

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
held at 2.00 pm on Thursday, 17 March 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor M Mutton (Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor S Bains
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor D Kershaw
Councillor J Lepoidevin
Councillor C Miks
Councillor H Noonan
Councillor J O'Boyle
Councillor E Ruane
Councillor P Seaman
Councillor S Thomas

Co-Opted Members:

Other Members: Councillors

Employees (by Directorate):

P Barnett, People Directorate
S Bates, People Directorate
G Holmes, Resources Directorate
C Parker, People Directorate
M Rose, Resources Directorate
S Watson, People Directorate

Apologies: Councillor
S Hanson, K Jones and R Potter

Public Business

61. Declarations of Interests

There were no discloseable pecuniary interests.

62. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 25th February, 2016 were approved.

The Scrutiny Board discussed Matters Arising from the last meeting and noted that further to minute 56/15 'Children's Services Workforce Development Strategy' Members had received further information about the Family Drug and Alcohol Court.

63. Serious Case Review - Child C

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note of the Serious Case Review Co-ordinator for Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards, which detailed the outcome of the Serious Case Review (SCR) relating to Child C, which was appended to the briefing note. A SCR was undertaken where the abuse or neglect of a child was known or suspected and the child had died. The briefing note highlighted that the primary aim of a SCR was to help agencies learn lessons from these events, and to use this experience to improve practice.

Each agency may make recommendations to support improvements in practice within their organisation. The on-going implementation and monitoring of these actions was the responsibility of the individual agency. Evidence of progress was regularly provided for the LCSB. This process enabled the LSCB to fulfil its responsibility for monitoring progress, and to be assured that the recommendations had been delivered in practice. Recommendations that were multi-agency were the responsibility of the LSCB, and an action plan to address these recommendations was currently being progressed.

Following the death of Child C in April 2014, the Independent Chair of Coventry Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) at that time, agreed this case should be the subject of a Serious Case Review. Child C died at the age of 11 months after being left unsupervised in the bath with Sibling 1, aged two years. The review was not able to establish the reason for the circumstances that led to the death of Child C and concluded that the sad death could not have been predicted or prevented by the professionals involved.

Janet Mokades, current Independent Chair of the LSCB attended the meeting and presented the recommendations and discussed the action plan.

The Scrutiny Board noted the background to the case which, in summary, was that when professionals visited the family home they observed a mother and, at times, a father who provided appropriate care and attention for their children, despite significant difficulties and disadvantages. The review was unable to establish the reason for the circumstances that led to the death of Child C. What had emerged was a concerning but familiar picture of the early stages of poor parental mental health, issues of domestic abuse and cannabis misuse. The report noted that this had been recognised as a common theme in reviews locally and nationally. There was evidence that the right referrals were being made and by the right people but the information was sometimes lost, incomplete or not acted upon. The failure to explore maternal wellbeing meant the impact on the family and relationships was not well understood. This, together with a lack of assessment of the couple's cannabis use and limited reporting of the domestic abuse, meant that the level of risk was not recognised. A poor referral and assessment process hindered the identification of the potential risks and needs of both the children and adults.

The report included details of methodology, process, chronology of the professional involvement with the family, referral and assessment, early help, children's experiences, domestic violence and abuse, and parental emotional wellbeing.

The recommendations were:

1) *Social Care*

When a social care decision was made for a case to be transferred to a higher or lower level of priority, the decision and rationale for this must be clearly communicated across all partner agencies involved with the family.

2) a) *Social Care*

All professional referrals made in response to a child's disclosure must result in the assessing social worker contacting the individual young people who had raised the allegation. Where there were known barriers to communication, the professionals involved should seek alternative methods of intervention to support the communication process which may also include advocacy support.

b) *All agencies*

When a young person was sharing a safeguarding concern with professionals about themselves or another young person, all necessary support should be given to allow that disclosure to be made including advocacy support.

3) *NHS England (as commissioners of primary care), Public Health (as commissioners of the health visiting service) and the Clinical Commissioning Group (as commissioners of maternity services) all GP Providers, Coventry and Rugby GP alliance, Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust (CWPT) and University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust (UHCW).*

It was recommended that general practice managers with the primary care team facilitate regular meetings between all health professionals involved in the delivery of care for the 0-5 age group. This would provide a more structured opportunity for regular and ongoing discussion about vulnerable families and would enable a coordinated approach to the provision of health care and support, including signposting and referral, where appropriate.

4) *LSCB*

The LSCB should continue to monitor individual agency progress on responses to domestic violence.

Councillor M Mutton, Chair of the Scrutiny Board reminded Members that their role was not to re-hear the review, but to scrutinise the recommendations and review them, bearing in mind that policies had moved on since April, 2014.

