

Minutes

of the Meeting of the

Children & Young People Services Policy & Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 5 March 2020

held at the Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset

Meeting Commenced: 10.00am Meeting Concluded: 12:10 pm

Councillors:

A Wendy Griggs (Chairman)
P Steve Hogg (Vice Chairman)

P Marc Aplin
P Ciarán Cronnelly
P Hugh Gregor
P Nicola Holland
P Huw James
P Lisa Pilgrim
P Tim Snaden

P Caroline Cherry
P Mark Crosby
P Ann Harley
A Ruth Jacobs
A Stuart McQuillan
P Geoff Richardson
P Richard Westwood

P: Present

A: Apologies for absence submitted

Other Councillors in attendance: None

Officers in attendance: Dawn Newton, Eifion Price, Sally Varley (People and Communities), Hazel Brinton, Michèle Chesterman, Katherine Sokol (Corporate Services)

Other persons in attendance: None

CAY Chairman's Welcome 21

In the absence of the Chairman it was agreed that the Vice-Chairman, chair the Panel meeting.

Resolved: that the Vice Chairman, Councillor Steve Hogg chair the meeting.

CAY Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (Agenda item 3) 22

None

CAY 23 Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 October 2019 (Agenda item 4.1)

Resolved: that the minutes of the last meeting held on 24 October 2019 be approved as a correct record.

CAY 24 Matters referred by Council, the Executive, other Committees and Panels (Agenda Item 5)

Children's Champion Group - Change of name to the Corporate Parenting Panel (attached)

The Assistant Director, Children's Support and Safeguarding presented the report. Members were informed that a change to the name of the Children's Champions Group and amendment of the terms of reference had been proposed. In order to better describe its purpose, it was proposed that the group should be known as the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Assistant Director, Children's Support and Safeguarding explained that under the Children Act 2004, local authorities had a duty to promote co-operation between 'relevant partners', including the police, the NHS and education providers, whilst those partners had a duty to co-operate with the local authority in turn. Guidance on the Act highlighted that corporate parenting was a 'task' that must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 defined for the first time in law the responsibility of corporate parents to ensure, as far as possible, secure, nurturing and positive experiences for looked-after children and young people and care leavers. It was nationally recognised as good practice for Councils to establish a corporate parenting panel.

Members discussed the change of name and raised concerns that the change of name to corporate parenting panel could lead to a change in emphasis for the group including no longer performing the role of being a children's champion. However, the Panel was reassured that the breadth of the terms of reference had not changed in terms of agenda items which would remain the same. In addition, it was stressed that corporate parenting was also used in statutory guidance as well as legislation.

Concluded: that the Panel endorsed the decision of the Children's Champions Group to change its name to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

CAY 25 North Somerset Fostering Recruitment Strategy 2019-20 (Agenda Item 6)

The Service Leader, People and Communities presented the report on the North Somerset Fostering Strategy 2019-20. The report provided an

overview of the fostering service at the current time, the steps being taken to improve the strategy and the direction of travel.

Members were informed that at the time of writing the report North Somerset Council had 241 children and young people who were looked after between the ages of 0-17. Local authorities were required to ensure they had an effective recruitment sufficiency strategy in place to continue recruitment and development of foster carers. North Somerset Council was responsible for ensuring there were enough placements available to meet the diverse needs of the children under its care. The report outlined North Somerset Council's recruitment strategy in response to the assessed local context and children's need.

The fostering recruitment team was responsible for the recruitment, assessment and retention of foster carers with the aim of ensuring a sufficiency of suitable placements to promote the best outcomes for children who were looked after. The aim was to recruit a range of carers that reflected the diversity of both the local community and young people in North Somerset who could provide a range of short-term, long-term and respite placements. The aim being to have a significant majority of children looked after to be cared for within North Somerset by North Somerset foster carers, providing placements for local children.

A Marketing Officer had now been appointed and in May 2019 North Somerset Council Fostering Service, with additional funding from the Trusted Relationships Team made the decision to bring the Fostering Network's Mockingbird Family Model to the area.

Members were informed that a range of fostering recruitment activities had been undertaken including: social media postings; regular articles in North Somerset Life; local press releases; a £50 incentive for staff introducing a new carer; attendance at community events; posters and displays at libraries; coffee mornings and open evenings advertised through Facebook; provision of Skills to Foster courses; staff communication opportunities such as The Knowledge, Noticeboards; developing positive relationships with those who might support fostering efforts; local advertising opportunities; positive relationships with communications colleagues; attending and sometimes hosting quarterly meetings with South West Fostering Consortium and responding to queries and offering home visits to those who were ready to foster.

