

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 Monday 28 February 2022 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr L Redman (Chair), Cllr R Williams (Vice-Chair), Cllr M Dimery and Cllr B Revans
The Revd T Osmond, R Hobbs and E Tipper – co-opted members

Other Members present: Cllr C Lawrence, Cllr F Nicholson, Cllr C Paul, Cllr L Leyshon, Cllr D Loveridge and Cllr T Munt

Apologies for absence: Cllr W Wallace

1 Declarations of Interest - Agenda Item 2

The following declaration of interest was made at the meeting: -

- (a) Councillor T Munt – agenda items relating to Inclusion – Governor at Special School in Somerset - non-pecuniary.

2 Notes of the Advisory Board meeting held on Tuesday 25 January 2022 - Agenda Item 3

The notes of the Advisory Board meeting held on Tuesday 25 January 2022 were agreed and no amendments suggested.

3 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no public questions.

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.

It was noted that this is the last meeting in the Municipal Year as the meeting on Monday 4 April has been cancelled. There is an informal joint workshop with the Adults & Health advisory board on Wednesday 6 April @ 10 am.

The Advisory Board noted the work programme and outcome tracker which will be helpful for the work by the new Committee after the elections.

5 **Inclusion Inquiry** - Agenda Item 6

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting for this agenda item - the Council's Assistant Director, Inclusion, Dr Rob Hart and Mr Brian Walton, Head Teacher Brookside Academy.

The Board received a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation, providing an update on the Inclusion Inquiry which is being led by school leaders as part of the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and developing an evidence-based understanding of what good inclusive practice looks like and suggestions for improvement. Mr Walton outlined the recommendations from the inquiry: -

- better signposting of support services across Somerset for all stakeholders to access;
- need for better local early intervention strategies;
- needs to be better behaviour planning and support structures (be preventative rather than reactive);
- inclusion data should be shared with schools, on the new Schools Data Dashboard, to ensure that evidence based inclusive practice becomes standard;
- trust building – the cornerstone of the findings – trust and transparency central to children, young adults, parents and Somerset staff when seeking advice / support for SEND or inclusion.

Mr Walton also explained the next steps, to ensure the recommendations become a reality: –

- establish governance arrangements - where the recommendations will be held and embed them into the work plan;
- continue with repeated communication messages and recommendations, sharing and celebrating good inclusive practice;
- link the recommendations in with on-going activities across Somerset to identify those already being addressed and any gaps;
- start proactively seeking opportunities to listen to all voices.

The Chair thanked Mr Walton for the excellent presentation and that it was good to hear about the involvement of young people in the inquiry and also welcomed the use of the word 'earlier' intervention. He also said that sharing of data proposed in this will help to build trust.

The Board then discussed the presentation and the following issues were highlighted: -

- governance question – will be role for all organisations and currently the governance structure is through the WSOA;
- data dashboard – there will be training for governors for example, which will be key and need to be transparent across the system;

- what are the outcomes from the Inquiry work / how make it count for children and young adults? There is a great deal of work happening across Somerset and key is bringing all it together;
- what are plans / how will ensure listen to all voices, including protected characteristics? This has been recognised and identified and will be taken forward.

On behalf of the Board the Chair thanked Mr Walton for attending the meeting and said that he would welcome a visit to the school to see the work being done there.

6 Inclusion and engagement in education - Agenda Item 7

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting for this agenda item - the Council's Assistant Director, Inclusion, Dr Rob Hart, Mr Phil Curd, Strategic Manager, Access & Additional Learning Needs and Ms Emily Walters, Head Virtual School & Learning Support. Prior to the meeting, the Board had received more detailed PowerPoint information on inclusion and engagement in education. This agenda item linked with the previous agenda item on the Inclusion Inquiry.

At the meeting, the presenters gave an overview PowerPoint presentation which drew out the main points and issues, covering the following - school attendance, exclusions and suspensions and elective home education, and the role of the Inclusion Partnership Boards; details on key priorities of supporting inclusion and ensuring a consistent and inclusive offer for all children and young people; information on supporting the most vulnerable and role of the Virtual School which can offer support to schools and settings across a broad range of needs.

