

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 Monday 16 January 2023 at 1.00 pm

Present: Cllr J Baker, Cllr S Carswell, Cllr A Hadley, Cllr B Height, Cllr J Hunt, Cllr E Potts-Jones, Cllr M Lovell, Cllr F Nicholson (substitute for Cllr S Hart), Cllr J Snell and Cllr L Trimnell (substitute for Cllr S Aujla)
R Hobbs and The Revd T Osmond – co-opted members (who attended virtually)

Other Members present: Cllr H Shearer, Cllr M Chilcott, Cllr S Osborne and Cllr R Wilkins

Other members present virtually: Cllr N Clark, Cllr D Darch, Cllr D Denton, Cllr A Dingwall, Cllr C Ellis, Cllr A Govier, Cllr D Johnson, Cllr E Pearlstone, Cllr M Stanton, Cllr S Wakefield and Cllr R Woods

Apologies for absence: Cllr S Aujla (substituted by Cllr L Trimnell), Cllr S Hart (substituted by Cllr F Nicholson), Cllr J Kenton and E Tipper (co-opted member)
Cllr Munt - unavoidably detained on Council business.

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 12 December 2022 - Agenda Item 3

The Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 12 December 2022 were approved and signed as a correct record.

3 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 4

There were no questions asked, statements made or petitions presented.

The Governance Manager advised that, further to the update to the Committee in December 2022 regarding the questions from Mr Whittaker on Special Guardian issues which had been taken at the November meeting, the Lead member Cllr Tessa Munt has confirmed that she has spoken with Mr Whittaker. Cllr Munt will be reporting back to the Committee at the next meeting.

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 Executive's Forward Plan of planned key decisions in the coming months.

The Governance Manager advised that it is proposed that the draft Somerset Integrated Health and Care Strategy will now be considered by the Adults and Health Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 26 January 2023, rather than as a joint meeting at this time. There was some discussion on this and the Chair confirmed that he would attend the meeting to ensure the views of young people are included in the discussions and also asked that the agenda be circulated to the Committee.

It was agreed that the work plan and outcome tracker be updated.

5 **Verbal Updates on Task and Finish Groups - (a) external placements; (b) home to school transport - Agenda Item 8**

The Chair provided a verbal update on the Committee's Task and Finish Groups and advised that the original timelines have been amended due to the SEND Inspection: -

(a) Sufficiency of External Placements

The Task and Finish Group has held further meetings and looked at the external placements budget information. The Group will be meeting again this week to consider their draft report and findings and recommendations to Executive.

(b) Home to School Transport

The Committee AGREED that the Task and Finish Group on Home to School Transport will be paused. This was agreed as an external review has been commissioned by the service to consider home to school transport provision. It is envisaged currently that this external review will be concluded by the end of March 2023 and by pausing, the Task and Finish Group will avoid duplicating work.

The Committee NOTED the updates.

6 **Scrutiny update on the Ofsted Action Plan - Agenda Item 6**

The Committee received a PowerPoint presentation from the Council's Acting Director Community and Strategy, Paul Shallcross on the Ofsted action plan and progress made. The Inspection of Children's Social Care services in July

2022 rated the service Good across the board and the inspection report was published on 21 September 2022.

The presentation covered the two named areas for improvement, which are – placement sufficiency (which is also a national issue) and which is being considered by the Committee's Task and Finish Group; the take-up of return to home interviews and which is also being considered as a separate agenda item later at the meeting; and other key areas of focus, such as the early help demand management work and strategy discussions and audit work.

The Committee made a number of comments, which were responded to at the meeting:

