

Notes

of the Informal Virtual Meeting of the

Children & Young People Services Policy & Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 21 October 2021

held via MS Teams

Meeting Commenced: 10.00 am Meeting Concluded: 12:20 pm

Councillors:

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

Marc Aplin

P Mark Crosby

A Ann Harley

Ruth Jacobs

P Lisa Pilgrim

A Richard Westwood

P Caroline Cherry

P Ciarán Cronnelly

A Hugh Gregor

P Nicola Holland

A Huw James

Tim Snaden

P: Present

A: Apologies for absence submitted

Other Councillors in attendance: Catherine Gibbons

Officers in attendance: Sheila Smith, Carolann James, Pip Hesketh, Sally Varley, Sindy Dube, Naomi Addicott, Brent Cross, Michèle Chesterman

Right to Speak: Angie Griggs, North Somerset Parent Carers Working Together (The Parent Carer Forum in North Somerset)

CAY Election of Vice-Chairman (Agenda item 1)

Recommendation of election of Vice Chairman, Cllr Steve Hogg at informal Panel meeting on 30 June 2021 (to be deferred for ratification at next formal panel meeting).

CAY Minutes and Notes (Agenda item 3)

Formal Panel Meeting Minutes – 11 March 2021, recommended for approval as a correct record at Informal Panel meeting dated 30 June 2021 (to be deferred for ratification at next formal Panel meeting).

Informal Panel Meeting Notes – 30 June 2021 attached for information.

CAY Provisional Dates for Panel meetings 2022/21 (Agenda item 5)

16 June 2022, 20 October 2022, 9 March 2023

Concluded: that the Panel note the provisional dates for Panel meetings in 2022/23

CAY Chairman's Update on CYPS Panel Working Groups (oral report) (Agenda item 6)

The Chairman provided an update on the CYPS Panels working groups.

Joint CAMHS Group – Further meeting scheduled to discuss the gap analysis.

Children's Improvement Focus Group – Further meeting scheduled to scrutinise the effectiveness of the front door.

School Organisation Scrutiny Steering Group

The Head of Strategic Planning and Governance, Children's Services provided members with the following updates:

Ravenswood

Members were informed that a flood had occurred in the annex and main building and some children were being educated at the Campus as a contingency measure. It was anticipated that with effect from 22 October 2021 the resources would be returned to the annex building with repair work continuing over the half term and the students returning to the main school building on 1 November 2021.

Baytree

It was reported that a pre-judicial review application had been lodged on 8 October 2021 by a local resident which challenged the appropriation and planning decisions in relation to the Baytree scheme. The Council had provided a response, to the pre-planning process, stating that it did not consider there were grounds for a judicial review.

The recommendation was that no actions should be taken on site before the decision was taken in relation to a judicial review. Members discussed communications and contingency built in for delays and also impact on family life. Members noted that the Authority could not statutorily delay any child's education. The issue would not be one of delay to education but the cost of

commissioning the education elsewhere. It was essential to be clear about what those costs were.

Churchill SEMH

Members were informed that the DfE led the project with the Council invited to attend meetings, for information. The case had proceeded for formal sign off for the Secretary of State to pay for the process at the end of September 2021. Funding of £7m was available to build the school. The DfE intended to work with the Council to provide facilities for the school to open temporary accommodation a year earlier in 2022.

As a free school LERNITMAT were required to undertake various Section 9 consultations on their plans with the community from 1 November 2021 which would involve liaising with key councillors (including the local ward councillor). Along with the positives it was flagged that there would be challenges from residents in relation to the building of a special school in Churchill.

Concluded: that the Panel receive and consider the oral report

CAY LJAR – Response to DfE with proposed Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) (Agenda item 7)

The Director of Children's Services provided members with a brief introduction to the report and invited the Assistant Director, Education Partnerships to present the detail. Members were informed following the outcome of the LJAR visit in May 2021 the authority had provided its response to the DfE and the proposed accelerated progress plan.

Members had been provided with the letter of written representation sent to the DfE jointly from the Authority and the CCG. Although the Improvement Notice was issued to a local authority there was an acknowledgement of the joint responsibility and accountability across the CCG and the local authority. The local authority had yet to hear the outcome as to whether the DfE had decided to issue such a notice but that was not affecting progress on the APP.

Of the 160 actions in the APP 82 were due by the end of December 2021. It was originally anticipated there would be 33 actions with green status at the end of this month but the actual figure was 16. It was anticipated there would be 25 amber but the actual figure was 45. However, there were fewer red actions than anticipated with more actions completed.

