

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CHILDREN, ADULTS, HEALTH AND WELLBEING POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Tuesday, 9th November, 2021

Present:- **Councillors** Vic Pritchard, Michelle O'Doherty, Ruth Malloy, Mark Roper, Andy Wait, Paul May, Liz Hardman, Gerry Curran and Rob Appleyard

Co-opted Voting Member: Gill Stobart

Co-opted Non-Voting Members: Chris Batten and Kevin Burnett

Also in attendance: Suzanne Westhead (Director of Adult Social Care), Mary Kearney-Knowles (Director of Children and Education), Claire Thorogood (Head of Contracting & Performance), Corinne Edwards (BSW CCG Chief Operating Officer), Chris Wilford (Director of Education & Safeguarding), Dr Bryn Bird (B&NES Locality Clinical Chair), Giles de Rivaz (Head of Somerset Sub-Region, RSC), Tish Bourke (BANES Project Lead, RSC), Sian Walker (Independent Chair, BCSSP) and Sarah Hogan (Deputy Safeguarding Lead for CYP & QA)

Cabinet Member for Adults: Councillor Alison Born

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Communities and Culture:
Councillor Dine Romero

55 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

56 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

58 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Paul May declared an other interest with regard to agenda item 11 (Virgin Care Contract Extension – Options Appraisal) as he is a non-executive Sirona board member.

Councillor Gerry Curran declared an other interest with regard to agenda item 11 (Virgin Care Contract Extension – Options Appraisal) as he is employed by Virgin Care. He stated that he would leave the room for the duration of this item.

59 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

60 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

There were none.

61 MINUTES: 15TH OCTOBER 2021

Kevin Burnett asked if any recent feedback had been gathered from schools on frontline services, if not, when could this take place.

The Director of Children's Services & Education replied that feedback would be sought within the next school survey.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that this would form part of the Section 175 survey that was due to be carried out in September 2022.

Kevin Burnett asked if following the last meeting a plan for easing the pressures on GPs had been completed.

Corinne Edwards, Chief Operating Officer, BSW CCG replied that this work was still ongoing, as were national negotiations in terms of the rescue package and the future arrangements for Primary Care.

Councillor Paul May asked the Chairman for an update on the Panel's request for Council to debate whether their remit could be reallocated to two separate Panels.

The Chairman replied that for the Panel to be separated they would need to identify funding as to how this proposal would be supported.

Councillor Rob Appleyard commented that he would like to know what the funding implications would be if the Panel were to split into two. He added that he felt there was a need to do justice to all the officers involved.

Councillor Paul May stated that he objected to the response that had been received.

Councillor Liz Hardman said that she felt that the majority of the Panel were in agreement with Councillor May.

The Chairman said that he would seek to have further discussions on the matter with the Chief Executive.

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chairman.

62 REGIONAL SCHOOLS COMMISSIONER PRESENTATION

Giles de Rivaz, Head of Somerset Sub-Region & Tish Bourke, BANES Project Lead, Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) addressed the Panel, a summary of the presentation is set out below.

Giles de Rivaz thanked the Panel for the opportunity to share their work with them and said that the RSC and the Local Authority were key partners in supporting the pupils within B&NES.

Overview

- The role of the RSC is to provide oversight and scrutiny of academy trusts with the ESFA (Education & Skills Funding Agency)
- RSC makes decisions through powers delegated by SoS (Secretary of State)
- RSCs are accountable to SoS and to the NSC (National Schools Commissioner), Dominic Herrington

Powers:

- RSC holds trusts to account through intervention powers in eligible schools & trust reviews, Advisory Board conditions
- RSC role & powers around the education landscape with advice from Advisory Board e.g.
 - deciding on applications for schools to convert
 - approving new sponsors & creation of multi-academy trusts
 - oversee school place sufficiency and advise on new free schools
 - decisions on changes to academies and free schools

Giles de Rivaz informed the Panel that the Advisory Board was a forum to enable decision making, but that the members of the Board were not decision makers, that role remains with the RSC.