- What is considered to be the biggest area of concern – *the focus is on keeping children at home / near to home and out of care, so placement sufficiency, including for emergency admissions, for older children with complex needs, is the biggest area of focus.*
- Query on the membership of Local Family Justice Board – *confirmed that involves statutory bodies such as CAFCASS and the local authority.*
- Question on staffing of 'Homes and Horizons' workforce / staffing – *confirmed the staffing, the majority are residential support workers and that the lead officer is happy with the quality of staff recruited.*
- Strategy discussions and Ofsted view - *did not disagree with Ofsted's assessment / outcome and highlighted the work undertaken and completed post Ofsted to understand the decision making; have updated guidance to First Response Team Managers around clearly identifying the rationale for not proceeding to strategy.*
- Early help – *there is huge focus on early help by the Family Intervention Service (FIS); it is essential and value it; work with families on voluntary basis and in the vast majority of cases this happens.*
- Staff turnover in the FIS mentioned, which is causing disruption to families – *there has been significant turnover, some is for positive reasons as staff have moved into social work training for example; there has been increase in number of Team Leaders; doing all can but do have high level of turnover; are reviewing pay rates to see if they are competitive.*
- Foster carer recruitment – *it is early days but has been significant increase in access to the Fostering website and this will hopefully lead to increase in numbers of Foster Carers.*
- Being a foster carer is a rewarding role and should be championed.
- Life story work, which is taking place for the majority of children looked after, and if this is available to all our staff so people do not have to repeat themselves causing frustration – *confirmed that data base does record it and be more organised and efficient.*

It was agreed that the Life Story Work and data around that, will be an agenda item at a future meeting.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Mr Shallcross for the update and presentation.

7 **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) – Trauma Informed Somerset practice model and implementation** – Agenda Item 9

The Chair welcomed the following to the meeting for this item:

- Vikki Hearn, Joint Commissioner, Children's and Health
- Patsy Temple, Consultant in Public Health
- Tim Cockerill, Principal Educational Psychologist
- Tamsin Coles, Consultant Clinical Psychologist

The Committee received a detailed PowerPoint presentation on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) – Trauma Informed Somerset / model and implementation across Somerset. A short film was shown at the start of the presentation and the presentation provided details on the terms used (ACE and trauma informed); 'Sam's story'; impact of childhood trauma; trauma recovery model, layers of intervention and underlying need; consistency, predictability, reliability; creating emotional safety; the five principles of trauma informed care (safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, empowerment); the importance of trauma informed practice and an improved model for Somerset.

Mr Cockerill outlined some examples of trauma informed education: relational behaviour policy and practice and referred to the 'pathfinder' schools who act as 'champions' in the local area, providing support. Ms Hearn highlighted the journey to developing a trauma informed model and the Trauma Informed Charter. The Charter will be released for consultation at the trauma informed network launch event on the 24 January to ensure system approval before being released and that Members are most welcome to attend. The Charter will also ask organisations which sign up to it to nominate a trauma informed champion to join the network, laying the initial groundwork. A copy of the Charter will be shared with the Committee.

Ms Hearn also highlighted the range and number of organisations included in those who have helped to develop the model and proposals.

The Committee made a number of comments, which were responded to at the meeting: -

- Discussion and questions about the work being done with schools, the role of mentoring schools, take-up and role of governors - *confirmed this is around the system working together have trailed this in some schools – there is a mix of school type, but majority are primary schools*

and established pathfinder school / champion; sign-posting to governor support useful; Ms Hearn advised that a coordinator is also being recruited to pull together training resources and training plan for the next two years and to be linked with the development and progression of the Children and Young People's Mental Health Transformation Plan.

- question about how those who are electively home educated would access support – *confirmed that this would be something to be picked up by the new coordinator.*

The Chair asked that the links to information on advice and mentoring be shared with the Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the presenters for the excellent presentation and information and asked for an update on progress in 6 months' time.

8 **Return Home Interviews process and progress** - Agenda Item 7

This item was introduced by the Council's Head of Service Prevention, Lise Bird who outlined the work being done in response to the Ofsted findings on the take up of return home interviews, with improved use of data to inform individual and service planning.

Ms Bird provided an overview of the numbers of missing reports / episodes and the increase in demand, managing risk and the main actions taken including rolling out of the [Philomena Protocol](#) and training and the review and reworking of the return home interview form to ensure capture of all information gathered allowing effective data reporting. Missing Return Interviews are completed by the small sub team within the Family Intervention Service. Ms Bird also highlighted the actions still required and in progress and shared some case examples.

The Committee made a number of comments, which were responded to at the meeting – the work with care providers was discussed; Ofsted regulations issue and need for all to be focussed on what is right for the child; the Philomena protocol is a good example of moving on that path; happy with tenacious approach of our workers; training for individual carers and foster carers also highlighted.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Ms Bird for the update.

9 **Items for Information - Standing Item** - Agenda Item 10

There were no items for information considered at this meeting.

10 **Any other urgent items of business** - Agenda Item 11

There were no other items of business.

(The meeting ended at 3.53 pm)

CHAIR