The Scrutiny Board discussed the following concerns with the Chair of the LSCB:

- Common Assessment Framework (CAF) threshold levels
- Working with partners
- Monitoring of SCR Recommendations
- Use of language/terminology/ meanings by different agencies
- Universal 'triggers' that indicate concern
- Multi-layered impact of factors
- Procedures and quality assurance audit
- Working with families that had not met thresholds where engaging would be compulsory

Janet was thankful for the support of the Scrutiny Board.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the recommendation action plan information discussed at the meeting be circulated to Members of Scrutiny Board from the LSCB**
- 2) the Scrutiny Board be updated on the new processes for 'stepping up' and 'stepping down' of cases**

3) the Scrutiny Board receive a report back on the Quality Assurance work regarding auditing procedures of front line cases

64. Impact of Voices of Care

The Scrutiny Board considered a briefing note and a presentation from the Coventry Voices of Care Council regarding the positive impact the Voices of Care had and an update on the 'Pledge'. The 'Pledge' was created by Young People and Members and was a list of promises made by Coventry City Council as Corporate Parents to the Looked After Children and Care Leavers of Coventry.

The Chair of the Voices of Care Council reported on the importance of the Voices of Care and the various projects that they were involved in. Young People had been consulted on the Pledge and the findings provided a snapshot of how children and young people view the care system in Coventry. The Pledge questionnaire responses were appended to the presentation.

The Ofsted inspection 2014 had stated "The Children in Care Council (Voices of Care Council) is a model of good practice and there are many examples of children and young people shaping and influencing services, leading to real change and improvements which have made a demonstrable difference to children's lives".

The Board questioned the Chair of the Voices of Care Council and officers on aspects of the presentation including:

- Responses to the consultation with young people and support from 'Route 21'
- The number of responses that had run away or gone missing
- Work with Universities

Councillors were really supportive of the positive impact the Voices of Care had, especially their work with Universities and City Council Social Care teams. Councillors were also encouraged by the high percentages of young people responding that they had hobbies and felt healthy.

Sheila Bates, Children's Champion reported that there was an Action Plan to improve areas of concern following the consultation and that some questions would be more specific for the next questionnaire.

RESOLVED that the Board thank the Voices of Care for the report and request regular updates from Young People

65. Library Service and Connecting Communities

The Scrutiny Board considered a report which updated Members on the recent changes to the library service in the City that were part of the Connecting Communities Programme.

The report noted that on 23rd February 2016 Cabinet (their minute 121/15 refers) had agreed to implement a series of proposals of which the following changes to Library Services in the City were included:

- a) To end delivery of library services from the Arena Park Library facility by not renewing the lease and to continue engagement with Holbrooks Community Care Association (HCCA) about the potential delivery of a reduced library service to be provided in the HCCA building by September 2016.
- b) To end delivery of library services by not renewing the lease from the current Willenhall Library facility and to continue engagement about the potential delivery of a reduced library service to be provided in the Hagard Centre building by September 2016.
- c) To end the mobile library service by 1 June 2016.
- d) To cut the library media fund of £658,000 to £558,000 with effect from 1 April 2016.
- e) For Central Library to continue to open seven days per week, but to close one hour earlier on weekdays – closing at 7pm instead of 8pm by September 2016.
- f) To close Caludon Castle, Earlsdon and Foleshill libraries on Wednesdays and close Stoke and Tile Hill on Sundays by September 2016. To agree in principle that Bell Green, Earlsdon and Foleshill libraries remain open on Sundays provided that officers were satisfied as to the viability of a mix of paid staff and volunteers operating the libraries on these days. In the event officers were not satisfied the question of whether the libraries should remain open on Sundays be referred back to the Cabinet Member for Education.

These changes were part of Connecting Communities, an ambitious and wide reaching approach to radically redesign services through co-production and collaboration with local communities. The approach focused on how services might be delivered differently in the future in the communities and neighbourhoods where there was most need, and within the resources available. This might include joining services together to reduce the number of buildings and staff that the Council and other statutory organisations require to deliver services.

Officers provided detail about the current library offer and usage and the challenges over the next few months.

The Scrutiny Board questioned the Cabinet Member for Education and officers on the following:

- changing the location of libraries in the city
- briefing Ward Councillors
- a 'reduced service' at the Hagard
- volunteers

The Cabinet Member for Education indicated that he was happy to enter discussions with as many people in communities as possible, including head teachers and other partners to try to prevent library closures.

RESOLVED that

- 1) The Scrutiny Board note the report and thank officers for hosting the meeting at Central Library**
- 2) The Scrutiny Board request that Ward Councillors be involved in discussions regarding any changes or proposals affecting their communities**

66. Improvement Board Progress Report from 17th February, 2016

Further to Minute 57/15 the Scrutiny Board noted a joint briefing note which detailed progress on the Children's Services Improvement Plan, reported to the Children's Services Improvement Board on 17th February, 2016 based on data from January, 2016. The next Improvement Board would be held on 30th March, 2016.

The progress Report included an update on the six themes aligned to the Department for Education (DfE) Improvement Notice including an update on the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

Members noted that they had been invited to a Seminar regarding Children's Services Improvement on 21st March, 2016 and that the action plan resulting from the audit of re-referrals would be available for the next meeting.

67. Work Programme

The Scrutiny Board noted the work programme.

68. Any Other Business

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 4.00 pm)