

Somerset Council – Decisions taken by the Scrutiny Committee - Children and Families on Tuesday, 12 December 2023

Agenda Item No	Topic	Decision
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Part A – Items considered in public

A1	Apologies for Absence	Apologies were received from Councillor C Ellis (substituted by Cllr S Coles), Cllr P Clayton (no substitute), Cllr J Snell (no substitute) and Mrs E Tipper (co-opted member).
A3	Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 November 2023	Resolved that the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee - Childrens and Families held on Wednesday 15 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.
A5	Scrutiny Committee - Children and Families Work Programme	<p>The Committee received and noted the current work plan and outcome tracker and Executive Forward Plan.</p> <p>A key area of focus will be the budget situation and the implications of the current financial situation on Children’s Services – the Chair and Vice Chair will discuss and meet with the relevant Executive members, to look at the best way members can monitor and focus on this in more depth.</p>
A6	2023/24 Children's Services - Budget Monitoring	<p>The Committee received a presentation on 2023/24 Children’s Services budget monitoring, the forecast outturn as at end September (month 6) and verbally updated on the latest position, which is showing the position is worsening, mainly due to situation around external placements.</p> <p>The presentation focussed on home to school transport (mainstream and SEN), DSG and in particular the High Needs forecast deficit position and the statutory override situation.</p>

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		<p>Noted that the Council is refreshing the DSG Deficit Management Plan and this will be presented to the Scrutiny Committee early next year. Reference made to the DBV / SEND programme work - the Newton report has been previously shared with the Committee and this will be recirculated for reference.</p>
<p>A7</p>	<p>Education, Health and Care Assessment and Plan 2022-2023 - Progress update</p>	<p>The Committee considered a report and received a presentation providing a progress update on Special education needs & disabilities (SEND) – improvement activity and Education, health and care plans (EHCP), providing a summary of the data, improvements, impact and ongoing challenges in relation to how the local area has continued to respond to delivering EHCP’s across Somerset since the reinspection of SEND services in November 2022. The Accelerated Progress Plan was signed off by the DfE in May 2023, there are monthly progress reports to the SEND Partnership Board, six-month reviews with DfE and NHSE.</p> <p>The key headline is increase in numbers of plans and the number of annual reviews – there has been a decrease in number of tribunals registered (slide 5). Highlighted the situation re funding and placements and that following the recent funding consultation (presented to Scrutiny meeting in November ‘23) are developing proposals to allocate more high needs funding to schools without need for an EHCP and to make banding more equal between mainstream and special school (slide 6).</p>

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		<p>Highlighted position re SEND in Somerset schools (slide 7) and since 2018 there has been 2.6% increase in total pupil numbers and 78% increase in pupils in specialist settings.</p> <p>Highlighted position re Annual Reviews / timeliness (slide 8) and referenced the LGCSO decision (slide 9). Performance against annual review timeliness will continue to challenge the LA as the number of EHC plans it needs to maintain continues to grow. The link to the Ombudsman report will be shared with the Committee.</p> <p>The Committee agreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the update on EHCPs and the ongoing challenges for teams across the Council and wider partners. 2. To note the activities underway to support improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Planning Meetings offered (and monitored) to every school across Somerset to identify children requiring support from specialist LA teams. • Clarify expectations with schools to ensure that appropriate advice and support in advance of meeting. • Notes the additional staff in place to process Annual Review reports in a timely way. • The scrutiny committee to receive an update in 6 months on impact / uptake / number of reviews completed and so on (KPIs & training).

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A8	Connect Somerset	<p>The Committee received a presentation on Connect Somerset – which is a way of delivering early help in the community. Connect Somerset is all about professionals and community groups working together in partnership to help families and residents to improve their lives.</p> <p>Noted it is a relational model - Members were encouraged to meet their respective Connect Champions – it was noted that they attend the local LCN’s meetings.</p> <p>The Committee thanked officers and the community leaders for attending the meeting and noted the update.</p>
A9	Children's Services Transformation Priorities 2023 - 2026	<p>The Chair referred to the discussions at the last meeting of the Committee on the Children’s transformation priorities and invited volunteers to express a preference, to gain a better understanding / learn more about one of the areas, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for life • CLA Transformation • SEND Strategy • Connect Somerset <p>The Chair is collating the information / names – to be circulated soon.</p>