Members queried the 9 red ratings. Three were connected to the JSNA which had been delayed. Two were in relation to the way attendance and attainment were being measured. There had been different parameters around attainment and attendance over the last couple of years which was the reason for the red RAG rating. One of the reasons was in relation to capacity for Quality Assurance (QA). It had been agreed that some capacity would be added to the SEND team to undertake more QA work. It was anticipated that the red RAG rating would change due to the time lag between the point at which it was agreed that resources would be added and the individual taking up the post and starting to make a difference. Some were waiting for sign off from managers before they could turn green.

Members asked and received clarification on in relation to the following queries:-

- *We are receiving additional EHCPs from Somerset Services. Is that what the additional QA resource is for or are we appointing additional staff?* – the QA resource involves recruiting two senior members of staff allocated to the SEND team for a year to identify and understand what the 'business as usual' need for resources is.
- *Why are the tables which have been circulated to members of the panel different to the ones being displayed and could an updated version be circulated to members?* – Members of the panel have received the version of the document sent to the DfE. The RAG ratings are currently being monitored on a weekly basis and as a result some of the colours are changing. An updated version will be emailed on a monthly basis to panel members.
- *North Somerset has inputted extra resources and capacity. Have our partners, who need to support or lead on some of those actions, done the same?* - Yes, they have to a degree. There are areas of pressure still which are SALT and CAMHS where waiting lists have been lengthy for some time. There is a commitment to do the work but when resources go in there is always a time lag. Our partners are starting to join our Friday meetings so the next update may provide a more vivid picture of what is going on in their areas.

Concluded:

(1) that the Panel receive and consider the report

(2) that the Panel be provided with monthly updates of the North Somerset Local Area Accelerated Progress Plan.

CAY Children's Improvement Plan

Quality Assurance Update (Agenda item 8)

The Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services provided panel members with a progress update in relation to Quality Assurance activity and its impact on social work practice. The report provided members with evidence of the impact of the changes which were still in the early stages of development.

In line with the Children's Improvement Plan members were informed that a focus had been placed on dedicated leadership capacity in the areas identified for improvement; teams and work were being streamlined in a way which enabled and supported consistent high quality and effective practice; improving social work practice with a single unified approach to recruitment, retention, learning and development; ensuring all children and families received the right support at the right time to achieve good outcomes.

To support the improvement work to enable the authority to maintain and improve practice and ensure the best possible practice and most effective

support for children and their families a stronger, more strengths-based model of practice was being developed. This model was built around signs of safety/wellbeing of learning, confident practice and feedback. In addition, the Quality Assurance service was being developed and the Principal Social Work role enhanced to support learning and reflection.

The audits had revealed that supervision was more task focussed and not reflective enough or following on the impact on the child. The revised audit process continued to enable the service to measure the impact of the work undertaken with the authority's children and families and hear the child's voice. Members were encouraged to hear that 90% compliance of auditor engagement was achieved over Q3 and Q4 for 2020/21 and that 100% compliance of auditor engagement was achieved in Q1 2020/21. It was noted that moderation of case file audits better enabled children's services to consider the robustness of auditing. In addition, children and their parents/carers were invited to participate in every audit, providing rich otherwise uncaptured feedback.

Members were made aware of the areas of concern which included the fact that moderation of audits had evidenced auditors could be over optimistic in consideration of the grading; all children needed chronologies that included all significant events/milestones and the impact of those events; improvements were needed in the quality of assessments and in the development of SMART children's plans; further improvements were needed in ensuring meaningful direct work with children was undertaken; further improvements were needed to ensure high quality, consistent reflective supervision and robust management oversight; further practice improvements were needed to enable more children's case audits to be graded good or outstanding.

Members were informed that steps taken to address these concerns including a training programme for auditors and the use of exemplars to aid understanding of what good looked like in terms of chronologies. The vision was for a strengths-based relationship, trauma informed practice model using the signs of safety as the framework within in that. Children's Services would sign off the multi-agency three-year learning and development programme in the near future. The QA framework was being updated along with child protection conferences, childcare reviews and some themed audits (including child protection) were scheduled to take place by the end of 2021.

The Children's Improvement Focus Group members were appreciative of being able to examine a sample of case audits and noted it had been a learning experience. Members were also encouraged by the positive progress with the quality assurance of the case audits and the progress had been encouraging.

Concluded: that the Panel receive and consider the report.

CAY Children's Improvement Plan - Progress Update in relation to Corporate Parenting Care Leavers Performance for Education, Employment and Training (Agenda item 8)

The Executive Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning provided members with an update on the challenges in North Somerset in relation to improving the performance for Care Leavers being in Education, Employment and Training and how the authority was progressing to improve this performance area which was one of the priority areas within the Children's Improvement plan.