Tish Bourke explained how the RSC holds Trusts to account.

Accountability through intervention

- RSC powers of intervention restricted to schools deemed eligible - Ofsted Inadequate grade
 - Maintained school: RSC has a **duty** to make an academy order
 - Academy: RSC is able to take action to transfer the academy to a new trust

Academies

- In academies, where failure occurs RSCs and ESFA may issue formal intervention notices:

- termination warning notices (RSCs)
- financial notices to improve (ESFA)
- In response, the academy trust may be required to submit:
 - trust school improvement plan,
 - financial recovery plan agreed between the trust and ESFA
- Depending on response RSC may decide to transfer academy to a new trust.

Trust reviews:

- Opportunity to support improvement

Advisory Board conditions:

- At time of RSC decision-making (e.g trust growth) RSC may set conditions in line with Trust Academies Handbook, e.g.
 - Governance
 - Trustees recruitment
 - Leadership support
 - Information-sharing

Improving the system & preventing failure

- Build school improvement capacity
- Encouraging and supporting system led trust and school improvement
- Strengthen governance oversight at leadership and board level
- Signpost to core DfE policy and support e.g. NTP (National Tutoring Programme)

Councillor Rob Appleyard asked how it can be ensured that in terms of budgets and a CEO salary there is still value for money and that enough funds are accessible for the classroom.

Giles de Rivaz replied that all Trusts publish an annual report and that within that there are value for money statements. He added that the reports are robustly audited by the ESFA.

Councillor Andy Wait asked what happens if a Trust is unable to meet its financial objectives – is the academy returned to the Local Authority.

Giles de Rivaz replied no, a mechanism does not exist for that to happen. He added that the ESFA would seek to avoid reaching that position and that if a deficit occurs financial recovery packages are available.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked how the membership of the Advisory Board is comprised.

Giles de Rivaz replied that it is split between Elected Board Members, Academy Heads and co-opted members.

Councillor Hardman asked if there was a limit on the number of academies to have within a MAT.

Tish Bourke replied that there was no limit. She added that they want to see MATs working together to enable a network of leaders within the Trust, enhance school improvement and cost save where possible.

Councillor Paul May commented that pupil / school outcomes were important to him and asked what assurances can be given that any elements of concern can be picked up outside of the review process.

Tish Bourke replied that formal intervention is only allowed following an Ofsted Inadequate grade but assured the Panel that work was always ongoing outside of the reviews through the Sponsor Leads within the RSC.

Councillor Ruth Malloy asked how councillors could find out more information about their local schools.

Tish Bourke replied that data is published on the DfE website.

Councillor Rob Appleyard asked if there were enough control measures were in place within the process.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that they were looking at how the arrangement between the DfE, RSC and LA can be formalised.

Gill Stobart asked what can be done to support a school that is not within a MAT that may have funding issues.

Giles de Rivaz replied that becoming a member of a MAT could alleviate that and said that due diligence would be carried out. He added that conversion funding was also available and that there is a Trust Capacity Fund to support vulnerable schools.

Kevin Burnett asked what the RSC does within B&NES in terms of education support.

Giles de Rivaz replied that their first relationship is with the Trust Board / CEO and that they have the ability to challenge them robustly. He added that when required they can draw on sector representatives and commission a deep dive to aid in their decision making.

Kevin Burnett commented that he felt that the process was reactive rather than proactive.

Giles de Rivaz replied that he did not agree with that view as the role that Tish has enables ongoing development and support to both pupils and staff.

Tish Bourke added that good governance is carried out through triangulation of school improvement data and that they do hold MAT leaders to account.

Kevin Burnett asked how duplication of work between MATs is assessed.

Tish Bourke replied that it is for Trusts themselves to assess whether any duplication occurs. She added that it was recognised that in some cases MATs do share services and there was an understanding that Trusts do have different approaches / ethos.

