

Minutes

of the Meeting of

The Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 22 February 2024

Kenn Room

Meeting Commenced: 10.00 am

Meeting Concluded: 12.25 pm

Councillors:

Joe Tristram (Chairperson)

Wendy Griggs (Vice-Chairperson)

Annabelle Chard

Stuart Davies

Thomas Daw

Clare Hunt

Sue Mason

Michael Pryke

Apologies: Councillors: Nicola Holland, Tom Nicholson and David Shopland.

Absent: Councillors Marc Aplin and Martin Williams.

Also in attendance: Councillors Catherine Gibbons and Jenna Ho Marris .

Officers in attendance: Claire Shiels (Director Children's Services), Pip Hesketh (Assistant Director, Education Partnerships), Jane Anstis (Assistant Director - Children's Services), Melanie Watts (Head of Finance), Brent Cross (Policy and Scrutiny Senior Officer) and Liz Godfrey-Day (Policy and Scrutiny Support Officer)..

CAY Declaration of disclosable pecuniary interest (Standing Order 37)

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None.

CAY Minutes

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Minutes of the CYPS meeting of 19 October 2023, to approve as a correct record.

Recommended: that the minutes of the meeting of 19 October 2023 be approved as a correct record.

CAY 20 Q3 Performance Monitor

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, introduced the report which contained an overview of the newly developed Key Performance Indicators basket for children's support and safeguarding services. The updated report also included benchmarking data and stretch targets against the benchmarks.

The overall picture was varied and needed to be set against the context of the three consecutive Requires Improvement judgements from Ofsted, but the new leadership team was focused on the overall improvement of Children's Services. The main identified areas of pressure in the system were in the recruitment and retention of staff, and in management oversight and 'grip'. A six-month transformation funding grant had been obtained to increase management and social worker capacity which would assist in working towards the targets.

Comments and queries from Members ranged around the following topics:

- What a similar report from a 'Good' rated authority would look like
- Whether family hubs and digital meetings could reduce some of the pressure in the system, and that there were resource pressures in the family support and safeguarding services aggravated by national pressures on recruitment and retention.
- That the causes of the three consecutive Requires Improvement judgements would take time and consistency to put right; the management and leadership oversight layers had been lacking grip, but this was being worked on. It was important to note that there were areas of high performance reflected in the report.
- That the directorate could not yet be confident that families and others knew how to access services, and that there was an emphasis on promoting services and raising referral rates into the services.
- That the measures of a 'Good' local authority would be in the culture of clear goals that all staff and service users would be able to buy into, and specifically into measures such as the caseload numbers of social workers, the proportion of agency staff, that the leadership team was joined-up (in terms of stability and all giving the same message). Overall, the aspiration was for an air of kindness and a recognition of the overriding importance of children's wellbeing.
- Attracting staff to North Somerset – the directorate now had some scope to think creatively about recruitment pipelines.

Recommended: that the report be received and comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

CAY 21 2023-24 MTFP Progress and 2024-25 MTFP Delivery Plan

The report was presented by the Head of Finance and included detail on the in-year budget monitoring position for the Children's Services directorate highlighting key variances, movements and contextual information. It also made reference to the principles and outcomes associated with the setting of the 2024/25 budget and on-going financial risks.

The bulk of the £6.975m overspend was on child placements, followed by staffing.

It was noted that placement cost fluctuated year-on-year both in terms of the numbers of children in care at any one time and also in respect of the complexity of need. Costs also varied depending on the type of provision and support provided, with planned entry into care being less costly. The service continued to face challenges in terms of the right mix of provision being available to support local need, although this was also highlighted as a national issue.

The Head of Finance advised of the 'valuing care' workstream that had been implemented by the senior leadership team in recent months to transform many aspects of service delivery, decision-making and reporting; this included the introduction of Panels which provided an opportunity to ensure that all options and impacts be discussed, including financial.

£8m had been added to budget for 2024-25 to baseline the service using forecast information held at the end of December, and also a savings target of £2m, largely linked to the planned step-down programme.

In discussion, Members raised the following topics:

- Whether an informal briefing could be provided to give more detail on the planned savings to be made in the 2024-25 MTFP Delivery Plan.
- That the mix of the right type of homes for children included sufficient numbers of foster carers, residential children's homes, in-home support and supported accommodation for 16 to 18 year olds.

Recommended: that the report be received and comments forwarded to officers in the form of minutes.

CAY 22 Children's and Young People's Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

The CYPS Chairman presented the report from the Social Worker Recruitment and Retention working group, which summarised the activity and recommendations of the working group on the subject.

Officers and Members then discussed: revisiting the councillor enrichment session on Children's Services that had been run at the start of the previous administration; the timeline for implementing the recommendations; the draft work being done on social worker recruitment and retention internally by Children's Services; and that communication work needed to be done to raise public awareness of what social work was.

Concluded: that it be **recommended** to the Executive Member that:

1. Career progression within the social work team be reviewed.
2. Staff retention be promoted by implementing a revisit of the learning and development offer, improving the quality and consistency of North Somerset's children's services presentation online and in other public fora, considering "golden handshakes" or retention bonuses, and to insert the question at leaving interviews: "what would make you want to return at a later point in your career?"
3. The permissions on social workers' work phones be reviewed.

4. Regular invitations for members to observe and understand the work of children's services be created.

CAY **The CYPS Panel's Work Plan**
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The Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer discussed the Panel's work plan and invited discussion with Members for additional items to add to it, as well as picking up any actions from the meeting.

Officers suggested a year-long programme of informal briefings on a variety of topics, and there was discussion of whether there should be a series of informal meetings outside of working hours, at venues around the district, halfway between each formal meeting.

The Chairperson also led a brief discussion of the Panel's working groups and reminded Members that the Home to School Transport consultation was about to go live, and that the School Places consultation was due to end on 15 March.

There was also discussion of the formation of a Children and Housing working group which would meet jointly with the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and the possibility of forming a working group on Supported Living Sufficiency.

Chairman