The report outlined the current support to care leavers in relation to EET, support services available to the local authority care leavers in achieving EET, development of staff and services to better support improved outcomes for care leavers, including EET performance and activities and actions to further improve performance within EET for care leavers over the next six to twelve months.

Members noted that in September 2021 North Somerset had 109 care leavers aged 18 to 21 with 51% (56) of those young adults currently in EET. The national average for this same cohort was 53% EET, the authority's statistical neighbours and regional neighbours were both also 53% - therefore the authority was slightly under the average for this cohort.

A discussion took place on the gap in the careers advice and help to children in care. Members were informed that a questionnaire was being developed asking young people about their aspirations and experience of careers advice generally. It had been agreed that this would be carried out with children in care and care leavers initially. The Assistant Director, Education Partnerships informed members that a weekly meeting had been set up to look at all children and young people receiving fewer than 25 hours a week to ensure that plans were in place to change that.

Members asked and received clarification on the following:

- *Are there regular meetings with care home managers regarding the education of the children?* – There is constant monitoring of the children's holistic needs including EET for all children in care. There is a personal education plan that is led through social work. The virtual school will go into the homes wherever the children live.
- *What about the children who are not on the roll with schools in our district? How much control do we have?* - If we have an EHCP from an area outside the district is it true we don't have any control about how often that is updated or how much information we get? – The social worker is engaged with the child and activity takes place regardless of where a child lives.
- *If we have a child living in North Somerset but registered with a different authority and on roll with a school outside our area how much influence do we have over changes to the EHCP and how much information do we get about the education the child is receiving?* – Whether a child has an EHCP or not we would be talking to their schools and carers and visiting them. If there were any issues with the host local authority educationally and there were challenges

with our colleagues in virtual school we would be reminding that school what they have to do. Even when we move children we cannot place a child without having every aspect of their care considered.

Concluded: that the Panel receive and consider the report.

CAY Presumption Competition for a new 630 place primary school in Haywood Village, Weston-super-Mare (Agenda item 9)

The Head of Strategic Planning and Governance, Childrens Services, presented the report which provided details of the need for a new 630 place primary school in Haywood Village, Weston super Mare to open in September 2023 (subject to planning approvals and developer delivery).

Members asked and received clarification in relation to the following queries:-

- *What support will the schools who are going to lose student numbers because of this new school receive?* – Numbers of children in schools peak and trough naturally. The formula allows for cutting significant numbers of children. The Authority provides support and advice on a regular basis to the schools but is unable to provide monetary support due to finite resources. With any new school there comes a risk that other schools could be impacted by that.
- *Which trust is going to take on the new school?* – We don't know. This is a new school and the government requires the Local Authority to go out to competition. The report explains that we are going to start the process of the competition to find out which multi trust it is going to be. It may be one that we already have in North Somerset or it may be something new.
- *Could a caveat be put on when it goes out to tender to the MATs that they have a resource hub for additional needs children within the school site?* - This would not be possible as the requirement to build the school was determined with Persimmon before the facility to have resource bases so the build would only take place based on the Section 106 agreement 6/7 years ago before the facility to have resource bases. We have, however, within the agreement, rooms we would recommend be used for SEND. Key to our success is the selection of the provider and making sure that they have the right cultural approach and can evidence that cultural approach so that we can build our capacity in mainstream schools. That has got to be our emphasis over the next couple of years.

A discussion took place on the risks of not proceeding with another school in the area which included the costs of Home to School Transport and an increase in the council's carbon footprint by not taking up the developer's option to provide the school. The caveat within that was that it was subject to planning and developer delivery. Negotiations were currently ongoing with regards the submission of the planning application by Persimmon. Although the aspiration was for it to be completed in 2023 another risk was that it went beyond that date.

Panel members were supportive of a decision to be taken by the Executive Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning to approve the progression of a Presumption Route competition to deliver a new 630 place primary school on the Haywood Village Development in Weston super Mare to open in September 2023 (subject to planning approvals and developer delivery).

Concluded: that the Panel receive and consider the report

CYPS Performance Monitoring (Agenda item 10)

The Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services, presented the report The Children and Young People's Services Policy and Scrutiny Panel receive regular performance management reports to help members evaluate the extent to which the council and its partners are achieving key plans and objectives for children and young people's services, and to provide appropriate challenge and suggestions to improve performance. The report presented the standard items: any recent Ofsted inspections of council services; an analysis of the performance of the relevant Key Corporate Performance Indicators (KCPIs) for Quarter 1 2021/22, that fell under the remit of the Panel and an overview of the performance of various Key Service Measures for Support and Safeguarding services within the council.