Dr Hart outlined some key messages – that this is 'work in progress' and there is still a long way to go. He referred to the impact of the pandemic, and growing challenges and levels of need and outlined what are focussing on - in terms of the right support offer, easy to access, a relationship-based approach, working with families and schools and a partnership approach, with schools working together to support and challenge. Dr Hart referred to the more detailed slide pack which provided more information and details on these points.

The Chair thanked Dr Hart, Ms Walters and Mr Curd for the detailed information and for the overview presentation. The Board then discussed the presentation, covering the following – rationale for Inclusion Inquiry and focus on SEND; transition; data on young people not in education, training or employment (NEETs); Parent Carer Forum; anxiety amongst children and young people and families; linking support / role of voluntary sector; how parents and

carers' views were included in the Inclusion Inquiry; what 'success' / 'improvement' will look like; information on pupil referral units; elective home education.

In response, Dr Hart explained that the rationale for the Inclusion Inquiry being set up was the WSoA, which identified that children and young people on SEN were missing out on education as they have been disproportionately impacted and the focus is on engagement and hearing the voices of children and young people as well. Mr Walton said that the data dashboard, referred to in the previous agenda item, will really help and will be a real strength going forward as will the Inclusion Partnership Boards. Dr Hart also said that the Parent Carer Forum has been instrumental in the work around the development of an outcomes framework. The vital work of the PSFA was highlighted and Mr Curd referred to the work of education safeguarding and early help front door and about the work with pupils who are electively home educated. Dr Hart also talked about the focus on early intervention and for schools, parents etc to have confidence in the process and support and decisions being taken.

The Chair thanked all the speakers for the excellent presentation and full discussion and the following matters need to be followed up – how best to share best practice and being open and transparent (data offer), signposting, how bring everyone together.

7 **Homes for Children** - Agenda Item 8

The Chair welcomed the Council's Assistant Director Commissioning & Performance, Ms Helen Price to the meeting for this agenda item. Ms Price gave a PowerPoint presentation which updated the Board on homes for children, high needs fostering and therapeutic education, which followed on from the presentation to Members in June 2021.

The Council has now appointed Homes 2 Inspire, Fostering2Inspire and Shaw Education Trust (all part of the Shaw Trust) as the strategic partner to deliver the service and have almost secured home one and are looking for home two. The Council has also been successful in its bid to the DfE for additional capital funding (£1.026m). The Institute of Public Care (Oxford Brooks) are conducting an evaluation, including what worked well and lessons to be learnt. In summary, Ms Price highlighted: -

- the innovation approach used and rationale for the approach, in terms of rising costs but not outcomes and fragmentation of lives;
- the involvement of children and young people, and that providers liked the values based approach;
- will offer different experience of homes and support which is more stable;

- will offer better value for money, controlling spend, blending care to make effective use of resources;
- have secured an experienced, diverse and good Not For Profit (NFP) provider, which is also making significant investment;
- there has been huge interest and are also supporting other Councils to do something similar.

The Chair thanked Ms Price for the update and that the enthusiasm and commitment is self evident and that he was excited about the project.

The Board then discussed the presentation and raised the following – the importance of interpersonal relationships with staff and young people and the recruitment and retention of staff; ages of children and young people in homes, schooling and where homes might be located; contract questions; support around trauma; how placements could work / lived experience; great initiative, imaginative and looks promising.

In response, Ms Price said that will be able to offer strong career pathways for staff. It is a challenging environment to work in and as the provider is a big NFP, will be able to offer something different to staff. With regard to the questions about the contract and its length, Ms Price explained that it is a strategic partnership with integrated management arrangement and the provider has a lot of experience and good track record in delivery and it will be a 10-year partnership. Ms Price also spoke about the proposed model for the service for the children and young people, which will be flexible and will feel a different experience.

The Chair thanked Ms Price for the detailed update and agreed that an update in 6 months be added to the Committee Work Programme.

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

The advisory board noted that the following information item would now be circulated to members following the meeting - Trauma Informed Somerset.

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

The Chair said that as this was the last formal meeting of the Committee of the 5-year period he wanted to place on record his thanks to Committee members, Cabinet members and support officers. He thanked the Vice Chair, Cllr Rod Williams for his help and support and that it had been an honour to be Chair of the Committee.

The Chair also said that it had been disappointing that more Committee members and senior leaders had not attended the meeting, which was echoed by other Committee members.

(The meeting ended at 12.55 pm)

CHAIR