the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for Children and Families Services for 2022/23 together with the report considered at the Cabinet meeting on 19 January 2022 and associated appendices. The advisory board was invited to (a) consider the proposed budget for 2022/23 for Children's and Family Services budgets; and (b) review / comment on specific proposals for changes from previous years, to offer assurance to Cabinet and/or identify any matters for consideration that would like to highlight to the Cabinet.

The advisory board additionally received a PowerPoint presentation which provided the context and the links and inter relationship with the Children's Services Business Plan and the Children's Services MTFP 2022/23.

In the presentation, Ms Winter highlighted the following: -

- outlined how Children's Services supports the SCC Business Plan
- how the Somerset Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP) links to the priorities and the Children's Transformation Programme (including, for example SEND Improvement) and the affiliated programme / joint commissioning (for example CAMHS Transformation Plan)
- the different time periods for the areas of work under the transformation plan and that the discussion on the MTFP relates to the 2022/23 budget
- there is the business-as-usual work / statutory functions they undertake, so this isn't the totality of the budget.

The Chair thanked Ms Winter for the time and effort in putting the information together and asked that the information be shared with all Councillors.

The Chair then invited Ms Kenny to present the Children's Services MTFP for 2022/23 and the following main points were raised: -

- total investment in Children's Services is £12.3m, an increase of £13.3% and referred to the information in Table 1 of the Report, which provided detail on the Children's budget
- Director confidence in the MTFP / budget is 'medium' – this is a robust process but there are unknowns / risks, such as the impact on staff capacity across health and social care and education (and unforeseen pressures) and there are mitigating actions
- provided information on the additional funding of £9.8m, as detailed in Table 2 of the Report
- provided information on anticipated cost reduction from transformation, savings and income proposals as detailed in Table 3 of the Report
- referred to the earmarked use of reserves, relating to 2 programmes – Family Safeguarding (£1.3m) and school reorganisation (Crewkerne and Ilminster) (£0.43m) and the capital programme new bids, around building local capacity and sufficiency, including the purchase of residential properties for care placements and investment in homes for children with disabilities (£9.9m across the next 3 years of the MTFP)
- highlighted next steps in budget process ahead of the Full Council meeting on 23 February 2022, which sets the revenue and capital budgets for 2022/23 and Council Tax levels.

The advisory board asked detailed questions and made a number of comments on the Business Plan and the MTFP proposals, which were responded to at the meeting, as follows: -

- request for clarity on the information relating to Children's Services, re SEND, as set out in Appendix 2 of the Cabinet Report (Transformation, savings and income generation proposals). The Council's Assistant Director Inclusion, Dr Hart confirmed that there is no plan to take money out of SENDIAS and what has been agreed is to put additional funding into the SENDIAS budget. Dr Hart said that he is happy to circulate an explanation in writing and share with the Committee. Ms Kenny further explained the principle that a negative figure equates to reinvestment in budget and a positive figure is a reduction in budget. For Children's Services specifically, the figures in the pie chart in the PowerPoint presentation add to £2.1m (anticipated cost reduction from transformation) and is the savings required for Children's Services in 2022/23. It was agreed that a note be circulated to the Committee providing clarification on these points.
- question around the additional statutory capacity for educational psychology and confidence that its sufficient to meet demand – Dr Hart said that work has been done based on assumptions on the number of assessments, reviews and future need. Also aware of the pressures SENCO's are under, especially in smaller schools and are looking at ways to offer practical support to them, to try to reduce some of the burden.
- comment made as to why the 'transport for Yr7 and Yr8 pupils from Ilminster to Crewkerne' is detailed separately to 'home to school transport' in the Report – the Council's Assistant Director, Education, Partnership and Skills, Ms Walker said that this is because of the difference between the MTFP and the budget and are at point of transition, so next time we would not expect to see that separated out in any way.
- question about what work is happening around the home to school transport budget – Dr Hart confirmed that work is ongoing focusing on this issue and are also engaging regionally and at a Council wide level.
- clarification requested on the Early Years funding situation, detailed in the Report. In response Ms Kenny referred to the appendix to the Cabinet Report and to the report to the Schools Forum on 12 January 2022 re the Dedicated Schools Grant Settlement (DSG) 2022/23. The Schools Forum is looking at the Early Years Block of the DSG allocation and the increase in entitlement rates. It was agreed that further information will be shared with the Committee, to help members understand the impact on the whole system (to be added to Scrutiny Committee's work programme).
- question asked about the confidence levels expressed in the Report and the robustness of assumptions around demographics and demand – Ms

