

Report of the Children's Scrutiny Committee: Report of the Standing Overview Group meeting of Tuesday 26th September 2023

Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

1) Recommendation

That the Committee be asked to:

- (a) accept this report as an accurate record of the issues explored in the meeting ensuring transparency in scrutiny activities.
- (b) Endorse the recommendation from the meeting, that Members present:
 - 1. Welcomed and supported the approach of the Family Hubs model.
 - 2. Raised concerns about:
 - i) ensuring the expertise, connections with families and important work from Action for Children is retained and not lost;
 - ii) access to local services in rural areas; and,
 - iii) the potential of closures to local Children's Centres.
 - 3. Would welcome all Councillors working with the Cabinet Members and Head of Service on the design of the future Family Hubs model and the potential locations of services.

2) Background / Introduction

The Standing Overview Group of the Children's Scrutiny Committee meets with the purpose of bringing rigour and understanding to complex issues across different services and the NHS which could not meaningfully explored at public Committee. This is an informal information sharing and member development session where issues are presented to the councillors to raise awareness and increase knowledge.

Members were appraised of the Family Hub proposals as part of a Standing Overview Group meeting because the future Cabinet decision is a Part II decision, and advisable for pre-decision Scrutiny to take place in this format. This report is brief due to the commercial sensitivity around the proposals.

To bring transparency, and ensure that Scrutiny is not 'carried out behind closed doors' a short report is brought back to the Committee to highlight pertinent issues and to take forward any actions or recommendations that have arisen.

3) Devon Family Hubs Proposal

The Head of Service – Commissioning and Resources appraised Members of the Council's Family Hubs proposal in advance of the upcoming decision by Cabinet.

The presentation provided to Members covered details of the proposal, an appraisal of the options, the Devon Family Hub approach/model, next steps and risks and mitigations.

Discussion and questions with Members included the following areas:

- Members praised the good work already done by their local Action for Children centre and the staff who worked there and raised their concerns about the loss of centres, expertise, and the potential loss of relationships with families in the transformation to a Family Hub model.
- The Head of Service committed to working with communities and to local Councillors before any decision is made on locations. Locations of services would be based on need and the use of current provision with some centres being underused.
- The Cabinet Member highlighted that locations of Family Hubs had not been decided but also committed to listening to Members and communities about where we need to locate services. The Cabinet Member did ask Members to wait for the detail on location before lobbying him regarding their local services.
- Members asked for more information about Action for Children and their local centres – The Scrutiny Officer circulated this information straight after the meeting to Committee members.
- Members asked about the Short Breaks offer within Action for Children and for clarification on how it operated.
- Discussion about the Corporate Asset Strategy and ensuring best use of our assets.
- Members highlighted their concerns around access to services and locations, considering the rural nature of Devon.

Action: The Head of Service's presentation slides would be circulated to Members following the decision at Cabinet on 11th October.

The Scrutiny Officer highlighted the potential wording of a recommendation made by the Members attending the meeting. This included supporting the proposals and raising their concerns about specific areas which Members discussed and then agreed to.

4) Options / Alternatives

The report is the summary of a Scrutiny Standing Overview Group meeting. Scrutiny does not make decisions and this report does not propose any alternatives.

5) Consultations / Representations / Technical Data

As above, there are no specific considerations in regard to consultations, representations and technical data in this report.

6) Strategic Plan

The alignment of all Scrutiny activity with the strategic plan is detailed on the Scrutiny work programme. The issues raised in the report and the benefit of developing member knowledge and the 'critical friend' challenge of Scrutiny contribute to the Council achieving its strategic plan.

Improving Member knowledge on key issues contributes to the Council's commitment to being a trust, inclusive and innovative Council. It ensures good decision making and that the Council listens and learns.

7) Financial Considerations

There are no specific financial considerations in this report.

8) Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations in this report.

9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

There are no specific environmental impact considerations in this report.

10) Equality Considerations

There are no specific equality considerations in this report.

11) Risk Management Considerations

The activity of Scrutiny Standing Overview Groups contributes to the mitigations for:

Ineffective Member Scrutiny

defined as: 'Due to ineffective scrutiny, the level and quality of service management may drop, leading to financial mismanagement or harm to staff and/or citizens and reputational damage e.g. Grenfell.'

Member Effectiveness

defined as: 'Inadequate member effectiveness due to a lack of training, support and knowledge leads to a lack of challenge to corporate officers and/or poor decision making, resulting in a negative effect on the County's citizens (poor value for money, poor service delivery, harm, etc).'

Because Family Hubs covers a multitude of service areas, the key points in this report do have regard to some risks identified in the service's [risk register](#) relating to Children's Social Care services. This includes but isn't limited to:

- Post ILACS Improvement.
- Children's Services Improvement
- Demand for Children's Social Work
- Managing demand for services and packages of care

12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations

The report outlines the topic(s) covered at the meeting of Tuesday 26th September 2023, highlights the key points raised during discussion and details any agreed actions.

The report is formally reported to the Children's Scrutiny Committee in the interests of openness, transparency and good decision making.

Maria Price

Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Organisational Development, Workforce & Digital Transformation:
Councillor Andrew Saywell

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Background Paper – NIL

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Appendix

[Attendance](#)

Scrutiny Members: Councillors Su Aves (Chair), Janet Bradford, Phil Bullivant, Linda Hellyer, Frank Letch, Margaret Squires and Jeff Wilton-Love.

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools: Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

Cabinet Member for Children's SEND Improvement Services: Councillor Lois Samuel

Officers: Vikki Hearn (Head of Service – Commissioning and Resources) and Charlie Fisher (Scrutiny Officer).