In discussing the report members congratulated the Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services on producing a report that was easier to read and contained more accessible data. The Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services acknowledged that inroads had been made but there was still a journey to go and the work would continue into the next financial year. Members also noted that performance information should not be considered a straightforward measure of good or bad practice but should be interrogated.

Members were informed that the numbers of children in care were decreasing and the numbers in foster placement were increasing. The vision was for the North Somerset children to be in family homes.

A mini review of the Front Door had recently taken place which had been carried out with the North Tyneside (Partners in Practice). There had been many positives including decision making in a day and Phase 2 would begin in autumn 2021. Phase 2 would focus on a much more robust and effective multi agency safeguarding activity so that when decisions were made they were local authority decisions about whether or not a child met the level of need for statutory care but with a level of multi-agency input.

Members asked and received clarification in relation to the following queries:

- *I was really interested with the statistic on page 81 of the report which mentioned that at the end of September 71% of all children in care were place inside North Somerset which I thought was really encouraging and down from last year. Do you think this is a trend that can continue in North Somerset, given the finance and resources? – Yes, because the delivery of our practice model is about making sure we bring the right children into care in a timely manner. We work with the young people and parents and carers and our partners to collectively support*

young people at home. We are involved in regional joint pilot of joint funding which commenced in July 2021 and will be evaluated. The pilot relates to young people, who historically we have failed, in out of county placements and historically outcomes were not great.

- *Are children in independent living in our area and is it possible for councillors to be provided with information on what that accommodation is and whether it is in the private rented centre or if it has been purpose built?* – I will arrange for that information to be provided. With regards supported independence, most of them are in our area. Sometimes we will place children in Bristol or surrounding areas if we have issues or sometimes that is in their best needs. We would always want our children and young people to be close to home if it was right for them. But for some children if they have been schooled outside the area and their friendships and relationships are there we will do our best to try and support their independence where they want.

It is a real challenge for us because understandably the other local authorities have their other cohorts – some of them are private rental areas (we have a mixed economy of what we use). We are also working very hard on our pathway planning and preparing our young people for independence. That is a piece of work that has been going on for some time and the newly appointed Head of Corporate Parenting is driving forwards.

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

CYPS Month 5 Children's Services Budget Monitor (Agenda item 11)

The Principal Accountant, Children's Services, presented the report which summarised and discussed the 2021/22 forecast spend against budget for children's services, highlighting key variances, movements and contextual information. It provided members with further details on the month 5 report which would be presented to the Executive on 20 October 2021. The report also made reference to the principles and outcomes associated with the setting of the 2022/23 budget.

Members' attention was drawn to page 88 of the report which provided an overview of the position. The report highlighted that overall Children's Services were in a favourable position with a projected underspend against budget of just over £360k. The table in section 3.6 of the report summarised the main variances.

Members were made advised that one of the key variances was on placements and was a favourable variance. There was a projected underspend of just over £1m which was quite significant. This was largely due to the fact that when the budget was set in 2020 the numbers of children in care were much higher than they were currently. In addition, because it was at the height of the Covid 19 pandemic, and the outlook in terms of what the future demand would look like was quite uncertain, additional budget was also provided in expectation that numbers would increase even further but quite

clearly that demand had not materialised and therefore there was the current significant underspend on the budget.

Mention was also made of the work being carried out by the service on reducing placement costs and more importantly stepping down young people into more appropriate and cost-effective placements. Compared to the spend in the last financial year there had been quite a big reduction in spend of just over a £1m.

Members noted that there were some cost pressures within the services – the main one being in relation to supporting families with disabled children.

Members were directed to page 92 of the report which provided some narrative on the Dedicated Support Grant (DSG). The grant was ringfenced and funded the school and education budget. The pressures around special school places and education costs for children with SEND were ongoing. The year had started with a balance that was carried forward of just over £7m and it was projected that that would increase to around £12m by the end of the year mainly due to the demand for special school places. There is a lot of work going on to increase our local provision but quite clearly also there are challenges. The hope was that once all the projects and strategies were in place and implemented some of those costs could be mitigated.

Concluded: that the Panel receive and consider the 2021/22 forecast spend against budget for children's services and on the risks and opportunities associated with the medium-term position.

CYPS Panel's Work Plan (Agenda item 12)

The Chairman presented the work plan and referred to item 6 – Chairman's Update on CYPS Working Groups.

Concluded: that the work plan be received and any comments forwarded to the Democratic and Electoral Services Officer.