Councillor Paul May asked how councillors would know how well a Trust is working.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding replied that they could look into a way of updating the Panel in terms of Trust performance. He assured the Panel that he is in regular contact with the RSC and that children were currently receiving good outcomes.

The Chairman thanked Giles de Rivaz and Tish Bourke for attending the meeting on behalf of the Panel.

63 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

Councillor Alison Born, Cabinet Member for Adults addressed the Panel, a summary is set out below and a copy of the update will be attached as an online appendix to these minutes.

System pressures

We continue to experience Covid outbreaks in care homes which also reduces the availability of beds, 4 homes are currently closed to admission due to Covid with 32 people, residents and staff currently testing positive. There has been a significant increase in cases following the false negative PCR tests.

While our adult care team has continued to work closely with the RUH, Virgin care and other local providers, staff shortages are having an increasing impact on the system and there are growing concerns about the RUH's ability to respond to acute needs and to tackle the backlog of work caused by the pandemic. Commissioners are currently working on actions to improve flow through the system which will have an impact on the adult social care response.

We are commissioning additional home care through the Discharge to Assess programme (D2A) and have set up an Intermediate care team to support people who are being reabled in care home beds. However, this is proving challenging in the current employment market.

One of the many measures we have taken to mitigate the staff shortages is to develop the Proud to Care campaign which included holding a Recruitment Fair at the end of September. While this was welcomed and well supported by local providers, the number of people that attended was low, but has resulted in a small number of appointments.

Learning Disability Services

A joint strategic review between the CCG and the Council has been undertaken which highlights the current gaps and issues in local provision for people with learning disabilities along with a lack of planning and market development. As a result, both the CCG and the Council are strengthening their commissioning of these services, developing the market in a more planned and strategic way.

The first phase of commissioning and procurement will be to continue to grow supported living services and the procurement for this will commence next year.

Care Homes

The Leader of the Council and myself have a planned visit to Cleeve Court in November to thank the staff for the fantastic work they are doing and for what they have done throughout the pandemic.

The Chairman asked if she planned to visit all three local Care Homes.

Councillor Born replied that she did intend to.

Kevin Burnett asked if the Council was working with the CCG to attempt to alleviate the current pressures mentioned.

The Director of Adult Social Care replied that they were looking to support the workforce as much as possible with events such as Proud to Care. She added that one of the main aims now within Social Care was to fund, recruit and retain staff.

Corinne Edwards, Chief Operating Officer, BSW CCG added that staffing was their level 1 priority as Winter approaches.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked how big the impact will be in terms of the need for frontline staff to now be vaccinated.

The Director of Adult Social Care replied that this affected all Care Home staff from 11th November 2021 and would come into force for NHS staff from April 2022. She added that issues concerning two members of staff had now been resolved.

Councillor Paul May commented that he was pleased to see the steps being taken to improve services for those with learning disabilities as he felt that Covid-19 had highlighted their vulnerability.

Councillor Born said that the work was ongoing and that there was a need to make sure that they are not isolated from services or their families.

Councillor Dine Romero, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Communities and Culture was unable to address the Panel, a copy of her update will be attached as an online appendix to these minutes and she asked for any questions to be submitted to her in writing.

The Chairman thanked them both for their updates on behalf of the Panel.

64 BSW CCG UPDATE

Dr Bryn Bird, B&NES Locality Clinical Chair addressed the Panel. A copy of the update can be found as an online appendix to these minutes, a summary of the update is set out below.

Pressure on GP services

Leading GPs from across our region issued an open letter to local people recently explaining the pressures currently affecting primary care services and offering advice about what people can do to help. The letter explained how staff absences, rising coronavirus cases and an increase in demand for urgent and emergency care had generated pressure not usually seen outside of winter.

The GPs have also shared how practices are now working differently, with more consultations happening remotely, either by phone or video call.

