

## **Annual Report of the Scrutiny Committee – Children and Families**

Lead Member: Councillor Leigh Redman – Chair of the Committee

Lead Officer; David Clark – Service Director – Governance, Democratic and Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

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### **1. Summary**

**1.1.** The Committee is required by the Constitution to provide Full Council with a summary progress report and outcomes of scrutiny. This report covers the work of the former Somerset County Council Scrutiny for Policies Children and Families Committee in the Municipal Year 2022 – 2023 and provides an update from the first meeting held in May 2023 which was the first meeting held in the new unitary Council.

**1.2.** The Committee focusses on the outcomes from the Ofsted Inspection of Children’s Services and the Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) which has the following three 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) and our work plan covers the following broad areas –

- universal education
- SEND and Inclusion
- social care and commissioning
- cross-cutting items

and a number of training items and workshop items.

**1.3.** Members of the Council are reminded that:

- all Members have been invited to attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committees and to contribute freely on any agenda item.
- any Member can propose a topic for inclusion on the Scrutiny Work Programmes.
- any Member can be asked by the Committee to contribute information and evidence and to participate in specific scrutiny reviews.

- 1.4. The Committee has 13 elected Members on it and has up to seven co-opted members appointed as follows - two church representatives (one vacancy), two School Governor representatives (both filled), one representative from the Somerset Schools Forum (vacant) and two parent governor representatives (both vacant). All co-opted members have voting rights on education matters only. We are seeking to appoint representatives to fill the vacancies.
- 1.5. I would like to thank my former Vice Chair, Cllr Oliver Patrick for his help and support over the year and wish him well in his new role. I would also like to thank the committee members and co-opted members for their engagement and officers for providing support to enable us to do our job.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1. Each of our meetings had specific agenda items to consider the work programme and allow members and officers to suggest items we should scrutinise in more depth. This has led to items being added to the work programme and has helped to guide our future work.
- 2.2. At each meeting we review how we monitor how our suggested outcomes and/or recommended actions have been progressed so we can understand the impact of our work and learn how we can better focus our scrutiny work to ensure we have made a difference.
- 2.3. Scrutiny Members have endeavoured through the Committee meetings to make suggestions and express opinions to Directors and Executive members after discussion and debate.
- 2.4. The Committee and I have always endeavoured to approach our task as a 'critical friend' by trying to be supportive to officers and encouraging them to highlight areas of concern to us, whilst hopefully providing a suitably robust challenge to question poor performance and seek reassurance that appropriate action is taken to achieve improvement.
- 2.5. We still feel the Council would benefit from Scrutiny being asked to undertake more pre-Executive decision work to help the transition from policy development to implementation. There has been a marked improvement regarding engagement from Officers in the Directorate and I am working hard to ensure there is no drop off in the support the Committee receives.
- 2.6. I still believe a dedicated Service/Scrutiny link officer would help ensure Committee, Executive members and Service leaders are driving in the same direction and have aligned agendas to better focus our work. The more the service embraces the Scrutiny function and capability this will help to ensure a better service is provided to the young people and families we serve.

### 3. Overview of meetings in 2022 – 2023

3.1. The former Somerset County Council Scrutiny for Policies, Children and Families Committee held 8 formal meetings in the 2022 – 2023 Municipal Year and considered a broad number of issues at its meetings, as follows:

3.2.

Topic	Meeting date(s)
training session for members of the Committee and priorities	20 June 2022
Overview of Family Safeguarding in Somerset	20 June 2022
School Place Planning	20 June 2022
Education and Inclusion Services redesign	25 July 2022
Budgetary pressures in Children’s Services, and creation of 2 Task and Finish Groups – sufficiency of external placements and home to school transport	5 September 2022 3 October 2022 7 November 2022 12 December 2022 16 January 2022 6 March 2023
Involved in the Task and Finish Group on scrutiny function for new Somerset Council	7 November 2022 12 December 2022
2022 Key Stage assessment results for Somerset – initial results and details on outcomes	5 September 2022 7 November 2022
Academisation – moving towards 2030	5 September 2022
Ofsted Inspection Result – Children’s Social Care Services and updates on the post Ofsted service planning and action plan	3 October 2022 7 November 2022 16 January 2023
SEND strategy and development and the Joint local Area SEND Inspection outcomes	3 October 2022 6 March 2023
pre executive / scrutiny on LA Maintained Schools Core Offer and business case	7 November 2022 12 December 2022 6 March 2023
Involved in the Task and Finish Group on scrutiny function for new Somerset Council	7 November 2022
Somerset Connect and links to Frome LCN development	12 December 2022
Workshop item on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s) – Trauma Informed Somerset / model and implementation across Somerset	16 January 2023
Return home interviews process and progress	16 January 2023
‘Education for Life’ Strategy	6 March 2023
Considered the work plan, outcome tracker, Executive Forward Plan	Each meeting
items for information	Each meeting

### 3.3. Meeting held 4 May 2023

This was the first meeting of the new council and the new Scrutiny Committee – Children and Families. At this meeting we considered the following items: -

**LA maintained schools core offer** – we received an update from the Council’s Service Director Education Partnerships & Skills on the [Update on LA maintained school core offer](#), which went live on 1 April 2023. As explained at the meeting, there is wider concern of position of school finances and have established 4 working parties, made up of school leaders, council leaders, to analyse budgets, understand wider picture / benchmarking information. The Service Director outlined the focus of work for coming term.