Members discussed ways to promote fostering. It was acknowledged that word of mouth from existing foster carers was crucial as they would give greater encouragement to others to foster. Members discussed using foster carer's week and national foster care as mechanisms to promote fostering and working with parish and town councils.

Members enquired how the success of the strategy would be measured. Officers responded that success would be measured on the number of foster carers recruited. Currently just over 100 children looked after were living with foster carers. The aim was to increase not reduce the numbers of looked after independent carers.

Success was largely dependent on the amount and quality of support whilst fostering which was why North Somerset which was why the Mockingbird Family Model was being adopted. The model consisted of Constellations of up to ten foster families and 18 children and young people who were supported by the Hub Home Foster Carer who offered support, guidance, sleepovers, monthly activities and training or events to the group of foster carers and children within the Constellation. A Constellation could also support the birth or adopted children of the foster carers as well as support children who were looked after return to their birth families.

Members of the Panel had been asked to submit questions in advance of the meeting and the following queries were raised under this item with officer responses in italics:

- In terms of promoting fostering might it be appropriate for councillors to enquire in their area to see if the Council could acquire more business support like the example of Costa? Clevedon had a mass of cafes and the councillor would be happy to do this if given direction. There was a Baptist church as well which has run children's groups and may be a possible source of pioneers? – *The Council's recently appointed a marketing officer would be looking at marketing opportunities. Opportunities were being investigated to publicise fostering more widely and hold marketing events. If members were aware of any specific contacts could they email the Assistant Director Children's Support and Safeguarding who would then pass on to the marketing officer to make direct contact.*
- Also, might more councillors be encouraged to share marketing messages on social media about the need for foster carers and to increase the frequency of this if required? – *If councillors own twitter accounts getting the message out was always helpful. There was also a fostering logo which could be used by individuals on social media.*
- Was there any way the agency foster carers from outside North Somerset could be reduced given the needs of the child and their link to families and or scrutinise this aspect of care or this was reviewed by the CQC? – *All local authorities were competing against internal/external fostering agencies of which there were many (some for profit and some not for profit). Local authorities had to compete with them in terms of recruitment of staff and the money paid for foster carers. In addition, all had to comply with statutory guidance, regulations and national minimum standards and received inspections from Ofsted.*

Concluded:

(1) that the Panel receive and comment on the report on the North Somerset Fostering Strategy 2019-21.

(2) that the Panel be provided with information on early help and an update on preventing younger people coming into care.

(3) that the Panel be provided with performance information to include the numbers of foster carers.

**CAY
26 Update on Progress to-date in Delivering the Education Commissioning Strategy (Agenda Item 7)**

The Service Leader, Strategic Planning & Governance, People & Communities, presented the report on the progress to date in delivering the Education Commissioning Strategy. The Education Provision in North Somerset – A Commissioning Strategy is the Council's Education Delivery Plan. It sets out how the Council would work with existing and new partners to commission and deliver the right numbers of school and pre-school places in the right locations to meet Basic Need. The report reviewed and provided a summary update of the progress made to deliver the actions recommended in the latest plan 2018 – 2021. The latest Education Provision in North Somerset – A Commissioning Strategy was approved by the Executive on 4 September 2018.

For the 2019/20 school year, to date, members were informed that there had been enough school places to meet the needs for all children that required a mainstream primary or secondary school allocation. There were also enough numbers of early years places for all those requiring a pre-school provision.

Members were made aware of the latest published percentages of North Somerset pupils securing a preference school place on National Offer Day. For 2019/20 93.47% achieved their first preference of primary school and 94.99% achieved their preference of secondary school. With regards securing one of their school preferences it was 99.04% for primary and 99.39% for secondary. North Somerset achieved one of the three best first preference rates for secondary schools across local authorities in England in 2019. Benchmarking updates for 2020 will follow in due course. rates for secondary schools across local authorities in England in 2019.

The Lead Officer referred to Appendix 1 (Update – North Somerset Council Cluster-Wide School Plans) and provided members with updates on the clusters at Backwell, Churchill, Clevedon, Portishead, Pill, Weston and SEND review actions.