Future of Primary Care

He said that having consulted colleagues regarding the national rescue package and the future arrangements for Primary Care there had been a number of negative responses and therefore they were not willing to support a response at the present time. He said that the CCG would continue to work hard to achieve the best quality of patient care.

BSW ICS Partnership Integrated Care System update

In recent weeks the BSW Partnership team has been working with representatives from the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) across BSW to discuss their involvement in developing ICS working arrangements. While there is already good engagement with VCSE organisations in Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire, ICSs are being encouraged to ensure that their governance and decision-making processes support close working with the sector as key strategic partners at all levels.

Working with 3SG in B&NES, Voluntary Action Swindon and Wessex Community Action the Partnership has co-produced an Expression of Interest to set out how these working arrangements will develop. This will provide some much-needed infrastructure and capacity to help the VCSE sector across BSW further engage in the work of the ICS.

Our Integrated Care Alliance in B&NES also continues to evolve as part of the ICS transition. An awayday meeting in October brought together leaders from the local health and care system, local authority and third sector organisations to consider the future place-based arrangements including joint ways of working and governance arrangements.

Councillor Paul May asked what the impact will be on staff if the CCG dissolves as a result of the ICS.

Dr Bird replied that there is an uncertainty within staff even though some functions will be transferred.

Corinne Edwards, Chief Operating Officer, BSW CCG added that staff were likely to transfer into the ICS in April and that mandatory roles would be announced within the next few weeks.

Councillor Liz Hardman commented that demand for vaccination of 12-15 year olds has outstripped the capacity to deliver vaccinations and asked in view of the importance of getting secondary school-aged children vaccinated in order to reduce transmission, and the desire of these young people to be vaccinated, what plans are there for vaccination teams to return to schools to complete vaccinations.

Dr Bird replied that he was aware that Virgin Care had to delay their programme but believed that they are committed to completing it.

Gill Stobart asked how have the triage support arrangements in terms of remote appointments developed.

Dr Bird replied that it has been a learning process over the past 20 months that was still under ongoing development. He said that practices were trying to find a balance between remote and face to face appointments.

Kevin Burnett asked if there would be a statutory Social Care role on the ICB.

Dr Bird replied that a Local Authority representative would be on the Board.

The Chairman thanked Dr Bird for his update on behalf of the Panel.

65 VIRGIN CARE CONTRACT EXTENSION - OPTIONS APPRAISAL

The Director of Adult Social Care introduced this report to the Panel. She explained that a decision regarding the contract extension was due to be taken by the Council's Cabinet at their meetings across 10th & 11th November 2021.

She stated that we are in year 5 (2021/22) of the contract and that the annual value of it is £54m, with the contributions as follows:

- CCG £28,147m
- Council £21, 930m
- Better Care Fund £4, 471m

She informed the Panel that the Council funding is fixed with cost increases managed through Virgin Care's savings plans and that the CCG and Better Care funding is subject to NHS annual uplifts applicable to provider contracts.

She explained the three options included within the appraisal:

- Option 1: Extend the contract term for the 3 year period (until 2026/27)
- Option 2: Do not extend the contract for the 3 year extension period and recommission both community health care, social care and public health services
- Option 3: Extend the contract term for the 3 year period (until 2026/27) but with identified services removed from block contract (i.e. CHC return to CCG and ASC safeguarding return to Council) and/or improvement trajectory for identified services.

She stated that the officer recommendation will ask the Cabinet to;

- Approve Option 3 - Extend the contract term for the 3 year period (until 31st March 2027) but with identified services removed from block contract and/or improvement trajectories for identified services and delegate to Suzanne Westhead, Director Adult Social Care (DASS) in consultation with Cllr Born, Member for Adult Services authority to serve notice to extend the contract once assured that the total price for the contract as varied is agreed and affordable.
- Note that an extra-ordinary B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BSWCCG) Governing Body meeting has been convened for a decision to be taken on 11th November 2021, to ensure a joint decision is taken in public on the same day, for the recommendation of Option 3 – Extend the contract term for the 3 year period (until 31st March 2027) but with identified services removed from block contract and/or improvement trajectories for identified services.