Winter said that the assessment has been made that the risk is 'medium' based on a number of factors - the demographic information which comes out nationally inputs into the likely demand; the impact of the pandemic on demand for Children's services is not fully known but the key factor locally is complexity and older children coming into care system, which in turn is more expensive.

- question as to whether there is sufficient resource / capital for the Homes2Inspire building local capacity programme. The Chair highlighted that Homes for Somerset will be an agenda item on the next meeting of the advisory board and will cover these issues. Ms Winter outlined the benefits of Somerset having its own capacity and resource and the Cabinet member, Cllr Chilcott highlighted there had been extra funding received from the DfE which enables more to be done than initially planned and that she welcomed the increase in budget.
- the Chair said that it was important for the advisory board to express the concern that there seems to be a degree of uncertainty around elements of the budget and that risks are ever more complex.
- question as to why the timeline information had been presented in a 'Gantt chart' and also on use of acronyms – Dr Hart said that, for example, the solid arrow on the chart for the Written Statement of Action SEND & Improvement Plan, reflects the period of time for the piece of work but there will be continued workstreams beyond then. Ms Winter confirmed that 'FDAC' stood for the Family and Drug Alcohol Court. This is a national initiative which the Council received funding for / match funding from the Ministry of Justice.

On behalf of the advisory board, the Chair thanked officers for the presentation and that Members still have the opportunity to feed into the budget and MTFP process. The advisory board noted the MTFP for Children and Families Services 2022 – 2023 and the Children's Services Plan and requested additional information / clarification on the following: -

- With reference to the additional funding information set out in Table 2 on page 41 of the Report, information on reasons for increases
- Clarification on how the Ilminster & Crewkerne transport position is shown in the Budget Report
- Clarification on Early Years funding / hourly rates, detailed on page 47 of the Report
- Clarity on SENDIAS funding and clarity on how investments and savings were displayed in Appendix 2 Cabinet Report
- Acceptance of the uncertainty in the budget due to unknowns around the long-term effects and impact of Covid.

7 **Task & Finish Group - update** - Agenda Item 8

The Chair provided a brief verbal update on the Task and Finish Group – Continuity of Children’s Services through Local Government Reorganisation, which the advisory board noted. It was also agreed that the full statement will be shared with members and is set out below: -

The Task and Finish Group (Continuity of Children’s Services through Local Government Reorganisation in Somerset) met on Tuesday 11 January to consider the current progress made and to think about the next steps. The Task and Finish Group members reflected on the significant amount of work this review would involve and the impending Council elections. The elections and the proximity of the pre-election notice period (beginning on 21 March) meant there were now only 2 scheduled meetings of the Committee before the pre-election notice period begins.

The group also acknowledged the officer led work already underway in the LGR process.

After careful consideration the Task and Finish Group members agreed that it would be very difficult for them to complete and conclude the evidence gathering aspect of the review, then interpret that information in a timely manner and make appropriate recommendations, as such they strongly believed the review would benefit from a robust process and specific input from children’s services. The Task and Finish Group felt that, in their opinion as members of this group and Children and Families Scrutiny Committee, that it would be more advantageous to the young people and families for the newly formed joint scrutiny committee, to take up and include this Task and Finish review into the transition work for children’s services, in their forward programme of business.

The members of the group thanked officers and members that went out of their way to help the review.

8 **Items for information** - Agenda Item 9

The advisory board noted the information item which had been circulated since the last meeting: -

(a) Family Safeguarding in Somerset - interim evaluation

It was noted that the decision had been taken that did not need to proceed with taking the scrutiny review update to the Scrutiny Committee, as will now incorporate much of that work into a best practice plan on how scrutiny will ideally work in the new authority.

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

There were no other items of business.

(The meeting ended at 12.17 pm)

CHAIR