Members asked and received clarification on issues in relation to expansion of schools, breach classes and air quality assessments for SEND schools.

Members were informed that work would begin over the summer on the next Education Commissioning Strategy 2021-2024 with consultations from early 2021.

Concluded:

(1) that the Panel receive and comment on the progress made to date in delivering the projects listed in the Education Provision in North Somerset – A Commissioning Strategy 2018 – 2021.

**CAY
27** **Month 9 Children’s Services Budget Monitor (Agenda Item 8)**

The Finance Business partner presented the report outlining the spend against budget for children’s services. The report summarised and discussed the 2019/20 estimated spend against budget for children’s services, highlighted key variances, movements and contextual information. The report provided further details on the month 9 report that was due to be presented to the Executive on 5 February 2020. The report also referred to the principles and outcomes associated with the setting of the 2020/21 budget.

The overall year end position for Children’s Services after use of earmarked reserves was net expenditure of £30.351m compared to a budgeted amount of £28.946m resulting in a projected overspend of £1.405m (4.9%). This position represented a small improvement when compared with the month 8 position reported to the Executive and compared well against an overspend of £1.844m in 2018/19.

There had been some significant growth in 2019/20 but cost pressures continued in areas such as adoptions, children’s centres and early years provision, legal costs, support to families with disabled children and education related services.

Members of the Panel had been asked to submit questions in advance of the meeting and the following queries were raised under this item with officer responses in italics:

- Referring to the Children’s Services budget monitor, in s3.24 with reference to the MTFP might it be more cost effective if the council were to directly employ an educational psychologist and or social worker/s to help deliver the EHCP assessments? On the basis that modelling suggests that this is a growing statutory obligation and we would avoid agency fees, delays to our service and provide certainty. Might this form part of our work plan to assess the best methods of service delivery? - *There is a contract in place with Somerset to provide educational psychologists of where there is currently a national shortage. The first port of call would be to negotiate with Somerset. If that failed the Council would have to use short term agency resources.*
- We may think as a group to employ directly a clinical psychologist and on-costs with that if recruit internally? – *That would be one of the options the Council would look consider but the first port of call would be to negotiate with Somerset.*
- I was concerned that as s3.31 sets out there are significant problems in terms of funding and in s3.32 there is reference to ‘significant

transformation activity', could we have officers' views on what this last phrase might mean? – *The intention of s3.28 – 3.32 was to illustrate the scale of the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit and generate an understanding that the deficit will likely increase unless significant additional funding comes from government or significant changes are made to the SEND model, namely, either to reduce the number of children who require special school places or to increase the supply of special school places (or both).*

- With regards S3.6, can we as a committee have more information on the stepdown policy where children are removed from residential to family settings. I appreciate there are cost savings but how are we scrutinising the process of the children's transformation programme 2019/20. Is there more qualitative data on this? – *response to follow.*
- Regarding the family new Adoption Agency, Adoption West, we mentioned previously concerns about scrutiny. Is it possible for either us or as a panel to see Adoption West or a small group to attend their meetings? Should we have this as part of the work programme? It has been operating since April 2019 and do we have reports on its performance? - *Adoption West Ltd is co-owned by six local authorities including North Somerset. When it was established the scrutiny arrangements were discussed. It was decided it would be a significant amount of work if Adoption West was scrutinised by all six local authority scrutiny panels. Therefore, it was agreed that all six would meet as a group to scrutinise that way. As Adoption West has been running for less than 12 months there are currently no performance reports but when the Annual Report is available this will be reported to Panel.*

Members asked and received clarification regarding an update on the Children's Transformation Programme.

Concluded: that the Panel received and discussed the 2019/20 forecast spend against budget for children's services and the risks and opportunities associated with the medium-term position.

CAY Performance Monitoring (Agenda Item 9)

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The Assistant Director, Children's Support and Safeguarding presented the report. In addition to the standard items, the report included an overview of trends in the number of families receiving Early Help, Children in Need, Children on a Child Protection Plan, Children Looked After (CLA), including demographic data, Foster Carers, Care Leavers, High Impact Families, Missing Children and Child Sexual Exploitation.

One inspection relating to North Somerset Council services and/or North Somerset Schools was carried out since the last report to the Panel and published on the Ofsted website – Backwell Secondary School – inspection date 28 January 2020. Schools are graded either 'Outstanding', 'Good',

'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate'. Backwell Secondary School was rated 'Good'.