We discussed the role of governors, KPI’s, next year’s process, academisation, information on the four Relationship Managers, pressures on schools / budgets and noted the update and the new core offer [information booklet](#) and agreed we would receive a further update in 6 months’ time.

**Sub group on education standards** – we then discussed and supported the proposal to establish a [sub group](#) on education standards.

There will be 3 – 5 members appointed to the sub group and volunteers and expressions of interest will be sought following the non key Decision: [Setup of a Standing Panel for Education Standards](#)

[SEND Strategy](#) – we then had a presentation on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy and update on Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) - developed as a response to the 2 remaining areas of weakness after the 2022 Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection. These are partnership plans, jointly owned by the Council and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and developed in partnership with education providers and parent carers and other partners.

The new SEND Strategy has been approved by the ICB and the SEND Partnership Board – a 3-year programme for improving SEND services and outcomes. The APP is a 12-month action plan and was submitted to the Department for Education on 21 March 2023 and has now been approved. We noted the Autism Strategy is in development and noted the update – there will be 6 monthly progress updates (progress on the 29 ‘missions’).

[Reforms in social care](#) – we received a presentation children’s social care reforms and draft consultation response discussed. In February 2022, government published implementation strategy and consultation, ‘Stable homes built on love’, backed by £200m of additional investment. The strategy is based on six pillars of reform. Issue around the recruitment and retention of social workers was discussed.

We supported the proposed response, and that Somerset is involved at every level doing everything it can (Pathfinder areas), and also to highlight good work being done, including the foster care and recruitment campaign. The response will be shared with the Committee, for information.

**Sufficiency of external placements** – response from the Executive to the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, which were agreed by the Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on [6 March 2023](#)

Cllr Munt, lead member thanked the Task and Finish Group for its work and report and advised that the Executive has seen the report and will have a deeper look / spend more time on this and some other matters which relate to education, children and families, in a specific meeting.

The Council's Executive Director, Ms Winter provided an update on the recommendations - the Homes and Horizons project, part of which is to create both residential and foster homes for children with complex needs; recruitment of foster carers for the complex needs fostering scheme - that scheme is to take up to 20 young people with complex needs who believe could be moved from residential care to fostering; working to develop sufficiency of fostering and residential care for children in Somerset through own provision; still work with independent sector / local providers; placements in unregistered provision & complex needs - highest priority children to move into the Homes and Horizons residential homes as soon as they are open; block contract places issues - being considered and use where appropriate; agree should refer to 'placement that children are in'; national issues highlighted; workforce issues. Officers said that they are very happy to continue to provide updates to the Committee on progress on Homes and Horizons and provision.

The formal response from Executive will be received and considered by the Task and Finish Group and a review of the Task & Finish Group outcomes by the Committee should be agreed accordingly by the Committee and the Executive/Lead Member.

**Home to school transport** – we then received a verbal update on this Task and Finish Group. Edge Public Solutions were appointed to undertake a review of the Council's home to school transport operations. This has been led by Richard Hall (Director, Edge) and as part of the review, met with members of the Scrutiny Committee task and finish group. Mr Hall has now prepared a final report and presentation which has been shared with officers for comment.

We noted that a further meeting with the task and finish group will be held to hear and discuss the report and conclusions. This meeting took place in mid-

May and requested that copy of the consultant's report be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee members once it is delivered, and agreed that: -

- the Scrutiny Committee receive an update from the Lead member / Executive member, detailing information on the timelines / plan specific to the recommendations outlined in the report, along with how Scrutiny can feed into that work.
- due to the urgent nature of the imperative for change (delivering required savings, and protection of the service from risk of failure), the Task and Finish Group will ask for an initial response back from the Executive for the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 July 2023.

### **3.4. Meeting on 12 July 2023**

Our second meeting in the municipal year will be on Wednesday 12 July 2023, beginning at 10am. We have a busy agenda and at this meeting we will be discussing the following areas: -

- Budget outturn position 22/23 and issues 23/24 - overview
- Academisation / Education Finance
- Update on Homes & Horizons Partnership
- Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing in Somerset – and will include an update on Trauma Informed Somerset practice model and implementation.
- Home to School Transport Task and Finish Group – interim update
- Somerset Youth Justice Partnership Board Annual Plan
- Items for information

We will be invited to attend the Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9 August 2023 for this agenda items – Appointment of providers to deliver housing related support and accommodation for 16–25-year-olds.

## **4. Consultations undertaken**

- 4.1.** The Committee invites all Councillors to attend and contribute to its meetings. The Committee Chair and Vice Chair invite prospective report authors to attend their pre-meetings and Lead Officers are engaged in this process.

## **5. Implications**

- 5.1.** The Committee considers carefully and often asks for further information about the implications as outlined in the reports considered at its meetings.

## **6. Background papers**

- 6.1.** [Report to SCC Full Council meeting on 1 March 2023](#)

- 6.2. Further information about the Committee including dates of meetings and agendas and reports from previous meetings, are available via the [Council's website](#).

**Note** For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author