Kevin Burnett asked why the two services, Strategic Adult Safeguarding and Continuing Health Care were proposed to be removed from the contract.

The Director of Adult Social Care replied that the Council and Virgin Care had agreed that it would be better to have one overall team rather than the current two, one for each organisation. She added that this proposal would incur no further costs and that cases would continue with their current Social Workers.

Corinne Edwards, Chief Operating Officer, BSW CCG added that the proposal to bring Continuing Health Care back into the CCG was to align with Swindon and Wiltshire whereby the CHC service is delivered by the CCG. This will enable the CCG to have consistent operational and strategic oversight and build a resilient team to serve the whole population of BSW. She said that if approved the transfer of staff would commence in April 2022.

Councillor Rob Appleyard commented that he agreed with the proposed option to extend the contract as it would give an opportunity over the next five years to focus on what will be required in the future. He added that he felt that the decision would

be of benefit to the local residents and that a lot of good things had been achieved through the collaboration with Virgin Care.

Councillor Liz Hardman commented that she felt that the process seemed a little rushed and asked if there were plans to remove further services from the contract.

The Director of Adult Social Care assured the Panel that the Cabinet Member and lead officers have been involved in this process for many months. She added that there were no plans to remove further services within the term of this contract.

Councillor Michelle O'Doherty asked if plans for the eventual end of the contract were being considered at this stage.

The Director of Adult Social Care replied that it was envisaged that there would be at least a two year process put in place prior to an award of any new contract in 2027. She added that a timetable for this process was currently being planned alongside future key commissioning intentions.

Councillor Paul May said that he supported the option being proposed to the Cabinet.

Kevin Burnett referred to section 7.8.10 of the Options Appraisal and asked why there had been an increase in Clinical Agency Staff from April 2021.

The Director of Adult Social Care replied that this was most likely to be related to Covid-19 and the management of the vaccination process.

The Chairman commented that he had been involved in many of these processes over the years and he believes the offer and service from Virgin Care has been increasingly well received and during COVID had been exemplary.

The Panel **RESOLVED** unanimously to agree that the Cabinet should approve Option 3: Extend the contract term for the 3 year period (until 2026/27) but with identified services removed from block contract (i.e. CHC return to CCG and ASC safeguarding return to Council) and/or improvement trajectory for identified services.

66 B&NES COMMUNITY SAFETY AND SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

Sian Walker, Independent Chair of the Bath & North East Somerset Community Safety & Safeguarding Partnership (BCSSP) introduced the report to the Panel.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked in respect of the data on domestic abuse, are we doing enough to safeguard the victims of domestic abuse, and how do we know.

Sian Walker replied that she was assured that we do. She added that Sub-Group Chairs are asked to hone down the activities that take place within this work area.

Councillor Hardman asked what were the outcomes of the strategy meetings held as a result of the eight individuals displaying behaviour which resulted in there being a need for a managing allegation strategy meeting to be convened.

Sian Walker replied that although she was not able to comment on the individual cases the LADO function within B&NES is carried out effectively and is assured that the relevant work is undertaken and that the children concerned are safe.

Kevin Burnett asked what key performance indicators would appear on the dashboard and how would these be monitored and evaluated.

Sian Walker replied that the dashboard does not relate directly to the KPI's and that the data will be used to monitor trends and influence the direction of the work of the BCSSP. She added that audit is also very important and that this is carried out throughout the year.

Councillor Michelle O'Doherty asked what work has been done to increase awareness of the role of LADO within Avon & Somerset Police.

The Deputy Safeguarding Lead for CYP & QA replied that training options have been discussed with the Police as to how the role of the LADO can be promoted.