Members of the Panel had been asked to submit questions in advance of the meeting and the following queries were raised under this item with officer responses in italics:

- Do we have statistics for pupil premium rather than free school meals? – *There has been a significant upward trend in these figures. These could be provided to a future panel.*
- The significant upward trend in early help episodes reported by the Children's Centre is of concern. Given the changes that have happened recently how will we keep monitoring this? – *We will be monitoring through early help, schools and professionals.*
- Could we be told about the care leavers' progress through achieving aspirations? Is there any possibility of further funding which I see is finished? – *The education percentage was 53% with a training target of at least 70%. Some further statistics would be brought to a future panel on this.*
- It looks as if supported or residential lodging is increasing. Does ASH or the children's scrutiny panel scrutinise the quality of this housing. Might this be part of the work of the panel or could we arrange a discrete visit? – *Supported accommodation is used for older young people as a way of helping them achieve independence skills. Whilst the Panel does not scrutinise, members are provided with updates on the numbers. The Council makes visits to residential lodging, some of which are registered and some not.*
- Are all our looked after children enrolled in appropriate schools? – *All of our primary aged children are enrolled. Five or six secondary children are waiting to be enrolled mainly due to children having moved. Others have been excluded and are waiting to be re-integrated. The Council provides additional schooling and mentoring, where required.*
- Have any of our children had to suffer repeated moves from one school to another or from one home to another? – *Data on the number of times children move placement will be provided to the Panel. The figure has been too high but is improving.*
- Is there any evidence that any of our children who reside outside North Somerset are being exploited by gangs or adults? – *This is a topical issue that we will keep a close eye on. Yes, some children are exploited sexually and criminally. Those have been identified and safety plans have been put in place. A list is also kept of children who are susceptible to this type of exploitation and this is monitored.*

- There are 14 children in North Somerset seeking asylum. The BREXIT procedures must be making things difficult for our officers. Could I have a comment about the problems being faced (citizenship fees are costly) – *Responses from the Home Office have indicated that asylum status has slowed down since government work around BREXIT increased. With regards the cost to apply for EU citizenship the government has removed the fee.*
- Are there any children facing deportation in 2021? – *Under 18s do not face deportation.*

Concluded: that the Panel receive the performance information presented in the report and comment on both areas for improvement and areas of good improvement.

CAY 29 Time of Panel Meetings in 2020-21 (Agenda Item 10)

The Council approved the draft 2020/21 Municipal Calendar at its meeting on 12 November 2019 – but in doing so invited individual committees and panels to determine the start time of their meetings.

Meetings of this Panel were currently scheduled to start at 10.00 am and the draft dates for 2020/21 were: 18 June 2020, 29 October 2020, 11 March 2021.

Concluded: that CYPS Panel meetings for the Municipal Year 2020/21 remain at 10.00 am.

CAY 30 The Panels' Work Plan (Agenda item 12)

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer provided an update on the Panel's Work Plan.

The next meeting of the CYPS School Organisation Scrutiny Steering Group was scheduled to take place on 21 April at 2.00 pm. The agenda items included:-

- Update on Baytree, Parklands and Chestnut Park projects
- Updates on the SEND Review and some potential new consultations alongside Bayside.
- Thoughts on possible options for the 2021 – 2024 Commissioning Strategy which officers would start work on over the summer.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that there were long standing vacancies in added member representation of the CYPS Panel.

The Localism Act 2011 stated that Scrutiny Committees which have an 'education function', like our CYPS, must have 1 voting Anglican and 1 Roman Catholic Diocese representative if they have Anglican and RC

Schools in the local authority area. These committee members may only vote on education matters.

The CYPS Panel may appoint governors of foundation or voluntary schools, as well as parent governors of local authority schools as co-opted members. Their voting rights are at the authority's discretion, but a scheme would have to be published of which co-optees can or cannot vote.

The Panel could allow whoever else it would want to speak (or vote) but this would have to be made public.

Members discussed future topics for the work plan and suggested that youth services and youth engagement should be added.

It was also suggested that a regular item be added to future Panels to review any items requiring actions.

Concluded:

- (1) that the work plan be received and updated as agreed.
- (2) that panel members consider the way forward with appointment of added members and delegate to democratic services to organise.

Chairman