Sian Walker added that this was a national issue that needed to be progressed.

Kevin Burnett asked what school representation there was within the Partnership.

Sian Walker replied they did have primary education reps on the Operational Group up until earlier this year, when the school became a MAT. She said that Bath College, Bath Spa University and Bath University are still represented. She added that the BCSSP are currently working with the Director of Education and Safeguarding to look at the options of further engagement with the education sector.

The Director of Education & Safeguarding added that a report regarding representation on the Partnership is to be discussed at a meeting of the School's Standards Board on 9th December.

Kevin Burnett asked if any reasons could be given for the rise in enquiries related to physical abuse & neglect or acts of omission.

Sian Walker replied that they had seen more self-neglect referrals to safeguarding rather than being managed through the MARMM (Multi-agency Risk Management Meeting) process. She added that this was due to be reviewed and had also been identified as a national issue.

Kevin Burnett asked if the E-learning safeguarding modules were accessible for schools and if so were all schools involved.

Sian Walker replied that the modules were accessible for all but that she was unable to confirm whether they were accessed by schools.

Kevin Burnett asked if there were any key points to be noted on the data contained within the report.

Sian Walker replied that transitional safeguarding was a key area to focus upon and that scrutiny of Community Safety should be improved where possible.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to note the Annual Report and Executive Summary for the BCSSP.

67 INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT

The Deputy Safeguarding Lead for CYP & QA introduced the report to the Panel and highlighted the following areas from within it.

This has been an extraordinary year because of Covid-19. IRO's have successfully maintained contact with children, young people, their carers, and family throughout this reporting period although this has for the most part been by zoom, text message, WhatsApp, email, and telephone calls.

The manager of the IRO service has been part of a working group looking at the introduction of the NSPCC's reunification framework in Bath and North East Somerset.

In April 2020, the IRO manager and Head of Service for Care Outcomes introduced a bi-monthly meeting to review and monitor the use of all unregulated placements. The meeting considers the current and long-term plans surrounding the child's placement and allows greater assurance that policies and procedures are being followed. The meetings allow opportunity to discuss placement provisions for children and identify any areas that may require further review or consideration. Where issues arise for specific children these will be highlighted with the social work team and the appointed IRO.

The IRO service has played a significant role in supporting children to participate in the Bright Spots 'Your life, Your Care' survey led by Coram Voice. IRO's as a trusted adult were fundamental in supporting children aged between 4 – 18 years to complete the survey. The IRO service are keen to understand how children experience being in care, what is going well and what areas they feel need to improve. The IRO manager will work alongside children's social care colleagues to develop a plan in response to the feedback from children in care.

Whilst the number of children in care who are unaccompanied or trafficked are significantly small (6), their needs are not, nor are the experiences the children will have had travelling to this country. Each child requires the professionals working with them and offering support to be sensitive to their experiences and carefully consider their current and long-term needs.

The IRO service continue to see an increase in the number of children being placed in residential settings, which is too often linked to the lack of foster placements alongside the needs of children in care increasing in complexity. The IRO service recognise that most often, children placed in residential settings are

children who have experienced significant adverse childhood experiences which make it difficult for them to adapt to life with foster carers. Whilst this can often be the most suitable arrangement for a child it is important that this remains under review and where there is evidence to suggest a child has begun to overcome some of the trauma they have experienced, the IRO service would wish to see an assessment undertaken to inform whether the child's needs could once again be met within a foster family.

Areas of focus for IRO Service 2021-22: Children with disabilities, greater focus on how children are supported to participate in their review.

Between the 1st April 2020 and the 31st March 2021 of the 501 reviews held only 29 (6%) were out of statutory timescale. The IRO service has shown consistently high performance in this area of practice year upon year.

The Chairman commented regarding the caseloads for IROs and asked why there was a need for so many out of area placements and were the arrangements reciprocal with other Local Authorities.

The Deputy Safeguarding Lead for CYP & QA replied that IRO caseload allocation is defined in the IRO Handbook which had not been revised since 2010 and therefore doesn't reflect the distance that officers now need to cover in order to meet with children. She added that this was however a national picture and that recruitment does remain an issue.

She said that the team around her was small but very busy and despite the challenges would always put children at the forefront of any decision making.

She stated that out of area placements were a reoccurring theme but assured the Panel that these would not be done unless it was absolutely necessary for the child concerned. She added that a recent campaign to recruit Foster Carers locally had been carried out.

She said that the arrangements were not reciprocal and that the child remains the responsibility of Local Authority regardless of where they are placed and it is about finding the best offer for the child. She stated that she was confident that the needs of these children were being met and that they are safe.

Councillor Liz Hardman asked how the Panel can support the introduction of the NSPCC's reunification framework within B&NES.

The Deputy Safeguarding Lead for CYP & QA replied that it had already been launched following 6 – 8 months of research and has given officers a clearly defined process to follow. She added that enables them to think about the child's journey and when reunification should be considered.

Councillor Hardman asked if she was able to expand on what is meant by 'consideration of a child's cultural needs is considered when assessments are undertaken and placements are explored...going beyond just thinking about a child's race and what they or their family celebrate as part of their culture'.

The Deputy Safeguarding Lead for CYP & QA replied that as well as looking at what a child needs now officers will look at what they might want to see within their records when they become an adult. She added that it was about giving greater consideration, particularly to children who were not born in this country, about things like language and connections to their original upbringing and culture.

Councillor Hardman asked if she was able to explain why a higher percentage of children under the age of four had decisions about their long-term care plans undetermined compared to last year.

The Deputy Safeguarding Lead for CYP & QA replied that naturally the percentage of placement orders was lower this year than the previous year which means a higher percentage of children that have not had their final decisions made. She added that it was not a delay within the Local Authority, but due to care proceedings and hearings within court being delayed due to Covid.

Kevin Burnett asked about the role of the Young Ambassadors / Advocates in terms of gathering feedback from children.

The Deputy Safeguarding Lead for CYP & QA replied that the Young Ambassador role had been setup recently within B&NES and that we have two in place. She said that she had met them to discuss her work within the Council and that they are supported in their role by Off The Record who also provide an advocacy service to our local young people.

She added that Advocates can provide support at and prior to Child in Care Reviews and it was the responsibility of the IRO to invite them if requested by the child. She said that this offer of support is also made to every child that enters care.

The Panel **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) Note the continued work and commitment of the Independent Reviewing Service within Bath and North East Somerset during a national pandemic. IRO's have maintained contact with all children in care and their carers despite significant changes in working practices, 94% of child in care reviews have been held within statutory timescales and IRO's have scrutinised and where necessary challenged care plans when these have been identified as not being in the child's best interest.
- (ii) Note that 70% of children in the care of Bath and North East Somerset are placed 20+ miles from their family home or from the local authority boundary. In order for IRO's to maintain direct contact with these children and continue to have close oversight and review of their care plans, the IRO service needs to have all vacancies filled so that the number of children allocated to an IRO remains within the 50-70 range.
- (iii) Note the input of the IRO service in:

- Working with children’s social care to develop a reunification policy,
- Ensuring children are appropriately matched to carers who can meet their identified long-term needs.
- Identifying and considering the needs and experiences of unaccompanied, asylum seeking and trafficked children
- Reviewing children placed in all unregulated placements, including those placed in Reg 24 ADM approved placements, children placed with their parents and children in accommodation with support (including supported lodgings)
- Supporting children to participate in the ‘Your Life, Your Care’

(iv) Acknowledge the progress in the areas for development / improvement identified for 2020-2021 despite the significant challenges brought about by Covid-19.

68 PANEL WORKPLAN

The Panel approved the workplan as printed.

The meeting ended at 1.05 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services